

Parsha Plug: Jewish Mourning, Memorializing, and Grieving a Loss: Acharei Mot

<p>Vayikra 16:1-2</p>	<p>ויקרא טז:א-ב</p>
<p>1 And the Lord spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they drew near before the Lord, and they died. 2 And the Lord said to Moshe: Speak to your brother Aharon, that he should not come at all times into the Holy within the dividing curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, so that he should not die, for I appear over the ark cover in a cloud [Yom Kippur instructions follow].</p>	<p>א וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי־ה' וַיָּמָתוּ: ב וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִירָךְ וְאֵל־יָבִיא בְּכַל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבַּיִת לְפָנַי כִּת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרוֹן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בָעֵנָן אֶרְאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת:</p>

<p>Vayikra 18:3, 19:27-28</p>	<p>ויקרא יח:ג, יט:כז-כח</p>
<p>3 After the practice of the land of Egypt, wherein you dwelled, you shall not do; and after the practice of the land of Canaan, where I bring you, you shall not do; you shall not walk in their statutes...27 You shall not round off the corner of your head, and you shall not destroy the edge of your beard. 28 You shall not make cuts in your flesh for a person [who died]. You shall not etch a tattoo on yourselves. I am the Lord.</p>	<p>ג כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁבַתְּמָהּ, לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ; וְכַמַּעֲשֵׂה אֶרֶץ־כְּנָעַן אֲשֶׁר אָנִי מְבִיא אֲתֶכֶם שָׁמָּה, לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ, וּבַחֲקֵיהֶם, לֹא תִלְכוּ... כז לֹא תִקְפוּ פְּאַת רֹאשְׁכֶם וְלֹא תִשְׁחִית אֶת פְּאַת זְקֵנְךָ: כח וְשָׂרַט לִנְפֶשׁ לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּבִשְׂרֹכֶם וְכַת בֶּת קַעֲקַע לֹא תִתְּנוּ בְּכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה.</p>

<p>Devarim 18: 9-12</p>	<p>דברים יח: ט-יד</p>
<p>9 When you come into the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. 10 There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, 11 or a charmer, or one that consults a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. 12 For anyone who does these things is an abomination to the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord your God is driving them out from before you.</p>	<p>ט כִּי אָתָּה בֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר־ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ--לֹא־תִלְמַד לַעֲשׂוֹת, כְּתוֹעֵבֹת הַגּוֹיִם הֵהֱמָ. י לֹא־יִמְצֵא בְךָ, מַעֲבִיר בְּנוֹ־וּבִתּוֹ בְּאֵשׁ, קֹסֵם קְסָמִים, מְעוֹנֵן וּמְנַחֵשׁ וּמְכַשֵּׁף. יא וְחַבֵּר, חֹבֵר; וְשֹׂאֵל אוֹב וַיִּדְעֹנִי, וְדֹרֵשׁ אֶל־הַמֵּתִים. יב כִּי־תוֹעֵבֹת הֵן, כָּל־עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים; וּבְגִלְלַת הַתּוֹעֵבֹת הָאֵלֹהִים, ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ, מוֹרִישׁ אוֹתָם מִפְּנֵיךָ.</p>

Rabbi Dr. Chaim Shapiro, *Zekher Liysiat Mitsrayim: A Sociological Interpretation*

[Zekher Liysiat Mitsrayim] may be perceived as a reaction to the practices of Egypt, an attempt to reverse the corrupting influences of the harsh Egyptian society, the world fashioned after the pyramid. The emphasis is on the word Liytsiat [leaving] in the sense of turning away and ridding our people of the evil influences of the social structure of Egypt...The most obvious difference concerns death and dead bodies. Our Kohanim are not only forbidden to be involved with all phases of preparing corpses for burial, but are not to come in contact with bodies, or even be in the same room as a corpse. Even

indirect contact results in temporary disqualification from the main functions and privileges of the Kohanim. Our Kohanim are to distance themselves from death. Death is not glorified, nor magnified. We are expected to bury our dead quickly, in a simple manner, without the distasteful fanfare of the ancient Egyptians. Tearing of garments rather than the tearing of flesh as a sign of mourning may also be a reaction to Egyptian practices...This cluster of verses includes bans against the shaving of heads in a fashion reminiscent of ancient Egyptian priests (and also medieval Catholic monks) as well as flesh cuttings for mourning. This set of laws culminates with the prohibition to mistreat a stranger, in direct opposition to Egyptian practices. It concludes, "You shall love him (the stranger) as yourself, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt" A direct relationship is shown here between our opposition to the practices we faced in Egypt; we are admonished to act differently.

Rambam Mishneh Torah Hilchot Aveilut 1:1. 13:11, 13:12	רמב"ם הלכות אבלות א:א, יג:יא, יב
<p>1:1 It is a positive mitzvah to mourn for one's close relatives, as it says, "Were I to partake of a sin offering today, would it find favor in God's eyes?" (Vayikra 10:20). 13:11 A person should not become excessively broken hearted because of a person's death. 13:12 Whoever does not mourn over his dead in the manner which our Sages commanded is cruel.</p>	<p>א:א מצות עשה להתאבל על הקרובים שנאמר ואכלתי חטאת היום הייטב בעיני ה'...יג:יא אל יתקשה אדם על מתו יתר מדאי...יג:יב כל מי שאינו מתאבל כמו שצונו חכמים הרי זה אכזרי.</p>

Rashi on Vayikra 16:1	רש"י ויקרא טז:א
<p>And the Lord spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons: What does this teach us? Rebbe Eleazar ben Azariah answered with a parable of a patient, whom a physician came to visit. The doctor said to him, "Do not eat cold foods, and do not lie down in a cold, damp place." Then, another doctor visited him, and advised him, "Do not eat cold foods or lie down in a cold, damp place, so that you will not die the way Ploni died." This one warned that patient more effectively than the former. Therefore, the Torah says, "after the death of Aharon's two sons".</p>	<p>וידבר ה' אל משה אחרי מות שני בני אהרן וגו' - מה תלמוד לומר, היה רבי אלעזר בן עזריה מושלו משל לחולה שנכנס אצלו רופא. אמר לו אל תאכל צונן ואל תשכב בטחב. בא אחר ואמר לו אל תאכל צונן ואל תשכב בטחב שלא תמות כדרך שמת פלוני. זה זרוז יותר מן הראשון, לכך נאמר אחרי מות שני בני אהרן.</p>

Vayikra Rabbah 21:7	ויקרא רבה כא:ז
<p>"And the Lord said to Moshe: Speak to your brother Aharon..." (Vayikra 16:2) Rebbe Avin said: He said to him, "Go and comfort him with words, as it says 'Speak to the heart of Jerusalem'" (Yeshayahu 40:2).</p>	<p>(ויקרא טז, ב): ויאמר ה' אל משה דבר אל אהרן אחיך, אמר רבי אבין אמר לו לך נחמו בדברים, כמה דאת אמר (ישעיה מ, ב): דברו על לב ירושלים.</p>

Torah Temimah on Vayikra 16:1	תורה תמימה ויקרא טז:א
<p>After the death of Aharon's two sons. It is taught in a braita:</p>	<p>אחרי מות וגו' - תניא, למה הוא מזכיר מיתתן</p>

Why is their death referenced at the Yom Kippur sacrifice? To teach that just as Yom Kippur atones for all of Yisrael, so too the deaths of the righteous atone for all of Israel. *It is not clear about the point that the deaths of the righteous atone and what the reason for this is. And it appears at the death of Shaul: "And they buried the bones of Shaul...and after that, God was entreated for the land". This means that when God saw that they bestowed kindness [that they fasted and cried and eulogized him], immediately God showered them with mercy, as it says, "God was entreated for the land". From here it is clear that it is not death itself that atones, but rather the honor that the mourning that we practice for the righteous, for this honor is the honor of God.*

ביום הכפורים, ללמדך שכשם שיום הכפורים מכפר על ישראל כך מיתתן של צדיקים מכפרת על ישראל. תורה תמימה הערות: לא נתבאר ערך הענין שמיתת צדיקים מכפר ומה טעם בדבר. ונראה ע"פ מ"ש בפדר"א פ' י"ז בענין מיתת שאול דכתיב ביה (ש"ב כ"א) ויקברו את עצמות שאול ויעתר אלקים לארץ אחרי כן, וז"ל, כיון שראה הקדוש ברוך הוא שגמלו לו חסד [שצמו ובכו וספדו לו, כמבואר בפסוק] מיד נתמלא רחמים, שנאמר ויעתר אלקים לארץ וכו', ע"כ. מבואר מזה שלא המיתה בעצמה מכפרת אלא הכבוד והאבל שנוהגין במיתת צדיקים, דכבוד זה הוא כבוד ה':

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Limits of Grief: Re'eh 5777*

We are commanded not to engage in excessive rituals of grief. To lose a close member of one's family is a shattering experience. It is as if something of ourselves had died too. Not to grieve is wrong, inhuman: Judaism does not command Stoic indifference in the face of death. But to give way to wild expressions of sorrow – lacerating one's flesh, tearing out one's hair – is also wrong. It is, the Torah suggests, not fitting to a holy people; it is the kind of behaviour associated with idolatrous cults...What has restraint in mourning to do with being "children of the Lord your God", a holy and chosen people? [1] Ibn Ezra says that just as a father may cause a child pain for his or her long-term good, so God sometimes brings us pain – here, bereavement – which we must accept in trust without an excessive show of grief. [2] Ramban suggests that it is our belief in the immortality of the soul that is why we should not grieve overmuch. Even so, he adds, we are right to mourn within the parameters set by Jewish law since, even if death is only a parting, every parting is painful. [3] R. Ovadiah Sforno and Chizkuni say that because we are "children of God" we are never completely orphaned. We may lose our earthly parents but never our ultimate Father; hence there is a limit to grief. [4] Rabbenu Meyuchas suggests that royalty does not defile itself by undergoing disfiguring injuries (*nivul*). Thus Israel – children of the supreme King – may not do so either. In this anti-traditional age, with its hostility to ritual and its preference for the public display of private emotion (what Philip Rieff, in the 1960s, called "the triumph of the therapeutic"), the idea that grief has its laws and limits sounds strange. Yet almost anyone who has had the misfortune to be bereaved can testify to the profound healing brought about by observance of the laws of *avelut* (mourning). Torah and tradition knew how to honour both the dead and the living, sustaining the delicate balance between grief and consolation, the loss of life that gives us pain, and the re-affirmation of life that gives us hope.