

Emor - A Few Comments from Biblical Scholars
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ויקרא כ"א:א' וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה אֲמַר אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן
וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם לִגְפֹשׁ לֹא־יִטְמָא בְּעַמּוּיוֹ:

Leviticus 21:1 *π' 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.* Baruch Levine writes: Priestly impurity which resulted from contact with the dead and from impure marriages, could, in turn, render the sanctuary itself impure. Although the impurity of corpses affected everyone, it was permissible for an Israelite to become impure, when necessary; such an individual could then be restored to purity by following the proper procedures. Priests, by exception, were not similarly permitted, except in the case of an ordinary priest, who was granted a dispensation when one of his close relatives died. The High Priest, however, was prevented from attending even the burial of his own parents. In effect, this law eliminated a funerary role for the Israelite priesthood. There can be little doubt that this fact, resulting from the attribution of extreme impurity to the human corpse, reflects the abhorrence felt in ancient Israel toward the cult of the dead. Worship of the dead was a widespread phenomenon in the ancient Near East, as it was elsewhere; and priests, as officiants in religious cults, usually had a prominent funerary role- as was not the case in the mono-theistic religion of ancient Israel.

ויקרא כ"א:ה' לֹא־יִקְרְחוּ קַרְחָהּ בְּרֹאשָׁם וּפְאֵת זָקְנָם לֹא יִגְלְחוּ וּבְבָשָׂרָם לֹא יִשְׂרְטוּ שְׂרָטָת:

Leviticus 21:5 *They shall not shave smooth any part of their heads, or cut the side-growth of their beards, or make gashes in their flesh.* Like gashing, shaving the hair and pulling it out were rites of mourning in ancient Canaan that Israelite religious leaders sought to prevent. (Levine) Comment: It's fascinating the length to which the priesthood is to maintain a distance from the dead. Underlying this and other rules is the centrality of life and the idea that the life force which God represents has to manifest itself in the life of Israel and by extension, the world.

ויקרא כ"א:ו' קִדְשִׁים יִהְיוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִתְלַו שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם
כִּי אֶת־אֲשֵׁי ה' לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הֵם מִקְרִיְבָם וְהָיוּ קִדְשׁ:

Leviticus 21:6 *They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God; for they offer π's offerings by fire, the food of their God, and so must be holy.* Why the insistence on their

holiness? Why the specific restrictions for Kohanim? Jacob Milgrom writes: In the priestly tradition, the priesthood is hereditary, limited to the descendants of Aaron. In this respect, Israel differs radically from its neighbors. In Egypt, for example, the priesthood had a lay character. Priests were in office for a limited time, perhaps three months a year; thereafter, they returned to their normal occupations. In Mesopotamia the priestly officials were appointed by the king... Why, then, was Israel's main, ongoing priesthood limited to one family (or tribe)? A practical reason surfaces at once. If a priest was court appointed, then his office could be bought, as occurred with annoying frequency in Egypt, precisely as occurred during Israel's second commonwealth, when the high priest was chosen by the (foreign) ruler-for a price. However, there is a more positive reason: the unique function of Israel's priest. First, he was bound by many prohibitions, as detailed in Lev. chapters 21-22. Above all, he had to know the laws of impurity (e.g., the laws of scale disease, chaps. 13-14)-and live by them lest their violation pollute the sanctuary. Moreover, the priest had to be a master of Torah, the entire compendium of Israel's law, so that he could teach it to his fellow Israelites. Comment: In other words, the kohanim were keepers of the "brand". If Israel is the vessel of God's name, the kohanim had a special responsibility to comport themselves, to preserve holiness and purity and to protect God's name, God's "brand". An analogy might be to the corporate brand identity of major institutions. A few weeks ago, for Rutgers Shabbat, I wanted to get a copy of the Rutgers logo to put on some material. Would you believe that there is a 56 page guide, a kind of Mishna, that details precisely how to imprint the Rutgers "brand" on communication or merchandise? That's probably not unusual. Quote: The Rutgers name is recognized around the world. As the eighth oldest institution of higher education in the nation, Rutgers has built a prominent and credible brand for over 250 years. We all play an important role in maintaining and strengthening that brand. By using the common set of graphic elements, colors, font styles, and symbols described in this guide, you convey a consistent visual identity for all of the campuses, divisions, schools, departments, centers, units, organizations, and programs that make up Rutgers. We all benefit

from this collective identity for the university...To keep the integrity of the Rutgers brand intact and preserve its value, everyone must display the Rutgers logotype, signatures, shield, Block R, and athletics marks correctly. This includes using the correct fonts, positioning, and size of all elements etc. Comment: The point is that just as RU is zealous about the proper use of their branding, as they should be, the kohanim had to be zealous about what they represented, namely, God's name.

ויקרא כ"ב: ל"ב-ל"ג וְלֹא תַחֲלִילוּ אֶת-שֵׁם קֹדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה' מְקֹדְשֵׁכֶם: הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵהֲיוֹת לָכֶם לְאֱלֹהִים אֲנִי ה':

Leviticus 22:32-33 *You shall not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people—I ה' who sanctify you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God, I ה'.* But then again, God's name, and the responsibility for preserving the sanctity of God's name is the responsibility of all Jews, not only kohanim.

ויקרא כ"ג: ב' דבָר אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר-תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֵלֶּה הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי:

Leviticus 23:2 *Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: The appointed times of God, which you are to proclaim to them [as] proclamations of holiness: these are they, my appointed-times:*

Embedded in this verse are four important concepts. 1. The calendar is not for the elite; it is not for the political or priestly class. It belongs to everyone. The calendar shapes the internal life of the people. 2. These are *appointed times of God*. That is, there is no secular element to the calendar, no *civic* days, no days recognizing individuals, like Presidents Day or the like. These are God's days and there is only one God. 3. There is a human role in the calendar, and that is that the sacred days have to be *proclaimed*. This takes on great significance, as the calendar is a ritual document and also a political document. There has to be a governing body that has to adjudicate it and make sure that its provisions are correct. 4. The sacredness of the calendar derives from the divine-human relationship.

ויקרא כ"ג: ג' שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת שָׁבַתוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ כָּל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שָׁבַת הוּא לָהּ כָּל מוֹשְׁבֵיכֶם:

Leviticus 23:3 *On six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there shall be a sabbath of complete rest, a sacred occasion. You shall do no*

work; it shall be a sabbath of ה' throughout your settlements. Let us take a moment to appreciate the unique place of Shabbat in the calendar system. The regular observance of Shabbat was a feature of the Israelite community already following the Exodus. The gathering of the manna included rules for Shabbat. But in listing Shabbat as the first layer of the calendar, the Torah establishes Shabbat as the essential feature of all ritual life. In this chapter, we don't get the explicit reasoning behind this. But there is no need to. It would have been obvious to the people, as it is to us: God imprinted Shabbat on time at creation. We observe Shabbat to connect to God and to connect to the rhythm imprinted by God onto the universe. Beyond the specifics listed in this chapter, we also have to appreciate the role of the calendar in Jewish life. Sacha Stern writes: Calendar reckoning is not just a technical pursuit; it is fundamental to social interaction and communal life. The calendar provides an essential point of reference for interpersonal relations and time-bound communal activity. It determines how time is lived and utilized in the community, and sometimes, shapes the community's distinctive identity. The calendar is also a way of conceptualizing the dimension of time, and hence, of 'making sense' of an important facet of human lived experience. But what happens if you forget when it is Shabbat? The Talmud deals with this question as follows:

אָמַר רַב הוּנָא: הִיָּה מְהֵלָּה בְּדַרְבָּי אוּ בְּמִדְבָּר וְאֵינִי יוֹדֵעַ אֵימְתֵי שָׁבַת, מוֹנֶה שְׁשֶׁה יָמִים וּמְשַׁמֵּר יוֹם אֶחָד. חֵיָּיא בַר רַב אֹמַר: מְשַׁמֵּר יוֹם אֶחָד, וּמוֹנֶה שְׁשֶׁה. בְּמֵאֵי קְמִיפְלִגִּי — מִרְסָב כְּרִייתוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, וּמִרְסָב כְּאֵדָם הָרֵאשׁוֹן.

Rav Huna said: One who was walking along the way or in the desert, and he does not know when Shabbat occurs, he counts six days from the day that he realized that he lost track of Shabbat and then observes one day as Shabbat. Hiyya bar Rav says: He first observes one day as Shabbat and then he counts six weekdays. The Gemara explains: With regard to what do they disagree? One Sage, Rav Huna, held: It is like the creation of the world, weekdays followed by Shabbat. And one Sage, Hiyya bar Rav, held: It is like Adam, the first man, who was created on the sixth day. He observed Shabbat followed by the six days of the week. The halakha follows Hiyya bar Rav. The tradition wants to imprint God's rhythm of creation onto our lives. The calendar is God's creation, not Adam's. Shabbat Shalom!

