

# MESHECH CHOCHMAH

## Parshas Bamidbar

### Kohanim and Leviim

וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם אֲנִי ה'

*The Leviim shall be Mine, I am Hashem (3:45)*

The pesukim toward the end of perek 3 of Bamidbar discuss the role assigned to the Leviim as attendants to the Kohanim in their Avodah. The Meshech Chochmah analyses the respective statuses of these two groups by relating them to a parallel discussion in halachah.

#### **TWO CATEGORIES OF ACCESSORY TO KEDUSHAH**

The Gemara<sup>1</sup> identifies two categories with reference to items associated with kedushah. *Tashmishei Kedushah*: “Accessories to kedushah.” These are objects which are in *direct* contact with a holy object, the cloth on a bimah, upon which a sefer Torah rests. *Tashmishei Tashmishei Kedushah*: “Accessories to accessories to kedushah.” These are objects which interact *indirectly* with a holy object, e.g., the bimah upon which the cloth rests.

The Gemara states that the items in the first category, which have direct contact with kedushah, themselves attain a level of kedushah, while the items in the second category, whose connection with kedushah is indirect, do not.

This distinction expresses itself, for example in the way one treats such an object once it has become worn out. A direct accessory, having attained a measure of kedushah, would need to be buried (as does a sefer Torah), while an indirect accessory would not.

According to the Meshech Chochmah, the primary source for these two categories is actually to be found *in our Parsha*. When we consider the relative roles of Kohanim and Leviim, we will see that they reflect the two abovementioned types of accessory to kedushah:

- ▶ Kohanim, by virtue of their direct contact with the avodah, have the status of “direct accessories to kedushah,” and thereby themselves possess kedushah.

<sup>1</sup> Megillah 26b.

Thus the pasuk states<sup>2</sup> regarding the Kohanim: “קְדוּשִׁים יִהְיוּ – They shall be holy”

- ▶ Leviim, on the other hand, do not interact with the avodah itself, but rather are “given over to the Kohanim,”<sup>3</sup> who are themselves accessories to kedushah. This puts the Leviim in the category of “indirect accessories to kedushah.”

This distinction expresses itself in a number of halachos that pertain to these two groups:

### **TERUMAH AND MAASER**

Both Kohanim and Leviim receive gifts from the Jewish people – terumah for Kohanim and maser for Leviim. There is a fundamental distinction between the status of these two gifts and, accordingly, between their respective halachos:

- ▶ Terumah food possess kedushah and hence, may not be consumed when the Kohen is in a state of tumah.<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Maaser, on the other hand, does not enjoy kedushah status and the Levi may consume it even if he is tamei.<sup>5</sup>

The background to this difference is the distinction, mentioned above, between Kohanim and Leviim. A Kohen has kedushah status and hence the gifts that he receives partake of that kedushah. Since a Levi does not have special kedushah, his gifts likewise do not enjoy that status.

For this reason, the halachah states that a daughter of a Kohen who engages in *znus* (forbidden relationships) is thereby disqualified from eating terumah, as the state of kedushah that she originally enjoyed is profaned by her act. By contrast, a daughter of a Levi who engaged in *znus* may still eat maser.<sup>6</sup> Since her status is not that of kedushah, it is not profaned by her act and her eligibility is not forfeited.

### **TRANSPORTING THE MISHKAN**

This indirect status is further reflected in the way the Mishkan and its vessels were transported by the Leviim, as outlined in Bamidbar perek 4:

- ▶ The items which comprised the structure of the Mishkan e.g. the beams and sockets were placed on wagons which were led by the Leviim. Hence, they did not transport the beams via direct interaction. Rather, the wagons on which the beams were placed were the direct accessory to kedushah, while the Leviim who led the wagons were an indirect accessory.
- ▶ The vessels of the Mishkan were carried bodily on the shoulders of the family of Kehas. However, the vessels were first wrapped in special cloths, so that here too, the cloths had the status of direct accessory while the Leviim were indirect accessories.

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2 *Vayikra 21:6.*

3 *Bamidbar 3:9.*

4 *Sanhedrin 83a.*

5 *Yevamos 86b, Tosafos ibid. s.v. mi.*

6 *See Bechoros 47a and Tosafos ibid. s.v. ela.*

## **A NAME WITHIN A NAME**

This idea of the Leviim relating to kedushah through the means of a covering receives nuanced expression in our pasuk which states “וְהָיוּ לִי הַלְוִיִּם אֲנִי ה' – The Leviim shall be Mine, I am Hashem.” The word “אני” is actually a Name of Hashem<sup>7</sup> and is associated with the Name of Adnus (א-ד-נ-י). The sources further state that the Name of Adnus itself is considered to be a “cloak”, i.e. a covering, for the Shem Havaya (i.e. the name of י-ה-ו-ה). This is based on the pasuk<sup>8</sup> which states “וְהָיָה בְּהִיכַל קְדֹשׁוֹ – Hashem<sup>9</sup> is in His holy Sanctuary.” The “holy Sanctuary” to which the pasuk refers is the Name of Adnus, which shares the numerical value of the word “היכל”,<sup>10</sup> and which serves as a “setting” for the Shem Havaya. Hence, in our pasuk, the Leviim’s indirect relationship with kedushah is reflected in our pasuk by their separation from Hashem’s name (ה') with the name that clothes it – “אני”.

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7 See Rashi *Succah 45a s.v. ani*, in explanation of the phrase “אני והו הושיעה נא”.

8 *Chabakuk 2:20*.

9 *Shem Havaya*.

10 = 65.