

Rabbi's Article II

The Kohain and the Levi

The verse (-Deuteronomy 31:9) states, "Then Moses wrote this Torah, and gave it to the Kohanim (-Link), the descendants of Levi (-Link), who carried the ark of the covenant of the L-rd, and to all the elders of Israel," upon which Rashi (-Link) comments, "When it was entirely completed, he gave it to the members of his tribe." Meaning, that he did not give the Torah to the *Kohanim*, but to the entire tribe of Levi (Moses' tribe). And Rashi deduces this simply because, the verse concludes with, "and to all the elders of Israel," meaning to all the 12 Tribes, hence, it wouldn't make sense that the only tribe that Moses didn't give a Torah to is the Levites, his own tribe!

The question is, many times previous did the verse refer to the *Kohanim* as, "the *Kohanim* the Levites," and at the first time the verse did this (-ibid 17:9), Rashi explained it as, "the *Kohanim* which come from the tribe of Levi." Hence, this terminology means only the *Kohanim*, and not the entire tribe of Levi! Therefore, we must say that Moses gave the Torah to the *Kohanim* ("who carried the ark of the covenant of the L-rd"), and with this, Moses' through the *Kohanim*, gave it the entire tribe of Levi, just as he gave the Torah to all the other tribes through their, "Elders of Israel." The point being, that even though the *Kohanim* camped separately from the rest of the tribe of Levi, and G-d had *separated* the *Kohanim* from their tribe, nevertheless, they were not separated in the way of being *not part of*, but rather, in addition to G-d separating the tribe of Levi from the other tribes, to belong to the Holy Temple's service to G-d, G-d then added on to the *Kohanim* an additional *separation* for this service.

There are three times in the Torah that we find clearly that the *Kohanim* are part of the tribe of Levi:

- (i) Our verse.
- (ii) After all the other tribes brought an inauguration for the altar (-Rashi, Numbers 8:1), "when Aaron saw the dedication of the chieftains, he felt distressed over not joining them in this dedication-neither he nor his tribe. So G-d said to him, '...you will light and prepare the lamps.'
- (iii) After the rebellion of Korach (-Link), G-d told Moses to tell Aaron (-ibid 17:17-18), "take... a staff for each father's house. Twelve staffs... Inscribe Aaron's name on the staff of Levi," upon which Rashi comments, "Although I have divided them into two families, the family of *kehanim* separate and the family of the Levites separate, it is, nevertheless, one tribe."

Now, seemingly, specifically by these three cases the *Kohanim* should not be seen as part-and-parcel of the tribe of Levi!

- (i) Moses' giving the Torah: Even though that concerning the entire tribe of Levi it is written (-Deuteronomy 33:10), "They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, and Your Torah to Israel," nevertheless, the verse clearly states (-ibid 17: 9-11), "And you shall come to the kohain!"
- (ii) Aaron's kindling the Menorah: Only Kohanim can do this, and not a Levi. Hence, the Levites should have needed a *different* compensation for not being part of the altar's inauguration.
- (iii) Korach's Rebellion: Korach was a Levite, who was fighting against the notion of *Kohanim*!!

On a mystical level, the difference between the *kohain* and the *Levi* is that the *Kohain* is not allowed to become impure, and hence, may never live out of Israel. The Levites, however, may become impure, only that when they are to work in the Holy Temple, they must first purify themselves. Meaning, that the *kohain* must be completely separated from worldly matters, while not so the Levi. In *Tanya* (-Link) terms (-Chapter 27), A *kohain* represents the service of *transformation*, transforming the mundane into holiness. In the *kohain's* realm, there exist no evil. While the Levi represents the service of *subduing*, in which there is evil, but one must break it.

Now we can understand why in these three instances we are seeing the *Kohanim* as part-and-parcel of the Levites, for we are speaking of the *Kohanim* receiving something in order to fix an evil, which does not exist in the realm of a *kohain*, but rather, in the service of a Levi:

- (i) Moses did not give the *Kohanim* the Torah in order for them to simply study Torah on their own. Rather, he gave them the Torah specifically in order to make sure that there will be no sins. Moses gave them the Torah specifically after the rebuke of the previous two Torah-portions.
- (ii) Kindling the Menorah was, (a) in response to Aaron's, "felt distressed," which is about Aaron doing repentance (for he thought that this was connected to his participation in the *golden calf*), and (b) the menorah is all about bringing light into darkness.
- (iii) Taking the staffs, after the Korach's rebellion, was an amends and a nullification to the *evil* Korach created, as the verse states (-Numbers 17:20), "And I (G-d) will calm down (turning away) from Myself the complaints of the children of Israel."

Therefore, being that in these three instances the *Kohanim* were to engage and correct an *evil*, which is the work of the Levites, hence, the *Kohanim* are being called, "The *Kohanim*, the Levites."

But, if so (that these three instances was the work of dealing with the existence of evil), then why give it to the *Kohanim* at all, rather than, giving it directly to only the Levites?! The answer is, that through giving it to, "The *Kohanim*, the Levites," making the *Kohanim* the emissaries of the Levites, to deal with the evil, Moses is making sure that there will not only be the *subduing* of the evil, but rather, a complete *transformation* from the evil into goodness and holiness, to the point of, "transforming darkness into light, and bitter into sweet," making it that all becomes only good.