

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Part of the problem of leadership is that one who achieves position and prominence is always held to a higher standard of behavior and accomplishment than we ordinary humans. In this week's parsha the Torah sets out special and stringent rules for the descendants of Aharon, the kohanim/priests of Israel.

Apparently with public privilege there are added responsibilities. Because of this, the Torah describes and demands specific personal and public behavior, actions and attitudes from kohanim. The prophet will later record for us that the lips of the kohein will guard knowledge and the people will ask for Torah lessons from him for he is likened unto an angel of the Lord of hosts.

To this verse the Talmud comments that if he resembles an angel of the Lord of hosts then the people should ask of him to teach them Torah. However, if in his personal and public deportment he bears no resemblance whatsoever to an angel of the Lord of hosts then the people should abstain from asking him to teach them Torah.

In the long history of the Jewish people, both in First and Second Temple times there were righteous High Priests who resembled angels and there were those who disgraced their exalted position by immoral and sinful behavior. There were Saducean High Priests who denied the very divinity of the office that they occupied. And there were righteous High Priests, such as Shimon HaTzadik, who proved to be the saviors of Israel in difficult and dangerous times. To a great extent, the entire situation of Israel, favorable or otherwise, depended on the High Priest and his attitudes and comportment.

It is interesting to note that the Torah in this week's parsha lays down many rules about the actions and behavior of the kohanim regarding their own personal lives. Apparently, nowhere does the Torah

deal with public policy issues and the national direction in which the kohanim are to lead the people of Israel.

The Torah assumes that people who behave in a holy and correct fashion in their own personal lives will benefit from Divine intuition and aid when it comes to making vital decisions about public policy for the Jewish people. Shimon HaTzadik saved the Jewish commonwealth of his day from destruction by Alexander the Great through successful and clever negotiation. The Tzadik bested the Great in that encounter.

That is why throughout Tanach we find the leaders of Israel being judged not so much by their public persona, policy decisions or by their wars and victories and reverses, as much as by their private behavior and interpersonal relationships and actions. In the blessings of the Haftorah reading we state that the Lord gave us good prophets? people of personal worth and integrity, of honesty and morality and correct Torah behavior.

Bad people are disqualified from being our true prophets. There are no perfect people so there cannot be any perfect leaders either. Yet, the Torah demands that the kohanim constantly strive for holiness and self-improvement. It therefore prescribes a regimen of behavior in personal life that will aid the kohein in that quest for holy self-fulfillment. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein-Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Alongside the holiness of place and person is the holiness of time, something parshat Emor charts in its deceptively simple list of festivals and holy days (Lev. 23: 1-44).

Time plays an enormous part in Judaism. The first thing G-d declared holy was a day: Shabbat, at the conclusion of creation.

The first mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a whole, prior to the Exodus, was the command to sanctify time, by determining and applying the Jewish calendar (Ex. 12: 1-2).

The prophets were the first people in history to see G-d in history, seeing time itself as the arena of the Divine-human encounter. Virtually every other religion

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated

לזכר נשמת

ג'ון ג'ון בת המרוחם אבא ע"ה

in memory of

Jon Jon bat Mola Aba a"h

by her grandson Ramin Kohen

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and civilization before and since has identified G-d, reality and truth with timelessness.

Isaiah Berlin used to quote Alexander Herzen who said about the Slavs that they had no history, only geography. The Jews, he said, had the reverse: a great deal of history but all too little geography. Much time, but little space.

So time in Judaism is an essential medium of the spiritual life. But there is one feature of the Jewish approach to time that has received less attention than it should: the duality that runs through its entire temporal structure.

Take, for instance, the calendar as a whole. Christianity uses a solar calendar, Islam a lunar one. Judaism uses both. We count time both by the monthly cycle of the moon and the seasonal cycle of the sun.

Then consider the day. Days normally have one identifiable beginning, whether this is at nightfall or daybreak or - as in the West - somewhere between. For calendar purposes, the Jewish day begins at nightfall ("And it was evening and it was morning, one day"). But if we look at the structure of the prayers - the morning prayer instituted by Abraham, afternoon by Isaac, evening by Jacob - there is a sense in which the worship of the day starts in the morning, not the night before.

Years, too, usually have one fixed beginning - the "new year". In Judaism, according to the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 1:1), there are no less than four new years. The first of Elul is the new year for the tithing of animals. The fifteenth of Shevat (the first according to Bet Shammai) is the new year for trees. These are specific and subsidiary dates, but the other two are more fundamental.

According to the Torah, the first month of the year is Nisan. This was the day the earth became dry after the Flood (Gen. 8: 13). It was the day the Israelites received their first command as a people (Ex. 12: 2). One year later it was the day the Tabernacle was dedicated and the service of the priests inaugurated (Ex. 40: 2). But the festival we call the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, falls six months later.

Holy time itself comes in two forms, as Emor makes clear. There is Shabbat and there are the festivals, and the two are announced separately. Shabbat was sanctified by G-d at the beginning of time for all time. The festivals are sanctified by the Jewish

people to whom was given the authority and responsibility for fixing the calendar.

Hence the difference in the blessings we say. On Shabbat we praise G-d who "sanctifies Shabbat". On the festivals we praise G-d who sanctifies "Israel and the holy times" - meaning, it is G-d who sanctifies Israel but Israel who sanctify the holy times, determining on which days the festivals fall.

Even within the festivals there is a dual cycle. One is formed by the three pilgrimage festivals: Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. These are days that represent the key historic moments at the dawn of Jewish time - the Exodus, the giving of the Torah, and the forty years of desert wandering. They are festivals of history.

The other is formed by the number seven and the concept of holiness: the seventh day, Shabbat; the seventh month, Tishri, with its three festivals of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot; the seventh year, Shemittah; and the Jubilee marking the completion of seven seven-year cycles.

These times (with the exception of Sukkot that belongs to both cycles) have less to do with history than with what, for want of a better word, we might call metaphysics and jurisprudence, ultimate truths about the universe, the human condition, and the laws, both natural and moral, under which we live.

Each is about creation (Shabbat, a reminder of it, Rosh Hashanah the anniversary of it), divine sovereignty, justice and judgment, together with the human condition of life, death, mortality. So on Yom Kippur we face justice and judgment. On Sukkot/Shmini Atseret we pray for rain, celebrate nature (the arba minim, lulav, etrog, hadassim and aravot, are the only mitzvah we do with unprocessed natural objects), and read the book of Kohelet, Tanakh's most profound meditation on mortality.

In Judaism time is both historical and natural. Unexpected, counter-intuitive, certainly. But glorious in its refusal to simplify the rich complexity of time: the ticking clock, the growing plant, the ageing body and the ever-deepening mind.

In the seventh and Jubilee years we acknowledge G-d's ultimate ownership of the land of Israel and the children of Israel. Hence we let slaves go free, release debts, let the land rest, and restore most property to its original owners. All of these have to do not with G-d's interventions into history but with his role as Creator and owner of the universe.

One way of seeing the difference between the first cycle and the second is to compare the prayers on Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot with those of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Amidah of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot begins with the phrase "You chose us from all the peoples." The emphasis is on Jewish particularity.

By contrast, the Amidah for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur begins by speaking of "all You have made, all You have created". The emphasis is on

universality: about the judgment that affects all of creation, everything that lives.

Even Sukkot has a marked universalist thrust with its seventy sacrificial bulls representing the "seventy nations". According to Zechariah 14, it is the festival that will one day be celebrated by all the nations.

Why the duality? Because G-d is both the G-d of nature and of culture. He is the G-d of everyone in general, and of the people of the covenant in particular. He is the Author of both scientific law (cause) and religious-ethical law (command).

We encounter G-d in both cyclical time, which represents the movement of the planets, and linear-historical time, which represents the events and evolution of the nation of which we are a part. This very duality gives rise to two kinds of religious leader: the prophet and the priest, and the different consciousness of time each represents.

Since the ancient Greeks, people have searched for a single principle that would explain everything, or the single point Archimedes sought at which to move the world, or the unique perspective (what philosophers call "the view from nowhere") from which to see truth in all its objectivity.

Judaism tells us there is no such point. Reality is more complicated than that. There is not even a single concept of time. At the very least we need two perspectives to be able to see reality in three dimensions, and that applies to time as well as space. Jewish time has two rhythms at once.

Judaism is to the spirit what Niels Bohr's complementarity theory is to quantum physics. In physics light is both a wave and a particle. In Judaism time is both historical and natural. Unexpected, counter-intuitive, certainly. But glorious in its refusal to simplify the rich complexity of time: the ticking clock, the growing plant, the ageing body and the ever-deepening mind. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah gives us a glimpse into the kohanim's status during Mashiach's times. The prophet Yechezkel begins by directing our attention to the specific regulations of the kohanim's garb. He then refers to their restriction from wine and shaving and mentions their prohibition from marrying certain women. This list seems to be, at first glance, a total repetition of the details of our parsha. Yet, a more careful analysis reveals to us something shocking about the elevated status of the ordinary kohain of Mashiach's times. His restrictions and regulations are similar to those of the Kohain Gadol mentioned in this week's parsha. This suggests that the ordinary kohain's spiritual status will be likened to that of the Kohain Gadol. Evidently, the Jewish people's status will be so elevated that the ordinary kohain will assume levels of

sanctity tantamount to the most sanctified person of earlier times.

The prophet Yechezkel conveys this message by drawing our focus to the priestly garb during their service. It will be exclusively linen rather than the customary complex woolen and golden material of earlier times. In addition, the kohanim will be forbidden to wear their garb outside the Bais Hamikdash thereby limiting all mundane association with the garb. Their hair length will be regulated and limited to that of the Kohain Gadol of earlier times- not too long, not too short. They will even be forbidden to marry widows thus limiting their marriage to virgins. (see comments of Radak, Abravenel and Malbim to these respective passages) All of these regulations run parallel lines with those of the earlier Kohain Gadol. In fact, some of them were previously prescribed for the Kohain Gadol during his elevated Yom Kippur service. We conclude from this that the daily Temple service of Mashiach's times will assume higher levels of devotion than ever and resemble, on some level, the Yom Kippur service of earlier generations. The earlier experience of the Kohain Gadol on the holiest of all days in the holiest of all places will eventually become part of the daily service of Mashiach's times!

In order to digest this overwhelming development let us study the inner workings of the Kohain Gadol. In this week's parsha, the Torah gives us the reason for the Kohain Gadol's elevated status. After listing all his specific regulations the Torah states "And he should not leave the Mikdash and not profane the sanctity of Hashem because the crown of Hashem is upon his head." (Vayikra 21:12) Sefer HaChinuch (in Mitzva 270) elaborates upon the concept of "the crown of Hashem". He cites the opinion of the Rambam (in Hilchos Klei Hamikdash 5:7) that the Kohain Gadol was confined to the Bais Hamikdash area throughout his entire day of service. In addition, Rambam teaches us that the Kohain Gadol was forbidden to leave the holy city of Yerushalayim during nightly hours. This produced an incredible focus on Hashem and His service yielding the supreme sanctity of the Kohain Gadol. Sefer HaChinuch profoundly states, "Although the Kohain Gadol was human he was designated to be Holy of Holies. His soul ranked amongst the angels constantly cleaving to Hashem thus detaching the Kohain Gadol from all mundane interests and concerns." (ad loc) Sefer HaChinuch understands the Kohain Gadol's elevated sanctity as a product of his total immersion in the service of Hashem. His surroundings of total sanctity together with his constant focus on Hashem and His service produced the holiest man on earth. His elevated life-style was restricted to one of total sanctity because his total interest and focus were devoted to purity and sanctity.

We can now appreciate the sanctity of the ordinary kohain of Mashiach's times and its message for us. First, a word about the general status of the

Jewish people during that era. The prophet Yeshaya refers to this illustrious time in the following terms, "And the land will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem likened to the water that fills the sea." (Yeshaya 11:9) Rambam elaborates upon this and states, "And in this time there will be no jealousy or quarreling... the preoccupation of all will be 'to know Hashem'...the Jewish people will be great scholars who will understand Hashem to maximum human capacity." (Hilchos M'lochim 12:5) In essence, the entire Jewish nation will be absorbed in learning Hashem's truthful ways. Their total focus will be on Hashem's expression in every aspect of life thus revealing more and more of His unlimited goodness and knowledge. It stands to reason that if this will be the knowledge of the ordinary Jew, how much greater will be that of the kohain who is privileged to stand in the actual presence of Hashem! One cannot begin contemplating the ordinary kohain's daily experience with Hashem. His profound knowledge of Hashem together with his direct and constant association with Him will truly elevate him to the sanctity of "Holy of Holies". His awareness of Hashem's presence will therefore, in certain ways, become tantamount to that of the Kohain Gadol on the holiest day of the year. May we soon merit to witness and experience such elevated levels of sanctity, so sorely needed in our times. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

Our parsha, Emor, contains the different yomim tovim. "In the first month, on the 15th day, Chag Hamatzos, the holiday of Matzos... And count seven weeks and bring a mincha chadasha (a new offering) to Hashem... And on the first day of the seventh month, a memorial of blowing the horn (shofar)... And on the tenth day, Yom Hakipurim... And on the 15th day, Chag HaSukkos..."

Chag HaShavuot is not named and the fact that it is the day of Matan Torah, the day when the very purpose of creation was realized, is not even mentioned! If it's referred to simply as a day of "mincha chadasha," a new offering, then that term must somehow reveal to us the core essence of Matan Torah.

We tend to get bored with the old, always looking for something new and exciting. The Torah has a supernatural quality—each repetition yields new bounties. Learning without reviewing is compared to planting without harvesting. Each time it's approached, it's a new encounter. A new harvest, followed by a new harvest, followed by a new harvest, with an infinite number of new harvests looming on the horizon.

The Kli Yakar explains that it would have been an injustice to the Torah had Matan Torah been relegated to a specific day. It would then be limited,

finite, attainable in a day. The Torah is, in fact, given every day—the harvests are always ready to be reaped.

But this gift wasn't always available for us. Thousands of years had to pass from the time of creation. Bnei Yisroel had to endure centuries of slavery. Only then could this r'chush gadol, this precious commodity, be received.

That day when this precious gift was first made available to us is termed the day of the "mincha chadasha." A mincha chadasha is brought on Shavuot because that is the day when the perennial mincha chadasha was given to us. Open. Expansive.

Limited only by the time and effort that we are willing to expend. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“And he [the Kohen] shall be sanctified..." (Leviticus 21: 8). I have long been fascinated by the blessing recited by the kohen-priests as they call upon G-d to bless the Jewish people: "Blessed art thou O Lord our G-d, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless His nation Israel with love."

Does this introduction to the Priestly Benediction imply that the kohen must discharge his blessing with love in his heart for every single Jew, or at least for every Jew in the congregation? Should we then test the kohen-priest before he stands in front of the Holy Ark to bless us, asking him whether, indeed, he loves everyone?

I have suggested that the words "with love" do not refer to the person of the kohen-priest who is giving the blessing, but rather to the content of the blessing itself. The kohen-priest is asking the Almighty to grant His nation material success ("May He bless you and preserve you"), Divine forgiveness and grace ("May He lift His face upon you and be gracious to you"), and - as the climax - love of every Jew by every Jew ("And grant you peace").

Peace in this context refers to internal peace, like the freely-given love between siblings (ahavat hinam) rather than the freely-given hatred (sinat hinam) which leads to the internal strife which has constantly plagued our nation. However, since the word in the blessing is "peace" rather than "love," it would seem that the benediction is concluding with peace from our enemies rather than a cessation of internal squabbling.

To understand this introduction to the benediction, it is necessary to understand the precise function of the kohen-priests. Yes, they ministered in the Temple, but that was only for two weeks a year. Since they did not own any land in Israel and lived off the sacrificial and tithe offerings of the nation, what did this elite class do the rest of the time?

Just before his death, in Moses' final benediction to the nation, he blessed the tribe of Levi, which included the kohen-priests as its most prominent constituency: "They shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel" (Deuteronomy 33:10). In this week's haftara, Ezekiel further defines the priestly function: "And they shall teach My nation the difference between the holy and the profane, and inform them as to what is ritually impure and what is pure. And in a controversy, they shall stand in judgment; they shall judge in accordance with My laws, and they shall safeguard My teachings and My statutes and all of My festival days of meeting, and they shall sanctify my Sabbaths" (Ezekiel 44:23, 24).

The kohen-priest, therefore, was responsible for safeguarding the Torah. He served as the educator and religio-legal judge. It is for this reason that he had no other responsibilities such as working the land or providing for his family. His task was to be a teacher and judge, ensuring that Torah observance remains the hallmark of the Jewish people.

The greatest blessing which G-d has given us is the Torah, which defines our national mission and is the secret of our eternity. The kohen-priest was the source of this Torah blessing, the communicator of the Torah message during Temple times. Undoubtedly, a nation imbued with Torah will be eternally strong and illuminating. However, that Torah must be a Torah of love, a Torah which expresses the will of G-d who is a "force of compassion, freely given love, long-suffering, filled with loving kindness and truth."

This is why the kohen-priest must teach Torah and make religio-legal judgments which define Torah with love. A Torah which worries exclusively about the purity of Israel while disregarding the hapless aguna, a woman chained to an impossible marriage; a Torah which sets up picayune road blocks to the convert, totally oblivious to the fundamental command "And you shall love the proselyte," displays the very antithesis of that love with which the kohen must bless his people. Hence, the most important phrase in the introduction to the priestly benediction is indeed the words "with love."

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RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

“You are to count from the day after the rest day, from the day you brought the Omer-Offering that is waved; they are to be seven complete weeks. Until the day after the seventh week you are to count fifty days..." (Vayikra 23:15)

We are now well into the Omer-Count once again, this Shabbos being the 18th day of the Omer. The fact that it begins each year the next day after the Seder shows that it is really the continuation of all that was supposed to have been accomplished during the Seder, and that all that was supposed to be

accomplished at the Seder reaches its culmination 50 days later with the holiday of Shavuos.

It is no coincidence that the Omer-Count begins with animal food-an omer of barley-and ends with human food-two loaves of wheat bread-for this is what it is all about: going from animal food to human food. That is true growth, and that is true freedom, as the following midrash alludes: "Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi said: When The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Adam, 'It will bring forth thorns and thistles,' a tear formed in his eye. He said before Him, 'Master of the Universe! Will I and my donkey eat from the same trough?!' When He answered him, 'By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread,' he calmed down." (Pesachim 118a)

However, as the Meiri points out, physical ingestion is really a symbol of a intellectual and spiritual ingestion: "Flour comes from the grinding of wheat, which, the Ultimate Wisdom made for this purpose. Through this, man is distinguished from the rest of the animals, as already stated in the Talmud: "When The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Adam, 'It will bring forth thorns and thistles,' a tear formed in his eye. He said before Him, 'Master of the Universe! Will I and my donkey eat from the same trough?!' (Pesachim 118a). This means that, had it not been that his food was ground finely, he would not have been able to achieve the completion of Torah (i.e., receive Torah at Mt. Sinai 26 generations later)." (Meiri, Pirkei Avos 3:21)

Thus, though the Torah refers to Pesach as Chag HaMatzos to commemorate our eating of matzah during the holiday of Pesach, we call the holiday Chag Pesach-the holiday of skipping-to remind ourselves of how G-d skipped over the houses of the Jewish people to kill only the Egyptian firstborn during the tenth and final plague in Egypt.

But why was it necessary to skip over the Jewish houses in the first place? Because, tradition tells us, the Jewish people had been living amongst the Egyptians, and on the 49th level of spiritual impurity-if you can call that living-which means, for all intents and purposes, that we had been "eating" from the same trough as the donkey of that generation. That is, our outlook towards life had been similar to that of our Egyptian hosts.

For, as the Talmud explains, the body of the Jewish people is called "Adam" (Yevamos 63a), whereas Mitzrayim is always represented by the donkey. I say Mitzrayim, and not Egypt, because though they were once one and the same place, they are not necessarily one and the same place. In fact, today Egypt is hardly the conceptual Mitzrayim it once was, for it is not the prime representative of the yetzer hara in our generation.

Rather, over the millennia, the Mitzrayim mantle has been passed from one culture to another. Throughout history, there is always one nation, or one culture made up of many nations, that represents the main yetzer hara of the day:

"Therefore, they could not remain in Egypt a moment longer lest the Sitra Achra (i.e., the Satan) become completely eradicated and free-will become eliminated, the purpose of Creation. For, Egypt was the chief of all the Klipos (i.e., spiritual impurity) and if she been destroyed then so would the Sitra Achra and yetzer hara have been destroyed completely as well." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 408)

This is alluded to by the word mitzrayim itself, which Kabbalah explains to be a composite of two words: meitzer, meaning "border," and yam, which means "sea." However, Yud-Mem is also the gematria of 50, alluding to the Fifty Gates of Understanding, the complete opposite of the 49 Gates of Spiritual Impurity. Hence, Mitzrayim is any place, in any period of history, whose culture stifles religious growth and adherence to Torah values by creating an intellectual border to keep it out.

The result of such an approach to life will always end up being spiritually lacking. As the Talmud states: ain apitrophus l'arayos, which means, loosely, that when people lack a higher authority to respect and fear, they will fall prey to baser instincts, such as promiscuity. Heresy always leads to morally bankruptcy, something that is always represented by the donkey.

This is because the Hebrew word for donkey is chamor, which has the same letters as the word chomer-physical ingredient. Being "beasts of burden," they represent non-spiritual beings distant from the reality of G-d and the path of Torah. Any society that rejects G-d and Torah, no matter how intellectually active and physically robust it may be, spiritually-speaking, is compared to a donkey.

In modern political terms, that tends to be the Left. The political Left, in our society is usually viewed as being an "anything goes" type group of people, very "open" and accepting of all kinds of lifestyles-except that is, lifestyles that oppose it. Indeed, the Left can vehemently oppose such counter-lifestyles, which is why it tends to be quite anti-G-d and religion.

That is why it must be more than ironic that the one animal that has come to represent the American Democratic Part is the donkey:

"The most common mascot symbol for the party is the donkey, although the party never officially adopted this symbol. Andrew Jackson's opponents had labeled him a jackass during the intense mudslinging in 1828. A political cartoon titled "A Modern Bilaam and his Ass" depicting Jackson riding and directing a donkey (representing the Democratic Party) was published in 1837. A political cartoon by Thomas Nast in an 1870 edition of Harper's Weekly revived the donkey as a symbol for the Democratic Party. Cartoonists followed Nast and used the donkey to represent the Democrats, and the elephant to represent the Republicans." (Wikipedia)

Even more fascinating is the source for the symbol: Bilaam. Remember Bilaam? He was the one

whose donkey saw the angel that he could not see, and ended up speaking like a human to chastise and embarrass him. It was Heaven's way of saying: If you're going to act like a donkey, then We'll make your donkey act like a human. Talk about role reversal!

Who was Bilaam, and what did he have to do with the Jewish people? Actually, nothing. Bilaam was a Midianite whose country was not destined to be conquered by the approaching Jewish nation. However, his jealousy and hatred of the Jewish people dragged him into a conflict that was not his to enter, and he caused a lot of damage to the Jewish nation before he was finally taken down by Pinchas. (Sound familiar today at all?)

His main weapon of choice was speech. As Balak says to Bilaam: "Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed." (Bamidbar 22:6)

To curse something evil can be a good thing. However, to curse something good is an evil thing, and totally contrary to the purpose of Creation. As the Talmud states: "Rebi Elazar said: Every man was created to toil, as it says, 'Because man was made to toil' (Iyov 5:7). Now, I do not know if that means to toil through speech, or in actual labor; however, once it says, 'A toiling soul toils for him, for his mouth compels him' (Mishlei 16:26), I know that a person was created to toil with his mouth. I do not know, though, if this means to toil in Torah or just in regular conversation. However, once it says, 'This Torah should not leave your mouth' (Yehoshua 1:8), I know that man was created to toil in Torah [through speech]." (Sanhedrin 99b)

No wonder the Talmud admonishes: "Rava said: Anyone who speaks of non-holy matters (Rashi: childishly and light-headedly) has transgressed a positive commandment, as it says, 'Speak of them' (Devarim 6:7); 'them' (Rashi: words of Torah), and not other words." (Yoma 19b)

"Anyone who speaks distastefully will cause a negative decree from Heaven, even if they have 70 years of merits in their favor." (Kesuvos 8b)

For, as we learn from the Torah, what comes out of a person's mouth can distinguish him from the donkey more than what goes into it: "G-d formed man from dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils a living soul, and the man became a living spirit." (Bereishis 2:7)

"A living spirit: A speaking spirit." (Onkeles)

The impact of the soul that G-d gave to man, which made him different from all other living beings within Creation, was speech. This, then, would imply that, unlike many of our other physical abilities, speech is "rooted" high up in the spiritual realm. Hence the

Zohar explains: "From a man's mouth you can tell what he is." (Zohar, Bamidbar 193)

More accurately, you can tell how much his soul holds sway over his body. Actions can be deceiving, but what comes out of a person's mouth and how it does can be an instant indicator of his level of spirituality. Hence, a person is obligated to verbalize the Haggadah even when alone and he is totally familiar with it, and we count the Omer by verbally pronouncing it. Some even add the following after: "Master of the Universe, You commanded us through Moshe, Your servant to count the Omer-Count in order to cleanse us from our encrustations of evil and from our contaminations, as You have written in Your Torah, 'You are to count from the day after the rest day, from the day you brought the Omer-Offering that is waved; they are to be seven complete weeks. Until the day after the seventh week you are to count fifty days...' (Vayikra 23:15), so that the souls of Your people Israel be cleansed of their contamination. Therefore, may it be Your will, G-d, our G-d and the G-d of our Forefathers, that in the merit of the Omer-Count that I have counted today, that there be corrected whatever blemish I have caused in the sefirah... May I be cleansed and sanctified with the holiness of above, and through this may abundant bounty flow in all the worlds. And may it correct our lives, spirits, and souls from all sediment and blemish; may it cleanse us and sanctify us with Your exalted holiness. Amen, Selah!"

We use speech, like a spiritual thermometer, to calculate how close or distant we are from being like a donkey. And then we use the Omer-Count to bring us to the level of Adam in order to receive Torah, and make the break from the donkey once and for all. © 2011 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's Torah portion presents many rules pertaining to the Kohen (Jewish priest). Among these laws is the prohibition against any contact with the dead. Except for his closest family members, the Kohen cannot touch a dead corpse, be present at burial or even be in the same room as a dead body. What is the rationale of this prohibition and what is its relationship to the Kehuna (priesthood)?

Perhaps the reasoning of this law lies with an understanding of the difference between the ultimate goal of life itself. Some faith communities see the ultimate goal of existence the arrival in the life hereafter. Christianity, for example, insists that redemption is dependent upon the belief that Jesus died for one's sins. In Islam, martyrdom is revered, as only through death can one reach the ultimate world.

The Torah, on the other hand, is fundamentally a system that accentuates commitment to G-d, in this world-the world of the living. While Judaism does

believe that the hereafter is of important status, it takes a back seat to this world. As the Psalmist states, "I shall not die but live and proclaim the works of the Lord," (Psalms 118:17) and "The dead cannot praise the Lord....but we (the living) will bless the Lord now and forever." (Psalms 115:17-18)

To teach this point the Kohen, the teacher par excellence is mandated not to have any contact with the dead. This is a way of imparting the concept that the ultimate sanctification of G-d is not through death but through life.

My dear friend and teacher, Rabbi Saul Berman has suggested another approach. It was the priest of old who was often called on to intercede on behalf of the deceased. In ancient times, families hoped that through such intercession, the dead person would receive a better place in the life hereafter. In such situations, the priest may have been tempted to, and sometimes did, take payoffs for intervening.

It is then understandable that the Torah insists that the Kohen have no contact whatsoever with the deceased. This would make it impossible for him to take advantage of people, particularly when they are going through a deep loss, when they are most vulnerable.

Today, the community, whether justified or not, sees the rabbi as the primary intermediary between G-d and humanity. Although most rabbis are not Kohanim (descendants of priests), I have the great honor of being both a rabbi and a Kohen. Due to my status as a Kohen, it has not always been easy for me to fulfill my role as the rabbi. Due to this limited ability to become involved in the bereavement process, I have gained a unique perspective toward death and mourning. The requirement to not fully engage has taught me that although in their time of most intense grief mourners need the support of family, friends and rabbis, there is such a thing as over involvement. No one fully understands the mystery of death, and no one can solve this age old question for a mourner as s/he sits beside her or his deceased loved one.

Only G-d knows these answers. Although they must stand as a support and comfort, no rabbi nor priest can serve as a buffer or intermediary between the intense dialogue between a grief stricken mourner and the Almighty One at the deepest moment of loneliness, the moment of loss. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And G-d said to Moshe, 'say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them [the following]' (Vayikra 21:1). The laws that follow pertain mainly to the Kohanim (the priestly class),

such as the prohibition against coming in contact with corpses and the limitations on whom they can marry. Nevertheless, there are laws contained in this section that are pertinent for non-Kohanim too. For example, we are obligated to treat Kohanim a certain way (see Rashi on 21:8), and to make sure that the Kohanim keep their additional obligations/restrictions (see Rashi on 21:6 and 21:8). Why was this section of the Torah "said" only to the Kohanim, and not to everyone?

This question is posed by Rav Aharon Leib Steinman, sh'lita (Ayeles HaShachar), who suggests that the verse should be translated as "say *about* the Kohanim" rather than "say *to* the Kohanim," with these laws being said to everyone (not just the Kohanim). Although translating the word "el" as "about" rather than "to" may seem to be a stretch, Radak (Sefer HaSherashim, aleph-lamed-hey) quotes numerous verses where "el" means something other than "to" (sometimes meaning "from" or "on"), including Beraishis 20:20, where Avraham said "about" Sara that she was his sister (which is how most commentators, including Rashi, understand it). This is backed up by a later verse (21:24), inserted between additional sets of laws pertaining to Kohanim, which says explicitly that "Moshe spoke (i.e. said over the just-taught laws) to Aharon, and to his sons, and to all of the Children of Israel." If the laws weren't taught only to the Kohanim, then they couldn't have been said only to the Kohanim.

One of the issues discussed by the commentators is why the first verse in our Parasha (21:1) says "say" twice (see Rashi and Ramban). Ibn Ezra and Sefornu say G-d was telling Moshe to tell the Kohanim the laws contained in last week's Parasha, which apply to the entire nation, and then to tell them the following laws, which apply only to them. Aside from Rav Steinman's question (that some details of these laws pertain to others too), these commentators would need to address why these laws were said only to the Kohanim (21:1) while other laws that are Kohain-focused were taught to everybody (21:24).

Although Moshe was taught all of the mitzvos at Sinai, he was taught them again in the Mishkan. Moshe didn't come down from Mt. Sinai and begin teaching everything to the nation immediately-this would have been too much, and little, if any, would have been retained. Children learn things piece by piece, as they become aware of what is happening in the home and as they learn them in school; learning everything as an adult is a much more difficult task. The generation that received the Torah was given a few mitzvos in Egypt, and then several more at Marah. As Moshe was taught each mitzvah again in the Mishkan, he taught it to the nation. By the end of their 40 years in the desert, all of the mitzvos had been learned, but they were not all taught right away, and not all at once. Chazal (Sifre, B'haalosecha 8/66) tell us that the laws of the holidays, which appear as a contiguous set of teachings in our Parasha, were not taught consecutively, as part of one

lesson or series of lectures. Instead, the laws for each holiday were taught separately, shortly before each holiday came up on the calendar ("the laws of Pesach by Pesach, the laws of Atzeres by Atzeres," etc.).

The Talmud (Gittin 60a) says that eight sections of the Torah were taught on the first day of the Mishkan's operation (Sifre Zuta, Naso 7:11, says 15 sections were taught that first day), all of which had become necessary once the Mishkan was operational. One of those eight sections was the beginning of our Parasha, the laws pertaining to the special status of the Kohanim. Even though it was necessary for the Kohanim to be taught the laws that applied to them and their service in the Mishkan right away, it was not as urgent for the rest of the nation to learn these laws immediately. Under normal circumstances, they would have been taught these laws at the same time that the Kohanim were. However, since there were so many other new laws being taught to them then, it was more prudent to wait before teaching these laws to everyone else. Therefore, even though these laws were relevant (to some extent) to non-Kohanim too, when they were originally taught, on the first day of the Mishkan, Moshe was told to only teach them to the Kohanim. Eventually, after the laws pertaining to the holiness of the entire nation (last week's Parasha) were taught to everyone, these laws were taught to the nation as well.

This would explain why prohibitions that apply equally to non-Kohanim (such as not "shaving the corners of their beards," see 21:5) are taught here only to the Kohanim. The Kohanim were taught these restrictions first, before they were taught to everyone else, and when Moshe taught this section to the rest of the nation, he kept the wording intact, teaching it the same way he had taught it to the Kohanim. In the Torah, this section appears in the order it was taught to the nation (after Parashas Kedoshim), even if the lesson itself was first taught much earlier, when it was taught to the Kohanim.

The first verse could be understood to mean "say to the Kohanim" now, on the first day of the Mishkan, "and you shall say to them," i.e. to the rest of the nation, later, when the time is right. Although it was originally said just "to the Kohanim" (21:4), Moshe eventually taught it to "all of the Children of Israel" (21:24). © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

