

"They shall be holy to their G-d." (21:6)

The *Kohen*, whose life is devoted to serving Hashem, is to be relaxed during the *avodah*, service. He must be totally at ease, focusing all his efforts on executing his role to the best of his ability. Consequently, he is not to permit anything to divert his attention from the job at hand. Dealing with death tends to impede one's concentration. The mere mention of death provokes anxiety. Hence, the *Kohen* is prohibited from coming in physical contact with a corpse. He may not even be under the same roof as a corpse.

The *Kohen* must also be discriminating in selecting a mate. A woman's ancestry and background are determining factors in her acceptability as a wife for a *Kohen*. Even the *Kohen's* physical appearance is under scrutiny. A blemish on his body disqualifies him from serving. The pain or embarrassment of a physical disfigurement can cause emotional stress which, in turn, impedes his ability to perform the *avodah* in a frame of mind that is not stressed by external pressure.

We may wonder why the *Torah* places such great emphasis upon the external appearance of the *Kohen*, while ignoring his internal character. Are we to permit an internally blemished *Kohen*, one whose character leaves much to be desired to serve? Is a *Kohen* who is vulgar, arrogant, miserly, or prone to anger, any more qualified to serve than the *Kohen* who is the paragon of rectitude, but just happens to be a *baal mum*, physically blemished?

The answer to this question is simple. Such an impairment does not invalidate him as a *Kohen* - it disqualifies him as a human being! Nothing is novel about a non-*mench* being excluded from serving in the *Kehunah*. Such a person should be rejected by society in general!

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, takes a somewhat different approach towards explaining this omission. After the *Torah* commanded *Bnei Yisrael* regarding their status of *kedushah* and the elevated status of *kedushah* imposed upon the *Kohanim*, the *Torah* now states *hase oa ,t ukkj, tku*, "*Do not profane My name.*" This admonishment concerning *chillul Hashem* is the heading under which a lack of character refinement is categorized. We are enjoined not to behave in a manner which disgraces Hashem's Name. Studying *Torah* and performing *mitzvos* while acting in an unethical manner in dealings with our fellow man makes a mockery of *Torah* and *mitzvos*, as well as their author - Hashem.

When people see an individual who is reputed to be a great scholar, someone who is punctilious in *mitzvah* observance, act uncouthly, they perceive a *chillul Hashem*. Such behavior spreads the inaccurate conception that the *Torah* does not elevate and refine one's character. This is categorically untrue. One whose character is not refined by *Torah* study is not studying *Torah* in the correct manner --with the proper intention and devotion. Regrettably, people are not always aware of this. Consequently, they are *m'chalel Hashem's Name*.

People tend to notice the negative aspect of one's behavior, especially if the individual in question

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is perceived to be on a pedestal. They never note his positive behavior - only his shortcomings. Our responsibility is to be alert, preventing the "opportunity" for people to misconstrue our actions.