

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim **After the Death/ Holy Ones** **Spiritual Separatism**
Torah: Lev. 16:1-20:27

(1) 17:7: **They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the goats with which they prostituted themselves.** We have to avoid all kinds of idolatry, both overt and subtle. Are there any goats in your life to which you sacrifice your time and money, instead of giving them over to the L-rd?

(2) 18:28: **Take heed that the land does not vomit you out if you defile it, just as it shall have vomited out the nations which preceded you.** The land remains the L-rd's and we have to live in our land according to His requirements. We have to be careful that our lives do not want to vomit us because we defile them – some people's lives are a series of vomits, where defilement spews them from one disaster to another. How is your life doing?

(3) 19:37: **You shall observe all my laws and my ordinances and you shall put them into practice. I am YHVH.** The sacred name appears fourteen times in this chapter and shows us how we need to be separate from the darkness of the world as we want to be holy. Holy is primarily a n ethical, moral reaction where our lives become the context for us to apply His Word and use it both as a means to live and as a means to separate ourselves from the uncleanness and darkness of this age.

(4) 19:26: **Show shall be holy for Me, for I am holy and I have separated you from all the peoples so that you would belong to Me.** This chapter contains 18 distinctions which must be made so that we do not imitate the abominations of the world out of which we have been delivered. How much distance are you building in your life between the values and priorities of the world and those of the L-rd? No single sin or abomination is singled out, but all and any sinfulness is defined as going against the specific teachings of the L-rd. May we all build in a widening distance between our lives and those which are lived by the dictates of the world.

Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15; Ezek. 22:1-16 (20:2-20)

(5) 20:7: **I say to them, let each reject the abominations which catch their eye and do not soil yourselves with the idols of Egypt, I am YHVH your G-d.** We win or lose by what we choose. What catches your eye? Are there functional idols which have you under their influence? We are in the world, but we are never to be of the world.

(6) 20:12: **I gave them also my Sabbaths as a sign between them and Me in order that they would know that I am the YHVH who sanctifies them.** How much of a clean break with the world is there in your life which the L-rd can use to fill you with His rest and His holiness? How much room is there in your life for the things of the L-rd during the week, so that you can take the power of the Sabbath with you for the other six days of the week?

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 6:9-20; Matt. 5:43-48

(7) 6:20: **For you have been bought with a great price (grand prix). Glorify therefore G-d in your body.** How you live is as important as what you believe and all the shifts and changes in your life need to be brought into line with the price that was paid for you so that how you live becomes more and more a reaction to both the price which was paid – so that there is more and more of a separation from the world and an attachment to the L-rd and to the teachings of His Word.

Psalms 26/15 (Sherri) **Jewish Hero: James Joachim**

2 Peter 1:16-21: ***For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and the coming of our L-rd Yeshua HaMashiach, but we did so as those who had seen His majesty with our own eyes. For He received honour and glory from G-d the Father when that voice was conveyed to Him by the majestic glory, saying: "This is my Son, my beloved, in whom I have placed all my affection". We ourselves heard this voice come from Heaven, while we were with Him on the holy mountain. And we hold for much more certain the prophetic Word, to which you would do well to pay attention to as a lamp which shines in a dark place up until the day appears and the Morning Star rises in your hearts. You should know first of all that no prophecy of the Scripture can be a matter of one's own interpretation, for it is not by the will of man that a prophecy was ever brought, but it is moved by the Holy Spirit that men have spoken on behalf of G-d.***"

As we prepare to observe Shavuot next month, I want to continue to highlight various aspects of the Word and how we should relate to it in our lives as believers. This morning, I want to distinguish between our experience and the Word, because far too many people, even believers, give more credence to personal experience than they do to the written Word and this is a weakness and not a source of strength. In our passage the apostle mentions His marvellous experience on the mountain when G-d spoke directly, confirming Yeshua as His beloved Son.

He begins by saying that our faith in the resurrected L-rd is not the product of some cunningly put together story that someone made up. For him and the other apostles, the Gospel message has two parallel sources – their personal encounter with the Word who was made flesh and the written Word, which despite Peter's amazing encounter with the L-rd, he says should take precedence over any personal experience or encounter we might possibly have. He is neither denying nor downplaying personal experience, but he is stating firmly that personal experience needs to be subject to the Word and even that our experiences in the L-rd, need to be encounters with the L-rd through the Word and not removed from it or in competition with it.

I am glad I have had many experiences with the L-rd and with His Word, but any authority or credibility I could have should not be primarily based on what I have experienced, but should derive directly from the written Word. ***He is saying that the inspired content of the Bible takes precedence over even the most intense and marvellous of personal experiences.***

Now we know that the Bible is not an exhaustive collection of everything we can know about G-d, nor is it even a collection which outlines every possible experience we could have with G-d. It is the guide and the means by which we need to evaluate and validate all and any personal experience.

You know how I feel about the various forms of mysticism which elevate personal experience above the Bible or which find all kinds of strange content supposedly hidden between the lines of the sacred text and which are simply not there. Said another way, ***if ever our spiritual experience contradicts or sets aside the written Word, then we have stepped outside of an authentic experience with the L-rd*** and have begun the slide into cunningly devised myths which elevate personal revelation above written revelation. Not even those who walked with the L-rd and witnessed His miracles while He walked on earth and even encountered the resurrected L-rd, ever placed themselves and their experiences above the inspired, written record.

If ever you have tried to put something together with those wonderful products which are labelled: ***some assembly required***, you quickly learn the hard way that ***personal experience must yield to the***

manufacturer's specifications if you want what you are working on both to be put together correctly and to work correctly. Ask me sometime about a bookshelf I tried to assemble when I was perumed – I was certain that I was doing everything right, but when I stood it up in my office, I found that I had put to lower half together with the pin holes on the outside and I am going to have to take it apart again and put it together correctly. Some of us may have to do likewise with portions of our lives.

Most of you know that I do not have much patience or time with many of the flashy ministries which pollute the airwaves and which are even beginning to crowd the internet. It is not because I do not believe in miracles or that I do not want to hear about the marvellous things which our L-rd is doing in the lives of people around the globe. It is just that I recognize that **any and all spiritual authority and authenticity comes uniquely from the written Word** and not from the powerful and wonderful claims these people are making, or from the tricks and testimonies they sponsor on their programs.

Too many believers seem to be **at war with the Bible** and seem to want to either side step its authority or improve on its content, as they elevate their own personal experiences to the level of the written Word and the apostle is saying that this is never going to happen. Well how do you have a valid, authentic experience in the L-rd and according to His Word?

From this passage there are two sources of light and I want to add a third source of light we need to access as we stumble through this dark, dreary life on our way home to our Father's home in glory. The first is a **lamp**, the second is a **star** and the third is the **day** whose coming this star's arrival announces.

Let's start with the lamp or torch. **Ps. 119:105** says that the Word is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path and we are not talking about **physical light or literal darkness**, where you need to hold the Bible in front of you wherever you go for fear of stumbling – but in a very real sense this is what you have to do. We live in a world full of **spiritual darkness** which will cause us to stumble and lose our way if we do not shine the light of His Word on **what we are doing and where we are going** – and it is definitely a **matter of spiritual accountability and biblical scrutiny**.

We need to hold up our experiences, our stories, our ideas and our ministries and examine them by the light of the Word, so we do not fall into the two big pitfalls the apostle mentions in this passage: **cleverly devised myths and personal interpretations**. The first one reminds me of the extravagant claims which I have heard believers make about their walk with the L-rd – including some pretty strange visions and weird teachings about things which run counter to what the Bible teaches. The second is a commonly practiced attempt to take what the Bible says and make it say what we want it to.

One of my favorite Talmudic commentators, **Elisha Ben Ishmael**, opposed the silly mysticism of Akiva and declared that the Torah was written in the **ordinary language of men** and did not contain hidden messages which could only be accessed by ignoring the surface meaning of the words and discovering strange and complicated methods of interpretation to get at what the Bible is actually saying.

G-d says what He means and means what He says and we know what we have to do with the rest, with the hidden secret things which the Bible does not delve into (Deut. 29:29). You all know that I like jokes and tall tales and that on April Fool's Day I am a menace to civilization, but I am very clear about the difference between a **tall tale and a real story** – and this distinction is not always clear in some of the ministries

which are trying to separate you from your hard earned cash to support an extravagant lifestyle which brings shame to the Gospel.

We have to avoid **cunningly devised myths** and we have to avoid trying to twist the Scriptures into saying something which they do not say, but there are two more sources of light I would like to talk to you about, so let's move on to the **morning star**. Ancient astronomers distinguished between two kinds of stars, those with a fixed position in the heavens and those which wandered. They called the wandering stars the planets and there are two of them which take turns being the morning star: Mars and Venus. At various seasons of the year, these stars appear just before dawn and can be seen as the fixed stars are beginning to fade.

Our L-rd is referred to by Peter as the Morning Star and he is talking about the **inner light** which we receive in our hearts and lives when we personally accept the L-rd into our lives. **This inner light is not the same as a hidden light** which only those who receive it can understand and it is not one which we need mystical knowledge wither to access or to understand – it is the personal experience of the light which the lamp (torch) speaks of and it is the inner testimony which shines in believers while we wait for the coming dawn – while we wait for the return of the L-rd.

This star gives us a **personal source of light** that is not visible to others, but can be detected by the effect it has on our lives when we cease stumbling around in spiritual darkness and begin to march steadily towards the coming dawn.

This **coming dawn** is the third source of light which we are all waiting for and it will one day destroy all spiritual darkness and confusion of this world – and will burn away all the myths and lies and deceits which linger in the darkness of this life and our inner experience with the light of our beloved Messiah, shall one day be eclipsed by His arrival when His light shall shine forever and no darkness shall remain.

What do we do in the interim? Three things. First we shine the light of His Word in all the dark recesses of our lives and use it to find the path He wants us to walk on. How much of the way you walk, and live, is based on the light of His Word? Next we need to listen to the inner voice of the Morning Star which lives in our hearts and allow Him to be our **personal homing beacon** while we are trapped in these bodies which are too often **addicted to darkness**. Lastly, we need to learn to wait for the dawn which is definitely coming, no matter how dark it gets in our lives or in the life of the world in which we live.

How is your torch doing? How good are you at letting the Morning Star shine in your heart and life? How firmly is your life pointed towards the coming day and how good are you getting at patiently waiting and not getting trapped into the fading darkness of this age? Are you falling for the two pitfalls we spoke of today? Do you elevate your experience above the Word or do you evaluate your experiences in the light of the Word? Have you fallen for the cunning myths of men who want to lead you astray and cause you to underwrite the extravagant folly of their showmanship driven lives?

May your little light shine in the great darkness we are travelling through as you personalize the Word and allow it to be the guide which you follow in the midst of all the paths which open up to us and in the midst of all the spiritual potholes we need to learn to avoid. As we approach Shavuot, may we prepare for this festival by making sure we are drawing close to the Word in every area of our lives, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

Let's pray.