

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXIII: Pekudei (Ex. 38:21–40:38)

Essay 7. Sanctification of four priests

פסוק "וַיִּתְּצוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מִשֶּׁה וְאֶהָרֶן וּבְנָיו" וכו', בַּגְּמָרָא (דְּזִבְחִים דָּף י"ט) לְפִי גְרַסְתָּ רַש"י לְמַדִּין מִמֶּנּוּ שְׁפָל פִּיּוֹר שְׂאִין בּוֹ לְקַדֵּשׁ אַרְבַּעַה כְּהֻנִּים מִמֶּנּוּ אֵין מְקַדְשִׁין בּוֹ, שְׁפִירֵשׁ שָׁם מִשֶּׁה וְאֶהָרֶן תְּרִין, וּבְנָיו תְּרִין דְּמִיעוּט רַבִּים שְׁנַיִם, דָּאֵם לֹא כֹן הָיָה לוֹ לומר וְכָל בְּנָיו.

There is a **verse** in this parsha: “He placed the laver between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing. **From it, Moses and Aaron and his sons would wash** their hands and feet” (Ex. 40:30–31). **In the Gemara (of Zevachim page 19b), according to the reading of Rashi, we learn from it:** “As Rabbi Yosei, son of Rabbi Chanina, says: [Regarding] **any laver that does not contain enough [water] for four priests to sanctify** [their hands and feet] **from it, they may not sanctify** [their hands and feet] **with it.**” Rashi’s comment is that the laver needs to hold enough water for the sanctification of four priests. **As [Rashi] explained there, Moses and Aaron were two, and [Aaron’s surviving] sons** [after the deaths of Nadav and Abihu] **were two, for the minimum of a plurality is two, for if not so, i.e., if there had been more than two, it would have said “and all his sons.”**

וְהַקְשָׁה בְּסִפְרָא צֵאֵן קַדְשִׁים דְּמַקְרָא זֶה פְּתוּב בְּעֵשִׂיית הַפִּיּוֹר בְּפִרְשֵׁת פְּקוּדֵי וְלָמָּה לֹא רָמַז זֶה הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ לְמִשֶּׁה בְּצוּי הַפִּיּוֹר בְּפִרְשֵׁת פִּי תִשָּׂא, וְהֶרְמַב"ם (בְּפִרְקָה ה' מְהִלְכוֹת בֵּיאַת הַמִּקְדָּשׁ) לְמַד זֶה הַדִּין מִהַפְּסוּק שֶׁל פִּי תִשָּׂא, "וַיִּתְּצוּ אֶהָרֶן וּבְנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ", וּפִינְחָס הָיָה עִמָּהֶם הָרִי אַרְבַּעַה. וְהַפְּסוּף מְשַׁנֵּה דָחָה גְרַסָּא זוּ וּמִסִּיק פְּגַרְסַת רַש"י, וְגַם הָרַב הַנַּ"ל הַקְשָׁה בְּשֵׁם הַבְּרַפְתָּ הַזֶּבַח עַל פִּירוּשׁ זֶה שֶׁל הֶרְמַב"ם דְּאִיָּה מְצִינּוּ לְמִילְפָּה מוּבְנָיו שְׂיִהְיוּ אַרְבַּעַה וְשְׂיִהְיֶה פִּינְחָס עִמָּהֶם וְהַנִּיחוּ בְּצַרְיָה עֵינֵי וְעֵי"ש.

The sefer Tzon Kedoshim¹ questions: This verse for the making of the laver is written in parshat Pikudei; why didn't G-d, may He be Blessed, hint to Moses the capacity requirement in His earlier command of [making] the laver in parshat Ki Tisa, “Make a laver of copper and a stand of copper for it, for washing; and place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar. Put water in it, and let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and feet [in water drawn] from it.” (Ex. 30:18–19).

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¹ Rabbi Avraham Chaim Shoren, *Tzon Kedoshim* (Wandsbek [Hamburg] 1729).

The Rambam (in the Mishneh Torah, chapter 5 of the laws of Entering the Sanctuary, halacha 13), did, in fact, learn this law from the earlier verse of Ki Tisa, “and from it, let Aaron and his sons wash their hands and feet” (Ex. 30:19). The Rambam states there: “How much water must there be in the basin? At least enough for four priests to sanctify [their hands and feet] from it, as it says, ‘Aaron and his sons.’ Together with him, there were Elazar, Itamar, and Pinchas with them, this was a total of four.” I.e., whereas Rashi’s count of four includes Moses, the Rambam’s count of four instead include Pinchas.

The Kessef Mishneh² rejected this reading of the Rambam, and inferred according to the reading of Rashi.

Also, the rabbi mentioned above, the Tzon Kedoshim, questioned, in the name of the Birkat haZevach,³ the Rambam’s explanation and how one can learn his understanding of a total of four, and that Pinchas will be among them, and they put this aside as requiring examination.

ועוד יש להקשות על פירושו של הרמב"ם, דאיך הנה פניחוס עמהם והלא לא נתפחה פניחוס עד שהרגו לזמרי, וכשהרג את זמרי כבר מת אהרן ונמצא שלעולם לא קדשו ארבעה בבת אחת, אלא אהרן ושני בניו, או שלושה בניו לבדם, דהיינו אלעזר ואיתמר ופניחוס, או אהרן וארבעה בניו.

Also, one should question the explanation of the Rambam, that how was Pinchas with them, for didn’t he become a priest only after he had killed Zimri,⁴ and when he killed Zimri, Aaron had already died,⁵ and so we find that they never consecrated four priests at one time. Rather, if one relies upon the verse in Ki Tisa, reading “Aaron and his sons,” then either it was three at one time, that is, Aaron and his two surviving sons, Elazar and Itamar; or the three “sons” alone, which were Elazar, Itamar, and Pinchas, as Pinchas was a son of Elazar and thus a grandson of Aaron; or else it was five at one time: Aaron and his four sons, i.e., Nadav, Abihu, Elazar, and Itamar.

ולתירוץ קושיא זו יש לומר דבפרק י"ב דזבחים (דף ק"א) איתא רבי יהודה ור' שמעון אומרים מפני טומאה נשפרה שאם אתה אומר מפני אגנינות נשפרה והלא פניחוס הנה עמהם שלא הנה אונן. ורבי נחמיה סבירא ליה שלא נתפחה פניחוס עד שהרגו לזמרי. ואפשר שהרמב"ם סבירא ליה כדיעה זו שפניחוס הנה פהו מתחלה.

As a solution to this question, it can be said that in the 12th chapter of tractate Zevachim (page 101a), Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon say the sin offering was burned due to ritual impurity. For if you say that it was burned, rather than being eaten, because of mourning on the part of Aaron, Elazar, and Itamar following the deaths of Nadav and Abihu,

² Rabbi Joseph Karo (1488–1575), author of the Beit Joseph and Shulchan Aruch. The *Kessef Mishneh* (Venice, 1574–75) is a commentary on the Rambam’s *Mishneh Torah*.

³ Rabbi Aharon Shmuel Kaidenover (1614–76), Polish-Lithuanian rabbi, *Birkat HaZevach* (Amsterdam 1669).

⁴ Num. 25:6–8. Zevachim 101b discusses that Pinchas wasn’t considered a priest until after this incident, and Rashi on Num. 25:13 also notes this.

⁵ Num. 20:28.

wasn't Pinchas with them? I.e., he could have eaten the sin offering, as **he was not a mourner**, as he was neither a father or brother of Nadav and Abihu, but rather their nephew, and thus he was not obliged to ritual mourning. I.e., they apparently feel that Pinchas was a priest even before he killed Zimri. **But Rabbi Nechemya holds that Pinchas did not become a priest until he killed Zimri. It is possible that the Rambam holds according to this thinking of Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Shimon: that Pinchas was a priest initially**, even before he killed Zimri.

ועוד איתא שם פְּרָק י"ד (דף קט"ו) "ונַעַדְתִּי שְׁמָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכַבְדִּי" אַל תִּקְרִי "בְּכַבְדִּי" אֶלָּא "בְּמִכּוּבְדִי", דְּבָר זֶה אָמַר הַקַּב"ה לְמֹשֶׁה מִתְחִלָּה וְלֹא יָדָעוּ עַד שְׁמָתוֹ בְּנָיו שֶׁל אֶהְרֹן וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש. דְּשָׁמַע מִיָּנָה שְׁמִתְחִלָּה נִגְזַר עֲלֵיהֶם, וּפְדָאִיתָא בְּמִדְרָשׁ שְׁמַסִּינֵי נָטְלוּ אַפּוֹפּוֹסִין שְׁלֵקָהּ לְמִיתָה דְּכַתִּיב "וְאֶל־אֶצִּילִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" וְכוּ'. וְאִם כֵּן לְדַעַת הַרְמַב"ם יֵשׁ לֹאמַר שֶׁהַפְּתוּב אָמַר "וּבְנָיו" סָתַם דְּמִשְׁמַע כָּל הַבְּנִים שֶׁיִּרְחָצוּ עִם אֶהְרֹן, וְיֵשׁ בְּכֻלָּל זֶה גַם כֵּן פִּינְחָס, שֶׁבְנֵי בְנֵי הָרִי הֵם כְּבָנִים. דְּאִין סְבָרָא לֹאמַר שֶׁ"וּבְנָיו" כּוּלָּל גַּם נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא שֶׁהָרִי הַפְּתוּב אֹמֵר "וְהִיְתָה לָהֶם חֻק־עוֹלָם לֹו וְלֹדוֹרְעוֹ". וְאִי אֶפְשָׁר שֶׁהַפְּתוּב יִדְבַר זֶה עַל נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא שֶׁכָּבַר גְּזַר עֲלֵיהֶם מִיתָה כְּשֶׁאָמַר לְמֹשֶׁה "וְנִקְדַּשׁ בְּכַבְדִּי". וְאִין הָכִי נִמְי שְׁמִתְחִלָּה לֹא הָיָה לָנוּ לִימּוּד בְּרוּר מִזֶּה הַפְּסוּק שֶׁיְהִיּוּ צָרִיכִים אַרְבָּעָה כְּהֻנִּים דְּנִקְא אֶלָּא מִהַפְּסוּק שֶׁל פְּרָשָׁה זוֹ "וְיִרְחָצוּ מִמָּנּוּ מִזֶּשֶׁה וְאֶהְרֹן וּבְנָיו", אֲמַנָּם לְאַחַר שְׁמָתוֹ נָדָב וְאַבְיָהוּא נוֹדַע לָנוּ לְמַפְרָע שְׁגָם בְּצִיּוּי הַפִּיּוּר כִּדְ הִיְתָה כְּוֹנֵת הַפְּתוּב.

Also, as far as not counting Nadav and Abihu, **we find there in the 14th chapter** of tractate Zevachim (page 115b): “**and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My glory** (Ex. 29:43), **don’t read it as ‘by My glory,’ but rather ‘by My honored ones.’ This is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Moses initially, but [the meaning] wasn’t known [to Moses or others] until the sons of Aaron died, etc.** Once the sons of Aaron died, [Moses] said to him: Aaron, my brother, your sons died only to sanctify the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He.” **See there** in Zevachim.

We hear from this that it was initially decreed upon them, as it is written in the midrash, Lev. Rabbah 20:10, that from Sinai, they received their verdict of death, as it is written, “Against the leaders of the Israelites, He did not raise a hand” (Ex. 24:11).

If so, according to the Rambam, it can be said that Scripture said “and his sons” only, with the meaning all the sons that washed with Aaron, and in this category is also Pinchas, for the sons of sons, i.e., grandsons, are also like sons. For there’s no thinking to say that “and his sons” includes Nadav and Abihu, for Scripture says, “they shall wash their hands and feet, that they may not die; it shall be an eternal law for them—for him and his offspring—through the generations” (Ex. 30:21). It’s impossible that Scripture would say this about Nadav and Abihu, for death was already decreed upon them when [G-d] said to Moses, “and it shall be sanctified by My glory.”

It is indeed so that initially, we had no clear lesson from this verse that we would need to simultaneously sanctify four priests, other than from the verse in this parsha, “From it, Moses and Aaron and his sons would wash their hands and feet” (Ex. 40:31). But after Nadav and Avihu died, it became known to us in retrospect that even in the command of making the laver, this was the intention of Scripture.

ובין דברי הרמב"ם ובין דברי רש"י הם דברי אלהים חיים, אלא שרש"י נקט פסוק של פרשה זו לפי שהוא לימוד יותר פשוט, ועוד משום דאזיל לשיטתיה דבפרכת פינחס פירש כמאן דאמר לא נתכנהו פינחס עד שהרגו לזמרי. והרמב"ם נקט הפסוק של כי תשא כי היכי דלא תקשה קושיא הנ"ל למה לא רמז זה הדין בצויי הכיור, והודיע לנו בזה שגם מאותו פסוק שפיר ילפינו זה הרמז.

Both the words of Rambam and the words of Rashi are the words of the living G-d, but Rashi took a verse of this parsha because it was a simpler lesson. Also, [Rashi] followed his method because in parshat Pinchas (Num. 25:13), he explained that it says in tractate Zevachim that Pinchas didn't become a priest until after he had killed Zimri.

The Rambam took the verse of Ki Tisa so that one should not ask the question above as to why [G-d] did not hint this law in His command to build the laver, and informed us by this that the derivation of this hint is superior from this verse.

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