

**A Nation of Rabbis**  
**Emor, 5781**  
**Shmuel Herzfeld**

One of the great rabbis of the twentieth century was Rabbi Eliyahu Dushnitzer. He was a student of both Rav Simcha Zissel, also known as the Alter of Kelm, and the Chofetz Chayim. He was also the rebbe to some of the greatest Torah scholars of the next generation, like Rav Elazar Menachem Shach and Rav Chaim Kanievsky.

There are many special stories about Rav Eliyahu's exactitude when it came to monetary matters. Rav Eliyahu often went beyond the letter of the law in order to demonstrate that he as a prominent Torah scholar was especially careful about being honest.

For example, one time he gave his coat to the tailor to fix. Rav Eliyahu retrieved the coat and paid for it on the eve of Shabbas. However, just before Shabbas, he noticed that the tailor had also done more than he had expected and fixed a loose button on the coat. Since Rav Eliyahu had not paid for the button to be fixed, and since he was scrupulous about paying workers on time, he put the coat aside until after Shabbas when he paid for the extra button.

There was also the time that Rav Eliyahu assumed responsibility for one of the ubiquitous ownerless cats in an open air *shouk*. What happened was that Rav Eliyahu's family used to sell chickens in the *shouk* in order to make a living. There was a cat that used to stop by their stall and eat the leftover scraps. Rav Eliyahu was concerned that since he fed the cat that therefore under Jewish law, he was responsible for any damage that the cat might inadvertently cause. Consequently, when the family closed the chicken business, Rav Eliyahu went to a local beit din and formally declared the cat ownerless. (These two stories are told here: <http://www.tog.org.il/en/Article.aspx?id=271> .)

One time, Rav Eliyahu was waiting in line to take a public bus. There was a big crowd trying to get on the bus and in the ensuing chaos the driver forgot to give a ticket to Rav Eliyahu. Rav Eliyahu turned to his students and explained his dilemma. He said if I will go to the driver and claim that I already paid, he will perhaps think I am trying to sneak out of paying and seeing as I am a rabbi, this will be a desecration of Hashem's name. For this reason, Rav Eliyahu paid a second fare rather than possibly desecrate Hashem's name (as told in Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, 318).

The prohibition of desecrating Hashem's name appears in parashat Emor. The Torah states, "*Ve lo techalelu et shem kadshi*, you shall not desecrate My Holy Name. I shall be sanctified among the children of Israel" (Vayikra, 22:32).

This is the mitzvah of sanctifying Hashem's name (*Kiddush Hashem*) and the prohibition of desecrating Hashem's name (*Chillul Hashem*).

Rambam describes these commandments as follows in *Laws of the Foundation of the Torah*:

*There are other things included in chillul Hashem, although they are not of themselves either among the mandatory or prohibitive commandments, as for example, when a great man, famed for his learning and piety, will do something that the public will suspect him on account thereof, even though such deeds be not transgressions, yet he has committed blasphemy, as for example: if he makes a purchase and does not pay for it at once, although he has the money and the vendors are claiming it and he delays them; or if he indulges in frivolity, or eats and drinks and among the ignorant, or if his speech with his fellow men be not polite, or if he does not receive them pleasantly, but acts as one looking for strife and shows anger. In such and like matters, all measured by the standard of the greatness of such scholar, he must take particular care, and act exceedingly better than the law requires. Conversely, if the scholar restrains himself, speaks politely to his fellow men, and when among them acts like one of them, and receives them pleasantly, takes abuse from them but never gives abuse to them in return, respects them, even those who do not respect him, acts in business honestly, does not remain in company with the unlearned, nor visits their assemblies, and is rarely seen otherwise than to be engaged in the study of the Torah, wrapped in the prayer-garment and adorned with phylacteries, and performs his duties exceedingly more than the law requires, provided he does not go to extremes and does not act so ridiculously, so that all praise him and love him and crave to imitate his actions, behold he does sanctify the Lord.... (Foundations of the Torah, 5:11)*

The commandments of *kiddush Hashem* and *chillul Hashem* also appear at the beginning of Emor with respect to the special laws of the Kohanim:

“The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: None shall defile himself for any [dead] person among his kin, except for the relatives that are closest to him: his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother; also for a virgin sister, close to him because she has not married, for her he may defile himself. But he shall not defile himself as a kinsman by marriage, and so profane himself. They shall not shave smooth any part of their heads, or cut the side-growth of their beards, or make gashes in their flesh. They shall be *kedoshim* to their God and *velo techalelu* the name of their God; for they offer the LORD's offerings by fire, the food of their God, and so must be holy” (21:1-6)

The special laws of the Kohanim in this case relate to the laws of who the *kohen* is permitted to come in contact with after they die. The *kohen* may only come in contact with the corpse of one of their seven closest relatives. The reason is that the *kohen* is a spiritual leader and has a responsibility to be ritually pure at all times. The *kohen* must be ready to serve the people and if he is *tamei* from a corpse he will be unable to serve.

So too, the *kohen* must not walk around in a manner of excessive mourning, as the *kohen* must be prepared and ready to serve at all times.

Part of the *kohen's* responsibilities was to serve in the Beit Hamikdash and offer the sacrifices. This was only **part** of his responsibilities. There were twenty-four groups (*mishmarot*) of kohanim that served in the Beit Hamikdash, each for one week at a time. This means that each *kohen's* *mishmar* only served approximately two weeks a year. Furthermore, each of these *mishmarot* were further subdivided into a group known as a *beit av*, which only served one day of their larger group's week. So, in the end, each individual *kohen* ended up serving only two days a year.

The haftorah for Emor (Ezekiel, 44) describes the responsibilities of the kohanim and thus tells us what the kohanim did the rest of the year. Says Ezekiel:

“They shall declare to My people what is sacred and what is profane, and inform them what is clean and what is unclean. In lawsuits, too, it is they who shall act as judges; they shall decide them in accordance with My rules. They shall preserve My teachings and My laws regarding all My fixed occasions; and they shall maintain the sanctity of My sabbaths” (v. 23-24).

From this description it is clear that the job of the *kohen* was to serve; to teach; and to inspire. The *kohen* was responsible to tell people the law and to maintain the sanctity of the Shabbat. The *kohen* was above all else a teacher; or, in other words, a rabbi.

The beginning of Emor and this chapter of Ezekiel both list the responsibilities of the *kohen* to strive for ritual purity in order to inspire others.

On a technical level the *kohanim* are only the biological children of Aaron, the *kohen gadol*. However, the Torah also intends for all of the Israelites to act as *kohanim/rabbis*.

Says the Torah, “*veatem tehiyu li mamlechet kohanim ve goi kadosh*, you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Shemot, 19:6).

The Torah wants us all to act like *kohanim* and to be a nation of teachers. It is the job of the Jew to be a *kohen* and to strive for spiritual greatness and to strive to teach the true.

In the time of the Beit Hamikdash, and the kohanim were still bringing sacrifices, all the Jews were still commanded to act like *kohanim*. How much more so is this true today when there are no sacrifices and the only responsibility that remains is the responsibility of teaching Torah and inspiring people to act in a spiritual manner.

Today we must all be the *kohanim* and teach Torah and sanctify Hashem's name. We have to be the *kohanim* of the world.

The Torah tells us that when the daughter of the *kohen* sins, it is her father who she has desecrated:

*“U’bat ish kohen ki teichel kizbot et avihah hi mechalelet, when the daughter of a priest defiles herself through harlotry, it is her father whom she defiles” (Vayikra, 21:9).*

The *Avnei Azei* explains that this verse refers to a father who imagines himself to be a *kohen*. He spends his time in pursuit of his lofty spiritual goals but he never takes the time to teach his own children. For this reason, when his daughter sins, it is the fault of the father, and as a consequence her sin desecrates the name of her father. Her sin is a reflection of the father’s defect in not teaching her.

When the daughter of the *kohen* (*bat ish kohen*) goes astray, sometimes it is the fault of the father for not teaching her. This doesn’t only refer to the literal daughter of the *kohen*. This also refers to the symbolic kohanim and their daughters. Today, we are the kohanim. And who are our daughters? This refers to those who are waiting and thirsting for what we can teach. Every single person who is reading this has the ability to teach Torah to someone else—a co-worker, a family member, a neighbor. That is our responsibility as *kohanim*. We have been given a mandate from Hashem to study and then to train and inspire. We are commanded to be a nation of rabbis.

This week in our daf yomi studies we encountered a devastating passage. The Talmud discusses the sad fact that in the Second Temple period the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) was sometimes ignorant and perhaps even unable to read (Yoma, 18a). The Talmud explains that the reason that this happened is that some people purchased the position of Kohen Gadol; i.e. it became a corrupt position. As an example, the Talmud cites the case of Yehoshua ben Gamla:

*As Rav Asi said: The wealthy Marta, daughter of Baitos, brought a half-se’a of dinars in to King Yannai for the fact that he appointed Yehoshua ben Gamla as High Priest. This is an example of the appointment of High Priests by means of bribery and gifts. Since that was the practice, a totally ignorant High Priest could have been appointed (Yoma, 18a).*

The image from this passage is of an ignorant and corrupt priesthood that has traveled very far from its intended mission.

And yet, there is another passage, in which we learn that Yehoshua ben Gamla personally took it upon himself to create a universal education system for the Jewish people. He noticed that ignorance was rampant amongst his people and he personally created reforms to make sure that there were teachers for young children in every village.

Says the Talmud,

*As Rav Yehuda says that Rav says: Truly, that man is remembered for the good, and his name is Yehoshua ben Gamla. If not for him the Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish people.... Yehoshua ben Gamla came and instituted an ordinance that*

*teachers of children should be established in each and every province and in each and every town, and they would bring the children in to learn at the age of six and at the age of seven (Bava Batra, 21a).*

Yehoshua ben Gamla was not satisfied with the status quo educational system so he took it upon himself to create a new model that would create more *kohanim*, more teachers, more rabbis.

If Yehoshua ben Gamla were alive today what would he say about the current state of the Jewish people?

I believe he would say that we need to do better. He would say that we need to create a new system that will educate and inspire more people to be kohanim/rabbis for our world.

***You can now watch a Youtube recording of Rabbi Herzfeld's D'var Torah:***

<https://youtu.be/btJrCDobiSo>