

**Teach the Children Well**

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The first half of this week's parsha, Emor, deals mostly with laws that are peculiar to the kohanim. As it begins, God addresses Moshe and says, " Say to the kohanim, the sons of Aharon, and you shall say to them : to a (dead) person he shall not become impure among his people." (Vayikra 21 : 1). The wording of this verse is very problematic. First, there seems to be a redundant expression - 'say to the kohanim and say to them.' Rashi, citing a Talmudic passage, explains that the added expression comes to adjoin the older kohanim concerning the kohanim of minor age. This explanation itself is difficult however, because a simple reading of the verse seems to indicate that both expressions of 'saying' are addressed to the same people. Another difficulty is raised in the Zohar, traditionally attributed to the great Tanna Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai, whose yahrzeit is observed and celebrated today, the 33rd day of the Omer. Why, asks the Zohar, is the admonition for the kohanim not to become impure through a dead body written in the singular - " to a (dead) person he shall not become impure among his people"? Isn't the verse addressed to all of the kohanim? Why then, is this admonition phrased in the singular? I would like to present an approach to this verse that will answer all of these questions.

The third Gerrer Rebbe, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai of Gur, cites, in his work 'Imrei Emes', a midrash which says that a double expression is used in this verse because people are not like angels, and they need to be told their obligations more than once. I believe that this midrash is not in conflict with the Talmudic passage cited by Rashi, which says that the double expression comes to enjoin the older kohanim regarding the minor kohanim. Rather, the idea is that in order for the kohanim to be able to influence their children, they themselves must be very careful to observe the laws they are given. This idea, a sound educational principle, is brought out very beautifully by Rabbi Shimon Schwab in explaining a verse in the book of Judges in regard to the birth of Samson. Manoach's wife was told by an angel of God that she would give birth to a son who she was bidden to raise as a Nazir, and who would bring salvation to Israel from the Phillistines. She told her husband about the news, and he in turn asked the angel, " What should be the conduct of the lad and his behavior"? The angel answered that Manoach's wife, the baby's mother, should refrain from all those things from which he had told her that her son, as a Nazir, would have to abstain (Judges 13 : 11-14). Rabbi Schwab explained that in order for Samson to grow up to be a Nazir, his mother had to be an example for him, and she had to prepare for this before he was even born - a Biblical prescription for pre-natal care! Similarly, in our verse, the kohanim are being told that in order for them to train their children to maintain their purity, they themselves had to exercise special care not to become impure.

Given our explanation of the double expression, one may still ask why it is that specifically in regard to the laws of impurity the kohanim are told to be an example for their children, rather than in regard to any other of the special mitzvos incumbent on the kohanim? I believe this question can be answered with another comment of the Imrei Emes. In answer to the Zohar's question of why the command to refrain from impurity is given in the singular, the Imrei Emes answers that the verse, literally translated, reads, " a soul should not become impure among his people," and explains that it is referring to the unique soul

of each individual. Each kohein is thus being enjoined to maintain the unique soul that he was given, and to cultivate his own, unique connection to God, in purity. By including the requirement of educating the children of the kohanim through personal example in this verse, then, the Torah is delivering an important message. The kohein, in educating his child, must teach him to develop his own, unique relationship with God, expressing and maintaining the purity of the soul implanted within him. In order for the kohein to be able to do this, he must serve as an example to his child, and must be an authentic person, true to his inner self. Children have a keen sense for knowing whether or not someone is being sincere. The kohanim, and by extension all of us, as members of the kingdom of priests, need to cultivate their unique personalities within the context of their service of God, in order to bring up the next generation in a proper way.

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