Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim: Live by Them, Love by Them

Source Sheet by Rabbi Mira Rivera for Romemu Open Book

Leviticus 16:1-6

(1) The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of the LORD. (2) The LORD said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover. (3) Thus only shall Aaron enter the Shrine: with a bull of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.— (4) He shall be dressed in a sacral linen tunic, with linen breeches next to his flesh, and be girt with a linen sash, and he shall wear a linen turban. They are sacral vestments; he shall bathe his body in water and then put them on.— (5) And from the Israelite community he shall take two he-goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. (6) Aaron is to offer his own bull of
sin offering, to make expiation for himself and for his household.

Leviticus 16:34
(34) This shall be to you a law for all time: to make atonement for the Israelites for all their sins once a year. And Moses did as the LORD had commanded him.

Rashi on Leviticus 16:34:1
(1) ‘AND HE DID AS [THE LORD] COMMANDED [MOSES] etc. — When the next Day of Atonement arrived he (Aaron) did everything as is here set forth in order. And Scripture only states this in order to declare the praise of Aaron — that he did not attire himself with them (the official garments) for his own aggrandisement, but as one who was executing the ordinance of his King (Sifra, Acharei Mot, Chapter 8 10).
Ramban on Leviticus 16:34:1

The meaning of *And Aharon did as G! d commanded Moshe* is that Aharon fulfilled all that he was commanded: that he took care all his life not to come *within the Curtain* (v. 2) except on Yom Kippur and that he performed his offerings on Yom Kippur as commanded by the Holy Name to Moshe.

Yoma 85b:3

Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya said: It is stated: “*And the children of Israel shall keep Shabbat, to observe Shabbat*” (Exodus 31:16). The Torah said: Desecrate one Shabbat on his behalf so he will observe many Shabbatot. Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: If I would have been there among those Sages who debated this question, I would have said that my proof is preferable to theirs, as it states: “*You shall keep My statutes and My ordinances, which a person shall do and live by them*” (Leviticus 18:5), and not that he should die by them.
In all circumstances, one must take care not to die as a result of fulfilling the mitzvot.

Ramban on Leviticus 18:4:1

*Carry out my ordinances:* And therefore it states: *which man shall carry out and by which he shall live* (v. 5) for the civil laws were given to the life of man in the functioning of societies, and for peacefulness between people, and to (ensure) that no man should injure his fellow or kill him. Similarly, Ezekiel mentions many times regarding the ordinances which human being should fulfill and live thereby, whereas re: Sabbaths, he states "to be a sign between Me and them (Ezekiel 20:12)." And similarly in the Book of Ezra: "they transgressed Your ordinances which a human should fulfill in order that they may live through them." (Nehemiah 9: 29)

Chizkuni, Leviticus 18:5:1

"and live by them;"
the implication is that failing to perform the commandments will bring about those people’s deaths, i.e. their souls will be wiped out, their connection to the Jewish nation will cease.

Or HaChaim on Leviticus 18:5:2

In one verse the Torah addresses the Jews who fulfil the commandments due to a feeling of love for G'd, whereas in the other verse the Torah addresses Jews who fulfil the commandments due to a fear of punishment should they fail to observe G'd's laws. Sotah 31 has already taught us that the reward for people performing the commandments out of a sense of fear of the Lord extends for up to one thousand generations, whereas the reward for people whose motivation is love for G'd extends for up to two thousand generations. It is quite impossible for a person to attain the level of serving the Lord out of feelings of love until he had first experienced the level of serving the Lord out of a feeling of fear of punishment. This is the mystical dimension of Psalms
118,19: "this is the gate of the Lord, the righteous are able to enter it." In accordance with this, verse 4 addresses itself to people who serve the Lord from a sense of fear, and the Torah writes: את תעשו משפטי תעשו, "you are to perform My ordinances, etc., ending with the words "I am the Lord your G'd," the word אלהים being a clear reference to G'd in His capacity of the attribute of Justice. In verse 5, however, when the Torah addresses itself to someone who has already passed the initial stage of serving the Lord out of fear and he serves the Lord out of feelings of love, the Torah no longer has to make mention of the attribute of Justice because the person addressed would not be influenced in his observance by mention of that attribute.

Likutei Moharan, Part II 44:1:5

(5) Moreover, concerning those who are exacting and unnecessarily strict it is said: "and live through them" (Leviticus 18:5), and not to die by them (Yoma 85b). For they have no vitality whatsoever and
are always depressed, because it seems to them that they fail to meet their religious duties with the mitzvot they perform. And on account of their exactitude and depression they have no vitality from any mitzvah {whereas [the Rebbe] himself did not practice any stringency}.

Assarah Perakim L'Ramchal 9:5

(5) The order of the judgments, those are the roots of the husk, from they overpower her, and from them they raise her, according to the deeds of the lower ones, this is what the Writing says: "And you shall guard My decrees and My ordinances, that a person shall do and live by them" (Leviticus 18:5)

Leviticus 19:1-14

(1) The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: (2) Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy. (3)
You shall each revere his mother and his father, and keep My sabbaths: I the LORD am your God. (4) Do not turn to idols or make molten gods for yourselves: I the LORD am your God. (5) When you sacrifice an offering of well-being to the LORD, sacrifice it so that it may be accepted on your behalf. (6) It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it, or on the day following; but what is left by the third day must be consumed in fire. (7) If it should be eaten on the third day, it is an offensive thing, it will not be acceptable. (8) And he who eats of it shall bear his guilt, for he has profaned what is sacred to the LORD; that person shall be cut off from his kin. (9) When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. (10) You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the LORD am your God. (11) You shall not steal; you shall not deal deceitfully or falsely with one another. (12) You shall not swear falsely by the Name of your God.
My name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD. (13) You shall not defraud your fellow. You shall not commit robbery. The wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning. (14) You shall not insult the deaf, or place a stumbling block before the blind. You shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

Kedushat Levi, Exodus, Vaera 3

On the Torah’s imperative for the Jewish people to strive to be “holy,”: (Leviticus 19,2) to be “holy,” i.e. קדושה חיה, כי קדוש איני, “be holy for I the Lord am holy,” we could have misunderstood this line to mean that we must strive to be as holy as G’d. Midrash Rabbah Vayikra Rabbah 24,9 therefore writes that the words: כי קדוש איני, “for I am holy,” in that verse are a reminder that only G’d is truly holy. G’d’s holiness transcends anyone else’s holiness. Anyone who endeavours to sincerely sanctify himself discovers that in spite of all the progress he makes in this direction that he is still far removed from his objective, i.e.
total holiness. If a person is under the illusion that he is already a worthy servant of the Lord, this is proof that he is still far from having reached his goal, that in fact he has not even begun the journey leading to holiness. Anyone who has begun this journey is painfully aware of how far he still has to travel on that road. This is what the Midrash had in mind when the author wrote, explaining the words: כי אלוקיכם אני קדוש קדושתי יתברך, for I the Lord your G'd am holy, קדושתי קדושתכם למעלה, My holiness is superior to your holiness.

[The author’s version of this Midrash apparently had the word מסתלקת “is receding,” instead of the word: למעלה “is superior”. Ed.]

Leviticus 20:26
(26) You shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and I have set you apart from other peoples to be Mine.
Rabbi Akiva said:
Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18);
This is an essential principle of the Torah.

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