



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT EMOR

Our parsha continues the discussion of holiness. The details of korbanot already discussed in Sefer Vayikra are the “how” of Divine Service. The details of Tuma are the “who” of Divine Service. And in our parsha, once we already know the how and the who of Divine Service, we focus on the “conduits” of Divine service, the kohen and the offerings themselves. And then holiness in time.



1ST ALIYA (VAYIKRA 21:1-15)

Kohanim may not come in contact with the dead except for their nuclear family. Nor may they adopt non-Jewish mourning practices such as balding their head and beard or cutting their flesh. Kohanim shall be holy to G-d, for they serve Him. A kohen may not marry a divorcee. You are to sanctify them. The Kohen Gadol may never become tamei, for he is anointed. He may not marry a divorcee or widow.

The kohen has to stay away from the dead as his main job is service in the Mikdash. A person who is tamei cannot serve in the Mikdash.

But what is more instructive is not when he cannot become tamei. But rather when he can, and in fact must become tamei.

He must become tamei for his immediate family. This is a powerful statement concerning the centrality of family. And the nature of the holy man.

In other religions, asceticism is viewed as holy. In that view this world of ours is

a mixture of holy and profane. The soul is holy. The physical is profane. Food, pleasure, and marriage are the physical part of life that drags the soul down. The holy person is celibate. Lives a life of simplicity, resisting the temptations of the flesh.

That is not our view. The kohen marries. Has a family. That family even overrides his kohen function; he is required to become tamei for his immediate family, even though becoming tamei will mean he can't do his kohen work.

Man was created dust from the earth, with his soul breathed in through his nostrils. We are a hybrid; physical body, spiritual soul. It is the balance of the two that we embrace. We avoid the extremes on both sides; we are not hedonists, embracing physicality, nor ascetics, rejecting the physical. Let's not overstate our embrace of the physical. We can go too far. Moderation is the Torah's way. But asceticism, the complete rejection of the physical is not. This is the way we were created.

The kohen does have marriage restrictions. But modest ones. And those restrictions operate in the context of our embrace of marriage and family, even for the holy man.



2ND ALIYA (21:16-22:16)

A kohen who has a blemish may not serve in the Mikdash. This includes blind, lame, broken limbs, eye conditions and others. He may consume holy items but not perform the service. A kohen may not serve while Tamei, as this desecrates

the holy. While a non-kohen may not consume the holy (teruma), those who are a part of the kohen's home may. His daughter, before marriage or after if childless, is part of his home and may consume the holy. The holy is profaned when consumed by others.

The kohen serves in the Mikdash. And he also receives certain benefits, like Teruma (2% of produce grown in the Land of Israel). If he has certain quite dramatic blemishes, he may not serve. But that does not mean he may not enjoy the benefits, like Teruma. His Kedushat Kehuna, his status as a kohen is unaffected by blemishes.

Perhaps this is to convey to the kohen: a blemish limits *what* you may *do*, but not *who* you *are*. You are a kohen with a blemish but a kohen you remain.

And this message resonates not only for the kohen. We all could use this reminder: we are created in His Image. Some with greater abilities some with less. And over time, our abilities wither and we aren't what we used to be; can't do what we used to do. Time limits *what* we *do*, but not *who* we *are*. Created in His Image we remain.



3RD ALIYA (22:17-33)

An animal offering may not have a blemish. This includes blind, broken limbs, eye conditions and others. This applies to a non-Jew's offering as well. An animal with a blemish is not pleasing. An offering must be at least 8 days old. A mother and offspring may not be slaughtered on the same day. An offering may not be eaten after the 2nd day. Do not profane My Name, rather sanctify Me in your midst.

Blemishes disqualify the kohen from serving in the Mikdash. And the blemished offering is disqualified as well.

The idea of bringing the best in the

Mikdash makes sense. But not only in the Mikdash. There is a tendency due to the routine of mitzvot, to fall into a minimalist approach to mitzvot. Just do the minimum of what is required. The example of the more maximalist requirements of the Mikdash should perhaps be aspirational for us in our private lives as well. When we celebrate special occasions, we want everything to be just right; the flowers, the catering, the lighting. We should be vigilant to avoid being maximalists when it comes to our occasions, but allow ourselves to be minimalists in mitzvot. We should aspire to do mitzvot to the full and not suffice with the minimum.

The conclusion of this section states the mitzvah of Kiddush Hashem and Hillul Hashem. Actions done by little ole me can cause G-d's Name to be desecrated, Hillul Hashem. Or sanctified, Kiddush Hashem. The Holiness of G-d's Name hovers over our every action. Our care and kindness, the gentle manner of our speech, the pleasantness of our demeanor can be a Kiddush Hashem, unbeknownst and unintended by us. What a weighty responsibility. And wonderful opportunity.



4TH ALIYA (23:1-22)

These are the holy days: 6 days work, 7th day is Shabbat. Pesach is on the 14th of the 1st month; for 7 days eat matza. The first day is holy, no melacha should be done, as is the 7th day. The Omer offering of freshly harvested barley is brought the day after the first holiday day of Pesach. It permits consumption of the new grain. Count 7 full weeks and on the 50th day bring an offering of new wheat as baked chametz. That day (Shavuot) shall be a holy day on which no melacha shall be done. When harvesting, leave the corners and the

dropped items to the poor and stranger.

The Torah here introduces us to a new theme of Kedusha: holiness in time. The holiness of proximity to G-d has been expressed in holiness in space, the Mishkan. And through food and relationships, we are holy. And kohanim have holiness. Now, time too. Shabbat and holidays are a rendezvous with G-d, not only in a particular place but in a particular time.

This listing of the holidays begins with Shabbat. Shabbat has come up numerous times in the Torah, focusing on different themes. There is the good employer theme; you know what it means to work as a slave with no reprieve. Grant a reprieve to your workers. There is the Creator theme; He created the world in 6 days, resting on the 7th, you doing the same attests to His Creation. There is the Exodus theme; His Pulling you out of Egypt demonstrates the unique covenant, Shabbat is a sign of that covenant.

Here we have the Holiness theme. Rendezvous. Special time unfettered by weekday concerns.

In all the wonderful ways we honor Shabbat and observe it, we need to remember that at its core it is time akin to prayer. In prayer we stand in isolation, communicating directly with G-d. On Shabbat we live a day in rendezvous with Him.



5TH ALIYA (23:23-32)

The first day of the 7th month (Rosh Hashana) is a truah remembrance. No work shall be done. The 10th day (Yom Kippur) is a holy day on which to afflict your soul, for it is a day of atonement. No work shall be done. From evening til evening.

The brevity of the Torah's description of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur belie their drama in our lives. But their description,

remembrance and atonement – those are resonant words. These are not historically rich like Pesach. But relationally rich; G-d noting us. And granting us atonement.



6TH ALIYA (23:33-44)

The 15th of the 7th month begins a 7-day holiday of Sukkot. The first day is holy, no work shall be done. The 8th day is holy, no work shall be done. These are the holy days each with its offerings, besides the offerings of Shabbat and voluntary ones. And also, on the 15th of the 7th month take a Lulav and Etrog and rejoice before G-d for 7 days. Dwell in Sukkot so you shall know that I had the Jews dwell in Sukkot upon the Exodus.

In the Torah, Sukkot is the end of the year. For the holidays. And so, we have extra joy and appreciation for the holiday cycle that began with Pesach. People need rhythm in life. Something to look forward to. To anticipate. To expect. Every culture has its special days. Our special days are holy, uplifted, change of routine, change of locale (in going to Jerusalem). And for that we are blessed. And appreciative.



7TH ALIYA (24:1-23)

Bring oil for a permanent light in the Menorah, set outside the Holy of Holies. Bake 12 loaves to be placed in 2 groups of 6 on the Shulchan every Shabbat. The kohanim shall eat this holy bread in the Mikdash. 2 men fought. The Jewish man cursed G-d. He was held until his sentence would be determined by G-d. He shall be stoned. These crimes are punishable by death: cursing G-d, murder. Others have financial penalties: property damage and bodily assault.

Oil, flour and wine figure prominently in the Mikdash. Oil in the Menorah. Bread on

the Shulchan. Wine, though not mentioned here, is brought with the animal sacrifices.

It is noteworthy that each of these 3 is processed. Grain is the natural item; the bread is processed by people. Olives, natural; olive oil processed. Grapes, natural; wine processed. None of these occur naturally; they are all processed by people.

Perhaps this is to emphasize the uniqueness of mankind. Only human beings can make wheat into bread. Human beings have creativity and ingenuity. We serve G-d specifically with the unique qualities of mankind. The products of our creativity and ingenuity; oil, bread, wine.

Holiness and its laws are expressions of the elevated and noble station of man.

HAFTORAH YEchezkel 44:15-31

This week's haftorah echoes the parsha, in that it discusses various laws pertaining to the *kohanim*.

We are privy in this memorable section to learn about the service of the *kohanim* in the third Holy Temple through the elevated prophecy of Yechezkel. The realities he describes will come to fruition at the time of the Final Redemption.

As part of his vision, we learn about the unique vestments worn by the priests, laws of who they can marry, and the laws regarding coming in contact with a dead body.

There is also a call to the *kohanim* to serve as teachers and leaders of the nation of Israel.

Being that the *kohanim* are to serve solely as the emissaries of the Almighty, they do not receive a portion of the Land of Israel but are given the meat of the sacrifices and tithes which support their holy work. ■

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STATS

31st of 54 sedras; 8th of 10 in Vayikra.
Written on 215 lines (rank: 20th).
17 parshiyot; 11 open, 6 closed.
124 pesukim, rank: 15; 1st in Vayikra.
1614 words, rank: 22; 2nd in Vayikra.
6106 letters, rank: 23; 2nd in Vayikra.
Relatively short pesukim account for its drop in ranking for words & letters.



MITZVOT

63 of 613 mitzvot; 24 positive,
39 prohibitions.
Emor has more than one mitzvah per two pesukim, five times the Torah's average. Only Ki Teitzei (with 74) has more mitzvot than Emor.