

ACCESSORY MODE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

The Leviim shall be Mine – I am Hashem.

Meshech Chochmah: A well-known halachic distinction differentiates between the holiness of objects. It bases that distinction upon their proximity to some item of intrinsic *kedushah*/ holiness. An accessory to *kedushah* must itself be treated with *kedushah* and elevated respect. But that which serves the accessory – an accessory to an accessory, if you will – does not require the reverential treatment of a single or primary accessory. The primary accessory cannot be casually disposed of, but requires sequestering or burial; the secondary accessory does not.

Tefillin, for example, possess intrinsic holiness because of the Names of G-d they contain, both the scrolls and even the black leather boxes in which those scrolls are inserted.^[2] A bag designated for *tefillin* is a primary accessory, and is treated itself like a holy object. A second bag into which the *tefillin* bag is placed is a secondary accessory, and not treated with *kedushah*.

We can make a case for our *parshah* being the source of this distinction. Both Kohanim and Leviim serve in the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash, places of great intrinsic *kedushah*. A key difference between them is that Kohanim are employed in the direct service of the *mishkan*. That puts them essentially in the position of primary accessories to *kedushah*. Leviim, however, are described as “given to Aharon and his sons,”^[3] i.e. they are accessories to the Kohanim who are themselves accessories. As secondary accessories, they are not treated as possessing *kedushah*.

This is exactly how they are treated. The Torah commands, “Holy they will be”^[4] in reference to the Kohanim. A kohen's daughter, possessed of this *kedushah*, becomes disqualified from eating *ma'aser* if she participates in an illicit union. Ironically, a Levi's daughter who does the same does not become disqualified. Tosafos^[5] explains that the *kedushah* of the Kohen (and hence his daughter) is one that physically consecrates. When this *kedushah* is sullied and violated, it disappears entirely. She becomes disqualified even from eating *ma'aser*, which is available even to the Levi. On the other hand, the lesser specialness vouchsafed a Levi is harder. When his daughter violates it, it does not disappear completely.

The key difference is that the Kohen's position acts like real *kedushah*. As a primary accessory to essential *kedushah*, he enjoys a position that behaves like other forms of *kedushah*. What the Levi enjoys as a secondary accessory is not really *kedushah* in the same sense. It is a function of status,

not *kedushah*. It does not vanish when mistreated.

In transporting the various components of the *mishkan* – all of which enjoyed *kedushah* – the Leviim generally moved them through wagons. Thus, the wagons became primary accessories, but the Leviim did not. The Kehas family was the exception. They bore the most important utensils on their shoulders – but only after those utensils were placed in covers. Those covers became primary accessories, and the Leviim again acted only as secondary accessories.

The strongest indication of that the difference in status of Kohanim and Leviim translates into *kedushah* or lack thereof comes from the way their relationship with Hashem is described. G-d is called, "Hashem, their *Elokim*,"^[6] regarding the Kohanim; He is simply called "Hashem" when speaking of the Leviim. Now, the four-letter Name of G-d does not take a possessive. One cannot speak of "my Hashem." This is not so in regard to *Elokim*/ G-d, where the Torah in fact does utilize phrases like, *zeh keli*^[7] / "this is my G-d." The use of the possessive in relation to the Kohanim ("...their *Elokim*") tells us of a closer relationship and bond between Kohanim and HKBH than can exist with Leviim. That closer relationship results in real *kedushah*.

1. Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bamidbar 3:45 .
2. Those of the head also bear the Name of Hashem, through the letter *shin* emblazoned on them. But even the tefillin of the arm are treated as items of intrinsic *kedushah*. See Biur Halachah 42:3 s.v. *tefillin chad zimna* .
3. Bamidbar 3:9 .
4. Vayikra 21:6 .
5. Bechoros 47A s.v. *de-tanya* .
6. Vayikra 20:6 .
7. Shemos 15:2 .