

# NONNEGOTIABLE BOUNDARIES

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

And HASHEM said to Moshe: 'Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and you shall say to them:"To a (dead) person he shall not become impure among his people..." (Vayikra 21:1)

There are two major motifs in Emor. The first part deals with laws pertaining to the maintenance of the integrity of the Kidusha-Holiness of the Cohanim. The second speaks of special combinations of sacrifices that are to be brought in the Mikdash on the various Yomim Tovim-Holy Days. It may already be too easy to figure out how these two are connected but it's still worth explaining.

There are three basic arenas of life- Olam -Shana- Nefesh; that is literally world (place), time, and person! The permissibility or the forbidden-ness of an act depend upon the coordination of these three factors; where, when, and who! Plug in the deed and the variables. Eating one hour before Yom Kippur begins may actually be a noble thing. An hour later it is despicable! Why? The Torah designated this time to for this set of behaviors and inappropriate for others. That's the reality of these boundaries like any others boundaries. That's what holiness means. It's the art and science of living respectfully within the G-d given boundaries of life.

Think about it! When people employ all their intelligence only to blur the lines of distinctions rather than to clarify them they are working against the Kodesh-the Holy and they are trying to make everything Chol-secular. Chol literally means sand! Sand is an undefined conglomerate of particles. It has no particular shape or direction. Kodesh, on the other hand, thrives on the drawing of and the obedience to clearly defined boundaries.

For example, a person needs to eat and sleep and learn and work. It then becomes important to eat when it's time to eat and sleep when it's time to sleep etc.

What happens when any of these disciplines are broken and the person sleeps when it's time to work or eats when it's time to sleep?! Once we know and appreciate that that these lines of time, place, and person are not negotiable then the stage is set for a life of holiness. Shabbos is Shabbos and not a time to work. The Cohanim have standards that protect the integrity of and enhance their inherent Holiness.

I still have ringing in my ears the cute words of one of my Rebbeim's sons from more than 31 years ago. Shabbos morning there was an Aufruf in Yeshiva and the groom as is customary was to be called to the Torah. With the extra guests in attendance there was a larger than usual crowd. The

children were also there in greater than to expected numbers. They could detect the sweet smell of candy like birds in the park gathering around the man with the bag of bed crumbs. Once the groom finished his blessing after the Torah reading the bags loaded with goodies began to fly from all directions and so did the scramble of little kids to collect them aggressively.

At the Kiddush one of Rebbeim's boys proudly showed off to his father his newly found cache of candy. His father was coaching him and advising that he squirrel away his treasure before they go home. The kid just did not want to depart from his hard earned candy bags and it wasn't time to open them up and eat them all right then and there. The boy insisted he wanted to take them home and the father reminded him firmly there was no Eruv to permit him to carry his package home and he would have to wait until after Shabbos. In desperation he said one more thing, "Abba, I'll put'm in my pocket! No one will see!"

I remember thinking then that this was a perfectly charming and immature attempt to obfuscate what an adult can understand are unavoidable and **nonnegotiable boundaries**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).