

Rabbi's Column

Yael Sadan. Tzur Alfi. Gali Balali. Ella Or. Adi Ra'anana. Maayan Barhum. Agam Levi. Ilam Bar Shalom. Romi Cohen. Shani Shamir.

These are the names of the ten victims of one subset of the flash flooding within Israel during the past week. There were some other victims in other parts of the country - those names have not been released as publicly as these ten.

Baruch Dayan Emet for all of them, the ones whose names have been made public and the ones currently only known to their family, friends and neighbors.

In this week's Torah Portion we read about how the people in a priesthood are to be made different from others. Even though in another spot the text tells us to be a "kingdom of priests, a nation set apart", I do not think that the text here is indicating that the limitations placed upon the priesthood, and the High Priest, are to be used as a model for other people's lives.

I base my opinion on the limitations concerning mourning. The average priest is unable to attend a funeral for any family member that is not an immediate relative. No grandparents, grandchildren (God forbid), favorite aunts, uncles or even friends. The High Priest is not only not allowed to attend any funerals at all, he must not exhibit any signs of mourning. His grief has no acceptable outlet. Despite the High Priest's importance to many ceremonial events (like Yom Kippur) this level of powerlessness and separation from regular people is not to be envied. The rest of us can count ourselves very fortunate to be able to show our emotions, specifically our grief, in ways that allow the community to help us in our time of need.

I think this is related to the listing of which women a priest can marry. He is only supposed to marry somebody who has been neither married nor sexually active. Since the priests are limited - that implies that other people are not. Each of these individuals is a potentially valid partner, with strengths that enable them to provide support for the people with whom they choose to partner.

I am actually beginning to pity the High Priest. The ability to grant atonement to the people does not compensate for being unable to mourn in public or being limited in who can become your life partner.

May this next week be one of health and kindness for all of us.