המוסד למען קדושת חיי אדם

Saving Jewish Lives



Healing Jewish Hearts

TORAH READING:
Acharei: Leviticus 16:1–18:30

The Torah reading Acharei, Leviticus 16:1–18:30, invites us to look to a future when human spiritual growth finally merits the messianic Redemption. The portion opens as Moses delivers a stern warning from Hashem to Aaron: He must refrain from seeking transcendental bliss and a similar fate as his sons, Nadav and Avihu. Aaron must only enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur to offer animal sacrifices required to atone for sins committed by the Jews during the previous year.

The messianic age cannot be rushed. It will ultimately occur when every Jew and righteous gentile achieves character refinement by performing mitzvot and Teshuvah rather than seeking an esoteric release in self-involved spiritual practices. Sin results when a person's animal soul holds sway over their godly soul. Our animal soul motivates us to increase our personal desires for personal satisfaction and gratification, while our godly soul motivates us to seek God's desire for us to create His Heaven on Earth.

To facilitate both personal and national redemption, we thoughtfully examine our own spiritual practice and patterns of living, making sure we seek the presence of God to strengthen our godly soul for service to Him rather than pursue personal power that allows our animal soul to control our actions, causing unhappiness and trouble for ourselves and others.

The Yom Kippur observance that started in the Tabernacle with special rituals and animal sacrifice has become a day set aside for fasting and prayer. We focus on our motives and conduct, sincerely offer our negative personality traits to God, and request He grant us forgiveness and transformation. Throughout the year, daily self examination, prayer, and service to God reward us with a deeper understanding of our proper role in life and an inner awareness of God's presence.

Acharei closes with a list of sexual relations forbidden to Jews, signifying a sharp departure from accepted customs in biblical times. 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.