

Devar Torah (Sermon) for אמור (*Emor*)
May 9, 2004 - Interview Shabbat

Note: All translations my own.

Last week, we read פרשת קדושים (*Parshat Kedoshim*), which is perhaps the most global reading in the book of ויקרא (Leviticus). In it, we have rich combination of ritual and civil law. Reverence for parents, respect for elders, keeping the Sabbath, fair business dealings, sacrificial laws etc. It is no wonder that last weeks parsha began with the words דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְתְּ יִשְׂרָאֵל *Speak to the entire congregation of Israel*, (Lev. 19:2). It's no wonder that all those laws needed to be taught, as Rashi explains, with a gathering of all the people - everyone was directly effected by the laws of that parsha.

This week, our reading begins on a very different note - with laws pertaining only to the priests - for whom they may become ritually impure by tending to their burial, and to whom they may get married. So, it is no wonder why today's reading begins with the words: "וַיֹּאמֶר ד' אֵל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאִמְרַתְּ אֲלֵהֶם *And God said to Moses, 'speak to the Priests, the sons of Aaron and say to them' . . .*" (Lev 21:1). No wonder. These are laws that pertain to the priests, so it makes sense that God would instruct Moses to speak to the priests. What I do find surprising, is the final words of these instructions: "וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל בְּנָיו וְאֶל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: *and Moses spoke to Aaron, and to his sons, and to all of the children of Israel.*" (Lev 21:24) Why is Moses speaking to everyone now? Do they need to hear what God has commanded for the Priests? Why is Moses going beyond what seems to be God's instructions?

It seems to me, that Moses understood that the people should hear all of God's instructions, regardless of whether it related to them directly. God's instructions, even if they applied only to the priests, had to be known to everyone. God's teachings are not reserved for the elites, the priest. Everyone has a right to hear and learn.

What is true in this week's parsha about the priests, is true also in the book of דברים (Deuteronomy) about the king. In דברים, we are told about the King's responsibilities.

דברים פרק יז
(יח) וְהָיָה כְּשִׁבְתוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל סֵפֶר מִלְּפָנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:
(יט) וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת ד' אֱלֹהָיו לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶת הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:

Deuteronomy 17

(18) *When he sits on his throne, he shall write this repetition of the Torah in a scroll before the levitical priests.*

(19) *And it (the scroll) shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of the Torah and to follow these laws.*

The King is what we might call a constitutional monarch, constrained by the law, and obliged to know and keep the law. What's more, it is not enough for this King to have the scroll before him and to read and know its contents. Instead, the entire people must be advised of the law. In דברים, the people are commanded to have an assembly of all Israelites, "הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂאִים וְהַבָּעֲרִידִים וְהַגֵּרִים בְּשַׁעְרֵיךָ *the men, the women and the children, and the stranger within your*

