

“You shall sanctify him, for he offers the food of your G-d.” (21:8)

Simply, the *pasuk* is teaching us to treat the *Kohanim* with the esteem befitting the Almighty's Divine servants whose function it is to offer Hashem's sacrifices. The *Kesav Sofer* takes a penetrating look into the meaning of this *pasuk*. If we look at the status of the *Kohen*, we note a paradox. On the one hand, he is the spiritual elite of the Jewish People. He has been selected to stand in Divine service before Hashem and also to act as a spiritual mentor of *Klal Yisrael*.

On the other hand, the Torah gives him no way to sustain himself. He does not receive a portion in *Eretz Yisrael*. Indeed, he subsists on the good will of the rest of the nation, who are enjoined to sustain him. Let us face it, we live in a society where a person's checkbook balance and the size of his paycheck determine his status in the eyes of many people. While we know that such ephemeral success has little value in the ultimate scheme of life, that is human nature. Therefore, the *Kohen* is really at a disadvantage. How do we correct society's failing?

The *Kesav Sofer* explains that there are two approaches, both of which are alluded to in this *pasuk*. First, we should understand that we are not paying the *Kohen* from our own pockets. The *Kohen* receives payment for his service in the *Bais HaMikdash* from Hashem. It just so happens that Hashem uses us as His paymasters. This is the meaning of “You shall sanctify him, for he offers the food of your G-d.” We have to pay for the service that the *Kohen* provides for us. In reality, Hashem reimburses the *Kohen* through us.

We tend to overlook another aspect of our relationship with the *Kohen*. We think that we give the *Kohen*, that we are the ones that support him. That is our first mistake. He sustains us. He mentors us. He is our spiritual guide. Furthermore, when we give the *Kohen*, his acceptance is – in reality – an act of giving! Yes, by taking from us, he is actually giving to us. A gift is a gift only when the individual on the receiving end is in need of the gift. If his acceptance is really a favor for us, then by accepting, he is giving. The *Kohen* does not need us – we need him! *V'kidashto* – “You shall sanctify him.” We should appreciate the *Kohen's* sanctity and his value to us.

Regrettably, we view our *Kohanim*, spiritual leadership, with a lack of proper respect. Some of us think they owe us; we forget who is sustaining whom. The *Kohen* owes us nothing. We owe him everything.