

5782 - Leviticus 21-24 - Emor (Speak [unto the Priests])

^{21:1}The LORD said to Moses, "**Speak** to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, ²except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, ³or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband—for her he may make himself unclean. ⁴He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself.

1. אָמַר אֶל-הַכֹּהֲנִים—*Say to the Kohanim*. The principles of holiness as experienced by the Jewish nation are developed in three major stages: from the broad base of the nation, up to the level of the Levites, and then to the highest level, the Kohanim, with **the Kohen Gadol at the very summit of human holiness**. Having specified the duties of holiness for the first two stages, the Torah now addresses itself to the Kohanim.

This concept of a gradual progression in the level of holiness is consistent with Jewish philosophy and matches the kabbalistic concept of God's holiness radiating outward through successive spheres or concentric circles. Just as the reality of holiness progresses through society in its stages, so does it pass through the dimensions of space and time. We find another example of the progression of holiness in the ascending levels of sanctity going from the Land of Israel, to Jerusalem, the Temple, and the Holy of Holies (*Mishnah Keilim* [Vessels] 1:5). The same principle occurs in the unfolding of time from ordinary weekdays up to its summit of holiness on Yom Kippur. Thus, we see that the structures of society reflect the images of nature as expressed in space and time. This offers us an understanding of existence as a vast hierarchy, a complex, yet essentially clear and harmonious structure, which serves as a model for the organization of society.¹

a. Hebrews 4:14-15

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Yeshua the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—**yet he did not sin**.

b. Hebrews 9:23-28

²³It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. ²⁴For Messiah **did not enter a sanc-**

tuary made with human hands that was ... a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

²⁵Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise Messiah would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But he has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages **to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself**. ²⁷Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸so Messiah was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

c. Nehemiah 11:1-2

¹Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten of them to live in **Jerusalem, the holy city**, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. ²The people commended all who volunteered to live in Jerusalem.

1) Matthew 4:5

⁵Then the devil took him to the **holy city** and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.

2) Revelation 21:1-2

¹Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw **the Holy City, the new Jerusalem**, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

d. Zechariah 2:10-13

¹⁰"Shout and be glad, Daughter Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. ¹¹"Many nations will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you. ¹²The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the **holy land** and will again choose Jerusalem.

¹³Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his **holy dwelling**."

2. וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם—*And tell them*. The unusual structure וְאָמַרְתָּ ... אָמַר, *say ...*

and tell, may be explained as follows: tell the Kohanim individually to speak to their children (*Rashi, Sifra*). The Kohanim were to watch over the holiness of the family by putting each of their children on guard against *spiritual contamination* (*Mizrachi*), *Rambam* refers to the statement in the Talmud (*Yevamot* 114a) that the adult Kohanim had the duty not to contaminate their own youngsters, yet also had to teach

1 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call to the Torah, Vayikra*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 250-262.

them to avoid contamination. This obligation rested upon the Kohanim themselves and not upon the religious authorities (*Hilchot Avel [Laws of Mourning]*), Ramban points out that the same principle of obliging the parents not to desecrate their youngsters with what is forbidden to adults applies to all prohibitions in the Torah.

Despite this Talmudic interpretation, many commentators draw other lessons from the threefold repetition of the verb **אָמַר**, *emor* [say], in this verse. According to R' Moshe Sofer,² the natural kindness and sense of duty of the Kohanim **might lead them to go overboard in expressing their respect for the dead**, going so far as to shave their heads **and cutting themselves in mourning**. That is why there was a need for extra emphasis here to discourage them from such practices.

a. Luke 10:30-33

³⁰In (response to the question, “Who is my neighbor”) Yeshua said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹**A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.** ³²**So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.** ³³But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

b. Leviticus 19:28

“Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put **tattoo** marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.

TNK—You shall not make **gashes in your flesh** for the dead, or **in-cise any marks on yourselves**: I am the LORD.

PJE—And **a corrupting incision** for the soul of the dead thou shalt not make in thy flesh, neither set upon yourselves **an inscription by the incutting of any figured sign**: I am the Lord.

- 1) “**gashes in your flesh for the dead**”—Judaism teaches us to express this grief by tearing our garments **rather than by wounding ourselves**. Again we are taught that the quest for holiness includes respect for one’s body, rather than a concentration on the spiritual at the bodies expense.”³

- 2) **You shall not make] cuts [in your flesh] for a person [who died]**: This was the practice of the Amorites: to make cuts in their flesh when a person [related] to them died (*Rashi*).

The *Zohar* recalls that the verb *emor* implies speaking with softness (*Rashi* to Exodus 19:3). The verb is repeated three times here because it is the tone most appropriate for Kohanim, whose service was to be performed *wn*, in reverential silence (as was noted in the commentary to 10.9). The sacred place where their duties are performed reflects the highest degrees of spiritual purity. This is a place in which the silence of absolute holiness reigns.

The Sages in the Midrash draw another lesson from the repetition of the verb *emor*. They see it as underscoring the importance that the Torah attaches to transmitting the laws **from father to son**. The safeguarding of this principle is incumbent on all generations of Kohanim, and is not dependent on the presence of the Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, the preservation of *spiritual purity*, is the unique and personal contribution of the Kohanim. It confers upon them a permanent dignity and nobility, independent of their hereditary entitlement to practice the priesthood and perform the sacrificial services (*Ramban*).

c. Sotah 22a

A certain widow had a Synagogue in her neighborhood; yet she used to come daily to the School of R. Johanan⁽¹⁸⁾ and pray there. He said to her, “My daughter, **is there not a Synagogue in your neighborhood?**” She answered him, “**Rabbi, but have I not the reward for the steps!**”⁽¹⁹⁾

(18) Where Services were held.

(19) I.e., for the extra distance she walked to attend the Services.

d. Avot 4:2

Ben Azzai says: Run to [perform even] a “minor” mitzvah, and flee from sin; for one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one sin leads to another sin; for the consequence of a mitzvah is a mitzvah, and the consequence of a sin is a sin.

- a) Shimon ben Azzai was a 2nd-century Tanna. He is among those who “visited the Orchard” (see *Pirkei Avot* [Eshav Books] note 291, p. 127) and “died.” **He taught that one was obligated to teach one’s daughter Torah as well as one’s son.**

3. **אִשְׁתּוֹ אֶל־אִשְׁתּוֹ**—*No one may contaminate himself*. Tradition explains *spiritual contamination*, as coming about through contact with a dead body, either directly or indirectly. The body deprived of a soul is a source of contamination (*Zohar*) ... Death is the ultimate expression of the stripping of soul and spirit from matter. Thus, the dead body represents

2 Moses Schreiber (1762–1839), known to his own community and Jewish posterity in the Hebrew translation as Moshe Sofer, also known by his main work *Chatam Sofer* (*Seal of the Scribe*, and acronym for *Chiddushei Toiras Moishe Sofer*), was one of the leading Orthodox rabbis of European Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century.

3 David L. Lieber, *Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary*, (The Jewish Publication Society, p. 699.

physical nature in its most absolute form and is the negation of the moral freedom that life offers to us.

4. (v. 2) כִּי אֶם-לְשָׂאוֹ—*Except for the relative who is closest to him.* **The**

word שָׂאוֹ means his flesh and refers to none other than his wife

(*Rashi*, see also *Malbim*). It was shown in the commentary to 20:10 that the kinships established through marriage are in no way inferior to those based on bloodlines. However, *Rashi* does point out (to v. 4) that this law does not apply to someone whom the Kohen married in violation of the law.

a. Genesis 2:21-25

²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³The man said, "**This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh**; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

²⁴That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

b. Ephesians 5:25-33 (CJB)

²⁵As for husbands, love your wives, just as the Messiah loved the Messianic Community, indeed, gave himself up on its behalf, ²⁶in order to set it apart for God, making it clean through immersion in the *mikveh*, so to speak, ²⁷in order to present the Messianic Community to himself as a bride to be proud of, without a spot, wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without defect. ²⁸This is how husbands ought to love their wives—like their own bodies; for the man who loves his wife is loving himself. ²⁹Why, no one ever hated his own flesh! On the contrary, he feeds it well and takes care of it, just as the Messiah does the Messianic Community, ³⁰because we are parts of his Body. ³¹"Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and remain with his wife, and the two will become one." ³²There is profound truth hidden here, which I say concerns the Messiah and the Messianic Community. ³³However, the text also applies to each of you individually: let each man love his wife as he does himself, and see that the wife respects her husband.

c. The Rabbis **explain this to include a sister who is betrothed**. Although betrothal was considered almost as close a bond as marriage (Deut 22:23ff), the priest may attend to the body in the event of her death.

1) On her marriage, **she became a part of her husband** (cf. Gen 2:24) and in the same way that a priest was not allowed to defile himself

for a brother-in-law, he was not allowed to defile himself for his brother-in-law's wife, even though she was his sister (*Hertz*).

2) The "wife" is *not* mentioned here, because throughout the Torah, a man and his wife are regarded as "one flesh" (אֶחָד בָּשָׂר אֶחָד—*basar echad*) (Gen 2:24). Both Abraham and Jacob personally attended to their wife's burials (cf., Gen 23; 48:7; 49:31ff).

^{21:6}**They (the priests) must be holy to their God** and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the food offerings to the LORD, **the food of their God**, they are to be holy.

1. (v. 6) קְדָשִׁים יִהְיוּ—*They shall be holy.* **This is an imperative, even against**

their will (*Rashi*), The court will oblige them to remain holy, despite the fact that the holiness of the Kohanim is a privilege of birth, granted by God: *I am Hashem Who sanctifies you*. The hereditary honor remains in effect even when the Kohen has been declared unfit for the sacrificial service because of a מוּם, *physical defect*. However, the Kohen does forfeit his right upon entering into an illicit marriage (*Orach Chaim*⁴ 128).

These general provisions pertaining to the status of the Kohanim apply in a similar fashion to the Jewish people as a nation. Indeed, from its very beginning the Jewish people was designated a מְמַלְכֶת כֹּהֲנִים, *kingdom of Kohanim* ... No more than the Kohen, the Jew cannot back out of his natural calling. He can of course turn his back on Judaism, but he remains Jewish nonetheless, אַף עַל פִּי שְׁחָתָא יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּא, *even though he may have sinned, he is a Jew*. The return to faithfulness to God and His law will always remain the first duty stemming from his destiny as a Jew (R' Hirsch).

a. Deuteronomy 29:10-15

¹⁰All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God—your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, ¹¹together with your children and your wives, and **the foreigners** living in your camps ... ¹²You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, ¹³to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ¹⁴I am making this covenant, with its oath, **not only**

⁴ Orach Chayim (Manner/Way of Life) is a section of Rabbi Jacob ben Asher's (c. 1269–c. 1343) compilation of Jewish law. This section treats aspects of Jewish law pertinent to the Hebrew calendar.

- with you ¹⁵who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not here today.
2. *Kadash*—to sanctify; **be holy**; set apart, be separated, an act whereby or a state wherein people or things are set apart for God's use.
 - a. Places
 - 1) Exodus 3:5
"The place where you are standing is **holy** ground."
 - 2) Exodus 29:43 (cf., 1Kings 9:3; Matthew 24:15)
"There ... I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be **consecrated** by my glory."
 - b. Times
 - 1) Genesis 2:3
"And God blessed the seventh day and made it **holy** ..."
 - 2) Joel 1:14
"Declare a holy fast; call a **sacred** assembly."
 - c. Persons/Things
 - 1) Deuteronomy 7:6
"You are a **holy** people ... the LORD ... has chosen you."
 - 2) Jeremiah 1:5
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I **set you apart**; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."
 - d. God
 - 1) Leviticus 11:44; 19:2; 20:26
"I am the LORD your God; **consecrate** (or **sanctify**) yourselves and be **holy**, because I am **holy** ..."
 - 2) Psalms 111:9
"He ordained his covenant forever - **holy** and awesome is his name."
 - e. Note—the terms "sanctification" and "holiness" do not refer to moral or spiritual qualities, but rather to "position" and "relationship"—*kādāsh* reflects the position that some person or thing has *in relationship to God*, consecrated (set apart) to His work and purpose. Therefore, **any moral or spiritual connotation is a result and not a cause of relationship with God.**
 3. "**the food of their God**" (lit. "the bread of their God," i.e., the substance of their offering to God). The Hebrew **לחם**, "bread" has here its primitive Semitic meaning "flesh"—another indication that the Hebrew associated with the sacrificial system is quite old (Hertz).

- a. The grain offering (Lev 2; 6:14-23; Num 15:20-21) (Hebrew, *minchah*—originally a gift of any kind) is called a "meat offering" in some translations—used in the Old English sense of "meat" i.e., "food." It is sometimes called a meal offering or cereal offering—because it consisted of flour or baked goods.
- b. The sacrifices are referred to as *lechem*, **because they are offered to God in the same way as food is served to humans**. In most ancient societies it was believed that gods required sustenance and relied on sacrifices for energy and strength (JPS).
- c. John 6:48-54
⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹**I am the living bread** that came down from heaven. **Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.**
⁵²Then the (Judeans) began to argue sharply among themselves, **"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"** ⁵³Yeshua said to them, "Very truly I tell you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.** ⁵⁴**Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life**, and I will raise them up at the last day.
 - 1) They obviously missed the point (*as did the early Church fathers*)—this verse is a *midrash* connected to verses (like Lev 21:6) that speak of the "bread" (and in other passages that speak of the "blood") offered to the LORD.
 - 2) 1Corinthians 9:13-14
¹³Don't you know that those who serve in the temple get their food from the temple, and that **those who serve at the altar share in what is offered on the altar?** ¹⁴In the same way, the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.
 - 3) 2Corinthians 5:21
²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that **in him** we might become the righteousness of God.
 - 4) Colossians 2:6-7
⁶So then, just as you received Messiah Yeshua as Lord, continue to live your lives **in him**, ⁷rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

^{21:7}""They (the priests) must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God.

⁸**Regard them as holy, because they offer up the food of your God.** Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy—I who make you holy.

⁹"If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, **she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire.**

1. According to Rabbinic interpretation, the Hebrew term *zonah* ("prostitute") refers to a woman **habitually given to harlotry, not to one who may have lapsed on a particular occasion.**⁵
2. It is hard to be the child of a leader—the child's behavior reflects upon the leader in a way that either adds to/or detracts from the way we perceive them.

^{21:10}"The **high priest**, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, **must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes.** ¹¹He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, ¹²nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, **because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the LORD.**

1. לֹא יִפְרֹעַ (lo yif-rah) from פָּרַע—let go, let loose, people, i.e. remove restraint from them; **unbind head (by removing the turban, a sign of mourning [forbidden to priests]).**

a. Leviticus 10:6 - after the death of Nadav and Avihu

Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, **"Do not let your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes,** or you will die and the LORD will be angry with the whole community. But your relatives, all the house of Israel, may mourn for those the LORD has destroyed by fire.

¹³"The woman he marries must be a virgin. ¹⁴He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or **a woman defiled by prostitution**, but only a virgin from his own people, ¹⁵so he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy."

1. **13-14.** Only the High Priest must marry a virgin from a priestly family. If her were to marry outside the priestly kinship, his offspring would be unfit to serve as priests.

^{21:16}The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁷"Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come **none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God.** ¹⁸**No man who has any defect may come near:** no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; ¹⁹no man with a crippled

foot or hand, ²⁰or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. ²¹**No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the LORD by fire.** He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. ²²**He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food;** ²³yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the LORD, who makes them holy. '"

²⁴So Moses told this to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites.

2. Only those who were capable of handling the heavy physical labor associated with the priesthood could serve—but **even those with physical defects were entitled to a share of the sacrificial dues.**
3. 18. לֹא יִקְרַב—*Shall not approach*. To explain the prohibition against a blemished Kohen performing the service, *Rashi* quotes the prophet (Malachi 1:8), "When you offer a blind animal for a sacrifice, is it not an evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not an evil? Present it then to your ruler! You will see if he will be pleased with you, if he will accept your favor." One can deduce that if the bringing of blemished animals shows a lack of respect, surely the same principle would apply if the foremost servants in the Temple, the Kohanim, have a blemish.

Rambam sees the requirement that the Kohen be unblemished as based on the nature of public opinion, which does not judge a man by his true value but by the perfection of his limbs and the beauty of his garb. It was therefore necessary that the Kohanim be unblemished to ensure that the Temple would be honored and revered by all. He points out, though, that this requirement only applied to the Kohanim. As for the Levites, they did not offer sacrifices and were not considered agents in asking forgiveness for sins; their sole function was to perform the vocal music. Accordingly, a Levite became unfit for service only when he lost his voice (Guide [for] the Perplexed, 3:45).

*Recanati*⁶ (167:4) observes that while physical defects do not render the Levite unfit for service, he is subject to the age limit of fifty (Numbers 8:25). On the other hand, the Kohen has no age limit. *Recanati* adds that the Levite who serves in the Temple may do so only as long as he possesses all his vitality and inner fire. That is why he must retire at age fifty. However, **the Kohen is called on to be the teacher of the people; the older he gets, the more he gains in wisdom.**

Ramban (according to the interpretation of *Ksav Sofer*) differs from the rationalist approach of *Rambam* and *Recanati*. Instead, he suggests

6 Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati (1223–1290) was an Italian rabbi who was born and died in the city of Recanati, who devoted the chief part of his writings to the Kabbalah.

that **bodily defects render the Kohen unfit for service because they are a reflection of spiritual defects** that he might have. That opinion is cited by the Zohar in the name of R' Yitzchak (1:181a).

a. Colossians 1:19-23 (cf. Eph 5:27)

¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Yeshua),
²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your **evil behavior**. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Messiah's physical body through death **to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation**— ²³if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

b. 2Timothy 2:15

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

c. Jude 1:21-25

²¹Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Yeshua HaMashiach to bring you to eternal life. ²²Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear-- hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. ²⁴To him who is able to keep you from falling and **to present you before his glorious presence without fault** and with great joy—²⁵to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Yeshua HaMashiach our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

d. 1Peter 1:18-19

¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹**but with the precious blood of Messiah, a lamb without blemish or defect**.