

Beth Tephila Messianic Jewish Congregation
(Under same management for over 5782 years)

Shabbat Service

May 7th 10:30AM Lolo Community “Synagogue”
12:30PM Oneg Shabbat & Intractive Torah Discussion

We are called to Preserve Life



Parashat Kedoshim

Parashat Kedoshim, Leviticus 19:1-20:27

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There is a principle in Judaism known as *pikuach nefesh*. It roughly translates to “saving a life.” The principle holds that human life is of the highest value—so high a value, in fact, that the commands of Torah can and should be set aside if a life can be spared in the process. You may have seen that this term even made it into the news recently when, amidst the Russian advance on Ukraine,

Rabbi Shlomo Baksht, the Chief Rabbi of Odessa, broke Shabbat in order to get 250 orphans out of Odessa and to safety in the west.

Yeshua draws on this principle in a story that appears in the synoptic gospels. He was teaching in a synagogue on Shabbat when a man came with a withered hand. Yeshua went to heal him, and the Pharisees took offense that he would be healing someone on the Sabbath. In response, Yeshua said to them, “I ask you, is it permitted on Shabbat to do good or to do evil, to save or to destroy a life?” (Luke 6:9 TLV).

As the textual support in Torah for *pikuach nefesh*, the sages focus on a passage that appears in last week’s parasha, Acharei Mot: “You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord” (Lev 18:5 ESV). The sages interpreted this to mean that, if one is to live by God’s commandments, then one should never perish on account of following them. There is another source for this principle from this week’s parasha, which states, “You are not to endanger the life of your neighbor” (19:16 TLV). That said, tradition tells us that there are exceptions to *pikuach nefesh*—three commandments from God that must be followed by a Jewish person under any circumstances: prohibitions against idolatry, against causing the death of another person, and against committing forbidden sexual acts. While Acharei Mot does touch on these topics, we find that this week’s parasha, Kedoshim, faces all three of them fulsomely.

Kedoshim begins and ends with parallel instructions from God. In Leviticus 19:2, God tells Moses, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” And then, near the end of the portion, God again says, “You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev 20:26 ESV). Here, we see God placing emphasis on a need for holiness, but also a need for separation—for distinctness. God had called Israel to be a people unto himself. But, beyond issues of chosenness, the fact remains that “the peoples” God refers to here were engaged in abhorrent practices—they murdered, they worshiped idols, and they committed sexual abominations. Of this, God says, “they did all these things, and therefore I detested them” (Lev 20:23b ESV). These practices were endemic to the cultures that the children of Israel found themselves in, but God commanded that Israel follow a different path.

Love of one’s neighbor is at the core of *pikuach nefesh*. But, interestingly, this principle is equally foundational for the three exceptions to *pikuach nefesh*—essentially, *pikuach nefesh* must be followed in love until the point where it ceases to be loving.

Loving one's neighbor is the core principle in many of the commands in Kedoshim, including the admonition to not steal or lie (19:11), not oppress your neighbor or rob him (19:13), not be cruel or abusive to people with disabilities (19:14), and to not engage in slander (19:16). When the narrative moves on to discuss sexual offenses, these actions are always discussed relationally, in terms of what one person is doing to or with another. The treatment of self, the treatment of another, and the resulting corruption or defilement, are essential to the way the text discusses these offenses. But there is perhaps nowhere in this parasha where this human relational principle is outlined more clearly than in its discussion of child sacrifice.

God commands unequivocally that the people of Israel are not to sacrifice their children to Molech. The relational context of this is clear, as it pertains directly to how they treat their children, and this passage comes between other passages about community relations. But there is an additional relational principle at work here, as idolatry concerns how we relate to God. In this text, God simultaneously calls his people to protect their kindred while also remaining steadfastly loyal to him, regardless of what the surrounding society approves, or even demands.

When Yeshua was asked what the greatest commandment is, he gave a dual response: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . . And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt 22:37, 39 ESV). Here, we see the principles undergirding the three central commands of today's parasha, the values behind *pikuach nefesh*, and the heavenly mandate that informs the three exceptions to the rule. God's commandments for Israel that are recorded in Kedoshim remain applicable for our world today. To understand how they can be applied, we need look no further than elsewhere in the Brit Chadasha. In his letter to the Corinthians, Rav Sha'ul had to guide a people who were living amongst one of the most wicked and licentious societies of the time. In his letter, he instructed believers to flee from idolatry and sexual perversion, and to treat one another with kindness and love.

An oft-repeated teaching in the Talmud tells us that when one saves a single life, it is as if he has saved an entire world (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5). Jewish tradition puts an extraordinarily high value on human life. But there are those in every age who would cheapen its value, or make light of efforts to preserve it. Through Torah, through Jewish tradition, and through the teachings of Messiah Yeshua, we are called to serve God in a better way: a way that would have us walking in steadfast obedience to him, and with protective consideration for the lives of others.

Shabbat Shalom



Yom Ha'atzmaut – Israel Independence Day

4 Iyyar – Cinco DeMayo – May 5th