

The Kohen who is exalted above his brothers... He shall not come near to any dead person... he shall not leave the Sanctuary... for a crown – the oil of his G-d's anointment – is upon him. (21:10-12)

There is a hierarchy within the Jewish nation. The *Kohanim* who serve in the *Bais HaMikdash* are enjoined with specific laws regarding their spiritual defilement caused by coming in contact with the dead. The *Kohen Hedyot*, regular *Kohen*, may come in contact with seven close relatives: father, mother, sister, brother, wife, son and daughter. Otherwise, all other Jewish dead are off-limit. The *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest, has further restrictions. He may not become *tamei*, defiled, to anyone – not even his closest relatives. Furthermore, he may not leave the Sanctuary to follow the funeral procession. In short, the *Kohen Gadol* must maintain his level of spiritual sanctity and purity, regardless of the trauma, the grief, the emotional toll.

Let us view this *halachah* in perspective. The *Kohen Gadol* is serving in the Sanctuary and receives a call that his father/mother has suddenly passed away. The shock is overpowering; the immediate grief is overwhelming. He may not leave. He may not halt what he is doing. His mind must continue concentrating on the *avodah*, service, at hand. His siblings are all involved in planning and preparing for the funeral – which he may not even attend! Even when they return from the gravesite and begin to sit *shivah*, seven-day mourning period, the *Kohen Gadol* does not sit in the same manner as they do. He does not sit on the ground. He is the spiritual leader of the Jewish People. He is different.

When we consider to whom this *halachah* is addressed, the incredulity increases. The *Kohen Gadol* is the standard-bearer of *ahavas Yisrael*, love for all Jews. Aharon *HaKohen*, the first *Kohen Gadol*, was known as the *ohaiv shalom*, lover of peace, between man and his fellow man. Clearly, his grandson personifies this attribute. His love for all Jews is certainly greater than one would expect of the average Jew. Yet, this great man is not permitted to perform – or even be a part of – the final honor given to the man who brought him into this world. His father's light has been suddenly and perhaps tragically extinguished, yet he must remain within the confines of the Sanctuary, resplendent in his gold brocaded Priestly vestments and continue his spiritual work – as if nothing had happened. How can so much be expected of a human being?

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, explains that the answer lies in the question. It is clearly too much to expect from a mere human being, but Aharon *HaKohen* was not a mere human being. Due to his incredible desire to cling to Hashem, he was able to transcend the physical boundaries and limitations that are intrinsic to the human nature. He strived, without letup, to achieve what is normally impossible for a human being to accomplish.

Chazal teach that three partners join in the creation of man: Hashem; his father; and his mother.

The parents share in contributing to his human dimension – his body and its various components. The portion that Hashem contributes is the *neshamah*, soul. Aharon endeavored his entire life, leaving no stone unturned, to make his spiritual dimension dominant over his physical component. Thus, he was closer to his spiritual side than to his physical. He lived in this world, but his mind was in Heaven.

The Torah intimates to us that in every generation, one of Aharon's descendants will achieve his grandfather's plateau of spiritual transcendence. The *Kohen Gadol* of every generation will be an individual whose bond with Hashem will be unlike that of other people. Through him, Hashem's spiritual flow will descend, bringing spiritual life and sustenance to the generation. This flow may not be halted – even momentarily. Thus, the *Kohen Gadol* may not pause in his relationship, even for a moment. He remains within the confines of the Sanctuary, replete in his sanctity and strong in his unbreakable bond with Hashem. The nation relies on him. A regular mortal cannot overcome his human nature, but the *Kohen Gadol* was no longer a regular mortal. He had achieved a spiritual ascendancy like no other man.

Rav Heyman writes that he discovered this idea, to which the *Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 270* alludes, "The soul of the *Kohen Gadol*, who is separated to be holy of holy despite being a mortal in a human body, resides in the upper echelons of the spiritual realm. Due to his increased clinging to Above, he becomes divorced from the nature of men. Thus, his heart forgets any involvement with this temporal world."

A flipside to this unique sanctity emerges: How does an individual so holy, so far-removed from human society, continue to remain connected with people? Aharon's disciples loved and pursued peace, loved people and brought them closer to Torah. Can a person removed from human endeavor succeed at human interaction?

Rav Heyman explains that Aharon's love for people originates from his total clinging to Hashem. His consummate bond with Hashem catalyzed within him such a feeling that he did not view himself as having a brother or a friend. **All** Jews were the same to him. His love for them was somewhat similar to the love Hashem has for us: total, unequivocal, balanced, everyone is the same in His eyes. As Hashem looks at us with compassion, sensitivity, and overwhelming mercy, so did Aharon. This is why he sought every avenue to promote peace and welfare among Jews. They were all the same to him. He saw no evil in anyone – only love for each one. Hashem's Will was Aharon's will. Thus, when his younger brother Moshe was selected to lead the Jewish People from Egypt, Aharon rejoiced for him. This is what Hashem wants; therefore, it is what Aharon wants, because he subjugated his will to that of Hashem.

Aharon sustained a mind-numbing tragedy on what should have been the most auspicious day of his life. The day of *Chanukas HaMishkan*, the Inauguration of the Sanctuary, was to be Aharon's crowning moment. He was to be invested in *Kehunah Gedolah*, the High Priesthood, while his two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, would begin to serve in the *Mishkan* as the first

Kohanim. His joy, however, was marred by indescribable tragedy – his two saintly sons died before his very eyes. *Chazal* teach that actually the decree concerning their deaths was that it take place earlier, during the Giving of the Torah. A number of reasons are stated for the “delay” in executing this decree. *Rav* Heyman suggests a novel rationale, based upon his understanding of *kedushas Aharon*, the sanctity of Aharon.

Hashem sought to impart to the nation the exemplary status of Aharon, to explain to them that the nation’s first High Priest had not been selected for this position as a result of his familial relationship with Moshe *Rabbeinu*. No, Aharon warranted this position of his own unique accord. Furthermore, Hashem was demonstrating to the nation why and how Aharon’s service had the capacity to achieve atonement for the people. They had to see with their very own eyes, without embellishment, that Aharon was like no other man. When the terrible tragedy occurred before a stunned crowd, **everyone** had the opportunity to see how this shocked father did not react, did not complain, did not fall apart in grief. He continued the service as if nothing extraordinary had taken place. When the people saw how Aharon continued his work without fanfare, without pause to regain his emotions, they understood why Hashem had selected him to represent them in achieving atonement. Indeed, Aharon was like no other man. He was the *Kohen Gadol* – *gadol mei’echav*, “exalted above his brothers.”