

5782 – Leviticus 16-20 - Acharei Mot (After the death)

^{16:1}The LORD spoke to Moses **after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died** when they approached the LORD. ²The LORD said to Moses: **"Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die.** For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. ³"This is how Aaron is to enter the Most Holy Place: He must first bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. ⁵From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

1. וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה—*HASHEM spoke to Moses.* Ramban states that this took place on the day after the death of Aaron's two sons, following the Divine prohibition against drinking wine or strong drink during the sacred service (10.9). But in the Talmud (Gittin [Documents] 60a) we find R' Levi teaching that this chapter is one of the eight passages revealed on the very day on which the Tabernacle was erected, that is, on the first day of Nissan, the day on which Aaron's sons died.

Rashi there adds that although this chapter deals with the laws of Yom Kippur, it was nevertheless proclaimed on the first day of Nissan because the sons of Aaron died on that day for having entered the Tabernacle without permission. That is why Aaron immediately received the warning that he may not come at any time into the Sanctuary (v. 2). The day of Yom Kippur is the one exception allowed for.

R' Elazar ben Azariah tells a parable to explain this passage. A sick person was told by his doctor not to eat cold foods nor sleep in a damp place. However, he did not take it as seriously as he should have until he was told the same thing by a second doctor, but this time with the added reminder that another patient had died because he did not heed his warning. In the same way, the death of Aaron's two sons serves to emphasize the seriousness of the prohibition against violating the sanctity of the Tabernacle (*Rashi, Sifra*)

R' Moshe Sofer holds that this extra emphasis was necessary only for later generations. For Aaron, who had personally experienced the loss of two exceptional sons, the general warning expressed in v. 2 was totally sufficient.¹

2. אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן—*After the death of Aaron's two sons.* The Midrash connects the death of Aaron's sons with the service of Yom Kippur from another viewpoint. It quotes R' Chiya who explains that the death of the righteous is a means of atonement, just as is the Yom Kippur service (*Vayikra Rabbah* 20). **The disappearance of the righteous from our midst causes us to reflect and leads us to regret and repent our failings ...**

The Zohar comments that **whoever is moved to tears when he reads about the death of Aaron's sons in the Torah is assured that he will not see his own sons die in his lifetime.** Here we find the hint of a connection between the episode of Aaron's sons and parental responsibility. The mere fact that the Torah refers to them as Aaron's sons rather than by name strengthens the impression of Aaron's responsibility for their actions. These two sons were righteous; they were raised in an atmosphere of holiness, with a view to their future duties as assistants to the Kohen Gadol. Nevertheless they had to die *for offering before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them* (10:1). **What a lesson in child-rearing all parents can learn from this passage!** If parents know what conclusions to draw from this and if, on Yom Kippur, **they resolve to watch over their own children's upbringing so that they do not bring before Hashem an alien fire,** then the parents can look forward with confidence to their children's future.

a. Deuteronomy 4:9

⁹Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. **Teach them to your children and to their children after them.**

1) Deuteronomy 6:7 (cf. 11:19)

⁷**Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.**

2) Deuteronomy 31:12

¹²Assemble the people **men, women and children,** and the foreigners residing in your towns **so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.**

3) Psalms 78:5

⁵He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which **he commanded our ancestors to teach their children ...**

¹ Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Vayikra*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 170-185.

b. Genesis 18:16-21

¹⁶When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

¹⁷Then the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ¹⁸Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. ¹⁹For **I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just**, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him." ²⁰Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous ²¹that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

JPS—For I have known him, **to the end** that he may command his children and his household after him ...

KJV, RSV, TNK, YLT—For I know him, **that he will command** his children and his household after him ...

LXX—**For I know that he will order his sons**, and his house after him ...

NAS, NKJ—"For I have chosen him, **in order that** he may command his children and his household after him ...

NJB—For **I have singled him out to command his sons** and his family after him ...

OKE—**because it is manifest before me that he will instruct his children**, and the men of his house after him ...

PJE—Because **his holiness** (piety, chasidut) **is manifest before Me, (and) that he will instruct his sons**, and the men of his house after him ...

1) Genesis 21:8-14

⁸(Isaac) grew ... and on the day (he) was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham **was mocking**, ¹⁰and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac." ¹¹The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹²But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. ¹³I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring." ¹⁴Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then **sent her off with the boy**. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

2) Genesis 25:7-10

⁷Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age ... ⁹**His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him** in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre ... ¹⁰(in) the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah ...

c. Proverbs 22:6

⁶Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.

CJB, JPS, KJV, NAS, NKJ, RSV, TNK—Train a child in the way he [should] go ...

NJB—Give a lad a training **suitable to his character** and, even when old, he will not go back on it.

YLT—Give instruction to a youth **about (better, according to) his way**, Even when he is old he turneth not from it.

1) Ephesians 6:4

⁴Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

2) For the parent: Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." Ensure that you are doing your part in training your child. Impart God's words and principles to them when you can. Even better, ask God to help you exemplify your Father's heart and to live out His commands. When you make mistakes, openly discuss them with your children, so that they can watch you run to God in your imperfections, rather than running from Him.²

d. Jeremiah 31:15-17

¹⁵This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." ¹⁶This is what the LORD says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the LORD. "**They will return from the land of the enemy**." ¹⁷So there is hope for your descendants," declares the LORD. "**Your children will return to their own land**."

1) For the child: Jeremiah 31:16-17 (Amp) "Thus says the LORD: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work (raising of your children, prayer) shall be rewarded, says the LORD, and they (your children) shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope (something you can expect)

in your future, says the LORD, that **your children shall come back to their own border (place of peace and safety and well-being).**"³

e. Proverbs 29:17

¹⁷**Discipline your children, and they will give you peace;** they will bring you the delights you desire.

1) 2Samuel 13:20-29

²⁰(Tamar's) brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman. ²¹**When King David heard all this, he was furious.** ²²And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar ...

²³Two years later ... ²⁸Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' **then kill him.** Don't be afraid. Haven't I given you this order? Be strong and brave." ²⁹So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered ...

LXX—And king David heard of all these things, and was very angry; **but he did not grieve the spirit of his son Amnon, because he loved him,** for he was his first-born.

NAB—**He would not,** however, **antagonize Amnon,** his high-spirited son; he loved him, because he was his firstborn.

NJB—but **he had no wish to harm his son Amnon,** whom he loved because he was his first-born.

DSS—*But **he would not inflict pain on his son Amnon's spirit, because he loved him, since he was his firstborn.***

a. Proverbs 13:24

²⁴Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them.

2) 1Kings 1:1-8

¹**When King David was very old,** he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him ...

⁵Now Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith, put himself forward and said, "I will be king." So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him. ⁶**(His father had never rebuked him by asking, "Why do you behave as you do?"** He was also very handsome and was born next after Absalom.)

⁷Adonijah conferred with Joab son of Zeruiah and with Abiathar

the priest, and they gave him their support. ⁸But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei and Rei and David's special guard **did not join** Adonijah.

3. בְּקִרְבָּתָם—*When they approached.* The sin for which the sons of Aaron died is expressed by the word בְּקִרְבָּתָם, *when they approached.* This expression can be interpreted to mean either the act of drawing near or the offering of a sacrifice. R' Yose HaGlili sees their sin as having drawn too near whereas R' Akiva blames the unauthorized sacrifice that they brought (Sifra).
4. וַיָּמָתוּ—*And they died.* The Midrash here develops the theme expressed in Ecclesiastes 9:2: *The same fate awaits the righteous and the wicked.* Korach and his followers who instigated rebellion against Moses died by fire; Aaron's two sons who offered their sacrifices to Hashem also perished in flames. The righteous are surely aware of this equality of men confronting destiny, but they nevertheless choose to do good for they are confident that **justice will be done in the world to come** (Rashi). There is, however, a subtle distinction between the two cases, says R' Shimon ben Yochai in the *Zohar*. Speaking of Korach and his followers, the Torah notes (Num16:33): וַיִּאָבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקְהָל׃, *they perished from among the assembly*, which alludes to their losing their place in the World to Come (R' Akiva in *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10:3). Yet the Torah makes no allusion of this kind regarding the sons of Aaron. Their souls survive, as was pointed out in the commentary to 10:2. In this verse the death of Aaron's sons is mentioned twice. The *Zohar* explains that their deaths represented complete physical extinction, for they ... left no children. That is why the Torah adds וַיָּמָתוּ, *and they died.*
5. (v. 2) וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה—*And HASHEM said to Moses.* The first Divine words to Moses in this chapter are introduced by the verb וַיְדַבֵּר [Hashem] *spoke*; the second by the verb וַיֹּאמֶר, (Hashem) *said*. This difference reflects a change in tone. The verb דַּבֵּר, *speaking*, is used for "harsh words" and the verb אָמַר, *say*, for softer language (*Rashi* to Exodus19:3). Thus, the first words are full of harshness—they remind us of the punishment of death for the offering made to God. The second verse, introduced by the word וַיֹּאמֶר, [Hashem] *said*, introduces a note of mercy for the Kohen Gadol Aaron. Here Moses is called upon to console his brother by telling him that his ordeals are over and that they have amply atoned for his earlier wrongdoings. The verb דַּבֵּר,

Speak, that is used in this verse sometimes refers to words of consolation, particularly when followed by the phrase עַל־לֵב, *to the heart*. The prophet Isaiah (40:1) begins his great chapter of consolation with these words of exhortation, דַּבְּרוּ עַל־לֵב יְרוּשָׁלַם, *Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and proclaim unto her that her time of ordeals is past, that her guilt is atoned for (Vayikra Rabbah)*.

Aaron here receives the formal right to enter into the Sanctuary at all times, if he but carries out the sacrificial service prescribed in this chapter. (That is the opinion of *Vayikra Rabbah* and explained by the Sages quoted in the commentary to v. 24.) Moses, who had the privilege of always being able to enter the Holy of Holies where Hashem appeared to him (Exodus 25:22), had feared that his brother would be kept away from the holy chamber. He had misinterpreted the phrase וְאֵל־יִבֹא בְּכָל־עֵת (v. 2). In reality, it signifies: *Let him not enter when he likes, but only after having performed the service commanded to him (Vayikra Rabbah)*.

6. (v. 2) וְאֵל־יִבֹא בְּכָל־עֵת—*He may not come at any time*. In the Zohar, R'

Abba is quoted as saying that **there are times which are favorable for receiving God's blessings and having prayers answered**. On the other hand, **there are times favorable for punishment, and still other times of uncertainty and suspense**. This principle is supported in numerous places in *Tanach* (eg. *Psa* 10:1, 69:14, *Isa* 55:6, *Jer* 31:2). **It is founded on nature itself, which is the Book of God**. Nature has its fertile and radiant seasons, bearing the treasures of blessing, but it also contains other periods which are bitter and fraught with dangers of every kind. The day, too, includes different periods, described by the three attributes of דִּין וְרַחֲמִים וְחֶסֶד (*lovingkindness, justice, and mercy*) the bright morning reminds us of the radiance of the sun, which calls us to life; the afternoon setting of the sun prepares us for an existence deprived of the benefits of light and heat; and lastly, the shadows of night are a time of anguish and uncertainty.

Because of this reference to nature, the belief in an עֵת רְצוֹן, *propitious time*, does not come under the category of לֹא תַעֲזוּבֵנוּ, *do not indulge in sorcery* (19:26), which forbids paying heed to magical omens.

a. Psalm 10:1

¹Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself **in times of trouble?**

b. Psalm 69:13

¹³But I pray to you, LORD, in **the time of your favor**; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation.

1) 2Corinthians 6:2

For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, **now is the time of God's favor**, now is the day of salvation.

c. Isaiah 55:6

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

1) Acts 17:26-28

²⁶From one man (God) made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. ²⁷God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though **he is not far from any one of us**. ²⁸'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

d. Jeremiah 31:2

²This is what the LORD says: "The people who survive the sword will **find favor** in the wilderness; I will come to give rest to Israel."

7. (v. 4) כִּתְּנֵי־בַד קָדָשׁ—*A sacred linen tunic*. He must not officiate with the eight garments that he wears to officiate outside in the Tabernacle Courtyard. Those garments are made with gold, which recalls the sin of the Golden Calf. As our Sages put it, *a prosecutor [gold] cannot become a defender (Rashi)*.

To perform the most sacred service inside the Holy of Holies, the Kohen Gadol had to divest himself of his ornate garments and clothe himself very simply in white linen. Whereas in his appearance before the people he was dressed in grandeur, **when he went to confess his sins and the sins of the people before the Shechinah in the Holy of Holies he appeared simply in the clothing of an ordinary Kohen**. At that moment, the most solemn moment of the year, the most highly placed of men became a simple mortal, no longer having any means of evading responsibility for his actions. This was the moment of truth.

All human devices became worthless in the sublime confrontation with his Maker.

a. Exodus 28:1-4

¹'Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. ²**Make sacred garments for your**

brother Aaron to give him dignity and honor. ³Tell all the skilled workers to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest ...

b. Revelation 19:1-8

¹After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ²for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants" ... ⁴The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" ⁵Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!" ⁶Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. ⁷Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For **the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.** ⁸**Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.**" (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people.)

1) Revelation 21:2

²I saw the Holy City, **the new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, **prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.**

c. Revelation 19:11-16

¹¹I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. ¹²His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. **He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.** ¹³**He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God.** ¹⁴The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses **and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.** ¹⁵Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter" (Psa 2:9). He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.