

## Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon... each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people. (21:1)

The **Chasam Sofer** renders this *pasuk* homiletically as presenting the imperative and guidelines for successful Jewish outreach. First: “Say to the *Kohanim*, the sons of Aharon” that they should act in accordance with their noble, illustrious heritage. Their Patriarch, Aharon *HaKohen*, was known by his *nom de plume* as the consummate *Ohaiv shalom v’rodef shalom, ohaiv es ha’brios u’mekarvan laTorah*, “(He) lover of peace and (he) pursuer of peace; (he) loves people and brings them closer to the Torah.” One who seeks success in reaching out to his fellow man must first make peace with himself. No sin, no moral turpitude, no spiritual flaws – these are a given. Otherwise, one is a hypocrite. He can hardly expect someone to listen to him if he sets such a defective standard. He must also be *mekabel kol ha’adam b’sivur panim yafos*, “receive everyone with a cheerful face.”

There is, however, one “catch” to the welcome embrace that we are to display to those who are not yet observant. There can be no vestige of *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem’s Name. One should not call attention to himself by bending over backwards in an effort to impress one who may be called a *rasha*, wicked, for his efforts to undermine Judaism. We must reach out, but, if we reach out to those whose perception of our work is limited, it might very well be misconstrued. This will result in a *chillul Hashem*, as people will say that we have mixed allegiances.

It is not worth turning off a large number of people in our attempt to reach out to one person who has gone sour. The Torah alludes to this when it writes *L’nefesh lo yetamei b’amav*, “Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people.” In order to save one *nefesh*, soul/person, it is not worth endangering an entire group of people who will be left with many unanswered questions. *Kiruv*, Jewish outreach, is all-important, but we must always be aware of and weigh the price we might have to pay for success.

While it is imperative that one exert great care in reaching out to the unaffiliated, we must address a serious problem. It is understandable that some of us fear the unknown and are even more concerned with what others might say. Regrettably, however, there is a shortage of good, knowledgeable, committed individuals who possess the answers and have the sensitivity necessary to deal with those who are either turned off from – or were never turned on to – Judaism.

Let me just share an example from a *kiruv* blog I read the other day which demonstrates the type of question one might be asked, and the answer an astute expert should give. The questioner wanted to know how one “leaves” Judaism. Apparently, the product of a secular-oriented home, he grew up with nothing Jewish; thus, he never felt a connection to the religion of his ancestors. In his mind, Judaism is a religion – not a race. Why should he be forced to be part of a religion to which he has no connection and for which he has no feeling? “Why is there no ‘exit strategy’?” he asks.

With care and expertise, the responder explained that, first of all, as far as the anti-Semites of the world are concerned, he is a Jew. Regardless of what he might do dispel this notion, the reality is: he is Jewish. Hitler did not seem to care about an individual's level of observance or his affiliation with anything Jewish, or even if he was the product of an intermarriage or himself intermarried. If they could trace a drop of Jewish blood in the person's bloodlines – he was considered Jewish.

Next, Judaism is much more than about belief and practice, as we find with other religions. Judaism is a family. We are all *bnei* Avraham, Yitzchak, v'Yaakov, descendants of the holy Patriarchs. We accept *geirim*, converts, who adopt our way of life. Then they also become "family." One cannot change his family.

Last, the mere reason that the person writes his questions is an indication that he does not want to leave. He wants to stay, but does not know how. His exposure to Judaism was through the few times that he had entered a temple which mocked G-d and Judaism. How is one to develop a connection to the real thing from such exposure? He was invited to experience Orthodox Judaism through a *Shabbos* and other such experiences. Before one closes the door on the religion for which so many died, it would only be proper that he become acutely aware of what it is that he is rejecting.

The above is an example. People seek the truth. We need individuals who are not afraid of the truth, who can expound it as well as they live it. These individuals must be aware, however, that there are dangers of overexposure. Just like the sun: the right amount is healthy; too much can be harmful and even deadly.