

מראה כהן

אָמַת, מַה נִּהְדָּר הָיָה כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל בְּצֵאתוֹ מִבֵּית
קֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדְשִׁים בְּשָׁלוֹם בְּלִי פָּגַע.

מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּאֶהֱלֵה הַנִּמְתַּח בְּדַרְי מְעֵלָה
מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּבָרְקִים הַיּוֹצְאִים מִזִּיּוֹ הַחַיּוֹת
מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּגִדְלֵי גְדִילִים בְּאַרְבַּע קְצוּוֹת
מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּדַמּוֹת הַקֶּשֶׁת בְּתוֹךְ הָעָנָן
מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּהוֹד אֲשֶׁר הִלְבִּישׁ צוּר לִיצוּרִים
מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּרוּד הַנְּתוֹן בְּתוֹךְ גִּנַּת הַחֶמֶד
מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. בְּרֵהֶן הַנְּתוֹן עַל מִצַּח מְלֶךְ

THE APPEARANCE OF THE KOHEN מְרֵאָה כֹּהֵן. This *piyyut* is based on chapter 50 of Ben Sira (second century B.C.E.), who described the High Priest, Simon ben Onias, as follows: "How glorious he was surrounded by the people as he came out of the sanctuary! Like the morning star among the clouds, like the moon when it is full . . . like roses in the days of first fruits . . ."

Using the magnificent imagery of the natural world, of human strivings toward holiness, and of the heavenly realms, the medieval poet attempts to portray the High Priest emerging from the Holy of Holies: he has experienced closeness with the Divine, and he now returns to the people in wholeness and radiant peace.

The images are chosen because they fit the alphabetical acrostic and not because of a progression of ideas, and the associations may seem odd. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect is to depict magnificent beauty.

This is one of the several traditional endings of the Avodah Service for Yom Kippur. Although the original poem by an unknown author is arranged as a full alphabetical acrostic, the Eastern European custom is to recite the poem only through the letter *kaf*, perhaps because of the esoteric nature of many of the images.

THOSE WHO DWELL ON HIGH דַּרְי מְעֵלָה. The poet may be referring to the sun, the moon, and the stars, which were understood by some midrashim to have angelic personality. Several images in the poem picture the High Priest in blue (see below).

HEAVENLY BEINGS הַחַיּוֹת. The prophet Ezekiel imagines some of the angels as having the form of fiery animals and refers to them as *hayot*, a term the poet uses here. He describes their fiery nature as follows: ". . . The fire had a radiance, and lightning issued from the fire" (Ezekiel 1:13).

LIKE . . . THE BRAID בְּגִדְלֵי גְדִילִים. Literally, "the most prominent of the *tzizit*," that is, the blue strand. "The blue of the *tzizit* is like the color of the sea, which is like the color of the heavens, which is like the throne of God's glory" (Babylonian Talmud, Menahot 43b).

THE GLORY כְּהוֹד. As God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, God fashioned clothes for them (Genesis 3:21). The midrash portrays the clothing as fashioned from God's own Glory (Leviticus Rabbah 18:3).

MAREH KOHEN

*Truly, how glorious was the High Priest as he emerged
from the Holy of Holies unharmed and in peace.*

Like the canopy of heaven stretched out for those who dwell
on high—

congregation: Mareh kohen
[Thus was the appearance of the Priest]

Like lightning flashing from radiant heavenly beings—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like the blue of the braid of the four corners of the garment—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like the image of the rainbow amidst the clouds—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like the glory that clothed the first creations—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like the rose rising in a treasured garden—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like a wreath crowning the forehead of a king—

congregation: Mareh kohen

מֵרָאָה כֹּהֵן.

בְּחֹסֶד הַנִּתָּן עַל פְּנֵי הָתָן

PRIESTLY CROWN בְּצַנִּיף. The High Priest wore a turban (sometimes referred to in English as a miter), which was tied with a blue cord on which the words "Holy unto God" were inscribed.

מֵרָאָה כֹּהֵן.

בְּטָהַר הַנִּתָּוֶן בְּצַנִּיף טָהוֹר

THE ONE HIDDEN IN THE CLEFT בְּסֵתֵר יוֹשֵׁב. A reference to Moses' request while on Mount Sinai to see God's face. Moses is hidden in the cleft of the mountain as God passes by.

מֵרָאָה כֹּהֵן.

בְּיוֹשֵׁב בְּסֵתֵר לְחֵלוֹת פְּנֵי מַלְאָךְ

BRIGHTEST STAR בּוֹכֵב הַנִּגְהָה. A reference to the planet Venus.

מֵרָאָה כֹּהֵן.

בְּבוֹכֵב הַנִּגְהָה בְּגִבּוֹל מְזָרְחָה

Like the love that lights the face of a groom—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like the purity of the pure priestly crown—

congregation: Mareh kohen

Like the one hidden in the cleft of the mountain,
praying before God—

congregation: Mareh kohen

like the brightest star that shines in the eastern sky—

congregation: Mareh kohen