

His kindness is eternal. כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ

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Pro-Life Torah Emor

May 8, 2020 | Pro Life Jewish Torah



The Torah reading, Emor: Leviticus 21:1-24:23, begins by enumerating

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special laws of purity required for the high priest. Disqualifying elements for priests are listed, as are unacceptable characteristics for animal sacrifices. This emphasis on sacredness, holiness, and purity as a demonstration of respect for HaShem and our devotion to Him, ranks very high in Judaism. So high, in fact, that when a Jew is compelled to choose between being killed or to commit murder, idolatry, or sexually immoral acts, we must choose our own death.

Idolatrous, murderous, and sexually deviant cultures were customary before the giving of the Noahide Laws and later the Jewish law at Sinai. The concepts of allegiance to a Supreme Being, sanctification of God's name, and respect for human life as made in God's image radically challenged the prevailing norms. Devoted

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faithfulness to God's moral law in the midst of mayhem was quite a test for the newly freed Israelites. Some embraced it; some accepted parts of it, some entirely rejected it.

Today, we continue to be influenced by idolatrous, murderous, and sexually deviant practices that remain deeply entrenched psychologically, politically, socially, culturally, and pseudo-religiously. Redefined as rights, equality, legal, progressive or spiritual, the reprehensible and dangerous becomes acceptable, even virtuous. Pursuing a lifestyle of holiness, purity, and respect for God's gift of life is choosing our own death in the sense that we are excised from the majority. No wonder that relatively speaking, few embrace it, some accept parts of it, and many entirely reject it.

The portion goes on to look at Jewish festivals, and the need to observe them for spiritual refinement and acknowledgement of God's sovereignty. During the seven weeks between Passover and Shavuot, known as the Counting of the Omer, we make a studied and mindful effort to replicate the spiritual transformation experienced by our ancestors as they transitioned from a degraded Egyptian existence to an elevated consciousness of God's presence. We study seven personality traits - Kindness(*Chesed*), Justice / Discipline(*Gevurah*), Harmony / Compassion(*Tiferet*), Endurance(*Netzach*), Humility(*Hod*), Bonding(*Yesod*), and Sovereignty / Leadership(*Malchut*). Carefully applying them within the context of Torah-based principles, we can fulfill our obligation to

respect His law in our everyday thoughts, words, and actions. With this as our guide and with God's assistance and mercy, we gain the insight, wisdom, and power to promote a culture of life though surrounded by a spiritually degraded culture of death in which human life is expendable and exploited for personal gain.

Because the essence of Judaism revolves around the value and dignity of each human soul, the portion ends with a stern warning against murdering innocent human life, "And if a man strikes down any human being he shall be put to death." In our modern culture, destroying innocent life in the womb imposes few legal penalties; however, as Maimonides explained, punishment for this appalling offense against God ultimately comes from a Heavenly court.

Until then, the perpetrator suffers an unavoidable spiritual death - an agonizing penalty, indeed.

May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and good life upon us and upon all Israel. Amen.

Cecily Routman, Founder & President Jewish Pro-Life Foundation

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