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D'var Torah Shabbat Acharei Mot Kidoshim May 5, 2012

Shabbat Shalom:

Our Torah reading this Shabbat combines the parashot Acharei Mot and Kidoshim. In Acharei Mot, meaning, after the death of the two sons of Aaron, Moses and the Israelites are instructed:

*I am the Lord your G-d. Like the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you, you shall not do, and you shall not follow their statutes.*

So we are told that things are going to be different now and we must behave differently. We must not follow the practices of the Egyptians or the Canaanites. The Torah goes on to enumerate the various prohibited sexual practices. Then there is one sin mentioned that does not involve any sexual conduct in chapter 18, verse 21:

*And you shall not give any of your children to pass through [fire ] for Molech. And not profane the Name of your God. I am Hashem..*

Molech was the idol worshipped by the Canaanites. This verse has been interpreted to prohibit idol worship and human sacrifice. But I think it means a great deal more than that and it is no accident that it is placed in the same parshah in which we are told not to follow the practices of the Canaanites and Egyptians. This seems to me to be very relevant to current times and the world in which we are living. It speaks to the responsibility we have to our children. We must not stand by and let our children be raised by, indoctrinated by saturated by, brainwashed by, the popular culture, the public schools, and the many forms of mass media that they now literally have at their fingertips and carry in their pockets.

We have a responsibility to impart our unique Jewish values, traditions and heritage to our children. As much as we can, we need to teach our children the ancient wisdom of the Torah and give them a sense of Jewish identity so they know who they are. That is not an easy thing to do as both we as adults and our children have an unlimited number of distractions. With all the distractions it becomes very difficult to remember and give enough attention to the things that are truly important. And that

is the beauty of Shabbat. It is a timeout from this crazy, noisy, demanding confusing world to rest, recalibrate, and reorient ourselves mentally, physically and spiritually.

We begin our Torah reading this morning with the Maftir for parshat Acharei Mot which says in part:

*And let the land not vomit you out for having defiled it, as it vomited out the nation that preceded you.*

Following that unsettling metaphor, we proceed to parshat Kidoshim which means holy. Moses is instructed to speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel, el col adat b'nei yisroel, and say to them Kidoshim t'hiyu, You shall be holy.

So how are we to be Holy? Well we don't just have to guess. We are given a to do list with many specifics. We must revere our parents, we must keep the Sabbath.

We are told not to reap the harvest of our land all the way to the edges or to gather the gleanings of the harvest, not to pick our vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of our vineyard, but to leave them for the poor and the stranger.

Now most of us no longer make our living through agriculture, but this can be a metaphor for an important, if counter-intuitive principle for business negotiations: Leave some money on the table. When you negotiate a deal, rather than take every possible advantage and every dollar you can get, leave some money on the table. Make the deal richer for the other person than it has to be. Why? Pragmatically, this can pay off in the long run, because that person will be much more eager to do business with you in the future and to send his friends to you, so you can profit many times over. It is also the right thing to do consistent with the teaching of the Torah.

Further commandments in Kidoshim show us how Jewish values inform universal values and remind us of important rules for living ethically. You shall not defraud your fellow. The wages of the laborer shall not remain with you until morning.

You shall not insult the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind.

Do not go about as a gossip among your people. Do not stand idle while the blood of your neighbor is shed.

Do not hate your brother in your heart. Do not take revenge and do not bear a grudge against your countrymen. It has been said that to hate another person or to nurse a grudge is like drinking poison and that hoping your enemy dies. The Torah wisely orders us not to drink that poison with the words *Lo tisna et achicha bil'vavecha*, Do not hate your brother in your heart.

You shall rise before the aged and show deference to the old. You shall not wrong the stranger in your land. You shall not falsify units of length, weight or capacity.

Parshat Kidoshim tells the Jewish people, you shall be holy, and then provides many specific instructions for seeking holiness and making the world a better, kinder, more just place. We follow it with a Haftorah reading from the book of Amos, which offers a promising vision of the future.

Together these readings give us all a great deal to learn from and reflect upon. Thank you, Hazel, for asking me to give this D'var and thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you. Shabbat Shalom.