

Stollen Moments – Kedoshim – May 11, 2024

PARASHA SUMMARY FROM WWW. REFORMJUDAISM.ORG

- God issues a variety of commandments, instructing the Israelites on how to be a holy people. (19:1-37)
- Various sex offenses are discussed and punishments for them are presented. (20:1-27)

Introduction to "the Holiness Codes"

Commentary on Chapter 19 from Etz Hayim Commentary

Leviticus Chapter 19 "is one of the richest and most exalted in the Torah, and begins with the words "you shall be holy" (kedoshim t'hiyu). What is holiness? The term can be applied to God, to good people, to a book, to a period of time, or to an animal to be offered as a sacrifice. To be holy is to be different, to be set apart from the ordinary. The opposite of holy (kadosh) is ordinary (chol). To be holy is to rise to partake in some measure of the special qualities of God, the source of holiness. Holiness is the highest level of human behavior, human beings at their most Godlike.

S.R. Hirsch defines holiness as occurring "when a morally free human being has complete dominion over one's own energies and inclinations and the temptations associated with them, and places them (his energy) at the service of God's will."

Martin Buber finds holiness in relationships (with other people), in human beings recognizing the hidden divinity in each of us.

As humans, we can be Godlike by exercising our power to sanctify moments and objects in our lives.

Time can be sanctified when it is used to draw closer to God. Objects can become holy when they help people rise toward God. The Torah is holy not because it comes from God, but because it leads to God."

Leviticus Chapter 19

1 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2 Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy. 3 You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths: I the Lord am your God. 4 Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I the Lord am your God.

5 When you sacrifice an offering of well-being to the Lord, sacrifice it so that it may be accepted on your behalf. 6 It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it, or on the day following; but what is left by the third day must be consumed in fire. 7 If it should be eaten on the third day, it is an offensive thing, it will not be acceptable. 8 And he who eats of it shall bear his guilt, for he has profaned what is sacred to the Lord; that person shall be cut off from his kin.

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God.

11 You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. 12 You shall not swear falsely by My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord.

13 You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning.

14 You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

15 You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly. 16 Do not deal basely with your countrymen. Do not profit by the blood of your fellow: I am the Lord.

17 You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart. Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Lord.

19 You shall observe My laws. You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material.

20 If a man has carnal relations with a woman who is a slave and has been designated for another man, but has not been redeemed or given her freedom, there shall be an indemnity; they shall not, however, be put to death, since she has not been freed. 21 But he must bring to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as his guilt offering to the Lord, a ram of guilt offering. 22 With the ram of guilt offering the priest shall make expiation for him before the Lord for the sin that he committed; and the sin that he committed will be forgiven him.

23 When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. 24 In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before the Lord; 25 and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit — that its yield to you may be increased: I the Lord am your God.

26 You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying. 27 You shall not round off the side-growth on your head, or destroy the side-growth of your beard. 28 You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am the Lord.

29 Do not degrade your daughter and make her a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land be filled with depravity. 30 You shall keep My sabbaths and venerate My sanctuary: I am the Lord.

31 Do not turn to ghosts and do not inquire of familiar spirits, to be defiled by them: I the Lord am your God.

32 You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

33 When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. 34 The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God.

35 You shall not falsify measures of length, weight, or capacity. 36 You shall have an honest balance, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin. I the Lord am your God who freed you from the land of Egypt. 37 You shall faithfully observe all My laws and all My rules: I am the Lord.

19:2 You shall be holy. In the Hebrew, the summons is phrased in the plural, implying that the capacity for holiness is not restricted to spiritually gifted people, anyone may attain holiness. The plural phrasing suggests further that holiness is most easily achieved in the context of community. It is difficult to live a life of holiness without others (Etz Hayim)

19:3 Revere his mother and his father: According to the Talmud, this requires that we refrain from publicly challenging our parents and from "sitting in their chair". The Torah would regard each of our parents equally with reverence and love, and would have each parent represent both discipline and forgiveness in the child's mind. (Etz Hayim commentary)

19:9-10 The command to leave the corner of field and fallen fruit is motivated by the desire to have us share our bounty with the poor. Even a poor person must leave a corner of harvest for others. (Etz Hayim commentary)

19:11 The words "you shall not steal" follow directly (smichut) after the laws of leaving part of the harvest for the poor. Does this teach that keeping everything for ourselves is a form of stealing? (Ibn Ezra)

19:14 You shall not curse a deaf person You shall not insult anyone, even a deaf person, whose feelings will not be hurt by your words, because the use of coarse language diminishes you as a person. (Talmud)

For example, one violates this law by deliberately giving bad advice, by providing someone with the means to do wrong whom you know cannot resist the temptation, or by provoking a short-tempered person to lash out in anger. (Talmud)

19:14 You shall fear/awe your God One might think that he or she has nothing to fear from the deaf or blind person who cannot know who is wronging them, but one is warned that God knows and that one should be afraid of the consequences. (Richard Elliot Friedman)

19:16 stand by at your neighbor's blood. To stand by when someone's life is in danger and one could do something to save it (also, to come forward as a witness when one has knowledge concerning a taking of life). This is the opposite of the principal in American law that one does not have an "affirmative duty to rescue". The biblical principal is that one has to help a fellow human being if one is able. (Richard Elliot Friedman)

19:18 you shall not keep on Meaning: to maintain hostility over time. One must not go on feeling anger, resentment, or a grudge against someone. Note that these are commands against taking revenge or persisting in hostile feelings do not address the question of whether the revenge or the "keeping on" is justified or not. The issue here is that one believes oneself to have been wrong, and the instruction is: don't get even, don't harbor the feelings forever. It is destructive to one's energy and one's spirit. (Richard Elliot Friedman)

19:19 sha'atnez. One is not permitted to wear an item of clothing made of two different species of fabric. This is specified in Deuteronomy as wool and linen together. Wool comes from an animal, a sheep, and linen comes from a plant, flax. Some think that such fabric is prohibited because it was thought to be an unnatural mixture. Others think that it is because the priests have both linen and wool in their clothing, and that "non-priests" should not wear apparel that belongs in the realm of the sacred.

19:18 and 19:19 It is a curious juxtaposition: the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, directly followed by three commandments to maintain distinctions. The Torah seems to be saying distinctions among animals, plants, and clothing are appropriate, but making distinctions in one's love of humankind is an offense.