

For on this day, he shall provide atonement for you. (16:30)

The *Yom Kippur* service revolves around the *Kohen Gadol*, in the sense that he has the leading role in performing the service, the culmination of which is his entrance into the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*, Holy of Holies. The *Kohen Gadol* had been accorded extraordinary honor when he left his home one week prior to *Yom Kippur*, enroute to the *Bais HaMikdash*. Tens of thousands of *Kohanim* and *Leviim*, along with the rest of *Klal Yisrael*, accompanied him on this “journey.” This display of *kavod haTorah*, honor accorded to a person who represents Torah, was unusual. What did the *Kohen Gadol* do to be deserving of such glory? He was essentially putting his life on the line for *Klal Yisrael*. He was about to represent them in the holiest chamber on earth. While on the one hand, it was an unparalleled spiritual experience, it was also the most uncompromising, and thus dangerous, place on earth. The slightest deviation from his mission, a thought not in perfect harmony with the sacredness of the service, could spell disaster for him – and *Klal Yisrael*. His service was an integral component of their atonement. He did this for them, fully aware of the personal danger involved. Is it any wonder that he was accorded such reverence?

Chazal quote *Shlomo Hamelech* (*Mishlei* 3:15): *Yekarah li mi'peninim v'chol Chafetzecha lo yishvu va*, “She is more precious than rubies, all your goods equal her.” They interpret its message metaphysically as a lesson concerning the value of Torah and those who devote themselves to its study. The *talmid chacham* is accorded greater honor than the *Kohen Gadol* who enters *lifnei v'lifnim*, into the innermost chamber of the *Bais HaMikdash* (play on the word *peninim*). *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, extrapolates from here that every *talmid chacham* (every *ben Torah*) who exerts himself for Torah study deserves such honor, on par with that of the *Kohen Gadol*.

Perhaps we may add that exertion has a broad meaning. The *Kohen Gadol's* honor is based upon his willingness to risk his life for the *Klal*. One thinks that the *ben Torah's* learning should equal this, in the sense that Torah learning has become his life, without which he cannot survive. He must be prepared to give up his life for Torah. Indeed, all our Torah leaders lived like this. Torah was the very air they breathed. This we expect of a Torah giant, and this is how one achieves this distinction. What about the novice who is starting out, the *baal ha'bayis*, layman, whose day is involved in material pursuits? Does the right to receive *kavod* for devotion to Torah apply equally to them? Certainly, the *kesser*, crown of Torah, is available to all who learn – regardless of background or proficiency. It is all about sincerity. One who is genuine and learns Torah with *emes*, spiritual integrity, will ascend to the highest rungs of the spiritual ladder.

Horav Yehudah Tzedaka, zl (*Rosh Yeshivah*, Porat Yosef), related an incredible story concerning *Horav Chaim Sofer, zl* (*Kaf HaChaim*). In 1927, Yerushalayim was the scene of a powerful, devastating earthquake, which resulted in hundreds of casualties. Miraculously, no one lost his life. Many of the homes and *shuls* were toppled when the ground shook violently. *Rav Tzedaka* was a young *yeshivah bachur* studying in Porat Yosef, who, together with the other students of the *yeshivah*, was spared. They all mobilized to scrounge the neighborhood for survivors. They walked through the various neighborhoods of the *Old Yishuv* and surveyed the damage, giving

support to those in need. They reached the *Bais Yisrael* neighborhood (one of the older neighborhoods, home to Yeshivas Mir). They were shocked to see the rubble that was left of the buildings which had been home to so many. They searched for survivors. They then walked past the *Shoshanim L'Dovid bais hamedrash*, made famous as the site where Rav Chaim Sofer spent eighteen hours daily in uninterrupted learning. He was so engrossed in his learning that the world outside his immediate circle did not exist. When the *yeshivah* students stared at the ruins of the *bais hamedrash*, their hearts sank. Three walls of the edifice were in ruins, nothing more than mounds of stone and mortar in a heap of dust. It was barely possible to see through all the dust, but they knew that Rav Chaim was surely somewhere in the destruction. He never left the *bais hamedrash* unless it was time to go home. They lifted the stone and dug through the dirt until they came upon the unmistakable figure of Rav Chaim, sitting and learning next to the one wall which miraculously had not crumbled during the earthquake. In the *z'chus*, merit, of this *tzaddik's* learning, the wall miraculously did not collapse during the earthquake. In the *z'chus*, merit, of this *tzaddik's* learning, the wall not only did not fall, but it actively protected him from harm. Is it any wonder that his *magnum opus*, the *Kaf Ha'Chaim*, has received worldwide acceptance throughout the generations as an authoritative work of *halachah*?