

The Kohen shall look at the affliction on the skin of his flesh....and declare him contaminated. (13:3)

The *Kohen* is the only individual which the *Torah* authorizes to render a decision regarding a person's *tzaraas*. This is consistent with the *pasuk* in *Devarim 21:5*, "And according to his word, shall be every grievance and every plague." Indeed, if for some reason the *Kohen* is not proficient in the area of *negaim*, plagues, *Chazal* state in *Toras Kohanim*, that a *talmid chacham*, *Torah* scholar, should be asked to observe the plague and instruct the *Kohen* "*shoteh*" in the decision to be rendered. The *Kesef Mishneh* notes the use of the word "*shoteh*," fool, to describe a *Kohen* who is not schooled in *hilchos negaim*. He should be referred to as an *am ha'aretz*, illiterate. Why is he called a *shoteh*? He explains that he is a *shoteh* only in relation to the *Yisrael talmid chacham*. Yet, the term seems hardly appropriate, especially in light of the fact that throughout *halachic* literature one who is unschooled or illiterate is called an *am ha'aretz*.

Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, offers an insightful response. Many people use the excuse of *parnassah*, the need to earn a living, as the reason for not designating time for *Torah* study. They are busy, involved, hard at work, under constant pressure. If they would only demonstrate the same resourcefulness for study as they do for making excuses, they would have sufficient time for *Torah* study. They, do, however, have a rationale, if not an excuse. What about the *Kohen* who has no worry about *parnassah*, who is to be involved in spiritual endeavor throughout the day? Why is he not involved in learning? How can he excuse himself from doing what he is assigned to do? He obviously has wasted his time, doing everything except what he was supposed to do. Such a person is a *shoteh*! Only a fool wastes his time. We are on this world for a purpose. If we take the precious time allotted to us and waste it, are we not being foolish?

While we do find the concept of a *Kohen am ha'aretz* in regard to one who is not meticulous in following the laws of *tumah* and *taharah*, the basic notion of an illiterate *Kohen* is described as a *Kohen shoteh*. This idea can be applied to all those who have time to study, but seek excuses to defer their obligation. They are not simply doing the wrong thing; they are actually foolish!