

COIN EXCHANGE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

This week's parsha contains many precepts which pertain to Aharon The Kohain (priest) and his descendants. He and his children merited to be the agents of the Jewish Nation in the sacred service performed in the Temple. As a result of this exalted status, being servants of the King in His palace, there are many extra stringencies which they, the Kohanim, are required to follow. These can be found in the book of Leviticus (Chap. 21).

The first verse states "And G-d said to Moshe, say to the Kohanim, (the) sons of Aharon, and say to them, he shall not defile himself (through contact) with death among his people." This means that a Kohain is required to avoid contact with a dead body, or even being under the same roof. A Kohain does not attend a funeral except for a wife, mother, father, unmarried sister, brother, son, or daughter.

The unusual thing about this verse is the repetition of the words "say to the Kohanim," and then again "you shall say to them." Seemingly, once would have been sufficient. Rashi quotes the Talmud that the repetition should be interpreted as follows. "Say to them" the following: "you (each Kohain) should say to them (your children) not to defile themselves etc." This means to say that each Kohain is exhorted to teach his children to follow these special laws. The possessors of this information should be purveyors of it as well.

There is an important lesson to us all in these words. If parents wish their children to identify with Jewish ideals, they must be taught by example to follow the ideals. Secondly, Jewish ideals must occupy a significant place in children's world view. In many places in North America, there are old Jewish communities which have all but died out. The ones which are still intact are the ones which established Jewish schools for their children to attend. The congregations, burial societies, and Jewish nationalistic and political organizations were not able to instill in Jewish youth the desire to maintain the level of observance or Jewish identity that so many Jews brought with them as immigrants to North America. Jewish education in a significant measure, with parents setting the example, is the only tried and true method of raising children who make Jewish identity a priority in their lives. There is a saying: "if there are no kids, where will the old goats come from?"

There is a story in "In the Footsteps of the Maggid," by Rabbi Paysach Krohn, about a child who grew up years ago in Jerusalem. He was from a very poor family. One Shabbos (Sabbath) day he was out walking through the Jaffa Gate, in a section of the city densely populated by Arabs. He was on his

way to the Western Wall when he happened upon a gold coin laying in the street. He dared not pick it up, as he would not handle money on Shabbos. He knew that the coin could be used to feed his hungry family for two weeks. He decided to just place his foot on top of the coin until Shabbos (the Sabbath) would end, and then he would take it. Needless to say, this was an amazing feat for a child of a young age. After standing there for over an hour, an Arab boy noticed him and questioned him as to why he was standing there like a statue. As the Arab boy insisted on hearing an answer, the Jewish child began to explain. Hearing that there was something under the boy's foot, the Arab boy immediately pushed the boy aside, grabbed the coin, and ran. Feeling quite down, the boy returned to synagogue. The *Rabbi noticed that he was not his usual helpful self, and he came to the boy inviting him to participate in Seudah Shlishis, the third Sabbath meal. The child related the entire story to the Rabbi. He told the boy that he should join the others at the table for now, and that after Shabbos he should join him at his home. Later, at home, the Rabbi reached into his drawer, took out an identical coin, and said "this coin is yours on the condition that you will give me the eternal reward that you will receive for what you did this afternoon. Upon hearing this offer, and understanding the worth of the deed, he refused. He said "if that is what the deed is worth, then it's not for sale." The Rabbi bent over to the boy, and kissed him on his forehead. With great wisdom, the Rabbi taught this boy the value of a mitzva (commandment), and that lesson stayed with him for many years hence.

*The Chernobyler Rebbe, Rabbi Nachum Twersky (1840-1936).

Good Shabbos!

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