

Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Korach

G-d said to Aharon... bring close your brothers, the Leviyim, they will assist you and they serve you (18:1-2).

Rashi explains what those services were (Rashi to 8:26, 18:2; c.f. Sifri 117).

Firstly, the Leviyim would be the gatekeepers for the Mishkan and later for the Beit HaMikdash. Their duties required them to open and close the doors at the appointed times, and to ensure that only the authorized kohanim and no others would enter the more holy places within.

Secondly, the Leviyim would be the singers, the choristers, for the music that went together with the services. The Temple services were instrumental and choral. Although we know about the T'hilim that they sang, we know relatively little about the musical instruments actively involved and virtually nothing about what the tunes were, as there was no way of writing the musical notes down as there is today.

Thus the roles of the Leviyim were very important. They, rather than the kohanim themselves, were the people the OLEI REGEL would meet on visiting the Beit HaMikdash. And they, the Leviyim, were the key take-aways experienced by those making ALIYA L'REGEL, as we will now examine.

Pilgrimages from the golah to Jerusalem, say from Rome or from Alexandria, were arduous and often fraught with danger. They entailed elaborate preparation and months of absence from home, happening probably once or twice a lifetime for the typical individual. The pilgrims would bring their korbanot or more likely purchase them on site, lead them up to the door, hand them over to the kohanim and that would be the last they would see of them. What would very likely be their biggest impression? Apart from the kedusha and the splendor of the surroundings and masses of people assembled for the same purpose, it would be the Leviyim as gatekeepers, spread all over all the kohanim-only entry points. And, most importantly, they would be deeply impressed by the Leviyim as musicians: the sounds of the choral worship accompanied by musical instruments would be ringing in their ears all the way home and for a long time afterwards. Even if they only got a smell of the korbanot and possibly not even that.

Those were the functions of the Leviyim: to safeguard the Beit HaMikdash and to beautify the services of the Beit HaMikdash. They decided what had to be kept out and they decided what had to be brought in.

Rav Asher Weiss (Minchat Asher) explains that what has to be kept out and what has to be brought in applies to

the centre of our society and traditions - the Jewish home, and most especially where children are concerned. Firstly, as we all know, there are certain things easily available today that can be irreparably harmful to young people who are invariably highly impressionable. They can access the most noxious and deadly sites with a few clicks in the wrong direction: immersing themselves in highly toxic materials that are venomous to any civilized society.

But, as Rav Weiss, explains, no gates are completely impervious. Unlike in the Beit HaMikdash, gatekeepers cannot be 100% effective however hard they try and whatever sanctions they threaten. If a young person wants those products, he or she will find a way of getting hold of them.

The right way, he explains, is to follow the other special duty of the Leviyim: bringing attractiveness to our traditions. In the Beit HaMikdash, it was the lasting impressions created by the beautiful traditions of the choral, musically-accompanied services. These made going to the Beit HaMikdash a pleasure. The same applies in the Jewish home: our range of mitzvot: Talmud Torah, daily t'fila, Shabbat, Chagim, (and no doubt the traditional foods as well) and so on. In fact, as Rav Weiss emphasizes, the second b'racha of Birkat HaTorah asks G-d to make our Torah learning a pleasant experience so that our children will likewise follow. It is the duty of

parents to make the home and its values pleasant, attractive, appealing to the children to such a degree that they will not even think of bring such items inside in the first place... 🌿📖