

Acharey Mot D'var Torah

Shabbat Shalom! One of the things this parsha deals with is G-d's instructions to the Israelites about entering the land of Canaan. The Canaanites did things that were abhorrent to G-d. For example, they would sacrifice their children to their false gods. G-d is concerned that since there are so many Canaanites and so few of us, that we would be influenced to do the things that they did and the land would have to spew us out. G-d tells the Israelites that the previous inhabitants of the land broke many of his laws and thus were spewed out. These included uncovering the nakedness of someone of your own flesh or family, offering up their children to Molech, their false god and having relations between animals and people. G-d is very stern about commanding the Israelites not to follow any of the Canaanites' ways or be influenced by them to do any of those things. The reason G-d is so stern about laying down these laws is because we lived with the Egyptians for many generations and now we were going into the Canaanites land. Both of those peoples followed religions and practices that were not according to G-d's laws. G-d wanted to draw a very clear fence around us to make sure that we didn't assimilate and become as bad as they were.

Today, we are Jews in a Christian country. I see signs that we are assimilating. We're getting too used to the people around us and starting to act like them even though we shouldn't. There's no such thing as a Chanukah bush!!! Yet, some Jews in America put up a tree in their home and decorate it during Chanukah and call it a Chanukah bush. Also, nowadays, very few Jews keep kosher. Most Jews have begun to eat treif following the dietary habits of non-Jews. This is important because kashrut used to be one of the unique things that Jews followed but today, many Jews barely even know the laws of kashrut exist. We used to value the laws of kashrut highly and Jews would never go near mixing milk and meat, but in America, everyone

else eats milk and meat together and so most Jews started doing it too. That means the Jewish people are slowly losing one of our most treasured laws. These laws are so important because its one of the things that makes us so different from other religions; if someone keeps kosher one knows for sure that they are Jewish. Keeping kosher is good for your health. A lot of unkosher things are quite unhealthy. Pork is fattier than beef for example. Kashrut also helps us remember the importance of life. When an animal is slaughtered according to the laws of kashrut, it is killed quickly with as little pain as possible. We don't eat the blood because the blood is the essence of life. Since we leave the essence of life to G-d, we always remember that an animal had to die for our food and that the animal was also G-d's creation and therefore precious in G-d's eyes. The laws of kashrut also help us to bring holiness into the everyday. By saying a bracha over our food and by following the laws of kashrut, we bring holiness into the everyday activity of eating and that makes us better people and better Jews. The parsha also deals with the kashrut law of not eating the blood of an animal. That is because the blood is the essence of the animal's life and leaving the essence of the animal's life to G-d means that G-d gets back what He created so that He can use it to create more. It's almost like paying G-d back for creating us all.

If you were to walk up to any Jew in America and ask them about child sacrifice, they would be horrified. But if you walked up to any Jew in America and asked them if they kept kosher, many of them would say no. Nowadays, child sacrifice is horrible not only to Jews but to everybody. But when you think about it, keeping kosher sometimes seems so trivial that you might take a bite of pork and just keep doing it. Eventually, kashrut would slip from your life and you would be that much further from Judaism. It just goes to show that it is easier to slip up on something small than something big, yet the small things and the big things are just as important. If all Jews were to do this, Judaism would slowly slip away from the planet and we

would be no more. It's important for Judaism to exist because we are partners with G-d in tikun olam and work to bring holiness and justice into the world.