

Keep It Hot

ל"ה

Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer

Parshat Emor

None of them shall incur spiritual impurity for the dead among his people. (Leviticus 21:1)

Rebbe Hanoch Henich of Alexander (d. 1872, disciple of Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk) provides us with a spiritual interpretation of this injunction. The Hebrew word עמיו (*amav*, his people) Rebbe Hanoch Henich relates to the word עימום (*imum*, dimming or darkening). *Imum* is used in particular to refer to coals or embers which have been left to burn out on their own. The first word of this stich is *l'nefesh*, literally “for a soul,” and traditionally understood – here and elsewhere in the Torah – as a person whose life on earth has come to an end.

While this verse is directed explicitly only to the priests, Rebbe Hanoch Henich (who was himself a Cohen, a priest) understands this stich as cautioning all of us against allowing the fire of our souls – the passion of serving G*d – to dwindle, darken, and die. Do not, he cautions, serve G*d dimly, half-heartedly, without fervor, for doing so is the source of all “defilement” and impurity. If the passion of our service of G*d is not continually tended and encouraged, it will grow dim. Rather, the rebbe says, we must always be careful to nurture and rekindle it.

To a rekindling and nurturing of our spark of G*dly service, may we speedily be led.

Shabbat Shalom.

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