

Children of the King: Kedushah of Body, Unique Soul-Portion, and Covenantal Order

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An Expanded and Extended Learned Essay on the Daily Learning of 5 August 2026 / 22 Menachem Av 5786 — Parshat Re'eh (Fourth Aliyah, Devarim 14:1–21), Tehillim 106–107, Tanya Iggeret HaKodesh Epistle 7 (middle), Rambam Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh Chapter 6, Hayom Yom 22 Av, and the Martyrdom of Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel HaKohen in the Rindfleisch Massacres of Nuremberg

Prologue: Calendar, Context, and the Non-Negotiable Status of the Holy People

Wednesday, 5 August 2026, corresponds to 22 Menachem Av 5786. The date sits inside the residual gravity of the Three Weeks and Tishah B'Av while already leaning toward the quiet consolation that begins with 15 Av. The daily Chumash is the fourth aliyah of Parshat Re'eh (Devarim 14:1–21). Tehillim cycles through the national confession of chapter 106 and the four classic deliverances of chapter 107. Tanya continues in the middle of Iggeret HaKodesh Epistle 7. Rambam's one-chapter track is Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh 6. Hayom Yom records the Rebbe Rashab's precise directive concerning the morning blessings. Jewish historical memory marks the same day as the martyrdom, in Nuremberg on 1 August 1298 (22 Av 5058), of Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel HaKohen — known simply as “the Mordechai” — together with his wife and their five children, among the roughly 628 Jews slaughtered after they refused conversion.

These strands are not coincidental. They converge on a single, multi-layered claim: Israel remains a holy people — children of Hashem — whose bodily integrity in grief, dietary discipline, unique non-transferable soul-portion, precise sanctification of time, and physical preparation for holy speech all express the same truth that was lived unto death by the Mordechai and the martyrs of 1298. The essay expands each element with classical, Chassidic, and academic perspectives, subjects them to critical analysis, and synchronizes Orthodox Jewish theology with republican political theory — particularly freedom as non-domination, dual jurisdictional architecture, and the covenantal restraint of arbitrary power. The result is neither reduction of Torah to politics nor romanticization of history, but a principled demonstration that the kedushah declared in Re'eh and the unique portion taught in Tanya supply the transcendent foundation that ordered liberty requires and that pure institutional design cannot generate from within itself.

The structure proceeds from close reading of the primary texts, through historical reconstruction of the 1298 events, to a sustained critical synthesis, and concludes with concrete directions for avodah. Throughout, differing opinions within the classical tradition and between traditional and academic approaches are presented and evaluated.

I. Parshat Re'eh, Fourth Aliyah: “You Are Children of Hashem Your G-d” — Kedushah of the Body in Grief and Nourishment

The section opens with an identity claim that immediately generates commandment: “You are children of Hashem your G-d. You shall not gash yourselves or make any baldness between your eyes for the dead. For you are a holy people to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem has chosen you to be a treasured people for Him out of all the peoples on the face of the earth” (Devarim 14:1–2). The detailed signs of kashrut follow at once (14:3–21): land animals must possess both split hooves and the capacity to chew the cud; fish must have fins and scales; birds are listed by prohibited species; certain insects and neveilah are forbidden; and the interdiction against cooking a kid in its mother’s milk appears for the third time in the Torah.

Classical commentators differ in emphasis yet converge on ontology. Rashi, citing Sifrei, links the prohibition of self-mutilation to the dignity appropriate to children of the Omnipresent: it is becoming for you to be comely and not cut about. The physical body of a Jew is expected to reflect the honor of its divine parentage. Ibn Ezra stresses the relational dimension — once you know that you are sons and that He loves you more than a father loves a child, you should not mutilate yourselves over anything He does, because whatever He does is for your good even when you do not understand it. Trust in the Father’s wisdom replaces the pagan impulse to force the attention of the gods through self-harm. Ramban extends the point further: the prohibition stated for the kohanim in Vayikra 21 is here applied to the entire nation because all Israel are holy and are, in a real sense, children of G-d like the priests. The status is not honorary; it generates concrete obligations of bodily integrity. The entire people is elevated to a priestly level of kedushah with respect to the treatment of the body in mourning.

Other voices within the tradition reinforce the point. The Sifrei and later midrashim emphasize that the prohibition applies even when the mourning is for a parent or child, underscoring that no human relationship overrides the prior claim of divine filiation. The body remains under divine jurisdiction even at the moment of greatest human loss. Academic studies of ancient Near Eastern mourning practices confirm the distinctiveness of the Torah’s ban. Self-laceration and head-shaving for the dead were widespread expressions of uncontrolled grief or propitiation of chthonic powers among Canaanite, Mesopotamian, and other neighboring cultures. The absolute prohibition is therefore a deliberate act of differentiation that refuses to let death dictate the form of the living body. It is an assertion of sovereignty over the self that belongs first to G-d.

The dietary laws are the positive counterpart of the same kedushah. The signs of the land animal — split hooves and chewing the cud — have been interpreted both physiologically and symbolically. Chassidic sources deepen the claim. The Baal Shem Tov taught that every permitted food contains sparks of holiness that a Jew elevates through mindful eating; the prohibitions protect the soul’s capacity to draw down its unique portion of Divine light. The Lubavitcher Rebbe’s Likkutei Sichot on Re’eh elaborates that the two signs of the land animal correspond to the balanced service of love and awe within the animal soul itself. An animal that only chews the cud or only has split hooves is incomplete; both must be present. Likewise, the service of the Jew must integrate the expansive force of love and the contracting force of awe. Kashrut is therefore not merely a boundary against impurity; it is the daily discipline by which the Jew transforms the physical into a vessel for the holy.

Critical analysis must acknowledge that modern academic approaches sometimes reduce these laws to anthropological boundary-maintenance (Mary Douglas and successors) or public-health rationalizations. Such reductions miss the theological core. The text itself grounds the restrictions in election and holiness (“for you are a holy people”), not in utilitarian calculation. The prohibitions are presented as expressions of the same identity that forbids self-mutilation. Yet the republican resonance is real and non-accidental. A people that disciplines its own body and table refuses the chaos of unchecked appetite and the domination of external custom. In an age of self-harm, disordered consumption, and the deliberate blurring of bodily and identity boundaries, these verses retain urgent force. Holiness is not abstract; it governs how we treat the body in grief and how we nourish it daily. The same principle that forbids gashing the flesh in mourning later grounds the refusal to surrender the body through apostasy under the sword.

The juxtaposition of mourning laws and dietary laws is itself significant. Both concern the integrity of the body — one in the face of death, the other in the face of life and nourishment. Together they assert that the Jewish body is not available for arbitrary marking, whether by pagan ritual or by the unexamined customs of the surrounding culture. This assertion of bodily sovereignty under divine law is a foundational element of the covenantal order.

II. Tehillim 106–107: National Confession, Deliverance, and the Obligation to Publicize Chesed

Chapter 106 is a sweeping historical confession. It rehearses Israel’s repeated failures — at the Red Sea, in the wilderness, with the golden calf, at Baal Peor, and inside the Land itself — yet never abandons the refrain of Divine chesed that endures despite the people’s unfaithfulness. The psalm moves through the entire narrative of national history, refusing either to whitewash the record or to despair of the relationship. Chapter 107 turns to thanksgiving and presents four classic deliverances: wanderers in the desert, prisoners in darkness and iron, the sick near death, and seafarers caught in storm. Each section ends with the same obligation: “Let them give thanks to Hashem for His kindness and for His wonders to the children of man.” The redeemed are commanded to publicize the kindness they have received.

Together the chapters teach that memory of sin and gratitude for redemption are not sequential stages but simultaneous postures. The confession of 106 is not despair; it is the precondition for the public declaration demanded in 107. Chassidic readings emphasize that the very capacity to confess is itself a gift of the soul’s portion of Divine light. Without the prior illumination of the unique portion, the capacity for honest self-accounting would be absent. Republican theory finds here a model of civic memory: a free people must remember its failures without being defined by them, and must institutionalize the public recounting of deliverance so that gratitude becomes a shared political virtue rather than a private sentiment. The refusal to forget either the sin or the chesed is the opposite of both historical amnesia and permanent grievance. In the shadow of 22 Av, the chapters supply the language that turns national catastrophe into renewed praise without denying the catastrophe.

The structure of chapter 107 is particularly instructive. Each of the four groups experiences a crisis that is beyond human control, cries out to G-d, is delivered, and is then obligated to declare the kindness. The sequence is not optional. Deliverance without the subsequent public declaration would leave the chesed incomplete in the public sphere. The psalm therefore models a form of civic liturgy in which private redemption becomes public testimony, reinforcing the bonds of a people that recognizes a common source of rescue.

III. Tanya, Iggeret HaKodesh, Epistle 7 (Middle): The Unique, Non-Transferable Portion and the Dissolution of Envy

The Alter Rebbe opens with the familiar morning prayer language: “Fortunate are we; how good is our portion, how pleasant is our lot.” He then interrogates the dual terminology. Although the Ein Sof is utterly simple and indivisible, the radiance that reaches creation is channeled primarily into 613 “rays” corresponding to the 613 mitzvot. These illuminate the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of the Jewish soul. Jacob (Israel) drew this all-encompassing light into his soul, rectifying the level of Adam. Every Jew therefore possesses a unique, non-transferable portion of G-dliness accessible through the mitzvot. Personal avodah is to perform one’s particular mitzvot with particular zeal, thereby drawing infinite light into measured vessels. Recognizing one’s lot dissolves envy and fosters joy. The cumulative illumination of all Jewish souls through their portions prepares the world for the complete revelation of the Ein Sof.

This teaching is the inner architecture that makes the outer kedushah of Re’eh possible. The body that must not be gashed is the vessel of a unique soul-portion; the food that must be chosen elevates the sparks assigned to that portion. The martyrdom of the Mordechai becomes, in this light, the ultimate return of a unique portion to its Source. Academic attempts to psychologize or historicize the Tanya’s ontology miss the point: the portion is not a metaphor for individual temperament but an ontological claim about the structure of Divine radiance. The “portion” language indicates that the light is distributed according to the structure of the mitzvot; the “lot” language indicates that the particular assignment to each soul transcends rational calculation and is determined from above.

Republican non-domination finds an unexpected and powerful ally here. Because each soul’s portion is non-transferable and non-negotiable, no human authority may claim absolute ownership over another’s inner life or force the surrender of that portion. The same theology that grounds kiddush Hashem also grounds the refusal of totalitarian claims upon the person. The “lot” language further dissolves the envy that fuels faction — a classic republican concern from Aristotle through Madison. When each person recognizes that his or her portion is uniquely assigned and non-transferable, the competitive scramble for status or recognition is relativized. The result is a form of civic peace that rests not on the suppression of difference but on the affirmation of irreducible uniqueness under a higher sovereignty.

IV. Rambam, Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh, Chapter 6: The Exactitude of Time as Divine Attribute and Political Stability

Rambam details the fixed mathematical remainders of the lunar month (1 day, 12 hours, 793 chalakim) and of the lunar year, the method of calculating successive moladot from the first conjunction of Creation, and the structure of the nineteen-year machzor containing seven leap years. The precision ensures that the festivals fall in their proper seasons. The calculations are not approximate; they are exact to the chalak (1/1080 of an hour). Chassidically, the exactitude of time itself is a Divine attribute; mastering the calendar is an act of aligning human life with the cosmic order that will be fully revealed in the era of geulah, when “time” itself is perfected.

In the context of 22 Av, the point is sharpened. The same people whose bodies and tables are ordered by kedushah are also commanded to order time with mathematical rigor. Chaos in the calendar would disorder the festivals; disorder in the festivals would erode the lived experience of covenant. Republican theory recognizes that a free polity requires stable, non-arbitrary

temporal frameworks — fixed terms, predictable legal calendars, the rule of law rather than the rule of emergency or mob passion. The Rambam’s precision is the theological ground of that stability. When imperial protection collapsed in 1298, the absence of ordered authority allowed the Rindfleisch mob to impose its own chaotic calendar of destruction. The Torah’s insistence on precise time is therefore also an insistence on ordered liberty.

The chapter further demonstrates that the calendar is not a purely human convention. The molad calculations begin from the first conjunction of Creation. Time itself is measured from a divine origin. Human authority to intercalate and adjust exists only within the framework established by that origin. This is a profound limitation on legislative power: even the regulation of time remains subordinate to a prior divine structure.

V. Hayom Yom, 22 Menachem Av: Physical Cleanliness as Preparation for Holy Speech and the Continuity of Kedushah

“My father [the Rebbe Rashab] said: One should not recite the Morning Berachot before rinsing the mouth in the morning, except on fast days.” Physical cleanliness precedes the utterance of holy words. The body is a vessel that must be prepared so that the blessings — and the angels who accompany them — find a pure dwelling. Even on ordinary weekdays the Jew begins the day by purifying speech and body, turning routine hygiene into conscious service.

The practical directive is the micro-expression of the macro-theme of Re’eh. The same body that may not be gashed in ordinary grief must be cleansed before it speaks blessing. The continuity is absolute: kedushah begins with the physical and rises to the speech that shapes the public square. In a culture that often treats the body as either commodity or canvas for self-expression, the Rashab’s insistence restores the body as vessel of service. The mouth that will soon recite blessings must first be rinsed; the body that will stand in prayer must first be prepared. The principle extends beyond the morning blessings to the entire life of speech and action.

VI. Deep Historical Layer: The Martyrdom of the Mordechai and the Rindfleisch Massacres — Kiddush Hashem under Collapse of Ordered Authority

On 22 Av 5058 (1 August 1298), the Nuremberg Jewish community, which had taken refuge in the imperial fortress, was overwhelmed by the Rindfleisch mob after a desperate defense assisted by some Christian citizens. Rabbi Mordechai ben Hillel HaKohen, his wife, and their five children were among the approximately 628 Jews murdered that day. The massacres had begun in Röttingen on 20 April 1298 with a Host-desecration accusation, led by a figure known as Rindfleisch (sources describe him variously as an impoverished knight or, more probably, a butcher or local strongman who claimed a heavenly mandate). Civil war between rival claimants to the German throne (Adolf of Nassau and Albert of Austria) left the empire without effective protection for Jewish communities that often served as moneylenders. Estimates of the dead range from several thousand to as high as 20,000–100,000 across roughly 146 communities. The Nürnberger Memorbuch records the names; contemporary chronicles and later martyrologies preserve the memory of refusal of conversion.

Scholarly consensus places the violence in the context of Host-desecration and blood-libel accusations that provided religious cover for debt cancellation and plunder. Academic analyses of the host-desecration myth emphasize that the accusation frequently followed rather than preceded the violence: communities were attacked, and the theological justification was retrofitted. The pattern is well documented: economic and political pressures created the

opportunity for violence; the religious accusation supplied the legitimating narrative. Jewish sources record the refusal of conversion and the choice of death rather than apostasy — classic kiddush Hashem. The survival and later influence of the Sefer HaMordechai — a major halachic compilation still printed with the Talmud and heavily cited by the Shulchan Aruch — demonstrate that Torah itself is not extinguished by the sword. The work preserved earlier Ashkenazi rulings that would otherwise have been lost. History is hashgacha pratit; every martyrdom and every surviving page of Torah advances the process of birurim and the ultimate geulah. The proximity to 20 Av (yahrzeit of the Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneerson) underscores intergenerational mesirut nefesh and the transmission of Torah under duress.

The Mordechai was a student of Meir of Rothenburg and related by marriage and scholarship to the leading families of Ashkenazi learning. His yeshiva in Nuremberg attracted students from across Europe. The destruction of that center was a severe blow to the continuity of Franco-German Torah scholarship. Yet the compilation that bears his name continued to circulate and to shape subsequent halachic development. The contrast is instructive: the bodies of the martyrs were destroyed; the Torah they transmitted was not.

VII. Critical Synthesis: Orthodox Theology, Academic Approaches, and Republican Political Theory

Academic historiography correctly situates the Rindfleisch massacres within the breakdown of imperial protection, economic resentment, and the weaponization of religious myth. It is less successful at explaining the Jewish response. The refusal to convert and the subsequent transmission of the Mordechai's Torah are not merely cultural survival strategies; they are the lived enactment of the identity declared in Re'eh: "You are children of Hashem." The unique soul-portion of Tanya explains why that refusal was non-negotiable. The body that may not be gashed in ordinary mourning was offered intact in martyrdom rather than surrendered through apostasy.

Republican political theory supplies the analytic language for the political failure that made the massacres possible. Philip Pettit's concept of freedom as non-domination distinguishes the absence of active interference from the structural protection against arbitrary power. The Jews of Franconia lived under a regime of domination: their security depended on the contingent goodwill or capacity of distant emperors and local lords. When that capacity collapsed in civil war, the mob exercised arbitrary power with lethal effect. The Torah's insistence on evidence, due process, and the dignity of the individual (the very opposite of collective Host-desecration libels) supplies the deepest foundation for constitutional restraint of mob passion.

The dual jurisdictional model of Rabbeinu Nissim of Gerona (Derashot Ha-Ran, Discourse 11) — Mishpat Ha-Torah administered by the Sanhedrin according to strict evidentiary standards, and Mishpat Ha-Melekh or civic ordinances for the practical ordering of society — anticipates the separation of powers and preserves the purity of ideal law from the compromises of realpolitik. The Sanhedrin is bound by rules that protect the accused even when those rules make conviction difficult; the civil authority is granted flexibility for the sake of public order. Neither jurisdiction is permitted to swallow the other. Abravanel's anti-monarchical reading of Devarim 17 and 1 Samuel 8 supplies a biblical republicanism that prefers collective deliberation, term limits, and subsidiarity to absolute rule. The keterim structure (kingship, priesthood, Torah/prophesy) articulated by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks prevents any single institution from monopolizing power, economic capital, and moral authority. The Yovel's economic reset

prevents the oligarchic concentration that produces domination. All of these elements find their ontological ground in the unique portion of each soul and the kedushah of the body declared in Re'eh.

Critical honesty requires acknowledgment of tension. Orthodox theology prioritizes Divine sovereignty and the eternity of Torah; republican theory prioritizes human institutional design and non-domination among citizens. The synthesis does not collapse one into the other. Rather, it argues that the transcendent covenant supplies the moral ontology and the inner discipline (teshuvah, hishtavut, recognition of one's lot) without which republican institutions become hollow. Conversely, republican analysis of domination and institutional design clarifies the political conditions under which the holy people can live its kedushah in relative security. The martyrs of 1298 lived the first truth under conditions of the second's catastrophic failure.

Contemporary relevance is direct. The pattern of scapegoating, collective accusation, and the collapse of ordered protection reappears in modern ideological movements that single out the Jewish people or the Jewish state. The response remains fidelity to Torah, the strengthening of both physical security and spiritual depth, and the building of communities and polities that protect the learned and the vulnerable as a matter of covenantal duty. The Torah's insistence on the integrity of the body, the uniqueness of the soul-portion, the precision of time, and the preparation of speech continues to supply the standards by which any political order must be judged.

VIII. Expanded Avodah Connections

- **Avodah of the Mind:** Meditate on “You are children of Hashem.” Internalize that every Jew's soul carries a unique, non-negotiable portion of the Divine.
- **Avodah of the Heart:** Refine the middah of grief — allow mourning its place, yet refuse despair or self-destructive expressions. Cultivate gratitude even while remembering loss (Tehillim 106–107).
- **Avodah of Action:** Strengthen one concrete practice of kashrut or bodily discipline; rinse the mouth before the morning blessings as a tangible act of preparation.
- **Avodah of Speech:** Speak only words that honor the holiness of the Jewish body and the Jewish name; avoid any language that cheapens identity or spreads baseless accusation.
- **Avodah of Time:** Treat the hours of this 22 Av as part of the precise Divine calendar; use the day to advance both personal study and the memory of those who died al kiddush Hashem.
- **Avodah of Identity:** Reaffirm that the essential Jewish self is not defined by external persecution but by the portion of G-dliness that is uniquely assigned. Live with geulah consciousness.
- **Avodah of Community:** Strengthen the transmission of Torah; support institutions that educate and protect. Leadership means ensuring the next generation inherits both the sefarim and the courage.
- **Avodah of the World:** Elevate ordinary physical acts — eating, washing, speaking — so that sparks of holiness are released into the material realm.

- **Civic Avodah:** Practice the republican virtues that flow from the same source — defend due process, reject mob justice, and uphold the dignity of every person as an expression of the Torah that declares us children of Hashem.

Daily avodah summary: Begin the day with physical and spiritual purity, study the laws of holiness and the unique soul-portion, remember the martyrs of 22 Av by continuing their Torah, and act in the world as a member of a holy nation preparing for complete redemption.

Conclusion: The Banner Raised on 22 Av

The historical martyrdom of a master of halachah on 22 Av resonates with Parshat Re'eh's insistence that Israel remains a holy people even in death and mourning. Tanya's teaching that each Jew possesses an irreplaceable portion of Divine light explains why the Torah of the Mordechai could not be erased. Rambam's precision in the calendar reminds us that time itself is sacred and must be sanctified even — or especially — in periods of destruction. Tehillim 106–107 supply the language of confession and thanksgiving that turns national catastrophe into renewed praise. Hayom Yom turns routine hygiene into service. The season of Av teaches that mourning is a stage, not a destination. Chassidus themes of birurim and geulah consciousness turn the memory of 1298 into fuel for personal and communal elevation.

The call remains constant: elevate the body through kashrut and purity of speech; reject every form of collective libel; build communities and polities that protect the learned and the vulnerable as covenantal duty. The unique portion remains. The banner of kedushah and ordered liberty is raised again.

May the learning of these portions illuminate footsteps, multiply avodah, and strengthen the covenantal banner. The children of the King walk on.

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- Works on Ashkenazi martyrdom and kiddush Hashem in the High Middle Ages

- Analyses of the Rindfleisch movement in the context of imperial civil war and economic grievance

Hyperlinked Daily Resources

- Full Calendar Page: <https://www.chabad.org/calendar/view/day.asp?tdate=08/05/2026>
- Parsha with Rashi: <https://www.sefaria.org/Deuteronomy.14>
- Tanya Epistle 7: https://www.chabad.org/library/tanya/tanya_cdo/aid/1029282/jewish/Epistle-7.htm
- Rambam Daily: <https://www.chabad.org/dailystudy/rambam.asp>
- Tehillim 106–107: <https://www.sefaria.org/Psalms.106>
- Hayom Yom 22 Av: https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/3316846/jewish/22-Menachem-Av.htm

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