

You shall be to Me a kingdom of ministers/priests and a holy nation. (19:6)

The Torah hereby informs us of our mission statement, the identity which we must strive to achieve as members of *Klal Yisrael*. The *Kohanim* stand at the spiritual helm of the nation as mentors and paradigms of moral/spiritual perfection. They have dedicated their lives to the service of Hashem – a mission which the Torah expects all of us to complete. Second, we are to become a *goy kadosh*, holy nation. Holiness is achieved via separation and removal of oneself from the moral temptations and conflicts that would destroy our spiritual ascent. One can hardly live a life of abandon, of moral profligacy and material excess, and expect to be close to Hashem. *Kedushah* requires devotion. One's devotion must be focused on Hashem if he hopes to achieve holiness. Thus, the Jewish People are charged with a dual mission: to serve as the aspiration and inspiration for an entire world to recognize Hashem and to strive for spiritual perfection; to have their own intrinsic value of sanctity and moral perfection, so that they can fulfill their own spiritual potential. One can hardly mentor others if he himself is deficient.

The appellation *goy kadosh* is not exclusive to Torah leadership. *Mi k'amcha Yisrael*, "Who is like Your People *Yisrael*?" applies to all Jews, regardless of lineage or erudition. Torah-observant Jews whose commitment to Hashem is unequivocal, whose *mitzvah* observance is without fanfare, and who do what is right without seeking accolades and tributes, earn the title *goy kadosh* for their many meaningful acts of *chesed*, lovingkindness. The following three examples (quoted by *Horav Shlomo Levenstein, Shlita*) are about Jews who exemplify *mi k'Amcha Yisrael*.

On December 4, 2010, a deadly forest fire in the Carmel Forest of northern *Eretz Yisrael* snuffed out 44 lives and consumed much of the Mediterranean forest covering the region. Among its victims was a young, unmarried 26 year-old man, by the name of Yakir Suissa. An observant Jew who was meticulous in his *shul* attendance, he made a point to attend a daily Torah *shiur*. As he was a friendly fellow, people thought they knew him, until after his death when it was discovered that he had performed an extraordinary act of *gemillas chesed* to help a *kollel* fellow who was strapped with overwhelming debt.

Yakir was standing in line at the *makolet*, grocery store, when a young *kollel* fellow in front of him asked the owner of the *makolet* to charge his present purchases. "I cannot do this anymore. Your balance is far beyond the standard credit that I allow. You will have to pay cash today," the owner said to the young man. The *kollel* fellow asked for one more chance at leniency: "Please, I am very short this month, and, if I cannot purchase these items, we will not have food at home. My children must eat. I promise that next week I will have payment." The owner was a good person who just did not want to go broke: "Fine. This one time, I will allow it, but you must bring me some money next week."

When the young man left, Yakir turned to the owner and said, "I am his relative. Tell me, how

much does he owe you?" "Twenty-five hundred *shekel*." Immediately, Yakir took out his credit card and said, "Charge his bill to my card." A week passed, and the fellow returned with payment on his account. The storekeeper told him, "It is not necessary. Your relative paid up your entire bill." "What do you mean?" he asked. "I have no relatives here." Yakir had paid the bill without fanfare, because he saw a young *ben Torah* straining under his debt. He was never heard from again, until his name and picture were posted in the paper as one of the victims of the deadly blaze. *Mi k'amcha Yisrael?*

A *rav* visited one of his students who was sitting *shivah* (seven-day mourning period) for his late mother. He asked his student to tell him something about his mother (whom he had heard was a special woman and who, although unable to attend a mainstream *Bais Yaakov*, grew up observant and raised a family of exemplary *bonei Torah*). "My mother would bake 24 *challo*s every Friday in honor of *Shabbos*. We lived with this custom, but never understood why she picked the number 24. When I grew up I asked her, '*Imma*, why do you bake 24 *challo*s?' She explained that it was in honor of the 24 times its says *ki l'olam Chasdo*, 'His mercy is for all eternity.' 'But *Imma*, it actually says this (*ki l'olam Chasdo*) 26 times.' His mother answered, 'I will not bake *challo*s for Sicho and Og (two pagan kings whom Hashem smote).'" This was a simple Jewish woman and the manner in which she paid tribute to Hashem.

Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita, relates that a Jew by the name of *Rav Goldstein* lived in Yerushalayim. He was a devout Jew who loved the Torah and was erudite in his teachings. While many Jews possess a love of Torah, his love was almost palpable. He was once asked who had inspired his extraordinary *ahavas Torah*. He related the following story.

"I was in Hungary at the outbreak of World War II. My father was taken from us during one of the early transports to the extermination camps, leaving my mother alone with all the children. One day the Nazi murderers came, rounded us up and threw us onto cattle cars; Auschwitz was our destination. For some reason, the engineer erred and took the wrong track, our destination miles away from Auschwitz. The Nazis jumped at the opportunity to degrade and persecute us more, making us walk the distance to Auschwitz. My mother lifted up one child in each arm and, without food or drink, broken in body but not in spirit, she began the long trek to Auschwitz.

"A gentile woman who lived along the road took pity on my mother trudging along carrying two children, and quickly ran over. She was about to place a few potatoes in my mother's arms. The Nazi sensed this and screamed at the woman, 'One more move, and I will shoot you!' The woman pulled back the bag, but, nonetheless, kept on walking alongside my mother. Suddenly, she saw that the Nazi had averted his eyes, and she quickly put the bag in my mother's arms and ran away. As soon as we stopped marching, we all begged for a bite of the raw potato. My mother raised her hand and said, 'Not so fast. Do you see that man up front? That is *Horav Moshe Stern*, the *Rav* of Debrecyn. You know that a *talmid chacham* takes precedence.' She walked over to the *Rav*, gave him a piece of potato, then returned and gave to the rest of us.

“From that day on, it was entrenched in my psyche that the apex of Judaism is the *talmid chacham*. He precedes everyone due to the Torah that is absorbed within him. Nothing – absolutely nothing – supersedes the Torah.”

Rav Goldstein's mother was an ishah peshutah, ordinary woman, not learned, no degrees, who did not carry a briefcase. She was unsophisticated in matters of Jewish philosophy, ethics and law, but she was sincere, committed and filled with faith in the Almighty and love for His Torah. Mi k'amcha Yisrael!