Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Haftarat Emor*: Timing and Upgrades*

Of the sixty-three *mitzvot* found in *Parashat Emor*, twenty-two deal with the *kohanim* – detailing both the special privileges and the responsibilities that accompany being *Hashem*'s representatives. *Sefer Vayikra* is called *Torat Kohanim*, and in distinction to the remainder of the *parashiyot* in the *sefer*, *Parashat Emor* addresses the character and personal conduct of the *kohanim* and the *Kohein Gadol*, not just their performance of the *avodah* in the *Mikdash*. The rule of "more *kedushah* = more restrictions" applies to the *kohanim*. Hence, whom a *kohein* may marry, for whom he can make himself *tumat meit* (impure due to proximity to a dead body), the privilege of eating *terumah*, and the restrictions that accompany that privilege, are among the many *mitzvot* found herein.

When the *Anshei Kenesset Ha-Gedolah* (The Men of the Great Assembly) needed to select a passage from the Prophets that would mirror this aspect of the *parashah*, they selected *Yechezkel* chapter 44. The *haftarah* begins on a positive note. It describes the special place of honor that will await the *kohanim*, descendants of *Tzadok Ha-Kohein*, at the time of the Third *Beit Ha-Mikdash*. According to Radak and Malbim, the Third *Beit Ha-Mikdash* (as opposed to the Second) is the focus of Yechezkel's prophecy, as Yechezkel was a *kohein*, and we do not find that he personally returned from *Bavel* to *Eretz Yisrael*, but rather he died in *Bavel* (and thus was presumably not describing the service in the Second Temple). Therefore, it is clear that Yechezkel's message regarding the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* is directed toward the future. In the Third *Beit Ha-Mikdash*, only the *kohanim* who are descendants of Tzadok will officiate in the Temple. The other *kohanim*'s descendants will not offer sacrifices in this Third Temple, due to their having officiated in idolatrous practices, as we are told earlier in this chapter (in verses which are not included in the *haftarah*). Rather, these *kohanim* will be demoted in terms of their service, to those activities that were originally for *levi'im*, such as Keepers of the Gates, and even slaughterers of animals, as these services are permissible even to a *Yisrael*.

In contrast, *Benei Tzadok* will receive an upgrade in their status. Even the regular *kohanim* among them will enjoy certain privileges that resemble those of a *Kohein Gadol*.

The first example of this is regarding the garments that these *kohanim* will wear. In *Parashat Tetzaveh*, we are taught that regular *kohanim* wore garments, one of which, the *avneit* (belt), was of wool and linen. (Interestingly, the prohibition of *shaatnez* [wearing wool and linen together], was suspended for *kohanim*.) In *Parashat Acharei Mot* we learn that only the *Kohein Gadol* who, upon entering the *Kodesh Ha-Kedashim* on *Yom Kippur,* donned only garments of linen. Here in *Yechezkel*, *Benei Tzadok* are rewarded with garments of linen, which are to be worn all year long. While they will not be *Kohanim Gedolim*, they will enjoy some of the unique privileges afforded to the *Kohanim Gedolim*.

In addition, we are taught the special *halakhah* of hair grooming for *Benei Tzadok*. The Talmud, in *Sanhedrin* 22b, identifies this special haircut (in which the tip of one hair reached the base of the hair adjacent to it) as otherwise unique to the *Kohein Gadol*.

The third area in which the *kohanim* were afforded special restrictions concerns marriage. While the Torah (*Vayikra* 21:7) permits a *kohein* to marry a widow, and only a *Kohein Gadol* is limited to marrying a virgin, *Benei Tzadok* who are treated as semi-*Kohanim Gedolim*, and should preferably marry virgins (*Yechezkel* 44:22). If they choose to marry a widow, they can only marry the widow of a *kohein*.

R. Hirsch, in his commentary on the *haftarah*, makes an interesting observation at the end of verse 19. After officiating in the Temple, the *kohanim* are to remove their priestly garments; this is similar to the command in *Acharei Mot* (16:23) that directs the *Kohein Gadol* to remove his special white linen garments and leave them in the *Mikdash*. So too, *Benei Tzadok*, upon completion of their daily service, are to remove their priestly garments and "clothe themselves with other garments – for not with their clothes do they sanctify the people." Whereas Radak explains that the reason for the removal of their garments is to prevent the *kohanim* from mingling with the masses while the *kohanim* are adorned with their special, priestly garments, lest they impart holiness to the people solely through the priestly garments, R. Hirsch understands this commandment as indicating that while these garments are crucial and indispensable to validate the Temple service, outside the Temple, the *kohanim* are to *be* a Temple in and of themselves. R. Hirsch writes:

> Wherever they are, outside the Temple too, not by their clerical appearance, but by their whole personality, by their whole life, in conduct and deed, by the pure model way in which they live it, they are to influence the people to live holy lives, and through their example – by no means through their clothes – prepare the basis, in the lives of the people, for the realization of these truths and aims which they express symbolically by the procedures they conduct in the Temple. For the pomp of ornate pontifical garb there is no place in the realm of the Divine Torah. But rather, the hypocritical haughty assumption of superior holiness worn on the surface receives the sharpest condemnation.

The Gra in *Aderet Eliyahu*, on verse 23 of this *haftarah*, sees the *kohanim* as an integral part of the judicial process in all areas of Jewish life and law. He explains: "They shall instruct My people concerning the difference between holy and ordinary" – this refers to *Seder Kodshim*; "Let them inform them of the difference between contaminated and clean" – this is a reference to *Seder Taharot*; in verse 24, "concerning a grievance let them stand in judgment" – this refers to *Seder Nezikin*; "according to My laws they are to adjudicate it" refers to *Seder Nashim*; "My teachings and decrees" refers to *Seder Zera'im*; and "My appointed times they are to protect" is a reference to *Seder Mo'ed*. Thus, the *kohein* is to be a walking *Shulchan Arukh* – a repository of Torah knowledge, and embodiment of a Torah personality and character.

Why, one may ask, will *Benei Tzadok* be afforded this special treatment in the future? The answer, explains the *Chofetz Chaim*, is found in the opening verse of the *haftarah*. The *navi* extols the exemplary service of the *kohanim* from the line of Tzadok, at a time when the rest of the Jewish community and the other *kohanim* were unfortunately involved in idolatrous practices. In fact, the Talmud, in *Menachot* 109a, cites the verses immediately prior to the beginning of our *haftarah* as the source of the law which states that a *kohein* who officiated in an idolatrous service may not officiate and partake in the *avodah* in the *Mikdash*, even if he repents.

The loyalty and devotion of *Benai Tzadok*, particularly highlighted due to the sinful times they were living in, and the challenges they faced from external sources, raised their performance of *mitzvot* to an appreciably higher level; hence, they merited greater reward in the future. This concept is substantiated by the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Bemidbar* 27:1). The *midrash* there (773) extols the positive attitude and attachment to the Land of Israel exhibited by *Benot Tzelofchad*. As the *midrash* explains, "a pious, righteous individual who lives in a generation that is wicked, receives not only his share of reward, but the reward of the entire generation." Tzelofchad's swimming against the current and the tide earned him and his daughters a special reward. Similarly, Noach received not only his own personal reward, but that of the entire generation of the flood. So too, Lot, who demonstrated strength of character in defying the laws of *Sedom*, received not only his own due reward, but that of the entire community. Lastly, Avraham, who challenged the monolithic idolatrous beliefs of his day, and the Generation of the Dispersed, received the reward of his entire generation. *Benot Tzelofchad*, at a time in the desert that the Jewish nation was calling out: "Let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt" (*Bemidbar* 14:4), wished to get an inheritance in the Land of Israel. As such, they not only

received their due reward, but also merited that of the entire nation. Along these same lines, our *haftarah* adds the loyalty and devotion of *Benai Tzadok* to this illustrious list of individuals.

The Talmud in *Massekhet Tamid* 27a teaches in the name of R. Yehoshua ben Levi that in no less than twenty-four places in Scripture are the *kohanim* referred to as *levi'im* as well, and the opening verse of our *haftarah* is cited as the primary example. In light of the above explanation, it is understandable that the *kohanim* of the Tzadok lineage are being praised for following in the footsteps of their progenitor, Levi. It was the entire tribe of Levi that answered the call of Moshe "whoever is for *Hashem*, join me" (*Shemot* 32:26). They were ready, willing, and able to direct their zeal and courage, originally used against Shechem (*Bereishit* 34:25), to execute those who worshipped the Golden Calf. So too, it was the tribe of Levi alone who circumcised their sons in the desert during the forty year trek. Levi had the courage to be that man – in an environment that was bereft of one (*Pirkei Avot* 2:6) – and *Benei Tzadok* emulated this trait.

Moreover, the twenty-four references to the *kohanim* as *levi'im* contain a deep mystical message, according to the *Zohar.* In *Parashat Acharei Mot*, the *Zohar* teaches that *Hashem* in *Gan Eden* bedecked Chava with twenty-four adornments. Unfortunately, when the serpent violated Chava he injected her and mankind with twenty-four forms of impurity. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 146a) relates that our coming to Mt. Sinai purged these impurities from our people. Hence, on the night of the *Pesach Seder*, the Jew can say "had *Hashem* only brought us to Sinai, and had not given us the Torah, *dayeinu*" – it would have been worthwhile just standing at Sinai. However, only forty days after the Revelation, when the Jewish nation worshipped the Golden Calf, these twenty-four impurities returned. It is not by chance, notes the *Megaleh Amukot*, that the number twenty-four keeps recurring in reference to the *kohanim* and *levi'im*. There were twenty-four gifts to the *kohanim*, twenty-four *mishmarot* (geographical districts of the Land of Israel from which the *kohanim* would rotate and come to officiate in the *Mikdash*), and twenty-four areas in the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* that the *levi'im* and *kohanim* stood guard for on a daily basis. These numerous twenty-four factors serve to fortify the *kohanim* and *levi'im* and enable them to safeguard and protect the environment and atmosphere around them.

The Rambam at the end of *Hilkhot Shemittah Ve-Yovel* (13:13) writes that just as the members of the tribe of Levi distinguished themselves to serve *Hashem* as their primary vocation, similarly, each and every individual can assume the mantle of Levi, and live life as an ambassador of *Hashem* in this world. Thus, the *haftarah* does not only provide a portent for the upgrade of *Benei Tzadok*, but it deputizes us to emulate them, and to follow the Torah and *mitzvot* in these most challenging times.