

Torah Weekly

ת"ב

"Thou Shalt Not Be Judgmental"

PARSHAT ACHAREI KEDOSHIM

19-25 April 2026
2-8 Iyar

Acharei-Kedoshim: Leviticus 16:1
- 20:27
Amos 9:7-15

Calendars

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzah for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Some years ago, I heard Rabbi Manis Friedman tell a story about a man who overheard his friend telling his wife on the phone, "Drop dead!"

"How can you speak that way to your wife?!" he demanded. The friend smiled and said, "She just asked me if her new dress was gorgeous, and I answered, 'Yes, drop-dead.'"

Hearing only half a conversation and drawing conclusions can be dangerous. I've lost count of how many times I've heard stories about others that I didn't want to believe, and indeed, upon investigation, they turned out to be either significant distortions or complete fabrications. I'm sure we've all had similar experiences.

In the portion of Kedoshim, we read the words, Betzedek tishpot amitecha,¹ "You shall judge your fellow with righteousness."

Rashi, the foremost Biblical commentator, first provides the simple analysis, which is that judges must rule righteously, without being swayed by any other considerations. In fact, the full title of a beth din, a Jewish court, is not only beth din, a "house of law," but beth din tzedek, a "house of just law." The law must be just, fair, and objective—otherwise the court itself is not doing justice.

But then Rashi adds a second interpretation, relevant not only for the judiciary but for all of us. "Another explanation is: Judge your fellow favorably" (i.e., give the benefit of the doubt).

The moral imperative to judge people favorably by giving them the benefit of the doubt is discussed in the Talmud,² Ethics of the Fathers,³ and many other Jewish sources.

I wondered what the connection might be to Kedoshim, a Torah portion dealing with the overall directive to be holy. And it occurred to me that perhaps it might be because, in fact, all of us are holy, but too often, people are misjudged and condemned before we have all the facts at our disposal. There

are so many

stories expressing this theme that we could go on forever, but let me share a few.

My friend and colleague, Rabbi Mendel Lipskar, tells the story of his early days in Johannesburg back in the '70s. He was a young, new rabbi in a synagogue frequented mainly by older people who were rather set in their ways. At some point during his first Yom Kippur there, a young man walked into the shul looking very out of place. He was wearing jeans and sandals, sporting long, frizzy hair—the consummate hippie. Rabbi Lipskar asked the gabbai to give the unexpected visitor the honor of opening the Holy Ark during the service. The gabbai was horrified. Who was this young man who was dressed so inappropriately? To give him such an honor was, to his mind, unthinkable. But the rabbi insisted, and the gabbai acceded, albeit most reluctantly. To make a long story short, that Yom Kippur experience was the beginning of a spiritual journey for the young visitor. Today the former hippie is a respected sofer (ritual scribe) in a large American city.

My son, Michoel, is a shliach in Kauai, the lushest of the Hawaiian Islands. Not infrequently, sunbathers come into the shul straight off the beach and need to be given not only a tallit, but robes or clothes as well. But the important thing is that they are always welcome.

I recently came across a letter to someone who complained to the Rebbe about a fellow who had been called into shul as the tenth man to help make the minyan. The complainant was outraged that the man sat in the back of the sanctuary reading the newspaper throughout the service.

The Rebbe suggested that he should appreciate how special it is that even a Jew who obviously cannot read Hebrew or participate in the service still comes in and gives up his time to help make the minyan.

It's all about perspective and giving people the benefit of the doubt.

Over 200 years ago, the holy Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev became famous for the lengths he would go to consider others favorably. Of the many stories that highlight his benevolent, non-judgmental attitude, one of my favorites is of his encounter with a young man outside shul on the holiest day of Yom Kippur. This strapping young man was eating publicly, in brazen violation of the fast.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak said, "I'm sorry to see that you're obviously not feeling well, and you had to break your fast. I wish you better."

"I'm fine, Rabbi. I couldn't be healthier," replied the young man.

"Well then, perhaps you forgot that today is Yom Kippur?"

"Who doesn't know that today is Yom Kippur, Rabbi?!"

"And are you also aware that Yom Kippur is a fast day, and we are not permitted to eat today?"

Sacred material – do not desecrate
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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

“Of course, I know! Which Jew doesn’t know that, Rabbi?!”

Hearing this, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak looked heavenward and exclaimed, “Master of the Universe, see how righteous are your people, Israel. I have given this young man so many opportunities, but he absolutely refuses to tell a lie!”

All are innately holy, but how we judge them may make all the difference. I know it’s not easy, but if we look at others favorably, then we ourselves will be behaving in a holy way, and this will bring out that innate holiness inside them.

Moreover, our rabbis taught: One who judges his friend favorably will himself be judged by G-d favorably.

By Yossy Goldman

Acharei-Kedoshim in a Nutshell

Leviticus 16:1–20:27

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.”

Rabbi Yeshaya (“Shayale”) Steiner of Kerestir (1925) 3 Iyar

Known affectionately as Reb Shayale, he served as rabbi (and Chassidic rebbe) in Kerestir (Bodrogkeresztúr), a village in Northern Hungary. An accomplished Torah scholar and disciple of many leading Chassidic masters, he was renowned for his love for simple folk, his radical hospitality, and the miracles that abounded in his presence. He passed away on 3 Iyar, 5685 (1925). In recent years, his gravesite and home in Kerestir have been a magnet for pilgrims, who come to soak up the Chassidic fervor and wholesome love and acceptance that guided his life.

Maimonides Saved (1165) 4 Iyar

The 4th of Iyar was observed by Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, 1135-1204) as a personal day of fasting and prayer. Maimonides recounts that when he and his family were fleeing Islamic persecution from Fez, Morocco to the Holy Land, their ship was caught in a fierce storm at sea. He cried out to G-d in prayer and vowed to fast each year on this date.

Napoleon Fails to Conquer Acre (1799) 5 Iyar

The attempted conquest of Acre was a vital part of Napoleon’s Mediterranean campaign against the Ottoman Empire. However, the local troops, supervised by the Pasha’s Jewish advisor Chaim Parchi, valiantly withstood the two-month-long siege. After a final attempt to conquer the city on May 10 (corresponding to 5 Iyar), Napoleon gave up his plans and the siege was lifted.

War of Independence (1948) 6 Iyar

One day after the State of Israel was proclaimed (see Jewish History for the 5th of Iyar), the surrounding Arab nations -- Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq --declared war on the fledgling state, with the objective of "driving the Jews into the sea." Tel Aviv was bombed on that very first day of the War of Independence.

Jerusalem Walls Dedicated (335 BCE) 7 Iyar

The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem was celebrated with great jubilation nearly 88 years after they were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia.

1st Crusade Begins (1096) 8 Iyar

In the early 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 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

