

PARSHAT ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM

6 - 12 Iyar 5785
4 - 10 May 2025

Torah: Leviticus 16:1-20:27
HafTorah: Amos 9:7-15

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Positive Mitzvah 59 Blowing Trumpets

We are commanded to blow trumpets while the sacrifices offered on special dates were being offered in the Holy Temple.

We are also commanded to blow trumpets during times of distress, to accompany our prayer to G-d.

Aleph Institute

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center

5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax: 412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org
info@AlephNE.org



ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

WHY SO RESTRICTIVE?

When a man and woman are together in a room, and the door closes, that is a sexual event. Not because of what is going to happen, but what has already happened. It may not be something to make novels of, but it is a sexual occurrence, because male and female is what sexuality used to be all about.

It is true that in our world today, in the "free world" certainly, people have, on the whole, stopped thinking in these terms. What happened was that we started putting up all these defenses, getting steeled, inured, against the constant exposure and stimulation of men and women sharing all sorts of activities - coeducational school, camps, gyms - is that we started blocking out groups of people. We can't be as naturally sexual as G-d created us to be. When a man says, "I have a woman friend, but we're just friends, nothing more, I'm not attracted to her in any sexual way, she's not my type," you've got to ask yourself what is really going on here. Is this a disciplined person? Or is this a person who has died a little bit?

What does he mean, "She's not my type?" When did all this "typing" come into existence? It's all artificial. It's not true to human sexuality. And it really isn't even true in this context, because given a slight change of circumstance, you could very easily be attracted. After all, you are a male, she's a female. How many times does a relationship begin that is casual, neighborly, and then suddenly becomes intimate? The great awakening of this boy and girl who are running around, doing all sorts of things, sharing all sorts of activities, and lo and behold, they realize - what drama, what drama - that they are attracted to each other. These are grownups, intelligent human beings, and it caught them by surprise. It's kind of silly.

So, closing a door should be recognized as a sexual event. And you need to ask yourself: Are you prepared for this? Is it permissible? Is it proper? If not, leave the door open. Should men and women shake hands? Should it be seen as an intimate gesture? Should any physical contact that is friendly be considered intimate? Hopefully, it should.

These laws are not guarantees against sin. They have never

completely prevented it. There are people who dress very modestly. They cover everything. They sin. It's a little more cumbersome, but they manage. All these laws are not just there to lessen the possibility of someone doing something wrong. They also preserve sexuality - because human sexuality is what G-d wants. He gave us these laws to preserve it, to enhance it - and make sure it's focused to the right places and circumstances - not to stifle it.

We have become callous about our sexuality. Even in marriage, a kiss on the run cheapens it, makes it callous - then we run to the therapist for advice. And do you know what the therapist who charges \$200 an hour for his advice says? He tells the couple not to touch each other for two weeks. Judaism tells you that, free of charge. Yes, there are two weeks each month during which a husband and wife don't touch. This therapy has been around for 3000 years. And it still works. It's a wonderful idea.

When you don't close the door on yourself and that other person, you are recognizing your own sexuality. You are acknowledging the sexuality of the other person. Being modest, recognizing our borders, knowing where intimacy begins and not waiting until it is so intimate that we're too far gone, is a very healthy way of living. It doesn't change your lifestyle dramatically, but enhances it dramatically, and you come away more capable of relaxing, better able to be spontaneous, because you know that you can trust yourself. You've defined your borders. Now you can be free. It takes a load off your mind, and it makes you a much more lovable person.

*By Rabbi Manis Friedman
Author, The Joy of Intimacy*

WHO IS HOLY?

If anyone was bent on convincing us that Torah was old-fashioned, this would be a good Parshah to prove it. Leviticus, Chapter 18, contains the Bible's Immorality Act. Our moral code, the forbidden relationships, who may marry whom and who may not - all come from this week's reading.

We read this same chapter every year on Yom Kippur afternoon. And every year in every Shul around the world someone asks the very same question. "Why on Yom Kippur, Rabbi? Was there no other section of the Torah to choose besides the one about illicit

sex? Is this an appropriate choice to read in Shul on the holiest day of the year?"

Fair question. So, the Rabbis explain that this is, in fact, the ultimate test of our holiness. The most challenging arena of human conduct, the one that really tests the mettle of our morality, is not how we behave in the synagogue but how we behave in our bedrooms. To conduct ourselves appropriately in public is far easier than to be morally consistent in our intimate lives.

Old-fashioned? You bet. In a world of ever-changing, relative morality, the Torah does indeed seem rather antiquated.

Man-made laws are forever being amended to suit changing times and circumstances. When a new super-highway is built, traffic officials may decide that it is safe to raise the speed limit. Should there be a fuel shortage, these same officials may decide to lower the speed limit in order to conserve the energy supply. Human legislation is constantly adapting to fluctuating realities. But G-d's laws are constant, consistent and eternal. Divine legislation governs moral issues. Values, ethics, right and wrong, these are eternal, never-changing issues. Humankind has been confronting these problems since time immemorial. From cavemen to Atilla the Hun to nuclear superpowers, the essential issues really have not changed very much. Questions of moral principle, good and evil, have been there from the very beginning. Life choices are made by each of us in every generation. These questions are timeless.

So, we read that adultery was forbidden in Moses' day and it still is in ours. So is incest. But it wouldn't shock me at all if the same forces motivating for new sexual freedoms soon began campaigning for incestuous relationships to become legal. And why not? If it's all about consenting adults, why deny siblings? Given the slippery slope of our moral mountains, nothing is unthinkable anymore.

Ultimately, morality cannot be decided by referendum. We desperately need a higher authority to guide us in the often-confusing dilemmas of life. In Egypt and Canaan lots of degenerate behavior was acceptable, even popular. In this week's Parshah, G-d tells His people

that He expects us to march to a different beat. We are called upon to be a holy nation, distinctively different in this, the most challenging test of our morality. It doesn't matter what is legal or trendy in Egypt, Canaan, America or Scandinavia. We have our own moral guide, our own book of books which requires no editing or revised editions for the new age. Because right is right and wrong is wrong and so it will always be.

A wise rabbi once wrote that we mustn't confuse "normal" with "average." Since there are people out there who, tragically, may have lost a leg, this would mean that the "average" person has something like 1.97 legs. But that isn't quite "normal." A normal person has two legs. When Torah teaches us to be holy and distinctive, it is reminding us to be normal, not average. Average can be rather mediocre. Just be normal and retain your Jewish uniqueness. It may not be easy. It may not be politically correct. You probably will not win any popularity contests. But you will be faithful to

the eternal truths of life. And in the long run, you will be right.

*By Rabbi Yossy Goldman
President, South African Rabbinical Association*

ACHAREI-KEDOSHIM IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Acharei Mot," means "after the death of" and it is found in Leviticus 16:1. The name of the Parshah, "Kedoshim," means "holy [ones]" and it is found in Leviticus 19:2.

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry "into the holy." Only one person, the Kohen Gadol ("high priest"), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred Ketoret to G-d.

Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats, to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing Korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with the statement: "You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy." This is followed by dozens of mitzvot (divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him- or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d.

These include: the prohibition against idolatry, the mitzvah of charity, the principle of equality before the law, Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one's parents, and the sacredness of life.

Also in Kedoshim is the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah, and of which Hillel said, "This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary" - "Love your fellow as yourself."

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 6 Iyar 5785 - 4 May 2025

Passing of Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1344)

Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, known by the acronym Ralbag or Gersonides, was a great Torah scholar who lived in Provence (a region in Southern France). He is famous for his Bible commentary, which includes many ethical lessons to be learned from the stories of Scripture. He was also proficient in philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics, and wrote numerous works and treatises on these topics. He passed away on 6 Iyar 5104 (1344).

Anti-Jewish Riots in Russia (1881)

Following the assassination, a month earlier, of Tzar Alexander II of Russia, and the subsequent rumors that the Jews were behind the assassination, anti-Jewish riots broke out on the 6th of Iyar 5641 (1881). The riots and pogroms lasted for four years, during which time thousands of Jewish homes and synagogues were destroyed, and countless Jews were injured and impoverished. The unrest started out in Southern Russia, and quickly spread throughout the entire country.

Tzar Alexander III actually blamed the riots on the Jews, and punished them by enacting new laws which further restricted their freedoms. Among these devastating laws were legislation which restricted Jews from residing in towns with fewer than 10,000 citizens and limiting their professional employment and education opportunities. These oppressive laws, known as the "May Laws," compelled many Jews to emigrate. They are said to have caused more than two million Jews to leave Russia, many of them opting to move to the United States of America for the freedoms it offered.

Monday, 7 Iyar 5785 - 5 May 2025

Jerusalem Walls Dedicated (335 BCE)

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was celebrated with great jubilation in 3425 (335 BCE), nearly 88 years after they were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia.

Rindfleisch Massacres Begin (1298)

Taking advantage of the state of anarchy in Germany, the result of a civil war between two

contenders to the throne, a mob led by a nobleman named Rindfleisch murdered the Jews of Rottingen on 7 Iyar, 5058 (1298). Over the next few years, hundreds of Jewish communities in Germany and Austria were destroyed.

Venetian Ghetto (1516)

On the 7th of Iyar, 5276 (1516), the Venetian City Council decreed that all Jews be segregated to a specific area of the city.

Venice's ghetto was surrounded by water, with a canal leading to its gates. At night the "Christian guards" patrolled the waters around the ghetto to ensure that the night curfew wasn't violated. At the same time of the establishment of this ghetto, numerous other degrading laws were enacted, including the requirement that all Jews wear yellow stars as identification.

Despite all these restrictions, the Jewish community blossomed and functioned normally. In 5457 (1797), the ghetto was abolished by Napoleon during the French Revolution.

The site chosen to accommodate the Jews had once housed the city's foundries, gettos in Italian - and thus the eventual popularization throughout Europe of the word "ghetto" to describe the city sections where Jews were forced to reside.

Tuesday, 8 Iyar 5785 - 6 May 2025

1st Crusade Begins (1096)

In the early 4830's (1070s), the Muslim Turks commenced an offensive against the Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem. Pope Gregory VII offered his help to defend the Greek Christians, but the army he promised never materialized.

In 4855 (1095), his successor, Urban II, began to call for a holy war to liberate the Christians in Jerusalem. By the next year, more than 100,000 men had rallied to his call, forming the First Crusade. Urban and the local clergymen in Europe felt that the Crusade had another purpose as well - to annihilate all non-Christians in Europe who refused to convert to Christianity.

On their way to the Holy Land, the mobs of crusaders attacked many Jewish communities. On Shabbat, the 8th of Iyar, the Jews of Speyer

(Rhineland-Palatinate), Germany were massacred. Many of the Jews of Worms, Germany were also massacred on this day; some of them took refuge in a local castle for a week before being slaughtered as they recited their morning prayers.

Thursday, 10 Iyar 5785 - 8 May 2025

Passing of Eli (891 BCE)

Eli the High Priest passed away on 10 Iyar 2825 (891 BCE) upon learning that the Holy Ark containing the Tablets was captured by the Philistines, and that his two sons were killed in battle. Eli was the 13th in the line of the "Shoftim" ("Judges") who led the Jewish people during the four centuries between the passing of Joshua in 2515 (1245 BCE) and the crowning of King Saul in 2881 (879 BCE).

Passing of Rif (1103)

Rabbi Isaac Al-Fasi (4773-4863, or 1013-1103), known by the acronym "Rif," was one of the earliest codifiers of the Talmud. In 4848 (1088) he was forced to flee his hometown of Fez, Morocco, to Spain, where he assumed the position of rabbi in Alusina (Lucene).

Friday, 11 Iyar 5785 - 9 May 2025

Jewish Books Confiscated (1510)

1,500 Jewish books were confiscated in Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany at the instigation of an apostate on the 11th of Iyar 5270 (1510).

Riots in Wasilkow and Konotop (1881)

Anti-Jewish riots (pogroms) continue to escalate in Russia, and, on the 11th of Iyar, they broke out in the cities of Waslikow and Konotop. The Jews were blamed for the assassination of Czar Alexander II, who was assassinated by revolutionaries. The pogroms continued for three years across the entire Russia.

Shabbat, 12 Iyar 5785 - 10 May 2025

Roman Jews Granted Privileges (1402)

On the 12th of Iyar, 5162 (1402), the Jews of Rome were granted "privileges" by Pope Boniface IX. They were given legal right to observe their Shabbat, protection from local oppressive officials, their taxes were reduced, and orders were given to treat Jews as full-fledged Roman citizens.