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*With  
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ב"ה

Parshas Emor

10th of Iyar 5784

### **Excuse Me, Where Is The Handicap Spot?**

The Jewish religion prides itself in being exceptionally caring for the underprivileged and weak groups within its society. The Torah tells us time and time again to be kind to the widow, the orphan and the blind. The Torah instructs us to visit the sick and to give charity to the poor. The Torah speaks at length about treating a convert with love and respect.

So, it seems rather odd that when it comes to the service within the Bais Hamikdash, the Torah takes an unusual and elitist stance. The Torah strongly forbids those who have physical defects to play any role in the Bais Hamikdash. Anyone lame or blind was not allowed to serve in the Bais Hamikdash. Anyone unusually tall or unusually short was likewise banned from serving. People with broken legs, people with broken arms, hunchbacks, and dwarfs were all nixed.

Why is this? Wouldn't Hashem want us to be kind and caring and go out of our way to hire such people? The modern world's attitude towards handicapped individuals with its increased social services, designated parking spots, priority airplane boarding, etc. makes the Torah's stance seem so outdated and insensitive. When it comes to filling positions in the Bais Hamikdash, why does the Torah seem to deviate from its regular loving and accepting mode of operation?

### **Why Law Offices Spend So Much Money On Their Lawns**

The Sefer HaChinuch offers the following powerful explanation. The success of the Bais Hamikdash in particular, and Judaism in general, is predicated on the Jewish people's awe, respect, and honor given to it. The continuity of Judaism requires the Jewish people's dramatic interest in perpetuating it. The very moment the Jewish people view Judaism as unimpressive and second-rate, as mere religious folklore, the future of Judaism becomes at stake.

Hence, the Torah implemented safeguards ensuring that we view the Bais Hamikdash and Judaism with the honor and prestige they deserve. Not because Hashem needs the power and prestige, but because we need to be impressed by its image. Without it we would sadly fail to appreciate its marvelous beauty, and we would become ensnared by the “beautiful” mirage of this world.

One of those safeguards was being particular in who serves as representatives in the Bais Hamikdash.

The Torah wants every child to walk into the Bais Hamikdash for the first time and be left in complete awe. It wants every child to dream of being there. Of aspiring to make the Bais Hamikdash the dominant force in his life. Having a welcoming committee comprising of Kohanim in pristine health, in the height of their strength, accomplishes this best. The sad reality is that employing the elderly or those suffering from physical deformities would run the risk of giving off the image that the Bais Hamikdash was a place where one goes to work after they retire, like a museum, a library, or an art gallery. In man’s puny mind we might have thought that that if you want to really make it in life, you would work elsewhere.

Of course, this could not be further from the truth, for Judaism loves and includes everyone, no matter what they look like, but the psychological makeup of humans is that man’s perception creates his reality, and the Torah required the Bais Hamikdash to work within those parameters. In order to promote the truth that Judaism is the ultimate goal in life, and its beauty and pleasure transcends petty things such as world pursuits, it required men only in pristine health and in the prime of their strength. The six foot two thirty-five-year-old men. The people who could have made it in any business or profession. The people who command dignity and respect. By selecting such people, we are showing that this is the most meaningful thing in the world. We don’t serve in the Bais Hamikdash because we cannot do anything else; we serve in the Bais Hamikdash as our first choice, because this is what gives our life meaning. We aren’t committed Jews because we cannot make it anywhere else; we are committed Jews because we deeply believe that this is the most valuable commitment.

The beginning of the parshah discusses the kohanim’s prohibition of contact with a dead body. The Gemara in Yevamos (114a) says that this pasuk, with its triple usage of the word amar, is alluding to the need for parents to teach their children about mitzvos from an early age. Reb Yaakov Weinberg, the late Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael in Baltimore,

asks why specifically here of all places does the Torah choose to teach us about chinuch. Why pick a mitzvah that is applicable to less than one-twelfth of the Jewish people, when trying to teach an idea that applies to all of them?

He explains that the Torah specifically chose the mitzvah of the kohen's prohibition of contact with dead bodies, for it serves as a model to all other mitzvos. The Torah is telling us that the same way a kohen is to tell his child that the reason he cannot run after his ball that rolled into a cemetery is because he is too holy and too pure, so should be the method of teaching all the mitzvos of the Torah. When we present the mitzvos to our children, we tell them what an unbelievable opportunity it is to keep them. When we tell our children that we can't transgress a negative commandment, we tell them we are too holy to do it. We tell them that we **get** to visit the sick, that we are too pure to eat non-kosher, that we are remarkably privileged to keep Shabbos.

### **The American Teenager**

An American man who ran an organization trying to help teenagers who left the Orthodox fold was once walking in Israel, and noticed Reb Moshe Shapiro (a leading Torah figure in Israel) on the other side of the street entering a car. He raced over to Reb Moshe right before he closed the door, and asked him, "Reb Moshe, there are hundreds of kids who are going against the religion their parents raised them with. Why is this happening?"

Reb Moshe turned to him and asked, "Do their parents dance around the Shabbos table? Do their parents' faces shine when they recite birchas hamazon? Do their parents sing in the sukkah late into the night? Do their parents beam with pride as they walk into shul on Rosh Hashanah? Do their parents lovingly and enthusiastically learn with their children the sweet Torah? Do their parents jump up and dance when they say kiddush levanah? Do their parents radiate purity and holiness each and every Friday night? Do their parents make a party at every one of their child's spiritual milestones, even the small ones?"

"There is a concept in Jewish law," continued Reb Moshe, "called *hamotzi meichaveiro alav harayah* – the burden of evidence is placed upon the one attempting to extract something from the other. These children look out into the American world and see nothing but pleasure in virtually every direction they turn. Parents, by forcing a seemingly restrictive religion on them, are, in the eyes of the child, attempting to take that life of pleasure away. It is incumbent on the parents to give the children evidence that what the parents are offering is better. Otherwise, why would those kids give up a life of pleasure for a life following a stale, ancient, irrelevant religion? Those kids don't see Judaism as the

desirable option, and, quite honestly, with the way their parents present it, who can blame them?" With that, he closed the door and drove off.

The Torah way of life is the ultimate life. Hashem does not need our service to Him. He wants nothing more than to give us good. The Torah is the method in attaining Hashem's definition of good. The ultimate definition. It sometimes takes a few years for that concept to be realized. It is up to us to ensure that our children see the Torah the way it is meant to be seen: the road map to the greatest existence on the face of the earth.