

What is the connection between the various Parshiot in ספר ויקרא? The disparate topics include מאכלות אסורות, עריות, the myriad of laws in פרשת קדושים, the laws relating to priests and their relationships followed by the festivals and concluding with the story of the מגדף, blasphemer. We need to discover the common, uniting thread that binds these various commandments. To do this, we must understand the principles contained in the שבע מצוות בני נח.

The מצוות בני נח are based on the concept of צלם אלקים, i.e. man was created in the image of Gd. Gd planted in creation an inherent obligation to obey certain moral principles. The foundation of these laws were restrictions that governed basic societal interactions. They included the prohibitions against illicit relationships, idolatry, murder, theft, cursing Gd, eating flesh of an animal that was not slaughtered, establishment of system of justice. Chazal say that the fate of the generation of the flood was sealed because they disregarded the prohibitions against illicit sexual relations and theft. After the flood Noah was given additional prohibitions of consuming אבר מן החי, flesh from an animal that was not slaughtered prior to consumption. In addition, the prohibition against murder was elucidated. These laws provided the blueprint and requirements for an orderly society that built on the foundation of צלם אלקים. Man redeems his existence and validates his creation by observing מצוות בני נח.

The common theme among all these prohibitions is they violate and contradict צלם אלקים. These laws define the minimum requirements for a human being that distinguishes him from the animal kingdom. For it is man's ability to comprehend these restrictions that redeems him and makes him worthy of the praise חביב אדם שנברא בצלם. Man, created בצלם אלקים, has free will to elevate himself above the rest of creation. If man rejects that charge and violates the seven obligations, he is no different than the beast in the field.

The 7 מצוות בני נח, Noahide laws, were supplemented with additional laws over time culminating with the full complement of the 613 Commandments. The more

commandments an individual is given, the higher he rises in terms of צלם אלקים. Noah was commanded to build an ark. According to Rashi, the people of his generation took notice of this covenant between Gd and Noah. They attempted to frustrate and prevent him from it. Apparently they wanted to ensure that all people remained on the same metaphysical plane with the same fundamental responsibilities and moral worth. By accepting the additional restrictions and commandments, Noah was raised to a higher level of sanctity, leaving the people of his generation behind. They sought to prevent that and were thwarted by Gd.

The same idea applied to Abraham when he accepted ברית מילה. Rashi says that the nations conspired to prevent Abraham from fulfilling this obligation. They realized that until now they were equal to Abraham as they all were created בצלם אלקים and commanded to act accordingly. Now that Abraham was charged with additional Commandments he would be elevated above them. Anything Abraham engaged in or acquired would now be holier, separated from them.

When Sarah died, Abraham negotiated the purchase of a burial plot with the Hittites. The local residents informed Abraham that he could bury Sarah in any of their plots. Abraham realized that he and Sarah had attained a higher level of sanctity and could not be buried together with Hittites who at best had the sanctity of צלם אלקים but not the level of sanctity attained by Abraham and Sarah. They required קבר ישראל. Apples and oranges could not be mixed. Upon hearing that, the Hittites withdrew from the negotiation and left it to Abraham and Efron to negotiate the sale, which is consummated after Efron's duplicitous tactics exact a huge sum of money from Abraham. Rashi describes the purchase of מערת המכפלה as an elevation in status for the field that left the hands of a commoner and became the property of royalty.

Rambam notes that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were given additional restrictions and Commandments that lifted each to a higher spiritual level than the rest of humanity that was limited to the seven מצוות בני נח. Indeed Chazal went out of their

way to note that the patriarchs observed all 613 Commandments to indicate that they had קדושת ישראל even before תורה.

The role of the Jewish People changed completely with the acceptance of the Sinaitic Covenant. While the rest of the world remained obligated with the core 7 laws representing צלם אלקים that separated man from the rest of the animal kingdom, the Jew blazed a new separate path. By declaring נעשה ונשמע, we accepted additional Commandments that separated us from the rest of humanity. We alone are bound by a higher and more encompassing set of rules that further defines us as קדוש וגוי קדוש. ממלכת כהנים. There are norms of behavior that are acceptable for the peasant but are inappropriate for the prince. The sanctification process at Sinai made us holy or separate from the other nations, קדושים תהיו. The sequence of topics mentioned in the Parshiot of ספר ויקרא describe the new role and mission given to the Jewish People at Sinai. The extra commandments raised us to the level of קדושת ישראל, that is now identified with a prohibition against desecrating that higher form of sanctity, or חלול השם. Hence we find the prohibition against חלול השם associated with many of the Commandments in these Parshiot.

פרשת שמיי details the animals that are kosher and non-kosher. In פרשת שמיי the Torah tells us that while the rest of mankind has a minimal set of rules that govern what they may eat, אבר מן החי, the Jew will now be bound by additional rules that govern our consumption and will further sanctify us beyond the other nations. In addition to the requirement of בצלם אלקים, the Jew now has an additional obligation of מאכלות אסורות that goes beyond that. פרשת קדושים expands on מאכלות אסורות to include things that are inherently prohibited as well as those thoughts and actions that desecrate our special sanctity, מחלל קדושת ישראל. For example, the Torah includes the prohibition against consuming sacrificial meat after the specified time. קדושת ישראל extends to the קדושת קרבן as well as the specifically prohibited food items.

In פרשת אחרי מות the Torah tells us that the basic set of forbidden relationships that apply to mankind in general are no longer sufficient or commensurate with קדושת ישראל. We have additional restrictions such as אשת אב that do not apply to the non-Jew. The original set that applied to mankind derived from צלם אלקים. A nation of priests and a holy nation required additional levels and restrictions. It is interesting to note that מאכלות אסורות and עריות as foundations of Jewish sanctity was not lost on the Rambam, who, included both in the section of הלכות קדושה instead of including איסורי ביאה in הלכות נשים and מאכלות אסורות in some other section. פרשת קדושה introduces additional rules regarding idolatry. Many additional forms are prohibited, providing a far more expansive list that applies to the Jew.

Interestingly, the Torah goes out of its way to emphasize that the previous inhabitants of the land were driven out because they did not observe their core basic set of prohibitions, the seven מצוות בני נח. Exile and destruction is the punishment for abdicating or rejecting a covenant with Gd formed on the requirement to fulfill Commandments. Adam and Eve were punished for violating the minimal Commandments they were obligated to observe. The generation of the flood violated their set of required commandments. The children of Noah violated the covenant Gd created with him after the flood and were driven from the land to make way for בני ישראל. As Jews, we are warned to observe our Commandments that includes צלם אלקים as well as the additional restrictions that distinguish us as קדוש lest we be exiled from the land as well.

פרשת קדושה mentions the prohibition against taking the life of another human being. This was originally forbidden in פרשת נח as one of the מצוות בני נח as it is most central to the concept of צלם אלקים. A world where one does not respect the life of another is not worthy of creation or sustaining. The Torah extends צלם אלקים associated with murder for the Jew with additional laws such as לא תעמוד על דם רעך that take us to a different level.

The Torah tells us that one of the reasons for the flood was prevalence of theft throughout society. מן החמס אשר בכפיהם. The prohibition against theft is, as Ramban refers to it, a מצוה שכלית. A logical human being appreciates that like murder, society cannot tolerate anarchy, corruption and theft. The generation of the flood flouted the concept of צלם אלקים in so many areas, most notably in its disregard for the prohibition against theft. פרשת קדושים extends the laws against theft that the Jew must observe. The laws of לקט שכחה ופאה are introduced to extend the laws of theft based on צלם אלקים to include various ways of stealing from the poor. We include, among other things, לפני עור לא תתן מכשול and אונאת דברים. We must be hyper vigilant to respect the needs of others lest we violate the added restrictions against גזל that extend the core rules included in צלם אלקים.

צלם אלקים requires one to demonstrate הכרת הטוב. This finds expression in the restriction against ברכת השם, blaspheming Gd's name. At a minimum, one should not disrespect Gd who created man and endowed him with צלם אלקים, through inappropriate use of His name. Chazal tell us that Hashem created the world through the utterance of His holy name. When man blasphemes the name of Gd, he denies creation and Creator. פרשת אמור and פרשת קדושים build upon this restriction. We are enjoined from cursing Gd as well as a parent. The Talmud tells us that there are 3 partners in the creation of a human being, Gd, father and mother. Blaspheming or cursing any of these partners is a lack of הכרת הטוב and denies the creation or צלם אלקים. It is interesting to note that the downfall of man that culminated with the great flood began in the generation of Enosh where the Torah says 'אז הוחל לקרא בשם ד'. Rashi interprets הוחל to mean trivialize, as they began to blaspheme the name of Gd with idolatry. There was a perversion of צלם אלקים. The Gd who gave them life and sustained them was mocked and trivialized by man who, through his abominable actions, perverted the צלם אלקים with which he was created, demonstrating a lack of הכרת הטוב to Gd. The Parshiot in ספר ויקרא add additional Commandments on top of the basic Noahide prohibition against ברכת השם that apply to the Jew through his increased קדושת ישראל. We are commanded to show הכרת הטוב to Gd for taking us out of Egypt by observing the festivals, where we focus on the associated joy by thanking Gd in various way.

The opposite of הכרת הטוב to Gd is to curse His name. With this foundation we now understand the juxtaposition of the story of the blasphemer, at the end of פרשת אמור. By invoking the name of Gd to curse another Jew, the blasphemer denied creation and desecrated that which is holy. Gd cannot dwell together with someone who denies creation and through his abhorrent use of Gd's name contradicts his own צלם אלקים and attempts to deny the צלם אלקים of a fellow Jew. One who curses his fellow human being, violates his צלם אלקים as well as that of the person he curses. One who curses a fellow Jew not only violates his צלם אלקים, but also negates the extra sanctity of the Jew, his קדושת ישראל. This raises the sin to a new level that includes חלול השם. Such an individual must be removed from Gd's world.

The seventh מצות בני נח is, דינים, the requirement to establish courts to ensure against anarchy. צלם אלקים requires that man live in peace with his fellow human being just as he must live in peace with Gd. Above and beyond the basic requirements of justice, we are required to ensure that our courts decide disputes correctly and do not corrupt justice. Corrupting justice denies צלם אלקים as we are created in His image and must judge fairly, as He would. Perversion of justice is a form of desecration or חלול השם. Hence קדושת ישראל requires us to observe the added prohibition of לא תעשו עול במשפט.

© Copyright 2019 Rabbi Josh Rapps. Permission to distribute this summary for individual use, with this notice, is granted. Distribution through electronic or printed media without the author's permission is prohibited.