

## Aharon will cleanse its thorns once a year ... it is holy of holies to Hashem. (30:10)

*Rashi* explains that the *Mizbayach*, Altar, is a *Kodesh Kodoshim*, Holy of Holies Its sanctity is supreme, designated for this service exclusively. We derive from *Rashi* that the *Mizbayach HaKetores*, Incense Altar, is considered *Kodesh Kodoshim*, since no other service (the application of blood on the horns of the *Mizbayach* on *Yom Kippur*) was performed on it. (The daily *Ketores*, Incense, was also offered on it.) In his commentary to the *pasuk*, the *Malbim* posits that the focus of *Kodesh Kodoshim* is not the *Mizbayach*, but Aharon *HaKohen*. Thus, the Torah is informing us that Aharon Hakohen performed the service of the blood application, because he was totally consecrated, *Kodesh Kodoshim*, to Hashem. He adds that Aharon is the source for all *Kohanim*, as all of his descendants merited the Priesthood only in his merit. In ensuing years, when the *Kohanim* would perform the service, it was all labeled under the rubric, *B'zos yavo Aharon el haKodesh*, "With this, Aharon shall enter into the Holy." Everyone was considered to be an extension of Aharon *HaKohen*.

The *Malbim* would give a *shiur* on *Parashas HaShavua* every Friday night to a standing-room only crowd. He was undisputedly brilliant, and his Torah exegesis was without peer. He was so good that his archenemies, the *Maskillim*, secular Jews, bent on destroying the very underpinnings of our faith, would also attend. They did not agree with him, but they enjoyed listening to the diamonds that emanated from his mouth.

That night, he rendered his understanding of the *pasukim* in the Torah, and he explained that *Kodesh Kodoshim* was a reference to Aharon *HaKohen*, not to the *Mizbayach*, in complete contrast/opposition to *Rashi*. The *Maskillim*, some of whom were scholars who had turned their backs on Judaism, its people and G-d, made jest of his words. After all, how could the *Malbim* dare oppose *Rashi*? They had the nerve to attempt to debate the *Malbim*. When he refused to discuss anything with them, they became scornful and began to harass and denigrate him. The problem was that the members of the community who were loyal to Torah and to their venerable *Rav* began questioning how he could argue with *Rashi*. They did not hide their feelings. They were troubled by their *Rav's* interpretation of *Kodesh Kodoshim*. The *Malbim* was sensitive to his members' questions, and he announced that, during the following week's *shiur*, he would address the question of Aharon *HaKohen's* extraordinary sanctity.

The following *Shabbos* not a seat could be found in the main *shul*. Everyone had come to hear the *Malbim's p'shat*, exposition, and how he would explain his disagreement with *Rashi*. To the incredulity and chagrin of the attendees, the *Malbim* repeated verbatim what he had said the previous week. He did not explain his position, until one of the members asked, "How can we ascribe the appellation *Kodesh Kodoshim* to a mortal?" Without batting an eye, the *Malbim* quoted from *Divrei HaYamim* I:23, where the *Navi* refers to Aharon as *Kodesh HaKodoshim*! When asked why he did not say so in the first place, he replied, "I will not countenance a cynic." The *Malbim*

could easily have demonstrated his peerless knowledge of the entire Torah. He refused to respond to a self-loathing Jew whose only purpose in asking a question was to undermine the *Malbim* and, by extension, Torah.

We see from here the greatness of the *Malbim*, who was one of history's most valiant fighters against those who would undermine the Torah. He knew the truth and did not feel it was incumbent upon him to assuage the scorn and cynicism of those whose whole goal in life is to provoke or demean. They are not interested in learning and growth. Why invest energy and essentially descend to their level, when it is best to ignore them? This attitude alone can make a world of difference. Responding with hostility and anger only encourages and reinforces them. On the other hand, by silently ignoring them, we subtly disarm them and potentially set the stage for them to introspect and see that they have nothing but negativity.

In conclusion, *Kodesh Kodoshim* can refer to a human being who is so refined and consecrated that he is worthy of this *nom de plume*. While in the Torah we find one person, Aharon *HaKohen*, who (according to the *Malbim*) earned this distinction, perhaps, on a more realistic level, our *gedolei Yisrael* throughout the generations have achieved incredible levels of sanctity. I would like to share a vignette which is especially inspiring because it demonstrates the degree of sanctity which one can achieve.

The *Maharsha*, *Moreinu HaRav Shmuel Eidels*, was a sixteenth century *gaon* who emerged as one of the most illustrious commentators on *Talmud* and *Midrash*. His works are viewed as foundational in *Talmud* study. His ability to clarify dense *Talmudic* passages, while weaving in profound ideas and explaining them in the simplest form made his commentary indispensable.

In his early youth (prior to being discovered as a *Talmudic* genius without peer), the *Maharsha* studied night and day in seclusion in his house. He allowed the locks of his hair to grow very long. He was not concerned with the stares of people who viewed him as an eccentric, and worse. Long hair was certainly not the norm in Orthodox Jewish circles. He tied the hair around a rope which he suspended from the rafter of his ceiling. Thus, whenever sleep was about to overcome him, as his head would droop, the rope would yank his hair and wake him. This bespeaks his unparalleled devotion to diligence in Torah study. This is how the *Maharsha* succeeded in authoring his brilliant commentary on *Shas*.

The *shamash*, sexton, of the main *shul* was a holy G-fearing man. He was accustomed to entering the *shul* every night around midnight, locking the doors and windows, and sitting all night reciting *Tehillim*. One night as he read *Tehillim*, he dozed off. After a short break, he woke up with a start to confront a distinguished looking man before him. The man asked the *shamash*, "Does the *Maharsha* live here?" The *shamash* gave the man directions to the *Maharsha's* home, despite that he was plagued by two pressing questions: First, how had this man entered the locked *shul*? Second, what would such a distinguished man have to do with someone like the *Maharsha*? [In deference to the *shamash*, the *Maharsha* looked and acted differently than anyone in the

community.]

The next night, the *shamash* made certain to check every lock on the door and every window. Once again he was overcome with sleep, only to be awakened a short while later by an impressively handsome red-haired young man. He, too, sought the *Maharsha's* home, and he, too, did not reveal to the *shamash* how he had been able to enter the locked *shul*.

It happened a third time. This time, however, when the man asked for the *Maharsha's* address, the *shamash* said, "Absolutely not! I will not reveal his address until you tell me how the three of you entered the *shul*. (He felt the third man was the leader and spokesman of the group.) The man replied, "I am Eliyahu *HaNavi*, and I will reveal to you a secret that is so guarded that if an individual were to relate what has taken place in the *shul*, he would forfeit his life." The *shamash* accepted the consequences if he were to breach the secret.

"I am Eliyahu *HaNavi*," the man said. "The man whom you saw the first night was Shaul *HaMelech*. The one whom you met the second night was David *HaMelech*. We know that Shaul pursued Dovid with intent to take his life. In Heaven, there is a dispute concerning what to do with regard to Shaul's actions. Should he be punished? It was decided in Heaven that the *she'ailah* should be presented to the *Maharsha*."

The *shamash* now understood that the *Maharsha* was extraordinarily holy. He shared this secret with the community's *Rav*, despite the fact that revealing the secret would cost him his life. He could not permit such a *gaon* to go unrecognized. The *shamash* passed away the very next day and was accorded a burial befitting a Torah scholar of note. [Not everyone can say he met and conversed with Eliyahu *HaNavi*, Shaul *HaMelech* and David *HaMelech*.] The *Rav* of the community was a G-d-fearing man, and, so he relinquished his position, which he transferred to the *Maharsha*. This is how the holy *Maharsha's* identity was revealed.