

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

EMOR

Leviticus 21:1-24:23

Torah Reading for Week of May 4-10, 2003

"Speak," says G-d to Moses in the Parshah of Emor, "to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them..."

The Kohanim ("priests"), who perform the service in the Holy Temple on behalf of the people, must adhere to a higher standard of sanctity. They must avoid all contact with a dead body, except in the case of a mother, father, son, daughter, brother or unmarried sister. A Kohen is also forbidden to marry "a harlot or profaned woman; neither shall they take a woman divorced from her husband."

And he that is the high priest (Kohen HaGadol) among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and who is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not suffer the hair of his head to grow long, nor rend his clothes.

Commentary

SPEAK TO THE KOHANIM, THE SONS OF AARON, AND SAY TO THEM... (LEVITICUS 21:1)

"Speak" and "say"—enjoin the elders regarding the youngsters..

(Talmud; Rashi)

The above dictum, which constitutes a primary biblical source for the concept of education, also offers insight into the nature of education.

The word used by the Talmud and Rashi—*lehaszir*, "to enjoin"—also means "to shine." Hence the phrase "to enjoin the elders regarding the youngsters" also translates "to illuminate the elders regarding the youngsters." Education is not only an elder teaching a youngster—it is also an illumination for the educator.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AND FOR HIS VIRGIN SISTER, WHO HAS NOT MARRIED A MAN—FOR HER, HE MAY CONTAMINATE HIMSELF (21:3)

Thus the verse states: "Who is this, coming from Edom? Of rancid and bloodied clothes, from Bozrah? ... I, [replies G-d,] who speaks in righteousness, mighty to save... all My garments, I have soiled" (Isaiah 63:1-3). Israel is G-d's "virgin sister, who has not married a man"—who has resisted all the alien masters she has been subject to throughout her exile. For her sake, G-d "contaminates" Himself, to battle her enemies and to raise her

Neither shall he go in to any dead body, nor contaminate himself [even] for his father or for his mother.

Neither shall he go out of the Sanctuary... for the crown of the anointing oil of his G-d is upon him

The Kohen Gadol may not marry a widow either, for "he shall marry a woman in her virginity."

A Kohen with a physical deformity cannot serve in the Holy Temple, nor can a deformed animal be brought as an offering.

Also commanded in Emor,

A bullock, or sheep, or goat that is born, shall be seven days under its mother; and from the eighth day and thenceforth it shall be accepted for an offering made by fire to G-d.

And whether it be cow or ewe, you shall not kill it and its young both in one day...

Our Parshah also contains the precept, "I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel," which implies the duty to "sanctify the Name" by giving up one's life, if necessary, rather than betray our covenant with G-d.

from the dust..

(Zohar)

NEITHER SHALL HE CONTAMINATE HIMSELF [EVEN] FOR HIS FATHER, OR FOR HIS MOTHER (21:11)

But he does contaminate himself for the sake of a met mitzvah (a dead person who has no one to attend to him).

(Talmud, Rashi)

I SHALL BE SANCTIFIED AMONG THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL (22:32)

It was resolved in the upper chambers of the house of Nithza in Lod: Regarding every law of the Torah, if a man is threatened, "Transgress, lest you be killed," he may transgress to avoid being killed... as it is written (Leviticus 18:5), "[And you keep My statutes and My laws, which man should do and] live by them"—not die by them... except for idolatry, *arayot* (incest and adultery), and murder [for which a person must give up his life rather than transgress].

When Rav Dimi came, he said: This applies only if there is no tyrant's decree [whose purpose is to uproot the Jewish faith]; but if there is a tyrant's decree, one must incur martyrdom rather than transgress even a minor precept. When Rabin came, he said in Rabbi Yochanan's name: Even without a tyrant's decree, it was only permitted in private; but in public one must be

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Appointments in Time

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: The appointed times of G-d, which you shall proclaim as callings of holiness—these are My appointed times::

Six days shall work be done. But the seventh day is a sabbath [of solemn rest](#), a calling of holiness, you shall do no work: it is a sabbath to G-d in all your dwellings....

On the fourteenth day of the first month towards evening is G-d's Passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the Feast of Matzot to G-d: seven days you shall eat unleavened bread.

The first and seventh days of the "[Festival of Matzot](#)"

are days of rest, on which no work is done.

On the second day of Passover, an *omer* (a biblical measure, the equivalent of approximately 43 ounces) of barley, from the very first grain harvest of the year, is to be brought as an offering in the Holy Temple; it is forbidden to eat from the year's harvest until the Omer offering is brought. From that day begins the count-down to the festival of Shavuot, when an offering of "two breads," prepared from wheat, are offered:

And you shall count for yourselves from the morrow of the Shabbat, from the day on which you bring the Omer offering, seven complete weeks they shall be; until the morrow of the seventh week, you shall count fifty days... And you shall proclaim that very day a holy festival.

More Appointments

The first of the seventh month (Tishrei) is a day of [remembrance](#) and blowing of the [shofar](#) (ram's horn). The tenth day of that month,

Shall be a day of atonement; it shall be a calling of holiness to you. You shall afflict your souls, and offer

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martyred even for a minor precept rather than violate it. What is meant by a "minor precept"? - Rabah the son of Rav Yitzchak said in Rab's name: Even to change one's shoe strap (from Jewish to Gentile custom).

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 74a)

THESE ARE THE APPOINTED TIMES OF G-D, CALLINGS OF HOLINESS, WHICH YOU SHALL CALL IN THEIR APPOINTED TIME (23:2)

The festivals are "callings of holiness" (*mikra'ei kodesh*) in the sense that each is a landmark in time at which we are empowered to call forth the particular holiness, or spiritual quality, imbedded within it.

On the first Passover, for example, G-d granted us the gift of freedom. On the first Shavuot, He gave us the Torah; on Rosh Hashanah, G-d became king of the universe, and humankind was instilled with an awe of its Creator; on Yom Kippur, we received the gift of *teshuvah*; and so on. But freedom, wisdom, awe, joy, peace, and the other divine gifts granted in the course of our history are constant needs of the soul; they are the spiritual nutrients that sustain her in her journey through life. G-d imbedded these qualities within the very substance of time, and set "appointed times" at which they can be accessed. Each year, when we arrive at the juncture of time where a particular spiritual quality has been embedded, we are granted the ability to access it once again.

The special mitzvot of each festival are the tools with which we "call forth" the "holiness" of the day: eating matzah on Passover unearths the gift of freedom, sounding the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah calls forth its quality of awe, and so on with all "the appointed times of G-d."

(The Chassidic Masters)

A king was traveling through the desert, and his son, the crown prince, thirsted for water. But instead of dispatching a horseman to fetch water from the nearest town, the king ordered a well to be dug at that very spot, and to mark it with a signpost.

"At the present time," explained the king to his son, "we have the means to obtain water far more quickly and easily. But perhaps one day, many years in the future, you will again be traveling this way. Perhaps you will be alone, without the power and privilege you now enjoy. Then, the well we dug today will be here to quench your thirst. Even if the sands of time have filled it, you will be able to reopen it, if you remember the spot and follow the signpost we have set."

This is what G-d did for us by establishing the festivals at those points in time when He initially granted us the gift of freedom on Passover, joy of Sukkot, and so on.

(Mar'eh Yechezkel)

AND YOU SHALL COUNT FOR YOURSELVES FROM THE MORROW OF THE SHABBAT, FROM THE DAY ON WHICH YOU BRING THE OMER OFFERING, SEVEN COMPLETE WEEKS THEY SHALL BE... (23:15)

The word *sefirah*, "counting", also means "luminance". On each of the 49 days of the *Sefirat HaOmer* ("Counting of the Omer"), we refine, rarify and illuminate another of the forty-nine traits of our soul.

(Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi)

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an offering made by fire to G-d. You shall do no work on that very same day; for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before G-d.

On the fifteenth of Tishrei begins the seven-day Sukkot festival, followed by an eighth day of festivities (Shemini Atzeret):

The first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath.

And you shall take for yourselves on the first day, the fruit of the splendid tree, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick leaved trees, and willows of the brook; and you shall rejoice before G-d your G-d seven days...

You shall dwell in huts seven days... so that your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to

dwell in huts, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt; I am G-d your G-d.

And Moses declared to the children of Israel the appointed seasons of G-d.

The Blasphemer

The son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this son of the Israelite woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp.

And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of G-d, and cursed. They brought him to Moses; and his mother's name was Shelomit, the daughter of Divri, of the tribe of Dan. And they put him in custody, for [his penalty] to be specified by the mouth of G-d.

And G-d spoke to Moses, saying, Bring forth him that has cursed outside the camp... and all the congregation shall stone him.

On that occasion, G-d also commands that one who murders a fellow man shall meet the death penalty; one who injures a fellow, or kills an animal, must make monetary restitution.

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IN THE SEVENTH MONTH, ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE MONTH, SHALL YOU HAVE A SABBATH, A MEMORIAL OF BLOWING OF HORNS, A CALLING OF HOLINESS (23:24)

On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed: How many shall pass on, and how many shall be born. Who shall live, and who shall die; who in his time, and who before his time. Who by water, and who by fire; who by sword, and who by beast; who by hunger, and by thirst; who by earthquake, and who by plague. Who shall rest, and who shall wander ... Who shall be impoverished, and who shall be enriched. Who shall fall and who shall rise.

(from the Rosh Hashanah prayers)

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, all things revert to their primordial state. The Inner Will ascends and is retracted into the divine essence; the worlds are in a state of sleep and are sustained only by the Outer Will. The service of man on Rosh Hashanah is to rebuild the divine attribute of sovereignty and reawaken the divine desire, "I shall reign," with the sounding of the *shofar*.

(Pri Etz Chaim)

FOR IT IS A DAY OF ATONEMENT, TO ATONE FOR YOU BEFORE G-D (23:28)

[The sages say:] Yom Kippur atones only for those who repent. Rabbi [Judah HaNassi] says: Yom Kippur atones whether one repents or one does not repent.

(Talmud, Shevuot 13a)

On Yom Kippur, the day itself atones... as it is written, "For on this day, it shall atone for you."

(Mishneh Torah)

YOU SHALL DWELL IN HUTS SEVEN DAYS (23:42)

How [does one fulfill] the mitzvah of dwelling in the *sukkah*? One should eat, drink, and live in the *sukkah*, both day and night, as one lives in one's house on the other days of the year: for seven days a person should make his home his temporary dwelling, and his *sukkah* his permanent dwelling.

(Shulchan Aruch)

Sukkah is the only mitzvah into which a person enters with his muddy boots.

(Chassidic saying)

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From the Chassidic Masters

A POOL OF FIRE

And G-d said to Moses: ... [a Kohen] shall not contaminate himself [through contact with] the dead of his people. Except for his closest kin—his mother, father, son, daughter or brother. Or for his virgin sister... who has not married a man—for her, he should contaminate himself...

But the Kohen Gadol, the greater of his brethren... may not come in contact with any dead; [even] for his father or mother, he may not contaminate himself.

Leviticus 21:1-11

A heretic once asked Rabbi Avahu: "Your G-d is a Kohen; so in what did He immerse Himself after He buried Moses?" Replied Rabbi Avahu: "He immersed in fire."

Talmud, Sanhedrin 39a

G-d is the essence of life, and the ultimate definition of "life" is contact with the divine. Our sages have therefore stated that "the righteous, even after their physical deaths, are, in truth, alive, while the wicked are dead even in their lifetimes."

Death is thus an aberration, unnatural to a world intrinsically one with its Creator. Indeed, death became part of our reality only after man distanced himself from G-d with his transgression of the divine will. By the same token, the annihilation of evil and the restoration of perfect harmony between G-d and His creation in the era of Moshiach will bring the cessation of death from our experience.

Until that day, contact with the dead (handling a corpse, visiting a grave, etc.) renders a person *tameh*—ritually impure—until he undergoes a process of purification that includes immersion in a *mikvah*. A Kohen ("priest"—one of Araon's descendents, who were chosen by G-d to serve Him in the Holy Temple) is forbidden to become *tameh* in the first place, unless it is to bury a close relative, as detailed in the verses quoted above. The Kohen Gadol ("high priest"), who is commanded to maintain an even higher standard of ritual purity, may not contaminate himself even for his closest kin.

Our sages tell us that Torah law (*Halachah*) is more than a divinely ordained behavior pattern for life on

earth: it also describes G-d's own "behavior pattern," the manner in which He chooses to relate to His creation. When we order our lives after Torah's directives, we are not only fulfilling G-d's will—we are also emulating His "behavior," translating the divine relationship with creation into human/physical terms. In the words of the Midrash, "G-d's manner is not like the manner of flesh and blood. The manner of flesh and blood is that he instructs others to do, but does not do himself; G-d, however, what He Himself does, that is what He tells Israel to do and observe."

It would therefore follow that G-d, who ascribes to Himself the Halachic status of a Kohen (see Talmud, Sanhedrin 39a) is precluded by Torah law from "contaminating" Himself through contact with the impurities of mortality. Yet the Torah tells us that G-d Himself buried Moses, and the Talmud discusses how He subsequently purified Himself in a "pool of fire." Our sages explain: The people of Israel are "G-d's children"; Moses is thus one of G-d's "closest kin," for whom a Kohen is permitted—indeed obligated—to become *tameh*.

In the same vein, the prophet Isaiah describes G-d's descent into the impurities of *galut* ("exile") to redeem His people: "Who is this, coming from Edom? Of soured and reddened clothes, from Bozrah? ... I (replies G-d), who speaks in righteousness, mighty to save... all My garments, I have soiled" (Isaiah 63:1-3). What about the law that forbids a Kohen to contaminate himself? The Zohar explains: Israel is G-d's "virgin sister, who has not married a man"—who has resisted all the alien masters and influences she has been subject to throughout her exile. For her, G-d "contaminates" Himself, entering the morgue of *galut* to raise her from the dust.

But one thing remains unresolved: surely G-d is not ordinary Kohen, but a Kohen Gadol, whose greater holiness proscribes any exposure to impurity, even for the sake of his closest relatives. How, then, could G-d "contaminate" Himself, even for His "children" or His "sister"?

Put another way: if, in His relationship with us, G-d assumes the role of an ordinary Kohen, whose lesser holiness allows him contact with impurity for the sake of "Israel, His kin," G-d certainly transcends this role, possessing also the inviolable sanctity of the Kohen Gadol. Does this mean that only the Kohen in G-d buried Moses? Or that G-d's involvement in our redemption is limited to a lesser expression of His holiness, while the height of His "priesthood" remains aloof from the mortality of our *galut*-state?

An Analogous Universe

To address this question, we must first reexamine the

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very notion of attributing humanly-defined traits and roles to the Almighty. On what basis do we refer to G-d as a “Kohen” or a “Kohen Gadol”, as a father or a brother, or, even, as a “being” and “existence”? These are all terms borrowed from the world of human experience and perception—what can they possibly tell us about He who invented this world and created it from naught?

Indeed, as the Kabbalists repeatedly caution, none of this refers to G-d Himself, only to His manner of relating to our reality. G-d chooses to continually involve Himself with our existence, assuming the roles of creator, provider, ruler, judge, etc.; it is solely in regard to this dimension of His being that these anthropomorphisms are applicable. Still, the question remains: why should we assume that G-d’s relationship with us can be described in the same (or similar) terms that we perceive ourselves and our relationships? Perhaps G-d relates to us in a manner that has no model or parallel in our experience?

Indeed, say the Chassidic masters, we have no reason to assume that the divine reality parallels ours in any way. Yet we know that it does, for the simple reason that G-d told us so. In His Torah, G-d describes Himself as “merciful,” “benevolent” or “angry”; He states that He “spoke” to Moses, “heard,” the prayers of His people, and took them out of Egypt with a “mighty hand and an outstretched arm”; He tells us that we are His “children,” “servants,” “flock,” and “bride.” For G-d desired that His involvement in our existence should be comprehensible to us—and the human mind comprehends only what it perceives or what it can abstract from what it perceives. So G-d created man “in His image, in His likeness” (Genesis 1:26) modeling us after the traits He assumes in order to create us and relate to us. He fashioned us as metaphors of the divine so that we could refer to our own existence for insight into the nature His presence in our lives.

Chassidic teaching takes this a step further. It’s not just that G-d “planted” analogs of His reality in ours, but that our reality is an offshoot of His, so that everything about it reflects the nature of its source as the groves in a phonograph record mirror the structure of the sound waves that forged it. Thus the kabbalists speak of a

seder histalshelet, a “chain of evolution,” in which the ten divine attributes (*sefirot*) that G-d projected from Himself to define His relationship with us evolve into the essence of creation, into the spiritual “dna” that determines the nature of every created thing.

So when Job says, “From My own flesh I perceive the divine,” he is not only saying, “G-d created me in such a way that my life should contain models that can be employed as metaphors for the divine reality”; he is also saying: “I, and everything about me, evolved from the ‘self’ that G-d projected to create and relate to our reality. So the nature of this divine projection is imprinted in every detail of my nature and experience.”

This explains the numerous Talmudic and Midrashic passages that “trace” the origins of various elements of the physical world. “From what was the earth created?” asks the Talmud. “From the snow under G-d’s throne of glory.” “How was light created?” queries the Midrash. “G-d wrapped Himself in a white *tallit* and glistened the radiance of His splendor.” At first glance, these are puzzling statements: does not the Torah clearly state that G-d created the heavens and the earth, and everything they contain, out of a prior state of utter non-existence? G-d said, “Let there be light!” and light came into being! Indeed, the concept of creation *ex nihilo* () is central to the Jewish view of G-d’s relationship with the created reality. How does supernal snow or a white *tallit* come into the picture?

But our sages are not speaking of the physical substance of the earth or of the physical phenomenon of light: these were created *ex nihilo* by G-d. What they are discussing is the nature and significance of these creations: what aspect of the divine reality do they reflect? from which divine attribute did they evolve? Ask an artist about the source of one of his paintings, and he’ll tell you about an experience he had, the emotions it roused in him, and how these feelings matured over time until his talent translated them into the particular creation before you. Obviously, he is not speaking of the source of the physical material of the painting—the canvas and paints he acquired in an art-supply store—but of the vision they embody. Similarly, while the physical substance of earth and light were brought into being from naught, their spiritual essence developed through the “chain of evolution” that G-d generated in order to provide us with a link to His reality. G-d’s “white *tallit*” is the kabbalistic term for a certain feature of the divine projection, as is the “snow under the divine throne”; light and earth are their physical incarnations and earthly metaphors.

The Translation of Light

The story is told of a first-grade teacher who was

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experiencing some difficulty in his *chumash* class. He was attempting to teach a relatively simple verse—"And Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth"—but one five-year-old mind found the concept too complex to comprehend. Finally, the teacher says: "Berel, you know your next-door neighbors, the Smiths? What's the father's name?"

"John," replies the child.

"And how many sons does John have?"

"Three: Tom, Dick and Harry."

"Great," says the teacher. "You see, it's not that difficult to understand. John Smith has three sons—Tom, Dick and Harry. Now, long ago, there lived a man called Noah, and he, too, had three sons. *Their* names were: Shem, Ham and Japheth."

That afternoon, little Berel comes home from *cheder*. "Mama!" he proudly announces. "Today we learned about the three sons of Noah!"

"That's wonderful, dear," says his mother. "And who were the three sons of Noah?"

"Tom, Dick and Harry."

The metaphor is a powerful and effective teaching tool. A skilled metaphorist can make tangible the most ethereal abstractions and familiarize the most foreign concepts, taking an idea that is utterly intelligible to his student and translating it into terms the student can relate to and comprehend. However, unless the student understands how metaphors are to be assimilated—unless he learns to distinguish the garments of simile from the concept they enclath—the metaphor will convey a diminished, or even distorted, version of the concept.

This is manifoldly so in regard to the endeavor to comprehend the Creator via the metaphor of His creation. Imagine a poem, written in a rich, graceful and versatile language, that is translated into a primitive tongue. The power of the poem (and of the translator) is such that this grossly inadequate vessel nevertheless conveys something of its beauty and profundity. In reading such a translation, one must be ever mindful of the limitations and deficiencies of its adopted language, so

as not to attribute them to the flawless original.

In the same way, even as we are told that G-d created us "in His image, after His likeness," enabling us to perceive His reality from our flesh, we are warned against attributing "a body, or any semblance of the bodily" to Him. Our reality is finite, subjective and deficient, while G-d, and everything about Him (including His projected creator-self) is infinite, utterly free of qualification, and perfect. So the words and models we use when we think and speak of G-d must first be stripped of all the connotations of finiteness and deficiency that their human context imparts to them before we can enlist them to aid our comprehension of the divine.

Let us illustrate both the power and the limitation of metaphor with the example of the first creation of the physical reality—light.

Light is an oft-employed metaphor in discussing the divine. Kabbalistic and Chassidic teaching speak of the "light of wisdom," the "light of benevolence," the "light of harmony," etc., that G-d bestows on His creation. It describes the various dimensions of G-d's relationship with reality as "," "," or "quintessential light." And its general term for the original, all inclusive divine projection is *or ein sof*, "infinite light" (or "light of the Infinite").

Why "light"? There are many reasons why light is deemed the appropriate metaphor to connote the flow of influence and sustenance we receive from G-d. Light evokes associations of spirituality, intangibility, purity, power (it travels faster, further, and with greater effect on the things it reaches than anything else we know), essentiality to life, dependence on its source (light is never disconnected from its emitter), and many other "divine" qualities.

Another of these qualities, discussed at great length in the Chassidic writings, is light's spontaneity. When a teacher imparts an idea to his student, a builder raises a wall, or a river carries water from a snowcap to the ocean, there is effort, expenditure and involvement: the teacher must cease all other (overt) mental activity and focus on the particular idea and the student's particular mind; the builder exhausts himself; water must be *removed* from mountaintop if it is to be emptied into the ocean. On the other hand, the sun's (or any other luminous body's) emission of light is spontaneous and effortless. When you open a window on a sunny day, the sun does not have to work harder, expend more energy, or shift focus to fill your room with light. A lamp in a room is utterly unaffected by the number of sighted eyes in the room, by the amount or size or color of the objects it illuminates, or by the uses to which its light is put.

To say that G-d "created" a world is to imply that He

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toiled, or at least “applied” Himself to the task, as an artisan might expend himself, mind, heart and muscle, to produce a work. The Kabbalists therefore prefer to say that G-d emanated a divine “light”—that He effected a world without Himself being affected in any way

And, as explained above, this is not merely a convenient metaphor we have discovered tucked in some corner of our experience: the spontaneity that characterizes the emission of physical light is the direct descendent of the “spontaneity” of G-d’s manner of creation.

But to say that an act is spontaneous implies not only that it is effortless and non-involving, but also that it is unconscious and non-elective. The sun has no choice but to emit light—such is its nature. Indeed, in our experience, anything spontaneous is also unchosen: if we can chose to do something, then it takes involvement on our part. Obviously, *this* aspect of the light model cannot be attributed to G-d, who has no “nature” to define and dictate to Him, and whose every “emanation” is an act of choice.

In other words, when employing light as the metaphor for divine bestowal we must distinguish between the essence of its spontaneity—its effortlessness—and the limitations of its spontaneity—limitations that stem not from its supernal source and analog but from its translation into the finiteness and imperfection of physicality.

The Essence of a Prohibition

The same applies to our references to G-d as “Kohen” and “KohenGadol.”

The human Kohen is one who has been imparted a greater measure of holiness than his more mundane fellows. His is a spiritual life, devoid of material endeavor and devoted to the service of the Creator. Therefore he is forbidden contact with death, the arch-symptom of the physical world’s distance from its divine source. Nevertheless, his station recognizes that, at times, exceptions must be made and his sanctity violated for the sake of his close kin. The KohenGadol embodies yet a higher level of holiness—a level on which these exceptions are not tenable, on which the Kohen’s aloofness from mortality cannot be compromised.

If every physical reality mirrors something of the

divine, this is certainly the case with the realities defined by the Torah, G-d’s blueprint for creation. Indeed, the Torah refers to itself as *mashal hakadmoni*—the “primordial metaphor” or the “metaphor of the Primordial One”—and our sages have stated that every word of Torah is a “name” of G-d, a description of His projected self. Thus, the earthly Kohen and Kohen Gadol are the human analogs of two corresponding truths in the divine reality—the “Kohen” and “Kohen Gadol” in G-d’s relationship with us.

The Kohen in G-d is G-d’s “holiness”—His transcendence of the earthly, the finite, the mundane. And yet, as with the ephemeral model of His priesthood, there are “exceptions”: times that He permits Himself to “soil His garments” for the sake of His close kin, times of which G-d says, “I Am with him in his affliction, [to] redeem him” (Psalms 91:15).

Yet G-d is also a Kohen Gadol, possessing a holiness that cannot be compromised. However, this is not to say that the Kohen Gadol in G-d is “forbidden” contact with the material reality. As emphasized above, we must always divest our earthly metaphors for the divine of all shortcomings of the physical state before applying their quintessential significance to our understanding of their supernal source; and terms such as “permissible” and “forbidden” are part of a creature’s lexicon, not of an omnipotent Creator’s. We must therefore distinguish between the uncontaminatability of the divine “Kohen Gadol” and its not-to-be-contaminated earthly metaphor.

In other words, a Kohen Gadol is one who cannot be contaminated. Applied to a human being, the holiest of whom is still mortal and vulnerable to mortality’s *tumah*, this translates as a *prohibition* to come in contact with those elements that would contaminate him. But in its original, quintessential sense, G-d’s Kohen-Gadolness connotes His immunity from contamination, His utter transcendence of the material even as He pervades the most corporeal corner of His creation. It is only in its involvement into a human state that the “cannot be contaminated” of the divine “KohenGadol” becomes the “may not contaminate himself” of a contaminatable son of Aaron.

Double Identity

Yet G-d chooses to relate to us not only as a Kohen Gadol but also as a “regular” Kohen.

If G-d had assumed His Kohen Gadol “self” to bury Moses, there would have been no need for Him to immerse in a *mikvah* of fire to purify Himself. If it were only the Kohen Gadol in G-d who “dwells amongst [Israel], in the midst of their impurities,” there would be no need “atone for the divine holiness” over this (as per

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Leviticus 16:16). If it were only the divine Kohen Gadol who empowered Moses to effect the redemption of Israel from Egyptian slavery, He would not have appeared in a thornbush in participation in His children's suffering. Had Isaiah beheld the divine Kohen Gadol coming from Edom, he would not have seen a figure in blood-stained garments.

As "Kohen Gadol", G-d effects all without being affected, pervading the lowliest tiers of His creation without being tainted by their deficiencies. Yet G-d chooses to also assume the more vulnerable holiness of the divine "ordinary Kohen" (which translates, on the human level, into the ordinary Kohen's permission to contaminate himself in certain circumstances): to contaminate Himself by His burial of Moses, to suffer along with His people, to bloody Himself in the process of extracting them from exile. He wants us to know that He is not only there with us wherever we are, but that He also subjects Himself to everything that we are subject to.

At the same time, He is also there with us as Kohen Gadol: transcending it all, and empowering us to also attain something of His inviolable sanctity.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
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APPOINTMENTS IN TIME

These are the appointed times (moadim) of G-d, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed times

Leviticus 23:4

A king was traveling with his child through the wilderness. And when a king travels, his entire entourage travels along: ministers, guards, attendants and servants, all at the ready to serve their master and carry out his will.

Suddenly, the procession ground to a halt. The king's child had a request. Water, said the crown prince. I want water.

The king convened his cabinet to address the crisis. My son is thirsty, he said to his ministers. But how is water to be obtained in the wilderness?

After much deliberation, two proposals were laid before the throne. I shall dispatch my ten ablest horsemen on my ten fastest steeds, proposed the commander of the royal cavalry. They will ride to the nearest settlement and fill their waterskins. Within the hour, there will be water for the prince.

I shall put my men and equipment to the task, proposed the chief of the royal engineering corps. They will erect a derrick and sink a well right here, on the very spot at which we have stopped. Before the day is out, there will be water for the prince.

The king opted for the latter proposal, and soon the royal engineers were boring a well through the desert sand and rock. Toward evening they reached a vein of water and the prince's thirst was quenched.

Why, asked the prince of his father, after he had drunk his fill, did you trouble your men to dig a well in the desert? After all, we have the means to obtain water far more quickly and easily.

Indeed, my son, replied the king, such is our situation today. But perhaps one day, many years in the future, you will again be traveling this way. Perhaps you will be alone, without the power and privilege you now enjoy. Then, the well we dug today will be here to quench your thirst.

But father, said the prince, in many years, the sands of time will have refilled the well, stopping its water and erasing its very memory!

My son, said the king, you have spoken with wisdom and foresight. This, then, is what we will do. We will mark the site of this well on our maps, and preserve our maps from the ravages of time. If you know the exact spot at which this well has been sunk, you will be able to reopen it with a minimum of effort and toil.

This we shall do at every encampment of our journey, resolved the king. We shall dig wells and mark their places on our map. We shall record the particular characteristics of each well and the method by which it can be reopened. So whenever, and under whatever circumstances, you will travel this route, you will be able to obtain the water that will sustain you on your journey.

The Torah refers to the festivals of the Jewish calendar as *moadim*, appointed times, and as *mikraei kodesh*, callings of holiness. These are G-d's appointed times, reads the introductory verse to the Torah's listing of the festivals in the book of Leviticus, callings of holiness, which you shall call in their appointed times.

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A festival is an appointment with the past, an encounter with an event and phenomenon in our history. It is an opportunity to call forth the particular holiness of the day, to tap the spiritual resources it holds.

Each festival marks a point in our journey through time at which our Heavenly Father, accompanying us in our first steps as a people, supplied us with the resources that nurture our spiritual lives. On Passover, we were granted the gift of freedom; on Shavuot, G-d revealed Himself to us at Mount Sinai and gave us His Torah, the embodiment of His wisdom and will and our charter as His kingdom of priests and a holy people; Rosh HaShanah is the day on which G-d first became King; on Yom Kippur, G-d forgave our first and most terrible betrayal as His people, the sin of the Golden Calf, granting us the gift of *teshuvah*—the capacity to rectify and transform a deficient past; Sukkot commemorates the time that we were sheltered and unified by the divine clouds of glory in our journey through the desert toward our Promised Land; the miracle of Chanukah marks the salvation of the Jewish soul—the triumph of light and purity over darkness and adulteration; the miracle of Purim, the salvation of the Jewish body and the speciality and chosenness of our physical selves; and so with all the festivals and special dates and periods on our calendar.

But these were not one-time gifts from above. Freedom, wisdom, commitment, joy, illumination, peace—these are constant needs of the soul, the spiritual nutrients that sustain her in her journey through life. Like the king in the above parable, told by Chassidic master Rabbi Yechezkel Panet to explain the soul of the Jewish calendar, G-d sunk wells at various points in the terrain of time to serve as perpetual sources of these blessings. As we travel through the year—the year being a microcosm of the entire universe of time—we encounter the festivals, each marking the location of a well of nurture for our souls.

G-d also provided us with a map of these wells—a calendar denoting their locations in our journey through time. The map also comes with instructions on how to reopen each well and access its waters: sounding the *shofar* on Rosh HaShanah will regenerate the divine

coronation that transpired on the first Rosh HaShanah when Adam crowned G-d as king of the universe; eating matzah evokes the freedom of Passover; kindling the Chanukah lights recreates the miracle of Chanukah. And so it is with every such appointment on our calendar: each comes supplied with its own mitzvot and observances—the tools that open the well and unleash the flow of its waters.

By Yanki Tauber: editor@chabadonline.com

THE MORROW OF THE SHABBAT

In the Torah reading of Emor, the commandment of Counting the Omer is stated: “And you shall count unto you from the morrow after the day of rest (‘Shabbat’), from the day that you brought the sheaf (‘Omer’) of the waving; there shall be seven complete weeks” (Leviticus 23:15).

The Talmud (Menachot 65a) tells us that the sect of the Boethusians interpreted the word Shabbat to mean the seventh day of the week, rather than the “day of rest” of Passover. As a consequence they held that the counting of the Omer always begins on a Sunday. There was considerable debate, during which the Rabbis brought many scriptural proofs to establish that the Boethusian interpretation was false. But a persistent question remains: Why did the Torah leave room for this error, instead of stating explicitly, “on the day after the Passover?”

2. Three Months

In Exodus 3:10, G-d tells Moses: “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain.” In other words, the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt lay in the Giving of the Torah. Between these two events, the Exodus and the Revelation on Sinai, came the seven weeks of the Omer. These seven weeks were the necessary transition between the start and the completion of redemption.

Three months were involved in this process: Nissan, in which the Exodus took place; Iyar, which is wholly taken up with the counting of the Omer; and Sivan, in which the Torah was given.

Only these three are explicitly mentioned in the context of the redemption. Of Nissan it is written: “the month of Spring, . . . in it you came out of Egypt” (Exodus 23:15). Of Iyar we find, “the second month . . . after they had come out of the land of Egypt” (Number 1:1). And of Sivan, “In the third month after the Children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt” (Exodus 19:1). All three are mentioned because each was an integral part of the redemption.

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3. Three Kinds of Food

Of these three, Passover is linked to the eating of Matzah. The Omer was a measure of barley. And Shavuot has a special offering of two loaves, of fine flour baked with leaven.

This presents a number of difficulties.

Only two meal offerings did not consist of wheat: The Omer, and the offering of a wife suspected of infidelity. Both of these were of barley. In the latter case the Talmud (Sotah 14a) gives a reason: Her offering was to be of animal food as a humiliation for her immorality ("She did the deed of an animal, therefore she brings animal feed as an offering"). But why was the Omer of animal food?

On Passover we are forbidden to eat leaven, because leaven symbolizes man's inclination to pride and self-esteem. As leaven raises the dough, so pride inflates a man to arrogance. But why, in that case, are we allowed to eat leaven the rest of the year, and indeed *obliged* (in the Temple) to do so on Shavuot?

4. "Draw Me; We Will Run After You"

In the Song of Songs (1:4), there is a verse, "Draw me, we will run after you; the king has brought me into his chambers." The Kabbalists see these three phrases as references to the three stages of the departure from Egypt. "Draw me" is the Exodus. "We will run after you" is the Counting of the Omer. "The king has brought me into his chambers" is the Giving of the Torah.

"Draw me" is passive — it refers to the Israelites being taken out by G-d. Also it is singular. Whereas "We will run after you" is both active and plural.

The Zohar explains that by the end of their enslavement, the Israelites were assimilated into the heathen ways of their captors. They were not deserving of redemption. They had to be seized and drawn out of their captivity by the initiative of G-d. Since they were not inwardly prepared for it, this unexpected revelation did not alter them inwardly. They were taken hold of by G-d rather than by the promptings of their heart. And although their "G-dly soul" responded, their "animal soul" was unchanged. One part of their being received

the revelation, but the other, the capacity for evil, remained. Indeed, says Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, this is why, the Israelites are described as having *fled* from Egypt (Exodus 14:5). What they were running from was the evil within themselves.

So we can understand the phrase "Draw me." Firstly, when we take possession of an object by seizing hold of it, nothing is changed in the subject itself; it merely changes hands: In this case, from Israel's being in the hand of Pharaoh to their being in the hand of G-d. Israel in itself was unchanged.

Secondly, it was passive. The drawing out of Egypt was achieved by the hand of Heaven, not by any spontaneous act on the part of the Israelites.

Thirdly, it was singular. The revelation of this sudden intervention of G-d affected only one side of their being. Their spirit responded; their physical passions did not.

5. Intellect and Passion

For all this, the purpose of a revelation is that the spirit should change the physical nature of man as well. As Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi puts it, if man were meant to be pure spirit, he would not have needed a body. The point of a religious life within the world is to bring *every* side of human nature into G-d's work: In the words of the Talmud: "'And you shall love the L-rd your G-d with all your heart' — this means, with *both* your inclinations."

This interplay not only elevates the physical side of man, but also his spiritual life, by adding to it the drive and energy of physical passion. Man as an intellectual being is dispassionate: his emotions and desires are mitigated by the rational control he exercises over them. But animal energy, be it literally in an animal or in the instinctual drives of man, is unchecked, powerful. "There is much increase by the strength of an ox" (Proverbs 14:4). When the animal in man is no longer at war with his spirit, but is sublimated to it, all its passionate intensity is transferred to the life of holiness.

This is why the Omer was of barley, animal food. Because this was the labor of that period, to transform the "animal soul" of the Israelites, which had remained unaffected by the initial revelation in Egypt.

How is this done? By meditation. Meditation on the nature of G-d awakens love and fear. At first, when one knows that rebellion, pride, animal obstinacy, is still a power within oneself, one must "flee" from it. This is the time of *suppression*. But once one has left the "Egypt" of temptation, there comes a time of meditation

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and *sublimation*, when the two sides of man no longer battle for possession, and when the spirit rules, and physical nature transfers its energy.

Thus Solomon wrote, "We will run after you." We will *run*, because our service is quickened by this new source of energy. *We* will run, because it is we, not G-d, who take the initiative. And "we", in the plural, because both sides of our nature are caught up in this effort of reaching out towards G-d, and each gives impetus to the other.

6. The Final Stage

There is still a further stage. At the Exodus, there was the Divine call. During the Omer, there was man's response. But at the Giving of the Torah, there was the final abnegation of man in the face of G-d.

While, for forty-nine days, he was transforming himself, he was still a self, still using his powers and relying on himself. But at Sinai, in the face of G-d, "With every single word that went forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, the souls of Israel departed" (Talmud, Shabbat 88b). They were empty: The only reality was G-d.

Thus it is that on Passover we may not eat leaven. At the outset, when pride and fulfillment preserve their power, they must be suppressed, set aside. They cannot be combated rationally, for they can subvert the mind: "They are wise to do evil" (Jeremiah 4:22).

At the stage of the Omer, we use our understanding to redirect our emotions. We use the leaven in ourselves to change ourselves.

And when, at the point of Shavuot, we reach the final openness of all our being to G-d, then we are *obliged* to use the leaven, making every part of our nature into a channel for the light of G-d.

7. Every Day

The Rabbis said, "In every generation, and every day, a man is obliged to see himself as if he had gone out of Egypt that very day" (Talmud, Pesachim 116b; Tanya ch. 47). So each of the three stages of the Exodus are components of the task of every day.

In the beginning of our prayers we say, "I give acknowledgment before you . . ." (the *Modeh Ani* prayer). This is the acknowledgment, the surrender to G-d, that precedes understanding. It is the Nissan of the day, the individual Exodus.

There then follow the Psalms of Praise (*Pesukei Dezimrah*) and the *Shema* and its benedictions. These are the prayers of meditation, and understanding. "Hear, O Israel," the first phrase of the *Shema*, means "understand." And through this meditation, the emotions are awakened, and the love of G-d is aroused with "all your heart and all your soul and all your might." This is the daily equivalent of the month of Iyar and the counting of the Omer.

But, so far, this represents only the battle against half, the "animal" half, of one's nature (*bittul ha-yesh*). There still awaits the final extinction of self-consciousness (*bittul bi-metziut*) which comes during the *Amidah* prayer, when "like a slave before his master" we have no self with which to speak. We are empty of words. We say, "O L-rd, open my lips." And this is the Sivan of the day, the moment when we confront — like the Israelites at Sinai — the all-possessing presence of G-d.

8. After the Shabbat

Now, finally, we realize why the Torah, in the verse quoted at the outset, says, "On the morrow after the Shabbat" instead of ". . . after the Passover."

To achieve the transformation of the "animal soul" demands the deepest reserves of spiritual energy. To have brought the Israelites out of their entrenched impurity needed more than an "angel" — an emissary — it needed G-d himself in His Glory and Essence. If this was true of the escape from evil, it is more so for the *transformation* of evil into good. It would need a spiritual source able to enter into the heart of evil without being affected.

Shabbat is a source of intense spirituality. It is the apex of the week. But it still belongs to the week, and thus to time and the finite. "The morrow after the Shabbat" refers to the step beyond Shabbat, beyond time itself: A revelation higher than the world.

To count the forty-nine days of Omer, that is, to transform into holiness every emotion that we feed, we must rest our efforts on the "morrow after the Shabbat" — the light of G-d from beyond the world.

From Torah Studies (Kehot 1986, www.kehotonline.com), an adaptation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe's talks by Britain's Chief Rabbi, Dr. Jonathan Sacks