



Parshas Emor

For the week ending 13 Iyar 5758 *20 Iyar outside Israel
8 & 9 May 1998 *15 & 16 May outside Israel

Overview

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: Father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. The physical defects that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

Insights

TRAVELLERS IN TIME

“In order that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in Sukkos when I brought them out from the land of Egypt...” (23:43)

Judaism treats women as second-class citizens, doesn't it? I mean, the reason women aren't allowed to do so many *mitzvos* is that they have to be free to do the cooking and nurse the babies, right?

If truth be told, women are *not* equal to men in Judaism. In some senses they are *superior*. And if you think that this is just patronizing chauvinist smooth-talk, have a look at the order of Creation: The more advanced was created after the less advanced. What was the last creation in the physical world? Woman. Woman was created after Man — and from Man. Man comes from the dirt and dust. Woman starts off much higher. She comes from flesh and blood.

So okay, if women are elevated, why don't they have to do those *mitzvos* which are time-related, like sitting in the *Sukkah*?

Hashem gave the three festivals of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkos *respectively* to the fathers of the Jewish People, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Hashem also designated Rosh Chodesh, the first of day of each of the twelve months, as the Yom Tov of the twelve tribes of Israel.

The males of the tribes lost their festival of Rosh Chodesh when they transgressed in the incident of the golden calf. As a result, Rosh Chodesh remained only for the women of Israel. But what is the deeper connection between Rosh Chodesh and the Jewish woman?

To make the golden calf, the men demanded jewelry from their wives, to which the women replied “You think a powerless idol can save us?” They refused to

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give over their jewels. Since the Jewish women had no part in the golden calf, Hashem rewarded them with Rosh Chodesh — a day when they would desist from the routine of the month.

What has this got to do with why they don't have to sit in the *sukkah*?

The spiritual well-being of a person requires a constant connection to reality. This connection has to be constantly recharged — like a battery — or the reception will fade and he will drift off into a world of illusion. There is a reality of time and a reality of space. We connect to the reality of time through the time-related *mitzvos*.

A man must pray three times a day at prescribed times. He must wear *tzitzis* and *tefillin*. He needs these and the other time-related *mitzvos* to connect him, to anchor him in Time. It's not that the Jewish woman doesn't have to sit in the *sukkah*. It's that she doesn't need to. She has her own built-in *sukkah*. She has built-in *tzitzis*. She has built-in *tefillin*. Hashem made Woman with a greater sensitivity to the reality of time and thus she needs less help to maintain her spiritual connection to the real world.

THE ETERNAL FLAME

“Command the Children of Israel ... to kindle a continual lamp.” (24:2)

Go into any Synagogue when it's dark and you will see a small lamp shining above the Holy Ark. It's called the *ner tamid* — the eternal flame.

That lamp is a memorial of the *ner ma'aravi* (western lamp) of the menorah which the *kohanim* lit in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The *ner ma'aravi* burned miraculously. It never went out. Every evening, when the *kohen* came to kindle the flames he would find the *ner ma'aravi* still alight from the previous evening. He would remove the still-burning wick and oil, clean out its receptacle and then put back the burning wick and the oil. Then he would kindle all the other lamps with the western lamp.

However, when the Romans destroyed the *Beis Hamikdash* it seemed that the little solitary flame had been put out forever.

In Rome, there stands a triumphal arch built by the Emperor Titus. One of its *bas-reliefs* depicts the menorah being carried through the streets of Rome as part of the booty pillaged from the *Beis Hamikdash*. All its lamps are dark. It looks like some expensive antique, soon to languish under the dust of ages in some Vatican vault.

But did Titus really extinguish that eternal flame?

The *Beis Hamikdash* is a macrocosm of the human body. If you look at a plan of the sanctuary in the *Beis Hamikdash*, you will notice that the placement of the

various vessels — the altar, the table, the menorah — corresponds to the location of the vital organs in the human body. Each of the Temple's vessels represents a human organ.

The menorah is the vessel that corresponds to the heart.

Why is it that so many young people today are choosing to return to the beliefs and practices that their parents had forgotten, and their grandparents despaired of seeing continued? It is as though some mystical force is transmitted in the spiritual genes of every Jew. A light burning on the menorah of the Jewish heart across the millennia. A light which can never be extinguished, which burns miraculously, even without replenishment of the oil or wicks of *mitzvah* observance.

So, in a mystical sense, the light Titus tried to put out continues to burn in the menorah of the Jewish heart. But there's more.

It would come as a great disappointment to Titus, but the menorah that is collecting dust in the Vatican is not the original Menorah. It is a copy. The original menorah was hidden away (together with the other vessels) in the caves and tunnels under the Temple Mount.

If while the Temple was standing the western lamp of the menorah burned miraculously without human assistance, so why shouldn't it go on burning even after it was buried?

That western lamp continues to “burn” under the Temple Mount throughout the long dark night of exile. It continues to “burn” to this day. And it will continue to “burn” until *Mashiach* comes. Then, the light of the menorah of the Jewish heart will be revealed as identical to the light of the menorah in the Holy *Beis Hamikdash*.

DOING TIME

“You shall not desecrate My holy Name; rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel. I am Hashem Who sanctifies you.” (22:32)

Two Jews traveling by train to work. One religious; the other — much less so.

“Look at this!” exclaims the less religious of the two, tossing the newspaper to his religious companion.

There, on the front page, is a picture of a very religious-looking man complete with a long flowing black beard. Underneath the picture the caption reads: ARRESTED FOR TAX EVASION! “So much for a long black beard!” sneers the secular Jew.

The religious Jew looks at the picture for a while and then says, “Trouble was ... under the beard, he was clean-shaven....”

When a Jew puts on a *kippah*, he becomes an ambassador for Hashem. His actions are scrutinized by all who see him: If he is crooked in business, no one

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will call him a crook; they will call him a crooked Jew! However if he's straight, Hashem takes the credit: Our Sages tell us of an Arab who sold a donkey to Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach. Shortly after the purchase, Rabbi Shimon discovered a valuable stone under the donkey's saddle. "I paid for a donkey, not a gem," he said. He promptly returned the jewel to the Arab, whereupon the Arab exclaimed "Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shimon ben Shetach."

CONCRETE TIME

"And you shall count from the day after the Shabbos (i.e., the day after Pesach), from the day of your bringing the Omer offering which is waved, seven weeks — complete and perfect they must be." (23:15)

"When are they (the weeks) perfect? When they do the will of the Omnipresent." (*Midrash*)

Nothing in this world lasts forever. Everything has its time and then passes. Even the heavens and the earth will pass into nothingness. Nevertheless, everything that comes into the world has a certain life-span, however short or long.

There is *one* thing in the world which has no span of existence at all. It is no sooner present than it has already changed, passed and is no longer.

That thing is Time itself.

As soon as Time emerges into Creation, it is gone. Time passed is no longer, and every second becomes, immediately and at once, the past.

Man, however, can give Time itself a substance that makes it eternal. When a person performs an action, it gives the time in which that action is done, the substance and the character of the action itself. So if the time is used to do a mitzvah, to do a kindness, or to study Torah, then because these things are eternal in

themselves, they in turn, eternalize Man's time. This is what the Midrash means when it says "When are they (the weeks) perfect? When they do the will of the Omnipresent."

The Counting of the Omer is a paradigm for the years of a person's life — the "seven weeks" allude to "The days of our years have in them 70 years" (*Tehillim*). The mitzvah of Counting the Omer demands that "complete and perfect they must be." When those hours do the will of Hashem, then Time itself stays eternally concrete and substantial.

Sources:

Travelers in Time - Rabbi Nota Schiller

The Eternal Flame - Sfas Emes, Rabbi Akiva Tatz

Doing Time - Rabbi Nota Schiller

Concrete Time - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in *L'Torah ul'Moadim*

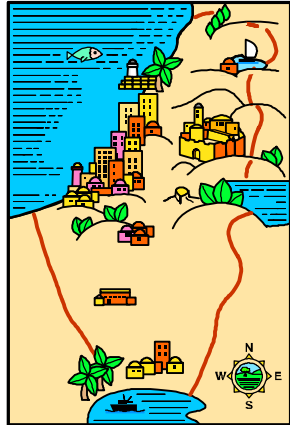
Haftorah: Shmuel 20:18-42

The literal meaning of the word kohen includes both the idea of basis and direction. Even when the masses are infatuated by heathen concepts, and immorality is rife amongst the powerful, the kohen must guard the sanctuary of the Torah, reaffirming both the basis and the direction of Jewish life. However, the kohanim did not always live up to their calling and their name, and Hashem proclaimed that those who fail in their task were to be barred from the priestly functions of bringing the offerings. However in contrast to these people, the Haftorah depicts those kohanim who, revering their ancestor Zadok, showed a brilliant contrast and kept the true spirit of the tribe of Levi.

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch)

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



THE MERIT SYSTEM

Why will Hashem not abandon His people Israel?

"For Hashem will not abandon His people," states one passage (*Shmuel I 12:22*), "because of His great Name."

But another passage (*Tehillim 94:14*) declares "Hashem will not abandon His people nor forsake His heritage."

When Jews in *Eretz Yisrael* are in trouble, Hashem promises not to abandon them because of their merits and the merit of their land which is called Hashem's heritage. But when Jews are outside of *Eretz Yisrael* Hashem has mercy on them so that His great Name, which is identified with them, will not be desecrated.

(*Ruth Rabbah 2*)