

# MAKING LIGHT OF THE KOHANIM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*G-d told Moshe, "Tell the priests that the descendants of Aaron may not become defiled by the dead..."*  
(Vayikra 21:1)

The beginning of this week's parshah focuses on the kohanim, while the end of the parshah deals with the chagim (the Jewish holidays), two seemingly unrelated topics. However, a somewhat deeper understanding of the role that the kohanim play in Klal Yisroel, reveals that they are really two sides of the same idea.

Obviously, the main role of the kohanim was to act on behalf of the Jewish people in terms of performing the Temple service. However, beyond that, their job was to unify the Jewish people and to keep them unified. That is why ultimately, they came from the tribe of Levi, as Leah, the mother of Levi hinted when she named her son:

*She became pregnant again, and gave birth to a son. She said, "This time my husband will be attached [laveh] to me, because I have given birth to three sons for him." Therefore, she called him "Levi".*  
(Bereishit 29:34)

In other words, inherent in Levi is the quality of attaching two things that belong together, the very basis of the kehunah (the priesthood). However, in this case the unification is not only between the Jewish people and G-d, but amongst all the tribes, something that had concerned Ya'akov Avinu from the beginning:

He took two stones in his hands and said, "If these two stones become one, then I know that nothing wasteful will come from me." (Bereishit Rabbah 68:11)

He said this before he was even married, and on his way to Padan Aram after taking the blessings originally meant for Eisav. The fulfillment of this prophecy, however, will not be until the End-of-Days, as the following prophecy of Yechezkel predicted:

The word of G-d came to me, saying, "Now you, Son of Man, take for yourself one piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Yehudah and for the Children of Israel, his comrades; and take one piece of wood and write upon it, 'For Yosef, the wood of Ephraim and all the House of Israel, his comrades'. Then bring them close to you, one to the other, like one piece of wood, and they will become united in your hand. Now when the children of your people say to you, saying, 'Will you not tell us what these

things are to you?', say to them, 'Thus said G-d: Behold, I am taking the wood of Yosef which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his comrades, and I am placing them and him together with the wood of Yehudah; and I will make them into one piece of wood, and they will become one in My hand'." (Yechezkel 37:15-19)

Amazingly, the issue of Jewish unity has been seen as secondary to the issue of redemption, when in fact, they are one in the same thing. The lack of unity amongst Klal Yisroel today is not just another obstacle along the path to the Final Redemption, its resolution is the Final Redemption, which was certainly made a lot harder once G-d hid ten of the tribes prior to the destruction of the Second Temple.

This is why the Kohen Gadol wore the names of all twelve tribes on his shoulders, six on one side, and six on the other, which worked out to be twenty-five letters on one shoulder, and twenty-five on the other, twelve words and fifty letters in total. Even the word "kohen" alludes to this, since it is spelled Chof-Heh-Nun, the first two letters totaling twenty and the last letter, the Nun equaling fifty. It was as if through the kohen, the tribes somehow became unified.

Thus, the mishnah states:

Hillel says: "Be like the students of Aharon. Love peace and pursue peace. Love humanity and bring them close to Torah. (Pirkei Avot 1:12) From the mishnah it might sound like, "Well, the truth is, the kohanim were always very busy with the Temple service. However, if you just happened to meet one in the local market place, you would have been impressed how peace-loving they are as a group. Not only that, but you would have seen how, if they had a spare moment, they tended to do outreach..." In fact, that was their Temple service; it's just that they had different ways of carrying it out depending upon their modus operandi.

### **SHABBAT DAY:**

*On the bottom of the robe, around the hem, place pomegranates of blue- purple, red-purple, and crimson [wool], and bells of gold in-between them all around — golden bell and pomegranate, golden bell and pomegranate — around the hem of the robe. (Shemot 28:33-34)*

Light unifies. Not just any light, but specifically the "Ohr HaGanuz", the original light of Creation that G-d subsequently hid from the evil people of history on the first day of Creation:

"G-d saw the light that it was good, and He divided..." (Bereishit 1:4): He saw that it was not worth letting the evil people use it, so He set it aside for the righteous in the Time-to-Come. (Chagigah 12a)

So, you might ask, if G-d hid the light, then how could the kohanim access it? This is the answer to that question:

G-d made a division in the light's shining, that it should only emanate for the righteous people whose actions draw the light down; the deeds of the evil people prevent its shining, and this was the hiding.

(Sha'arei Leshem, p. 103)

Hence, since the kohanim were devoted to the service of G-d and commanded to remain in a high state of spiritual purity, they had open access to the Ohr HaGanuz (the hidden light of Creation). This is alluded to by both the Chof-Heh and the Nun of "kohen", two numbers that directly allude to this very light:

*G-d said, "Yehi ohr — Let there be light!" (Bereishit 1:3)*

Though, traditionally the Hebrew word "yehi" translates as "let there be", the entire phrase can also be read as follows: yehi = ohr, that is, yehi is the ohr. And, if the word yehi — Yud-Heh-Yud is converted into a gematria of 10+5+10, which has a total of twenty-five, then the phrase would read: twenty-five equals light, and hence, the twenty-fifth word in the Torah is "ohr" (light).

As for the Nun, which represents the number fifty, it is always an allusion to the "Nun Sha'arei Binah" (the "Fifty Gates of Understanding"). This is a very a deep concept. Kabbalistically, but in simpler terms it is the Torah knowledge that results in the kind of intellectual clarity that allows a person to see the hand of G-d in everyday life, and to appreciate how mitzvot are really the most productive route for a human being to follow, and in particular, a Jew. It is the knowledge that neutralizes our yetzer hara so that we can do that which is fitting for our soul. It is the "Light of Twenty-Five" that results in the "Understanding of Fifty", which is why the holiday of Chanukah, which occurs on the 25th day of the month of Kislev, is called "Yemai Binah" — "Days of Understanding", made possible by the kohanim who saved the day at that time in history. It is this light that results in this profound spiritual understanding that makes the kohanim the "pursuers of peace".

Hence, the Kohan Gadol wore thirty-six bells and "pomegranates" on the bottom of his cloak, the other number that relates to this light. For, twenty-five represents the light hidden within Creation, whereas the number thirty-six is always a reference to the light after it has been revealed through the actions of man. Hence, the miracle of Chanukah that occurred through the kohanim (in the 36th Century) resulted in a holiday that occurs on the 25th day of the month that lasts for eight days during which we kindle thirty-six candles.

Not only this, but the Mishkan (the Tabernacle) in which the kohanim served G-d, and through which they drew down this light, was completed on the 25th day of Kislev at the base of Mt. Sinai, the future date of the holiday of Chanukah. Apparently, that is the day in Creation that is the perfect window of opportunity for accessing this light, and anything associated with this day is, by definition, a lens for it.

### **SEUDAT SHLISHIT:**

*"You will be a kingdom of priests to Me, a holy nation." (Shemot 19:6)*

Thus the "Shema", the ultimate statement of unity, has twenty-five letters, alluding to the fact that without access to this light, the unity it commands is not possible. For Amalek divides the Name of

G-d, meaning that He makes G-d appear as if He lacks unity, G-d forbid, in the minds of men. The gematria of Amalek is 240, the same as that of "suffek", the Hebrew word for "doubt", meaning that Amalek tries to block the Ohr HaGanuz from reaching mankind to keep him in doubt about G-d's unity, without which the unity of mankind is absolutely impossible.

This is what we learn from Mt. Sinai. At Mt. Sinai the Jewish people achieved the sublime unity of "k'ish echad b'leiv echad"—"like a single person with a single heart". This was made possible because of the incredible revelation of the Divine Presence that occurred at that time. No nation had ever experienced such a high level of prophecy until the revelation at Mt. Sinai. There was no trace of Amalek whatsoever at that time.

Likewise, the gematria of "Erev Rav" (the "Mixed Multitude") explains the Vilna Gaon, is equal to that of "da'at" which means "knowledge". The Erev Rav is the element of the Jewish people that surfaces because of Amalekian- based doubt, and which perpetuates that doubt, eroding the will and unity of the Jewish people. Only the Light of 25/36 can erode them until none exist any longer, on which day "G-d will be One and His Name One" (Zechariah 14:9).

So, when the Jewish people are told to be a "light unto nations" (Yeshayahu 42:6), what it really means is that we are supposed to act like kohanim and access this light through our deeds, and reveal it to the world so that it can be "filled with the knowledge of G-d":

*"And I will take you from the nations and gather you... And I will sprinkle pure waters upon you... And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit... I will put My spirit within you, and I will make it so that you will follow My decrees and keep My judgments and do them. You will dwell in the land."* (Yechezkel 36:23-28)

After [the War of Gog and Magog], The Holy One, Blessed is He, will take His revenge against them, as spoken about in Yechezkel, and the Jewish people will dwell in their land in security and with much good. Da'at (G- dly understanding) will greatly increase, as will wisdom and purity. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 491)

Thus, the Torah when defining the Jewish people states explicitly: You will be a kingdom of priests to Me, a holy nation. (Shemot 19:6) Hence, even though all of us may not qualify to serve in the Temple, we do possess the ability to be like students of Aharon, who "love peace and pursue peace; who love humanity and bring them close to Torah." As a "nation of priests", each and every Jew possesses the potential to access this light and heightened awareness of reality, by virtue of the special soul we received at Mt. Sinai in order to be able to receive Torah from G-d.

With access only to the level of "Nefesh", the lowest of the five levels of soul, it is impossible to even relate properly to Torah. Therefore, by accepting Torah, we gained access to Ruach and Neshamah as well, two higher levels of soul so that we can draw down the Ohr HaGanuz through Torah-based actions, and in so doing, emanate this light to the rest of Creation until every last aspect of Creation is filled with it.

If we don't, then the consequences are formidable:

"And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day — Heh-Shin-Shin- Yud.' (Bereishit 1:31): The letter Heh [preceding the word Shin-Shin-Yud] is extra... to say that [G-d] made a condition with them [Creation]: 'If the Jewish people accept the Five Books of the Torah, then it is good; if not, then you will resort back to null and void.'" (Shabbat 88a)

In other words, the letter Heh which represents the number five is an allusion to the five books of the Torah; the "sixth day" is also an allusion to the sixth day of Sivan, 2,448 years later at Mt. Sinai when the Torah was destined be given. If the Jewish people do not live up to their role as the light unto nations, then chaos will reign, and chaos is anti-relationship; it is anti-unity.

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*G-d told Moshe, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and tell them the appointed times of G-d, to be celebrated as sacred holidays to G-d. These are My appointed times..." (Vayikra 23:1-2)*

Which brings us to the chagim (the Jewish holidays). The Leshem writes: However, Purim and Yom HaKippurim will not be annulled at that time [in Techiyat HaMeitim, as opposed to the other holidays], since Purim is the revelation of the Yesod of Abba [which will govern history from 8000-9000] as it is known in Kavanat Purim [of the Arizal], and therefore it alludes to the Eighth Millennium when [the sefirah of] Chochmah will be the primary influence. Likewise, Yom HaKippurim, which is the level of Binah, is the sod of the World-to-Come of the Seventh Millennium, of which we say, "the entire day is Shabbat," as it is says in Rosh Hashanah (31a). Therefore, Shabbat, Yom HaKippurim, and Purim, which allude to periods after Yemot HaMoshiach, to periods of the World-to-Come and to eternal lights, will remain [as holidays] in order to allow access to their lights and revelations of the future. However, all the [rest of the] holidays allude only to lights of rectification of Yemot HaMoshiach after the beginning of the time of Techiyat HaMeitim onward until the end of the 6,000 years. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 492)

It is well known from Kabbalah, the Sefirot (spiritual emanations) comprised of G-d's light, are the basis of history. All the potential of a particular millennium is within its corresponding sefirah, which acts as the spiritual DNA of that 1000-year period of time. Jewish holidays are also functions of that same light, and when one comes up during the course of a year at this stage in history, it is really a sneak preview of a light from a different period of time, a taste of a future level of spirituality, an experiencing of the Ohr HaGanuz. It is the temporary dwelling amidst the light of "on that day, G-d will be One and His Name, One".

Thus, the holidays provide access, for the rest of us, to the same light that the kohanim access by their very nature, going all the way back to Levi ben Ya'akov. Thus, we change from our regular lifestyle on the chagim to resemble the kohanim, being less involved in profane matters, dressed more like the kohanim, and being more involved in matters of holiness. Indeed, our table at which we eat our Yom Tov meals resemble an altar more than our every day table of our daily meals, at

least spiritually-speaking. Furthermore, an important aspect of the Yomin Tovim was to draw all males up to the Temple from all over Eretz Yisroel, unifying them into a single people, physically as well as spiritually. Then, dressed as we were, sacrificing to G-d as we did, behaving towards one another as we were compelled to do by the holy atmosphere created at that time, we looked and acted like "Mamlechet Kohanim" — a "Nation of Priests". At that time, we truly became students of Aharon HaKohen.

Hence, the parshah ends with the account of the blasphemer, seemingly thrown into the parshah for no obvious reason. However, after having explained the parshah as we have, the connection is indeed obvious. To blasphemy is to reject the Light of Twenty-Five, to block it from entering the world and emanating out to others. The blasphemer is the antithesis of the kohanim and of the chagim as well.

Thus, the Talmud equates the disgracing of the holidays with idol worship. In doing so, one denies the Light of Twenty-Five that emanates at that time, making his connection to more mundane things more important than his connection to G-d. Chol HaMoed is NOT to be treated lightly at all because of the light that emanates during it.

Nor is the Omer to be treated lightly for that matter, for during each day of the Omer, it is as if another set amount of the Ohr HaGanuz is allowed to enter the world, for the one whose deeds draw it to him. And, to the extent that he is able to draw this light to him is the extent to which he will be able to fulfill the mandate of "k'ish echad, b'leiv echad", a "single person with a single heart", the prerequisite for a more complete Kabbalat HaTorah, the receiving of Torah on the holiday of Shavuot.

Have a great Shabbat,  
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