Overview

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

Insights

TRAVELLERS IN TIME

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

Judaism treats women as second-class citizens, doesn’t it? I mean, the reason women aren’t allowed to do so many mitzvos is that they have to be free to do the cooking and nurse the babies, right? If truth be told, women are not equal to men in Judaism. In some senses they are superior. And if you think that this is just patronizing chauvinist smooth-talk, have a look at the order of Creation: The more advanced was created after the less advanced. What was the last creation in the physical world? Woman. Woman was created after Man — and from Man. Man comes from the dirt and dust. Woman starts off much higher. She comes from flesh and blood.

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

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

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

To make the golden calf, the men demanded jewelry from their wives, to which the women replied “You think a powerless idol can save us?” They refused to
That lamp is a memorial of the ner tamid, a small lamp shining above the Holy Ark. It's called the "continual lamp." (24:2)

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

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

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

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

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

But did Titus really extinguish that eternal flame?

The Beis Hamikdash is a macrocosm of the human body. If you look at a plan of the sanctuary in the Beis Hamikdash, you will notice that the placement of the various vessels — the altar, the table, the menorah — corresponds to the location of the vital organs in the human body. Each of the Temple's vessels represents a human organ.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When a Jew puts on a kippah, he becomes an ambassador for Hashem. His actions are scrutinized by all who see him: If he is crooked in business, no one
will call him a crook; they will call him a crooked Jew! However if he’s straight, Hashem takes the credit. Our Sages tell us of an Arab who sold a donkey to Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach. Shortly after the purchase, Rabbi Shimon discovered a valuable stone under the donkey’s saddle. “I paid for a donkey, not a gem,” he said. He promptly returned the jewel to the Arab, whereupon the Arab exclaimed “Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Shimon ben Shetach.”

**Concrete Time**

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

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

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

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

That thing is Time itself.

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

Man, however, can give Time itself a substance that makes it eternal. When a person performs an action, it gives the time in which that action is done, the substance and the character of the action itself. So if the time is used to do a mitzvah, to do a kindness, or to study Torah, then because these things are eternal in themselves, they in turn, eternalize Man’s time. This is what the Midrash means when it says “When are they (the weeks) perfect? When they do the will of the Omnipresent.”

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

**Sources:**

**Travelers in Time** - Rabbi Nota Schiller
**The Eternal Flame** - Sfas Emes, Rabbi Akiva Tatz
**Doing Time** - Rabbi Nota Schiller
**Concrete Time** - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in L’Torah ul’Moadim

**Haftorah: Shmuel 20:18-42**

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

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch)
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

THE MERIT SYSTEM

Why will Hashem not abandon His people Israel?

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

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

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

(Ruth Rabbah 2)