המוסד למען קדושת חיי אדם

Saving Jewish Lives



Healing Jewish Hearts

TORAH READINGS:
Acharei: Leviticus 16:1–18:30.

The torah reading this week, Acharei: Leviticus 16:1–18:30, examines atonement for sin, which results when a person's animal soul holds sway over their godly soul. Our animal soul motivates us to increase our personal power for earthly satisfaction and gratification, while our godly soul motivates us to seek the power of God to create His Heaven on Earth. The portion introduces this idea with the spontaneous death of Nadav and Avihu when they enter the Holy of Holies to approach the Almighty presence. They seek spiritual rapture with God for selfish transcendental elevation rather than with a desire to gain Divine direction and power needed to assume their earthly responsibilities.

This incident serves as a warning to Aaron, their father and high priest, to honestly examine his own motives when approaching the Holy of Holies. Likewise, we ought to seriously examine our own religious practice, making sure we seek the presence of God to strengthen our godly soul for service to Him rather than to look for personal empowerment that allows our animal soul to control our actions, causing unhappiness and trouble in our circle of influence.

Addressing this lifelong personality conflict, the text focusses on Yom Kippur observance that started in the Tabernacle with special rituals and animal sacrifice. Today, we set aside the day for fasting and prayer to focus on our motives and conduct, sincerely offering our negative personality traits to God, requesting He grant us forgiveness and transformation. Daily self examination, prayer, and practice serving God rewards us with a deeper understanding of our proper role in life and an inner awareness of God's presence.

This portion closes with a list of sexual relations forbidden to Jews, signifying a sharp departure from accepted customs of the day. Within this section is the prohibition of idol worship and child sacrifice, then common practices in neighboring cultures: *And you shall not give any of your offspring to pass through for Molech. And you shall not profane the Name of your God. I am the Lord.*

Here, Judaism instructs us to value and protect children, rather than sacrifice them in the pursuit of selfish goals or misguided ideological objectives. We are challenged to cultivate a culture of life within Judaism and within our surrounding communities. Doing so animates our godly soul, inviting God's presence and grace into our daily lives.

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