



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 18 | Bamidbar | Sichah 1

## Standing Out With Distinction

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## 1.

### SAFEGUARDING

Commenting on the verse<sup>1</sup> “You shall appoint {*tifkod*} Aharon and his sons, and they shall safeguard their priesthood; any foreigner<sup>2</sup> who approaches shall be put to death,” Rashi remarks: “*They shall safeguard their priesthood*, כהונתם — receiving the blood {of offerings in a receptacle}, sprinkling it, and burning {the fats}, and other services entrusted to the *kohanim*.” Rashi understands the words “their priesthood” to refer to the *kohanim*’s service, so “**they shall safeguard** their priesthood” means that they should prevent a “foreigner” from performing any of these services (“any foreigner who approaches shall be put to death”).

*Ibn Ezra*, on the other hand, interprets “*they shall safeguard their priesthood* — They should not become disqualified.” Meaning, the *kohanim* must safeguard themselves (**their** priesthood), to avoid becoming disqualified (through ritual impurity, etc.) to carry out the functions required of the priesthood .

We need to understand: Why does Rashi interpret the word, כהונתם, “their priesthood” (**not** according to its simple {semantic} meaning, that it refers to the priesthood **itself**, as *Ibn Ezra* does, but to) “services entrusted to the *kohanim*”?

[We might venture to say that Rashi was compelled to do so by the conclusion of the verse — “any foreigner who approaches shall be put to death” — which is talking about a non-*kohen* who performs any of the *kohanim*’s services. Presumably, this would imply that the beginning of verse is also speaking about priestly service. However, we cannot say this, if this were the case, Rashi would have also quoted the verse’s conclusion, or at least have alluded to it by writing, “etc.”

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<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:10.

<sup>2</sup> {I.e. a non-*kohen*.}

In truth, the verse's conclusion does not support this alternate explanation because the clause, "Any foreigner who approaches shall be put to death" is not necessarily a continuation of the first point, "they shall safeguard their priesthood"; it could be possibly making a **different** point.]

We must also clarify: Why does Rashi also quote the words "they shall safeguard"? Why is he not content to quote just the words (that he interprets, viz.,) "their priesthood"?

## 2.

UNIQUE TO KOHANIM OR NOT?

Studying Rashi's remarks, one would assume at first glance that "receiving the blood, sprinkling it, and burning" are specific examples of "services entrusted to the *kohanim*."

But if this is how we interpret Rashi's remarks, we must clarify:

a) Rashi's **elaboration**: (a) Why are examples necessary altogether? Rashi could have simply said "services entrusted to the *kohanim*." (b) If Rashi's goal is to exclude any steps prior to receiving the blood, seemingly, it would have been more appropriate to say,<sup>3</sup> "All services from receiving {the blood} and on are entrusted to *kohanim*." (c) If {for whatever reason} Rashi does need to cite examples, why specifically **three** examples?

b) The **order** of Rashi's remarks: Why does Rashi list these examples first, followed by "services entrusted to the *kohanim*"? The order should have been reversed: First "services entrusted to the *kohanim* (a general statement, followed by the specifics) **for example**, receiving the blood, etc."

c) Most importantly, since receiving and sprinkling the blood were, as discussed, "services entrusted to *kohanim*," Rashi should have said, "**and other** services entrusted to *kohanim*."

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<sup>3</sup> Similar to his remarks on *Vayikra* 1:5.

Based on the above, we understand that Rashi's intent is that "they shall safeguard their priesthood" consists of **two** categories: a) "Receiving the blood, sprinkling it, and burning" — services not entrusted {exclusively} to *kohanim*; b) **and** (another category), "services entrusted to *kohanim*."

This is puzzling:

a) Rashi himself already remarked at the beginning of *parshas Vayikra*:<sup>4</sup> "{All services} from receiving {the blood} and on are **obligations of the *kohanim***." So how can we assert that "receiving the blood, sprinkling it, and burning" were **not** included in the "services entrusted to *kohanim*"?

b) If "receiving the blood, etc." could be interpreted as *not* being "services entrusted to *kohanim*," we still need to clarify: What compelled Rashi to say that "(they shall safeguard) **their priesthood**" refers also to services not {exclusively} "entrusted to *kohanim*"?

### 3.

A NEW TASK

The explanation:

Rashi is compelled to interpret "they shall safeguard their priesthood" as not referring to the safeguarding of the actual priesthood (*Ibn Ezra's* interpretation), but to the safeguarding the "**services** entrusted to the *kohanim*," because the purpose of this verse is to introduce the appointment of Aharon and his sons to a new role. As Rashi himself says, the word "*tifkod*" is "an expression of appointment..."<sup>5</sup> If the clause, "they shall safeguard their priesthood," meant that they should cautiously "avoid becoming disqualified" (from their status as *kohanim*), this would not have been a new appointment —

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> {As opposed to "counting," which is another definition of the same word.}

they had been already instructed about this in *parshas Emor* (that a *kohen* must be careful {not to become ritually impure}).

Rashi, therefore, interprets this new appointment to mean that they must ensure that a non-*kohen* does not perform any “services entrusted to the *kohanim*”: “They shall safeguard... and any foreigner who approaches shall be put to death” all refer to the same duty.

We can now understand why Rashi also quotes in his caption the words “they shall safeguard” — which connote the appointment of the *kohanim* to this role. He quotes these words because the proof for his interpretation is that the Torah here introduces a new duty for Aharon and his sons.

#### 4.

*LEVIIM OR KOHANIM?*

Rashi answers another question on this verse:

Both the earlier and the later verses discuss the *leviim* (their service, their census, etc.). So how do the instructions for the assignment of a new role for Aharon and his sons who were *kohanim* — “they shall safeguard their priesthood” — fit in here? On the face of it, the Torah should have described this appointment earlier, when it says,<sup>6</sup> “These are the names of the sons of Aharon, the anointed ***kohanim***, whom He consecrated to serve as *kohanim*,” or in other similar verses.

This must mean that based solely on the earlier passages regarding the service of the *leviim*, we might have assumed that certain services in the *Mishkan* and in the Temple could have been performed by a “foreigner.” Therefore, the Torah must **immediately** state: “You shall appoint Aharon and his sons... any foreigner who approaches shall be put to death.”

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<sup>6</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:3.

## 5.

ONLY KOHANIM

The explanation:

On the Torah's previously statement<sup>7</sup> that the *leviim* must protect the “charge {*mishmeres*} of the **Jewish people**,” Rashi remarks: **All** Jews are obligated to tend to the needs of the Temple, but the *leviim* act in their stead, **as their agents....**”

Since the *leviim* act as agents of all Jews for “the needs of the Temple,” we might have assumed that the services performed in the past by regular Israelite Jews (as we will soon discuss) could have been, or should have been, performed by *leviim*, “in their stead, as their agents,” once the *Mishkan* was erected.

This was Rashi's intent in interpreting the verse, “they shall safeguard their priesthood” to specifically mean “receiving the blood, sprinkling it, and burning,” since previously **these** specific services were performed by **all** Jews (as we will explain in section 6). Thus, we may have thought that now {after the *Mishkan* was erected} these services should be performed by the *leviim* “in their stead, as their agents.” To forestall this misunderstanding, the Torah immediately says, “they shall safeguard their priesthood, and any foreigner {i.e., non-kohen} who approaches shall be put to death.”

Rashi, nonetheless, is not content with this, and adds (a second category): “**and** other services entrusted to the *kohanim*.” These other services refer to services that were performed by *kohanim* exclusively **at the outset**, despite there being no reason to assume that a (*levi* {who is also a non-*kohen*, and thus a}) foreigner may perform them. Since **here** the commandment “they shall safeguard their priesthood” had to be given regarding “receiving the blood, sprinkling it, and burning,” obviously, then, the warning that “they shall safeguard their priesthood” includes and applies to all services. This also applies

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<sup>7</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:8.

those services that were always performed exclusively by *kohanim*. And on the contrary, regarding these services, the warning applies all the more so.

## 6.

### THE ONE TIME JEWS PERFORMED THE SERVICE

Where do we see {a source indicating} that the Jewish people performed the above-mentioned services, which might have led to the assumption that these services were now entrusted (to the Jewish people, and by extension) to the *leviim* (as their agents)?

We find this clearly in *pshuto shel mikra*, in *parshas Bo*, regarding the *korban Pesach*<sup>8</sup> in Egypt. The Jews were commanded:<sup>9</sup> “They shall take the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel... They shall eat the meat, roasted over fire... with its legs and its innards.” Evidently, the Jews had performed three services: (a) “They shall take the blood,” meaning (as **Rashi** explains), “**receiving the blood**”; (b) they shall “put it...” (in place of) the “**sprinkling**”; (c) it shall be “roasted over fire” — similar to the service of “**burning** {the fats}” (on the altar’s fire).

Therefore, we might have assumed that regarding future *korban Pesachs* [which would be similar to the *korban Pesach* in Egypt, with many laws of future *korban Pesachs* being derived from the *korban Pesach* in Egypt, as **Rashi** discusses in *parshas Bo*], these steps would also be associated with the Jewish people, and the *leviim* would perform them “in their stead, as their agents.” To forestall this mistake, the Torah immediately says that “they shall safeguard their priesthood, receiving the blood, sprinkling it, and burning...,” as mentioned.

The issue as to how we might have assumed that these services could have (also) been performed by *leviim*, when Rashi already derived from an earlier verse that “{all services} from receiving {the blood} and on are obligations of the

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<sup>8</sup> {Paschal sacrifice.}

<sup>9</sup> *Shemos* 12:7-9.

*kohanim*” (as discussed in section 2), is not a concern. For this verse (and Rashi’s remark) relates to a *korban olah* {elevation offering} (and the other offerings described in the beginning of *Chumash Vayikra*). No verse indicates that only *kohanim* could perform the services associated with future *korban Pesachs* [or similarly, with tithes].

## 7.

### RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

The lesson from the above in our *avodah*:

There exists a distinction between various categories of Jews (about **all** of whom, generally speaking, the Torah says,<sup>10</sup> “you shall be to me a kingdom of *kohanim*...”). This distinction applies to the extent that even {regular} Jews who are involved with certain services — **their own** “needs of the Temple” — are nonetheless enjoined severely by the Torah that “any foreigner who approaches shall be put to death.” Not only does a non-*kohen* who serves have nothing to gain in holiness; on the contrary, he stands to lose, as such service leads, G-d forbid, to him forfeiting his life (he “dies”).

How much more does this lesson apply regarding the separation and distinction between the Jewish people and other nations. There are certain elements who attempt (by means other than through halachic conversion) to “blend” into the Jewish people a true “foreigner” from among “the nations.” They rationalize this attempt by thinking that while this {forbidden inclusion} may indeed damage and pose a great danger for the Jewish people, we should, all the same, do the non-Jew a favor. But the exact opposite is true: Considerable damage will also be inflicted on the non-Jew; he will become a great stumbling block for everyone — leading to the loss of his own existence.<sup>11</sup>

Only when we do not disturb the “**distinction** between the Jewish people and the other nations,” a distinction set in place by the Creator of the universe

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<sup>10</sup> *Shemos* 19:6.

<sup>11</sup> {I.e., the forfeiture of his life.”}



and the Giver of the Torah, can we attain genuine peace and goodness in the world for all of the world's inhabitants.

– Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Bamidbar* 5734 (1974)