



Parashat Emor begins with the special laws that apply to the *kohanim*, as well as the unique restrictions imposed on the *kohen gadol*. Among these laws is the prohibition that forbids a *kohen gadol* from letting his hair grow or rending his garments in response to a personal tragedy ("*et rosho lo yifra u-vgadav lo yifrom*" – 21:10). The commentators were troubled by the implication that these laws apply specifically to the *kohen gadol*. Earlier in the Book of Vayikra (10:6), in response to the sudden death of two of Aharon's sons, Moshe instructed Aharon and the surviving brothers not to rend their garments or allow their hair to grow despite this tragedy. Aharon served as *kohen gadol*, and his sons were consecrated as regular *kohanim*, and yet these prohibitions applied to all three of them. Clearly, then, the Torah forbids all *kohanim* from displaying these signs of grief in response to a relative's passing. Why, then, does the Torah issue a particular command with regard to the *kohen gadol*?

Maimonides addresses this question in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot (lo ta'aseh 164)*, where he explains that these laws apply differently to a *kohen gadol* than they do to other *kohanim*. Ordinary *kohanim* are forbidden only from entering the Temple to perform the service with grown hair or torn garments. The *kohen gadol*, by contrast, may not rend his garments or allow his hair to grow at any time, even while outside the *Mikdash*. The Torah alludes to this unique provision by repeating the prohibition in the specific context of the *kohen gadol*.

Maimonides codifies this *halakha* in *Hilkhot Bi'at Mikdash (1:9)*, where he explains the reason why a *kohen gadol* may never make these displays of mourning: "for he is always in the Temple." The *kohen gadol* is always considered "in the Temple," even when he temporarily leaves the physical boundaries of the *Mikdash*. Therefore, it is always forbidden for him to show signs of grief and mourning, just as this is forbidden in the Temple for ordinary *kohanim*.

It would seem that the Torah forbids expressions of sorrow and grief in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* because the joy of standing in God's presence and serving Him must overshadow one's feelings of personal anguish. Whatever loss a person has endured pales in comparison to the privilege of serving God in the Temple. Therefore, a *kohen gadol*, who is considered as "always in the Temple," may never rend his garments or let his hair grow, while other *kohanim* are forbidden from entering the *Mikdash* with physical expressions of sorrow.

The Torah of course requires that everyone but the *kohen gadol* observe a period of mourning upon the death of a loved one, but the general message of the *kohen gadol* is nevertheless relevant to all people. Although we do not reside in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, and we are permitted – and encouraged – to pursue careers and engage in the mundane world, we must nevertheless view ourselves – on one level or another – in the constant presence of God. We, too, must devote our lives to the service of the Almighty, and must feel privileged and blessed to be assigned such a role. The opportunities we are given each day to serve God and to live "in His presence" should give us some perspective on the hardships and challenges that we must confront during life. A person will invariably suffer periods of frustration, disappointment and anguish during his life, but these emotions must be tempered by the realization that he is "always in the Temple," that he lives a life devoted to *avodat Hashem*. This awareness should hopefully provide enough joy and fulfillment to help each of us overcome the difficult periods of life, and thereby achieve true happiness and satisfaction regardless of the challenges we must confront along the way.