

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

Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, observes that Judaism sustains three levels of *kedushah*, holiness: that of a *Yisrael*, common Jew; that of a *Kohen*, member of the priestly family; that of the *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. These three distinct individuals represent three ascending levels of Divine sanctity. The average Jew, the *Yisrael* or *Levi* who is not a *Kohen*, is a member of an "*Am Kadosh*," holy nation, consecrated to the Almighty, separated from all that is impure and unclean. Just as Hashem is holy and unsusceptible to evil and contamination, the *Yisrael* who is to emulate Hashem is adjured to distinguish himself in a number of areas. He is forbidden to eat specific food and forbidden to enter places which by their very nature impart spiritual pollution.

The next level of *kedushah* is that of a *Kohen*. While the *Kohen* is included in all of the demands made upon the *Yisrael*, he is to additionally refrain from coming in contact with a dead body. He also may not marry certain women. Interestingly, if a *Yisrael* were to accept upon himself the various stringencies of a *Kohen*, such as not entering a room in which a dead body lies, he would be considered cruel. Imagine an individual not going to a funeral because he wants to behave like a *Kohen*! Where is his sensitivity for another Jew?

The *Kohen*, however, who from birth is consecrated for his exalted position, is not permitted to enter a building while even his best friend or close relative lies dead. This is all due to his distinct level of *kedushah*. He may only defile himself for his six closest relatives and his wife. Is he cruel? No! He is holy. It is understood that one who distinguishes himself in holiness must remain removed from any form of spiritual contaminant - regardless of how emotionally difficult it may be.

While, the *Kohen hedyot* may contaminate himself for these close relatives, the *Kohen Gadol*, who maintains the highest level of *kedushah*, may not become *tamei* even for his closest relatives. His relationship with Hashem raises him above everyone else to the point that what seems natural and right for the average Jew is far removed from the *Kohen Gadol*.

How does this happen? Consider the example of parents who have devoted their lives to raising a son to excel in all areas of spiritual life. He succeeds in exemplifying the ideals of *Torah* to the point that he is chosen to be the spiritual leader of the Jewish people. He will have the closest connection to Hashem. What is the parents' reward? Now their son, the *Kohen Gadol*, cannot even follow behind their coffin. He may not do anything that might shatter the idyllic life of service to Hashem that he now leads. While his parents may view this as "the greatest *nachas*," what about the *Kohen Gadol* himself? Where does he conjure up such super-human strength to transcend his natural emotions?

We can better understand the nature of the *Kohen Gadol* when we take into account his position,

his relationship with Hashem, and his new focus on life. The *Kohen Gadol* wears the "crown of Hashem on his head," his essence is suffused in Hashem; he is to be the embodiment of Heavenly spirituality on this world. He "lives" in the Heavens, while his body exists on earth. He has achieved such a sublime level of *kedushah* that the affairs of this world have but a distant meaning to him. Obviously, not everyone is able to attain this remarkable level of achievement. On the other hand, not everyone is worthy of becoming the *Kohen Gadol*. What is proper and even meritorious for others is "beneath" his dignity and level of *deveikus*, clinging/closeness to Hashem. Conversely, if anyone other than the *Kohen Gadol* would attempt to act in such a manner, he would be considered cruel and not *mentschlich*, outside the bounds of human nature. The *Torah* demands that each Jew interact with Hashem and other people in accordance with his individual degree of *kedushah* - not someone else's.

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, makes a noteworthy statement which serves as a compelling addendum to this idea. The *kesser Kehunah*, crown of the priesthood, is demanding; there is, however, a loftier crown - the *kesser Torah*, crown of the *Torah*. While this diadem is available to everyone who so desires and seeks to immerse himself totally in the study of *Torah*, it demands much of its achiever. It requires that one totally abnegate himself from the affairs of the mundane - not by ignoring them - but rather by not permitting them to impede spiritual growth. The *ben Torah* must have the acquired ability to stand firm in the face of secular and mundane challenge, for, his essence embodies *Torah*.