

# א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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אמור

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## When can a כהן become טמא?

Sheva Burstein

At the beginning of this week's פרשה, אמור, we see a very peculiar commandment from 'ה, referring to לנפש לא יטמא בעמיו: כי אם לשאריו הקרב אליו ולאביו ולבנו: ולאחתו הבתולה הקרובה אליו... לה יטמא. כהנים "None shall impurify himself for any [dead] person among his nation, except for the relatives that are closest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother, and his virgin sister who is close to him... he should impurify himself to her" (ויקרא כ"א:ב-ד). When first reading these פסוקים a very shocking thing is missing from the list, a regular כהן's wife. While it seems obvious that a regular כהן should be allowed to go to his wife's funeral, according to the פשוט reading of the פסוקים, a regular כהן is not permitted to go to his wife's funeral. What is the הלכה in this case?

It turns out that the Rabbis were just as confused by this question. According to the גמרא in זבחים ק. in גמרא, not only *can* a regular כהן become טמא for his relatives, it is a מצוה for a כהן to do so. Even more so, he has to become טמא from burying his close relatives who are not on the list provided by 'ה. If he refuses, others must make him טמא against his will. The גמרא brings a story: There was a man named יוסף, a regular כהן, whose wife died on פסח. ערב פסח. He did not want to become טמא because he wanted to be able to bring the פסח קרבן. His fellow כהנים voted and ended up making him טמא against his will. This story makes it seem like you *must* go to your wife's funeral even if you wanted to stay טהור in order to do a different מצוה instead.

So, if a regular כהן is required to become טמא for his close relatives, are there cases where the regular כהן would not become טמא for a relative? רבינו בחיי says that the addition of the words "הקרב אליו" tells us that a regular כהן cannot become טמא for someone who is only betrothed to him but has not yet completed the marriage ceremony with חופה. The regular כהן would also not be permitted to attend the funeral of a woman he had been married to but had since divorced.

We learn from this that though it may seem that 'ה made it forbidden for regular כהנים to go to their wives' funerals, 'ה actually let them because marriage is a meaningful thing to כהנים. While on the surface it looks like 'ה was not being kind to כהנים, really 'ה had the best intentions and knows exactly what is right for us. The next time we have any struggles, may we be זוכה to say to remember that 'ה always knows what is best for us.

# The Importance of Our Language

Yaniv Kaufman-Grob

פרשת אמור is full of laws for the כהנים, their work in the משכן, and what disqualifies them from doing this work. The following story is told about a fight in this week's פרשה: "ויצא בן אשה ישראלית והוא בן אִישׁ" פרשה: "מִצְרִי... וְיָקֵב בֶּן־הָאִשָּׁה הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִית אֶת־הַשֵּׁם וַיִּקְלֵל... וַיִּרְגְּמוּ אֹתוֹ אֲבֵן" "And the son of the Israelite woman, who is the son of an Egyptian father... and the son of the Israelite woman cursed 'ה's name... and they stoned him." (ויקרא כ"ד:יא-כ"ג).

After reading this story a few questions come up. First, why does the פסוק have to mention that his father was an Egyptian? Second, what were they fighting about? And third, why does this person get killed for the words they said? However, these questions, while important, aren't the first thing that comes to mind. The first question that needs to be asked is what this story is doing in פרשת אמור. Why is this such an important story that it needs to be inserted in the middle of detailed laws about the כהנים and holidays? ויקרא is a book about law and therefore it has very little narrative in it. This is one of the few exceptions.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that the reason for the story being here is that it relates to three types of holiness: קדושת המקום, קדושת הזמן וקדושת הלשון. ויקרא asks a lot from the כהנים. They have to protect the קדושה of the משכן, which is קדושת מקום. They also have to help teach about שבת, which is קדושת זמן. These two aspects of holiness are covered throughout the rest of the פרשה, leaving only קדושת הלשון not yet discussed. This story teaches us about this and explains that the expectations for using proper language are not limited to the כהנים, but extend to all people. We must avoid bad language and expressions that put down other people. We also must be especially careful not to dishonor the name of 'ה with words, which is so important that in the case where it is violated, the penalty is death.

In a time when there is no בית המקדש, the holiness of קדושת המקום is the holiness of Shul. Just like the כהנים can't have a physical imperfection to work in the בית המקדש you have to be respectful with your actions when you are in Shul, which is a מקדש מעט. פרשת אמור spends 44 פסוקים, and 534 words talking about שבת and חגים, which are קדושת זמן. This is of course still relevant today. The hardest and probably most important is קדושת הלשון. It affects all of us every day and in every single casual conversation. One's words affect others and not just themselves. May we be careful with how we speak and soon be able to go to the real קדושת המקום, בית המקדש.

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