



Kohanim, Keep Out

In the beginning of the fourth *perek* of *Masechet Bechorot* we learn that one is obligated to care for and raise the *bechor* (first born domesticated kosher animal) prior to handing it over to the *kohen*. The exact time of this care is the subject of debate and varies with the type of animal. We also learnt that if a *kohen* volunteers to care for the animal within this time period, his offer is rejected. Why?

The *Gemara* (26b) explains that if a *kohen* were to take care of the animal during this time, it would be comparable to the case where a *kohen* helped the field-owner at the threshing floor. The *Beraita* explains that in such a case the *kohen* is not given *trumah*. If one however does so it is considered as if he “profaned” the gifts.

The difficulty with the above quoted *Beraita* is that it also includes the *Levi* in this prohibition. In other words, the *Levi* is likewise not allowed to help the field-owner at the threshing floor and then consequently be given *ma’aser*. The difficulty is the expression that one who gives the *kohen* or *levi* the *trumah* or *ma’aser* is considered as having profaned the gifts. *Ma’aser* has no inherent sanctity; so it is puzzling why this specific expression is used in this context.

A more basic question is - why does the prohibition exist at all? It should be seen as a positive gesture of gratitude that the *kohen* or *levi* wants to be able to assist the owner. Surely acknowledging the good benefited from others is a fundamental principle of our faith.

Rashi explains that the problem is that it appears that the *kohen* or *levi*, is paying the field-owner to give it to him and no one else. We can understand this firstly, on a simple level, that it is unfair to other *kohanim*. Secondly the protocol by which the *kohen* and *levi* receive these gifts is that they are

indeed just that – gifts. By helping out, this idea of ‘giving a gift’ is shattered. Nonetheless the term used to describe this (“profane”) needs more explanation.

Rav Neventzal answers differently by explaining why the *kohanim* and *levi'im* receive this gift. We wrongly perceive them as being “gifts”. These gifts should rather be seen as their payment. He explains, essentially all of *Am Yisrael* were chosen to be engaged in *Avodat Hashem*. Yet the *Torah* decreed that twelve tribes should receive inheritance and settle throughout the land, while one tribe would be free to work in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*. This tribe, the *levi'im* would be effectively working in their stead. The work was not a privilege that could be enjoyed. The *Rambam* writes that a *Levi* refusing to work would be forced to do so, as the work was a personal obligation.

Rav Neventzal continues and says when a field worker comes to pick up his pay check, it would not cross his mind to start doing extra work. He worked and he should get paid. If a *kohen* or *levi* would help out, despite his good intentions, he is perceived as saying that his work, his *avodah* in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash*, is not enough to warrant the *trumah* or *ma’aser*. He is “only” involved in spiritual matters and feels he needs to contribute a bit more. This is a *chilul* of the highest order.

With this understanding our perception of the *avodah* and *trumot* and *ma'asrot* is drastically changed. On the one hand great responsibility and weight is given to the *kohen* and *levi*'s work in the *Beit Ha'Mikdash* as “employees”. On the other hand, the *ma'asrot* given are not given out of the kindness of our hearts, but rather as paying them their dues.

Yisrael-Yitzchak Bankier

Revision Questions

בכורות ב': ג' – ד'

- What is the law regarding a first born animal from an animal sanctified for a *korban* but then developed a *mum*? (ב': ג')
- In which case does the *Tana Kama* and *R' Shimon ben Gamliel* argue whether the offspring from an “iron sheep” belong to a *Nochri*, has the status of a *bechor*? (ב': ד')
- To what extent does the offspring need to appear like the mother in order to have the status of a *bechor*? (ב': ח')
- What are the three (or four) opinions regarding the law if the head's of two offspring of an animal (that had not given birth yet) exited the mother at the same time? (ב': י')
- Regarding the previous case explain the debate if one of them died? (ב': י')
- What is the law if the offspring consisted of a male and female? (ב': י')
- What is the law if the offspring from two animals that had not given birth yet, consisted of: (ב': י'ג')
 - Two males?
 - A male and female?
 - Two males and a female?
- Regarding the first case in the previous question, what is the law if one of the mothers had already given birth? (ב': ח')
- Explain the debate regarding the first two offspring of an animal with the first was delivered by means of caesarian section. (ב': ט')
- According to *R' Yishmael*, if one purchased an animal for a *Nochri* and is not aware if it had given birth, what is the difference if this animal is goat, sheep or cow? (ג': א')
- Explain the opinion of *R' Akiva* regarding the previous question. (ג': א')
- Regarding the previous case, what is the opinion of *R' Shimon ben Gamliel* if the purchased animal was feeding? (ג': ב')
- If a *bechor* has a *mum* can its hair be removed to analyse the *mum*? (ג': ג')
- Explain the debate regarding hair that fell off a *bechor ba'al mum*, and then the animal was slaughtered. (ג': ד')
- According to *R' Yosi*, to what cases was the debate really referring? (ד': ג')
- For how long must a *yisrael* take care of the *bechor* before giving it to the *kohen*? (ד': א')
- In which two cases could one give the *bechor* to the *kohen* immediately? (ד': א')
- How is the first year of the *bechor* calculated and why is it important? (ד': א'-ב')
- Explain the debate regarding a *bechor* that had a *mum* and was slaughtered and only then shown to an expert to examine? (ד': ג')

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

שבת קודש	Friday	Thursday	Wednesday	Tuesday	Monday	Sunday
כ"ז אלול 27 th September	Bechorot 5:6-6:1	Bechorot 5:2-3	Bechorot 4:10 - 5:1	Bechorot 4:8-9	כ"ב אלול 22 nd September	כ"א אלול 21 st September
Bechorot 4:4-5	Bechorot 4:6-7					

