

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

ACHAREI-K'DOSHEM

Anyone who performs any of these (forbidden sexual) acts shall be cut off from his people (18:29)

The penalty KAREIT, being cut from Am Yisrael for various particularly serious transgressions, is stated three times in Acharei and six times in K'doshim. The Torah does not tell us exactly what it means, other than it appears to be carried out by G-d rather than by a human court.

The 36 sins for which KAREIT applies are listed in the first Mishna in K'RITOT. Almost half are forbidden sexual relationships including adultery and nida. Also included are wilfully breaking Shabbat, eating chametz on Pesach, and eating at all on Yom Kippur. There are also two instances of non-observance of a mitzva: neglecting the Korban Pesach when it is possible to bring it, and neglecting Brit Mila.

What KAREIT actually is has been debated for centuries. For example, Rashi says it means dying at a young age, before one's time. It can also mean the death of one's children during the lifetime of the parents, effectively putting a stop to their continuity. The Ramban holds in addition that particularly heinous sins

can face excision in the World to Come, though Abarbanel limits the great suffering in the Afterlife to be a means of refining and purifying the soul after which it may receive its portion in the World to Come.

Perhaps in addition 'shall be cut off from his people' may be taken absolutely literally. It means that by sinning in such a way he himself actually cuts his own soul off from his people. It comes with the sin. Here there is a message for the spiritually sensitive and aware individual who is part of an aspiring and inspirational Torah-true setting (and it is wonderful that such communities do exist). Perhaps he succumbed in a fit of temper, or failed to restrain the passions of the moment V'HAMASKIL YAVIN. Or after Musaf on Yom Kippur, he was longing so much for his regular coffee that he went home, took some water from the hot water urn intending 'just a small drop' (which actually would have been forbidden though not liable to the whole penalties) and then didn't stop himself finishing off the whole glass. On reflection, he cannot look at himself in the mirror and believe that such a thing happened. As he goes to shul next day and puts on tefillin, he senses great dissonance and disturbance in himself. Everybody else fasted, he didn't. How can I be part of such a people? He is there, but he isn't there. He is physically among his

people, yet he feels he cannot look at them in the face. He is ashamed to see them and he believes that they, if they knew, would be ashamed to see him.

Yet 'one of the great kindnesses of G-d' is that he allows a way back through Teshuva (Rabbeinu Yona, Introduction to Shaarei Teshuva). The Rambam, based on Yoma 86a, spells out that process. The foundation is fourfold: feeling sincere regret, abandoning the sin by immediately stopping the forbidden action, confessing the sin to G-d (and obtaining forgiveness if the sin caused offence to others), and making a firm commitment never to sin in that way again. Yet the complete Teshuva is described by the Rambam as a person having the same opportunity to sin and choosing not to solely out of commitment to Torah and Mitzvot. 🌿📖