

## **Parashat TETZAVEH**

### **Sanctity and Service**

**By Rav Meir Spiegelman**

In many places in the Torah, we find differences between the literal text and actual halakha; different explanations are offered for this phenomenon in various sources. Our parasha would seem to include the most blatant example of the discrepancy between the Written Law and the Halakha as prescribed by the Sages. This discrepancy is particularly troubling in view of the fact that what is involved here is not some small detail of halakhic practice, but rather the very structure of the Temple (or Mishkan) service, as I shall explain below.

#### **KOHEN GADOL VS. REGULAR KOHEN**

As we know, there are two types of kohanim: the Kohen Gadol (High Priest), and the regular kohen. The status of these two is fundamentally different: the Kohen Gadol is considered a holy man, while the rest of the kohanim are simply called kohanim. Obviously, this does not imply that there is no sanctity in the service performed by a regular kohen; it simply means that the kohen himself is not defined as holy. As an example, we read in parashat Pekudei (40:13-15), when the kohanim are anointed to inaugurate their service in the Mishkan, that Aharon himself attains sanctity through the anointment, whereas the kohanim are anointed simply as kohanim. In general, the concept of sanctity is mentioned in connection with a regular kohen only as an adjunct to the sanctity of the Kohen Gadol.

Likewise, at the beginning of our parasha there is a command appearing twice to fashion holy garments for Aharon alone. Only the third time (28:4) are we told that holy garments are made also for Aharon's sons, but even then the command concludes in the singular: "to minister (le-khahano) to Me." The most striking differentiation is to be found in chapter 39: "the holy garments for Aharon, the Kohen, and the

garments of his sons, to minister" (verse 41). At the beginning of the same chapter, too, we are told that the holy garments are for Aharon the Kohen.

Even this partial list of verses demonstrates clearly that there is a difference between Aharon, whose garments in fact sanctify him, and the garments of his sons, which merely render them fit for ministering in the Mishkan. Therefore, even when we come across verses that may be understood differently, we should adopt the interpretation that preserves this differentiation. The Torah fails to explain the nature of the difference, nor does it tell us why only Aharon is sanctified, while his sons do not acquire the same status.

"WHEN HE COMES TO THE HOLY PLACE..."

Two further problems arise from an examination of the Torah's command concerning the priestly garments.

1. In several places, the Torah emphasizes that the function of Aharon's clothes is to serve him when he enters the kodesh ha-kodashim (holy of holies). This is the explanation offered concerning the breastplate that Aharon must wear: "...when he comes to the holy place, as a remembrance before Me" (28:29). From this verse, we may deduce that the command concerning the two stones of the breastplate - "And Aharon shall bear their names before God" (28:12) - likewise focuses on Aharon's entry into the kodesh ha-kodashim. This point is not explained in the Torah: what is the meaning of the close connection between the garments of the Kohen Gadol and his entry into the kodesh ha-kodashim?

This question aside, a real difficulty arises in relation to the Torah's instruction that his long coat must be decorated with bells. The explanation given for this requirement is that he should be heard as he enters the kodesh ha-kodashim, in order that he will not die: "And it shall be upon Aharon when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he comes into the holy place before God and when he emerges, that he may not die" (28:35). This verse is extremely problematic: the Kohen Gadol does not enter the kodesh ha-kodashim with his eight special garments; he ministers wearing these garments in the kodesh only! (Rather, he enters the kodesh ha-kodashim wearing only the four garments of the regular kohen.) If we suggest that the text here is referring to Aharon as he enters the kodesh – the other kohanim enter there too, and there is no requirement anywhere that they attach bells to their garments.

2. A further issue requiring explanation is the thread from which the priestly garments are made. The clothes of the Kohen Gadol are made up of blue,

purple, scarlet, gold and twined threads. The clothes of the regular kohanim, in contrast, are sewn only from twined thread. The only garment boasting other threads is the sash, but even here the other threads are only embroidered onto the fabric, rather than forming an integral part of it. Here, again, the Torah provides no explanation for this difference between the kohanim and the Kohen Gadol.

The problem of the bells disturbed the early commentators, who proposed various solutions. The Rashbam maintains that the purpose of the bells was to keep everyone far away, so as to adhere to the prohibition against anyone being found inside the Mishkan at the time when the Kohen Gadol enters the kodesh ha-kodashim. In order to reconcile this explanation with the fact that the Kohen Gadol performs his Yom Kippur service wearing only four garments – the coat not being one of them – we must adopt one of two alternatives.

1. In the Rashbam's view, the service of the Kohen Gadol in the kodesh ha-kodashim was originally, ideally intended to be performed with him garbed in all eight garments.
2. Alternatively, it is possible that in his view the Yom Kippur atonement service was supposed to take place in the kodesh, where the Kohen Gadol indeed wears his regular garments, and not in the kodesh ha-kodashim.

Ramban follows the same direction as the Rashbam, but explains that the need for the bells relates to those sections of the service performed on Yom Kippur in the kodesh, during which the Kohen Gadol wears his eight regular garments. According to his explanation, it is specifically on this day that the bells are required, for the glory of the Kohen Gadol. This explanation still leaves us with a problem: the Torah formulates the requirement in general terms, not in relation to Yom Kippur specifically. Moreover, the parasha of the Kohen Gadol's service in the Mishkan on Yom Kippur may even have been given over by God only after the Mishkan was built. If this was the case, then the Ramban's explanation cannot be accepted.

There may be a different way of solving the problems raised here. To discover this, we must pay attention to the different function of the regular kohanim as opposed to the role and location of the Kohen Gadol, as arising from the literal text itself.

## SANCTUARY VS. COURTYARD

Aside from some unusual exceptions – which I shall address further on – we find no license in the Torah for a regular kohen to serve within the Mishkan itself; rather, his service is performed in the courtyard – specifically, upon the altar. Wherever a ministering function is mentioned that must be performed within the Mishkan, the

Torah explicitly makes it Aharon's responsibility. This is true of the command to offer incense (30:7), as well as the command to prepare the lights and kindle them (Vayikra 24:1-4; Bamidbar 8:1-3). While throughout parashat Vayikra it is Aharon's sons who sprinkle the blood upon the copper altar, when it comes to the ox of the "anointed kohen" and the ox of the matter that is hidden from the congregation, we are told that it is the anointed kohen who brings some of the blood into the Ohel Mo'ed – in contrast to a regular sin offering, where even a regular kohen may sprinkle the blood.[1]

Accordingly we may say that when the Torah specifies, in our parasha, "The kohen who shall minister in his place, from among his sons, shall wear them for seven days when he comes to the Ohel Mo'ed to minister in the kodesh" (29:30), it means service not in the kodesh ha-kodashim, but rather in the kodesh. After all, what is the point of performing the service for seven days wearing all eight garments in preparation for the Yom Kippur service, which is to be performed in only four garments? It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the Kohen Gadol is indeed preparing for service in the kodesh – which, obviously, is performed with all eight garments.

If we accept this assumption, according to which a regular kohen is not permitted to serve in the kodesh, we are able to answer the questions raised above. Aharon is holy and his garments are holy because he is uniquely chosen to minister in the kodesh. His sons are "mere" kohanim because they are chosen to minister in the courtyard, which does not embody the same sanctity as does the interior of the Mishkan. It is specifically Aharon who needs the bells because only he enters the Sanctuary, and only he needs to make some sound as he enters the kodesh. This also explains the connection between the garments and the entry into the kodesh: it is not entry into the kodesh ha-kodashim that the text refers to here, but rather entry into the kodesh, by virtue of which the Kohen Gadol is sanctified with special clothes.

This also helps us understand the composition of the clothes themselves: only Aharon's garments are composed of blue, purple, scarlet, gold and twined thread, because these same materials comprise the curtains of the Mishkan, and it is Aharon who ministers there. In the courtyard, in contrast, the threads comprising the curtains consist only of twined thread, and therefore the clothes of the regular kohanim are made of the same material. And since the sacrificial altar is connected to the heikhal (sanctuary), as I shall explain elsewhere, and the kohanim minister upon the altar, there are also threads of wool in the sash. However, they are only embroidered there, rather than actually being woven into the garment, in order to emphasize that the role of the kohanim is centered outside.

There is a further point supporting this view. The kohen charged with taking the ashes out of the camp wears two garments,[2] a regular kohen wears four, while the Kohen

Gadol wears eight. We may conclude that the number of garments reflects the place where the service happens: a service performed outside requires only two garments, service within the courtyard requires four, and service inside the actual heikhal requires eight. We may even add that Am Yisrael in its entirety is a "kingdom of priests" (mamlekhet kohanim), and for this reason all of Am Yisrael wears one priestly garment: the tzitzit. There is a fundamental connection between the Mishkan and tzitzit. We infer this from the fact that the expression "a thread of blue" (petil tekhelet) is common to the "tzitz" and to the tzitzit – in addition to the obvious similarity in the names of these articles. Even the structure of the tzitzit is reminiscent of the priestly garments: the corner of the tzitzit is composed of four threads that are folded in half. (I hope, on a different occasion, to explore this connection between the Mishkan and tzitzit.)

Thus, the number of garments depends on the location where the service takes place, and to the extent that the place of service is of greater sanctity, the required number of garments grows.

From our parasha we may also conclude – and I hope to expand on this elsewhere – that originally Aharon was not meant to enter the kodesh ha-kodashim at all. Otherwise, it is impossible to understand why the white garments, reserved for such entry, are not mentioned in our parasha among the other priestly garments. Entry into the kodesh ha-kodashim became necessary only as a result of the sin of the golden calf (or for some other reason, which the scope of this shiur does not allow us to expand on). We can understand this restriction, especially in light of the parallel between the Mishkan and Mt. Sinai, where only Moshe was permitted to ascend, but not Aharon. This fact, according to which entry into the kodesh ha-kodashim was instituted only post facto, explains – to some degree – why such entry is not carried out wearing sixteen garments (as we may have expected), but rather wearing only four.[3] These garments appear only at a later stage, with the law permitting Aharon to enter the kodesh ha-kodashim.

As previously stated, there are a number of sources that would seem to contradict the thesis presented above. At the beginning of our parasha, we read that the lights are to be prepared by Aharon and his sons in the Ohel Mo'ed (27:21), and we therefore deduce that Aharon's sons did indeed minister inside the Ohel Mo'ed. However, it appears that this verse should be understood differently. When the Torah stipulates, further on in the parasha, that Aharon's sacred garments are to be worn by his sons after him ("And the sacred garments that are Aharon's shall belong to his sons after him" – 29:30), the text certainly does not mean all his sons, as regular kohanim, but rather those individuals who will inherit the role of Kohen Gadol.

The same applies to the mincha offering of the anointed kohen: "This is the offering of Aharon and his sons, which they will sacrifice to God on the day of his anointing" (Vayikra 6:13). Here, again, the "sons" referred to are those who will serve as Kohen Gadol, not all the regular kohanim. We must interpret these verses thus, for the text continues and makes it clear that it is only the anointed kohen who is being referred to. Admittedly, a regular kohen also offers a "minchat chinukh" (inaugural offering), but the parasha here is discussing only the Kohen Gadol. Accordingly, we should interpret the instruction at the beginning of our parasha as meaning that only the Kohen Gadol prepares the lights, and when the text mentions "his sons," the reference is only to those who will succeed him. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the verses at the beginning of parashat Tetzaveh correspond almost word-for-word to the verses in parashat Emor (Vayikra 24:3-4), where Aharon alone is responsible for the lights.

Another problematic verse is to be found at the end of chapter 28: "And they [the trousers] shall be worn by Aharon and by his sons when they come to the Ohel Mo'ed or when they approach the altar, to minister in the kodesh" (verse 43). Concerning this verse, we may suggest various possible explanations.

1. Similar to the case above, the expression "his sons" here could refer to Aharon's successors in the post of Kohen Gadol. But this interpretation does not sit well with the literal meaning of the verse.
2. The verse may be divided into two parts. It is Aharon who comes to the Ohel Mo'ed, while his sons approach the altar. Once again, the literal formulation of the verse makes this possibility difficult to accept: it says, explicitly, "when they come," rather than "when he comes."
3. The regular kohanim are indeed permitted to enter the kodesh, but they are not permitted to minister there. They are required to enter the kodesh for the purposes of dismantling the Mishkan in preparation for the journey to the next desert stop, as explained in Sefer Bamidbar (4:19).[4] This proposal finds support in the traditional Torah chant, which makes it clear that the "service in the kodesh" applies only to the altar, and not to entry into the kodesh; hence we may conclude that entry into the kodesh is not necessarily for the purposes of ministering there. What the Torah is teaching in this verse is that when they enter, they are still obligated to wear trousers – even though their intention is not to minister there.

## AGENTS OF ISRAEL OR AGENTS OF GOD?

To complete our thesis, we must add an important detail regarding the nature of the Kohen Gadol's garments, as opposed to those of the regular kohanim. As stated above,

the threads from which the curtains of the Mishkan are fashioned correspond to the threads from which the clothes of the Kohen Gadol are sewn. But there is a difference between them: the curtains of the Mishkan contain no gold,[5] while the garments of the Kohen Gadol include gold thread. The vessels of the Mishkan, in contrast, are made of gold, but they contain no blue. Hence, we mindicate a clear differentiation: the Mishkan is made of blue, while the vessels are made of gold. In the garments of the Kohen Gadol, blue and gold are combined.

In general, we may understand the status of priesthood in one of two ways. One way perceives the kohanim as representatives of the community; in their service in the Mishkan, they represent the entire nation. The other approach sees the kohanim as an integral part of the Mishkan itself, such that they minister to God and serve Him – just as the royal guard is not considered to be a body representing the nation, but rather a part of the royal palace.

Against the background of these two approaches, we may perhaps understand the coexistence of both blue and gold in the garments of the Kohen Gadol as expressing the fact that the kohanim belong to the Mishkan; they are part of the Mishkan vessels. This message does not necessarily negate their status as representatives of the nation; it merely emphasizes that they should also be perceived as part of the Mishkan. The fact that the kohanim are part of the Mishkan allows us to view their consumption of sacrificial meat as atoning for the person who offers it – in exactly the same way that the altar atones. This would also explain why Shemuel is permitted to sleep inside the heikhal, even though it is forbidden even to sit there.[6]

In summary, it should be noted that my thesis here does not match the halakhic norm according to which regular kohanim are quite entitled to minister fully within the heikhal. How is it possible that the halakha was changed such that it suddenly became permissible for regular kohanim to serve in the heikhal? It must be emphasized that the problem here is not "only" the contradiction of halakha. The tradition rooted in all the mishnayot describing the service in the Mishkan depicts regular kohanim ministering there. We may address this problem in several different ways, but for the sake of brevity I shall focus only on one possible solution.

At the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah commands that those who are ritually impure be sent out of the camp. From the verses it appears that a person who has contracted ritual impurity through contact with a corpse must be sent out of all three camps, and not only out of the Mishkan precincts, as Halakha rules. We may resolve this contradiction by distinguishing between the camp of Israel in the desert and the camp of Israel in the land. In the desert, God rested within the entire camp, such that there was a special level of Divine Presence, requiring that the ritually impure be removed from the entire encampment.

We may say the same of the service of the kohanim in the Mishkan. Owing to the special level of Divine Presence in the desert, finding expression in God's revelation to Moshe and the presence of the pillar of cloud before the camp, the regular kohanim were not permitted to serve in the Mishkan. This restriction was lifted when the Jews settled in the land and built a permanent Mikdash, where the level of the Divine Presence was less intense. This is especially true in light of the fact that there is no explicit prohibition against kohanim serving in the heikhal; we merely conclude from the verses that in practice the regular kohanim did not enter the Mishkan to minister there.

#### NOTES:

[1] In light of the Torat Kohanim, there is a debate among the early and later authorities as to whether the anointed kohen is required for the sacrifice of an ox for a law that is hidden from the community (*par he'elem davar shel tzibbur*). The literal text would seem to indicate that there is a need for the anointed kohen – see Rambam, *Hilkhot Ma'aseh Ha-korbanot* 5:15, and the *Mishneh La-melekh ad loc*. If we assume that a regular kohen is fit for this task, this would sit well with our claim further on: that since, ultimately, a regular kohen may serve in the sanctuary in the Mikdash, there is license for his ministering in instances such as these, too, even though ideally the principle is that the Kohen Gadol should perform this service.

[2] The Tannaim are divided on this point. But even the opinion that requires four garments will admit that the basic obligation involves only two garments, and that the need for four arises only because of the general law that priestly service is not conducted wearing less than four garments.

[3] Chazal note that the lack of gold in the priestly garments is a result of the sin of the golden calf. My claim is that originally the Kohen Gadol was never meant to enter the *kodesh ha-kodashim* at all.

[4] This explanation obviates the need for the debate as to whether it was permissible to enter with no particular purpose, or to enter with the purpose of worship, but I shall not discuss that debate here.

[5] I have not addressed here the sockets, which are made of gold. These sockets are not part of the structure of the curtains, and I hope to focus on their function on another occasion.

[6] I have adopted here one interpretation from the story of Shemuel; the scope of this *shiur* obviously does not allow for elaboration.



(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

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