

April 12, 2014

## ACHAREI MOT – After the Death

This week's *parashah* begins by cautioning Aaron about when he can approach the Most Holy Place. The *parashah* continues with descriptions of what clothing is to be worn, what sacrifices to bring, and how to carry out the sacrifices. When we get to chapter 18, we read: "You shall do my judgments, and you shall observe my laws." We have read 17 chapters of laws and regulations already, so why should we all of a sudden be told to observe and do these things? Chapter 18 seems to be a turning point of sorts. Up until this time, most of the laws have had to do with ritual. The laws have been concerned with sacrifices, kashrut, and leprosy and things like that. Now we are faced with some ethical laws. The ethical laws seem to be easier for us to deal with because, first of all, there are fewer of them, and secondly, the reasons for these laws are more apparent. We might be inclined to question why it is OK to eat cows but not pigs – after all, everybody else eats them and I've been told that they are quite tasty. But when we are told that we must not steal or kill, it is easier to understand why it is wrong. The ethical laws include diverse matters but there is no common denominator except possibly feeling empathy with other human beings. You know, the Golden Rule – do unto others.

If we observe these laws and do these judgments, we are told that we will live. This way of picturing the laws, as a path to life, begins here. If you remember, the path to the tree of life was blocked when Adam and that woman sinned, and this is the way to get back in. The laws are not presented as a burden, but as a blessing. Those people who have characterized the law as a weight that no human being can possibly bear do not appreciate the positive, fulfilling quality available to those who live by it. It is presented here as something that humans *can* do and the laws only become a burden when people add so much to it that it becomes a weight. The law is ultimately a source of blessing to the whole world.

The *Haftarah* reading for today includes some of the acts that do not line up with the law. They include sorcery, adultery, perjury, and the exploitation of widows and orphans. Later in the chapter, we are exhorted to remember the Law that was given through Moses.

The *B'rit Chadashah* lists even more unrighteous acts that go against *HaShem's* regulations and judgments. We are reminded at the end of the chapter that we were bought with a price and are, therefore, to glorify God in our bodies and spirits which are God's to begin with.

Hebrew            Leviticus 18:4-5  
English            Leviticus 18:1-5  
*Haftarah*        Malachi 3:4-7  
*B'rit Chadasha* 1 Corinthians 6:9-12