

CHUKAS (NUMBERS 19:1-22:1)**Who's 'The MAN'? ... YOU'RE 'The MAN'!**

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

There are many rules in the Torah pertaining to ritual purity and impurity. Most of these laws apply to the circumstances under which one may enter the Temple or consume sacrificial foods. As such, most of these laws currently don't apply due to our temporary lack of a Temple in Jerusalem. (This situation will hopefully be rectified in the very near future.)

One exception is the requirement for Kohanim-Priests to avoid contact with the dead. A Kohain, even nowadays, may not enter a cemetery except for the funerals of certain very close relatives. Under most circumstances a Kohain may not become a doctor because most medical schools require direct contact with cadavers. (In some schools this is changing.)

A Kohain may not even enter a building if there is a dead body inside:

This is the law concerning a man who dies in a tent. Anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent shall be contaminated... (Numbers, 19:14)

A "tent" for these purposes is defined as anything that serves as a common "roof." If, for example, a large tree overhangs graves in a cemetery and also covers the sidewalk outside of the cemetery, the Kohain needs to walk across the street, rather than being in the same "tent" as the graves.

There is a dispute as to whether this ritual "contamination" applies to all graves or just Jewish ones. While a Kohain may not come in physical contact with ANY dead body, some authorities maintain that the prohibition of entering a "tent" where there is a body is only if the deceased was Jewish.

The basis for this ruling is an analysis of the specific wording of the verse quoted above, as well as a verse in Ezekiel. Often the Torah teaches us important lessons based upon a nuanced choice of wording.

Ezekiel cites the special relationship between G-d and Israel:

"They will know that I, their G-d, am with them, and that they are My nation, the House of Israel ... you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are Man, I am your G-d..." (Ezekiel, 34:30-31)

There are several words for "man" in Hebrew. One of those words is "**אָדָם** – Adam." The Talmud (Yevamos 61a) observes that the Hebrew word "Adam" – Man, is used in the two verses we have quoted:

*“This is the law concerning a man (**ADAM**) who dies in a tent.”*

*...you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are Man (**ADAM**), I am your G-d...*

The Talmud interprets “...you are Man...”, to mean ‘You (i.e., Israel) are called ‘MAN; the nations of the world are not called “MAN.” Therefore, concludes the Talmud, “...the law concerning a MAN who dies in a tent” only applies to Israel.

What does the Talmud mean by, ‘You are called ‘MAN; the nations of the world are not called “MAN”? Certainly it can’t mean to humiliate Gentiles and to consider them less than human! The Talmud is replete with references to the fact that all of humanity was created in G-d’s Image. We share the planet with our fellow Children of G-d.

So what does it mean?

Several commentaries offer interpretations. One explanation I have seen is that G-d created the world and called upon Adam to live a life of spiritual devotion. Adam was given one Mitzvah to fulfill, and he messed up! Adam and his wife were expelled from the Garden of Eden; they had failed their mission.

That mission was put on hold until there was an Abraham who could be a Light to the Nations. Abraham’s children stood at Mount Sinai and received 613 Commandments. We have taken over Adam’s role. We ARE Adam. We have more commandments.

This is not to say that Jews are better than others; it means we have different responsibilities. A non-Jew who observes all seven of his required commandments is a Righteous Gentile. (See “How to be an Orthodox Jewish Gentile”.) A Jew who fulfills only seven of his hundreds of his religious requirements obviously falls far short of his obligation to be an “Adam.”

In our history, there have been those who chose to demean Jews and our beliefs by quoting the Talmud out of context. What better excuse for a blood libel than to “prove” that we think non-Jews are animals?! “Look what those Jews think of us! Israel is called ‘Man’, and the nations of the world are not?!”

There is an interesting analysis of the Hebrew word “ADAM.” I have heard it attributed to Rabbi Meir Shapiro. (See “(Madison Square) Garden of Eden”) I have also heard it attributed to Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim.)

There are several ways to say “man” in Hebrew:

יִשׁ – *ISH* = Man. The plural is *ANOSHOM*. (Some claim that *ANOSHIM* is plural of *ENOSH*, which also means “man.”)

גֵּבֶר – *GEVER* = Man. The Plural is *GEVARIM*.

אָדָם – *ADAM* = Man. The plural is *ADAM!!!*

The word *ADAM* is unique in that the plural form is the same as the singular form. (We have a similar concept in English. Sometimes “man” means a single person, and sometimes “man” means the human race.)

When a Frenchman robs a bank, people say, “Francois is a thief.” When a Russian breaks into a house, people say “Igor is a burglar.” When an Italian kills someone, people say “Giovanni is a murderer.”

When, however, a Jew does something wrong, “The Jews are no good!”

We are *ADAM*. Jews, whether we like it or not, are viewed collectively by the world. When my front lawn is a mess, my neighbors are given the opportunity to complain about sloppy Jews. If my ethics in the workplace are less than pristine, it reflects upon all of us.

We are *ADAM*. We are one big (happy?) family. We are responsible for one another. When my fellow Jew has a Simcha, I should share his joy. If he is sad, I should share his pain. When terrorists attack Israelis, they are attacking US. When Europeans boycott Israel, they are boycotting US. When the President of the United States snubs the Prime Minister of Israel, he is snubbing US.

G-d told Ezekiel to remind us who we are. “...*you are My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are Man (ADAM), I am your G-d...*”

In that phrase, “... *you are Adam*,” the word “*you*” is written in plural form. G-d is saying, “You people are one man. You are viewed as one unit.”

We are Adam. We are one. Maybe it would be a good idea if we would act that way.

Have a great Shabbos

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