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Selected and Adapted by Rabbi Dov Karoll

Quote from the Rosh Yeshiva

Charity is not only a “favor” performed for a poor person who happens to ask for help. Rather, it shapes the personality of the person who gives it. By giving charity, a person sharpens his worldview, develops a sense of dependence on God, and merits to stand before Him. –Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein, taken from:

<https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-vayikra/parashat-emor/emor-great-charity>

Parashat Emor Kohanim and Ritual Impurity from a Corpse

By Rav Michael Hattin



Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-vayikra/parashat-emor/emor-kohanim-and-ritual-impurity-corpse>

INTRODUCTION

Parashat Emor begins with a discussion of laws pertaining to Kohanim concerning their service in the Mishkan. As ministers to God in His holy abode, they are limited from coming into contact with forms of tuma – sources of ritual disqualification. In particular, the Parasha addresses the matter of corpse-tuma, the temporary unfitness for service caused by touching, carrying or sharing enclosed space with a dead human body. The Kohanim are prohibited from contracting corpse-tuma by attending to matters of burial, unless the deceased is 1 of 7 immediate family members – father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter or spouse. For the High Priest, the limitations are even stricter, for he may not even attend the funeral of his close, immediate relatives, nor may he display any of the traditional outward signs of mourning such as rent garments or unkempt hair (see 21:1-15).

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN THE REGULAR KOHEN AND THE KOHEN HAGADOL

The opening passage of the parasha spells out several rites associated with mourning, as well as drawing important distinctions in this matter between a regular Kohen and the Kohen HaGadol or High Priest. A Kohen is not only forbidden from attending the funeral of a non-immediate family member but is also forbidden to display certain manifestations of mourning that were popular at the time. Though he may grieve, he may not pluck out his hair, shave his beard or make incisions in his flesh. For comparison, we may note the example of Iyov, who responded to the tragic news of his children's demise by “tearing his robe, shearing his hair and falling to the ground” (Iyov 1:20), or the idolatrous priests of Ba'al who attempted to rouse their god by “crying out loudly, and cutting themselves after their custom with swords and spears until their blood began to flow” (Melakhim 1:18:28). The Kohen HaGadol may not attend any funeral whatsoever nor may he show any signs of mourning at all. In fact, in contrast to the regular Kohen who MUST suspend his service in the Temple in order to attend to the burial of his 7 immediate relatives, the Kohen HaGadol is explicitly forbidden from doing so and continues to perform his rites under all circumstances.

THE EXPLANATION OF THE RAMBAN

The Ramban expands upon the matter and offers an explanation for these seemingly unsympathetic laws (commentary to 21:11): ...the main thrust of this verse concerns the High Priest who may not leave the holy precincts during the service for any deceased whatsoever. Were he to leave his service for the honor of the deceased it would constitute a profanation of the Temple. Rather, the glory of the Mikdash and his service must be greater to him than the honor due to the deceased and his love of him. All the more so would he be in abrogation of this command if he leaves his service for no good reason at all. But the verse addresses the matter of the deceased in order to permit the Kohen HaGadol to serve even as an “Onen” (on the day of the burial). Since he may serve even under those circumstances, were he to willingly abandon his service it would constitute

a grave profanation of the Temple.

For the Ramban, the main issue at stake is the glory and honor of the Holy Temple and its service. The Kohen HaGadol is nowhere called upon to be a demi-god or superhuman figure. He is a man like other men, he is enjoined both to marry as well as to mourn. But at the same time, his office is like no other, for he ministers before God at the Holy Temple. He must remain at his post not because he doesn't feel the pain of his loss or care for the honor of the deceased, but rather because his love of God must surpass his bereavement, and his concern for the glory of His service must transcend the honor due to the dead.

For the Ramban, then, it is the private spiritual state of the Kohen HaGadol that is at the core of the matter. HE must place the glory of the Temple and his exalted service within it before all else, even before his own profound personal losses, the demise of his loved ones. Thus he continues to serve even as an "Onen" on the day of burial, while the regular Kohen must not do so.

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF ALL ISRAEL

There is another dimension to the discussion and the Ramban is presumably not indifferent to its relevance. As the Torah presents it, the Kohen HaGadol is not only the most exalted of the priests that serve before God but is also the emissary of the people of Israel. He serves God as their representative and performs his rites as their envoy. He is most assuredly NOT an intermediary that stands between them and God but rather represents what a man can achieve if he is sensitive to life's innate worth and inestimable spiritual value. All of the garments that the Kohen HaGadol wears testify to 1 overarching principle, the most comprehensive principle that the Torah offers its adherents: "HOLY TO GOD" (see Shemot 28:36 and our discussion of the vestments of the High Priest – Parashat Tetzaveh 2000/5760).

As the emissary of all Israel, the Kohen HaGadol must always carry the great burden of his office upon his shoulders and in his heart, as surely as the precious stones of his epaulets and breastplate are engraved with the names of the 12 tribes (Shemot 28:9, 21). In other words, his personal moments of tragedy are of necessity overshadowed by his awesome responsibilities on behalf of all Israel. Because he serves them as well as God, he must not allow individual cares, painful as they may be, to supersede his national responsibilities. The Torah's laws therefore place him within the great tradition of noble leadership, among the select few who transcend their own wants, desires and even overwhelming needs, in order to serve the people who have entrusted them with the sacred mandate to wield their power selflessly.

THE EXCEPTION OF THE "MET MITZVA"

Significantly, there is 1 notable exception to the provisions of the Torah, and it casts in sharp relief the inherent tension between the needs of the people, the glory of the Temple, and the service of God on the 1 hand, versus the exigencies of mortality, the tragedy of death and the image of God in which man was created on the other. The Rabbinic Midrash in the Sifre relates a most remarkable (but purely hypothetical) progression, related in simplified form by Rashi in his commentary to Tractate Megilla 3b:

(Concerning the Nazir the verse states) "He shall not come into contact with any deceased, he may not ritually defile himself for his father or for his mother" (Bamidbar 6:6-7) – But he must defile himself for the sake of the "Met Mitzva"... though he may be a Kohen HaGadol as well as a Nazir, though he may be on the way to perform the Passover sacrifice or the circumcision of his son, though he may be involved in the service of the Temple, he nevertheless must defile himself for the sake of the "Met Mitzva."

The "Met Mitzva" is one who dies without any living relatives or friends present who can attend to his proper burial. Under such circumstances, it becomes a special mitzva for any Israelite who chances upon the deceased (the "Met") to take care of his needs and ensure that a proper burial is effected. Here, the Rabbis entertain a striking situation: let us assume that the only person present with the "Met" is a Nazir, one who has taken on special vows that include the prohibition of contracting corpse-tuma. Nevertheless, rules the Torah, the Nazir must suspend his vows in order to attend to the deceased.

But what if the said Nazir also happens to be the Kohen HaGadol who, as we have seen, is strictly forbidden from attending to the burial of even his closest relatives? He must nevertheless attend to the "Met Mitzva." Though the Kohen HaGadol-Nazir may be involved in either the preparation of the Passover sacrifice or else the circumcision of his son – the only 2 positive mitzvot whose abrogation carries the harsh penalty of spiritual excision from Israel – he must nevertheless temporarily abandon those in order to attend to the Met Mitzva! Even though he may be involved in the service of the Temple, which we have already seen overrides any private affairs of the Kohen HaGadol, the Met Mitzva takes precedence.

In other words, the Torah was not indifferent to the honor that is due to the deceased, to the great value that we must place upon

the final care and internment of the human body, and to the elementary and universal human need to express the pain of loss. But there are typically other individuals who can provide admirably for these things without the need for the Kohen HaGadol to leave his station. Under such circumstances, both necessities can be met: the need for the honor of the deceased and the need for the glory of the Temple. But where there is a direct and irresolvable conflict between the 2, then God, so to speak, suspends His honor for the sake of ours, commanding us to drop all else in order to first attend to the human being who has died leaving no one else to perform the final act of lovingkindness.

THE GENERAL PROHIBITIONS PERTAINING TO ALL ISRAEL

We return to the Ramban on this topic. Note that the prohibition upon the Kohen to not pluck his hair, shave his beard or cut his flesh as expressions of grief are not exclusive to the priestly class, but are enjoined upon all of Israel. The Torah states in Parashat Reeh: You are the children of God your Lord, you shall not cut yourselves nor make baldness between your eyes for the deceased. For you are a holy people to God your Lord, and He has chosen you to be His treasured nation from all of the peoples who are upon the face of the earth... (Devarim 14:1-2).

The Ramban comments (commentary to Devarim 14:1-2):

The Torah here indicates that these prohibitions were not enjoined upon the Kohanim exclusively because they are “holy to God,” but rather the entire congregation is holy, all of them are children to God your Lord like the Kohanim, and therefore must observe these rites as they do... In my opinion, the notion of a “holy nation” constitutes an assurance of the soul’s immortality before God, may He be blessed. It is as if the Torah states that since you are a holy nation and God’s treasure, and “God does not take souls but considers how they shall not be driven from before Him” (Shmuel 2:14:14), therefore it is inappropriate to cut one’s flesh or pluck one’s hair for the deceased, even if he died in his youth. Now the Torah does not outlaw crying, because human nature is to cry out when one is separated from a loved one even while alive, but this nevertheless serves as an allusion for the Sages who forbade excessive mourning over the deceased.

CONCLUSION

In other words, the Ramban suggests, the holiness of the people of Israel implies the immortality of the soul. To be close to Him and to live in His presence means to continue to exist even after the demise of the material body. That being the case, excessive expressions of mourning such as cutting oneself or making baldness are unwarranted, for the deceased may have been taken from us but not ceased to exist. We cry out because we feel OUR loss, but the soul lives on. For the Ramban, then, these very laws that stress the necessity of the Kohen HaGadol to not abandon his service even when death summons him may be more than an emphatic statement about the glory of God’s service on the one hand or the responsibility of the leader towards his people on the other. The Kohen HaGadol remains in the Temple because that place is associated with God’s ongoing presence, with the ultimate Source of all life with Whom we strive so mightily to be united.

By remaining there even as a loved one passes from this earthly plain, the Kohen HaGadol highlights the immortality of the soul, that a person’s spiritual being can never be extinguished because it is bound up with God – Himself absolutely incorporeal and eternal. As an expression of the human being’s most noble strivings to be constantly aware of God’s overarching presence and spiritually sensitive to His closeness, the Kohen HaGadol therefore remains behind as his loved ones are borne to their final earthly resting place, not because he does not care but because he cares so much. Bound up with God, he is afforded a rare glimpse into an existence that transcends death and conquers mourning, that overpowers our material transience and looks towards eternity. And within that realm, engaged in the service of the Most High Who gives life and takes it away, mourning, sadness and even death itself are an outrage. Shabbat Shalom

Sefer Daniel Lesson 23 The Final Vision (Part 3) By Harav Yaakov Medan

Based on: <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/ketuvim/sefer-daniel/final-vision-3>

6. The "wise ones" and “those who act wickedly against the covenant”

Let us now return to the question we raised previously: What is the significance of this vision, in all its detail, concerning the Greek Empire? Based on the conclusions we drew from the preceding chapters, both Nevukhadnetzar’s first dream and Daniel’s visions lead



up to this vision, which is indeed the most detailed. It is also the vision that concludes the Book of Daniel, thereby appearing to represent the ultimate purpose of Daniel's mission. Let us examine the continuation of this vision (11:28-12:13):

Then he shall return to his land with great riches, with his heart set against the holy covenant, and he shall do [as he wishes] and shall return to his land. At the appointed time he shall return, and come through the south, but it shall not be at this latter time as it was previously. For ships of Kittim shall come against him, and he will lose heart and will go back, and he shall resent the holy covenant, and shall do [his will]; and he shall return and shall show understanding to those who forsake the holy covenant. And arms shall stand up on his part, and they shall defile the Sanctuary, the fortress, and shall do away with the daily sacrifice, and shall set up the abomination that brings desolation. And he shall seduce with flattery those who act wickedly against the covenant, but the people who know their God shall be strong and prevail. And those who are wise among the people shall cause the many to understand, but they will fall by the sword and by the flame, by captivity and by spoil, for many days. And when they fall they shall be helped with a little help, but many shall join themselves to them with flattery. And some of those who are wise shall fall, to try them and to refine, and to cleanse them, until the time of the end, for it is yet for the appointed time. And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak wondrous things against the God of gods; and he shall prosper until the fury is over, for that which is determined shall be done. Nor shall he regard the gods of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor any god shall he regard; for he shall magnify himself above all. But in his place shall he honor the god of strongholds; and he shall honor a god whom his fathers did not know, with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and costly things. And he shall deal with the strongest fortresses with the help of a foreign god; he shall increase the glory of those whom he acknowledges; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for a price. And at the time of the end, the king of the south shall push at him; and the king of the north shall come against him like a storm, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow as he passes through. He shall enter also into the beautiful land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom and Moav, and the chief of the children of Ammon. He shall also stretch forth his hand upon the countries; and the land of Egypt shall not escape. But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall follow his steps. But rumors from the east and from the north shall frighten him; so he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and utterly to do away with many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the holy mountain of beauty; and he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.

And at that time, Michael, the chief angel who stands for the children of your people, shall arise, and there shall be a time of trouble, such as there has not been since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awaken, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who lead many to righteousness – like the stars, forever and ever. But you, Daniel - shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, there stood 2 others, 1 on this bank of the river and the other on the other bank. And one said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river: "How long until the end of the wonders?" And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he lifted up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him Who lives forever, that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and when the crushing of the power of the holy people is finished, all of this will be finished. And I heard, but I did not understand; and I said: "My lord, what shall be the end of these things?" And he said: "Go, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. Many shall purify themselves, and cleanse themselves and be refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. And from the time that the daily sacrifice is done away with, and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there shall be 1290 days. Happy is he who waits and reaches 1335 days. As for you – go, until the end comes; and you shall rest and stand up for your allotted portion at the end of days."

The beginning of this section mentions the "holy covenant" 3 times. There is 1 reference to "those who forsake the holy covenant," and thereafter the text speaks of "those who act wickedly against the covenant." Likewise, there are 3 references to "those who are wise," the "wise among the people," and "the people who know their God." The vision speaks of those who awaken from sleeping in the dust to eternal life, and others who proceed to "shame and everlasting contempt," as well as the "wicked" and the "many who join

themselves with flattery.” The internal conflict within Am Yisrael, between those who are wise and guard the covenant and those who forsake it and act wickedly against it, is central to the vision, and it relates to the decrees of the Greek tyrant against the covenant and the Sanctuary, which are mentioned here, as well as in the vision in chapter 8, as we discussed.

We mentioned that the Greek Empire was the first – both in Daniel’s vision and historically – to wage ongoing, all-out war against observance of the covenant, adherence to the Torah and its commandments. This was not a battle waged against the Jewish nation, like Nevukhadnetzar’s campaign against Jerusalem, nor did it seek to annihilate the Jewish people, like Haman’s decrees against “the people of Mordekhai.” In this war, man is not viewed as a leaf blown about by the winds of forces greater than himself, which determine his fate. Rather, it gives each individual the choice to be a “soldier” of faith, of the covenant, of the Torah – to risk his life and even to give it up, for the sake of observance. On the other hand, for the sake of survival, comfort, or as an extraneous pretext to remove the yoke of Torah and the commandments from upon himself, he may accept the “law of the land” and reconcile himself to the decrees of the tyrannical king, even using them to benefit his personal status in Jewish society that is remolding itself.

The risk and challenge that these decrees posed to Am Yisrael had significant repercussions for the nation’s religious life. There was thus a need for a detailed, precise vision to last many generations, foreseeing the test that Am Yisrael would face and providing the spiritual support needed to withstand it, as well as the hope of redemption, proclaiming to the world that there is a guiding force behind history, a Master of the world Who sees everything and Who will reward those who fear Him and punish those who go against Him.

Daniel experienced his visions long before the rise of the kingdom of Greece. Daniel and his companions – Chanania, Mishael and Azarya – set the precedent already in the first exile of giving up one’s life to sanctify God’s Name by observing and upholding the covenant of the Torah and its commandments to the point of “even if He takes your life.” They risked their lives by secretly eating only seeds in Nevukhadnetzar’s palace, not wishing to defile themselves with the royal food. They demonstrated the same behavior later when, as ministers, they refused to worship Nevukhadnetzar’s golden image. Daniel exhibited the same defiance of royal dictates when he prayed for the ruins of Jerusalem despite the decree by the ministers of Darius the Mede.

Eventually, during the rule of the kings of Greece, the law established by Daniel and his friends had become a way of life for anyone who held dear the observance of God’s covenant (see Bereishit Rabba 65). The Books of the Chashmonaim are filled with stories of such martyr deaths during this period, including stories of torture. Some describe martyrdom for fulfillment of circumcision, others unwilling to desecrate Shabbat by waging war, some giving their lives rather than offer the Temple treasures, yet others preferring death and/or suffering to consuming or even touching prohibited food. The essence of these narratives relates to self-sacrifice involving torture and death so as not to become defiled with forbidden foods – following in the footsteps of Chanania, Mishael and Azarya, in their time. Indeed, in Makkabim 4:13 and 16, these 3 are mentioned as the model for the 7 sons who sanctified God’s Name.

These laws were established for all future generations during the time of R. Yochanan in Tiberias (Sanhedrin 74a) as the laws of giving up one’s life at a time of religious persecution – even for sins other than idolatry, killing, and sexual immorality.

We note further that on the basis of what we find in Makkabim 4:4 concerning the women who circumcised their sons, a new halakha was established in that generation. Unlike the previous 2 sources, where the women were sentenced to death by the Greek authorities, we find here that the women threw themselves together with their infants – after circumcising them – to their deaths. This halakha is not mentioned explicitly in the laws of kiddush Hashem, although there is evidence of its observance in a later period.

The Gemara in Gittin (57b) tells of 400 children who were taken captive to be forced into prostitution at the time of the exile. They asked aloud, if they would drown themselves, would they be granted a portion in the World to Come, determined that there would be a positive response, and acted accordingly.

During the Middle Ages, there were many debates over this law concerning a person who commits suicide for kiddush Hashem. Rabbeinu Tam writes (Tosafot, Avoda Zara 18a):

“And he shall not harm himself’ – Rabbeinu Tam says that when they are afraid that they will be forced into forbidden idolatry, such as through torture that would be unbearable, he is commanded to harm himself [i.e., commit suicide] as in the story in Gittin concerning the children who were taken captive for prostitution, and who threw themselves into the sea.

The events at Massada should also be reviewed in light of this source, and the reality of suicide for kiddush Hashem during the Crusades is attested to in the lamentation for Tish’a be-Av, “Al Beit Yisrael ve-al Am Hashem ki naflu ba-cherev.” Many historians have regarded the mass suicide at Massada as the source for this type of kiddush Hashem, but we maintain that the original source for it is

in the story set forth in Makkabim 4, cited above.

This halakha is also related to the account of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya in the Book of Daniel, in light of the assumption in the midrash that these 3 men could have evaded Nevukhadnetzar's decree had they hidden, but they deliberately chose to perform their Kiddush Hashem (see Bereishit Rabba 34:13).

Chanania, Mishael and Azarya did not enter the fiery furnace of their own free will, and the only "accusation" against them is that they did not run away or hide. This is in contrast to the other instances which we cited, where the individuals involved ended their own lives before the enemy reached them. Indeed, on the 1 hand, during the Crusades, people were unable to save themselves without violating some prohibition, whereas Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya could have saved themselves. On the other hand, however, these 3 performed no action to end their lives, whereas during the Crusades, the communities of Worms and Mainz committed suicide.

It is also possible that Greek culture, rich both materially and intellectually – "western culture" – to which Am Yisrael was exposed here for the first time in its history, was God's reason for warning against its dangers as early as the time of Chanania, Mishael, and Azarya, long before it burst into our lives during the reign of the House of Seleucus. The ability to stand up to this culture, with the great self-sacrifice that this involved, was 1 reason for the promise given to Daniel in his vision that Jewish sovereignty and the dwelling of the Divine Presence would come (during the days of the Chashmona'im) with victory in the struggle against this culture.

Another unique difficulty which the Greek Empire presented to the spiritual existence of Am Yisrael involved, to a considerable degree, Alexander's policy during his conquests. Alexander paid his soldiers with portions of land in the countries he conquered. Thus, within a short time, Eretz Yisrael was filled with a foreign people unknown to us; in fact, the area became a mixture of people, with Greek culture serving as their sole, weak common denominator. Identity was no longer national but rather cultural. Having so many foreigners coming to assimilate with the inhabitants of the land could potentially break the local spirit – in our case, the spirit of Torah and faith. This culture led to many mixed marriages between the Greek soldiers and local Jewish girls.

Circumcision and the holiness of Jewish seed stood in opposition to this trend and attempted to halt it. It is no wonder that decrees against circumcision were at the center of the struggle, as noted above. Perhaps this is what Daniel refers to in his vision, when he speaks of those who forsake the covenant, and those who act wickedly against the covenant, and about the enemy that shows fury towards the holy covenant. A tremendous spiritual effort, inspired by the example of Daniel and his companions, was necessary in order to defeat this phenomenon and to restore the Divine Presence to the holy land. The path set down by Daniel and his friends for the generation of the Chashmona'im is engraved "with an iron pen and a diamond point" in our book, the Book of Daniel.

7. "Charut" (engraved) and "cherut"

The struggle of the "keepers of the covenant" against "those who act wickedly against it" is, on our interpretation of the vision, the final struggle before the appearance of Jewish sovereignty upon God's appointed throne – in our case, the kingdom of the Chashmona'im – which, had we been worthy, would have established its throne forever (the king being succeeded by a descendant of David). The connection between the self-sacrificing struggle of the keepers of the covenant and the establishment of Jewish sovereignty upon the throne of God's Kingdom might be expressed in the following exegesis:

"And the writing was Divine writing, engraved (charut) upon the tablets:" Do not read charut (engraved), but rather cherut (freedom), for no person is free except him who engages in Torah study. (Avot 6:2)

Indeed, many of the struggles for Jewish independence started out as struggles for observance of the Torah. The struggle for Israel's exodus from slavery in Egypt to freedom began as a struggle for the basic right to serve their God and to offer Him sacrifices after a 3-day journey. It was only when Pharaoh refused this elementary religious demand, ruling that slaves lack even the right to believe in their God and to worship Him, that the struggle erupted in full force, leading to a push for full freedom from Egyptian slavery.

The same was true of the period of the Chashmona'im. The rebellion was initiated by Matityahu as a struggle for the right of God's servants to fulfill their obligation towards their God. It continued under the leadership of his son, Yehuda, as a struggle for national liberation from the yoke of the Syrian-Greeks. Almost certainly, the struggle of R. Akiva and his students, led by Ben Koziba, followed a similar development.

Daniel establishes, in his vision, that without a determined struggle, with self-sacrifice to the point of death for observance of the Torah and its commandments and the guarding of the covenant, there will be no Jewish sovereignty, nor will God's sovereignty be established.

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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