

## **"Speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and say to them; in relation to no person may he render himself unclean among his people." (21:1)**

The *Torah's* text in its admonition to the *kohanim* is unusual. At the outset it says "*speak to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon,*" rather than the usual, "the sons of Aharon, the *kohanim*." The redundancy of the word *rnt*, speak/say, as in *,rntu / rnt*, is also noted by *Chazal*. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, concludes that in this *pasuk* we deal with two sentences of separate idealogical content. The *Torah* first instructs Moshe to speak to the *kohanim* as "*Bnei Aharon,*" emphasizing their exalted pedigree. They should take special note of their inherent holiness by virtue of their lineage, and be cognizant of their responsibility to be worthy of maintaining it. Secondly, they are admonished not to occupy themselves with a dead body. Ministering to the needs of the departed, the preparation of the corpse for burial, is to be the domain of the rest of *Klal Yisrael*, not the *kohanim*. It would seem that these two ideals are connected to each other. Although, the reason may be that since the *kohanim* must maintain themselves on a certain plateau, they are to refrain from any association with death.

This approach taken by *Horav Moshe Swift, z.l.*, is a practical one. The *kohanim* serve in the Sanctuary. Their bodies and lives are consecrated and dedicated to serve the Eternal. The food they eat must be ritually pure; the marriages they contract are restricted and hallowed. In their daily "encounter" with the Almighty they are affected by a sense of eternity, the opposite of death. The very touch of a dead body defiles them and consequently, disqualifies them from serving in the Sanctuary. The service of Hashem is the service of the Eternal. In its path there is no death. The *kohen* focuses on the *neshamah*, soul, which is the essence of life in that it is a part of Hashem. The soul never dies. The *kohanim* rise above the finite and the mundane, the things that come to an end and decay. They are to be the embodiment of purity and holiness, a way of life which bears testimony to the eternal character of the soul. A Kohen's service suppresses the finite and gives efficacy to the infinite. Consequently, service to the dead may not be his concern.

*Horav Shlomo Breuer, z.l.*, asserts that the *Torah* is saying to the *kohanim* that in spite of the fact that they are *Bnei Aharon*, they still may not come in contact with the dead. He gives the following reason. Aharon *Ha'kohen's* outstanding attribute was his boundless love of man. This outstanding character trait was surely transmitted to his descendants. When *Chazal* implore us to act as the "disciples of Aharon," they clearly demand of Aharon's own descendants to live up to this admonition. The *kohanim* have an overriding inclination to demonstrate by the performance of acts of loving-kindness that they are *Bnei Aharon*.

Hashem has, however, set boundaries in the practice and fulfillment of these acts of loving-kindness. *Chesed*, in its most sublime and altruistic form, is *chesed shel emes*, the loving-kindness for which one receives no recompense -- in other words, the care of the dead. It is in this pure form of *chesed* that the *kohanim* would certainly demand the opportunity to demonstrate their

overflowing love and compassion for their fellow man. Yet, Hashem has set a limitation upon their *chesed* performance -- death. Suddenly, the love for their fellow man is subordinated to a Higher Authority. This obedience runs counter to the basic nature of the "*ben Aharon*"/*kohen*.

In order to ingrain this subordination of their nature in the minds and hearts of the *kohanim*, it is inherent that they be educated during the tender years of their childhood. Hence, the double demand of, ,rntu rnt, emphasizing the educational principle which is essential for all Jews, not only *kohanim*. To overcome an inclination which is not *Torah*-oriented, a single "speaking" is insufficient; it must be reiterated, ,rntu rnt. This double *amirah* (speaking), which is the principle of education determines the success or failure of one's moral/spiritual development.