

Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim

In the first of this week's parsha, Moshe is told, "after the death of the sons of Aaron," the services relating to Yom Kippur. Rashi, at the beginning of the Parsha, explains by a parable why the death of the sons is written here, which is to prescribe a more impactful message than just saying the next section (i.e., service on Yom Kippur) by highlighting the mistaken service of Aaron's sons, it highlights what should not be done (practically, and emotionally). Ultimately, the message is to follow the Torah's path to connect to Hashem (and not take matters into your own hands). What better message than to tell us this for Yom Kippur, the second time we received the Torah from Har Sinai (the first set of Luchos having been previously broken due to Moshe dropping them when seeing the Eigel Hazahav). Meaning Yom Kippur isn't just a time to ask for forgiveness; it is a time to reconnect with Hashem because of the second giving of the Torah (which was formed out of human carving, unlike the first set, which Hashem formed. Another metaphor of the work of humans and what it means to be a human.)

The theme is so connected that the clothes the High Priest wore in the holiest of holies were four white garments, with no gold (as Rashi explains, Ein Kateigor, Na'seh Saneigor, the prosecutor doesn't become the defence. This means when you ask for forgiveness, don't bring evidence, i.e., gold,

¹ The specific message to the Kohanim from 16:3 where the posuk says "Bizos" (with this) which is gematria 410, i.e. the 410 years of the 1st Beis Hamikdash. That is from Aaron Hakohen until the end of the first Beis Hamikdash the righteousness of the Kohanim was unbroken. One can ask, what does

of which you were guilty of serving). The Alter Rebbe explains that the goal of the teshuvah, as proscribed through the service of Yom Kippur, is to reconnect with Hashem face to face. How does one accomplish this? Through Torah and more, the Alter Rebbe explains, through learning Halacha. Therefore, the reminder of the two sons of Aaron isn't just a message to the Kohanim; it was stated to Moshe, which means the message of sticking to the Torah (and following in its ways) is to the non-Kohanim as well¹. How should one serve Hashem? With the way taught in Torah (and not to take matters into your own interpretation, that may or may not be on the right path even if it seems right). Furthermore, as the Alter Rebbe says, it is by learning Halacha. As we know (from Davening), it says in the Gemara at the end of Niddah 73a (copied from www.sefaria.org) , "The Gemara concludes the tractate with a general statement with regard to Torah study. **The school of Elijah taught: Anyone who studies *halakhot* every day is guaranteed that he is destined for the World-to-Come, as it is stated: "His ways [*halikhot*] are eternal"** (Habakkuk 3:6). **Do not read the verse as *halikhot*; rather, read it as *halakhot*.** The verse indicates that the study of *halakhot* brings one to eternal life in the future world."

In the middle of the Parsha (and as I quoted for the Pesach D'var Torah) at the beginning of chapter 18, don't act like Mitzraim (taken to mean don't act like the world around you.) Hashem reiterates for the Jews, the

the Kohen bring? It literally means the previous pesukim that is with the message of righteousness, and not to make the sacred space of Hashem unholy. But the message of the Torah extends beyond the message to the Kohanim, to the non-Kohen's as well. Hence the message.

first of the ten commandments, I am Hashem your G-d, Rashi there, (18:2) states you accepted me as your G-d, accept the decrees. If they are being stated in the Torah, it means they are forever a temptation to be overcome².

From this introduction, Parshas Acharei, we can look ahead to the second parsha this week of Kedoshim. Once you overcome and truly follow in the ways of the Torah, "Be Holy!" the Torah says, why? "Because I, Hashem, am holy!" This means that the common denominator connecting humans to Hashem is that we are both holy. This Parsha, as explained in Rashi, was stated in the time of Hakhel (ingathering of the whole nation, which is the same for us this year in 5783). The Torah tells us a very positive message about ourselves. Unlike Esav, who was an embarrassment to the Bechoros because he said about himself, he will die anyway, why should the responsibility of being the firstborn matter? The nation of Israel, which follows Yaakov, is taught not to achieve holiness (which can be a deterrent as it was for Esav) but to *be* holy because, fundamentally, all are holy because Hashem is holy.

The rest of the Parsha directly connects us to standard laws that, without Torah, can be perverted, causing Chas Vishalom to distance from Hashem. Even if something seems right, if Torah does not guide it, we must be very careful, which connects us back to the beginning of Acharei. The intention of the sons of Aaron was right,

² These are read on Yom Kippur, likely to remind us how easily we can falter because of the world around us. Hashem doesn't mince words with the threat of succumbing to temptations, even on Yom Kippur; when we read this portion, we need to know that the animalistic part of ourselves is strong and

they wanted to connect to Hashem, but their actions were incorrect. As such, their neshamos were extinguished, but it repeats that incident in the Parsha to really reinforce the idea that one needs to look at Torah purely and study it, specifically as the Alter Rebbe explains through Halacha. In this way, let us hope that we can read Kedoshim Hakhel with Mashiach speedily in our days.

Good Shabbos

has the power to sway us. We may not commit or be tempted to commit the forbidden relations. Nonetheless, we are reminded of how close we are to giving into our animalistic parts of ourselves if we don't commit our minds, bodies and souls to Torah.