

Acharei Mot**After the Death****Torah:**

Lev. 16:1-18:20

This portion divides into three sections intended to prevent the people from adopting negative pagan practices of any kind: (1) limited access to the divine presence, (2) sacrificial primacy of the tabernacle, (3) establishing solid sexual boundaries.

(1) We will deal with Chapter 16 in detail on the morning of Yom Kippur (Avodah), both to explain the meaning of the ritual access and how to relate to the otherness of G-d. Let me just say today that we can relate to Him devotionally and in prayer and in corporate worship, as we migrate through the festivals and the stages of our lives, but we must never think we own or even control the abiding presence of G-d, even though as believers in the Messiah, we become the temple of G-d. We are owned by Him and not the other way around. Part of the enduring paradox of intimacy with our King requires a continually renewed atonement (cleansing from sinfulness) so that our hearts and lives never allow the defilement of sin to form a barrier between us and our King.

He remains both accessible and wholly other, as long as we wander through this life and until the New Heavens and the New Earth allow us the unlimited, full access which our hearts crave and can only experience partially in this life. We live in constant peril of either wandering away from the presence or of violating it by not maintaining good spiritual hygiene and allowing subtle or overt forms of paganism to creep into our lives.

(2) Sacrifice and celebration will always be a community function focused on the Presence in our midst and not something which can be realized solely as an individual activity. We can pray and seek Him individually, but our regular devotion must be a gathering together as a community around His presence where no pagan worship practices are allowed to spoil our celebration of this devotion.

As well, this portion stipulates that sacrifices are only offered to Him and not to any other force or supposed source of blessing. We live in a culture where games of chance absorb an increasing chunk of our income as we try and get lady luck to smile on us, instead of relying on G-d and trusting Him for the means to meet our needs. This is the reason I am convinced that believers should not fall into the trap of buying lottery tickets and looking to bingo for their big break. The only big break we need in our pilgrimage is our relationship with the L-rd. Once He becomes the One we rely on, we are no longer spending our lives waiting for lady luck to bless and ultimately ruin our lives.

The biggest violation which this chapter forbids is eating live animals in an attempt to feed on both their flesh and their spirit (life force). You cannot eat their life, only their flesh. This is not a dietary stipulation related to Kosher; it forbids the ritual use of food to gain spiritual power and advantage which we should only seek from our walk with the L-rd.

(3) Chapter 18 deals with the violations of sexuality and the abominations which the pagan societies which surrounded Israel practised. We live in a sexualized society which in reality is a society which promotes sexual addiction and seeks to permit any kind of sexual satisfaction

outside of the bonds of matrimony. Marriage is the only, singular context for sexual gratification which the Scriptures allow. Extramarital sexuality of any kind is wrong, sinful and ultimately destructive. True sexual freedom exists only within the bounds of heterosexual matrimony between a man and his wife.

Before the passage makes a brief condemnation of homosexuality and bestiality, it outlines 18 forbidden heterosexual unions which violate kinship bonds. Some of the major characters in the Bible violated these kinship bonds, but as G-d prepared to turn Israel into His special covenant people, He wanted to prevent the possibility of the mistakes of the past being passed on to future generations.

He outlines five more forbidden sexual practices which include adultery, sacrificing of children to Moloch, homosexuality and bestiality. The passage also mentions that sexual activity should not be carried out during the menstrual cycle, to protect both partners from the possibility of infection and defilement. The sacrificing of children to Moloch is mentioned because the fruit of sexuality is being offered as a sacrifice and not being treated as a life with the full rights which the parents possess, but which they are violating with their offspring. Both sexuality and life need to be treated as sacred and not just as self-serving sources of carnal pleasure at the discretion of interested parties.

Homosexuality is forbidden in conjunction with at least 21 other forbidden sexual practices and is never singled out for special attention. It is one of many practices which the Bible calls abominations because true sexual fulfilment can only occur when a man and a woman unite in the bonds of matrimony. All and any forms of sexual brokenness should never be confused with sexual fulfilment and it is sad and cruel to allow lust to be the guiding principle in sexuality rather the limitations which the Scriptures place on this activity.

Sexual integrity is an essential feature of practical spirituality and none of the polluted practices of the pagans around us should be permitted among us as the people of G-d who are called to practice holiness.

Political correctness is often a cover to allow the Trojan horse of pagan fornication to use sexual abomination and brokenness to cripple our ability to walk with the L-rd in the light of His Word. Sexuality should not violate the three limits which the Word places on it. It should not violate kinship, gender or species.

Proponents of gay rights seem unaware that same sex activity is placed in the same category as bestiality, because it is unnatural and violates how our human anatomy was intended to function. Bestiality is a perverted sexual practice which the Canaanites practised to gain the sexual strength and power of the animals, which is something humans never need and can never get.

The three boundaries which define and limit sexuality (it must not violate kinship, gender or species) is the clear, firm teaching of the Scriptures on acceptable sexuality. Our modern society has done an excellent job of portraying biblical sexual standards as cruel and unreasonable, but truly, any violation of the boundaries of biblical sexuality rips apart the generational intimacy and sanctity of the family unit. With rights come responsibilities and the forgiveness of the L-rd wants to heal us and set us free from the crippling brokenness which occurs when sexual desire becomes the sexual lust which seeks for carnal gratification and

makes any possibility of sustained sexual fulfilment impossible.

Haftarah: Amos 9:7-15; Ezek. 22:1-16

These two passages identify the sinfulness which brought Israel out from under the blessing and protection of the L-rd and which caused Him to send them into captivity as a means of purging them of their defilement. Unfortunately they caved in to the sexual perversions of the Canaanites, including child sacrifice and various forms of ritual prostitution. If they were going to act like the defiled nations among whom they lived, He was going to scatter them among the nations until they were ready to come home and leave the defilement behind. They had just exchanged Egyptian paganism for Canaanite paganism and His people had to learn that no brand of paganism is ever acceptable for the people of the L-rd.

Amos looks ahead to the restoration of captive Israel to the Promised Land and to the arrival of the Messiah, when all nations shall acknowledge His Kingship and never allow paganism to take root again. When our people came home, they never had to be displaced again, but even as they wander from land to land, they do so under the L-rd's protection until it is time for them to return home and acknowledge Messiah's Kingship as He ushers in His eternal kingdom. We are seeing this begin to happen in our days.

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 6:9-20

The New testament twice deals with all and any forms of sexual defilement as it upholds the boundaries which the Word places on acceptable sexual practice – Romans 1:18-32 and I Corin 6:9-11. This is never an attack on the sexually broken, but is an attack on sexual brokenness of any kind and it places sexual violations in their proper perspective as violations of G-d's Word along with murder, theft, coveting and lying.

Our passage in Corinthians mentions ten kingdom exclusions from which some of us have been delivered, by being washed, justified and sanctified so that no trace of the defilement remains to chain us to any form of brokenness. It then introduces a theme of moral freedom which is related to the new status of our bodies as the temple of G-d. Instead of seeing the exclusions as limits which prevent us from being free, we need to see them as detours which we are warned against and which want to trap us into various forms of dead end carnality which will take away our freedom.

He is not trying to cramp our style or ruin our fun; He wants to teach us the path of true, sustained satisfaction, free from the seductive slavery the world wants to suck us into.

We are set free to serve the L-rd and to explore all and any means of wholesome fulfilment which will strengthen us spiritually and show us how to get true and lasting satisfaction as we wander through this life on our way home. There are ten, because the only valid guide to happiness and satisfaction in this life is found in the Ten Commandments and we are set free when we observe them and are enslaved when we violate them.

We need to avoid all and any detours or counterfeit forms of satisfaction which may falsely promise us freedom, while they chain our spirit and empower our flesh and leave us incapable of satisfaction and endlessly wracked with violent desires. This would include murder, theft, slander as well as sexual perversion and our society is increasingly striking out in all realms of

wholesome, biblical morality.

We need to learn to empower our spirituality and to prevent our carnal nature from enslaving us to desires which are by their nature addictive and destructive and which cannot ensure our freedom or our fulfilment.

Patti and I are celebrating forty years of marriage and while it does not seem a long time to either of us, it remains a good time, both through the good times and the bad times and I would recommend this institution. I do this in spite of all the brokenness and pain which couples can encounter as they are bombarded with so many attempts to destroy biblical morality.

The beauty of the Bible is the opportunity to heal from all and any hurts, brokenness and pain which our society, our flesh and the enemy bombard us with. As Israel camped around the mountain, they were being shown the secrets of happiness and fulfilment in every area of their lives. Whenever we encounter brokenness in our lives, there is healing, forgiveness, washing and justification, whether we walk with the Lord in the bonds of matrimony or recover from whatever failures and defeat this life can throw at us.

In Him we are never defeated and we are never down for the count and He will guide us so that our search for satisfaction and fulfilment will enrich our lives and not chain us to a destructive lifestyle. When we bring our brokenness to Him, He heals us, both within and without the bonds of matrimony because we belong to the community of the redeemed.

Next week we discuss the meaning of the counting of the Omer in our joyful, festival driven pilgrimage through this life towards our final home in glory.

Shabbat Shalom.

(Margaret p. 141) **Ps. 26** Jewish hero: Zachariah (John's father) Torah Carrier: Donna