

IN A WORLD - MINUS PEACE

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM said to Moshe: Say to the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron, and tell them: "Each of you shall not contaminate himself to a (dead) person among his people... (Vayikra 21:1)

Why is the double expression of "saying" and "telling" employed in the verse? Rashi explains the imperative of the adults to steer the children away from coming in contact with dead bodies. Why is it uniquely applicable to this situation? Don't all parents have a general obligation of education? These are not the usual Mitzvos for the mature, while the young ones gradually become more accustomed. We are talking about intense forms of spiritual contamination. For purity sake it is necessary for the children to be kept apart from the earliest point and the parents are expected to be the bearers of that that standard of holiness. This is the trickle-down effect of holiness. The Kohanim are mandated to set the highest example of holiness for the entire Nation of Israel who in turn are meant to be a "Mamlachas Kohanim v' Goi Kadosh" - a "Kingship of Priests and a Holy Nation" for the whole world. From where does it start? It starts from the top! How so?

There is a famous incident in the Talmud: A person should always be gentle like Hillel... "The story is told about two people who made a wager between themselves. They said, "Any person who will go and make Hillel angry will receive 400 zuz." One Friday one of them said, "I will go and make him angry!" That day was Friday and Hillel was washing his head, so he passed by the door of Hillel's house shouting, "Is Hillel here? Where is Hillel?" (Disrespectfully and without mentioning his title as the Nasi). Hillel put on his robe and went out to him saying, "My son, how can I help you?" He replied, "I have a question to ask." "Go ahead and ask, my son, prodded Hillel." "Why are the heads of Babylonians round?" He asked (Not an urgent matter for a busy Erev Shabbos!) Hillel replied, "I'll tell you. It is because they don't have good midwives."

The man left and waited and came and shouted again "Is Hillel here? Where is Hillel?" The man had a question equally inane and irrelevant for a busy Erev Shabbos discussion but Hillel answered him calmly and with equanimity. This scene repeated itself again and even again and he failed to upset Hillel. Desperate that he was about to lose his bet the man said to Hillel, "I have many other questions to ask but I am afraid you are going to get angry at me." Hillel put on his robe and sat down and said to him, "Ask all the questions to have to ask." Said, the man, "Are you Hillel who is called the Nasi-Prince of Israel?" "If you're really the one" he retorted, "may there not be any more like you in Israel." "Why not, my son?" inquired Hillel. "I lost 400 zuz because of you!" he exclaimed. Hillel replied, "Always be careful and watch your temper. It is worth that you lose 400 zuz because of

Hillel and even another 400 zuz, but no matter what you do, do not lose your temper!" (Shabbos 31A)

The Sifsei Chaim asks a phenomenal question about this final response of Hillel. We can understand very well that Hillel would gain from not getting angry. Why does Hillel claim that it would be worthwhile for the man to lose even another 400 zuz so long as Hillel would not become angry? How does he benefit 800 zuz -worth by Hillel remaining calm?

The answer is that Hillel is the Nasi- the Prince. He is the standard bearer for the generation and for all generations. Maybe people sometimes give in to their weaknesses rationalizing that it is impossible to do this thing or not do that. Sometimes people get angry and claim, "He made me angry!" Hillel is the living proof that it is not so. No one makes another angry. It is possible to control one's passions in this and other areas as well. Hillel was telling the man and us too that if he would lower himself and act out angrily he would let loose a fury throughout the world, and then what good would 800 zuz be **in a world - minus peace!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).