

Summary

The *Kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They are permitted to attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: Father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The *Kohen Gadol* may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *Kohanim*. The nation is required to honor the *Kohanim*. The physical defects that invalidate a *Kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a produce tithe given to the *Kohanim*, may be eaten only by *Kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects. The nation is commanded to "sanctify Hashem" (*Kiddush Hashem*), by insuring that one's behavior is always exemplary, and by being prepared to surrender one's life rather than murder, engage in licentious relations, or worship idols. The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain *Melacha* — creative work — during them. New grain ("Chadash") may not be used until after the second day of Pesach, when the *Omer* of barley is offered when there is a Temple. The Parsha explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *Lechem HaPanim* (the show-bread) in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

Commentaries

THE ETERNAL FLAME

**"Command the children of Israel ... to kindle a continual lamp."
(24:2)**

Go into any Synagogue when it's dark and you will see a small lamp shining above the holy ark. It is called the *Ner Tamid* - the eternal flame. That lamp is a memorial of the *Ner Ma'aravi* (western lamp) of the Menorah which the *Kohanim* lit in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The *Ner Ma'aravi* burned miraculously. It never went out. Every evening, when the *Kohen* came to kindle the flames he would find the *Ner Ma'aravi* still alight from the previous evening. He would remove the still-burning wick and oil, clean out its receptacle and then put back the burning wick and the oil. Then he would kindle all the other lamps with the western lamp.

But when the Romans came and destroyed the *Beis Hamikdash*, it seemed that the little solitary flame had been put out forever: In Rome, there stands a triumphal arch built by the Emperor Titus. One of its *bas-reliefs* depicts the Menorah being carried through the streets of Rome as part of the booty pillaged from the *Beis Hamikdash*. All its lamps are dark. It looks like some expensive antique, soon to languish under the dust of ages in some Vatican vault.

But did Titus really extinguish that eternal flame?

In his commentary on *Chumash*, the *Malbim* explains that the *Beis Hamikdash* is a macrocosm of the human body:

If you look at a plan of the *Heichal* (Sanctuary) in the *Beis Hamikdash*, you will notice that the placement of the various vessels - the altar, the table, the Menorah - corresponds to the location of the vital organs in the human body. In other words, each of the Temple's vessels represents a human organ. **The Menorah is the vessel that corresponds to the heart.**

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

So, in a mystical sense the light that Titus tried to put out, continues to burn in the Menorah of the Jewish heart. But even in the physical world, the light of the Menorah burns on...

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

Now, if, while the Temple was standing, the Western Lamp of the Menorah burned miraculously without human assistance, **so why shouldn't it go on burning even after it was buried?**

In fact, that Western Lamp continues to burn miraculously under the Temple Mount throughout the long dark night of exile. It continues to burn to this day. And it will continue to burn until *Mashiach* comes. Then, the light of the Menorah of the Jewish heart will be united with the light of the Menorah in the Holy *Beis Hamikdash*.

(Based on the *Sfas Emes*)

DOING TIME

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

Two Jews were traveling by train to work. One was religious, the other, to say the least, less so. “Look at this!” exclaimed the less religious of the two, tossing the newspaper to his religious companion. There, on the front page, was a picture of a very religious-looking Jew, complete with a long flowing black beard. Underneath the picture the caption read: **ARRESTED FOR TAX EVASION!** “So much for a long black beard!” sneered the secular Jew. “The trouble was...” replied the other, “the trouble was that under the beard, he was unshaven...”

When a Jew puts on a *Kippah*, he becomes an ambassador for Hashem. His actions are scrutinized by all who see him: If he is crooked in business, no one will call him a crook, they will call him a crooked Jew! But if he’s straight, it is Hashem Who will take the credit.

The Midrash tells of an Arab who sold a donkey to Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach. Shortly after the purchase, Rabbi Shimon discovered a valuable stone under the donkey’s saddle. “I paid for a donkey, not a gem” he said, and promptly returned the jewel to the Arab. When Rabbi Shimon handed the stone back to the Arab, the Arab exclaimed “Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shimon ben Shatach.”

(Heard from Rabbi Nota Schiller)

CONCRETE TIME

“And you shall count to yourselves from the day after the Shabbos [i.e., the day after Pesach] from the day of your bringing the Omer offering which is waved, seven Shabbosos - complete and perfect they must be”. (23:15)

“When are they perfect? When they do the will of The Omnipresent.” (Midrash)

Nothing in this world lasts forever. Everything has its time and then passes. Even the heavens and the earth will pass into nothingness. Nevertheless, everything that comes into the world has a certain period of existence, however short or long. However, there is one thing in the world for which the concept of ‘span of existence’ has no meaning whatsoever. It is no sooner present, than it has already changed, passed and is no longer. That thing is Time itself. Every second as it emerges into Creation, in the blink of an eye, it is gone. Time passed is no longer, and every second becomes immediately and at once, the past.

Man, however, through his actions in Time can give Time itself a substance that makes it eternal. An action gives the time in which that action is being done the substance and the character of the action itself. So if time is used to do a mitzvah, to do a kindness, or to learn Torah, then **because these things are eternal in themselves, they in turn eternalize Man’s time.** This is what the Midrash means when it says “When are they (the weeks) perfect? When they do the will of the Omnipresent.” The Counting of the Omer is a paradigm for the years of the life of Man - the “Seven Shabbosos” allude to “The days of our years have in them 70 years” (Tehillim). The mitzva of Counting The Omer demands that “complete and perfect they must be.” When those hours do the will of Hashem, then Time itself stays eternally concrete and substantial.

(Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

Haftorah: Yechezkel 44

The literal meaning of the word ‘Kohen’ includes both the idea of *basis* and *direction*. Even when the masses are infatuated by heathen concepts, and immorality is rife amongst the powerful, the *Kohen* must guard the sanctuary of the Torah, re-affirming both the *basis* and the *direction* of Jewish life. However, the priests did not always live up to their calling

- and their name - and Hashem proclaimed that they were to be barred from the priestly functions of bringing the offerings. However in contrast to these people, the Haftorah depicts those priests who, revering their ancestor *Zadok*, showed a brilliant contrast and kept the true spirit of the tribe of *Levi*.

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Tzarah Nafshi - לַפְּבַתְנִי
“My Soul Thirsts...”

“If those who have withdrawn (from the ways of Torah) wish to return from their ways, let them do so before they lie in the grave - the house designated for all living.”

h j k f k s g u n ` h c ... u c t o t o h d u x b

This stanza in Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra’s classic is based on a passage in *Iyov* (30:23) in which man’s mortality finds epic expression: “For I am aware that You will bring me to death, and to the house designated for all living.”

The great Biblical commentator and poet cries out in song that “my soul thirsts for G-d, the living G-d; my heart and flesh sing to the living G-d,” the refrain which is sung at the end of each stanza. What greater expression of longing could there be than that of man’s desire - and opportunity - to unite with his Creator while his heart and flesh can still sing His praises, before they reach the inevitable destination of all mortals.

One is capable of even singing about death when he reflects at the Shabbos table on the precious opportunities of life and return.

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