



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Emor / פרשת אמור / 5779

The “Great” and the “Small” of Yerushalayim

Our parsha begins with the unique laws of the kohanim who must hold themselves to a higher standard of sanctity. Interestingly, the first Rashi on the parsha comments that the Torah contains a seemingly extra word to emphasize the following point: ¹

“Speak [to the kohanim ...] and say [to them],” lit. “Say...and you shall say.” [This double expression comes] to admonish the adult [kohanim to be responsible] for the minors [that they must not contaminate them.

The adult kohanim must teach the special laws of priesthood to their children.

While education is certainly important, it is a general value that applies to all areas of Torah and life. Why would the Torah choose specifically here to highlight the adult population’s responsibilities vis-à-vis the next generation? Why not mention this idea by other commandments?²

One response that is alluded to in the writings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe³ is that emphasizing the care for the minors in the context of the kohanim highlights a certain value. The kohanim are involved and high and spiritual matters. They need to serve in the Beit HaMikdash. They need to teach Torah to the people. One might have thought that they need to focus all their energies on these significant pursuits.

Therefore, the Torah emphasizes specifically in this context that the kohanim must care for the *ketanim* – literally translated as “minors” but also including, perhaps, the “small” and more simple elements of society. The kohanim must realize the fundamental equality and unity that exists

¹ Rashi to Vaikra 21:1. Translation is adapted from Chabad.org.

² See Yevamot 114a that from a halachik perspective the sentiments of this Rashi are expanded to the entirety of halacha.

³ Likkutei Sihot Volume 7, parshat Emor #1.



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amongst the Jewish people and use their unique spiritual tasks to *help* others as opposed to ignoring them.

The lesson of the fundamental equality of the Jewish people is accented by the fact that their service ultimately takes place within the confines of Yerushalayim. The Mishna⁴ records that when a procession of Bikkurim-bearers approached Yerushalayim, the residents of the city would send out an entourage to greet them. The makeup of the greeters was “based on the honor of those entering the city.” Simply understood, the Mishna teaches that if a more dignified person was present amongst the travelers, correspondingly, a more dignified group of Yerushalayim’s citizens would go out to greet him.

The Talmud Yerushalmi,⁵ however, immediately challenges this approach: “Is there a “great one” and a “small one” in Yerushalayim?” The Rogotchover explains that Yerushalayim is the home of God, before whom all human differences pale and are obliterated. Accordingly, the Mishna cannot really mean that a specific person in Yerushalayim is “greater” than another. Rather, the Talmud Yerushalmi explains, the Mishna refers to the *number* of the visiting group. If they were a large number of people, then a correspondingly large number of Yerushalmis would come out to greet them.

According to the Rogotchover’s understanding, the Talmud Yerushalmi encodes the same lesson as the beginning of our parsha. The closer one is to God and spirituality – such as a kohen in Yerushalayim - the more one realizes that all Jews are fundamentally equal and a single unified entity. Therefore, there is no essential difference between the adult kohanim and the seeming small ones of the nation.

⁴ Bikkurim 3:3.

⁵ Ibid.