

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim@ the DC Beit Midrash

Monday, April 26, 2004; Yom Sheini, 5 Iyar (Yom HaZikaron/Yom Haatzmaut) 5764

Welcome to the DC Beit Midrash!

The Chumash (Five Books of Moses) is divided into 54 portions, which Jews read sequentially each week in services. On a regular evening, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study of this portion, or *parsha*. The voices of both past and contemporary interpreters will inform our discussion. Every week, a sheet summarizing the Torah portion of the week and the other sources the teacher will use will be provided to aid you in your study.

This Week's Parsha (Torah Portion):

Acharei Mot/Kedoshim (Leviticus), Chapter 16: Verse 1 to Chapter 20: Verse 27

Acharei Mot begins "after the death" of Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu and proceeds with a lengthy elucidation of the laws of Yom Kippur, directed to Aaron and the priests. The service is described, including the sequence of sacrificial offering, ritual purification, expiation, and the sending of the "scapegoat" into the wilderness. Further rules are then given about offerings, including the prohibition against the consumption of blood, and other dietary laws. Finally, the parsha presents a list of forbidden sexual relationships, concluding with the general prohibition against following the abhorrent practices of other. **Kedoshim** literally means "holy things," and this parsha is a list of behaviors that are either holy or not holy. These laws are both ethical and religious, and sometimes both, as in the prohibitions against certain kinds of incest. Other famous laws in this section include the prohibition against putting a "stumbling block" before the blind, and the commandment to "love your fellow human as yourself." Israel is commanded to be holy just as Israel's God is Holy.

(http://www.kolel.org/pages/parasha/vayikra_summary.html)

This Week's Sources

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

1907-1972

Heschel was a European-born scholar and philosopher. He received a classical Jewish education, and a doctorate from the *Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Berlin. He later succeeded philosopher Martin Buber in Frankfurt on the Main. With the rise of the Nazis, Heschel was deported to Poland and eventually made his way to the United States by way of England. In the United States, Rabbi Heschel taught at the Hebrew Union College beginning in 1940, and he joined the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1945 as professor of Jewish ethics and philosophy. Heschel's works attempt to penetrate and illumine the reality underlying religion, the living dynamic between God and Man, through the understanding of Jewish text and experience. In this quest, Heschel recognized the limited value of the tools of the philosopher. While reason may help structure his inquiry, it is limited in its ability to quantify the aspect of divinity that is infinite and unquantifiable. Heschel's work fits into two categories. He did traditional scholarly study and interpretation of classic Jewish texts. Additionally, he sought to offer an authentic theology based on traditional sources that could be applied to the questions and challenges facing the modern Jew. His approach to the challenges of modernity was composed not only of the rhetoric of philosophy, but was also brought to action through his involvement in the civil rights movement and other areas of social activism.

(Excerpted from <http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/sources/ajheschel.shtml>)

Jon Levenson

Contemporary

Jon D. Levenson is the Albert A. List Professor of Jewish Studies in the Divinity School and the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Before coming to Harvard, Professor Levenson taught in the Divinity School and the Division of the Humanities at the University of Chicago (1982-88) and at Wellesley College (1975-82). Professor Levenson is primarily a specialist in the literary and theological dimensions of the Hebrew Bible, but he works in rabbinic midrash, medieval Jewish Bible commentary, Jewish-Christian relations, and the philosophical issues raised by biblical studies as well. He also maintains a strong interest in modern Jewish theology and has published in that field. His books include *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence*, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old*

Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies, The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity, and Esther: A Commentary.

(http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~nelc/faculty_files/levenson.html)

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschuetz

1690-1764

Rav Yonatan Eybeschuetz was by all opinions one of the major Rabbinic figures of the first half of the 18th century. He studied in his youth in Poland, Moravia and Prague. The first half of his mature life was spent in Prague where he served as *rosh yeshiva*, was a highly respected and charismatic preacher and, from 1736, upon the death of Rabbi David Oppenheim, also *dayan*—head of the religious court. During the Prague period he also had contact with both Christian clergy and lay intellectuals, and discussed religious matters with Cardinal Hassebauer and others. From 1741 on he was in Germany. It was here that violent controversy broke out over his alleged Sabbatianism. Sabbatianism refers to the great messianic movement which swept Jewry during the mid-17th century, centered around the figure of Sabbatai Zevi, which persisted even after his forced conversion to Islam in 1666 and his death in 1676. The movement was rooted in a complex, tortuous Kabbalistic theology, based upon the teachings of the Lurianic Kabbalah of 16th century Safed, but took these in a new direction, crossing the line into heresy with mystical doctrines of descent into the realm of the forbidden in order to redeem sparks of the Divine present therein. This same penchant for mystical dialectics provided the fuel for mystical rationalizations of Sabbatai Zevi's apostasy, making possible the persistence of an underground, crypto-Sabbatian movement well into the 18th century, and possibly beyond. The above is but a drop in the bucket of the serpentine doings of this bizarre chapter in Jewish history.

(*excerpted from <http://www.zchor.org/rabbis/eib.htm>*)

This Week's Teacher

Allison Peiser is currently spending the year putting off grad school by interning at OWL: The Voice of Midlife and Older Women. She also teaches 6th and 7th grade at Temple Rodef Shalom in Northern Virginia. Next year she plans on studying at Pardes for a year before applying (and hopefully) attending HUC for Rabbinical School. She can be reached at allip717@hotmail.com.

This Week's Food Sponsor

Nir Boms is sponsoring food this week in honor of Yom Haatzmeut. Thank you to Joe Gindi for assisting with shlepping.

Wanna teach, think about teaching, or suggest a teacher? teachers@dcbeitmidrash.org

Wanna sponsor food? wanna_sponsor_food@dcbeitmidrash.org

Questions, feedback, wanna join our email list? Anything else? Email DCBeitMidrash@hotmail.com

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