



Wembley Synagogue

בְּמִדְבָּר

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Bamidbar 5768

What's the Sidra about?

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe counts all males over the age of 20, and registers them according to their paternal ancestry. The total, not including Shevet Levi, was 603,550. **3rd Aliya:** The tribes are each assigned their position within the camp, and in the order of the travelling. **4th Aliya:** In preparation for separating the tribe of Levi, the Torah establishes Aharon's genealogy. Although the Kohanim were also from the Tribe of Levi, they were counted by themselves. **5th Aliya:** Moshe counts the Leviyim according to their three basic families: Gershon, Kehat, and Merarri. Their individual responsibilities in transporting the Mishkan is stated, and their total was 22,000. **6th Aliya:** Being that the Leviyim were to be in direct exchange for the first born, Moshe counts all the first born in the rest of the nation. Their total was 22,273. The extra 273 first born are instructed to redeem themselves from Aharon the Kohen for 5 silver shekels. **7th Aliya:** The Parsha concludes with detailed instructions for the family of Kehat. Their primary responsibility was to transport the vessels of the Mishkan. Only Aharon and his sons were allowed to cover the vessels in preparation for transport. Once covered, the family of Kehat did the actual carrying. (Source: Rav Aron Tendler)

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבָּר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד -Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, . . . `Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael . (1:1-2) Rashi comments: "Because of G-d's love for the Jewish people, He counts them repeatedly. Here, He counted them in honour of His resting His Shechinah among them in the Tabernacle." [In chronological order, this parashah belongs earlier in the Torah, shortly after the dedication of the Mishkan.] R' Raphael Baruch Sorotzkin z"l observes that this may be understood in light of the Talmudic teaching that the first ten men who come to davening receive reward equal to the combined rewards of all the other men who come. Why? The Maharsha explains that it is these ten men who cause the Shechinah to rest on the congregation; therefore, they deserve special reward. The Shechinah rested on the Mishkan in the merit of all the Jewish people. In order to emphasise this, Hashem counted Bnei Yisrael after the Mishkan's dedication. (Source Ha'Binah Ve'haberachah)

וַאֲנִי תָמָּה לָקַחְתִּי אֶת-הַלֵּוִיִּם מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -Behold! I have taken the Levites from the midst of Bnei Yisrael . . ." (3:12) R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld z"l notes that whenever the Torah speaks of the fact that the Levi'im were counted separately from the other tribes, it also says that they were taken "from the midst" of Bnei Yisrael. The Torah wishes to emphasize that, despite being different in some ways, the Levi'im remain an integral part of the Jewish people. R' Sonnenfeld notes that this is alluded to in the very words "Levi'im" and "Yisrael". "Yisrael" is spelled: "Yud, sin, raish, aleph, lamed." If the names of each of those letters is written out, and we take the middle letter (for example, "Yud" = "Yud, vav, dalet") "from the midst" of each of those "words", we have the letters of the word "Levi'im." (Source: Chochmat Chaim)

RESPECT AND HONOUR: HOW TO TREAT A KOHEN

(Source: Halacha Discussion: Parshat Bamidbar by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt)

וְאֶת-אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת-בָּנָיו תִּפְקֹד וְשָׁמְרוּ אֶת-כְּהֻנָּתָם -You shall appoint Aaron and his sons and they shall safeguard their kehunah (3:10)

Included in Hashem's commandment to Moshe to appoint his brother Aharon and his sons as kohanim is the Biblical command: 'You shall sanctify him he shall remain holy to you'(1). The Torah commands us to acknowledge the sanctity of kohanim by showing them respect and giving them preferential treatment, since they are the ones who are entrusted to do Hashem's work in the Mishkan and Bet ha-Mikdash. This mitzvah is divided into two parts: a) the mitzvah of honouring a kohen; b) the prohibition against using the services of a kohen for one's needs. Let us elaborate: How do we honour a kohen? Whenever a blessing is recited in public, a kohen should be the one asked to recite it. Thus a kohen is the first one to be called up to the Torah whenever it is read. At meal time, he is the one who is asked to recite Kiddush, Birkat ha-Motzi and Birkat ha-Mazon. In addition, a kohen is served first, he is asked to speak first and is generally given more respect than a Yisrael or a Levi(2). Some poskim(3) mention that a Levi is given priority over a Yisrael in all of the above honours, just as he is called to the Torah before a Yisrael. Other poskim hold that a Levi does not take precedence at all(4). May a kohen forego this honour? A kohen may be mochel [lit.: release others from paying him] the honour due him [except being called up first to the Torah](5). The reason why a kohen may be mochel his honour is based on the Rabbinic dictum(6) that "one honours a man by doing his will." Since the kohen wants to bestow upon someone else the honour due him, that, in turn, becomes his honour(7). If a Yisrael recites Birkat ha-Mazon in the presence of a kohen, he must ask for the kohen's permission. It is not sufficient to merely say 'bi-reshut ha-kohen'(8).

As stated above, the only exception to the rule that a kohen may forego his honour is that he must be called up first to the Torah. This is a Rabbinic edict instituted by the Sages of the Mishnah, who insisted that the kohen always accept his aliyah lest he defer to some people and not to others, and thus cause discord among members of the shul(9). Are there any exceptions to this requirement? -The head of a household where a meal is being served is not obligated to offer a kohen guest the honour of reciting ha-motzi(10) or Birkat ha-Mazon(11). -If a Yisrael is a greater talmid chacham than a kohen, the Yisrael is not obligated to honour the kohen. It is, nevertheless, proper for him to do so, and one who does so is rewarded with longevity(12). -If the kohen is an am ha-aretz, a Yisrael-who is a talmid chacham-is not permitted to honour the kehunah of such a kohen, since he is thereby degrading the honour of the Torah(13). The Prohibition of Using the Services of a Kohen The second half of the obligation to honour a kohen is the prohibition against having him perform "services" for the benefit of a Yisrael(14). It is forbidden to ask a kohen to serve a Yisrael or to send him on an errand, etc. Even if a kohen waives his status and allows a Yisrael to use his services, this should not be done l'chatchilah, and certainly, the Yisrael should never ask a kohen to perform a lowly task for him like emptying the garbage(15), etc. For this reason, it is preferable that a kohen not enter a profession which may require his Yisrael employer to order him to engage in degrading types of work(16). When is it permitted to benefit from the services of a kohen? -If a kohen receives payment or if he is serving a distinguished person and derives pleasure from serving him, it is permitted to ask the kohen to serve a Yisrael(17). Similarly, if a kohen offers to serve a Yisrael without being told to do so, it is permitted to accept his offer(18). -Some poskim allow a Yisrael to use the services of a kohen am ha'aretz, although not in a demeaning manner(19). A kohen who violates the sanctity of the kehunah by marrying a divorcee or entering a cemetery when he is forbidden to do so, etc., forfeits the privileges of the kehunah. It is not a mitzvah to honour him, nor are there any restrictions on asking him to perform services. Such a kohen is excluded from nesiat kapayim as well(20). -The poskim debate whether these halachot pertain to a kohen who is a minor(21) or who has a blemish which renders him unfit for the avodah(22). Why are some people not careful to observe these halachot? There are some people who, although generally meticulous in mitzvah observance, are not careful about their treatment of kohanim. The poskim offer two possible reasons for their behavior: -Now that the Bet ha-Mikdash is destroyed, this mitzvah does not apply-except for those who conduct themselves lifnim mi-shurat ha-din(23); -With the passage of time, the lineage and yichus of the kohanim have become blurred. Thus we are not positive who is a kohen(24). These objections notwithstanding, the majority of the poskim agree that the mitzvah of honouring a kohen applies even nowadays (25) and we ought not doubt the purity of lineage of our kohanim (26).

References

1 Vayikra 21:8. There is a dispute among the Rishonim if this is a mitzvas assei min ha-Torah or mi- d'Rabbanan-See Magen Avraham 201:4 and Korban Nesanel 300 (Rosh, Gitin 5:20). 2 Mishnah Berurah 201:13. 3 Mishnah Berurah 201:12; Kaf ha-Chayim 167:101. 4 Aruch ha-Shulchan 201:4. This is the prevailing custom-Ben Ish Chai (Korach 14). 5 Rama 128:45; Mishnah Berurah 201:13. 6 Originally appearing in Sefer Chasidim 152. 7 Shulchan Aruch Harav 128:60; Eishel Avraham 128:45. 8 Mishnah Berurah 167:75. 9 Mishnah Berurah 135:9. The custom is that even a private minyan always calls up the kohen first. See Sha'ar ha-Tziyon 12. See Igros Moshe O.C. 2:34; 3:20 for possible exceptions. 10 Mishnah Berurah 167:73. 11 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyon 167:65 and Beur Halachah 201:1; Aruch ha-Shulchan 201:4. 12 O.C. 167:14 and Mishnah Berurah 71; 201:12. 13 O.C. 201:2; Mishnah Berurah 167:70. 14 According to some poskim, a kohen cannot serve another kohen either. Others allow this-see Kesav Sofer O.C. 15; Beur Halachah 128:45; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:75; Kaf ha-Chayim 128:283. 15 Mishnah Berurah 128:175; Yabia Omer 6:22. See also the Chafetz Chayim's opening remarks to Shemiras ha-Lashon where he rules that one who speaks lashon ha-ra about a kohen [in the presence of the kohen] transgresses the halachah of honouring a kohen. 16 Harav S.Z. Auerbach, quoted in Nishmas Avraham O.C. 128:10. 17 Mishnah Berurah 128:175. 18 Eishel Avraham 128:45; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72. 19 Beur Halachah 128:45. Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72 disagrees. 20 O.C. 128:40-41. 21 Mishnah Berurah 282:12 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyon 15 quotes a dispute between Magen Avraham and R' Akiva Eiger concerning this. See Emes l'Yaakov al ha-Torah, pg. 391. 22 Most poskim maintain that a kohen who has a blemish is included in this mitzvah. See, however, Minchas Chinuch 269, Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:72 and Responsa Avnei Cheifetz 71. 23 R' Tam (quoted by Taz 128:39); Mekor Chayim 128:45. 24 Magen Avraham 201:4. Many other poskim are also of the opinion that the kohanim's yichus is questionable-see Y.D. 322 Taz 5 and Shach 9; Sh'elas Ya'avetz 155; Chazon Ish, Shvi'is 5:12. See also Rama O.C. 457:2 and Mishnah Berurah 22. 25 Mishnah Berurah 128:172; Aruch ha-Shulchan 71. See Rivash 94. 26 Maharit 1:149; Be'er Heitev O.C. 128:83; Aruch ha-Shulchan O.C. 128:72; Y.D. 305:55

שבת שלום!

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.10pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר חייאל משה וולפסון ז"ל

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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