

Be Holy Because I Adonai Your Elohim am Holy – Kedoshim

קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I יהוה your Elohim am holy.

Speak to the Entire Assembly of the Children of Israel

The text indicates that Moshe was not just to speak to some of the children of Israel, but to the whole community of Israel, אל-כל-עדת, El Kol Edat. The famous commentator, Rashi, contends that this section of Leviticus, "...was said at a gathering of the entire assembly of Israel." The magnitude of the crowd suggests a valuable spiritual lesson was at hand. Moshe taught special things to the *cohanim* which applied only to them. Moshe also gave specific instructions to the elders which he did not teach to others. But the content of these chapters—the teaching about holiness—was applicable to the entire community. The point was that if Israel was to walk as *Adonai* intended them to walk, it required the obedience of entire community for it to come to pass.

The presence of the entire assembly indicates that the ultimate goal of holiness can be achieved only through the collective efforts of the whole nation. From this, we can all learn that there is a personal holiness in which יהוה (*Adonai*), the Eternal One, wants us individually to walk. But there is also a community holiness in which we, as a community, are to walk. An important point in this *Torah* Portion is that we are not islands unto ourselves. As believers, we are intimately connected to each other, dependent upon one another, and supportive of each other. *Adonai* knew that. That is why He chose for Moshe to speak to the entire assembly, instead of just to a certain group of members of it.

Be Holy, For I Adonai Your Elohim Am Holy

This phrase is the topic sentence for the whole section of Vayikra. It tells us what *Adonai* expects out of us. It tells us the purpose for each of the specific instructions in this parasha. It tells us the motive for doing them. It also tells us the means for doing them. What does our *Elohim* expect from the individual members of His redeemed community? In one word: He expects holiness. *Elohim's* definition of holiness is spelled out clearly in this *parasha*. It encompasses being totally set apart unto *Adonai Eloheinu* in absolutely every area of our lives. Not be even one aspect of our lives is not covered. Yet there is also another dimension to the holiness spoken of in chapter 19. At the end of chapter 20, *Elohim* reminds Israel that He does not want them to live like the nations around them. When they were to occupy the Promised Land, He did not want Israel to live like, worship like, think like, or look like the Canaanites. The holiness of Israel is defined by being in complete contrast with the Canaanites. Israel was to be radically different. So different, that the only thing they and the Canaanites would have had in common was their language. (The *Torah* is silent about what kind of language the Canaanites spoke. But we know from other historical sources that it was a sister language to Hebrew. Many words were even identical.)

In light of the above statements, we are to view each of the commands or teachings in this *parasha* as aids or helps to us to live a separate life from the idolatrous and immoral world around us (i.e., our "modern" Canaanites.) The meaning or interpretation of each command is to be considered in light of what it would contribute to the holiness of Israel—and ultimately, how it would contribute to demonstrating the utter perfect holiness of our *Elohim* in this world. In other words, when we consider living out these commands, we need to ask: How can I do this in such a way as to visibly communicate to those around me the matchless perfection of *Adonai Eloheinu* who instructed me to do this to begin with?

The Motive for Doing the Commands

When we read that *Adonai* wants us to be holy because He is holy, we also learn the motivation for being holy, i.e., living the teachings in Leviticus. The only revealed motive is that we are to do so only because our

Elohim is holy. We are to seek to be imitators of Him alone who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We are not to do so to earn merit with Him. We are not to do so to earn His love. We already have His love, and we rest totally on the merits of His Son, our Messiah *Yeshua*. We are to follow these teachings only because they reflect who He is inside of us.

The Means to Being Holy

There is a secret hidden in the words, “*Be holy because Adonai Your Elohim is holy?*” If we understand the secret, we will be able to accomplish what these words are asking us to do. The first part of the secret is to understand that in and of ourselves we cannot be holy; we cannot live according to the standards set forth in this chapter. The second part of the secret is to make sure that He is, in fact, *Adonai* our *Elohim*. If יהוה is not our personal *Elohim* then it is impossible to be like Him. *Yeshua* the Messiah said that if we receive Him it is the same as receiving His Father. In other words, how does a one have יהוה, the Creator of the universe, as his personal *Elohim*? Answer: by receiving His Son. When that happens, the Scripture tells us that we are not only forgiven for all of our sins, but that we are made into entirely new creations and new people. We are made into people whose basic identity is changed from being a slave to sin, to people who are desirous of living out what the *Torah* teaches because that is what is written on our hearts! (Jer. 31:31-34) It is naturally part of our character making us who we are as perfect mirrors of *Adonai*’s righteousness on planet earth! That, then, is the secret! We can only be holy if we have trusted in *Yeshua*. He, then transforms us into the potential of being completely holy, blameless, righteous, and upright—just like He is! For us who are believers, reading this list of holy actions in Vayikra is not a check list of do it or you will be zapped! It is like reading a description of what we really want to do from our innermost being.

Religious Duties

Beginning with the command to be holy and ending with the end of this chapter, we find *Adonai*’s own exposition of the Ten Commandments. Hertz (the writer of a famous *Chumash*) affirms this when he states that the Ten Commandments are in essence repeated in these verses.

“³*Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am Adonai your Elohim.* ⁴*Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am Adonai your Elohim*”

The responsibility toward our father and mother is stated differently in Exodus than it is here. In *Shemot*, we are told to give our parents honor, or glory. The Hebrew word used in that passage is *kabod* the usual word for honoring someone. In this case when it concerns the parents, it most likely carries the connotation of “*to stand in awe of?*” But here, in this passage, we are told “*to fear?*” our parents. The Hebrew word is from the root, יָרָא. Its basic meaning is “*to be afraid of* or *to be in awe of?*” something. The word translated “*reverence?*” [fear] here is also used in Vayikra 19:14 and 32, that of “*fearing Adonai?*” (cf. Proverbs 1:7). As far as a child is concerned, his parents are in the place of *Adonai*; through them he can learn what *Adonai* is like and what he requires. It is therefore fitting that in his younger years a child should honor and fear his parents, as in later years he will fear *Adonai*. It should also be noted that not only is the order of the commandments reversed when compared to *Shemot* 20, but also the order of the parents reversed as well. This scripture indicates that both father and mother are on an equal footing, each should equally be obeyed and honored.

Fearing *Elohim*, in our context, therefore, is reflected in how we treat our parents and how we regard the *Shabbat*. Why is *Shabbat* spoken of in such close context to honoring one’s parents? Honoring the *Shabbat* is one of the most important duties towards *Adonai*, our heavenly Father. Honoring the *Shabbat* means that people need to first enter into a spiritual *Shabbat* rest by trusting in the Messiah. This, then, is reflected in our physical life by setting apart the seventh day as special. This would afford us the opportunity to practice at least once a week living and walking in the rest into which we have entered by faith in *Yeshua*, (Hebrews chapter four). Hertz further states that “These two commands are placed side by side in order to teach that the fear of parents

must not exceed the fear of *Elohim*.” However, if we honor *Shabbat* the way *Adonai* intends us to and honor our parents in like fashion, there will never be a fear of one command taking precedent over the other.

⁵Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to יהוה, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. ⁶It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and the next day; but what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. ⁷So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense; it will not be accepted. ⁸Everyone who eats it will bear his iniquity, for he has profaned the holy thing of יהוה; and that person shall be cut off from his people. ⁹Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am יהוה your Elohim.

And your shall love your neighbor...

The next group of Scriptures teaches us how to live in a holy way with the people around us. It instructs us concerning the right way to conduct interpersonal relationships.

¹¹You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. ¹²You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your Elohim; I am יהוה. ¹³You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. ¹⁴You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your Elohim; I am יהוה. ¹⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. ¹⁶You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am יהוה. ¹⁷You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am יהוה.

Lying and Stealing

If people are going to get along with each other in the redeemed community in a way that honors *Adonai*, they need to live honestly with each other. Moreover, they need to be able to trust each other. Stealing is a crime where the breach of trust is most evident. These verses subtly deal with the sin of theft in a rather interesting way. Notice that the teachings concerning theft, lying, and oppression come very closely together and are immediately following the instructions about leaving food for the poor. This is no accident. In fact it is a calculated expression of the grace and wisdom of the Holy One. Taken together, these verses answer the question: How can theft be avoided in society? Theft can be avoided in society by: (1) The holy community collectively providing for the poor, i.e. leaving food in the fields; (2) By not provoking people to sin or anger by slandering them, oppressing them; but instead by being honest with them; (3) By employers giving their employees honest, fair wages and paying them on time. In fact the text states to pay the laborers on the same day in which they work!

If there is ever a glaring need in the body of Messiah, the redeemed community, it is for justice. *Vayikra* 19:15 stresses the importance to treat one another with fairness and equality. The body of Messiah is plagued with judgment making between each other. We slander. We make assumptions. We form opinions about one another without first knowing the facts. Consequently, too many are victims of severe slander, and perverted justice. This, of course, is exactly one of the things which this verse in *Vayikra* was seeking to avoid.

These verses also prohibit us to be passive when it comes to coming to the aid or defense of another in the redeemed community. The first way in which we can defend each other is to protect what we say about each other. The Hebrew word translated “gossiper” is really an idiom which means literally “go up and down as a peddler?” It describes a person who peddles scandal, lies, false stories and maliciousness about a person to someone else. So we are obligated to protect one another from such harm by using our tongue for godly ends.

Because of the seriousness of this sin, we are reminded at least three times a day when we pray the Amidah, “*My Elohim, guard my tongue from evil, and my lips from speaking falsehood.*”

Love and Kindness

The *Torah* is not a superficial guide to life. From this chapter we see many outward forms of behavior from the redeemed community. This verse teaches us the importance of watching our heart toward one another. It tells us not to hate another brother/sister in our heart. There are several ways we can accomplish this. One is to make sure the line of communication is left open between people, especially between two people who have some kind of a conflict between them. They must talk it out. A second thing to do is to make sure that we are basing our opinions on fact, not on “impression:” outward appearance, or supposed “discernment?” In short, we need to judge them fairly as discussed above. A third help in this area is learning to take all thoughts captive, especially those thoughts which would lure us in to nurturing a root of bitterness against someone else in the redeemed community; Lastly, verse 18 warns us against any form of revenge against someone who we think did us harm. This revenge does not always have to be physical harm. Some times our flesh takes revenge by denying someone our love, attention, kindness, or help.

¹⁹ You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together. ²⁰ Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for another man, but who has in no way been redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, however, be put to death, because she was not free. ²¹ He shall bring his guilt offering to יהוה to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. ²² The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before יהוה for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him. ²³ When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten. ²⁴ But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to יהוה. ²⁵ In the fifth year you are to eat of its fruit, that its yield may increase for you; I am יהוה your Elohim. ²⁶ You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying. ²⁷ You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard. ²⁸ You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am יהוה. ²⁹ Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness. ³⁰ You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary; I am יהוה. ³¹ Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am יהוה your Elohim.

Prohibition Against Canaanite Practices

The holiness of the Israelites must stand in contrast to the lifestyle of the idolatrous nations which would surround their nation. Leviticus 19:26-31, therefore, give specific instructions which have to do with certain Canaanite practices. Mentioned particularly, are prohibitions against bodily mutilation (verses 27, 28), harlotry (verse 29), the worship of false gods, and the participation in demonic activity (verses 26, 31). Vayikra 19:30 is fascinating because we know from history that other religions from the ancient Near East also had sacred days, even Sabbaths. *Elohim* wanted Israel to observe only His holy days, not the sabbaths of the Canaanites.

The Elderly

This final section of Leviticus chapter 19 contains various ethical rulings for the redeemed community. One of the major subjects here is the treatment of the elderly. It stresses the importance of giving the elderly in the community proper honor and respect. One way this is demonstrated is by rising when an elderly person comes into our presence.

³² You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your Elohim; I am יהוה.
³³ When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of

Egypt; I am יהוה your Elohim. ³⁵ You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. ³⁶ You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am יהוה your Elohim, who brought you out from the land of Egypt. ³⁷ You shall thus observe all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them; I am יהוה.”

The Sojourner

The *Torah* speaks frequently about a certain group of people called gerim, sojourners. Our present passage gives the most information to date on the subject. A few comments are necessary. First, who are the sojourners? There is sharp difference of opinion between Jewish and non Jewish commentators. Almost across the board, the rabbis consider the gerim as proselytes, or converts from the Gentiles to Judaism. This is even reflected in many Bible translations, such as the ArtScroll *Chumash*. The problem with this understanding is that it seems to misrepresent the way the *Torah* used the word ger. According to *Vayikra* 19:34, *Elohim* uses the same word, ger, to describe both the identity of the children of Israel when they lived in Egypt, and the Gentile when he lives in the land of Israel.

When the Jewish people lived in Egypt, they were most likely not converts or proselytes to Egyptian religion. They were simply Israelites in a land in which they were not natives. We must, therefore, understand the alien/sojourner in this passage the same way. A Gentile who resides in the land of Israel is a sojourner, not a proselyte, just as Israel lived in the land of Egypt.

There are several important points in this passage about sojourners or aliens. First, *Elohim* permits them! Contrary to modern Israeli law, practice, and attitudes, *Elohim* permits any Gentile who so desires, to live in the land of Israel. Second, *Elohim* teaches the Israelites that they must treat the sojourners with goodness, kindness, and love. In fact they are to love the sojourners the same way they love native-born Israelites. But there is a flip-side to this relationship. Other parts of *Torah* specifically instruct the sojourners that when they live in the land of Israel, they must abide by the same *Torah* as the native-born Israelite! *Torah* simply teaches justice and fairness for all. But it also is clear that *Torah* is to be THE law of the land of Israel.

Chapter 20

Although stated a little differently, the thrust of the teaching of this chapter is very similar to that of chapter 19 with one very important difference: Leviticus chapter 20 mentions the disciplines which are to be meted out to violators of the various teachings described in chapter 19. Specifically, we are given instructions about the disciplines for going after other gods, *Vayikra* 20:1-7, for dishonoring the parents in verses 8 and 9, and for adultery and other forbidden sexual relationships in verses 10-21.

The specific penalties for the sins described in chapter 20 are cast into two kinds of statements. First, HaShem says that He will “set My face against” the violator(s). The JPS says that the phrase, “set My face against:” expresses the intent to punish. The most common interpretation is physical death (an early grave).

Finally, this parasha finishes with yet another reminder of the reason why יהוה gives such strict teachings for life in the holy community. He says that He is leading them to a wonderful land. But in this land are inhabitants which worship other gods and live grossly immoral lives in that idolatrous worship. The redeemed community is to be different because their *Elohim* is entirely different. In short, יהוה reminds them that their life in the Land needs to be characterized by a life which is a true representation of the kind of *Elohim* they have: a Holy, Righteous, Merciful, Loving, and Just *Elohim*—יהוה!

¹Then יהוה spoke to Moses, saying, ²"You shall also say to the sons of Israel: `Any man from the sons of Israel or from the aliens sojourning in Israel who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall surely be put to death; the people of the land shall stone him with stones. ³I will also set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given some of his offspring to Molech, so as to defile My sanctuary and to profane My holy name. ⁴If the people of the land, however, should ever disregard that man when he gives any of his offspring to Molech, so as not to put him to death, ⁵then I Myself will set My face against that man and against his family, and I will cut off from among their people both him and all those who play the harlot after him, by playing the harlot after Molech. ⁶As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. ⁷You shall consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy, for I am יהוה your Elohim. ⁸You shall keep My statutes and practice them; I am יהוה who sanctifies you (M^eKadesh.) ⁹If there is anyone who curses his father or his mother, he shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother, his bloodguiltiness is upon him. ¹⁰If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. ¹¹If there is a man who lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. ¹²If there is a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed incest, their bloodguiltiness is upon them. ¹³If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. ¹⁴If there is a man who marries a woman and her mother, it is immorality; both he and they shall be burned with fire, so that there will be no immorality in your midst. ¹⁵If there is a man who lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death; you shall also kill the animal. ¹⁶If there is a woman who approaches any animal to mate with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them. ¹⁷If there is a man who takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace; and they shall be cut off in the sight of the sons of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness; he bears his guilt. ¹⁸If there is a man who lies with a menstruous woman and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow, and she has exposed the flow of her blood; thus both of them shall be cut off from among their people. ¹⁹You shall also not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for such a one has made naked his blood relative; they will bear their guilt. ²⁰If there is a man who lies with his uncle's wife he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they will bear their sin. They will die childless. ²¹If there is a man who takes his brother's wife, it is abhorrent; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They will be childless. ²²You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. ²³Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. ²⁴Hence I have said to you, "You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am יהוה your Elohim, who has separated you from the peoples. ²⁵You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. ²⁶Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I יהוה am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine. ²⁷Now a man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones, their bloodguiltiness is upon them."