

And they shall not marry a woman who has been divorced by her husband; for each one is holy to his G-d. (21:7)

The circle of permitted marriages diminishes as one rises higher in the social/spiritual hierarchy. The Torah places restrictions upon the *Levi* and *Yisrael* concerning certain marriages. The *Kohen* has even greater limitations, while the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, is in a very tight circle with regard to marriage. These provisions concerning marriage are governed primarily by the principle of *yichus*, pedigree, and the nobility of untainted family descent. The preservation of the blood lines is one of the principles of Jewish family life. In its purest form, *yichus* is conveyed through the male line from generation to generation by marriages to woman who are *halachically* suitable for this union. Why certain women are considered unsuitable may be rationalized, but when all is said and done, it is Hashem Who, for reasons known only to Him, determines suitability. We can only obey.

A *Kohen* may not marry a divorcee, regardless of who her former spouse was, or the circumstances leading up to the ultimate separation. The Torah is clear in its prohibition. We must accept its edicts. I recently came across a poignant story, quoted by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, which should inspire our *emunas chachamim*, faith in our Sages.

A couple had a wonderful, loving marriage for fifteen years. One thing, however, kept gnawing at this relationship: they had no children. After much deliberation and despite the harmony that reigned in their home, they decided to divorce. Perhaps they would each be blessed the second time around. They said their “goodbyes,” and the *get*, divorce, was processed. Shortly after the *get* had been completed, the woman discovered that, lo and behold, she was pregnant. This was wonderful news and should have generated much joy. Indeed, it would have – had the husband not been a *Kohen*. His ex-wife was pregnant, but he could not remarry her, since she was a divorcee. Talk about misfortune! Their pain and heartbreak were “off the charts.”

The husband turned to *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*, who told him that there was no way to override the *Halachah*. He could not remarry his former wife. He suggested that he should consult with his father-in-law, *Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl*. The man listened and turned to *Rav Elyashiv* and poured out his heart. The *Rav* shared his pain, regrettably however the *halachah* is very clear: as a *Kohen*, he may not marry his former wife. “The only thing I can tell you,” he said, “is to go to the *Kosel Maaravi* and *daven*, pray to Hashem to save you.”

When *Rav Elyashiv* speaks – one listens, and he immediately left for the *Kosel* to pour out his heart without restraint. Fifteen years of yearning; fifteen years of prayer, hope and rejection. Finally, when their prayers were answered, there was an insurmountable obstacle to their shared joy. One cannot get around Biblical law. He cried and cried, his hands scraping the stone wall. After *davening* for a lengthy period of time, he felt someone’s hand on his shoulder. He turned around and saw a young, distinguished *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar of note, who inquired what had happened to him. Anyone observing the *Kohen’s* heartfelt prayer, would have raised that question.

This was no ordinary *davening*. The *Kohen* repeated his story, and the scholar asked him, “Do you have a father?” The question did not really make sense to the *Kohen*. “Of course I have a father,” he replied. “He is very old and lives in a nursing home in America. He is quite ill and barely communicates with those around him.”

The scholar turned to the depressed *Kohen* and said, “In my opinion, you should fly to America and speak with your father. Tell him what has taken place and ask his advice.” The *Kohen* looked at the man as if he had just landed from outer space: “I just told you that my father’s physical and mental condition has deteriorated considerably. He neither talks, nor does he seem to understand what people say to him. Anyway, about what could I talk to him which would change my situation?” The stranger listened to the *Kohen* and looked at him in such a manner as if to say, “Listen, I am telling you to go. Your excuses are no reason not to go. Who knows? The visit might even pay off.”

The *Kohen* ruminated over the events of the past few days. First, *Rav* Kanievesky told him to speak with *Rav* Eliyashiv. The venerable *gadol ha’dor*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, told him to pray at the *Kosel*. At the *Kosel*, he met a stranger who insisted that his problem would be solved if he were to fly to America and speak with his incommunicable father. What should he do? The entire story seemed like a mystery, but to believing Jews, every mystery has an underlying meaning. Somehow, all of these events fit together and had to make sense. All he had to lose was a plane ticket. What could it hurt if he paid a visit to his father? Twenty four hours later, the *Kohen* was walking up the steps of the nursing home entrance.

When the *Kohen* entered the home and said that he had come to visit with his father, the nurses said that it was a waste of time. His father had not communicated with anyone in the last four months. Nothing – period. Not even eye contact. He should not expect a reaction. This did not prevent the *Kohen* from relating the entire story to his father, who just sat there staring out in space, seemingly oblivious to all that was taking place. Then the son burst out in bitter weeping. It was just too much. The trauma of years of yearning – followed by divorce and the pregnancy – was overwhelming. Suddenly, the unbelievable happened. The father began to speak! “You are wrong. It is all a mistake. You are not my biological son! After the Holocaust, your mother and I realized that we could no longer have children, so we adopted you as an infant and raised you as our child – which you are, but you are not a *Kohen*! Thus, there is no reason that you cannot marry your former wife.”

A powerful story with an even more powerful lesson. One must have faith in our *chachamim*. They are blessed with an extraordinary intuition called *daas Torah*, the thought process that is the result of a lifetime of Torah study. They see things that we do not see; they hear things that we do not hear. They are aware of things that elude us. It is about trust.