

## אַחֲרֵי מוֹת

### ACHAREI MOT/AFTER THE DEATH Vayikra/Leviticus 16:1-18:30

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The first two chapters of our Torah reading revolve around Yom Kippur and the location to where sacrifices and offerings are to be brought. Then, in **chapter 18**, an in-depth listing of forbidden sexual relations is given. **Vayikra 18** is perfectly placed as the lead-in to next week's **Parashat Kedoshim**, the parasha of "holiness."

Here is how **Vayikra 18** begins:

**Vayikra/Leviticus 18:1** Then יהוה spoke to Moshe, saying,<sup>2</sup> "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'I am יהוה your Elohim.'<sup>3</sup> 'According to the **doings** (ma'aseh – מַעֲשֵׂה) of the **land of Egypt**, where you dwelt, **you shall not do** (asah – עָשָׂה); and according to the **doings** (ma'aseh – מַעֲשֵׂה) of the **land of Canaan**, where I am bringing you, **you shall not do** (asah – עָשָׂה); nor shall you walk in **their statutes**.<sup>4</sup> '**You shall do** (asah – עָשָׂה) **My judgments and keep My statutes**, to walk in them: I am יהוה your Elohim.'<sup>5</sup> 'You shall therefore keep **My statutes and My judgments**, which if a man **does** (asah – עָשָׂה), he shall live by them: I am יהוה.

In the above verses, the verb "asah" (עָשָׂה – to do, act, or perform) and its noun which speaks of "actions" (מַעֲשֵׂה - actions or things done) are repeated six times. In **verse 3**, the "acts" are the customs of "Egypt" and "Canaan," which יהוה commands them – "you shall not do," while **verses 4-5** speak of יהוה's "statutes and judgments" which they must "do."

It is commonly taught, that "judgments" (mishpatim – מִשְׁפָּטִים) describe a category of logical laws which man would understand as important, even without any Divine commandment. "Statutes" (chuqatim – חֻקִּים) include laws which Israel must simply obey because they are decrees that the Holy One of Israel has made, even though they might not be fully understood. Thus we can understand the warning that יהוה gave through Moshe in **Vayikra 18**, telling the people that "Egypt" (the only place they had ever known until now) and the land of "Canaan" to where they were going were both places that represented cultures and gentile practices that He found "abominable" and must never be emulated by His chosen ones.

If we briefly describe the structure of **Vayikra 18**, after the intro verses which we have already taken a look at, we have the lengthy list of prohibited sexual relations (**verses 6-23**), followed by the conclusion of the chapter:

**Vayikra 18:24** ' Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are **defiled**, which I am casting out before you.<sup>25</sup> 'For the land is defiled; therefore, I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the **land vomits out its inhabitants**.<sup>26</sup> 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and **shall not commit any of these abominations**, either

any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you <sup>27</sup> '(for all these **abominations** the men of the land have **done** (asah – אָשָׁח), who *were* before you, and thus the **land is defiled**), <sup>28</sup> 'lest the **land vomit you out** also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that *were* before you. <sup>29</sup> 'For whoever shall **do** (asah – אָשָׁח) any of these **abominations**, the persons who **does** (asah – אָשָׁח) *them* shall be cut off from among their people. <sup>30</sup> 'Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so as not to **do** (asah – אָשָׁח) *any* of these **abominable customs** which were **done** (asah – אָשָׁח) before you, and that you **do not defile yourselves** by them: I *am* יהוה your Elohim.' "

Recall that the verb/noun “**do/things done**” (asah – אָשָׁח), appeared six times in the opening verses of **Chapter 18** and now at its conclusion, another five times. This should tell us how important it is to the Elohim of Israel that His people remain faithful to Him and NOT adopt the perverted ways of the nations.

And at the end of **Vayikra 18**, we find even more repetitions:

- Three times it is mentioned that the nations committed these “**abominations**” and were “**defiled**” by them (**verses 24, 27, 30**)
- Two times the Israelites are told not to act in the manner of the nations (**verses 26, 30**)
- Twice they are told to keep His laws (**verses 26, 30**)
- Two times the Israelites are told that they can become personally “**defiled**” through the practices of the nations (**verses 24, 30**)
- Twice these verses speak of the “**defilement of the Land**” and how the “**Land will vomit out**” its inhabitants (**verses 25; 27-28**)

So again, WHY are there so many repetitions in this chapter? It appears that the prohibited sexual relations as detailed in **Vayikra 18**, lead to defilement of man and the Land. The heavy emphasis is meant to warn the Israelites. Not only have they come out of “**Egypt**” where these behaviors were the prevalent and accepted as part of the lifestyle of the culture, but they were headed towards “**Canaan**” where these acts were often considered “**holy**” in the context of pagan rituals.

The Elohim of Israel was in the process of teaching His people HIS ways, not the ways of “**Egypt**” ... which they had already witnessed, or “**Canaan**” ...the destination to where they were headed. These practices were “**abominations**” in the eyes of יהוה and He wanted His people to see them through His eyes. But what happened to the Israelites after they entered the Promised Land? And how did it happen that they eventually ended up being “**vomited out of the Land?**”

For 40 years, the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness. יהוה accompanied them in a visible way, and they were protected, fed, and guided as a shepherd leads his sheep. There was no doubt in the minds of the children of Israel that יהוה was their Elohim and their Shepherd in the wilderness.



The Israelites entered the Land and were led by Yehoshua/Joshua in battles to take their inheritance. Once they received their plot of land, they became farmers...not just shepherds. The land was fertile, completely different from that which they had experienced in the wilderness. The Canaanites attributed this fertility to their god, **Ba'al** ("lord"). And that is where the problems all began.

The evil one specializes in putting questions in one's mind. "**Did Elohim really say...?**" And so, as the Israelites were successful in physically conquering the Land, an intense battle began for their hearts and minds. Could the Elohim who had led them out of "**Egypt**" and through the wilderness also provide fertile farms in the Promised Land? Should they now honor the fertility god of "**Canaan?**" Did the Israelites rationalize in their minds that now they must honor both the Elohim of the wilderness and the Elohim of fertility?

A search online turned up this information about "**Ba'al**":

The earliest deity recognized by the people of the ancient Near East was the creator god, El. His mistress, the fertility goddess Asherah, gave birth to many gods, including a powerful god named Ba'al. There appears to have been only one Ba'al, who was manifested in lesser Ba'als at different places and times. Over the years, Ba'al became the dominant deity, and the worship of El faded.

Ba'al won his dominance by defeating the other deities, including the god of the sea, the god of storms, and the god of death. Ba'al's victory over death was thought to be repeated each year when he returned from the land of death (underworld), bringing rain to renew the earth's fertility. The Hebrews were attracted to his ability to produce abundant harvests. It's hard to know why יהוה's people failed to see that He alone had power over these things. Possibly, their desert origins led them to question יהוה's sovereignty over fertile land. Or maybe it was simply the sinful pagan sex practices that attracted them to Ba'al.

An example of the children of Israel being attracted to Ba'al is mentioned in **Bemidbar/Numbers** where the Israelites disgraced themselves in perverted sexual rites with the Moabites. A sex act was performed in the sight of all Israel right at the very "**door of the Tabernacle!**"

**Bemidbar 25:1** Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab.<sup>2</sup> They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.<sup>3</sup> So Israel was joined to Baal of Peor, and the anger of יהוה was aroused against Israel...<sup>6</sup> And indeed, one of the children of Israel came and presented to his brethren a Midianite woman in the sight of Moshe and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who *were* weeping at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

**Pinchas/Phinehas** stopped this wickedness, but the consequence was a plague which killed thousands:

**Bemidbar 25:7** Now when Pinchas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aharon the priest, saw *it*, he rose from among the congregation and took a javelin in his hand;<sup>8</sup> and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman through

her body. So the plague was stopped among the children of Israel. <sup>9</sup> And **those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.**

Entwined with the cultic sex practices of the Canaanites was the sacrifice of children. In fact, we see mention of this right in the middle of the listing of the prohibited sex acts of **Vayikra 18**:

**Vayikra 18:21** 'And **you shall not let any of your descendants pass through the fire to Molech,** nor shall you profane the name of your Elohim: I am יהוה.

יהוה reacted very strongly to this kind of pagan worship. The Torah on several occasions commands the death penalty for anyone worshipping “**Molech**”:

**Vayikra 20:2** "Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: **Whoever** of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who **gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death.** The people of the land shall stone him with stones. <sup>3</sup> 'I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given *some* of his descendants to **Molech**, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name.



Even the wise-hearted King Solomon was led astray by “**Molech, the abomination of the people of Ammon**”:

**1 Kings 11:5** For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. <sup>6</sup> Solomon did evil in the sight of יהוה, and did not fully follow יהוה, as *did* his father David. <sup>7</sup> Then **Solomon built a high place** for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that *is* east of Jerusalem, and **for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon.**

For this disobedience, יהוה became angry and the result was the split of the Kingdom.

**1 Kings 11:9** So יהוה became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from יהוה Elohim of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, <sup>10</sup> and had **commanded him concerning this thing,** that he should not go after other gods; but **he did not keep what יהוה had commanded.**

<sup>11</sup> Therefore יהוה said to Solomon, **“Because you have done this,** and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, **I will surely tear the kingdom away from you** and give it to your servant.

It obviously was a huge temptation for the Israelites when they saw the impressive temples of the pagan gods, the loud music, the professional priesthoods and their luring “holy” sex acts, and their claims that their blood sacrifices and exotic fertility rites could make their lives better. Comparatively speaking, the

Hebrew Elohim lived in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem. There were no images, wild parties, or sex acts associated with His worship. The Torah set the specific guidelines for worship.

It was also the syncretism of worshiping יהוה with worshiping other gods which led to diaspora for the southern kingdom of Judah. First, read how bad things became during the reign of Manasseh:

**2 Kings 21:2** And he did evil in the sight of יהוה, according to the abominations of the nations whom יהוה had cast out before the children of Israel. <sup>3</sup> For **he rebuilt the high places** which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; **he raised up altars for Ba'al**, and made a wooden image, as Ahab king of Israel had done; and **he worshiped all the host of heaven and served them**. <sup>4</sup> **He also built altars in the house of יהוה**, of which יהוה had said, "In Jerusalem I will put My name." <sup>5</sup> And **he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of יהוה**. <sup>6</sup> Also **he made his son pass through the fire, practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft, and consulted spiritists and mediums**. He did much evil in the sight of יהוה, to provoke *Him* to anger.

During the reign of Manasseh's grandson, **Josiah**, an amazing thing happened. They "**FOUND the book of the Torah**"! Who even knew it was lost??

**2 Kings 22:8** Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "**I have found the Book of the Torah** in the house of יהוה." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it...And Shaphan read it before the king. <sup>11</sup> Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Torah, that he tore his clothes.

King Josiah institutes massive reforms to clear the Temple of its pagan influences, including "**ritual booths of the male shrine prostitutes that were IN the House of יהוה**"

**2 Kings 23:4** And the king commanded Hilkiyah the high priest, the priests of the second order, and the doorkeepers, to **bring out of the temple of יהוה all the articles that were made for Ba'al, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them** outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried their ashes to Bethel. <sup>5</sup> Then **he removed the idolatrous priests** whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense on the high places in the cities of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, and those **who burned incense to Ba'al, to the sun, to the moon, to the constellations, and to all the host of heaven**. <sup>6</sup> And he **brought out the wooden image from the house of יהוה**, to the Brook Kidron outside Jerusalem, burned it at the Brook Kidron and ground *it* to ashes, and threw its ashes on the graves of the common people. <sup>7</sup> Then **he tore down the ritual booths of the male shrine prostitutes that were in the house of יהוה**, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image.

But tragically, the next generations went back to what was evil in the sight of יהוה and Babylonian captivity began:

**2 Chronicles 36:19** They (*Babylonians*) set fire to Elohim's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there. <sup>20</sup> **He carried into exile to Babylon** the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his sons until the kingdom of Persia came to power.

If we could go back now to **Vayikra 18**, and to how this mixing of יהוה and the gods of the “**Egyptians**” (i.e. Mitzraim) and “**Canaanites**” all began, we would have to go all the way back to **Bereshith/Genesis 10** to read of the generations of “**Cham's** (Noach's son) **sons**”:

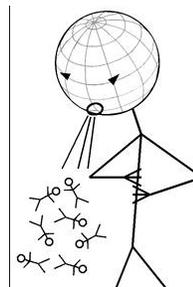
**Bereshith 10:6** And **sons of Cham** are Cush, and **Mitzraim**, and Phut, and **Canaan**.

The “**Egyptians** (Mitzraim)” were known for their licentiousness. This was the reason why Avraham felt forced to introduce his wife as his sister, lest they kill him in order to take her. The same scenario is repeated with Avimelech. Dinah is raped by Shechem, son of Chamor (of the Canaanite nation). And the customs of Sodom/Sodom (also Canaanite) also are related to sexual deviance. So as we have seen, in **Vayikra 18** the Torah speaks with reference to “**Mitzraim and Canaan**” as to the forms of sexual immorality that are forbidden to the sons of Israel.

We should note that in **Bereshith 10**, the only land borders that are mentioned in the list of Noach's sons are those of “**Canaan**” (**Bereshith 10:19**). These borders are important as they are the background to the story of Avraham and the Almighty's promise to give him the Land.

So, we see this Land which is mentioned by its borders as being the land of the descendants of Cham, is the Land to which Avraham is later commanded to go. It is the Land of inheritance. It is the Land over which a conflict will rage between the children of Cham and the children of the Israelites until this day. It is the land that will throw out the sons of Cham because of the sexual immorality which characterizes them. But the same warning is also there for the Israelites. While the Land will be taken from the descendants of Cham, the descendants of Israel may also lose the Land if they do not observe the prohibitions of sexual immorality:

**Vayikra 18:26** 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit *any* of these abominations, *either* any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you <sup>27</sup> '(for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who *were* before you, and thus the land is defiled), <sup>28</sup> **lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.**



Therefore, the very next chapter, **Vayikra 19**, opens with the words:

**Vayikra 19:1** And יהוה spoke to Moshe, saying, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall **be holy**, for I יהוה your Elohim *am* holy.

Israel's Elohim was commanding the establishment of a “**holy**” people in a “**holy**” Land. They were to separate themselves from any hint of sexual immorality. Therefore, there will be a repetition in next

week's **Parashat Kedoshim** (be holy) on proper sexual boundaries along with the sanctity that is created by observance of **הַחֻמּוֹת**'s "judgments" and "statutes."

There is so much that could be carried forward concerning this subject in the **Brit Chadasha**. Some of the verses continue with the theme of "**the sexually immoral not inheriting**":

**1 Corinthians 6:9** Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of Elohim? Do not be deceived. **Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,** <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners **will inherit the kingdom of Elohim.**

**Galatians 5:19** Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness,** <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, <sup>21</sup> envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that **those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of Elohim.**

Some of the final words of the last book of the Bible also continue with this theme:

**Revelation 22:14** Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. <sup>15</sup> But **outside** *are* dogs and sorcerers and **sexually immoral** and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

And yet, there is still hope. We are told to "**flee sexual immorality,**" and through Messiah Yeshua, we can find that strength:

**1 Corinthians 6:18** **Flee sexual immorality.** Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from Elohim, and you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought at a price; therefore, glorify Elohim in your body and in your spirit, which are Elohim's.

**1 Timothy 1:15** This *is* a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that **Messiah Yeshua came into the world to save sinners,** of whom I am chief.

This one verse seems to sum it all up as it refers to the "**will of Elohim**" to be our "**sanctification**" (holiness):

**1 Thessalonians 4:3** For this is the **will of Elohim, your sanctification:** that **you should abstain from sexual immorality;** <sup>4</sup> that each of you should know how to **possess his own vessel in holiness** and honor

Shabbat Shalom!

*Ardelle*