

## **Flesh of my Flesh (Emor)**

***May the gods grant you all things which your heart desires, and may they give you a husband and a home and gracious concord, for there is nothing greater and better than this - when a husband and wife keep a household in oneness of mind, a great woe to their enemies and joy to their friends, and win high renown. -Homer, The Odyssey***

Priests of the Jewish nation (Kohanim) are prohibited from approaching the dead. Whether in a hospital, a cemetery or even for the burial ceremony. Kohanim are only allowed to come in contact with the deceased from a short list of immediate family members. At the top of that list is the wife.

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619), on Leviticus 21:2 explains both the unusual formulation for wife in the verse ('sheero hakarov' – literally, "his flesh that is close") and why she's mentioned first. He states that while the husband may be the classical breadwinner, the wife is the one who historically turned grain into food and threads into clothes.

The term 'sheero hakarov' indicates this proximity, that according to Rabbinic dictum, the wife is as his own body ('ishto kegufo'). The Kli Yakar explains that in a smoothly operating household the wife is the one who "brightens his eyes and stands him on his feet." More than a parent and more than a child, one's spouse can and ideally should be as close to a unit as possible. In a healthy and loving relationship, spouses consider each other as one body, a pair that when unified is much stronger and more powerful than their individual selves.

May we each find and be cherished spouses.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

### *Dedication*

*To the 2024 International Chidon Ha'Tanach (Bible Contest) that was conducted on Yom Ha'atzmaut. It was particularly inspiring and moving.*