

You shall make garments of sanctity for Aharon your brother, for glory and splendor. (28:2)

The Kohanim were attired in special vestments that were resplendent in their beauty, as befitting the spiritual mentors of Klal Yisrael, individuals who served in the Sanctuary and represented the nation. They also represented the glory of their mission and the One before Whom they served. The Kohanim were the agents of the Jewish People who served Hashem on their behalf. Halachah teaches that the Bigdei Kehunah, Priestly Vestments, were paid for by public funds. The Kedushas HaLevi explains that, since the Kohen represents the nation, it is only proper that his garments be supplied by the kahal, congregation, that he serves. When he wears these garments, he is reminded of the generosity of those who sponsored them, which increases his feelings of love and concern for their welfare. Acknowledging his responsibility will be his source of inspiration to execute his duties to the fullest extent, thereby earning Hashem's forgiveness for the sins of the people.

Furthermore, as cited by Horav Avraham Pam, zl (quoted by Rabbi Sholom Smith in "Rav Pam on the Parsha"), the brachah, blessing, recited by the Kohanim, prior to blessing the people is... v'tzivanu l'vareich es amo Yisrael b'ahavah, "and command us to bless His People with love."

The Kohanim have an obligation to bless the people with love. [This does not refer to a demonstration of love, but rather, to real emotions of love, to care, to feel for them.] The Zohar HaKadosh (Parashas Naso) contends that a Kohen who has feelings of animosity toward the congregation may not bless them, because he does not carry out his obligation lovingly.

The Rosh Yeshivah understands the symbolism of the Bigdei Kehunah being purchased through the medium of public funds as a means to impress upon the Kohen that, as the representative of the people, he must carry out his duties in a manner that will fulfill the expectations of the people. While this idea applies initially to the Kohanim, it does not apply to them exclusively. Any person who carries the lofty mantle of klal worker must always remember that his achrayos, responsibility, is first and foremost to the community for whom he has devoted himself. They have entrusted him with a task; they rely on him. He may not let them down.

Oskim b'tzarchei tzibur, those who involve themselves with the needs of the community, must do so b'emunah, with integrity and devotion. It is not about them – it is about the community whom they serve. Furthermore, as the Rosh Yeshivah observes, b'emunah also means that they believe in their work and its ultimate success. (I think it goes without saying that one who does not believe in his work will not succeed.) Often, the needs of the community are vital, but not glamorous or long range, and the chances for full success are minimal. One must not allow the limited chance of success and lack of accolades to cloud his vision of achievement. One who believes in his efforts will ultimately realize his goal. It might take time, great effort and possibly, bizyonos, episodes of disgrace, but if it is worth it to him, and he believes it will be with Hashem's blessing, it will happen. I present two stories, possibly known to some readers, but nonetheless well worth repeating. The first one teaches us the overriding responsibility and spiritual integrity that one who serves the klal must maintain. The second one teaches us the importance of tzniyus, modesty, privacy, in carrying out an act of chesed. It is not about the attention and public adoration; it is about helping another

Yid stand on his own two feet.

The Bais HaLevi, Horav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, zl, was Rav of Brisk. Despite his stature as a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, without peer, it did not prevent someone who felt that his business was being stunted by the Rav's psak, halachic decision, from taking the matter into his own hands. While such rude and disgraceful chutzpah is sadly not uncommon when things do not follow the perceived demands of the litigant, it is the reaction of the oseik b'tzarchei tzibur, the Rav, which I want to underscore.

Rav Yosha Ber (as he was fondly and reverently referred to) was learning b'chavrusa with his son, Rav Chaim, zl (Brisker), when they were interrupted by a knock on the door. It was the butcher's errand boy who came bearing the lung of a recently slaughtered animal. "My boss wants to know if this lung is kosher," said the boy. The Rav looked at the lung from all sides and declared that there was no way he could deem it kosher. "I am sorry. It is treif," he said.

The errand boy returned with the "unexpected" news to his boss – who was not prepared to accept the Rav's psak. A non-kosher rendering of this lung would translate into a loss of income for the butcher – something he was not prepared to accept. He pushed his way into the Rav's house and began hurling insults at the Rav, questioning his halachic knowledge and integrity. After abusing the Rav, he slammed the door as he left the home. During the entire encounter, Rav Yosha Ber said nothing. When the man retreated from the house, however, he declared loudly, "Machal lach, machal lach, I forgive you, I forgive you for the humiliation."

The butcher left for the livestock market to purchase another animal. As long as his first animal was deemed unkosher, he could not sell it. While he was there, a bull came loose and gored the butcher. Then, he trampled him to a horrible death. The spectators were helpless to do anything about it. Obviously, word got back to the town, and became abuzz with the news. A man had violated the respect to be given the Rav, and he was immediately punished. The reverence that the community manifested the Rav increased exponentially. Woe to the man who belittled a Rav who was held in such esteem by Hashem!

The Bais HaLevi, however, was totally devastated. The fact that another Jew should be punished because of him made him miserable. Even after Rav Chaim reminded his father that he had forgiven the butcher, the Bais HaLevi did not remember doing so, and his conscience gave him no rest. For the rest of his life, the Bais HaLevi fasted on the butcher's yahrzeit, as well as recited Kaddish for him, accompanied by the study of Mishnayos. The Bais HaLevi's boundless love for every Jew – even one who had humiliated him – did not permit him to rest, to forget the tragedy for which he blamed himself. This is the length to which the responsibility of an oseik b'tzarchei tzibur goes.

The second story teaches us about how chesed should be performed. I write this because the Jewish community is blessed with a plethora of chesed organizations and baalei chesed, individuals who give of themselves and their wherewithal to assist, maintain and strengthen those who are in need. There is, however, a yetzer hora, evil inclination, that subtly incites the person to seek some attention, a little limelight, or a display of gratitude. This demeans, distorts and detracts from the loftiness of his act of kindness, depreciating it to the level of a task – not an act of chesed. Now for the story.

A Holocaust survivor moved to the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and started a small egg

business. This was in the days before the large supermarkets. People would go to the corner grocery and purchase their staples. Most people could afford nothing more. Business was slow, and “egg man” needed a gimmick to jump start sales. After a few hits and misses, he came up with the idea of providing a delivery service. Eggs were fragile, and most people were not sending their six-year-old to the store to fetch a dozen eggs, because they might end up with a half dozen by the time the youngster returned home. It improved business, especially when he received his first weekly order. While it was not enough to live on, it was an encouraging start. He was hopeful that, in due time, sales would improve.

One day, at the end of his delivery route, he passed the Skverer Bais Hamedrash of Williamsburg. One of the mispallelim, worshippers, was standing outside looking for a tenth man for Minchah. He decided to help out the minyan. Following Minchah, he noticed something very strange. The gabbai, sexton, went around the shul and gave each person who had attended the service some eggs to take home.

Curiosity got the better of the egg man, so once the gabbai had finished his egg distribution, he asked him, “What is the meaning of the custom to distribute eggs after davening?”

The gabbai’s response floored him: “It is not minhag, unique custom. The Skverer Rebbetzin who lives upstairs (of the bais hamedrash) orders a box of eggs each week and gives out the eggs to the mispallelim. It is her way of supporting a person who earns his living by selling eggs. She does not need the entire box, so she asks me to give out the rest of the eggs to the minyan. Why should the eggs go to waste?”

The man now realized that the Rebbetzin was truly a tzadeikes, righteous woman. She had figured out a way to support a Jew in need without compromising his dignity. Skverer Chassidus seventy years ago was far from what it is today. The Rebbetzin was a distinguished woman whose husband had reestablished the chassidus in America. Yet, she not only made the time to help a poor Jew who was not one of her husband’s chassidim, but she did this in such a manner that his self-esteem would be upheld. No plaques; no newspaper spread; no dinner – just simple, wholesome chesed performed b’hatznea leches, with modesty and respect for others.