

## Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch

### Acharei Mot-Kedoshim 21 “A Fragile Treasure”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat shalom. This week's Sermon and Kiddush are sponsored by the Morley family, in honor of Rabbi Hirsch (me), the board, and the community, on their last Shabbat in the city. David has been a Mekor member and a close friend for over a decade, and he's been a dedicated Mekor board member for almost 7 years. As some of you may know, David and Miriam are the 6<sup>th</sup> couple to meet at shul (or at a shul event) and are therefore enshrined as “Mekor couple #6”. This is a significant loss for our community, and we are very sad that they are leaving us. We wish the Morley family the best of luck in their new community. We will miss you dearly.

The title of Acharei Mot is derived from the parsha's opening verse, which briefly recounts the death of Aaron's 2 sons. After that verse, however, the parsha seems to switch topics, when it goes on to describe the Yom Kippur service in the mishkan. As we have pointed out many times, the parsha concerns the service for the coronation of the mishkan, not Yom Kippur. It was only **later** that we derived our Yom Kippur service from this parsha.

With that in mind, perhaps we can better understand why the parsha begins with death of Aaron's sons. Their death was a necessary element of the service. Although it is certainly beyond our comprehension to know **why** God decided they had to die, the Torah is telling us that their death was a sacrifice, so to speak, that became the first step in the service. As I usually say about bad things happening, we cannot understand why, but we **can** find a purpose, a lesson. In this instance, the lesson logically connects with Yom Kippur, which is a day when we remove ourselves from the concerns of this world and contemplate death.

I understand the lesson of the near-death experience of Akeidat Yitzchak to be that we must never take life for granted, and that is also the stark reminder we derive from reading about the death of the 2 sons of Aharon.

I think we can find the same message in our 2<sup>nd</sup> parsha, Kedoshim. The ultimate kedusha/holiness, is giving up your life for God, *al kiddush hashem*, and that is how we think of those we recently memorialized, who perished in the Holocaust and in the Israeli army. We may wonder, then, why the parsha illustrates kedusha with such mundane examples: keep Shabbos, don't take revenge or bear a grudge; don't gossip, don't engage in dishonest business practices, don't eat blood, don't get tattoos etc.

I think the Torah is telling us that we need not die to tap into holiness; the opportunities for kedusha abound even in our routine existence. But the only way to experience kedusha in our daily life is to remind ourselves that life is a fragile treasure.

So, in this period when we're finally emerging from the worst of the Covid pandemic, our parsha is giving us a fitting message. We have mourned the loss of many people, and we have no way to understand why this all had to happen. But we can take this experience and hold onto it as a reminder that life is precious, and we must cherish every moment. Shabbat shalom.