

Say to the Kohanim... Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his People. (21:1)

Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, interprets this *pasuk* homiletically, utilizing it as a primer and guide for those who seek to devote themselves to Jewish outreach. Such work requires extreme dedication, love of Hashem and His children, consummate patience and selflessness – never expecting a thank you, because it is often not forthcoming. The work is very satisfying; saving a Jewish child or adult, bringing one back, encouraging a brother or sister to embrace a life of Torah and *mitzvah* observance are satisfying endeavors. They can be spiritually dangerous, however, for someone who is ill-prepared, who himself has a way to go in his own personal development.

The spiritual dimension of a Jew consists of four levels, of which *nefesh* is the lowest. Thus, the *nefesh* of our *pasuk* refers to *pechusim*, individuals who are on a base level of spirituality – or have attained no level at all. They are the subjects of outreach. While it is every Jew's obligation to reach out to his fellow Jew and attempt to inspire him or her to return to Hashem's embrace, one must be acutely aware of the dangers that abide in this endeavor. The observant Jew, the *ben Torah*, who had previously been living in an insular society, far-removed from the moral and spiritual bankruptcy that prevails and controls much of contemporary society, is in for a culture shock. He is no longer functioning within the confines of his comfort zone: the *bais hamedrash*, the *shul*, the *frum*, observant milieu in which he has been ensconced his entire life. His work is noble – and quite necessary, but, he must realize that the spiritual umbilical cord that has sustained him until now should not be severed. Otherwise, he will become a victim, a challenge for the next outreach person.

Furthermore, one must be vigilant concerning whom he brings home. When a *kiruv* professional is being *mekarev*, bringing someone closer to observance, a person whose prior Jewish affiliation had been negative, he should take into consideration that who they are, their background and level of negativity, can have an adverse influence on the unassuming minds of his children. There are those unaffiliated who hail from fine, upstanding, cultured families, who just happen to be non-observant. There are also those whose family background, prior relationships and exposure to the base profligate morals of our society leave much to be desired. They could have a harmful influence upon one's impressionable children. While it is true that he is engaged in spiritual life-saving, he must take his family into consideration as well.

Rav Gamliel presents a rule which he feels should be the determining factor in our *kiruv* decisions: Any person whose demeanor we would personally reject as unsavory, should be dealt with outside of the parameters of our homes. We must do whatever we can to bring him or her back to a life of Torah, but this endeavor should be carried out outside of our homes. Our children should not be sacrificed to our outreach endeavors.

Rav Gamliel interprets this idea into the *pasuk*, *L'nefesh lo yitameh b'amav*, "Each of you shall not

contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people.” The criteria concerning whom to bring home should be *b’amav*, “among his people,” whether this individual can be viewed as one of his people, someone with whom he would readily and comfortably associate. Otherwise, his office would be the best place for his outreach activities.

We forget that, in *kiruv*, relationships based upon trust and caring determine success. Relationships are often established by individuals who are like-minded. The outreach individual must remember that he is different from his subjects. If this difference is philosophically confined, such that they do not share an equal perspective concerning *avodas Hashem*, service to the Almighty, we should reach out and explain to them, guide them, inspire them – but never undermine our own commitment in order to promote a like-minded relationship. The Torah says that a *Kohen* can be *metameh*, ritually contaminate, himself only *l’sheiro ha’karov eilav*, “to his relative who is closest to him.” For our purposes, this may be interpreted as: One may reach out to someone who is already “close” to him. This is certainly germane to one who must reach out to a relative who has lapsed in observance. After all, he is family.

I say this because, sadly, some individuals have an open home, hand, and heart to everyone, but when a family member requires assistance, they are suddenly too busy to get involved. The reason for this is simple: Family members often expect assistance, so the gratitude is not quickly forthcoming. Outsiders are more appreciative, because they do not expect the help. We are human beings who need and thrive on gratitude, and, when this gratitude is not anticipated, we shirk our duties. We must remember that we do what is right because this is Hashem’s command. We are not in this for appreciation, gratitude, recognition because it is not inevitable. On the contrary, if one errs in judgment, his kindheartedness notwithstanding, he will be blamed and even derogated. We must care for Hashem’s children – because we are all Hashem’s children. We are all one family.