

Kedoshim      Holy Ones      The Practice of Practical Holiness

Torah:      Lev. 19:1-20:27

Chapter 19 has 14 declarations (I am YHVH) and outlines a series of obedience applications which reflect our need for personal holiness in response to the L-RD's holiness. All forms of idolatry are forbidden, especially calling upon the dead or disfiguring your body in honour of the dead – we are only to give devotional honour to the L-rd. We are also to give practical honour to both our parents and to the elderly in our midst. We are to treat each other honourably and we are to love our neighbour as ourselves and not lie, nor bear false witness or cheat or commit fornication.

We are to honour the poor by leaving the gleanings of our fields to them and we are to be kind to strangers in our midst. The passage outlines a need to show sevenfold honour: to the L-RD (avoid idolatry and idolatrous practices), to the Sabbath (sacrifices), to our parents, the elderly, our neighbours, the poor and to strangers in our midst. It is summarized by 19:37: ***You shall observe all my laws and all my ordinances and you shall put them into practice, for I am YHVH.***

We need to learn to see the circumstances of our lives as opportunities for us to apply His Laws and ordinances to every area of our lives as a form of practical devotion to Him. This is not to be done by rote, but as both a voluntary submission to Him and in recognition that His Laws and ordinances represent the principles by which a life of practical holiness can be conducted.

Chapter 20 outlines a series of capital offences which involve Moloch worship, calling upon the dead and sexual perversions which were listed in chapter 18. Avoiding these offences will ensure that the land does not vomit them out (as it is going to vomit out its current inhabitants). Israel is called to be separate from this criminal idolatry and belong solely and entirely to the L-RD by both avoiding all and any forms of criminal idolatry and criminal immorality as they learn to distinguish between what is pure and what is impure – and kosher is our biggest object lesson to show us the kind of practical holiness we are called to practice.

We are to be separate from the world and avoid any kind of idolatry and immorality.

Haftarah:      Ezekiel 20:2-20

As a group of elders approach Ezekiel to seek the L-RD, he receives a word from the L-RD which explains both the reasons for the captivity and the compassion of G-d which was extended first to rebellious Israel in the desert and then to the remnant of Israel going into captivity. The whole point of the exodus from Egypt was that Israel was to leave the idolatry of Egypt behind as they entered the most beautiful of countries and became a light to the nations.

Israel did not obey the laws and ordinances of the L-RD and suffered the years of wandering. In a similar way the then current generation of Israel was going into captivity for the same reason. The calling of Israel remains a call to practical holiness, where the Laws and ordinances of G-d are the principles upon which we build our lives and react (testify) to the world around us. Without holiness, we cannot really know G-d and walk with Him and belong

to Him. This was not the kind of answer the elders were looking for, but it is the only answer G-d will ever give to His people, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.

**Brit Chadashah:** Matt. 5:43-48

At the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, our L-rd corrects the current abuses of Judaism and proclaims the need to return to what the Torah teaches as the only acceptable way to walk with the L-rd. At the end of this summary of what needs to be corrected, we are called to a radical approach to our enemies – we are to love them. This does not mean we are to agree with them or cave in and let them show us how to live; we are to adopt the same approach which the L-rd adopts and not fall into the trap of premature judging and condemning.

One day judgment will come, but it is to be conducted by the L-rd and in the interim we are to continue to practice practical holiness in every area of our lives and not get sidetracked into useless vendettas which will distract us from our singular high calling – the be holy as the One whom we serve is holy. We are never to deviate from this singular objective, no matter how good or how bad the circumstances of our lives become. G-d's Word, not our enemies, needs to be the only set of principles we will adopt in reaction to our life on our pilgrimage towards our Father's Home in Glory.

(Marie pp. 143, 145) **Ps. 15** (Jewish hero: John's mother Elizabeth)  
Torah carrier: Teresa L-rd's Table

### **Sermon: Counting the Omer: Adjusting to Freedom**

After the seven day dash out of Egyptian territory, the people settled into a seven week journey to the mountain where they were to both enter into a covenant relationship with YHVH and receive their marching orders for their glorious return to the Promised Land. Along the way the other shoe was going to drop and once the excitement of the exodus began to fade, it must have begun to dawn on them that they were actually free and no longer slaves!

As they walked along, they were no longer whipped or yelled at and how they lived and how they walked was no longer something which was forced on them. They must have pinched themselves frequently as they got used to the idea that they were truly free and that they were not going to suddenly be surrounded by their former masters and dragged back into slavery.

The same kind of shock was hitting them which must now be hitting the evacuees from Fort McMurray – we got out safely, now what? Where do we go from here and how do we rebuild our lives? Once the reality of their situation sinks in they are going to need a lot of support to figure out how to get back to the ordinary business of living and begin the long road home. Israel had left behind homes and possessions which they did not have the time or the energy to take with them. They had escaped with their lives and their flocks and they were given time to get used to their new found freedom and their new status as a free people. This new status wasn't just relating to a new location; it also involved relating to a totally new way of seeing the world and a totally new way of relating to the world – because none of their former slave survival strategies were applicable to the new reality they found themselves in.

The counting of the Omer remembers the journey they made from Egypt in two stages – first the seven day dash and the cleansing at Mara, then the forty one day road trip to the mountain

where they would be shown what their new freedom would look like in the long run. On the way there, they were being given time to relate to the new situation as they got used to being a free people and not just former slaves who were going to be exchanging one kind of slavery for another.

Even after their refusal to enter the Promised Land, the generation which left Egypt still had manna in the morning and quail at night, as they wandered from one watering hole to another. They had shade during the day and a nightlight when it was dark. Their feet did not swell and their clothes did not wear out and no enemy dared oppose their progress.

As we examine three passages which will outline the transition they were called to undergo (slaves to free people), I would like to briefly digress and deal with a question which came to me as I was preparing this sermon. What did they do during the 40 years of wandering? We know that they did not practice circumcision, but did they also not keep the Sabbath and not follow the festival cycle? Did they continue to offer sacrifices and dedicate their firstborn to the L-rd, along with all the other life cycle events which their yearlong training at the mountain prepared them to embrace?

Deut. 29:29 applies here, but I would like to say that there is a way to discover a little about their lives. G-d would never have permitted them to engage in any form of idolatry or paganism and there is no indication that any of them (or even that many of them) abandoned the camp to either return to Egypt or assimilate into the surrounding nations. They had an entire younger generation to prepare for the Holy Land and it is obvious to me that they still let their lives revolve around the Sabbath and the festival cycle, because we have no further indication of any kind of subsequent disobedience from the lost generation.

It was still better to wander through the wilderness under the protections and the provision of the L-RD, then to return to the slavery of Egypt or to slip into the criminal idolatry of the surrounding nations. For us in our lives, even when we feel that we have blown it and are not in the place in the L-RD where we think we should be, as long as we live lives which are Sabbath empowered and Festival driven and which remain separate from any form of paganism (no idolatry and no immorality), then our wandering will be blessed, because in the final analysis our lives need to be about Him and His Word.

Worship and holiness (active obedience) is our singular and primary call and whatever circumstances try to get in our way, as long as we practice these, we will be just fine. Here are my passages:

**(1) *Teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom* (Ps. 90:12).**

As we count down the Omer, we are numbering our days so that they revolve around His Word and not around the circumstances or stages of our lives. As long as we see the circumstances and stages of our lives as the context for applying His Word and are learning to be obedient and holy, then we are on the right track. This is the only Psalm assigned to Moses and He walked peacefully and joyfully with the L-rd, even during the forty years of wandering with the lost generation.

Instead of saying why do things happen to us the way we do, we need to understand that true spiritual freedom comes from asking what would the L-RD through His Word have us do as we

wander through the whatever's and the happenstances of our lives. Are you getting used to the freedom He calls us to, or are you still behaving like a slave who has not yet abandoned Egyptian habits and who has not yet learned to avoid adopting any Canaanite foolishness , which is what spiritual assimilation is all about?

**(2) *Therefore, from this point on, we will not know anyone according to the flesh; and if we have known the Messiah according to the flesh, now we will no longer know Him in this manner. If anyone is in the Messiah, He is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold all things have become new.* (2 Corin. 5:16, 17)**

The term: "according to the flesh" refers to any secular or carnal understanding which stands in opposition to the revealed truth of G-d's Word. There are many strange and wonderful opinions about our Messiah and about G-d, from any number of weird and wonderful sources which stand in opposition to the revealed Word. Many even claim to explain things which are hidden in the Scriptures and can only be accessed by special understandings and further revelations – even when these further revelations contradict or undermine the Bible.

What can be known about G-d and His Messiah is clearly and firmly outlined in the Scriptures and does not need any subsequent revelation. Now, I am aware that there are historical details which can help us better understand certain passages and teachings of the Bible, because G-d's Word is firmly placed in time and space and contains no mythology. However, we do not seek to establish any other authority on the same level as the revealed Word of our G-d and some things which we would like to know, but which are not given to us to understand in this life (the mysteries) need to come under our commitment to Deuteronomy 29:29.

We are called to abandon all secular understandings of the origin and purpose of life, along with all and any competing spiritual understandings about the nature of reality which do not come from biblical revelation. When it says that we are new creatures in the Messiah it refers to our perspective which is no longer derived from any lesser sources. It also refers to our destiny in the world to come and to our purpose in this life which must not be allowed to be polluted or diluted by anything in any way. The counting of the Omer gave Israel the opportunity to relate to the new spiritual reality which the exodus from Egypt opened up.

All things have become new because we are no longer in Egypt and we need to do three things. First, we need to abandon all and any Egyptian understandings and habits. Next, we need to protect ourselves from any Trojan horse spiritual influences of the Canaanites among who we are to settle and shine our light to and be salty towards in all of our dealings with them. Assimilation is never an option, being totally separate is our calling. Lastly, we are to learn about our new identity and our new destiny and fill our lives with them, as we empty them of lesser habits and inferior understandings, wherever they come from and whenever they rear their ugly heads.

Letting old things pass away and letting all things become new is our calling and the kind of spirituality we are called to adopt. How is yours doing? The Omer is an object lesson about the transition from a flawed, carnal Egyptian worldview as we make room for a radical new set

of marching orders as we keep pinching ourselves as it gradually dawns on us that we are no longer in Egypt and that we have truly been set free.

Are you walking in newness of life or are you letting the former things pollute, confuse and distract you as you come to terms with the singular spiritual pilgrimage of holiness we are called to fully embrace? As we count down the Omer, may it be a time of adjustment to the wonderful freedom which is ours as we make room for the Word and for the practical holiness adjustments which we are called to embrace.

**(3) *To whom will wisdom be taught and to whom will lessons be given? Is it to children who have just been weaned and who have just left the breast? For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, rule upon rule, rule upon rule, a little here and a little there. Well then, it is using men of stammering lips using a barbaric language that the L-RD will use to speak to this people with. He will say to them: here is the rest. Let the one who is tired rest. Behold the place of rest! And for them, the Word of the L-RD shall be precept upon precept, precept upon precept, rule upon rule, rule upon rule, a little here and a little there, in order that in walking they would fall backwards and be broken, in order that they would be snared and taken.* (Isaiah 28:9-13)**

This is a passage which positively impacted my impatience as a young believer who wanted everything to change right away, because learning to walk in holiness is both a gradual process and a biblical process. There are many new and wonderful forms of carnal holiness in our world which do not conform to the Word of our Messiah and they may appear sophisticated and desirable, but they are not based on the eternal Word of the King, nor do they teach us how to walk towards eternity with the King according to His word.

During the time between Egypt and the mountain, Israel was given time to get used to being free and to prepare themselves to receive all the covenant instructions they would need to learn to walk with the King as they prepared to set themselves up in the Promised Land. When they got to the mountain, it took them a full year to receive these instructions and complete the ark and set up tabernacle worship. They knew what they were heading towards and the seven week journey gave them an opportunity to let the sound and the smell and the feel of Egypt die down and die out as they made room in their hearts and lives for the Word.

Learning to walk with the L-rd according to His Word is a learning process where we both learn and unlearn as we learn to discern the truth and avoid any form of error or deviation from divine truth. The motley crew which stumbled out of Egypt had to learn that redemption was only the first stage of what the L-RD had in store for them. Free people need to learn the principles of freedom so that they are not snared or trapped into another version of slavery and so that they do not let anything of their former slavery ruin or infect their new freedom.

We need to number our days to apply our hearts to wisdom. It is a process of continual renewal and it is one of the primary objectives of living a Sabbath powered, festival driven lifestyle. It is too easy to return to the burning barn from which we have been delivered and the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life are always waiting on every street corner to get a foothold into our lives and spoil the freedom we are learning to embrace as we apply His Word to every area of our lives.

All things have become new and old things have passed away and we need to let their influence

die out and be removed from our lives. We have a single source which wants to be our sole spiritual influence through every stage of our pilgrimage through this life and it is the Bible. We have a new direction, a new destination and we are called to live a new lifestyle which reflects the power and wonder of the redemption we have received when we came to faith in the L-rd. There is no room for the old habits we left behind and there should also be no room for new bad habits to take root in our lives as we walk with the L-rd.

Counting the Omer teaches us that we need to adjust to our new freedom and this is a gradual process where we learn new precepts and new rules and where we learn a little here and a little there. There is no other spiritual learning curve which is worth our time. We have been set free from this world and are walking, generation by generation, towards both our Father's Home in Glory and towards the New Heavens and New Earth where all the folly and all the abominations of this foolish world will be finally and fully removed.

We are not to imitate or assimilate any of the beliefs and values of our dying and fading world, no matter how attractive they may seem. Our beliefs, our spirituality and our morality are being marginalized and are under constant attack from any number of worldly sources – the media and our school system being the most guilty.

We need to renew our view of the world as the place from which we have been delivered and we need to renew our view of Heaven (The New Heavens and the New Earth) as our ultimate and final destination. Anything and anyone who tries to turn us away from this or tries to stall the progress of our pilgrimage, needs to be purged from our hearts and lives as we get used to our new freedom and as we determine not to allow any subsequent spiritual slavery to take root in our midst, both as individuals and as a congregation.

How comfortable are you with the new spiritual freedom we are called to? Are you getting used to your new freedom? May this counting of the Omer motivate you to explore this freedom more deeply and more effectively and may it alert you to all the subtle and all the direct assaults on your freedom which our world concocts and tries to snare us with.