

אֲשֶׁרֵינוּ
יִסְחָדּוּךָ

פרשת אחרי מות

Acharei Mot

Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



UN-INFLUENCED

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ ('21)

MEIR SCHOCHET ('21)

YAFFA SHEKHTER ('20)

ELISHEVA GREENE ('20)

When teaching a class, in order to make his or her point crystal clear, the teacher will often give an example. The better the example, the better the students will understand the

lesson. The more relevant and applicable example, the easier it will be for the students to fully grasp what the teacher is attempting to impart.

כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבַּתֶּם-בָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ;
וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ-כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה לֹא
תַעֲשׂוּ וּבַחֲקֵיהֶם לֹא תִלְכוּ:

“Like the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you,

you shall not do, and you shall not follow their statutes” (Vayikra 18:3).

In these pesukim, the Torah comes to teach us a famous commandment of not following the practices, ways, and actions of the non-Jewish nations.

The mefarshim raise the following question: Why does the Torah use Mitzrayim and Canaan as the examples of nations not to follow? Are there other nations that we are allowed to follow?! Obviously not! So why single out these two nations?

Rashi comments that the pasuk is teaching us that the practices of the Mitzriyim and Canaanim were the most corrupt of all the nations. Since these nations are where the Jewish people had once lived and would in the future live, they were the most corrupt of them all.

The Kli Yakar takes a unique approach to this ques-

tion. He says that we may have had a *hava amina*, an initial thought, to say that since at points in our history we dwelled among these nations, maybe their actions were not so bad. We lived in Goshen and we are headed to *Eretz Canaan*, maybe Hashem let us live there because these nations' actions are not necessarily the worst in the world? Maybe we can even live among them and take upon ourselves some of their actions that we might find meaningful. Since we lived and will live among them, we might feel confident that we can handle any negative effect of our surroundings.

Therefore, the Torah goes out of its way to use these specific nations as the example. The Torah wants to highlight to us that even these nations, which you may have thought you could handle and are more manageable, nevertheless present a threat to our identity and philosophy; therefore, we must remove ourselves from among them and avoid mimicking their practices.

As we know, every word and letter in the Torah is precious. What I believe the Torah is trying to convey to us is that we should never minimize or downplay any possible negative influence or environment. There are times where we may be invited to or find ourselves in situations or locations with negative influences. We must never brush off and say to ourselves, "this is no big deal, I can handle this," or "this is really not going to be so bad, I am better than anything negative that could come about." The Torah is teaching us otherwise. We can not be overconfident in our ability to withstand the pressures of our environment and its impact on our spirituality; we must be careful to surround ourselves with people and places that will uplift us instead.

ENHANCING SPIRITUALITY

ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ ('21)

Parshat Acharei Mot details every aspect of the Yom Kippur service. During one segment of the service, the Kohen Gadol would bring two offerings to the Beit Hamikdash to ask Hashem for forgiveness: one for himself (offered first) and one for the rest of the Jewish people. Why is the Kohen Gadol commanded to bring an offering for himself first? As a representative of the Jewish nation, it would seem that he should first offer a korban to fulfill his primary goal of representing the people and only then offer a separate korban to atone for his own sins.

The Chafetz Chaim offers an answer to this question by suggesting that the Kohen must first focus on atoning for his sins before he is able to ask for forgiveness for the sins of others. In order to represent and save the entire nation, the Kohen Gadol must understand how to improve himself first.

Later on, Hashem commanded the Jewish people to offer a male goat in the Beit Hamikdash. Then an identical goat, meant to personify uncleanness, would be thrown off of a cliff. Why would Hashem ask the Jews to spend superfluous money on an additional goat? The money intended for buying the goat meant to be thrown off the cliff could instead be used for physical necessities or spiritual matters, like mitzvot and tzedakah.

Money spent on physical items does not have long term benefit and is often associated with wastefulness, unlike money spent to pursue spirituality. The concept of the two goats is similar to this metaphor of money; the goat used as an offering to Hashem has a long-lasting effect on our spirituality, while the goat thrown off of the cliff is seen as wasteful, similar to money. This teaches us the lesson to spend our money less carelessly

and instead to enhance our spirituality, as money spent on spirituality has an everlasting effect.

HASHEM, JEALOUS?

MEIR SCHOCHET ('21)

Parshat Acharei Mot is filled with a plethora of halachot, including some laws that seem a bit strange. One law discusses the prohibition of *Avodat HaMolech*, a specific type of avodah zarah. This worship required a parent to give over their child to the priest of their religion, who would then pass the child through two bonfires. Right before the explanation of this prohibition, the Torah mentions the prohibition of an affair between a man and an *eshet ish*, a married woman. What is the connection between these two prohibitions that the Torah purposefully placed one after the other?

In his answer to this question, Rabbeinu Bachye draws a comparison between the two prohibitions. When a married woman has a relationship with another man, her husband becomes jealous. Similarly, by doing *Avodat HaMolech*, an individual brings about jealousy in Hashem. Although our lowly human comprehension cannot know what the jealousy of Hashem is or means, this saying appears in other parshiyot concerning idol worship. For example, with regards to the *Aseret Hadibrot* in Parshat Yitro, the Torah mentions that one should not do avodah zarah because Hashem will not forgive us because He is a *Kel kana*, an impassioned god. Whatever Hashem's jealousy is, one should recognize that the same way one inflicts human jealousy through unfaithful marital relations, one would inflict the same emotion onto Hakadosh Baruch Hu by worshipping other gods or philosophies.

PURITY AND IMPURITY

YAFFA SHEKHTER ('20)

This week's parsha, Parshat Acharei Mot, starts

off by discussing the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, the holiest and purest day of the year. However, the end of the parsha discusses the prohibition of *arayot*, forbidden relationships. What is the reason for the juxtaposition of these two topics, one about complete purity and one about severe impurity, that placed them both in the same parsha? The connection between these two topics continues to be very confusing to many, especially because the Torah reading for Mincha on Yom Kippur is the section in this parsha about forbidden relationships.

The Tosafot answer this question by saying that since women are dressed up nicely for Yom Tov, the reading of this parsha serves as a reminder for people not to turn to sin.

Many reject this explanation because on Yom Kippur, most people are tired and hungry and only focused on tefillah. One can learn from this interpretation that even in our mind's holiest and purest state and our body's weakest state, we must not give in to our *yeitzer harah*. For most, it is extremely difficult to overcome humankind's instinctive desires. The parsha of forbidden relations is read specifically on Yom Kippur to make a clear point: that one can never ever let his or her guard down, because there is never one moment in a person's life that they are not susceptible to the influence by the powerful *yeitzer harah*.

NATURE VS NURTURE

ELISHEVA GREENE ('20)

This week's parsha, Acharei Mot, details the tasks the Kohen Gadol should perform on Yom Kippur. One part of the service requires the Kohen to give sacrifices in order to gain forgiveness from Hashem. He fulfills this in a unique way by picking lots.

For most of time, there has been a debate over how much of a person's character is innate or a

direct reflection of their surroundings. An event decided by a lottery can be viewed in one of two ways: as a coincidence or a clear action of Hashem. The majority's nature is to write something off as a coincidence and to think nothing of it. As Jews, we are nurtured to believe that everything is because of Hashem.

For some people, it is harder to automatically believe that everything is from Hashem. Through a lottery, Hashem is able to take everything into consideration and prove that the results of the lottery were specifically chosen. The ritual of forgiveness reminds us that each person is responsible for their actions, whether the wrongdoings stem from a person's nature or nurture. We are always judged fairly by Hashem because He is the only one who can give consideration to the factors that influence our behaviors and demeanor.

WE WANT TO THANK OUR SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS FOR ALL THEIR HARD WORK THIS YEAR. THEIR DEDICATION WAS ESSENTIAL TO PUBLISHING INSIGHTFUL DIVREI TORAH EACH WEEK. WE WISH THEM ONLY SUCCESS IN ALL OF THEIR FUTURE ENDEAVORS AFTER GRADUATING FROM KYHS.

Staff

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

BATSHEVA SHEKHTER

DESIGN DIRECTOR

MAYRAV SAKETKHOV
SHIREL GARZON

EDITORS

LIBBY WEINGARTEN ('19)
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MORDY SHEKHTER ('20)
YAFFA SHEKHTER ('20)
DONIELLA ZAK ('21)
ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ ('21)

FACULTY ADVISOR

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

DEVELOPERS

MAX FROHLICH ('21)
DOVID ZAK ('19)

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RAVH@YESHIVAHS.ORG