

**PARASHOT AHAREI MOT & KEDOSHIM****Leviticus 16:1-20:27****'The Holiness Code'****1. Overview**

The High Priest's Yom Kippur Rituals (Azazel goat included)

Command to Observe Yom Kippur Annually

The Holiness Code: chapters 17-26

- Israelite holiness; sexual improprieties; relationship between personal actions and holiness; treatment of the less fortunate; don't steal; how to treat laborers; newly planted trees; avoid sorcery; honest business dealings; relationship between God's holiness and Israelite holiness ('you shall be holy for I God am holy').

**2. Leviticus 18:1-3** *God spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: I the LORD am your God. You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; nor shall you follow their laws.*

**a) Rashi** (11<sup>th</sup>c. France) What has Scripture left unsaid when it spoke of the deeds of the Egyptians and Canaanites that it felt compelled to add, 'Nor shall you follow their laws'? These latter words refer to their social customs — things which have assumed for them the character of a law as, for instance, the frequenting of theaters and race-courses.

**b) Ibn Ezra** (12<sup>th</sup> c. Spain) 'Nor shall you follow their laws' A person should not habituate himself to walk in this way to the point where it becomes a statute for him.

**c) Bava Kamma 83a** (The Talmud is discussing examples of sages who tolerated Greek influences). The household of Rabban Gamliel is different, as they held close ties with the government. Since knowledge of Greek wisdom was crucial for the members of this family, the Sages exempted them from the general decree, as it is taught in a *baraita*: With regard to one who cuts his hair in the fashion of *komi*, a certain haircut favored by the Romans, this is considered one of the ways of the Amorites, i.e., a gentile practice prohibited by the Torah (Leviticus 18:3). Despite this, the Sages permitted Avtolmos bar Reuven to cut his hair in the fashion of *komi*, because he had close ties with the government. Like-wise, they permitted the members of the household of Rabban Gamliel to discuss matters of Greek wisdom, because they had close ties with the government.

**d) Mishnah Shabbat 6:10**

One may go out on Shabbat with a locust egg, and with a fox tooth, and with a nail from the crucified, for the purpose of healing; this is the statement of Rabbi Meir. The Rabbis prohibit using these remedies even during the week, due to the prohibition of following the ways of the Amorite. These are superstitious beliefs and the customs of gentiles from which one must distance oneself.

**e) Midrash Akeidat Yitzchak 40:1:12**

Pride can also be recognized in his food and drink, and in his wearing of proud garments — the garments of a heathen — and against this we are warned in the Torah of Moses, as it is said: "You shall not follow the practices of the nation ..." (Lev. 20:23), and it is also written: "... Neither shall you walk in their statues ..." (Ibid. 18:3), and it is further said: "Take heed that you be not ensnared to follow them ..." (Deut. 12:30). All of these precepts concern one matter — warning that Israel should be distinguished from the nations in its garments, speech and customs, and thus it says: "... for I have set you apart from the peoples" (Lev. 20:26).

**3. What is *Kedushah/Sacredness*?**

**a) *Parashat Kedoshim* in Context**

**JPS Torah Commentary:** Chapter 19 may be characterized as a brief *torah* (instruction). It states the duties incumbent on the Israelites as a people and includes a wide range of laws and commandments that are representative of the basic teachings of the Torah. More specifically, it echoes the Ten Commandments. These features were noted by the ancient sages. In (Midrash) Leviticus Rabba 24, we read as follows: "Speak to the entire Israelite people and say to them: 'You shall be holy...' Rabbi Hiyya taught: These words inform us that this section is to be read before the people in an assembly. And why is it read before the people in an assembly? Because most of the essential laws of the Torah can be derived from it. Rabbi Levi said: Because the Ten Commandments are embodied in it." The midrash then proceeds to list a series of parallels between chapter 19 and the Ten Commandments. Some of the parallels require homiletic license, but even according to the strictest exegesis the following can be established:

***Leviticus 19***

Reverence for parents (v.3a)  
*The Sabbath* (v.3b)  
Idolatry (v.4)  
*Stealing and deceitful conduct*  
(vv. 11a, 13, 15, 35)  
False oaths (v.12)  
*"I am God who freed you  
from the land of Egypt"* (v.36)

***The Ten Commandments***

Honoring parents (no.5)  
*The Sabbath* (no.4)  
Idolatry; worship no other Gods (no.2)  
*Stealing* (no.8)  
False oaths (no.3)  
*"I am God..."* (no.1)

**b) An Important Theological Distinction:**

All humans are *kadosh*; Israelites are commanded to act *kadosh*.

**c) JPS Excursis 6**

The *Sifra* (*midrash*) 19:2 says: You shall be holy – 'you shall be distinct,' meaning that the people of Israel, in becoming a holy nation, must preserve its distinctiveness from other peoples. It must pursue a way of life different from that practiced by other peoples.

The overall content of chapter 19, with its diverse categories of laws and commandments, outlines what the Israelites must do in order to become a holy

people. It includes many matters of religious concern, as we understand the term: proper worship, observance of the Sabbath, and also the avoidance of actions that are taboo, such as mixed planting and consumption of fruit from trees during the first three years after planting. What is less expected in ritual legislation is the emphasis on human relations: respect for parents, concern for the poor and the stranger, prompt payment of wages, justice in all dealings, and honest conduct of business. Even proper attitudes towards others are commanded.

#### 4. From Harold Kushner, To Life! A Celebration of Jewish Being and Thinking

### The Sacred Deed — Making the Ordinary Extraordinary

**W**HILE MANY OF US tend to see the world as divided into the holy (the realm of the religious) and the profane (the ordinary, nonreligious, meaning everything else; the word *profane* literally means outside or in front of the church), theologian Martin Buber taught that the division is really between the holy and the not-yet-holy. Everything in God's world can be holy if you realize its potential holiness. One of the fundamental teachings of Judaism is that the search for holiness, for the encounter with God, is not confined to the synagogue. Everything we do can be transformed into a Sinai experience, an encounter with the sacred. The goal of Judaism is not to teach us how to escape from the profane world to the cleansing presence of God, but to teach us how to bring God into the world, how to take the ordinary and make it holy.

So many of the rules and rituals of the Jewish way of life are spiritual calisthenics, designed to teach us to control the most basic instincts of our lives — hunger, sex, anger, acquisitiveness, and so on. We are not directed to deny or stifle them, but to control them, to rule them rather than let them rule us, and to sanctify them by dedicating our living of them to God's purposes. The freedom the Torah offers us is the freedom to say no to appetite.

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The unit of Jewish religious currency is the *mitzvah*, the literal translation of which is "commandment," as in the terms *Bar Mitzvah*/*Bat Mitzvah*. But functionally, a *mitzvah* is something you do because you recognize that you are supposed to do it as a Jew. Anything from lighting the Sabbath or Hanukkah candles to writing a check to protect the environment can be a *mitzvah* if you do it as a way of living out your Jewishness. When a traditional Jew performs a *mitzvah*, she prefaces it with a prayer: "Praised are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the World, who has brought holiness into our lives by teaching us to perform the *mitzvah* of . . . [for example, lighting the Sabbath candles]." As my teacher Max Kadushin used to point out, to say "Praised are You, O Lord . . ." is to imply that God is present. We come into the presence of God, we reenact the moment of Sinai, not so much by going to a certain place, but by translating our Jewish identity into action wherever we are by performing a *mitzvah*. We bring holiness into our lives not by entering a sanctuary, but by acting to sanctify the everyday, making the ordinary extraordinary.

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