

ALL FOR ONE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Tell the kohanim that the descendants of Aharon may not become defiled. (Vayikra 21:1)

The beginning of this week's *parshah* focuses on the *kohanim*, while the end of the *parshah* deals with the Jewish holidays. They are two seemingly unrelated topics, but a deeper look into the role the *kohanim* played in Jewish life reveals that they are really two sides of the same "*kohen*."

Obviously, the *kohanim* acted on behalf of the Jewish people in the performance of the Temple service. Beyond that, their job was also to unify the Jewish people and to keep them unified. After all, they came from the tribe of Levi which, as Leah pointed out, had the strength of unification:

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." (Bereishis 29:34)

Thus inherent in Levi was the quality of bringing two things together, the very basis of the *kehunah*. Inherent in the *Kohanim*, who came from the *Levi'im*, was the ability to unify, not only the Jewish people with God, but all the tribes as well, 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." (*Bereishis Rabbah* 68:11)

He said this on his way to Padan Aram even before he met his wives. The fulfillment of his prophecy though will not occur until the End-of-Days, as Yechezkel prophesied:

The word of God 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 God: 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 and 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. This was certainly made harder, if not impossible, since God "lost" 10 of the tribes to Assyria.

This is one of the reasons why the *Kohen Gadol* wore the names of all 12 tribes on his shoulders, six on one side and six on the other, 25 letters on one shoulder and 25 on the other, 50 letters in total. Even the word "*kohen*" alludes to this being spelled *Chof-Heh-Nun*: the first two letters total 25 and the last letter, *Nun*, equals 50. It was as if through the *Kohen Gadol* the tribes 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 Avos* 1:12)

This theme of unification was in their clothing as well:

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. (Shemos 28:33-34)

In general, light unifies. It allows vision, and vision allows relationships. Walk across a room in darkness and you will constantly bump into things. You will lose your bearing and become confused. Turn the light on and you will be able to navigate. You will be able to chart a safe course across the room and determine your proximity to objects that can block your way.

If this is true about physical light it is even more true about spiritual light, in particular the "*Ohr HaGanuz*." This is the original light of Creation that God subsequently hid from the evil people of history on the first day of creating:

"God saw the light that it was good, and He divided . . ." (Bereishis 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)

If the light is hidden, how did the *kohanim* access it?

God made a division in the light's emanation, that it should only emanate for the righteous people whose actions draw the light down. The deeds of the evil people prevent its flow, and this was its hiding. (*Sefer HaKlallim, Klal 18, Anaf 8, Os 4*)

Since the *kohanim* were devoted to the service of God and remained in a high state of spiritual purity, they had open access to the *Ohr HaGanuz*. This is alluded to by both the *Chof-Heh* and the *Nun* of "*kohen*," two numbers that directly allude to this very light:

God said, "Yehi ohr—Let there be light!" (Bereishit 1:3)

The Hebrew word "*yehi*" translates as "*let there be*," but the entire phrase can also be read as an equation: *yehi* = *ohr*, that is, *yehi* is the *ohr*. The word itself can be converted into a *gematria* of $10+5+10$, which has a total of 25, making the phrase read: *twenty-five equals light*. Even the 25th word in the Torah is "light."

The *Nun*, which represents the number 50, is always an allusion to the "*Nun Sha'arei Binah*," the "Fifty Gates of Understanding." In simple terms it is the Torah knowledge that results in the kind of intellectual clarity that allows a person to see the hand of God in everyday life, and to appreciate how *mitzvos* are really the path to personal fulfillment. It is the knowledge that neutralizes the *yetzer hara* so that a person can do what is fitting for his or her soul.

It is the "Light of 25" that results in the "Understanding of 50." This is why the holiday of Chanukah, which occurs on the 25th day of the month of Kislev, is called "*Yemai Binah*," or "Days of Understanding." And, it is a holiday that was made possible by the *kohanim* who miraculously overcame the Greeks.

Hence, there were 36 bells and pomegranates on the bottom of the cloak that the *Kohen Gadol* wore, the other number that relates to this light. For, as 25 represents the light hidden within Creation, the number 36 refers to the light after it has been revealed in the world through the actions of man. Not only this, but the *Mishkan* in which the *kohanim* served, and through which they drew down this light, was completed on the 25th day of Kislev, the future date of Chanukah.

It turns out that all of this did not only apply to the actual *kohanim*. It says regarding the entire Jewish nation:

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

This verse tells us that though not every person is qualified to serve in the Temple, each Jew has an inherent 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 Jew possesses the potential to access this "light of unity" and rectify the Jewish people on some level.

The *chagim* help with this mission as well. They provide, for the rest of us, access to the same light that the *kohanim* access by their very nature. The holidays allow us to change from our regular lifestyle and to resemble the *kohanim*. Thus on a holiday we ascend to Jerusalem, visit the Temple, and unify as a nation. The *chagim* brought the light to us, and out of us. They help us to live up to the title of "*Mamleches Kohanim*," a "Nation of Priests."

This provides another explanation as to why the *parshah* ends with the account of the blasphemer:

Take the blasphemer outside the camp, and all who heard [his blasphemy] shall lean their hands on his head. And the entire community shall stone him. (Vayikra 24:14)

After explaining the *parshah* in this light, the connection is obvious. To blasphemy is to reject the

"Light of 25," to block it from entering the world and emanating out to others. Blasphemy does not unify but instead destroys the fabric of unity, between man and God and man and man. The blasphemer is antithetical to the concepts of *kehunah* and the *chagim*.

In fact, the Talmud equates the disgracing of the holidays with idol worship. To treat the holidays in a profane manner is to deny the Light of 25 that emanates at that time. It is to make one's connection to mundane matters more important than one's connection to God. Very little else reduces the power of a *Mamleches Kohanim* more than this.

Text

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