

פרשת

אזרחי מות וקדשים *Parshiyot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim*

*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:1-20:27, Ezekiel 22:1-19
John 7:1-52/John 7:53-10:21*

Reckless Behavior can Effect Others

In this week's Torah portion we read the following from *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:1-7*, וידבר יהוה אל־משה לאמר, *20:1 And the LORD spoke to Moses: ואל־בני ישראל תאמר איש איש מבני ישראל ומן־הגר הגר הארץ ירגמהו באבן 20:2 בישראל אשר יתן מזרעו למלך מות יומת עם הארץ ירגמהו באבן Say further to the Israelite people: Anyone among the Israelites, or among the strangers residing in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Molech, shall be put to death; the people of the land shall pelt him with stones. ואני אתן את־פני באיש ההוא והכרתי אתו מקרב עמו כי מז־ 20:3 And I will set My face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he gave of his offspring to Molech and so defiled My sanctuary and profaned My holy name. ואם העלם יעלימו עם הארץ את־ 20:4 And if the people of the land should shut their eyes to that man when he gives of his offspring to Molech, and should not put him to death, ושמתי אני את־פני באיש ההוא ובמשפחתו והכרתי אתו ואת כל־הזנים אחריו לזנות 20:5 I Myself will set My face against that man and his kin, and will cut off from among their people both him and all*

who follow him in going astray after Molech. והנפש אשר תפנה אל- האבת ואל-הידענים לזנות אחריהם ונתתי את-פני בנפש ההוא והכרתי אתו עמו 20:6 *And if any person turns to ghosts and familiar spirits and goes astray after them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from among his people.* והתקדשתם והייתם קדשים כי אני 20:7 *You shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I the LORD am your God.* The commandments here are in relation to the fire-god Molech where the Lord God explains to us the spiritual connection and state of the one who joins himself to ungodliness in *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:6*. The description states the people would give their children to the fire-god to be burned upon the hands of Molech, an awful and wretched form of worship. If none of the people take care of this problem, the Lord says *“I will set My face against that man and cut him off from among his people who profaned My holy name.”* (ג וְאֲנִי) אֶתְּךָ אֶת-פְּנֵי בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֹתוֹ מִקֶּרֶב עַמּוֹ כִּי מִזְרָעוֹ נָתַן לַמִּלְךָ לְמַעַן (טִמָּא אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי וְלַחֲלֹל אֶת-שֵׁם קֹדְשִׁי: Notice how this is repeated two more times in verses 20:5 and 20:6. The Lord Himself will cut off such people who serve this evil god. *Rabbeinu Bahya, Vayikra / Leviticus 20:2 Parts 1-2* states that this statement may also *“refer to such situations as the deed being committed in secret when no witnesses were present at all, or a situation where the deed had been witnessed but the people do not care and do not testify against such a person. This may be due to their fear of revenge by family members of the guilty person or to other considerations. G’d means that He will not only intervene against the actively guilty party who “murdered” his children under the guise of a religious ceremony, but also against the silent onlookers who agreed with this cult.”* To demonstrate the extreme concern of the Torah with this cult the Lord also stated the words לְמַעַן טִמָּא אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי וְלַחֲלֹל אֶת-שֵׁם קֹדְשִׁי *“in order to defile My Sanctuary and to desecrate My holy Name”* (20:3). The Torah tells us that he who has fellowship with these things hoping to sacrifice only one of his children will have all his children destroyed by God as a result. *Sforno on Vayikra / Leviticus 20:2 Part 1* states, *“אשר יתן מזרעו למולך, after the Torah had explained G’d’s plan to sanctify the Israelites in order for them to become as much like Him as is possible for any creature, and He taught them the path to take to achieve such an aim, it now warns of a*

lifestyle which could produce the opposite result.” Note how Sforno states this warns of a particular lifestyle that we are to be careful not to have a part in. If we consider the greater context, in addition to next week’s Torah portion, Parashat Emor, we read of spiritual contamination as it is related to ritual purity that comes by coming in contact with the dead. This Torah portion also speaks of physical blemishes and going before the Lord, both for the priest and the common man which would disqualify one from carrying out his duties before God. (i.e. the priests in the Tabernacle.) The commandments of God also relate to the impediment of ritual contamination which represents the sacred things, the sacrifices, atonement, forgiveness (the spiritual things). Notice how spiritual contamination is related to all of these things. In addition, we are given commands related to the abuse of the sacred objects in the Tabernacle, which is juxtaposed to incestuous marriages. This is related to the contamination of one’s seed, i.e. where a person has been born by incestuous sexual relations with forbidden partners. All of these things are connected to this week’s double portion with the desecrating of one’s seed (children) by sacrificing to the abomination, the fire-god Molech. This is the context under which the Torah writes the words למען טמא את מקדשי ולחלל את שם קדשי *“in order to defile My Sanctuary and to desecrate My holy Name”* (20:3). Our lives, what we think and what we do, are connected to the sanctuary, the holy place of God. Taking these things into consideration, what might be a modern day Molech? Consider in the statement of the Lord saying *“I will set My face against that man and cut him off from among his people who profaned My holy name.”* (וְאֲנִי אֶתְּנֶה אֶת-פְּנֵי בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא) וְהִכַּרְתִּי אֹתוֹ מִקֶּרֶב עַמּוֹ כִּי מִזְרָעוֹ נָתַן לְמַלְאָךְ לְמַעַן טַמֵּא אֶת-מִקְדָּשִׁי וְלַחְלֹל (אֶת-שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי): We understand this may also refer to the sin-laden human condition which is destined for death and decay. This speaks of the hidden sins, those which no man sees. This raises the bar to our accountability before God. The Lord says we are to sanctify ourselves because He is our God. This sanctification process includes life and not death. Just as we read last week, each time Yeshua the Messiah healed a leper, it illustrated the reversal of the corrupt mortality that we live in. Every leper healed of his affliction was a testimony that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. This is why Paul wrote *“Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Yeshua the Messiah*

our Master!” (Romans 7:24-25) The Messiah came to set us free from the ways of death and to empower us by the Spirit of God to overcome sin “if” we believe in Him and seek Him all the days of our lives!

This week is a double portion, Parshiyot Acharei Mot and Kedoshim (*Vayikra / Leviticus 16:1-20:27*). This week’s Torah portion contains a large number of positive and negative commands. To live in Holiness, a duty to parents, observance of the Shabbat, against idolatry, peace offerings, the gleanings of the harvest left for the poor, no stealing or lying, swearing falsely, defrauding the hireling, laws on the deaf and the blind, respect of persons in judgment, tale-bearing, hatred and uncharitableness, revenge, and to love your neighbor as yourself. Parashat Acharei Mot continues speaking of sexual sin in relation to incest, mother, father, sister, brother, and cousins. The laws of *niddah* during menstruation, and to not be engaged in bestiality. We are told to not defile ourselves by these things because it is for this reason the nations were being cast out because they became defiled by them (*18:24*). It is interesting, based upon this text, the Lord states that the nations were cast out of the Promised Land, and the other nations are perishing because they too became defiled by all of these things. If we consider the context, The way this text is written suggests these commands were binding prior to the giving of the Torah at Sinai suggesting that all of mankind is obligated to obey these moral laws. In addition, Parashat Kedoshim speaks of the laws for harvest, to leave the corners of the field for the gleanings, and to not steal or deal falsely with one another (*19:11*). Parashat Kedoshim also speaks of entering the land and planting kinds of trees and allowing three years before harvesting the fruit. The Scriptures go on to say, *19:9 ‘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. (NASB)*. We also read in *Devarim / Deuteronomy 22:9* a similar text which states, *22:9 You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, or all the produce of the seed which you have sown and the increase of the vineyard will become defiled. (NASB)* These verses seem strange and archaic with the idea of mixing threads and planting two kinds of seed in the vineyard. Why would the Lord command His people to not do these things? When we consider the rabbinic literature, according to Rambam’s *Guide for the*

Perplexed, Part 3, 37:10, the idea of mixing different kinds of plants in the grain fields was connected to an ancient occult practice by the nations. The occult practice involved witchcraft, sexual immorality, and the planting of trees, and is the way the nations are described in their unrighteousness. The Lord speaks to us saying, *20:22 'You 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. 20:23 'Moreover, 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. (NASB)* These scriptures describe how the iniquity of the people is visited upon the land itself which is said to “*Vomit*” out her inhabitants. The Scriptures this week reveal to us the Torah was already established by God, it preexisted from since the beginning of time and hence the standard, prohibiting all the horrible crimes that are enumerated above. These things are binding upon all of God’s creation (all of mankind). The Torah states that these laws were obligatory upon the Canaanites as well as the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai. Let’s discuss this further in this week’s Torah portion.

This week’s Torah portion we are looking at *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22-27*.

Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22-27

20:22 'You 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. 20:23 'Moreover, 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. 20:24 'Hence 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 the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 20:25 'You 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 detest-

able by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. 20:26 'Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine. 20:27 'Now 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.' (NASB)

כב וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-כָּל-חֻקֹּתַי וְאֶת-כָּל-מִשְׁפָּטַי וְעַשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם וְלֹא-תִקְיֵא אֶתְכֶם הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְבִיא אֶתְכֶם שָׁמָּה לְשִׁבְתָּ בָּהּ: [שביעי] כג וְלֹא תֵלְכוּ בְּחֻקֹּת הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר-אֲנִי מְשַׁלַּח מִפְּנֵיכֶם כִּי אֶת-כָּל-אֱלֹהִים עָשׂוּ וְאָקִץ בָּם: כד וְאָמַר לְכֶם אֲתָם תִּירְשׁוּ אֶת-אֲדָמָתָם וְאֲנִי אֶתְנַנֶּה לְכֶם לְרֵשֶׁת אֶתָּה אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֵלֶב וְדִבְשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר-הִבְדַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָעַמִּים: [מפטיר] כה וְהִבְדַּלְתֶּם בֵּין-הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה לְטְמֵאָה וּבֵין-הָעוֹף הַטָּמֵא לְטָהוֹר וְלֹא-תִשְׁקְצוּ אֶת-נִפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם בַּבְּהֵמָה וּבָעוֹף וּבְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמַשׁ הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר-הִבְדַּלְתִּי לְכֶם לְטָמֵא: כו וְהֵייתֶם לִי קְדוֹשִׁים כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֲבַדְלֵ אֶתְכֶם מִן-הָעַמִּים לְהִיּוֹת לִי: כז וְאִישׁ אוֹ-אִשָּׁה כִּי-יִהְיֶה בְּהֶם אוֹב אוֹ יִדְעֹנֵי מוֹת יוֹמְתוּ בְּאָכָן יִרְגְּמוּ אֹתָם דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם:

In this week's Torah portion the Lord speaks to us saying, *20:22 'You 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. 20:23 'Moreover, 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. (NASB)* These scriptures speak of the deep connection between the iniquity of the people and the land in which they live. Our righteous behavior has a direct influence upon the produce of the land (crops), the inhabitation, our neighbors, and our enemies. The Torah reveals to us the eternal nature of God's Word, past, present, and future which was already established by God even before creation itself. The Torah was previously in existence and hence the standard, prohibiting all the horrible crimes that are enumerated in

these parshiyot and are binding upon all of God's creation (all of mankind). The reason being, man was made in the image of God and therefore His standard for living is binding upon His creation. This does not mean that the Lord has forced a covenant upon all peoples. The Torah states that these laws were obligatory upon the Canaanites as well as the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai. The Lord God is Righteous, Holy, and Just, and He expects the same from His creation (all of mankind). If the ultimate outcome of life is to spend an eternity with the Lord God of Israel, the one who lives his life in wickedness has no place in the world to come with a righteous and holy God. This life is meant to prepare us for the world to come. This is the perspective we should have as we live our lives each day.

The rabbis have the following to say concerning the command to keep the statutes and ordinances according to *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22*.

Chizkuni on Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22

Part 1

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל חֻקֹּתַי, “*and you are to observe all My statutes.*” *You must not violate any of the commandments involving sexual restrictions and incest. (Ibn Ezra)*

Part 2

וְאֵת כָּל מִשְׁפָּטַי, “*and all My instructions concerning penalties for transgressing these laws,*” *by your judges seeing to this.*

Part 3

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת כָּל חֻקֹּתַי, “*the reason why the Torah has repeated this phrase once again, is to remind the people that G-d's statutes apply in the Diaspora as well as in the Holy Land. In this verse only the statutes applicable in the Holy Land are meant.*”

It is important to note in part 1 of the commentary the emphasis on the moral commands. The interpretation on these Scriptures is based on the reason these verses are repeated (20:22 ‘*You 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. NASB*) is because

God's statutes apply in the Diaspora as well as in the Holy Land. This is a very significant observation since I have heard the claim that the Torah was only for the Jews and only for the Promised Land (Israel). Based upon these Scriptures and the opinion of the rabbis, this is consistent with *Ecclesiastes 12:13* which states, *12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. (NIV)* We are all accountable before God and one day we will all be held accountable before God according to His Word.

The commentary Chizkuni goes on to say the following:

Chizkuni on Vayikra / Leviticus 20:23 Part 1

ולא תלכו בחקות הגוי, “*you must not adopt the statutes of gentile nations.*” *The reason why this too has been repeated here is so that you could not claim that these statutes are only the ones that apply to the Israelites as a community, but not to statutes that apply to them as individuals.*

The rabbis state that the interpretation on *ולא תלכו בחקות הגוי*, “*you must not adopt the statutes of gentile nations*” is repeated to indicate these statutes are not only for the community of Israel, but also for the individual person. This is an important observation in light of the Torah comments that these laws were obligatory upon the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai.

The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 3:2 has the following to say:

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 3:2

We do not act in the ways of the nations, and we do not emulate them--not in dress, nor in hair style, and the like--as it says, “And ye shall not walk in the customs of the nation” (Leviticus 20:23). And as it says, “Neither shall ye walk in their statutes” (Leviticus 18:3). And as it says, “Take heed to thyself that thou be not ensnared to follow them” (Deuteronomy 12:30). One must not dress in clothing unique to them for pride, i.e. clothing

worn by officers. For example, it is stated in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 74a) that it is forbidden for a Jew to act like them, even regarding shoelaces. If they would tie [their shoes] in one way, and Jews would tie another way, or if their custom was to have red laces, and Jews would have black (for the color black is instructive in humility, lowliness, and modesty), it is forbidden for a Jew to differ. And from this every person should learn, according to his time and place, that the clothing that is made for arrogance and licentiousness--a Jew may not use it. Rather, his dress must be made in a way that is instructive of submissiveness and modesty. So it is said in the Sifri that you must not say, "Since they go out in purple, I too will go out in purple," or "Since they go out with kolasin, i.e. weapons, I too will go out with weapons." For these are matters of arrogance, and this is not the portion of Jacob. Rather, their [the children of Jacob] way is to be modest and humble, and not to turn toward conceit. And so too anything which they [the nations] do that can be suspected of containing an iota of foreign worship, a Jew may not do it. And so he may not shave his head or grown his hair like them. Rather, he must separate himself from them in dress and speech and in all his other actions, just as he separates himself from them in his knowledge and opinions. And so it is said, "And I have set you apart from the peoples" (Leviticus 20:26).

Kitzur Shulkhan Aruch speaks of not walking in the customs of the nations by not wearing our hair and clothing in the same manner they do. These things are believed to lead one to becoming ensnared to follow their ways by reason of pride. The point is not to dress in clothing that is unique to them, because this parallels to one acting like them in the example given in the Talmud about the officer. The point is to live a humble life where behaving in the manner of the nations leads to a sense of pride. The rabbis say "*anything which they [the nations] do that can be suspected of containing an iota of foreign worship, a Jew*

may not do it.” This emphasizes the kind of influence the idolatrous and occult practice played in the life of the gentile person. This also places some emphasis on the ease at which one may be deceived in the sense that the deception is subtle and possess the capacity to change a person very slowly. This is the danger of walking amongst the nations without carefully considering what we do so as not to be deceived. Consider this in light of what we see on television today that is full of witchcraft, foul language, and sexual immorality. The rabbis conclude saying, *“he must separate himself from them in dress and speech and in all his other actions, just as he separates himself from them in his knowledge and opinions. And so it is said, “And I have set you apart from the peoples” (Leviticus 20:26).”* This setting apart the Lord does is contained within these moral commands which again are binding upon all of mankind. The point is whether one will seek the Lord, His Messiah, and His ways, or choose to live according to what one sees is right in his own eyes.

Rambam provides us with a picture into the ways of the nations to emphasize the level of wickedness that was taking place amongst the nations. (*Guide for the Perplexed, Part 3 37:10*) Rambam uses the example of grafting a branch into a tree that is coupled to one developing a potion and a incantation that is to be performed at a particular time corresponding to the sun and the moon, and to unnatural sexual intercourse while the woman grafts the branch into the tree. If this may be taken as what was actually occurring amongst the nations, there is a very good reason the Lord commanded, *“The Law prohibiting us from mixing different species together.”* In order to avoid grafting two branches together, we are given the command to not sow two kinds of seed together in a field and so preventing this form of witchcraft from occurring in the Land. Rambam says that this is a command that is good for all countries (including the diaspora). Rambam also says the nations would sow two types of seed together as a formula believing only then would the crops prosper. The idea of developing a formula to effect the growth of the plant was coupled to an occult practice and immorality which is in violation of God’s holy ways on many levels. The different cultures (*e.g. Amorite*) also connected these things to idolatrous worship. The nations believed all of these practices were magic charms which greatly helped in their agricultural growth which

led them to worship the inanimate object, the stars, etc. Rambam concludes saying, *“It must now be clear to you, and no room can be left for any doubt, that the prohibition of wearing garments of wool and linen, of using the fruit of a tree in the first three years, and of mixing divers species, are directed against idolatry, and that the prohibition against adopting heathen manners serves to remove anything which leads to idolatry, as has been shown by us.”* Rambam provides us with a graphic picture of how the nations functioned in their idolatrous and occult practices. These things explain to us the problem of going through the motions like the nations do which the rabbis say are connected to the way one dresses, indicating what we put on the outside for all to see. This reminds us of Israel asking Samuel for a king to be like the nations. (*1 Samuel 8*) This also reminds us of what Paul wrote that we are to (*1 Thessalonians 5:22*) *Abstain from all appearance of evil. (KJV)*

In this week’s Torah portion, the Lord gives us a very important command that is coupled to a warning saying the following, *Vayikra / Leviticus 20:22 ‘You 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. 20:23 ‘Moreover, 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. (NASB)* These scriptures speak of the deep connection between how we live our lives, our relationship with God, our iniquity (sin), and the land in which we live. Our righteous behavior has a direct influence upon our lives and the lives of others. The Torah reveals to us the eternal nature of God’s Word as being relevant in the past, present, and future, God’s Word was established by the Lord Himself even before creation itself. The Torah was in existence prior to it having been given at Sinai and hence is the standard, prohibiting all the horrible crimes that are enumerated in this week’s Torah portion. These Scriptures indicate how God’s Word is binding upon all of God’s creation (all of mankind) and stand as a warning for us today to not behave immorally in sin. Man was made in the image of God and therefore His standard for living is binding upon His creation. The Torah states that these laws were obligatory upon the Canaanites as well as the other nations, and were already in legal binding force before the Torah was given at Sinai. The Lord God is Righ-

teous, Holy, and Just, and He expects the same from His creation (all of mankind). Fortunately the Lord did not leave us alone to keep these commands. Based upon the Apostolic Writings, by faith in the Messiah Yeshua, the Lord sends His Holy Spirit into our lives to guide and empower us enabling us to walk according to the Spirit in the way that He chooses, according to His commands. The Lord changes us from the inside out such that we will have a desire to walk in righteousness and holiness and truth. Freedom, Deliverance, Redemption, a change of heart, the desire to serve the Lord and others, a deep love and respect for the Lord God of Israel, all of this comes by faith in His Messiah Yeshua!