

April 20, 2013

ACHAREI MOT (After the Death)/**KEDOSHIM** (Holiness)

Today we have a double portion, but it could just as well have been one rather large portion owing to the similarity of content. After the death of Aaron's two sons and further instruction for Aaron and his remaining sons, the *parashah* go on with instructions for *Yom Kippur*. This is all about atonement for sin through sacrifices. This is followed by what has been called the "Holiness Code." It is called the Holiness Code because the dominant theme is the holiness of the people of Israel. In the first 2 verses of *parashat Kedoshim*, we learn that we are to be holy because *HaShem* is holy. Then there are a lot of rules like keeping the *Shabbat*, turning away from idols, not stealing nor swearing falsely, etc., etc., etc.

This imperative – "You shall be holy" – is lofty in its call to morality, yet it also raises a problem for us, as it did for our ancestors. In repeating this instruction to be holy, the Torah tells us *what* to be, but it doesn't tell us what that attribute entails. What exactly does being "holy" mean? Some link it to a sense of justice because Isaiah 18:1 says that "the Lord is exalted through justice." Others see study of Torah a mark of holiness since the Torah, itself, declares, "She is a tree life to them that hold fast to her." Still others think that if you can manage to follow the 613 *mitzvot*, that will do the trick. So you're telling me that I can't be holy because I'm not always just in my decisions and because I'm not a *Torah* scholar. Surely there must be something I can do to be holy.

In Psalm 116, King David asks, "What shall I return to the Lord for all of His goodness to me?" With overflowing gratitude, how could David, a mere mortal, thank *HaShem*. What could David give to the One who created everything and lacks nothing? David answers in the next verse, "I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord." David will honor *HaShem* by bringing sacrifices as prescribed in the *Torah*. That's good for David, but what about us? We no longer have the option to bring sacrifices. Besides, the prophets have already told us that God has no desire for mere rituals.

HaShem wants us. He wants our hearts. He wants to be a part of our lives. He wants us to turn to Him in prayer – not only when we have troubles, but also in gratitude. As our loving Father in heaven, He wants nothing more than closeness with His children. God loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation, but to have a relationship with Him, we must love Him back.

But what can we do to show *HaShem* that we love Him and want to have a relationship with Him? What do we have that God could possibly want? When we offer up our prayers, we bring a gift to God. When we read and study God's word, we give a gift to God. When we apply His teachings to our lives and make God the focus of our lives, we give Him great pleasure. At least, that's a starting point.

Focus: Be Holy

Hebrew - Leviticus 18:30 & 19:1-2

English - Leviticus 18:26-19:2

Haftarah – Ezekiel 20:15-20

B'rit Chadasha – Matthew 5:43-48