



Acharei Mot

VaYikra (Leviticus) 16:1 - 18:30

This week's parsha begins by telling us that once a year, on what would later be known as Yom Kippur, Aaron was to enter the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the priesthood and the entire community. He took goats for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering. One of the goats was sacrificed, while the other was sent into the wilderness as a symbol that the community's sin and guilt had been expunged. This section of the Torah is also the reading for the morning of Yom Kippur.

Aaron also sacrificed a bullock as a sin-offering on his own behalf. Then he entered the Holy of Holies and "put the incense of the fire before the Lord." He was commanded to bathe again and to put on his distinctive priestly garments, after which he offered up his own burnt-offering and that of the community. This later became the observance in the Beit HaMikdash, the Holy Temple, as well. This ancient ritual is recalled each year during the Avodah service on Yom Kippur morning.

The parsha then lists the forbidden degrees of marriage, incestuous and adulterous relationships, and other immoral practices. This section of the Torah is read now as well as on the afternoon of Yom Kippur.

This Shabbat, the Shabbat immediately preceding Passover, is known as Shabbat HaGadol. It takes its name from the final verse of the special Haftarah selected for this day, which heralds both the coming of Eliahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet) and our hope for the coming of the Messiah. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the laws, observances, and true meaning of Passover, which are redemption, liberation, and the special responsibilities that accompany the freedom with which we have been blessed.



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