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The Purity Issue

16: 1-2

The purity issue DIG: Based on this chapter, how would you describe the human condition? How do Aaron and his two sons (Nadab and Abihu) typify this basic character flaw? What is ADONAI's typical response to that? How does this affect one's fellowship with God?

REFLECT: What is your favorite "scapegoat" to blame when things go wrong? Do you think the basic character of human beings is much different today than in the days of Moshe? How do you handle problems? Do you blame God? Yourself? Or just merely part of life?

Parashah 29: Acharei Mot (After the death) 16:1 to 18:30

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see link click [Af](#) - Parashah)

[In regular years read with Parashah 30, in leap years read separately]

The Key People are Moshe and Aaron, and the people.

The Scene is the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai.

The Main Events include advice to approach **God** carefully after **the death of Aaron's sons**; to follow the order of ritual specified in detail; to atone for the Sanctuary and for the people and the priests; information about Yom Kippur offerings; a reminder that the life is in the blood and there is only one place, the bronze altar, for making sacrifices; the spiritual connection between the bronze altar, the priest, and the people; advice to keep holy after all is cleansed and to avoid immoral behavior; warning that the Land vomited out its unclean inhabitants; and the necessity of holiness so that God will continue to dwell in His nation.

This parashah begins by reminding us of the narrative content. It was **after the death of Nadab and Abihu** (to see link click [Bh](#) - The Death of Nadab and Abihu) that ADONAI issued the instructions for **the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)** service. This would seem to imply a connection between **the death of the two priests** and the mitzvot of **the Yom**

Kippur rituals.



Some commentators infer that **their death** is again mentioned here in **Leviticus 16** to imply that **Nadab** and **Abihu's** untimely demise was the result of **their** entering into **the Most Holy Place** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fs - The Mercy Seat in the Most Holy Place: Christ at the Throne of Grace**). It may well have been a factor. **They** may have offered **their strange fire** before **the ark** and **the mercy seat**. It was, after this, that **YHVH** gave **Aaron** specific instructions how and when to enter **the Most Holy Place**. If **Aaron** was to avoid the same fate, he needed to follow carefully the instructions that followed. **The Sh'khinah glory** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ju - The Glory of the LORD Rises Upon You**) dwelt within **the Most Holy Place**, and if **Aaron** was to enter, **he** would have died like **his sons**. **He** was to enter behind **the inner veil** (see the commentary on **Exodus Fq - The Inner Veil of the Sanctuary: That is Christ, His Body**) only once a year on **Yom Kippur**.

The danger involved with entering **the Most Holy Place** reminds us of the original question **Leviticus** set out to answer: How can mere humans come near to **God**? The restriction of **the Most Holy Place** created something of a balance between mankind's access to **God** (immanence) and **God's holiness** (transcendence). That is to say, because **Isra'el** had found the means to come near to **God** through **the sacrifices**, and because **the priesthood** had found **their** way into **the Tabernacle**, there was a danger of *too much* access. Given the privilege of coming near to **God** at will, there was also the possibility of making light of that relationship. The separateness of **God** could be quickly forgotten and **holy** fear and trembling could be replaced with familiarity. **The Most Holy Place** served as a counter balance to the easy access **the priests** enjoyed. It remained a level of distinction and separateness that could not be breached. It was the very throne room of **YHVH** where **the LORD** appeared between the wings of the cherubim on **the ark**. The place behind **the**

inner veil inspired fear and awe.

This ominous beginning is followed by a strong warning. **ADONAI spoke with Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they tried to sacrifice before ADONAI and died; ADONAI said to Moshe, "Tell your brother Aaron not to come at just any time into the Most Holy Place beyond the curtain, in front of the mercy seat which is on the ark, so that he will not die; because I appear in the cloud over the mercy seat" (16:1-2).** Yet, if **the Most Holy Place** was so dangerous to mankind, and so vital to understanding **the holiness of God**, why would **the high priest** ever have been allowed to go into **it**? Why risk the consequences? Why breach **the absolute holiness of God's Throne**?

The answer was a **purity** issue.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, How Awesome **You** are perfect in holiness, wisdom and love! It is such a joy to know that **You** love me so dearly! It is also so very special and comforting to know that **You** are completely wise, even knowing the future to the end. All **Your** love and wisdom is wrapped up in your **purity**. **Holy, holy, holy** is the only time in the scriptures are you are described in the Hebrew superlative of the same word three times: **Holy, holy, holy, is ADONAI-Tzva'ot! The whole earth is full of His glory (Isaiah 6:3). Your holiness** qualifies **Your** love, making it totally **pure** and wise. When **You** give directions to guide me, I need to carefully follow what you say. "**For I know the plans that I have in mind for you,**" declares **ADONAI, "plans for shalom and not calamity - to give you a future and a hope."** (Jeremiah 29:11).*

*Trusting **Your** love and wisdom means that even when the path seems unclear to me, it is the best path to take. I can read **Your Word** for direction, pray to **You** for guidance to clearly know **Your** will and then with confidence I can follow your every step; knowing that even if the path is hard and rough, **You** will always guide me wisely and with a tender heart of love down the right path. Not only will **You** guide me, but **You** promise to come alongside of me, never leaving me and always being there to bless me with **Your** guidance and love. **For God Himself has said: I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5c).** I bow in humble worship before **the Awesome God** of the universe who so wisely and tenderly guides me. Thank **You** for being so wise, loving and **holy**! In **Yeshua's** name and power of resurrection. Amen*

Remember that when **YHVH** issued **His** directive to build **the Tabernacle**, **He** said: **Let them construct a Sanctuary (Hebrew: miqdash) for Me, that I may dwell among them (Exodus 25:8). The Tabernacle** needed to be a **holy** and separate place so that **the holy**

and separate **God** could **dwell** among unholy and common mankind. **The Israelites** built **the Tabernacle**, and **the Sh'khinah glory, God's Dwelling Presence**, came to fill it. Through **the sacrifices** and **the priesthood**, **the Israelites** were able to come near to **the Presence of God**. This access, however, created a problem. Because **the Tabernacle** was in the midst of unholy, unclean, and sinful people, **it** was in danger of being spiritually polluted by their presence.

In the previous two parashah of the Torah, we learned the concepts of **Levitical purity** and **impurity**. We learned the strict mitzvot that forbid **Isra'el** to approach **the Tabernacle** or enter **the Temple** compound while in a state of ritual **impurity**. To do so was to risk one's own life. We learned that **purification** rituals for cleansing after childbirth, leprosy and emissions, and we compared those rituals to the **purification** ceremony of **the red heifer** as described in **Numbers 19** (see the commentary on **Numbers Df - The Red Heifer**). It is in the context of Levitical **purity** mitzvot and **purification** ceremonies **that we encounter the complex and sweeping details of the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur**.

Even though **the priesthood** was ritually **purified** before **they** could serve, and even though each individual **Israelite** was immersed and **purified** before bringing **his** or **her** **sacrifice**, the mortal state of man is such that there was still an inevitable accumulation of ritual contamination in **the Tabernacle** and **Temple**. What is more, the iniquity, rebellion and sin of **the Israelites** also left a stain of ritual defilement on **the Sanctuary itself**. As we will see later in **Leviticus** (see **Cy - The Holiness Code**), sin begets a type of ritual **impurity** that can defile both mankind and place.

Left uncleansed, the level of contamination could have reached a critical point at which **the Dwelling Presence of God** would have been withdrawn, or, perhaps, **the Tabernacle** (and **the priesthood** along with it) would have shared a fate similar to **Nadab** and **Abihu**. **The Most Holy Place, the priesthood** and the congregation were all in need of **purification** and **covering** (Hebrew: *kaphar*, meaning *atonement*) if **they** were to have continued interaction with **the Sh'khinah glory of YHVH**. The necessary **purification** rituals were to be carried out by **the high priest annually on the Day of Atonement**. Those rituals required an entrance into **the Most Holy Place** where **the Dwelling Presence** resided.

That it was a necessary ritual of **purification** is stated explicitly. **He will make atonement for the Holy Place because of the impurities of the people of Isra'el and because of their transgressions - all their sins; and he is to do the same for the Tabernacle which is there with them right in the middle of their impurity (Leviticus 16:16)**. The reason **the high priest** had to enter **the Most Holy Place** was to **purify it**. It was a matter

of annual maintenance.²⁷¹