

## If the daughter of a Kohen will be desecrated through adultery, she desecrates her father – she shall be consumed by fire. (21:9)

The less than savory activities of one's offspring – whether intended or not – will affect his parents' reputation. People like to talk. It is a disease that affects many of us, and, when someone's child acts in an uncomplimentary manner, people have reason to talk – and they do. This is especially true when the children are products of an illustrious lineage. This adds fuel to the fire. The *bas kohen* that desecrated herself receives an unusual punishment which is not consistent with the sin of adultery. Rightfully, an adulteress is stoned for her contemptible behavior. The *bas kohen* is punished with fire, which is two levels above stoning. Furthermore, *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 45a) teach that *bais din* should seek the lightest punishment for an offender. We have no reason to make even a sinner suffer more than necessary.

*Horav Simcha Zissel, zl*, the *Alter m'Kelm*, explains that the education which *Kohanim* receive is the most elevated education. They are charged with dealing with *kodshim*, sacrificial offerings, *tumah v'taharah*, ritual contamination and purity. They must function with heightened spiritual awareness at all times. Their educational standards must be more demanding, preparing them to address such a demanding lifestyle.

Undoubtedly, when one is involved in such spiritually-taxing work, it is reflected in his entire demeanor. He lives by a different, more lofty benchmark. As such, he certainly influences the members of his household to maintain a similar lifestyle. In other words, a girl growing up in a *Kohen's* home has been exposed to a unique lifestyle, one that places greater focus on sanctity and spiritual purity. When the daughter of a *Kohen* acts out in such a reprehensible manner, she casts a cloud, a pall on the education she received at home. She has catalyzed questions about the type of guidance and upbringing she received at home. Not only does she look bad, but people likewise view her father with distrust. How did he raise his children? How did he act at home? What example did he show his children? The *bas kohen's* punishment reflects all of these ambiguities. The harsh punishment which she receives conveys a message concerning a parent's educational responsibility.

*Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, supplemented this thought with a powerful observation. We learn in *Pirkei Avos* that the study of Torah -- and, by extension, those who devote their lives to living and mastering the Torah-- is on a higher level than *Kehunah*, Priesthood, and *malchus*, monarchy. In other words, the Torah scholar supersedes the *Kohen* and the *Melech Yisrael*, king. Therefore, the actions of a *ben Torah* who was raised in a Torah home, in which he saw and breathed Torah, must certainly exemplify his education. He must be especially circumspect in everything he does, to be careful not to desecrate the Torah. His responsibility is exceedingly great.

The *Alter* expands this idea in explaining a difficult passage in *Chazal* (*Succah* 56b). Miriam bas

Bilgah apostatized herself and married a Greek soldier. When the Greeks entered the *Bais Hamikdash*, she accompanied them and walked over to the *Mizbayach*, Altar, and kicked it, screaming out, “Lukas! Lukas! Wolf! Wolf! Until when will you continue to consume the money of the Jews and not stand behind them during their distress?” As a result of her nefarious actions, her entire family of *Kohanim* was penalized. *Chazal* question why the family suffered due to the actions of one member. The classic response is, *Oy l’rasha v’oy l’shecheinav*, “Woe is to the wicked person and woe is to his neighbors;” guilt by association or associations have repercussions. When the *rasha* goes down, so do all who have befriended and supported him.

The *Talmud* asks why should Bilgah’s entire *mishmar* be penalized due to his daughter’s actions? *Abaye* replies, “We say that the speech of a child in the marketplace is learned either from the father or the mother (Miriam would not have said such things had she not heard it at home.) Therefore, the father had a stake in her sin.

The *Alter* explains that we have no question that Bilgah did not speak so disparagingly at home. His daughter Miriam, however, never heard him rave about the service in the *Bais Hamikdash*. He never extolled the work involved, the preparation and care to see that everything adhered to the highest standards of holiness and purity. Thus, while the father never spoke negatively, his lack of positivity sent a negative message to his daughter: “I really do not care about what I am doing.” Thus, he is to blame for his daughter’s defection. Had she seen or heard the *geshmak*, satisfaction, or felt the enthusiasm, she would not have become an apostate.

*Horav Shraga Feldman, Shlita (Mashgiach Yeshivas Nachlas David)*, wonders why *Chazal* are so preoccupied with her shameless deprecation of the sacred Temple service. What about the apostasy and marriage to a Greek? One would think that such an egregious sin would easily trump Miriam’s lack of respect for the Temple.

*Rav Feldman* explains that while we may posit that had her father done a better job of raising her she might not have married a *goy*, her negative attitude towards the *Mikdash* is the direct result of a father who did not rave about the sweetness and joy associated with serving Hashem in the *Mikdash*. Parents are not punished for not doing more, for not being more demanding regarding their child’s education. They are, however, held liable for not being a positive standard bearer, an example of commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, amid incredible joy and excitement. When a boy sees his father’s blasé attitude toward learning Torah and *mitzvah* observance, why should he be different? When there is no *joie de’vivre* concerning *Yiddishkeit* – then we cannot expect much better from the children.

It was this zest and inexhaustible *joie de’vivre* that we, as *talmidim* in Telshe, saw our venerable *Rebbeim* demonstrate. When they learned, they lived Torah. When they taught Torah, it was with an exultation of spirit. To them, Torah was their life force. In the biography of Telshe *Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl* (by Rabbi Yechiel Spero), the author relates that when the *pirush*, commentary, of *Rabbeinu Avraham min HaHar* on *Meseches Nedarim* was published, the

*Rosh Yeshivah* discovered a Torah thought which (I think encapsulated his life of devotion to Torah) he often quoted, *Ikar mitzvaso hi h'ahanaah v'hataanug ba'meh she'masig u'meivin b'limudo*; "The primary *mitzvah* of *limud haTorah* is the enjoyment and pleasure which one derives from grasping and understanding what he is learning." One had to just look at the *Rosh Yeshivah* when he learned or gave a *shiur*, and he would be privy to a buoyant joy of life, because Torah was his life force that accompanied him until his last mortal moment.