



Wembley Synagogue

אחרי מות

Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Acharei Mot 5768

What's the Sidra about?

First Aliyah: The High Priest is instructed to only enter the Holy of Holies chamber of the sanctuary once a year, on Yom Kippur; and even on this holiest day of the year, the entry into the Temple's inner sanctum must be accompanied by a special service and specific offerings which are detailed in this reading. The High Priest was only permitted to enter amidst a cloud of burning incense. Also, special white garments were worn by the High Priest on this day. While offering the day's sacrifices, the High Priest would "confess" on behalf of the entire nation, attaining atonement for the past year's sins. **Second Aliyah:** This section continues the description of the special Yom Kippur service. The procedure of the "scapegoat" ceremony is described in this aliyah. **Third Aliyah:** After concluding the order of the Yom Kippur service in the Temple, the Torah instructs us to observe Yom Kippur as a Day of Atonement when we must abstain from work and "afflict" ourselves. **Fourth Aliyah:** The Jews are forbidden to offer sacrifices anywhere other than the Tabernacle or Temple. **Fifth Aliyah:** We are commanded not to consume blood. When slaughtering fowl or undomesticated animals, we are commanded to cover their blood with earth. The Jews are admonished not to follow the ways of the Egyptians and Canaanites. **Sixth Aliyah:** Continuing on the above theme, the Torah provides a list of prohibited relationships. **Seventh Aliyah:** The prohibitions against homosexuality and bestiality are mentioned. The Jews are then warned that engaging in these forbidden relationships will result in their expulsion from the Land of Israel.

Much of this week's parashah is devoted to describing the sacrificial service that the Kohen Gadol was required to perform whenever he entered the Kodesh Ha'kodashim - The Holy of Holies. The Torah says (Vayikra 16:2), וְאֵלֵיבָנָה בְּכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ, "He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary . . ." Why not? Rashi explains: "Because My Shechinah is revealed there, Aharon should be careful not to enter regularly." R' Chaim Shmuelevitz z"l elaborates, saying: "Habit is the greatest enemy of one who wishes to feel holy and uplifted. When one stands opposite that which is sublime and exalted, and in his soul burn sparks of a holy fire, habit sneaks in and douses the embers one by one until the entire fire is extinguished." R' Shmuelevitz continues: The prophet Ezekiel writes (46:9), "When the population comes before Hashem on the appointed days, whoever comes in by way of the northern gate [of the Temple] to prostrate himself shall go out by way of the southern gate, and whoever comes in by way of the southern gate shall go out by way of the northern gate. He shall not return by way of the gate through which he came in; rather, he shall go out opposite it." R' Yosef Yaavetz z"l explains that Hashem does not want a person to see one of the gates twice, lest he equate it in his mind with the gate of his own house. Likewise, one should not see the same wall of the Bet Hamikdash twice lest he equate it with the walls of his own house. In fact, writes R' Yaavetz, this is what caused the sin of the Golden Calf, for they took the Ohel Mo'ed for granted and began to despise it. Therefore, after the sin, we read Shemot 33:7 that Moshe dismantled the Tent and rebuilt it outside of the camp. (Source: Sichot Mussar 5731, No. 16)

וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן - And Hashem said to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon in their approach before Hashem and they died. (16:1) The Torah relates how two of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, brought an unwarranted offering of incense and fire and were punished by death. In explaining why their act carried such a severe punishment, one view in the Midrash states that they were guilty of expounding halacha in the presence of their teacher (Moshe) by bringing an offering without first consulting him, which is disrespectful. However, if this is the reason why Nadav and Avihu incurred the death penalty, it is puzzling that the Torah gives no clue of this. Rather, the Torah implies that the punishment was incurred for their attempt to approach Hashem in an unauthorized manner.

We can understand this by first considering the following analogy. Consider a sergeant who, upon his own initiative, begins to act like a lieutenant. He may be court-martialed, even if his motivation is to serve the country in a higher capacity. He is guilty of violating protocol. True service requires that

one not disregard his own position. One who decides the halacha in his teachers' presence is like one who usurps his teacher's position. Such a person is venturing into a realm above his own. Thus, the phrase "in their approach before Hashem" can be understood to include not only their physical approach to the altar, but their approach towards Hashem in a spiritual sense by acting as if they were in their teacher's position. The verse does not leave the main reason for their punishment unsaid; rather it captures the essence of this Midrash's interpretation. (Source: Kedushat Levi)

וְאֵלֶיבָנָא בְּכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ - And he should not come in every time to the Holy (sanctuary)(16:2)

We all have our moments and seasons, some are productive and some are not. A person must serve Hashem the best he/she can, regardless of the time or season. In a homiletic way we can see this dictum in the above verse by translating בְּכָל־עֵת to mean 'with all times,' instead of 'in every time.' One must strive not to use times and seasons as an excuse for not drawing near to the Holy service, to serve G-d.(Source: Parsha Pearls quoting R' Zusya of Hanipoli)

בְּזֹאת יָבֵא אַהֲרֹן אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ - Thus shall Aharon enter the Holy (sanctuary) (16:3)

The gematria of the word "בְּזֹאת" is 410, alluding to the 410 years that the first Temple stood. The second Temple is not alluded to here because the Holy of Holies in the second Temple did not contain the aron (which had been hidden away), and was less holy than in the first Temple. (Source: Rav Yisrael Isserlin z"l, author of Terumat Hadeshen)

וְבָא אַהֲרֹן אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּפָשַׁט אֶת־בְּגָדֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ - Aharon shall enter the Tent of Meeting, he shall remove the linen vestments (that he had worn when he entered the Sanctuary, and he shall leave them there. (16:23) Rashi writes (quoting the gemara) that this verse is out of place. In the actual order of the Yom Kippur service, this verse should be placed at the very end of the service, perhaps after verse 33. Then why is it here? asks R' Avraham Danzig z"l Also, when the Torah describes the Temple service for the other holidays, it mentions the holiday first and then describes the service. Here, the service is described in detail and the holiday (Yom Kippur) is mentioned only incidentally at the end. Why? Also, why does the above verse say, "Aharon shall enter"? What of future high priests after Aharon? Also, the Torah's description of the Yom Kippur service mentions a ram, which some sages say is the same ram mentioned in Bamidbar 29:8 as part of the Yom Kippur mussaf sacrifice. Why then is it mentioned here? R' Danzig explains: The midrash says that Aharon was different from all other high priests. Every other Kohen Gadol was allowed to enter the Kodesh Ha'kodashim/"Holy of Holies" only on Yom Kippur, but Aharon was permitted to enter whenever he wished. The only requirement was that he perform the service described in the parashah whenever he entered. This, writes R' Danzig in the name of the Vilna Gaon, answers the first question above. As applied to Aharon, our verse is not out of order. True, on Yom Kippur, this part of the service was performed at the end. The reason is that Hashem had told Moshe as part of the Oral Law that the Kohen Gadol should change his clothes and immerse in the mikvah five times on Yom Kippur. ("Moving" this verse and changing its context has the effect of increasing the number of clothes changes and immersions.) However, when Aharon entered the Kodesh Ha'kodashim on other days, there was no such requirement.

Our other questions are answered by this idea as well, R' Danzig writes. Our verse refers to "Aharon," not to the "Kohen Gadol," because our verse is in context for Aharon, but not for other High Priests, as just explained. Also, Yom Kippur is mentioned incidentally, because for Aharon, it was incidental. He could enter the Holy of Holies at any time. Finally, the ram from the korban mussaf is mentioned here to teach that not only on Yom Kippur must a ram be sacrificed, but any time Aharon wished to enter the Kodesh Ha'kodashim he had to sacrifice a ram. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

שבת שלום!

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 7.48pm



Shabbat ends: 8.55pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר יחיאל משה וולפסון ז"ל

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html