

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Acharei Mot – Kedoshim
April 25, 2026 *** 8 Iyar, 5786

Acharei – Kedoshim in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2894/jewish/Acharei-Kedoshim-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, “Acharei Mot,” means “after the death of” and it is found in Leviticus 16:1. The name of the Parshah, “Kedoshim,” means “holy [ones]” and it is found in Leviticus 19:2.

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry “into the holy.” Only one person, the kohen gadol (“high priest”), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred ketoret to G-d.

Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats, to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

The Parshah of Kedoshim begins with the statement: “You shall be holy, for I, the L-rd your G-d, am holy.” This is followed by dozens of mitzvot (divine commandments) through which the Jew sanctifies him- or herself and relates to the holiness of G-d.

These include: the prohibition against idolatry, the mitzvah of charity, the principle of equality before the law, Shabbat, sexual morality, honesty in business, honor and awe of one's parents, and the sacredness of life.

Also in Kedoshim is the dictum which the great sage Rabbi Akiva called a cardinal principle of Torah, and of which Hillel said, "This is the entire Torah, the rest is commentary"—"Love your fellow as yourself."

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Amos 9:7-15

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/877057/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah foretells the exiles and punishments that will befall the Jews because they strayed after the ways of the heathens — behavior that this week's Torah reading proscribes.

The prophet Amos delivers G-d's message, reminding the people of G-d's kindness to them — taking them out of Egypt and singling them out as His chosen nation. Nevertheless, because of their misdeeds, G-d will destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel; but will not completely destroy the house of Jacob. The Jews will be scattered amongst the nations, but eventually they will return to their land — on the day of the redemption. G-d will then reinstall the House of David to its former glory and there shall be peace and abundance upon the land.

The haftarah ends with G-d's promise: "And I will return the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall rebuild desolate cities and inhabit [them], and they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their

produce. And I will plant them on their land, and they shall no longer be uprooted from upon their land, that I have given them, said the L-rd your G-d."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[Of Love and Hate by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l \(5767\)](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/of-love-and-hate/)
<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/of-love-and-hate/>

At the centre of the Mosaic books is Sefer Vayikra. At the centre of Vayikra is the "holiness code" (chapter 19) with its momentous call: "You shall be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." And at the centre of chapter 19 is a brief paragraph which, by its positioning, is the apex, the high point, of the Torah:

Do not hate your brother in your heart.

Admonish your fellow and do not bear guilt on his account.

Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people,

but love your neighbour as your own self. I am the Lord.

Vayikra 19:17-18

I want, in this study, to examine the second of these provisions: "Admonish your fellow and do not bear guilt on his account."

Rambam and Ramban agree in seeing two quite different levels of meaning in this sentence. This is how Rambam puts it:

When one person sins against another, the latter should not hate him and remain silent. As it is said about the wicked: “And Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor evil, although Absalom hated Amnon.” Rather, he is commanded to speak to him and to say to him, “Why did you do such-and-such to me? Why did you sin against me in such-and-such a matter?” As it is said, “You must surely admonish your neighbour.” If he repents and requests forgiveness from him, he must forgive and not be cruel, as it is said, “And Abraham prayed to God . . .”

If someone sees his fellow committing a sin or embarking on a path that is not good, it is a commandment to make him return to the good and to make known to him that he is sinning against himself by his evil actions, as it is said, “You must surely admonish your neighbour...” Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De’ot 6:6

Likewise, Ramban:

“You shall surely remonstrate with your neighbour” – this is a separate command, namely that we must teach him the reproof of instruction. “And not bear sin because of him” – for you will bear sin because of his transgression if you do not rebuke him.

However, it seems to me that the correct interpretation is that the expression “you shall surely remonstrate” is to be understood in the same way as “And Abraham remonstrated with Avimelech”. The verse is thus saying: “Do not hate your brother in your heart when he does something to you against your will, but instead

you should remonstrate with him, saying, ‘Why did you do this to me?’ and you will not bear sin because of him by covering up your hatred in your heart and not telling him, for when you remonstrate with him, he will justify himself before you or he will regret his action and admit his sin, and you will forgive him.” Ramban to Lev. 19:17

The difference between the two interpretations is that one is social, the other interpersonal. On Rambam’s second and Ramban’s first reading, the command is about collective responsibility. When we see a fellow Jew about to commit a sin, we must try to persuade him not to do so. We are not allowed to say, “That is a private matter between him and God.” “All Israel,” said the Sages, “are sureties for one another.” We are each responsible, not only for our own conduct, but for the behaviour of others. That is a major chapter in Jewish law and thought.

However, both Rambam and Ramban are aware that this is not the plain sense of the text. Taken in context, what we have before us is a subtle account of the psychology of interpersonal relations.

Judaism has sometimes been accused by Christianity of being about justice rather than love (“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”). This is entirely untrue. There is a wonderful teaching in Avot deRabbi Natan: “Who is the greatest hero? One who turns an enemy into a friend.” What sets the Torah apart is its understanding of the psychology of hatred.

If someone has done us harm, it is natural to feel aggrieved. What then are we to do in order to fulfil the command, “Do not hate your brother in your heart”? The Torah’s answer is:

Speak. Converse. Challenge. Remonstrate. It may be that the other person had a good reason for doing what he did. Or it may be that he was acting out of malice, in which case our remonstrations will give him, if he so chooses, the opportunity to rethink, and apologise, and we should then forgive him. In either case, talking it through is the best way of restoring a broken relationship. Once again we encounter here one of the leitmotifs of Judaism: the power of speech to create, sustain, and mend relationships.

Maimonides cites a key proof-text. The story is told (II Samuel 13) of how Amnon, one of King David's children, raped his half-sister, Tamar. When Absalom, Tamar's brother, hears about the episode, his reaction seems on the face of it irenic, serene:

Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet, 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. When King David heard all this, he was furious. Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad . . ."

Appearances, however, deceive. Absalom is anything but forgiving. He waits for two years, then invites Amnon to a festive meal at sheep-shearing time. He gives instructions to his men: "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him." And so it happened.

Absalom's silence was not the silence of forgiveness but of hate – the hate of which Pierre de LaClos spoke in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* when he wrote the famous line, "Revenge is a dish best served cold."

There is another equally powerful example in Bereishit:

Now, Israel loved Joseph more than all his other sons, for he was a child of his old age; he made him an ornately coloured robe. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not say a peaceful word to him. (Velo yachlu dabro leshalom, literally, “they could not speak with him to peace”) Bereishit 37:3-4

On this, Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz comments:

“Had they been able to sit together as a group, they would have spoken to one another, and remonstrated with each other, and would eventually have made their peace with one another. The tragedy of conflict is that it prevents people from talking together and listening to one another.”[1]

A failure to communicate is often the prelude to revenge.

The inner logic of the two verses in our sedra is therefore this: “Love your neighbour as yourself. But not all neighbours are loveable. There are those who, out of envy or malice, have done you harm. I do not therefore command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do however forbid you to hate. That is why, when someone does you wrong, you must confront the wrongdoer. You must tell him of your feelings of hurt and distress. It may be that you completely misunderstood his intentions. Or it may be that he genuinely meant to do you harm, but now, faced with the reality of the injury he has done you, he may sincerely repent of what he did. If, however, you fail to talk it through, there is a real possibility that you will bear a grudge and in the fullness of time, come to take revenge – as did Absalom.”

What is so impressive about the Torah is that it both articulates the highest of high ideals, and at the same time speaks to us as human beings. If we were angels, it would be easy to love one another. But we are not. An ethic that commands us to love our enemies, without any hint as to how we are to achieve this, is simply unliveable. Instead, the Torah sets out a realistic programme: Communication.

By being honest with one another, talking things through, we may be able to achieve reconciliation – not always, to be sure, but often. How much distress and even bloodshed might be spared if humanity heeded this simple command. [1] Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschutz (c. 1690–1764), Tiferet Yehonatan, Commentary to Genesis 37:4, p. 73.

[Acharei – Kedoshim: Coming Close by Rabbi Paula Marcus](https://truah.org/resources/paula-marcus-acharei-mot-kedoshim-moraltorah_2026/)
[https://truah.org/resources/paula-marcus-acharei-mot-kedoshim-moraltorah_2026_ /](https://truah.org/resources/paula-marcus-acharei-mot-kedoshim-moraltorah_2026/)

I have always been compelled by the description of the death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu. They enter the Holy of Holies, bringing esh zarah, strange fire, and are consumed by Divine flames. Their behavior is widely condemned as being in direct violation of the detailed instructions given to the priests. And yet, the dramatic consequences of their actions have always seemed so tragic to me. They were bringing an offering, a korban.

The word korban so clearly defines the purpose of an offering, to bring one closer to the Divine. However flawed their behavior, doesn't their desire to be close to the Divine matter? And was their act intentional?

The opening verse of Acharei Mot uses these words to open

the parshah: “And God spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they came near to God, and died.”
(Leviticus 16:1)

The preceding detailed and clear instructions given to the priests should have been enough to help Nadav and Avihu serve properly. And yet, they chose to disobey these rules. I’ve wondered if this verse might actually be implying that they were giving of their lives on purpose with a strong desire to come close to the Divine.

This double portion focuses on the path of holiness. We read details of how the High Priest is to perform the Yom Kippur service. And most importantly, we find instructions about how we are to live a holy life by following the ethical commandments such as honoring our elders, giving tzedakah, and engaging in ethical business practices. We also find the command to love our neighbour and the ger, the stranger.

I myself don’t eat meat, so I am not advocating for bringing back the biblical korbanot, and yet I can imagine how these visceral practices, the drama involved, must have had a profound impact upon the kohanim (the Jewish priests) and all who witnessed them. We know that any animals sacrificed had to be without blemish, which must have meant they were not easy to offer.

We are taught that the korbanot were replaced with avodah sh’b’lev, the service of our hearts. I imagine that Nadav and Avihu were bringing offerings from their hearts. Since they had just received very clear instructions about how they were supposed to bring their korbanot, and they disobeyed these rules, they had to have known there would be grave consequences. Their hearts must have motivated them to bring the “strange fire.”

As a congregational rabbi, speaking out about social justice issues has been a challenge. My colleagues and I have been asked to make sacrifices for the sake of shalom bayit in our communities. Don't go against what is "best for the community." Don't cause a fire that could be perceived as "strange."

If I am to take seriously the command to love my neighbor, I have to speak out against what is happening in Israel, in particular the treatment of Palestinians in the West Bank. My commitment to support activists and organizations that call for an end to violence and movement toward reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a core value for me. The recent bill that passed in the Knesset, authorizing the death penalty for Palestinians, is the latest in what I see as a desecration of Jewish values.

So I am left with this question: How can we be conscious and act to fulfill our ethical obligations found in this week's double portion and, in doing so, come close to the Source of All Life, in the face of sacrifices we are called to offer?

May we find the paths to balance the call to bring the offerings from our hearts and speak with integrity, while helping our communities engage in meaningful conversations that lead to peace. *(Rabbi Paula Marcus has served Temple Beth El in Aptos, CA, since 1979, first as a teacher in the religious school and preschool, then as co-principal of the religious school, then as a congregational cantor, and finally as the rabbi, beginning in May 2004, upon being ordained by the Academy for Jewish Religion in Los Angeles.)*

[Acharei Mot/Kedoshim – The Father's Test: Leading When Children Go Astray By Denise Blumenfeld](https://yeshivatmaharat.org/acharei-mot-kedoshim-the-fathers-children-go-astray-by-denise-blumenfeld)

[https://yeshivatmaharat.org/acharei-mot-kedoshim-the-fathers-](https://yeshivatmaharat.org/acharei-mot-kedoshim-the-fathers-children-go-astray-by-denise-blumenfeld)

[test-leading-when-children-go-astray/](#)

After the death of his two eldest sons, did Aharon feel like a failure as a father for not having properly taught his sons the priestly duties? Did he feel guilt? To what extent was he responsible for the actions of Nadav and Avihu?

The Torah tells us nothing about his guilt, nothing about his fatherhood, and nothing about his responsibility. It tells us only about his silence—and that he continued forward, carrying out the sacred tasks with precision and devotion. “**And Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon, when they drew near before Hashem and died**” (Vayikra 16:1). Thus begins Parshat Acharei Mot, returning us to that devastating episode.

After seven days of intense preparation, the fire of Hashem descends upon the Mishkan, inaugurating a new form of sacred closeness. And at that very moment, tragedy strikes with the death of Aharon’s two sons.

I invite us to look at Aharon through three dimensions so that we may understand how someone of his stature lives through this moment—emotionally, relationally, and spiritually—and what we, as his descendants in Torah, can learn from that journey. This follows the principle of “**ma’aseh avot siman labanim:**” the experience of our forefathers becomes a model for our own.

a) Aharon as a human being

I have always been moved by Aharon’s gevurah, his inner strength, his capacity to stand upright in the face of such a crushing loss. The Torah says: “**And Aharon was silent**” (Vayikra 10:3). A silence empty of words yet full of meaning. A silence of connection, reverence, and deep awareness before

the sacred.

Rashi teaches that Aharon was rewarded for this silence. It does not indicate an absence of emotion; rather, it reflects the greatness of one who recognizes yir'ah, the trembling reverence before kedushah. In that moment, Aharon grasps the fragility of life and the weight of death.

b) Aharon as a father

We generally expect children to outlive their parents. When the opposite occurs, the pain reverberates across generations. A consuming flame takes the lives of Nadav and Avihu—the eldest sons, the heirs, those meant to continue Aharon's legacy, uphold peace, and sustain the sacred service.

It was not only the loss of two sons; it was the immediate rupture of spiritual continuity. Their deaths were understood as the direct consequence of their own actions—bringing an esh zarah, a strange fire, which resulted in their tragic end. The father who always chose peace, who always built bridges, now witnesses helplessly the deviation of his sons and the divine punishment that follows without warning.

c) Aharon as a leader and influencer

Pirkei Avot 1:12 teaches: “Be among the disciples of Aharon: love peace and pursue peace, love all creatures and bring them close to Torah.”

Aharon is the eternal model of loving leadership, the leader who blesses be'ahavah, with love. Yet the text does not hide that his own children did not follow his path. Nothing is said about whether he felt shame or doubt, or whether his authority wavered. All we see is that his leadership does not falter. Aharon rises above. The sacred service depends on him, and he responds—with silence, but also with action.

Although the Torah itself is silent, two midrashim (Vayikra Rabbah 20:8-9) present eight possible reasons for the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. According to Bar Kappara (Vayikra Rabbah 20:8): They drew too close. They offered an unauthorized korban. They brought strange fire. They did not seek counsel from one another. According to R. Mani, R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin, and R. Yochanan in the name of R. Levi (Vayikra Rabbah 20:9): They entered while intoxicated. They lacked a required priestly garment. They did not wash their hands and feet. They had no children. And one additional opinion suggests that they were not married.

Despite their differences, both midrashim point to two essential dimensions: a lack of precision in the ritual avodah, and a lack of responsibility or connection in the realm of the human—family, counsel, mutual care. Which brings us to the critics, the external voices that address the failures of the children.

Aharon could have been accused of failing to prevent his sons from getting drunk, of not supervising their garments, of not guiding their upbringing closely enough. He could have been criticized as a “teacher of peace” whose own children did not listen to one another. Even if he was able to overcome the turmoil within, Aharon might still have been condemned by the voices from without.

But the Torah does not judge him. It does not blame him. It does not reduce him to the choices his children made.

Aharon transcends. Aharon the kohen rises above both the inner and outer noise. With a closed mouth and a clear mind, he fulfills the mission entrusted to him.

Each of us knows that our children walk their own path, make their own choices, and live with their own consequences. May

we, like Aharon, strive to be the best example we can be—in integrity, in silence, and in action—for our children and for Am Yisrael. And may they make the best decisions for their lives, with clarity, peace, and blessing. *(Denise Blumenfeld is a holistic existential counselor, holds a degree in NGO management, and has a master's in Jewish Studies. She has over 10 years of experience leading religious services in Jewish communities in Argentina and more than 30 years of experience as a teacher of Judaism and Hebrew for children and adults.)*

Only Love Will Prevail – Acharei Mot Kedoshim by Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

<https://thekotel.org/en/155288/>

These days, the days of counting the Omer, serve as a preparation of an inner “receptive vessel” in anticipation of the festival of Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah. These days also carry within them a painful historical memory: the death of 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva, who “did not treat one another with respect.” At the same time, these are also days of great light, during which the secrets of the Torah were revealed by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a student of Rabbi Akiva.

Precisely because these are days of such great influence, the demand placed upon us is also greater: to refine our behavior, to be more precise in our conduct toward others, and to examine our character traits. Above all stands the verse written in this week’s parasha:

“Love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord”
(Leviticus 19:18).

Regarding this, the Jerusalem Talmud states:

“It was taught: Rabbi Akiva said, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ – this is a great principle of the Torah (Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4).

This well-known sentence often loses its significance. It appears in children’s songs, is sung simply, and is perceived as a general, banal slogan of “being nice.” But a deeper look requires us to stop and ask: is this truly “the great principle of the Torah”?

If we were asked, we would likely point to values such as Shabbat observance, Torah study, or modesty. However, Rabbi Akiva, about whom it is said that he was worthy of having the Torah given through him, chooses to place love of others as the central foundation of Judaism. This does not mean, of course, that love of others replaces, Heaven forbid, the fulfillment of commandments. Rather, it is the foundation upon which everything is built.

Recent studies indicate that every person has an internal, almost automatic system that classifies people within a split second – “who is like me” and “who is different from me.” Accordingly, a positive or negative reaction develops. The result is an unconscious division into groups: religion, culture, gender, ideology. This division sometimes creates distance and even alienation toward those who are not “like us.” This attitude prevents a person from reaching our true purpose, which is built on an inseparable system of love of humanity and love of God. On this matter, the Maharal of Prague writes:

“The commandment in Israel is ‘Love your neighbor as yourself,’ for one who loves people

also loves God, for one who loves one being loves all the works of His hands... therefore when one loves God, it is impossible not to love His creatures. And if one hates creatures, it is impossible to love God who created them.”
(Netivot Olam, Nativ Ahavat Rea, Chapter 1)

The message is clear: love of humanity and love of God are one system. One cannot claim to love the Creator while disrespecting His creations. There is room for disagreement, for different opinions, and for diverse ways of life, but hatred, rejection, or division into “us and them” cannot coexist with service of God.

And so it is told about the Elder of Kelm, who fought strongly against the Enlightenment movements of his time. Yet when one of his opponents passed away, he was found crying. When those around him expressed surprise, he explained: the struggle was against ideas, not against people.

This understanding, that God and His creations are an inseparable unit, is the tradition passed down to us by Rabbi Akiva. Precisely he, who began his life as an uneducated shepherd, can teach us about the connection between man and God that stems from love of others. For had it not been for the faith of his wife Rachel in his potential, we would have lost all the good he brought into the world.

This insight illuminates the greatness of Rabbi Akiva’s principle, for it unites and binds the Jewish nation with God into a single entity that brings every individual to their proper purpose.

We understand from this why Rabbi Akiva defined love of others as “a great principle of the Torah.” It is the foundation

upon which everything stands. Especially in these days of preparation for receiving the Torah, we must understand that refining character traits and strengthening interpersonal mitzvot are the key to receiving the Torah and serving God. Without this inner work, we remain lacking.

A practical suggestion: every person can choose to improve one trait – patience, respect, generosity, listening – and focus on it during these days. Small but consistent effort can bring great change. And then something surprising is revealed: one who improves their relationship with others does not only gain in one area, but also merits a stronger connection between themselves and God. *(Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is the Rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites)*

Yahrtzeits

Elaine Berkenwald remembers her mother Jean Berkenwald on Thurs. Apr. 30

Linda Dorf remembers her mother Annette Pinkowitz Dorf-Hills on Thurs. Apr. 30