

Filling Up With The Spirit

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim After the Death/Holy Ones Practical Holiness in Action

Torah: Lev. 16:1-18:30; 19:1-20:27

Chapter 16 warns against strange fire and details the conditions whereby the high priest can enter the Holy of Holies where the Shekinah of G-d dwelt. He could receive direction and help all year long (prophetic and ecstatic function), but the way into the Holy of Holies was not yet open because the sins of the people meant that contact with G-d's presence would be fatal (until Messiah came and opened the way by dying on the cross). So an elaborate ritual was created so that the people could know that they were forgiven and that their sacrifices were acceptable for another year. All of the festivals of Judaism contained an atonement function, whereby sin was dealt with symbolically until Messiah should come, but once a year the ritual was unique because the High Priest only went behind the veil once a year and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, was one of the atonement sacrifices released alive to carry our sins into the wilderness.

The Priest would make double atonement (for himself and for the people) and would strip down to his kittel and take a freshly filled incensor (incense burner) and would wave it back and forth as he went behind the veil, once for himself and once for the people. That way he was protected from the Presence and he also waved the incensor in the holy place as he prepared the tabernacle and the tent for another cycle of sacrifices. Incense is a symbol of prayer and this unique ritual kept the people connected with G-d and conscious of their constant need to seek forgiveness (payment for the sin) and atonement (removal of the stain).

This need remains for us today, but with a difference - I John 1:9 and Hebrews 4:16. We can approach the real mercy seat (atonement lid) daily and constantly and receive direct forgiveness and regular atonement.

Chapter 17 deals with three things. First the tabernacle and the tent of meeting were where the Children of Israel were to meet with G-d (eventually at least three times a year). This was to prevent them from slipping into functional paganism and even idolatry. Related to this, they were not to sacrifice to the gods which they had been worshipping - called prostituting in this chapter. Our worship is either of G-d alone or it is illegitimate. Lastly, they were warned not to eat blood, and this is explained in various places in the Scripture. The ancient Canaanites ate animals alive - because the life is in the blood and they wanted eat the life force of the animal as well as its flesh. The life is in the blood - shed the blood - kill the animal - the life force of all living creatures belongs to G-d and we should try and increase our life force by trying to ingest the life force of animals we eat. It was a cruel, futile, idolatrous practice.

Chapter 18 deals with acceptable (holy) sexuality and unacceptable (abominable) sexuality. In brief sexuality should not violate kinship, gender or species.

This chapter outlines fourteen forbidden kinship unions and six abominable sexual practices, one of which was the offering of children to Moloch as a burnt offering. In our world today many people are offering their children as burnt offerings, but inside the womb before the children get to see the light of day. Acceptable sexuality is clearly defined in the Torah and

the same level and kind of acceptable sexuality is also reflected in the New Testament.

Chapter 19 outlines 14 applications of holiness into various areas of our lives with the phrase: I am YHVH. Fairness in business, respecting the aged, taking care of the handicapped, to having fair business practices and not spreading malicious gossip, but learning to love our neighbour as we love ourselves (the golden rule). The chapter ends with the stipulation that obedience must be complete and be entirely based on His Word. Selective obedience based on any lesser sources remains unacceptable for believers today. Both our faith and our obedience must be both firmly based on the Word and not contain any selective omissions or additions - both must remain undiluted.

Chapter 20 brings the double portion to a close by dealing with various capital offences, many of which are violations of the stipulations of the previous chapters. The rationale behind the stipulations is given as the same reason for which the Canaanites were driven out of the land and exterminated - they practised abominable idolatry and fornication and the land vomited them out. The Holy Land is the site of the original Garden of Eden and was intended to be a light to the nations to call them away from their paganism into the practice of practical holiness - both in how (and what or who) they worshipped and in how they conducted their business and lived their lives - including the sexual sin for which they were well known. Our society today is becoming increasingly Canaanite in its spirituality (idolatry). While we need to maintain a dialogue with the world to explain to them the reason of the hope which is in us, we need to avoid being sucked into their erroneous attitudes and practices. We need to stand firm on the Word and not back down and adopt spiritually criminal behaviours just because our society has shifted away from the practise of Judeo-Christian beliefs and ethics. We need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds and not conformed to the corruptions of this present darkening world.

Haftarah: Ezek. 22:1-16; Amos 9:7-15; Ezek. 20:1-20

Ezek. 22:16 describes the functional desecration of Jerusalem and of the House of Jacob by the practice of the criminal abominations which the Torah condemns. The passage ends by saying the people will be scattered among the nations and be defiled by themselves in the eyes of the nations and shall come to their senses when they see how far they have fallen and how defiled they have become. There is a day coming when all mankind shall stand before the King of Kings and their criminal folly shall be revealed. As believers we have the opportunity to have this revealed to us early so that we may escape the judgment which is coming on the nations and generations of mankind.

Amos 9:7-15 outlines both the fall and the final restoration of Israel when she shall possess all the nations (in the Gospel) and all of mankind shall come and rest in the re-established Garden of G-d. He has to punish the wicked, but He will never completely destroy Israel. This is because He wants to use our people as an illustration to the nations, both of His great mercy and also of His great holiness. He is slow to anger and full of compassion, but He does not consider the (unrepentant) wicked one free of reaping the fruit of their own evil actions. He takes us seriously - do we take Him seriously? How can you tell if someone takes the L-rd seriously? Easy - the ones who take His Word seriously, both in what they believe and in how they live, take the L-rd seriously. How about you? How about us?

Ezek. 20:1-20 is G-d pleading with His people to turn their backs on their infidelities and

realize that the plans He has for us are to lead us into a land which flows with milk and honey and that this entrance into the land and maintenance of our right to live in the land is based on both complete obedience to His Word and Sabbath observance (on resting in His completed work). The Torah passages may seem severe, but we live in a world where severe sin is building momentum as it runs increasingly rampant, tearing apart the moral and spiritual fabric of our world. The only solution to this terminal spiritual and moral decay is complete and full faith and obedience so that we do not contract the spiritual and moral infections which are destroying our world and which are trying to drag believers away from the light and into the darkness.

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 6:9-20; Matt. 5:43-48

I Cor. 6:9-20 follows the model of the passages we examined in Leviticus and gives the ten kingdom exclusions from which many of us have been delivered and for which we have been forgiven. It goes on to say that while all things are permitted to us (within the context of biblical morality), all things are not profitable and we should not become enslaved to anything. Paul deals with a common problem in the Roman world - ritual prostitution where sex was falsely seen as a means of drawing people closer to the gods and which was widely practised in many pagan temples. The passage ends with a declaration that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, which have been bought at a great price - therefore we should glorify G-d in all that we do with our bodies. The addition of our spirits was a later addition because in biblical spirituality you cannot separate the two.

Matt. 5:43-48 comes at the end of the corrections of faulty spirituality which our L-rd taught at the beginning of His ministry. He quotes Leviticus 19:18 and says that we need to love our enemies (without becoming like them), for G-d causes the sun to shine on the good and on the wicked. So we should pray for our enemies and not seek to perpetuate the violence and hatred which we may become the victims of. We are children of the light who may be victimized but who never victimize. We practice practical holiness, both in what we believe and in what we obey, all the while not treating the darkness dwellers of this world as our enemies, but as those we are called to love and to share our faith with so that they may escape out of the snares of the devil which they have fallen into spiritually and morally.

It is never easy to walk in the light in a darkening world where people are increasingly targeting our faith and our morality and our duty remains twofold. We need to love our enemies and we need to stand firm on the truth and shine in the darkness without letting it get any footholds in our hearts and lives.

We need the wisdom and the strength of the Spirit for this mighty task so that we can be as harmless as doves and as wise as serpents, which leads me to my sermon topic for today: filling up with the Spirit.

There is one big difference between the way the Spirit was manifest before our Messiah and how He manifests Himself today. He is still in the business of convicting and working in people's lives to draw them back to G-d and to His Word. He still leads and guides the prophets and gives dreams and visions to them and even to world leaders and community leaders, within and without the faith.

However, when our Messiah ascended, He promised to return to the apostles before His final return when the entire cosmos will be brought to its final forever conclusion. How does He

come back before He comes back? The Spirit is now the Comforter who brings the presence of Yeshua back to us and helps us to walk with Him as intimately and as powerfully as when He walked among us in the days of His flesh.

In other words, He is present among us through His Spirit and can walk with each of us and all of us just as dynamically as He walked with the apostles before His death, resurrection and ascension. He is not physically present among us, but He is truly present among us through the Spirit and this is wonderful because He can be in many places at the same time, walking with many people as they go through different things in their lives.

Today I want to talk to you about filling up with the Spirit and I want to begin by saying that filling up with the Spirit is spending time with the L-rd in prayer, in worship, in Bible Study and in intimate fellowship with fellow believers in whom the Spirit also dwells. This fullness is not like the pagan concept of fullness where you lose control and make noise as if you were having a group seizure, it is drawing close to and entering into the powerful and peaceful presence of Yeshua, where no manifestations of carnality are allowed to sully or diminish the peace, joy, love, and harmony which flows as we listen together to the wonderful voice of our blessed redeemer and let Him show us how to live and how to relate to this world through which we are walking on our way home to our Father's Forever House, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

You see, the Spirit is the author of the Torah, the Spirit is also the guiding light which lead our people through the wilderness - the Shekinah glory of G-d is one of the most powerful manifestations of the Spirit in the Scriptures and the level and kind of spirituality to which we are called to in the New Testament is the same kind and level of spirituality to which our people have always been called to throughout the Scriptures.

The Holy Spirit in the Torah says the same things the same way in the New Testament, because He is the same Holy Spirit with the same agenda: faith and obedience based on the Scriptures. Because of what the Messiah accomplished on the cross, the Spirit has a new role over and above His original mandate. He brings the personal presence of the Messiah into our midst as He continues all the other aspects of His ministry to all the nations and generations of mankind. How do we go about filling up with the Spirit?

Let me say first that seeking the L-rd with all of our hearts and all of our lives is still the principal way of filling up with the Spirit and of staying filled with the Spirit. However, each of us needs to develop a rapport with the Messiah through the Spirit, and our community also needs to establish a corporate rapport (priorities, procedures and community structure) so that the Spirit fills each of us and all of us, both as we learn to walk with the L-rd through the Spirit and as we learn to walk with each other in this same Spirit.

Prayer is a big feature of this walking, because we need to both let Him hear the cries of our heart and learn to hear the cries of His heart, both for us as individuals and as a community. Religious communities are unfortunately notorious for disputes, divisions and hard feelings and this is not the will of the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit.

At B'nai Chayim we will always strive to be a community that is constantly being filled up with the Spirit and this takes a lot of prayer and a lot of learning how to pray. It also takes the realization that wherever two or three of us gather in His name, He is in the midst of us and

we need to learn to respect His presence and deal with the issues which always need to be resolved whenever a group of people gathers together, even when the purpose of that gathering is for prayer.

You see the flesh, the world, and the enemy are terrified of the unity which believers can generate, because it is this unity which the L-rd will use to pour forth His Spirit and His Word into the world in which we dwell (or through which we are travelling as pilgrims). This unity is not one person or one personality dominating over all others, nor is it a competition to be heard or for our ideas to be followed as if whatever we thought or whatever we wanted came directly from the Spirit every time we opened our mouths.

There is a recognition process of discerning and judging which true prophets and true disciples recognize. We will all take turns being told off, like Peter and even Paul when we put our foot in our mouths instead of letting Him and His Word fill our mouths. But if we ever slide into the Corinthian confusion we will need to realize that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets and learn to discern the difference between His Spirit working and talking through us and our own spirit trying to be in charge.

Peace, joy, humility, and patience are needed as we learn to really move in the Spirit and not flounder in the flesh. Also, as we get to know each other and as we learn to work together we will need the Spirit's help to give us optimum communication and minimum confusion. Instead of always saying that whatever comes to our minds always comes directly from the Spirit (carnal spiritual pride), as we mature, we learn to submit what we hear to trusted fellow believers so that they may judge and discern and help us to grow in this indispensable discipline.

When we read the Bible and see how the people of G-d behaved and how they misbehaved, we see the need for great patience and discernment, for even a mighty prophet like Miriam strayed into carnal judgement. Also, even our great lawgiver struck the rock and we need to learn not to hang a beating on the voice of the Spirit when we are too busy spouting off.

We will receive many severe messages from the Spirit, but we will also receive many great messages of consolation and comfort and we need to be sensitive to the voice of the Spirit by making sure we are filled up when we speak or when we act, so we do not need to be slapped down like Peter and even Paul when they stepped out of the spirit and into the flesh.

One of the greatest ways of discerning the Spirit and the flesh is to look at the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit and so much of this discerning comes from both an intimate knowledge of the Word and a perseverance in prayer to seek His face and find His strategies for every situation we may encounter.

Conflict will occur because we have some pretty strong personalities in our midst, but I am learning to tone myself down [:-)] and I only make up my mind when I have done my spiritual homework and discerned the voice of G-d and submitted what we have heard to the community of G-d's people. His voice in our midst will always be a corporate voice.

There will be times when we will be the voice crying out in the wilderness or the warning voice of Jeremiah which no one paid attention to, but we had better be sure that we are not just being difficult and flaring when we do not get our own way. Stubbornness can be transformed

into steadfastness when we are guided by His voice firmly and gently.

I truly desire that we have a shul which is continually being filled up with the Spirit and it always involves a big learning curve, because every newcomer alters the chemistry of our community as does everyone who leaves our community. We will have visitors of many kinds with many kinds of agendas and we will need wisdom to discern both the wolves in sheep's clothing and the sheep in wolves clothing and the Gospel has always attracted the Clint Eastwood syndrome - the good, the bad and the ugly and all of us will take turns fitting into each category.

Leadership takes both a lot of patience and a hefty dose of humility as we build a truly spirit filled flock that practices dynamic faith and steadfast obedience. We will come up with new ideas and we will also rely on old ideas, as long as the new ideas reflect our commitment to the Word of G-d and our old ideas are steeped in the Spirit of G-d.

This will never be an easy task, but it is the only task to which we are genuinely called - filling up with the Spirit and living spirit filled lives. At some point in the future, I will give a teaching about the gifts of the Spirit, but as we saw in Corinth, these gifts can be carnal and destructive and we want to do all things decently and in order.

Everything we do for the L-rd in the Spirit will always retain the flavour of who we are, but our challenge in this festival cycle is to make sure that the flavours we have in the community have nothing to do with the flesh, the world or the enemy. Learning how to be authentically filled with the Spirit will always be a bumpy road - as it was for all the great men and women of G-d who sought this reality in their lives. May we all bump along until being Spirit filled is what our shul is known for as we grow in grace and knowledge before our King, in prayer, in the Bible and in how we fellowship and conduct our affairs, both as individuals and as a community.

Let's pray.