

Rabbi Rebecca Richman

Yom Kippur 5781

Minhah Intro to Torah Reading (Alternative - Lev 19:1-17)

Holiness is the subject and focus on today's Torah reading, Leviticus 19:1-17. These verses are often referred to as the "holy of holies" of the book of Vayikra, Leviticus.¹

G!d spoke to Moses, saying: *Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them:*

קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ

You shall be holy,

כִּי קֹדֶשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

for I, Adonai your G!d, am holy (Leviticus 19:1).

What follows are a series of instructions - including a repetition of the ten commandments - that are largely rooted in ethics and love. A commentary in the Lev Shalem Mahzor reads:

"The ethical commands in this chapter move from the corner of the field to your heart from the stranger to your neighbor, from that which is distant to that which is most intimate. Jewish ethical training asks us to begin with simple acts but ultimately demands the most fundamental transformation in character and behavior: to be a truly loving and compassionate human being. The Torah commands us to love G!d and to love our neighbor. Each is a reflection of the other."

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We come to these holy of holies of the verses of Leviticus on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, when our minds and hearts are warmed up to the task of personal refinement. In the context of Yom Kippur, these verses remind us that ethics, love, and holiness are interdependent -- we need each to sustain the other.

¹ Mahzor Lev Shalem, 365.