

פרשת אחורי מות

Parshat Acharei Mot

אשרינו | Ashreinu

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



Doing Our Own Thing

Mrs. Allie Goldenberg

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Atara Keehn ('23)

This week's parsha begins:

אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שָׁנִי בָּנִי
אַהֲרֹן בְּקָרְבָּתְם
לִפְנֵי הָיְם

Binny Perl ('24)

This describes what happened following the

Avichai Shekhter ('22)

death of two of the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu.

Many opinions are given as to what crime Nadav and Avihu committed, so grave as to be punishable by death. The midrash and some mefarshim offer the suggestion that they were *shetuyay yayin*, intoxicated, having drunk wine before entering the Holy of Holies; others maintain that they were moreh halacha *lifnei rabo*, they made a halachic decision without consulting their teacher, Moshe.

Alternatively, some of our mefarshim believe that they did not respect one another, as each of them brought an individual offering and not one joint offering, or perhaps that they entered the Holy of Holies on a day other than Yom HaKippurim, the only day which access by the Kohen Gadol is permitted.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch offers a different perspective. Imagine, says Rav Hirsch, that it is the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan, the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the greatest structure, designed by God and built for God. The excitement in the crowd is palpable as the princes from each tribe offer sacrifices on behalf of their tribe. The nation is waiting to see Aharon be initiated into the priesthood – everyone is waiting with bated breath. And yet, at this moment, Nadav and Avihu go to offer their indi-

vidual offerings. Is it appropriate for two individuals to remove themselves from this crowd? To leave the spiritually uplifting energy of the entire nation? The sin which Nadav and Avihu committed, suggests Rav Hirsch, is that they felt the need to extricate themselves from the group. They felt the need to be different. Why go off on your own when there is a grand communal ceremony?

The lesson of Nadav and Avihu is one which we can still learn from today. While modern society pushes us to “do you” and to fight conformity, perhaps Judaism begs us to think differently. The Torah and its mitzvot require that we ALL do that which is commanded of us. Yes, there is room for individuality, yet we can not be so independent that we say of a mitzvah that it simply doesn’t speak to us. May we merit to fulfill our mitzvot with the understanding that they apply to us all.

Pure Soul

Atara Keehn ('23)

This week's Torah portion talks about the Yom Kippur service in the Beit HaMikdash. Believe it or not, Yom Kippur is actually a celebration – a celebration of mistakes. It's a time that we reflect on all the things we might not have done right and what we can learn from them. It teaches us that mistakes don't define us as who we are. Instead they are the baggage that weighs us down. It also teaches us that if we choose to, we can unload that baggage. We can remove it because it does not make up who we are. Every morning we say: **אֶלְקָנָן, נְשִׁמָה שְׁנִתְתַּת בֵּינוֹתָה הִיא** – Hashem has placed within me a pure soul. Yes, we make mistakes and we may be covered in some sins, but underneath we are pure and that's who Hashem knows we are. That's why Hashem looks at us even when we are in the worst place in the world and says, “That's My child.” He says, “Yes, he's covered in sins. Yes,

she's fallen so far, but look at his or her soul, it's shining bright.”

No matter how far we fall, our soul will never be destroyed. We're not defined by the mistakes we've made, rather by how we choose to learn from those mistakes.

Redirect

Binny Perl ('24)

In Parshat Acharei Mot, we recall how Aharon famously lost his two sons, Nadav and Avihu. While any death of a child is immensely painful for a parent, it's even harder when you are left with unanswerable questions about why their life ended. This is what Aharon was feeling. Both of his sons, who had prominent futures in front of them, suddenly died and Aharon did not know why their lives were wasted. The reasonable thing for Hashem to do at that time would have been to give Aharon some time to process and grieve. But Hashem does exactly the opposite – He gives Aharon a job and tells him how to bring the *korbanot* of Yom Kippur.

בְּזֹאת יָבֹא אַהֲרֹן אֶל הַקְדֵשׁ בְּפֶר בָּנֵי בְקָר
לְחַטָּאת וְאַיִל לְעַלָּה

“With this only shall Aharon enter the shrine: with a bull of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering” (Vayikra 16:3). Two questions arise from this pasuk. First, why is Hashem forcing Aharon to bring the most important *korban* of the year right after his sons died? Second, what is the phrase **בְּזֹאת**, “with this”, referring to?

Perhaps the answer to both of these questions is that by giving Aharon a korban to sacrifice, Hashem allows Aharon to process the death of his sons. Hashem is asking Aharon to take the intense emotions that he is feeling and, “with this,” serve Hashem. By redirecting his emotions toward bringing a korban and serving Hashem, Aharon will be able to process the tragedy.

During times of intense pain, it is incredibly

difficult to see the hand of Hashem at work. However, even if it is not always obvious, that guiding hand is always there, helping us process and recover from the most tragic events.

Appreciation

Avichai Shekhter ('22)

כַּמְעַשָּׂה אָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אָשָׁר יָשַׁבְתֶּם בָּה לֹא תַעֲשֶׂו
וְכַמְעַשָּׂה אָרֶץ כְּנָעָן אָשָׁר אָנָּי מַבְיא אֶתְכֶם שְׁמָה לֹא
תַעֲשֶׂו וּבְחַקְתֵּיכֶם לֹא תַלְכֵו

“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” (Vayikra 18:3).

The words “*לֹא תַלְכֵו*” – “you will not do”, appear twice in the pasuk above, once after the prohibition of copying the practices of the Egyptians, and again after copying the practices of the Canaanites. What is the difference between these actions that they each need an individual prohibition?

The Kli Yakar explains that there are actually two separate transgressions, one for acting like Egyptians and one for acting like the Canaanites. The rabbis tell us that 80 percent of Bnei Yisrael died during the plague of *choshech* because they didn't want to leave Mitzrayim, even after the oppression they went through there. They liked where they were and preferred remaining in exile with people who threw Jewish babies into the river, rather than travel through the desert to an unknown land. That is the first prohibition against being like the Egyptians. We are cautioned against feeling comfortable in a foreign land. We must not be *toshavim*, comfortable with exile and acting like we belong in Mitzrayim; rather we are to be *gerim* - strangers.

The second part of the pasuk is the complete opposite of the first. What are we to avoid doing regarding Canaan, if Hashem told us that it is the greatest (promised) land? Yehoshua and

Calev, Moshe and Aharon all loved the land, but still Bnei Yisrael rejected it. That's the second prohibition: don't reject Eretz Yisrael.

This time of year, we remember the great *nissim* that happened over the past hundred years that allowed Jews to return to Israel. There are more Jews learning Torah in Israel than ever before. We owe so much gratitude to Hashem for allowing us to return. Let us be careful not to be too comfortable in exile and not to criticize Eretz Yisrael. Yes, there are challenges we face building up a new country, but we must embrace Israel, see all the good, and appreciate the most precious gift we have been given in our generation.

Free Fall

Zachy Dennis ('23)

וַיְנַתְּ אַהֲרֹן עַל שְׁנֵי הַשְׁעִירִם גُזְלֹות גָּזֶל אֶחָד

“Aharon shall cast lots for the two goats; one lot for Hashem, and the other lot for the scapegoat” (Vayikra 16:8).

In this week's parsha, Parshat Acharei Mot, Hashem commands Moshe to tell Aharon to take a chatat offering from one of two goats and an *olah* offering from a ram. Of the two goats, Aharon is commanded to sacrifice one to Hashem and lead the other one off of a cliff after confessing all of Bnei Yisrael's sins onto it. When this second goat dies, it cleanses the Jews of all their sins.

This halacha is rightfully classified by Chazal as a *chok* – a law we can't understand. The concept of an animal carrying away all the sins of Bnei Yisrael seems crazy?! So what's really going on here?

Rav Hirsch explains that the two goats represent a person's choice between doing good and evil. A person must choose which path they want to

go down in life – serving God and chasing *kedusha*, or moving away from God and towards a “spiritual destruction.” There is no opportunity to stay neutral! Everyone must make that choice, and those who don’t choose to move towards *kedusha* are by definition moving away from it.

The Rambam explains that the Azazel goat is thrown to symbolize to the Jews that everyone is able to free themselves from their past sins and start anew. In order to do that however, one must keep in mind that there is no neutral, as Rav Hirsch explains. Hashem is allowing the Jews a chance to separate from their sins, but they must always be looking ahead.

As we move away from the Pesach break and progress towards the end of the school year, we should keep in mind this lesson and remember to always be moving forward. Good Shabbos!



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