

## **EMOR 5773**

### **Rabbi Aharon Ziegler**

I have always been troubled with a very strange and difficult concept in this week's parasha. Moshe is told to instruct the Kohanim (21:17) that a Kohen with a physical blemish or disability is forbidden to perform the Avodah [service] in the Mishkan and, later, in the Beit HaMikdash.

How could HaKadosh Baruch Hu, who is infinitely good and benevolent, have such harsh regulations to deprive a blemished Kohen of the opportunity to serve in the Avodah? In our modern attitudes, it is difficult to comprehend how one could be punished for things out of one's own control, such as physical deformities. I always answered to myself that this is a Gezeirat HaKatuv, a Chok, a law that is beyond our comprehension, which we must accept. It is not so different than the law concerning a relative being disqualified as a witness. This law would apply to any relative regardless of how honest and trustworthy he may be and even Mohse Rabbeinu would be disqualified as a witness against his brother Aharon or sister Miriam. That is the law of the Torah - and we cannot question it. From that perspective, I could live with our situation of a disabled Kohen as well.

Subsequently, I felt much better when I saw that Rav Moshe Feinstein, ZT'L, in his sefer Darash Moshe, addresses this issue. R' Moshe writes: if this was merely a "Chok," an arbitrary law, then we would have no problem because there are many "Chukim" in the Torah. However, the Torah continues with an explanation in pasuk 18, "KI KOL ISH ASHER BO MUM" - For anyone with a "mum" [blemish or disability], "LO YIKRAV", shall not serve. Rashi here adds, because it would be in violation of "HAK'RIVEI'HU NA LE'FECHA'TECHA?" Would you present this to your governor? (Malachi 1:8). Although the Torah does not usually offer a reason for a Mitzvah, here R' Moshe writes, this is an exception.

What it meant is that although in HaShem's eyes there is no objection, G-d looks into the heart of the individual, and not to his physical appearance and, as a matter of fact, His very mercy shines most brightly upon those who are downtrodden, poor, and defenseless. Nevertheless, a disabled Kohen is rejected because, writes R' Moshe, the Temple service must be aesthetic and beautiful even to ordinary mortals. And since to them it appears unseemly that one with a physical deformity brings gifts to a king, the Torah disqualified such Kohanim for that function.

We learn a great lesson from here that in matters of public affair we must take into consideration what the average person sees and believes to be unseemly, even if, in fact, that is not the case.