

קְדוּשִׁים יִהְיוּ לֵאלֹהֵיהֶם וְלֹא יִחַלְלוּ שֵׁם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם כִּי אֶת־אֲשֵׁי ה' לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם הֵם מִקְרִיבִם וְהָיוּ קְדוּשׁ: וַיִּקְרָא כֹהֵן:	<i>Holy are they to be to their God, they are not to profane the name of their God— for the fire-offerings of God, the food-offerings of their God they bring near, so they are to be holy!</i> Lev. 21:6
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**The Kohen's Code of Conduct:** At first glance there is nothing unusual about this verse. It tells us that the kohanim are to *be holy* and that they are *not to profane God's name*. Nothing earth shattering there. But while the Torah does not usually state the



reason for the mitzvot, here it tells us why they are to guard their behaviors: because *they bring the fire offerings and the food offerings to God*, in other words, they perform one of the most important functions in the sanctuary.

This maintains God's presence among the people, and thus, their survival. Prior to this verse, the Torah states rules that restrict their contact with the dead, and rules that prohibit the shaving of their heads and beards, or gashing their bodies (most likely, these were mourning rituals practiced in the surrounding cultures). After this verse, there are rules about who they can and cannot marry. Simply put, this text is a brief *Code of Conduct* for the Kohanim. No doubt, as with all guilds, societies, and sports, the Kohanim probably had a whole host of *unwritten* rules as well. The rationale for *unwritten* rules usually goes unstated but it is usually self-evident. In hockey, for example if you hit the goalie, even accidentally, you can expect the other team to kill you. Why? Because the goalie is the most vulnerable (and often the most valuable) player on the team. (In baseball: Don't swing at the first pitch after the pitcher has allowed back-to-back homers. Don't bunt in the late innings of a no-hitter. Why? To honor your opponent. In basketball: Thou shalt not run up the score when you're winning.) Every profession has its own code of conduct. Why? So that the members of that profession know clearly what is expected of them, and so that they can be held accountable by both the people they serve and their fellow professionals. The *Code of Conduct for US Judges* states that, "A judge should not act as a leader or hold any office in a political organization." (Code, Canon 5A:1). Why? The Code spells out the reason in a long preamble, but like the verse above, we could condense it to a few words: *for they serve as judges and we depend on their impartiality.*<sup>1</sup> The Code specifies this to clarify to judges what kind of conduct is expected of them, and so that the people they serve can hold them accountable to that expectation. This verse above works in two directions. To the Kohanim it clarifies their role: to serve God. To the people, it enables them to hold them accountable.



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<sup>1</sup> The actual wording: *Deference to the judgments and rulings of courts depends on public confidence in the integrity and independence of judges. The integrity and independence of judges depend in turn on their acting without fear or favor. Although judges should be independent, they must comply with*

וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִקְרִיב זֶבַח־שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ לְעֹלֹת אוֹ לְזֶבֶחַ בְּבָקָר אוֹ בַצֹּאן תָּמִים יִהְיֶה לְרִצּוֹן קְלִימוֹם לֹא יִהְיֶה־בּוֹ: וַיִּקְרָא כֹהֵן:	<i>A man— when he brings near a sacrifice of shalom to God for making a vow-offering or for a freewill-offering—among the herd or among the flock: wholly-sound must it be, for acceptance, any defect there must not be in it.</i> Lev. 22:21
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This is a fascinating verse. It means that if you bring an offering, an offering that you can eat, like a *zevah shelamim*, it has to be without blemish. Why? Lest you be tempted to think that you can achieve a measure of virtue by using your defective animals, and thinking that you are also fulfilling a mitzvah. S.D. Luzzatto frames the issue like this: *מה לי אם יהיה בו מום?—What difference does it make to me if it has a blemish? One way or another, the meat is the meat. I might as well get some use out of it and some credit for offering it as a sacrifice!* But it's the intention that matters here. When it comes to worshiping God, even when you eat the offering, you can't just pawn off the feeblest animals of the flock and claim to be virtuous or pious. It's false piety and pretentious. It's like donating your used car for a tax receipt. On the one hand, you can be forgiven for thinking that there is some virtue in that. After all, you are giving something of value to someone less fortunate, so that they can either use it for their own purposes or sell it for the proceeds. But let's be honest. You're also doing it for the tax receipt and because it's too much of a hassle to sell it yourself, or because it's got no value for a trade-in. On the one hand, there's nothing wrong with that. It's practical, helpful to those in need, and it keeps a charity economy of rummage sales and thrift stores in operation. But on the other hand, is it virtuous? Is it giving of yourself? Of course, we all want someone else to benefit from our used furniture, clothing, books, and other possessions. That's natural. And if it qualifies as a tax-deductible donation, why not? But is it virtuous? Let's not fool ourselves. Organizations such as Kars-4-Kids exploit this tendency to disguise our enlightened self-interest (the need to discard our used items for money) as virtue. Generosity exists on a spectrum from total selflessness and altruism to utilitarianism and the need for personal recognition. And while the whole system of animal sacrifice is unpalatable to begin with, the Torah's insistence on unblemished offerings speaks to a higher purpose beyond that world: don't claim virtue when acting in self-interest. When you are called to give something, give something of value, and most importantly, give of yourself.



*the law and should comply with this Code. Adherence to this responsibility helps to maintain public confidence in the impartiality of the judiciary. Conversely, violation of this Code diminishes public confidence in the judiciary and injures our system of government under law.*

We read this chapter on the second day of Passover and the first and second days of Sukkot. In general, on those occasions I point out that the entire chapter functions as a sacred calendar. That is consistent with the central theme of Leviticus, which is the pursuit of holiness. This chapter lists all of the times during the year that are **מקראי קדש** - *proclamations of holiness*, times when people gathered,

<p>אלה מועדי ה' מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אתם במועדים: ויקרא כג:ד</p>	<p><i>These are the appointed-times of God, proclamations of holiness, which you are to proclaim at their appointed-times:</i> Lev. 23:4</p>
<p>אלה מועדי ה' אשר תקראו אתם מקראי קדש, להקריב אשפה לה' עלה ומנחה זבחה ונסכים דבר-יום ביומו: מלבד שבתת ה' ומלבד מתנותיכם ומלבד פלינדריכם ומלבד פלינדבתיכם אשר נתתו לה': ויקרא כג:לז-לח</p>	<p><i>These are the appointed-times of God, which you are to proclaim as proclamations of holiness, to bring near fire-offerings to God— offering-up, grain-gift, sacrifice and pour-offerings, each-day's protocol in its day, aside from the Sabbaths of God, aside from your presents, aside from all your vow-offerings and aside from all your freewill-offerings that you give to God.</i> Lev. 23:37-38</p>

rejoiced, feasted, re-enacted key moments of their history, and worshiped. But if we take a closer look at this calendar, we can discover a few more details that we tend to overlook. 1. There are exactly **seven** holidays that are **מועדי ה'** - *the appointed-times of God*. 2. These **seven** holidays are commemorated in the first **seven** months of the year. 3. The **seventh** month contains the most holidays.

In Exodus 12 we learned that the first month of the year is the month of liberation, and thus the calendar is tied to the Exodus. *Let this month be for you the beginning of months, the beginning-one let it be for you of the months of the year* (Exod. 12:2). What does the calendar have to do with the Exodus? The answer: only a free people is capable of structuring its time. An enslaved people, on the other hand, is not able to govern its calendar. Encoded in the Jewish calendar then, is the idea of freedom. The calendar serves as a reminder of Israel's freedom and is a testament to God's gift of



liberation. By observing Shabbat every seventh day, we punctuate the week with a reminder that we are free. By celebrating the **seven** festivals of God in the first **seven** months of the year, we punctuate the year with **seven**-day festivals that also celebrate our freedom. By counting **seven** sets of **seven** days - as we are doing now in the Omer period - we are linking an intense period of agricultural activity with freedom. The harvest of grain which is used for bread, which sustains life, is linked to the celebration of freedom. By ceasing to work the land every **seventh** year, as we will read next week, we dedicate the entire year to being free. And then by having a general economic reset after **seven** cycles of **seven** years, we enable the concentric cycles of septi-centric freedom units to commence again. Thus, in the biblical conception of time, our days, months, and years are structured by units of **seven**, each of which having at its core, the idea that freedom is a divine gift and that freed is to honored by the cessation of our own labor and the prohibitions against enslaving others or forcing other people to labor for us. (Rahel Elior).

**Rabbi Harold Kushner, z'l.** This past week Rabbi Harold Kushner passed away. Among the most important and articulate rabbis of the 20th Century, Rabbi Kushner gained wide recognition for his numerous books, his frequent media appearances, and his remarkable ability to open a pathway to God to Jews and non-Jews alike, who, in their experience of tragic loss and painful suffering had felt that they were being somehow punished by God and alienated from God's comforting presence. Controversial to some, simplistic to others, he leaves a legacy of accessible writings and wise insights. Here are some quotes: *God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws. The painful things that happen to us are not punishments for our misbehavior, nor are they in any way part of some grand design on God's part. Because the tragedy is not God's will, we need not feel hurt or betrayed by God when tragedy strikes. We can turn to Him for help in overcoming it, precisely because we can tell ourselves that God is as outraged by it as we are.* *When I proclaim, "The Lord is one," as I do daily in my prayers, I'm not making a mathematical statement. It is not a report of the population of divine beings in heaven. It is a theological statement. It is not, as many people take it to be, a denial of the religious significance of other putative divine beings: God is God and they are not. It is the insistence that*

	Date	Festival	Hebrew Verse
1	15th day of the 1st month	1st day of Matzot festival	ובחמשה עשר יום לתדש הזה תג המצות לה' שבועת ימים מצות תאכלו: ביום הראשון מקרא-קדש... (כג:ו)
2	(22nd day of the 1st month)	7th day of Matzot festival	ביום השביעי מקרא-קדש... (כג:ח)
3	7 full weeks later - 50th day	Bikkurim	וספרתם לכם ממחרת השבת מיום הביאתכם את-עמר התנופה שבע שבתות תמימת ההריגה: עד מחרת השבת השביעת תספרו חמשים יום... וקראתם בעצם! היום הזה מקרא-קדש... (כג:טו-טז)
4	1st day of 7th month	Remembrance of sounding	בהחדש השביעי באחד לחדש והיה לכם שבתון זכרון תריעה מקרא-קדש: (כג:כד)
5	10th day of 7th month	Yom Hakippurim	אף בעשור לחדש השביעי הזה יום הכפרים הוא מקרא-קדש... (כג:כז)
6	15th day of the 7th month	1st day of Sukkot festival	בחמשה עשר יום לתדש השביעי הזה תג הסכות שבועת ימים לה': ביום הראשון מקרא-קדש... (כג:לד-לה)
7	(23rd day of 7th month)	8th day of Sukkot festival	ביום השמיני מקרא-קדש... (כג:לו)

*God embraces all polarities, male and female, young and old, scolding and forgiving. Everything— all polarities— finds its place in God. "God is one" means something like "God is all." יהי זכרו ברוך May his memory be a blessing.*

**Shabbat Shalom!**  
שבת שלום!