

"He shall be brought to Aharon the Kohen, or to one of his sons, the Kohanim. The kohen shall look at the affliction ... and declare him contaminated." (13:2,3)

The *kohen* is the only one who is able to render decisions regarding the purity or impurity of *negaim*, physical afflictions. Indeed, *Chazal* teach us that in the event that the *kohen* is not versed in the laws of *negaim* -- or can not distinguish between the various types of plagues -- a *Torah* scholar should be summoned. After the scholar considers the situation, he is obligated to relate his decision to the *kohen*, who, in turn, pronounces the individual *tameh* or *tahor*. The *kohen* must be the one to articulate the judgment. Describing this uneducated *kohen*, *Chazal* use the word *shoteh*, fool, as the adjective to characterize his lack of proficiency in *negaim*. This term seems harsh and inconsistent with *Chazal's* prevalent term of *am ha'aretz*, simple or unschooled, which is generally used in reference to describe such an individual. Why does the *kohen* "merit" such a derogatory portrayal?

Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, z.l., offers a profound but practical insight into the matter. *Torah* proficiency demands unrelenting effort. It requires commitment and dedication towards attaining the goal of *Torah* scholarship. The typical Jew has one hurdle to overcome in order to achieve this goal -- *parnassah*, livelihood. The most common excuse for "not finding the time" to study *Torah* assiduously is, "I have to make a living." Regrettably, this excuse leads to a host of other rationalizations for "justifying" one's lack of commitment to *Torah* study. This explanation, however, only "excuses" the Yisrael, who must earn his living through his own endeavor. The *kohen*, on the other hand, is supported through the *terumah* and twenty-four special gifts that he receives from the people. How can he rationalize being illiterate? Why did he squander his time when he could have been studying *Torah*? Such a person who wastes his precious time is not simply illiterate, he is a fool!