



# Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim

For the week ending 8 Iyar 5759  
23 - 24 April 1999

## Overview

## Insights

### ACHAREI MOS

**H**ashem instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the *Mishkan*. On Yom Kippur, the *kohen gadol* is to approach the holiest part of the *Mishkan* after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for Hashem" and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel" in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must afflict oneself. We abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing, and marital relations.

Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

### KEDOSHIM

**T**he nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught:

- *Prohibitions:* Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone's property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one's parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing; revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; and tattooing.
- *Positive:* Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree's 4th year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf.

Family life must be holy. We are warned again not to imitate gentile behavior, lest we lose the Land of Israel. We must observe *kashrus*, thus maintaining our unique and separate status.

### TOO JEWISH!

**"In front of the kapores (top) that is upon the Ark" (16:2)**

**T**here's a famous New York Jewish comedian who has a well-known catch phrase — "Too Jewish!" On hearing this line, audiences, Jewish and Gentile alike, clutch their sides with hysterical laughter. It would be difficult to imagine someone eliciting the same response with the quip "Too Irish!" or "Too Native American!" or "Too Polish!"

For almost as long as there have been Jews, there have been Jews who would like to pretend they aren't Jews. During the Greek occupation of Israel in the times of the Second Temple, well-to-do Jews enamored of Greek culture underwent painful operations to reverse the outward signs of *bris mila* (circumcision) so they could compete in track events in the Greek coliseum. After Napoleon opened the doors of European culture to the ghetto, conversion to Christianity was, for so many brilliant Jewish minds, the ticket into Western Society. And in our own times, so many Dutch and German Jews, who had almost forgotten they were Jews, found themselves being brutally dragged from their beds in the middle of the night by the Nazis. To those fiends, they looked identical to their *Ostjudisch* brethren with their beards and sidelocks.

Owning up to being Jewish, and being proud of it, is much more than being proud of your roots. Sometimes it's a lifeline. In Egypt, the Jews were on the precipice of total assimilation. The Midrash tells us that they were saved because they didn't change their names, their clothes or their language.

In this week's parsha, the Torah uses the phrase "*in front of the kapores (top) that is upon the Ark.*" The Midrash tells us that the *kapores* was to be a lid *on top* of the holy Ark, not a cover to be countersunk and hidden. The *Aron*, the Holy Ark, symbolizes Torah and *mitzvos*. When a Jew performs the Will of G-d, he has nothing to be ashamed of. His actions should sit "proud" like the *kapores* on top of the *Aron*. He shouldn't cover up his observance of Torah. He should wear it proudly — "on top." Let the world see that he is a Jew.

For when a Jew sanctifies G-d by his actions, he can never be "too Jewish."

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**EAT, MY CHILD!**

**“Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them ‘You shall be holy — for Holy am I, Hashem, Your G-d.’ ” (19:2)**

I come from a generation of Jews who believed that synagogue worship consists of middle-aged ladies with blue-hair standing outside the synagogue, almost kissing each other on the cheek, and saying “Lovely to see you too, dear!” Finding this particular mode of worship somewhat lacking, many of my generation have hi-tailed it to the Himalayas where they are now watching their navels and waiting for something to happen.

I have news for them. Nothing happens when you watch your navel — except for getting a stiff-neck. But then we always were a stiff-necked people...

About those blue-haired ladies, however, they made a mistake. They failed to notice that lying dormant behind those blue rinses was a kind of spirituality of which we could not even guess.

“Eat! He never eats!” How many Jewish jokes are there about eating! The caricature Jewish mother complains continually that her offspring are dying of hunger in spite of the fact that their daily calorie intake would support a thoroughbred racehorse.

Behind every joke lies a truth. It may be a distorted truth, but a truth nonetheless. Judaism is unique in that it views the body neither as an enemy nor as a bacchanalian banquet — but as a resource. The body is not only *capable* of spiritual elevation, but it is *created* for this purpose. The body’s deepest satisfaction comes from being correctly used in the service of the soul.

To the secular mindset, holiness is synonymous with abstinence. The body is incapable of spiritual elevation and must be mortified or transcended.

This week’s parsha begins with G-d saying to Moshe: “*Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them ‘You shall be holy — for Holy am I, Hashem, Your G-d.’ ”* Since G-d instructed Moshe to speak to *the entire* assembly, we know that this commandment was to be spoken in public to all the Jewish People together. Why? What is it about the command to be holy that it needed to be communicated in this fashion?

The holiness that the Torah seeks from us is not a holiness of separation and denial, of monasticism and seclusion, rather it is a holiness which is to be lived in an *assembly*; a holiness where the body is elevated by the soul and where its greatest potential is only realized in our interaction with our fellow beings.

**DYING TO HELP**

**“After the death of Aharon’s two sons” (16:1)**

This week’s Parsha is the source of the Yom Kippur service. The Torah introduces the description of this holiest of days with a reference to the death of two of Aharon’s sons, Nadav and Avihu. What is the connection between Yom Kippur and these two tragic deaths?

Just as Yom Kippur brings atonement, so the death of the righteous brings atonement. When a righteous person ascends to the world of souls, the other souls rejoice at his presence amongst them. This rejoicing can create a spirit of forgiveness and atonement in the higher realms toward those who are still on earth.

A great threat to Judaism has always been the attempt to take one mitzvah and make it the be-all and end-all of Judaism. The Torah prohibits adding to or subtracting from the *mitzvos*. Perhaps this injunction can also be understood as a prohibition to take one mitzvah and elevate its importance above the rest of the Torah.

For example, there’s a well-known faith that took one aspect of Judaism — that the death of the righteous atones — and made it into an entire religion. However, there is another enormous difference between their concept and ours. The Jewish idea of atonement, whether it comes from the death of the righteous or from Yom Kippur, is predicated on the genuine repentance of the transgressor in both thought and deed. Blind faith is no substitute for genuine regret, cessation of wrong-doing, and a whole-hearted acceptance never to repeat the error. The death of the righteous on Yom Kippur can do no more than to create a climate in which true repentance is possible. It can never be a substitute for doing *teshuva*.

Sources:

*Too Jewish!* - Hadrash V’Ha’iyun in Iturei Torah

*Eat, My Child!* - Chasam Sofer in Iturei Torah

*Dying To Help* - Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1; Meshech Chochma; Artscroll Chumash

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Parshas **Acharei-Kedoshim**

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## Haftarah: Amos 9:7-9:15

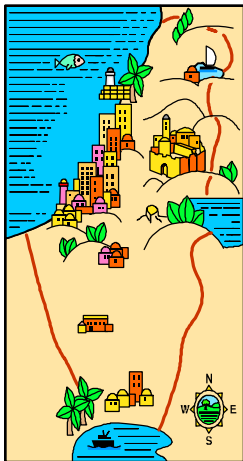
This Haftarah is related to the Parsha of Acharei Mos where G-d warned the people of Israel not to imitate the immoral ways of the Canaanites for the land not to regurgitate them into exile (Vayikra 18:28). In this Haftarah the prophet Amos warns them that they now resemble the sons of Cush — the Canaanites — and are about to be thrown out of the Land because of their immoral ways. The prophet then tells of the redemption when G-d will return the people of Israel from exile to the bountiful land of Israel, and rebuild the kingdom of the seed of King David. The desolate cities will be rebuilt and the populace prosperous and peaceful forever more.

## Toil and reward

One of the elements in the prophecy of Amos regarding the future golden age in the land of Israel is that "days will come, says Hashem, when the plowman will be reached by the reaper" (9:13). This is explained by the Maggid of Dubno that in today's world we see people who toil and others who enjoy; not always does a man have the pleasure of enjoying the fruit of his labor. Especially during the exile when the people of Israel are oppressed continuously, one can toil in anticipation for the future but someone else will steal the profits. In the future utopia, the plowman who toils will become the reaper who harvests the grain and enjoy the fruits of his hard work, as King David says "Those who tearfully sow will reap in glad song" (*Psalms 126:5*). Also, this will be the era when everyone who toiled and suffered as a Jew will merit the Divine reward and understand that nothing was in vain. location, and the righteous will be also the prosperous.

## LOVE OF

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



## ASHKELON

In Biblical times Ashkelon was one of the five most important Philistine cities. Here is where the mighty Samson slew 30 Philistines and used their outfits to pay off the wager which he lost to their countrymen through their trickery. (*Shoftim 14:19*) The city's prominence as a stronghold of anti-Israel feeling is evident from King David's eulogy on Saul who was slain in battle by the Philistines: "Publicize it not in the streets of Ashkelon lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice." (*Shmuel II 1:20*) The Prophets Yirmiyahu (47:6), Amos (1:8) and Tzefania (2:4) all prophesied the destruction of this perpetual thorn in the side of the Jewish community in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The word scallion is derived from the Latin name *Ascalonia* given to a kind of onion extensively cultivated at Ashkelon.

Modern Ashkelon, established in 1953 by the Jewish South African development company Afridar, is a major development town in the South which still contains many relics of its colorful past.