

- Sefat Emet: “*Kach et ha’l’vi’yim mi’toch b’nei yisrael v’ti’haram*”. (Ba’midbar 8:6) [Eitz Chaim pg. 817].
 - God commands Moses to “take the Levites from among the Children of Israel and cleanse them.
 - What follows is a rather involved and intimate step by step process to wash and shave them from head to toe, followed by a lavish sacrifice and meal.
- God is singling out the *Levi'im* for special tasks.
- Midrash: God is a music lover. And the *Levi'im* were like the house band for the Temple in Jerusalem.
 - Reason for singling out is God’s affection, because the *Levi'im* would sing to God.
 - In the Midrash, the Rabbis nerd out on the instrumentation – how many strings on the lyres of the *Levi'im*. They decide based on appropriate text references that it is 7 during the current times -> 8 when the Mashiach comes -> 10 strings
- SE: music will be transformed through these different eras of time
- Music requires time:
 - Obvious, but something deeper too.
 - Each day has its own unique song – referring to the psalms sung by the *Levi'im* in the Temple - each day brings a new song.
 - The sun sings a song as it shines forth.
 - How do we know that? Midrash (*Tanhuma Buber*): when Joshua is waging war on *Giv'on*, says to the sun “*Shemesh b’Giv'on Dom*”, usually interpreted ‘Sun, stand still’, but *dom* can also mean ‘be silent’, so “Sun, be silent at *Giv'on*”.
 - Wouldn’t tell the sun to be silent if it wasn’t singing in the first place.
- SE quotes Isaac Luria, the great 16th century mystic: “No day is the same as another since the creation of the universe.”
 - Here we have entwined two central elements of Jewish spiritual practice.
 - The inexorable march of time reminds us of the limits of our days and of our mortality.
 - But that very impermanence manifests as renewal, *hit’chad’shut*. Creation is an ongoing process. God is Being, YHVH, an ongoing process of which we and everything is a part.
- Rainier Maria Rilke, the early 20th century German poet, wrote that

Ah, the knowledge of impermanence
That haunts our days
Is their very fragrance.
We in our striving think we should last forever,
But could we be used by the Divine
If we were not ephemeral?
- SE: There are three dimensions of holiness: space, time and person (*olam, shana, nefesh*).
 - He applies this analogy to the three broad classes of Israelites in ancient Jewish practice
 - *Levi'im* represent the dimension of time, as we’ve seen – and also tht they are supposed to retire at age 50
 - *Kohanim* represent the dimension of person

- Requirements that kohanim be free of blemish, which many of us find problematic – return to this in a moment
 - The remainder of the Israelites, the Yisraelim, represent the dimension of space
 - Each tribe assigned a portion of the land of Israel
 - Central element to the SE's teachings
 - A little jarring to a 21st century scientist – used to time and space – where did person come from?
 - Modern parallels – Einstein's notion of space-time requires a reference frame, in the form of an observer.
 - Larger recognition in science of the importance of our personal perspectives in how we perceive and report on reality
- But here the SE brings in a much more modern perspective
 - Also central to the SE's teachings is that we are all priests and princes, each and every one.
 - There is no class division when it comes to discovering and witnessing holiness.
 - He writes each person is obligated to redeem space and time in a manner specific to their soul
 - Uses the word *l'takei*, which can also mean repair, or perhaps through discovering holiness in each aspect of this experience, we can repair the world.
 - And so the allusion to the blemish-free Kohanim is a reference to all of us. We are all blemish free, no matter the lumps and tears and missing parts in our bodies, no matter the color of our eyes or hair or skin.
 - These bodies of ours are garments for our n'shama, our soul, our true Divine nature, which is of course perfect because it is a part of the eternal One, the Kadosh Baruch Hu.
 - All the different songs we sing as individuals, all of our scattered identities, coalesce when we come together to enter Shabbat as a community.
 - And in that sense Shabbat is our collective contemplative practice.
 - Every time we join our voices together celebrating our differences and connection, whether it is here in our virtual shul or out on the streets demanding justice for black lives, we compose a new symphony.
 - So we'll keep taking up those Levitic guitars, dusting off those rusty strings one more time, and if we keep singing together, with all our bodies and souls, someday soon we will change this world.
 - Shabbat shalom