

# Parshiot Acharei Mot--K'doshim

May 2, 2020 – 8 Iyar 5780

Annual (Leviticus 16:1 – 20:27): Hertz p. 480

Haftarah (Amos 9:7 –15): Hertz p. 509

## Torah Portion Summary

God instructs Moshe about the Yom Kippur rituals, during which the high priest was to cleanse and purify the sanctuary from the effects of the sins of the Israelites. Only on this day was Aaron permitted to enter the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary. He was to dress in special linen garments and to bring a purification offering on behalf of himself and his household. He would then cast lots over two goats, designating one for God as a purification offering on behalf of the people and one for Azazel. This is the scapegoat to be sent off into the wilderness bearing Israel's sins. The people were to observe Yom Kippur each year as a day of fasting and abstinence from work so that their sins might be forgiven. Moshe tells the people that whether they were intended for food or as sacrifices, animals were to be slaughtered only at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. It is strictly forbidden to eat blood. God instructs Moshe to tell the people that they are not to copy the practices of the Egyptians or the Canaanites. Specifics about forbidden sexual relationships are given.

The second part of this double parasha, K'doshim, contains the bulk of the Holiness Code, which is characterized by the commandment, You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy. The many mitzvot found here call for striving for holiness in all areas of life - ritual (You shall keep My Sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary, 19:30), civil (You shall not falsify measures of length, weight, or capacity, 19:35), and ethical (You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old, 19:32). Its best known commandment is "Love your fellow as yourself". Israel is told to observe all of God's laws and rules. God tells Moshe to warn the people against child sacrifice and witchcraft and divination. The laws of forbidden sexual relationships are repeated. Similarly, God warns Israel not to follow the practices of the Canaanite nations and to remember that God has set them apart to be a holy people.

### I. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord. (*Leviticus 19:18*)

1. "Love your fellow as yourself." Rabbi Akiva said: This is the fundamental principle of the Torah. Ben Azzai said: "This is the record of Adam's line" (Genesis 5:1) - is a fundamental principle superior to this. (*Sifra*)
2. You should desire for your neighbor that which you would desire for yourself, were you in his position. (*Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno, 1475-1550, Italy*)
3. It is a mitzvah for every person to love every single fellow Jew as himself, as it says, "Love your fellow as yourself." Therefore it is necessary to speak his praise and to care about his money as you care about your own, and to desire his honor. Whoever derives honor by degrading his fellow has no share in the World to Come. (*Rambam--Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, 1135-1209, Spain and Egypt; Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Dei-ot 6:31*)
4. It happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, "Convert me to Judaism on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Shammai chased him away with the builder's rod in his hand. When he came before Hillel, Hillel converted him and said, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: this is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Now go and study." (*Talmud Shabbat 31a*)
5. If the text means that a man must love his fellow as himself, it is hardly conceivable that the Almighty should command something that is beyond human capacity. Moreover, feelings such as hate and love are hardly the object of commands, since they are not under human control. To fulfill such a command to the letter, a man would have to grieve for his fellow's sorrows just as he grieves for his own. This would be intolerable, since scarcely a moment passes without hearing of someone's misfortune. Hillel therefore correctly interpreted the passage in a negative manner. At least do nothing to your neighbor that you would not like to be done to yourself. (*Biur--Hebrew commentary by Moshe Mendelsohn, 1729-1786, in collaboration with Solomon Dubnow, Naftali Herz Wessely, and Aaron Yaroslav, Germany*)
6. Why did Hillel state the Torah principle in the form of a negative, rather than as the Torah puts it: "Love your fellow as yourself"? It is possible that Hillel realized, from the very question, that the

person asking it was looking for a simple summation, and that he would understand only the negative, namely that a person should not do anything to another that would cause the doer distress if done to himself. The loftier idea, though, of “Love your fellow as yourself” was beyond his comprehension. (*Chidushei HaRIM--Rabbi Isaac Meir Alter, the Gerer Rabbi, 1799-1866, Poland*)

7. Sometimes a person will be interested in his neighbor's welfare in certain respects only; he may wish him wealth, but not scholarly attainments and the like. But even if he wishes him well in everything, in wealth, honor, learning, and wisdom, he still will not want him to be absolutely equal with him. He will still want to be superior to him in some respect. It was this form of selfishness that the Torah condemned. But a person should wish his fellow well in all things, just as he wishes his own self, and have no reservations. (*Ramban--Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270, Spain*)

### Sparks for Discussion

“Love your fellow as yourself” may be the Torah's best-known commandment, but what exactly does it mean? Does it apply to feelings, to actions or to both? Are we required to love only our fellow Jews or all human beings? Is Hillel's interpretation - What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow - an inferior minimalist version or the best way to explain this mitzvah in practical terms? How do you go about fulfilling this commandment? How does this compare to the Golden Rule?

### II. *Al tashlikheinu l'eit zikna* - Do not cast us off in old age

You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (*Leviticus 19:32*)

1. Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is attained by the way of righteousness. (*Proverbs 16:31*)
2. Do not cast me off in old age; when my strength fails, do not forsake me! (*Psalms 71:9*)
3. Rabbi Yose the Galilean said: By old is meant a person who has acquired wisdom... What is showing deference? It means that one should not sit in the seat of the old or speak before he has spoken or contradict him. “You shall rise” A person might think that he could shut his eyes when he passes as if he had not seen him. This is a matter entrusted to the heart; that is why it says, “You shall fear your God.” (*Talmud Kiddushin 32b*)
4. As regards scholars, the older they become the more wisdom they acquire... But as regards the ignorant, the older they become, the more foolish they become. (*Talmud Shabbat 152a*)
5. Show respect to an old man who has forgotten his learning through no fault of his own, for we have learned that the fragments of the old tablets [of the Ten Commandments which Moshe shattered] were kept alongside the new tablets in the Ark of the Covenant. (*Talmud Berakhot 8b*)
6. A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old. It is easy to love children. Even tyrants and dictators make a point of being fond of children. But the affection and care for the old, the incurable, the helpless are the true gold mines of a culture. (*Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Insecurity of Freedom, p. 72*)
7. Although the Jewish community has always laid great stress on the Jewish education of its young, Maimonides reminds us that old people need to fill their lives with learning. The Book of Job suggests that learning of the old might be of particular value: “With age comes wisdom, and length of days brings understanding.” (Job 12:12) Job's notion that “with age comes wisdom” contrasts markedly with the worship of youth and beauty in contemporary society. Indeed, the biblical and Jewish approach is inherently more optimistic. In contemporary society, which places such emphasis on one's physical appearance, our value can only decrease with time, whereas the Jewish emphasis on wisdom and experience suggests that our value can continue to increase throughout life. (*Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, The Book of Jewish Values, p. 288*)

### Sparks for Discussion

The verses from Proverbs and Psalms remind us of the ideal and the reality of aging. Our commentators suggest that respect is due to the aged because of the wisdom they have acquired. Do you agree? What is the nature of the wisdom acquired with age? Do we owe this same respect to all the elderly? How exactly do you understand showing deference to the old? Is your community a place where gray hair is a crown or a curse? What more can be done to make the elderly feel included and valued?