

**Cohen and Cohen Gadol-Kodesha and Kodesh Kodashim-Parshas Acharei
by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

Parshas Acharei opens up with the mitzvos pertaining to Aharon Hacoen and all future Cohanim Gedolim. On Yom Kippur, the Cohen Gadol brought all of the *korbonos* of the day. From the daily morning and afternoon tamidim and incense to the *musafim* to all of the unique *korbonos* of Yom Kippur, they were all to be performed by the Cohen Gadol. The Torah clearly states that the order of *korbonos* on Yom Kippur day was for forgiveness of the Klal Yisroel and reconnecting them with *Avihem Shebashamayim*. So first the Cohen Gadol atoned for himself and his family and then for the rest of Am Yisroel.

Interestingly, it is stressed that these Mitzvos were given after the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. These deaths place on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and the Mitzvos discussed here were not to become applicable till Yom Kippur, which was just over six months away. The Kedushas Levi explains that Nadav and Avihu were not, chas Veshalom, sinners. Rather, their death took place as a result of coming too close to Hashem than allowed by their physicality which is similar to a malach who goes out its borders out yearning to get nearer to Hashem and simply ceases to exist.

The Divrei Yisroel of Modzhitz has a similar approach to Nadav and Avihu and builds it into valuable lessons for us. He explains that they were yearning to come close to Hashem and died from being overpowered by holiness. Yet, what were they missing that Aharon had? He answers that Aharon was noted, as Chazal tell us, for his traits of loving and pursuing peace and bringing all Jews from the most sophisticated to the simple to the beauty of the Torah. This requires contemplation. It is known that in order to be worthy of surviving entrance into the kodesh kodashim, One had to be prepared in many ways. To begin with, he had to be a rare extraordinary Tzaddik. The Mishna and Gemarah in the first Perek of Yoma tell us how much the Cohen Gadol had to separate himself for a whole week and prepare himself emotionally and spiritually to enter the kodesh kodashim to bring about kappara for all of Am Yisroel on Yom Kippur. If he were not worthy, he simply would not survive the holiness of the place of the kodesh kodasheim. It is known how during the period of the second Bais Hamikdash there were many cohanim gedolim that for sure would never survive the entry into that holy place and preparations were even made in advance to deal with this reality. So the Cohen Gadol indeed had to be a paragon of holiness. But did this mean he was some sort of austere, ascetic individual who so divorced from the mundane world that he could not connect with ordinary people? Indeed not! Aharon Hacoen, whose one of a kind, unique holiness made him the chosen representative for all Am Yisroel in the Kodesh Kadashim was the very same Aharon Hacoen who was the medium to bring the beauty and holiness of the Torah to the masses of the Klal Yisroel!

While the achievement of holiness, which involves separation from the mundane is a worthy achievement, it is not the ultimate achievement. Being able to bring this holiness to others is an even higher level of achievement. I once heard a similar idea expressed in the fact that on Yom Kippur when the Cohen Gadol did the special *avodah* for the day, he wore white linen garments similar to those of the ordinary cohanim. The truth of his holiness was expressed in the fact that it did not have to be underscored or proven.

All of these ideas go back to the character of the first Cohen Gadol, Aharon Hacoheh. I once heard in A Yom Kippur *drasha* about the fact that the Torah at each phase of describing the unique service of the day the Torah keeps repeating what AHARON will do instead of stating the Cohen Gadol as if the Mitzvah was only given to Aharon. While it is obviously not true halachically, there was a tremendous mussar for all future cohanim gedolim. This rav wanted to emphasize that every future kohen gadol in both batei mikdashim entered the kodesh kodashim not because of his position as the kohen gadol but as the living carrier of the legacy of Aharon Hakohen, the bridge between the worlds of holiness and mundane.

We find support for these ideas from the gemara in Sukkah . We are told about the students of Hillel. The Gemara describes how much Rabban Yochanan Ben Zakkai knew who was the smallest of Hillel's students. We are then told about his greatest student, Yonasan Ben Uziel whose holiness was so great that if a bird came flew directly above him while he was learning Torah, the bird would be instantly burned up. Such was the holiness generated by his Torah learning. However, why did not Hillel the teacher and master have such an effect on creation? I heard that Hillel because his higher level of kedusha that came from being involved with the people, he was able to channel the fire of the Torah to warm people and bring about a positive effect rather than a destructive outcome. Indeed, Hillel is the author of the statement quoted above that we should strive to be students of Aharon, loving and pursuing peace and bringing the rest of Am Yisroel to the Torah.

We find another illustration of this idea in the history of Lubavitch. The Mittlerer Rebbe of Lubavitch, the son the famed Alter Rebbe, Rav Shneur Zalman, was know from his early youth to be a kadosh, totally uninterested in matters of this world. Yet, was he greater than his father a rebbe from one generation back? It is explained in Lubavitch circles that the difference between the father and the son was that the father, while for himself had no need for material things, had the ability to see how for average people who were not on his level, material things were very important which the son was not able to see.

Perhaps this is illustrated in another story told over in Lubavitch circles involving these two Rebbes. Late one night, when the Mittlerer Rebbe was recently married and not yet the Rebbe, he was deeply engrossed in his learning. He did not hear that his baby started

crying. The baby's crying got louder and louder yet his concentration was not broken. His father, the Alter Rebbe came in and rebuked him gently and told him that while growth in Torah is indeed important and noble, nevertheless, it is no excuse to remain unaware of the crying of his child. Besides the personal lesson, there was a lesson for his future as well. Later on when he was going to be the Rebbe and a leader of Klal Yisroel and his fellow Jews would be crying from the pains and suffering of galus, he could not remain oblivious to their tribulations. Indeed his greatness would be manifested in how he would sacrifice his own growth in Torah and ruchniyus in order to be a proper leader of Klal Yisroel. In essence, this became a special feature of all of the rebbes of Lubavitch. While they were all phenomenal Torah scholars in all areas of Torah, both hidden and revealed parts of the Torah, their greatness became known through their great mesiras nefesh for Am Yisroel. It has been repeated often in the mesorah of Lubavitch that had these rebbes lived in different times, their greatness as Talmudic scholars would have been more revealed to the world. It is Truthfully this has been the hallmark of all of our great Torah leaders throughout our history; true manifestation of holiness lay in being able to bring the world of Torah and Kedusha to all of segments Am Yisroel.