



PORTION FROM

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THE PORTION

## Between Life And Death

Our parsha begins with God telling Moshe to tell Aharon's descendents, the Kohanim, that they are prohibited from becoming *tamei* – impure. They must not participate in the burial of most dead people “*lnefesh lo itama b'amav*” (21:1).

We all know that dealing with the dead is a very important mitzvah of chesed so much so that the person who is occupied in burying the dead is exempt from other mitzvot even from wearing tefillin, saying Shema and davening. It is one of the ways that we follow in the footsteps of God and do the mitzvah of “*Vhalchta bdrachav*” (Dvarim 28). So it seems strange that the Kohanim would be prohibited from such an important mitzvah.

One reason is that the Kohanim need to remain pure so that they can do their important work in the Mishkan or Temple. Coming in contact with the dead would make them impure and then they wouldn't be able to enter the Holy places and wouldn't be able to do their work – so when there are other people who could bury the dead person it is best if they do it.

The Oznaim LTorah brings another reason. He says it is important for people to

care for the dead and to go to the home of a mourner because all mortals will die one day and that way we can remind ourselves of our end and improve our behavior. He says that the Kohanim don't need this reminder because they are always living in the shadow of death. Their job puts them on the tight wire between life and death every day since they work in the presence of God. If they come to the Holy areas to do their work in inappropriate ways, ( such as drunk, impure, without their special garments, without washing their hands and feet...) the punishment is death. This we saw with the death of the two son's of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, “*b'kirvatam lfnei Hashem*” (10:1). They live with a constant threat of death so they are more apt to be careful with their behavior.

Yet there are a few exceptions to this prohibition, when the Kohanim are actually obligated to deal with the burial of a dead person, such as for the very close relatives that are listed in verses 21:1-3 and for a dead person who has no one else to bury them. There are times in everyone's life, even the Kohen's, when they are confronted with death and they must rise to those occasions as well. The Rambam learns from these verses the general mitzva for all Jews, not just kohanim, of *aveilut* - mourning. The Torah does not want us to ignore tragedies that may befall us. Crying and mourning are normal stages when

there is a loss. The Torah does not want us to skip over these important stages of dealing with grief. Crying is important and can bring healing.

This is an important lesson especially at this time of year with Yom HaZikaron LeShoa, and Yom HaZikaron LHalei M'a'arakhot Yisrael ul'Nifge'ei Pe'ulot HaEivah. We as a community mourn the loss of every Jew who is killed for being a Jew and every soldier who has given their life to protect the Jewish people. Every Jew is important. This can be seen from the prayer said by mourners, the *Kaddish*, that begins with the words “*Yitgadal VYitkadash Shmei Rabba* – May His Great Name grow exalted and sanctified”. Why do we begin the prayer by talking about the sanctification of God’s name? What is the connection to mourning? In the book *Shiach Sarfei Kodesh* on Kadish he brings in the name of Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshishcha that although in a regular army the death of one soldier might go unnoticed and the army wouldn’t feel that anything or anyone is missing, in God’s “army”, His nation, He notices the loss of even a single Jewish person. He feels the loss of that unique person who had a special role to fulfill in this world.

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God’s name is, in a sense, missing something with the death of even that single person so we say Kadish to raise up God’s name again. Every person is important to God. Every life must be mourned by the community.

After talking about death so much I would like to end with the last words of the Kadish – *Ose Shalom Binromav* – He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace upon us, and upon all Israel.



## RECIPE

Since we talked about mourning and crying – here’s a simple salad recipe with chickpeas served to the mourner and small tomatoes shaped like a teardrop. If you can’t find teardrop tomatoes, use cherry tomatoes instead.

### TEARDROP TOMATOES AND CHICKPEA SALAD

3C. chickpeas- 800g canned chickpeas rinsed and drained or fresh beans soaked overnight and cooked and drained

200g. tear drop tomatoes, halved

1/2 cup parsley, chopped

1/4 cup red onion, chopped

3tblsp olive oil

3 tblsp lemon juice

2 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 teaspoon oregano

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Mix the first four ingredients in a salad bowl. Combine the rest of the ingredients and pour over the salad. Mix and serve. ■