

Stollen Moments – Emor – May 18, 2024

PARASHA SUMMARY FROM WWW. REFORMJUDAISM.ORG

- Laws regulating the lives and sacrifices of the priests are presented. (21:1-22:33)
- The set times of the Jewish calendar are named and described: the Sabbath, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the Pilgrimage Festivals of Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot. (23:1-44)
- God commands the Israelites to bring clear olive oil for lighting the sanctuary menorah. The ingredients and placement of the displayed loaves of sanctuary bread are explained. (24:1-9)
- Laws dealing with profanity, murder, and the maiming of others are outlined. (24:10-23)

Leviticus Chapter 21

1) יהוה 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, 2) except for the relatives that are closest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; 3) also for a virgin sister, close to him because she has not become someone's [wife], for her he may defile himself. 4) But he shall not defile himself as a kinsman by marriage, and so profane himself.

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. 6) They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God; for they offer יהוה's offerings by fire, the food of their God, and so must be holy.

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 8) and you must treat them as holy, since they offer the food of your God; they shall be holy to you, for I יהוה who sanctify you am holy.

9) When the daughter of a priest defiles herself through harlotry, it is her father whom she defiles; she shall be put to the fire. 10) The priest who is exalted above his fellows, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been ordained to wear the vestments, shall not bare his head or rend his vestments. 11) He shall not go in where there is any dead body; he shall not defile himself even for his father or mother.

12) He shall not go outside the sanctuary and profane the sanctuary of his God, for upon him is the distinction of the anointing oil of his God, Mine יהוה's. 13) He may take [into his household as his wife] only a woman who is a virgin. 14) A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is degraded by harlotry—such he may not take. Only a virgin of his own kin may he take as his wife— 15) that he may not profane his offspring among his kin, for I יהוה have sanctified him.

16) יהוה spoke further to Moses: 17) Speak to Aaron and say: No man of your offspring throughout the ages who has a defect shall be qualified to offer the food of his God. 18) No one at all who has a defect shall be qualified: no man who is blind, or lame, or has a limb too short or too long; 19) no man who has a broken leg or a broken arm; 20) or who is a hunchback, or a dwarf, or who has a growth in his eye, or who has a boil-scar, or scurvy, or crushed testes.

21) No man among the offspring of Aaron the priest who has a defect shall be qualified to offer יהוה's offering by fire; having a defect, he shall not be qualified to offer the food of his God. 22) He may eat of the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy; 23) but he shall not enter behind the curtain or come near the altar, for he has a defect. He shall not profane these places sacred to Me, for I יהוה have sanctified them. 24) Thus Moses spoke to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites.

Rashi on 21 :1

לא יטמא בעמיו THERE SHALL NONE BE DEFILED BY THE DEAD AMONG HIS PEOPLES — This means, as long as the dead is among his peoples (i. e. so long as there are some of his people — Jews — who can occupy themselves with his burial) thus excluding the case of a מת מצוה (a corpse of a person whose relatives are unknown or which lies in a place where there are no Jews, nor are there any in the near vicinity; cf. Nazir 43b) in which case the priest is allowed to make himself unclean by handling the corpse (Sifra, Emor, Section 1 3).

My Jewish Learning on Priestly Restrictions

According to the Torah (Leviticus 21:7), a kohen is restricted from marrying a prostitute (zonah) or a divorcee. According to the mishnah, the category of zonah includes a female convert, a freed maidservant and any woman who engaged in a forbidden sexual relationship. Different communities have different levels of adherence to this law. It is still practiced by Orthodox communities, and some Conservative communities, but rabbinic authorities sometimes make exceptions. Jewish law (Leviticus 21:1) also forbids a kohen from having contact with corpses, other than those of close family members. This means that a kohen might avoid entering a cemetery, or attending a funeral unless it is for a close relative (mother/father, sister/brother, son/daughter, spouse). Some kohanim are especially careful about this rule, and may even avoid entering a museum that contains mummies. Since kohen status cannot be proven (although widespread DNA testing may eventually change that), synagogues giving special honors to kohanim rely on individuals to identify themselves.

Rabbi Jack Riemer

If Yitzchak Avinu, Father Isaac, who became legally blind in his old age, were to come into our synagogue and want to daven with us, would we have a large print prayer book available for him? If Yaakov Avinu, Father Jacob, who was injured in an encounter with a mysterious stranger and limped for the rest of his life as a result, were to come into our synagogue and want an aliyah, would he be able to get up to the bimah here? And if not, if we don't have a ramp that makes the bimah accessible to the people with disabilities, what would we say to him? If Moshe Rabeynu, Moses our teacher, who had a speech defect, were to come into our shul and want to read from the Torah that he gave us, could we handle it without becoming embarrassed if he were to stutter?