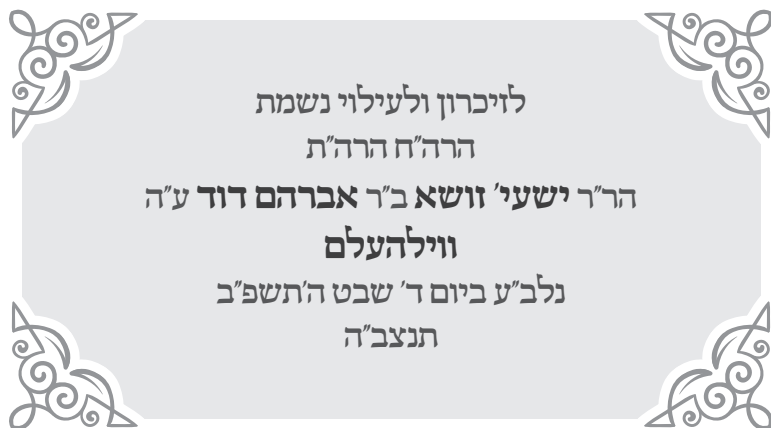


Acharei-Kedoshim

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FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
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לזיכרון ולעילוי נשמת
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תנצב"ה

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אחרי *Acharei*

טז:א | 16:1

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי ה'

G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they drew near before G-d.

The Afterdeath

The first 34 verses of Acharei Mos discuss the holiest person, place, and time in the Jewish experience. They detail the service of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest—who is “separated, to be sanctified as most holy [of people],”¹ in the Kodesh Hakodashim, the Holy of Holies in the Temple—the most sanctified space in the world, on Yom Kippur—the holiest day on the calendar.

Reading this Parshah annually encourages us too to likewise strive for holiness. The key to this quest for holiness lies in the name Acharei Mos.

1. I Divrei Hayamim 23:13.

The words *acharei mos* literally mean “after the death of,” and refer to the circumstances in which G-d conveyed to Moshe the mitzvos recorded in this Parshah: after the deaths of Aharon’s sons Nadav and Avihu. According to Chassidic teaching,² they died as a direct result of their ecstatic love of G-d, which became too intense for their bodies to handle. They truly “drew near before G-d,”³ albeit to a fault. Thus the name Acharei Mos—“*After* the death [of the sons of Aharon],” implies that there is still something to strive for even after reaching the extraordinary heights Nadav and Avihu reached at their deaths.

How is this possible? We are told in the following Parshah, “You shall be holy, *because* I, Hashem, your G-d, am holy.”⁴ This means that a Jew has the ability to reach truly unlimited levels of holiness, mirroring the infinite holiness of G-d Himself, as the soul of every Jew is “a veritable part of G-d above.”⁵

The Torah therefore categorizes the mitzvos given in this parsha as “*Acharei Mos*,” after—or *beyond*—the “deaths of the sons of Aharon,” to teach us that even if we have reached what seems to be the “spiritual ceiling” for a living human being, there is still more work to be done and greater holiness to attain.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 12, pp. 92–93*

2. See also Ohr Hachaim, Vayikra 16:1.

3. Vayikra 16:1.

4. Vayikra 9:2.

5. Tanya, Likkutei Amarim, chapter 2.

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 אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי ה' וַיָּמָתוּ

G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they drew near before G-d and they died.

Business before Pleasure

The Parshah of Acharei Mos opens, “G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon’s two sons, when they drew near before G-d and they died.” The wording of this verse seems unnecessarily repetitive. Having established that this was taking place “after the death of the sons of Aharon,” and explaining the circumstances in which they died—“when they drew near to G-d”—why repeat “and they died”?

According to an interpretation offered by Ohr Hachaim⁶ regarding the cause of Nadav and Avihu’s death, the words “and they died” can be understood not as repeating the fact that they died, but explaining *why* they died.

Nadav and Avihu died “by the kiss of G-d,” says Ohr Hachaim. He explains this to mean that they sensed and delighted in the closeness of G-d to the point that their souls expired from sheer ecstasy.

Chassidus explains, however, that Nadav and Avihu’s demise under such circumstances is regarded as sinful. Granted, a Jew must aspire to transcend the constraints of physicality in unbridled devotion to G-d, but at the same time it is imperative to acknowledge that G-d grants us physical life because

6. Or Hachaim, Vayikra 16:1.

He desires that we transform *this physical world* into a place where His presence is manifest. Our ultimate objective must therefore be not to escape mortal life, but to remain within and sanctify it. In contrast, the conduct of Nadav and Avihu, who allowed their spiritual rapture to reach a point of no return, is regarded as a “sin.”

This is the meaning of the verse “After the death of the two sons of Aharon, when they drew near before G-d and they died.” What brought about the death? Why was their conduct displeasing to G-d? Because “they drew near before G-d *and they died*” — i.e., they opted to delight in the closeness to G-d, to love G-d to death quite literally, at the expense of fulfilling their mission to infuse holiness into mortal life.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 3, pp. 987–988*

קדושים

Kedoshim

יט:ב | 19:2

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם
קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

Speak to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael, and say to them, “You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy.”

The Motivation Behind It All

Rashi notes that G-d instructed Moshe to teach this passage to “the *entire* congregation of Bnei Yisrael,” i.e., at an assembly of all the men, women and children. The need for publicity was, in Rashi’s words, “because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it.” Although it is not the only portion containing many mitzvos, Parshas Kedoshim is unique because most of the Torah’s teachings are “dependent on it”: they hinge on the principle of holiness taught in its opening words, “You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy.”

Rashi's words also teach us the most effective method of motivating others and ourselves toward the service of G-d. Historically, one school of thought has been to focus on "shunning evil,"¹ through heightened awareness of Judaism's belief in Divine retribution. A different approach has been to highlight the value of Torah study and the beauty of its observance, and emphasize the Jew's distinction and good fortune in having been granted the opportunity to live a Torah life. Aversion to evil will follow automatically (for the most part, if not entirely).

The superiority of the second approach is evident from Rashi's words above. How did Moshe introduce "the fundamental teachings of the Torah" to the assembly of the entire Jewish people? By reiterating that through the observance of the Torah, "you shall be holy, because I, Hashem your G-d, am holy." Moshe conveyed to each of the men, women and children assembled that as a Jew, he or she has the potential to reach a level of holiness and sanctity comparable to the sanctity of G-d Himself! And as history has shown, communicating this positive message is what "most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent upon."

—*Sefer Hasichos 5748, vol. 2, pp. 433-434*

1. Tehillim 34:15.

 יט:ב | 19:2

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ

Speak to the entire congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them, “You shall be holy.”

You Can Be Holy

The commentaries ask: what is the meaning of the command to “be holy” as a unique obligation? Is not the objective of every mitzvah, and of the entire Torah, for us to be sanctified?

Ramban² explains that the Torah’s directive to “be holy,” or in a broader sense to set ourselves apart, indeed refers to a distinct effort to sanctify ourselves—independent of the inherent sanctity that we achieve through the observance of the Torah’s commands and prohibitions. Here the Torah warns us not to be “a hedonist with the Torah’s permission,” i.e. not to indulge excessively in the pleasures of the world even when they are technically permissible.³ “Therefore,” continues the Ramban, “after enumerating the things that it forbids entirely, the Torah adds the general directive: ‘Be holy.’ Constrain yourself and resist even that which is permissible.”

Upon honest self-reckoning, however, one might assume that the Torah’s directive to “be holy,” to sanctify oneself even with that which is permitted, is directed at people who are already perfect in their observance of all the Torah’s *explicit* commands and prohibitions. But can it be that a person who is still struggling to abstain from the things the Torah blatantly

2. Vayikra 19:2.

3. See also Talmud, Yevamos 20a.

prohibits is instructed to refrain even from indulging in the permissible?

G-d therefore prefaced His command with the somewhat unusual introduction, “Speak to *the entire congregation*,” thereby emphasizing that *all* Jews, regardless of their weaknesses or spiritual struggles, are expected to—and therefore certainly have the capacity to—not only observe the Torah’s laws, but sanctify themselves even beyond the letter of the law.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 7, pp. 323-324

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