

TEMPLE BETH-EL SHABBAT AM TORAH STUDY 5782

EMOR...Leviticus 21:1-8

KOSHI: What does the Holiness Code of the Kohanim teach us about the path to Kedusha for the people Israel?

Verse	JPS	HEBREW
1	Adonai said to Moses: Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: None shall defile himself for any [dead] person among his kin,	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲמַר אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לִנְפֹשׁ לֹא־יִטְמָא בְעַמְיֹו:
2	except for the relatives that are closest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother;	כִּי אִם־לְשֹׂאָרוֹ הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו לְאִמּוֹ וּלְאָבִיו וּלְבָנָו וּלְבִתּוֹ וּלְאָחָיו:
3	also for a virgin sister, close to him because she has not become someone's [wife], for her he may defile himself.	וְלְאִחָתּוֹ הַבְּתוּלָה הַקְּרוּבָה אֵלָיו אֲשֶׁר לֹא־הָיְתָה לְאִישׁ לָהּ יִטְמָא:
4	But he shall not defile himself as a kinsman by marriage and so profane himself.	לֹא יִטְמָא בְעַל בְּעַמְיֹו לְהַחֲלוֹ:
5	They shall not shave smooth any part of their heads, or cut the side-growth of their beards, or make gashes in their flesh.	קָרְחָה בְּרֹאשָׁם (יִקְרַח) [יִקְרְחוּ] לֹא־וּפְאֹת זָקָנָם לֹא יִגְלְחוּ וּבְבִשְׂרָם לֹא יִשְׂרְטוּ שְׂרָטָת:
6	They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God; for they offer Adonai's offerings by fire, the food of their God, and so must be holy.	קִדְשִׁים יִהְיוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַחֲלִילוּ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי אֶת־אֲשֵׁי יְהוָה לַחֵם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הֵם מִקְרִיבִם וְהֵיוּ קִדְשׁ:
7	They shall not take [into their household as their wife] a woman defiled by harlotry, nor shall they take one divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God	אִשָּׁה זִנָּה וַחֲלָלָה לֹא יִקְחוּ וְאִשָּׁה גְרוּשָׁה מֵאִשָּׁה לֹא יִקְחוּ כִּי־קִדְשׁ הוּא לֵאלֹהֵיו:
8	and you must treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I Adonai who sanctify you am holy.	וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם כִּי־אֶת־לַחֵם אֱלֹהֵיךָ הוּא מִקְרִיב קִדְשׁ יִהְיֶה לָּךְ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה מְקִדְשְׁכֶם:

REMEZ...The Hint

Searching for clues that give us greater insight into the world of our ancestors

v. 1 *Adonai said to Moses: Speak to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and say to them...*

IBN EZRA...The previous portion dealt with the kedusha of the entire people—all striving to become holy, but now we turn to the Kohanim, whose Divine Service places upon them a particular responsibility to maintain high standards of holy behavior.

B'CHOR SHOR. . .Israel was commanded "*K'doshim tih'yu*-separate shall you be..." and so holy, from among the peoples. . .And now Torah commands the Kohanim to separate further by adhering to a higher standard of holiness.

RABBI HAROLD KUSHNER... This parshah lives up to the book's alternate title, 'TORAT KOHANIM—the Priest's Manual.' The previous parshah set Israel apart from the nations by their actions, and this parshah sets the kohanim apart from the Israelites by means of obligations and restrictions. . .As Israel must represent the God-oriented life to the nations, so the kohanim are to represent a maximal level of devotion to Israel. Every society needs a core of people who live by a more demanding code. . .

RASHI . . . "*b'nei Aharon*—the sons of Aaron..." All of them—even those who are blemished and may not perform the Temple Service. . . 'Emor...Speak' to them, too.

RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH... "*b'nei Aharon*—the sons of Aaron..." "You are Kohanim by virtue of the fact that you are *b'nei Aharon*—the sons of Aaron..., since your greatness is hereditary. . .Still, you must take care to convey the importance of your lineage to your children.

V. 6 *They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God...*

S'FORNO.... "*so they shall not profane the Name of their God...*" The Kohanim have many responsibilities and privileges beyond those of the average Jew, yet they do not have the right to assume they are permitted that which is forbidden everyone else...not in mourning nor in joy.

RASHI... "*They shall be holy ...*" Even against their will, the Bet-Din will sanctify them.

MIZRACHI. . . Our verse could have said, "They are holy," but "*Kedoshim yih'yu- they shall be holy*" implies that it is the responsibility of the community to see to it that the kohanim remain so.

HAEMEK DAVAR... The Kohanim must be holy, in the sense that they abstain from excess and maintain higher standards. . .But they must be careful to do so only "*Ley-lohey'hem—for their God.*"

V. 8 *You shall sanctify him, since he offers the food of your God; he shall remain holy to you, for holy am I, Adonai, who sanctifies you.*

RASHI. . . "*You shall sanctify him...*" Even against his will, that if a Kohen will not divorce the harlot he married, give him lashes and chastise him publicly until he does. [TALMUD, Yevamot, 88b]
"*he shall be holy to you*" Thus treat him with holiness, that he should be first to commence any occasion, and to make the first blessing at any feast or festival. [TALMUD, Gittin, 59b]

K'TAV SOFER... *he shall be holy for you. . .* " Since the kohanim were dependent upon all others in the household of Israel for their food, some treated the kohanim as less. . .That is why Torah tresses their role in offering "the food of their God."

RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH... The Kohen is not merely an individual, but an expression of the Sanctuary he serves. As such, he is responsible to the people to offer before God, and the people Israel are responsible to compel him remain true to his task.

ALSHECH... "*you shall sanctify him...*" There can be no doubt that among the Israelite masses, there must have been people who questioned the special status of the kohanim. How could a small group attain such superior status by heredity? Israel is informed not to be jealous of the kohanim, since the key to their holiness is connected to the performance of sacred tasks which the people have granted they do on their behalf. . .Israel is thereby reminded; there is no major difference in the degree of holiness between the Kohen and an ordinary Israelite. . .Torah does not want Israel to honor the kohanim for the benefits they derive from their performing sacrificial rites on their behalf, but rather so God will have reason to bestow holiness on them also, 'for holy am I who sanctifies you. '

DRASH...The Interpretation

How do Ancient Truths Impact our Modern Reality?

PROFFESOR YESHAYAHU LEIBOWITZ. .. "*He shall be holy to his God...*" This is *Torat Kohanim* in the specific, and as discussed last week, here too do we have a repetition of the key word: *Kedushah*. But here we must ask ourselves: Is this holiness—which is specific to the *Kohanim* and transferred by inheritance from one generation to the next-- something innate in them? Or must we say here as well, that this holiness is only a special obligation imposed upon them? Indeed, the key word to all matters of holiness in *Torat Kohanim* is the term "*to their God.*" It is not written they shall be holy to you," But rather, "*to their God.*" The Jewish people do not have to treat the Kohen's status as something which is itself holy. Rabbi Chayim of Volozhin, (the NETZIV) notes that the holiness attributed to the *kohanim* is conditional — on their being holy in behavior. They are not holy by nature, nor are they to consider themselves holy...In the Book of Exodus, in Tetzaveh, the obligation of priestly garments is described. But in Ezekiel [44:19], a detail is added that is not specifically stated in Torah. "When the Kohanim returning from performing sacrifice in the inner court go to the outer chamber to the people, they will take off the clothes they wear and leave them in the inner chambers and put on other clothes, so as not to wear holiness by their clothes." The NETZIV comments, 'They will not imply holiness to the people through their clothes, thus they should not appear holy because of what they wear. Inside, they are priests offering sacrifice; outside they are like any other people, and so should dress like them too. If they attempt to look holy and thus separate from the people beyond their Temple work, they are profaning "*the kedusha* of their God." . . . So we must say today, without the Divine Service and the Holy Temple...to regard certain people as holy in themselves is nothing but a form of idolatry...Our Jewish faith does not recognize *kedusha* as an inherent, nor an inherited part of any person — and, one should add, that the same applies to anything which exists in human reality, in a grand building or even a promised land...Holiness comes as a result of the function we fill in teaching Torah and observing Torah, whatever we do, and wherever we live...

RABBI ARNOLD JACOB WOLF.... Nobody believes me, least of all my own congregants, but the fact is that I only work here. Rabbis are not, in my view, bosses or organizers, fund-raisers or PR types. We are teachers, hired to teach and only to teach. And if we do that, we hardly have time for anything else. . .If the rabbi is truly a teacher, not a coach, and not a performer, that leaves the congregation free to do its job. The membership is released to be Jewish without the rabbi's substituting for them or directing their Jewish destinies...They are free to learn. . .Ours is an era of diminished rabbinic authority in the service of lay leadership, what Eugene Borowitz prophetically called *tsimtsum*— self—limitation. Even God had to pull Himself back in order to leave space for people to act...My responsibility as rabbi, then, is to help them see their responsibilities...And likewise, to be the best Jew I can. I must learn in order to teach...I must work out my own religious path, which will not always be the same as the one most of my congregation will work out as theirs. If they are truly free, then so am I. My sanctity is not in their hands any more than theirs is in mine. . .I am bound to, but distanced from, the very community I serve, and, so help me, love...We are brothers and sisters, but we are not surrogates...Being a rabbi is, I suppose, easier said than done...But rabbis demythologized from priestly status and congregations empowered often do sacred work together. In the end, it is God alone who makes us holy and establishes the work of our hands. [SHEMA, May 14, 1982]

SOD...The Secret

What deeper knowing do we take away from spending time with the Torah text?

"Ten shoemakers can make a minyan, but nine rabbis cannot."

---Yiddish Proverb