



**5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier**  
**פרשת אחרי מות קדשים / Parashat Achrei Mot-Kedoshim**

## **Transcendence and Unity: The Paradox of the Kohen Gadol**

The *Yom Kippur* sacrificial service, as delineated in our *parsha*, highlights the *Kohen Gadol's* unique and spiritually transcendent status. On this holy day, the *Kohen Gadol* alone fulfills the extensive duties of *korbanot* in the *Mikdash*. He even enters into the *Kodesh HaKadoshim*, the Holy of Holies, to intercede on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. Only a spiritually superior *kohen* such as the *Kohen Gadol* can represent *Klal Yisrael* on this crucial day.

The *Kohen Gadol* is expected to remain separate from the nation, acting in a dignified manner that separates him from normal society. He cannot bathe in the public bathhouses, nor relieve himself in public restrooms. Even something as mundane as receiving a haircut in public is discouraged (see *Rambam, Klei HaMikdash* 5:3). We are obligated to exalt him with honor and prestige, making him “הגדול מאחיו-greater than his brothers” (see *Tosefta Sanhedrin* 4:1).

In fact, the *Kohen Gadol* is supposed to be exceptionally wealthy. If he is poor upon assuming the role of *Kohen Gadol*, his fellow *kohanim* are obligated to generously bestow him with riches until his wealth surpasses their own. But that isn't all. *Chazal* inform us that this *kohen* should also ideally be more wise, beautiful, and powerful than all of his brethren (*Yoma* 18a).

The *Kohen Gadol's* unique spiritual capabilities, coupled with the Torah's insistence that he be elevated above society, would have us think that he is a spiritually aloof individual. How can someone with such lofty holiness understand the frailties of the human condition, the pain and struggle of mundane existence?

And yet, *Hillel HaZaken* in *Avot* (1:12) tells us that it was specifically *Aharon HaKohen* who was most adept at connecting with the common folk and facilitating peace amongst them. He loved his fellow man and vigorously pursued *shalom*, thereby causing a great sanctification of *Hashem's* name.

Is it a coincidence that the most dignified and exalted member of *Klal Yisrael* would also be the one most capable of facilitating *achdut*? As the *Maharal MiPrague* constantly emphasizes, there is no such thing as coincidence. The *Maharal (Derech Chaim* 1:12) explains that this mortal world is particularly prone to conflict, where unified units break apart into smaller factions. This is why the first family in history is marred by heartrending conflict; *Kayin* and *Hevel's* story reflects the natural tendency of this physical world towards brokenness and separation.

But the holy city of Jerusalem, when utilized properly, can reverse the process of estrangement and destruction. It is the city *לה' יחדיו*, שחברה, that unites together the various tribes of Israel into a seamless



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unit. No persona better represents Jerusalem's power to unite than the *Kohen Gadol*. Just as there is only one temple in Jerusalem with one altar, the *Kohen Gadol* serves as a single representative for the entire nation. As he enters the innermost sanctum on *Yom Kippur*, he carries the names of the various *shevatim* on his shoulders and heart, symbolizing his responsibility and profound love for the nation.

It is specifically the *Kohen Gadol's* rarefied spiritual status that allows him to transcend the physical distinctions and separation between different Jews. His connection to the *Mikdash* doesn't isolate him from the nation. Quite to the contrary, it allows him to access the essence of every Jew and appreciate their incalculable worth. His sanctity creates a burning passion for uniting the nation and repairing the breaches of this mortal world.

In the sacred solitude of the *Kodesh HaKadoshim*, the *Kohen Gadol* becomes the beating heart of a united people. His holiness is not a barrier, but rather the very bridge that binds us together. May we merit ascending to the rebuilt Jerusalem to witness the *Kohen Gadol* emerging from the *Kodesh HaKadoshim* again, speedily in our days.

