

# TRAINING the TRIBE of LEVI

*The Gemara tells us that in the time of King Chizkiyahu, during the Second Temple, even schoolchildren were experts in the laws of ritual purity. Rabbi Yaakov Kleinman of the Center for Kohanim wants Aharon Hakohen's descendants to be similarly well prepared for what we all hope will be the Mashiach's imminent arrival*

by Avraham Zuroff and Yisroel Besser

☞ How do I feel about being a Kohein? It's a gateway to our Creator. A vision into a very relevant past that has been handed down from generation to generation.."

This expression by a participant at last week's Kohein-Levi Conference in Jerusalem is a heartening reminder that even as we wallow in the difficulties of our final exile, preceding our complete redemption, there is an invisible thread of holiness running through the tribe of our nation chosen to perform the Divine service in the Beis HaMikdash. In the last decade, major advances in genetic research have provided scientific evidence of a genetic

relationship among Kohanim, and of their direct lineage from a common ancestor. This has sparked new awareness of both the privileges and the immense responsibilities entailed in being a member of the Jewish priestly class. It is something that Rabbi Yaakov Kleinman, a Kohein who has had the privilege himself of raising a family of many sons in Jerusalem's Old City can readily appreciate.

Rabbi Kleinman, author of the book *DNA and Tradition*, tracing the discovery of this genetic link, says that perhaps the most important ongoing impact of the discovery of the "Kohein gene" is its influence on nonreligious Jews. "It's fascinating that even people from families far removed from Yiddishkeit, who know virtually nothing of their background, are now aware that they are Kohanim," he says.



Photos: Moshe Stern

**“It’s fascinating that even people from families far removed from Yiddishkeit, who know virtually nothing of their background, are aware that they are Kohanim”**  
— Rabbi Yaakov Kleiman



Boys examine a harp on display at the conference



Conference organizer Rabbi Yaakov Kleiman (r) listens to Dr. Karl Skorecki whose DNA research has provided scientific evidence of a genetic relationship among Kohanim

For Rabbi Kleiman, a former lecturer at Aish HaTorah, this was more than a mere scientific marvel.

It was a calling, a challenge to the tribe to step forward and ready itself once again to serve *Klal Yisrael*, even if it did create many new challenges.

“Often, discovery that they are Kohanim is a daunting obstacle on their road to return because it limits their personal choices to a degree. But this discovery has done much to make them feel part of something special,” says Rabbi Kleiman.

**Kohanim of the World, Unite!** Held on Rosh Chodesh Av, the *yahrzeit* of Aharon HaKohen at the Yeshivat Hakotel, about half of those attending the conference were Kohanim; most of the rest were Levitim, with a few daughters of Kohanim. Most of the participants were Jerusalem-area residents, though some came from North America, Ireland, and the UK for the occasion.

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live in detached houses, especially in Israel. In the times of Chazal, *bayis*, house, was synonymous with “room.” Nowadays, most city dwellers live in apartment complexes or attached homes. If someone dies in an apartment, the *tumah*, impurity, may contaminate neighboring apartments. The single-roofed terrace house or row house presents a problem for Kohanim, if a neighbor in any of the apartments should pass away. Tree branches, too, act as a roof, spreading *tumah*.

**Kohanim in the Future** The Rambam says that no Jew prayed because of political or economic reasons that Mashiach should come; he prayed for Mashiach to come so that there would be more opportunity for mitzvos,” says Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff, who reminded his audience that when Mashiach comes, Kohanim will have to enter “another mindset.”

For example, today’s standard metal spring mattress is a receptacle for *tumah*. Rather than taking one’s spring mattress to the *mikveh* and waiting for it to dry, Rabbi Kaganoff says Kohanim might consider buying a foam mattress, in anticipation of the day when they will once again become vigilant about *tumah*. In ancient homes of Kohanim, stone furniture was standard, since stone is not receptive of *tumah*. Most *poskim* rule that plastic is not receptive of *tumah*, either, though Rabbi Kaganoff says that more comfortable plastic chairs will be needed than those available today.

Rabbi Kaganoff described how Kohanim may grab polyester suits off the racks, since neither nylon or polyester are receptacles of *tumah*. He described how



Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

mealtime will differ, as well, not only for the Kohanim who will have to get used to eating *trumah* and *challah*, but also for all Jews who will eat from their sacrificial offerings.

“What bread are you going to eat? By adding water to flour, the food will be susceptible to becoming defiled. In whose mouth are you going to put it?” Rabbi Kaganoff asked his mesmerized audience. “I guarantee you that no one in this room has thought about this question!”

The current Old City walls, built by Sultan Suleiman, cover only 50 percent of the halachic boundaries. Getting to know where the actual boundaries of ancient Jerusalem are is important, to know where offerings may be eaten.

This issue will eventually be resolved

by the Sanhedrin HaGadol, who have the authority to extend the boundaries.

What will happen if a Kohen becomes defiled? Any metal pot that he cooks with will become *tamei*, too. Instead of jugging his pots to the *mikveh*, the Kohen will prefer cooking in vessels that can’t become defiled.

So a mass industry of scientists and engineers will produce *keilim*, vessels, that are not susceptible to ritual impurity. “Wonderous things will happen when Mashiach comes. I don’t look at a newspaper without muttering under my breath, ‘I wish Mashiach was here,’ said Rabbi Kaganoff.

“And, we will all be happy and enjoy the new rules and be happy to be Jews,” he added. ■



Mishpacha

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