

Our Gifts To Kohanim

Machberes: Inside The Chassidish And Yeshivish World

BY RABBI GERSHON TANNENBAUM

Note: As we recall the service performed in the Beis HaMikdash on Yom Kippur, it is an appropriate time to publicize the work of Igud HaKohanim.

Kehuna.org is the educational website of Igud HaKohanim, the foremost contemporary *kehunah* organization operated by *kohanim*. The primary purpose of Igud Kohanim is advancing the application of *kehunah*, the Jewish priesthood, to the general Jewish population. *Kehunah* has been a fundamental part of mankind's relationship with the G-d of Israel since the world's creation. It has been a part of the deep-rooted heritage and history of the Jewish people since before the Exodus, and continues to have an important role in Judaism today.

Kehunah, integral to historical and contemporary Jewish life, is also a fundamental component of the future third Holy Temple. Igud HaKohanim takes

pride in delivering to today's *kohen* a comprehensive database of what the Torah and *halachah* expect of *kohanim*, where a *kohen* will find viable means of connecting with other *kohanim* and to the rich Torah- and *halachah*-based heritage of the *kehunah*.

Who is a *kohen*? A *kohen* is a Jewish priest by birth and of direct patrilineal descent from Aharon HaKohen. The *kehunah* (priesthood) in Judaism is passed down from father to son, provided the son is not the product of a marriage prohibited to a *kohen*. Once born a *kohen*, the *kohen* remains so for life and passes the *kehunah* on to his offspring. A *kohen* has no option in terms of *kehunah* restrictions, such as becoming impure to the deceased, marrying a divorcée, etc., but does have an option in accepting benefits; i.e., the *kohen* has the right to forgo certain *kehunah* privileges.



Birkas Kohanim at the Kotel

The Torah and *Chazal* place numerous restrictions regarding whom a *kohen* may marry; only permitted marriages produce a "kosher" *kohen* fit to perform those services

a *kohen* is commanded to perform. Today, there are thousands of religious *kohanim* worldwide who are proud descendants of Aharon HaKohen and are happy to perform those *mitzvos* that apply to *kohanim*, including *nesias kapayim* (priestly blessings) and *pidyon ha'ben* (redemption of the firstborn son).

Kohanim are in fact members of *Shevet Levi*, and are often referred to in the Torah as "the *kohanim* the Levites." The Talmud cites Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi who counted 24 places in the Torah where the *kohanim* are called *Levi'im*. However, they are not interchangeable, nor have *Levi'im* been called *kohanim*. Scholars have compiled 21 locations where the reference has been found. The others are yet unknown. *Talmidei chachamim* have presented different ways to complete the count; however, there is no consensus beyond the 21 citations. This is discussed in *Sefer Ben Yehuda*, *Kuntres Eitz Yehuda*, and *Sefer Ohel Dovid*.

Of extreme interest is the intention of Igud HaKohanim to resurrect the *mitzvah* of giving the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum (the fourth or true stomach of cud-chewing animals) of every kosher slaughtered animal to a *kohen*. This *mitzvah* is unique in that it is to be performed by the *shochet*. This applies to every four-legged animal, even if slaughtered for commercial use and even if the animal does not belong to the *shochet*. The *mitzvah* of giving the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum is one of the "*matanos*" (gifts), the most frequent of all the 24 Torah-mandated gifts to the *kohen*.

Unfortunately, this *mitzvah* has fallen to the wayside of Jewish life. Torah-true observant Jews, *kohanim*, *shochtim*, and kashrus-certifying agen-

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cies are almost uniformly unaware of its details and specific requirements. Igud Kohanim has launched its campaign to restore the giving of the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum to *kohanim* and to the *mitzvah's* glory.

The following are some highlights of *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah* 61, which is titled "The Foreleg, Cheeks, and Abomasum to *Kohanim*."

The *shochet* is required to give the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum of an ox and sheep to a *kohen*. . . . The cheeks are from the portion where they begin up until the opening of the trachea, which is called "the great ring," including the tongue between those two joints. Also, the *shochet* is to give the cheeks with the attached skin and wool that is on the head of goats. The *shochet* is not permitted to soak the cheeks in hot water in order to remove its skin before giving it to the *kohen*. The *shochet* gives the abomasum to the *kohen* with all of its fat, both inner fat and outer fat. This is obligatory irrespective of whether the *kohanim* of an area have a custom to leave the fats with the owner of the animal. (61:1-4)

Even though it is permitted to eat from the (other) meat of the animal before the *shochet* separates and gives the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum to a *kohen*, the *mitzvah* is for the *shochet* to separate immediately. The foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum are forbidden to be eaten by a non-*kohen* (unless permitted or sold by the *kohen*). Note: The preferred fulfillment of the *mitzvah* is for the *shochet* to immediately

separate the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum, before the animal is checked for its kosher status. (61:5)

If the *shochet* is not slaughtering the animal for normal consumption, such as to feed dogs or for medicinal purposes, the *shochet* is nevertheless obligated to give the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum to a *kohen*. If, however, the *shochet* discovers that the animal is *treif* (non-kosher), the *shochet* is exempt from the *mitzvah*. Note: This applies if the animal is *treif* according to the Torah. If the animal is *treif* according to rabbinical interpretation, the matter is in dispute between the *Toras Yekusiel* and the *Rambam*. (61:6)

The *shochet* should initially attempt to give the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum to a *kohen* who is also a learned scholar. If no scholarly *kohen* is available, then an unlearned *kohen* can be a recipient. (61:7) The foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum can be given to a *kohenes* (female *kohen*) even if not married to a *kohen*. Giving the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum to the non-*kohen* husband of a *kohenes* fulfills the *mitzvah*. The *mitzvah* exempts a non-*kohen* husband of a *kohenes* from having to give a foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum. (61:8) *Kohanim* are exempt from this *mitzvah*. (61:22) *Levi'im* are exempt. (61:23) A partnership in an animal with a *kohen* or a non-Jew creates an exemption. (61:26)

A *shochet* should not distribute one set of foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum to several *kohanim*, as an individual *kohen* may not receive a sizable por-

tion. However, the foreleg may be given to one *kohen*, the abomasum to another *kohen*, and the cheeks to yet two other *kohanim*. If an ox is large, then the *shochet* may divide the foreleg, giving one part of the foreleg to each of two *kohanim*. (61:9)

If no *kohen* is immediately available to receive the gifts, then the *shochet* may consume or sell the parts. However, he must give the monetary value to a *kohen*. The *kohen* must not grab the gifts, nor verbally request them. The gifts should respectfully be given to him. If several *kohanim* are at a slaughterhouse or place of slaughter, modest *kohanim* withdraw their hands while gluttonous *kohanim* grab. However, if a *kohen* is in such place that he is unknown, he may acknowledge that he is a *kohen* and is ready

to receive. A *kohen* should not refuse the gifts, as the giving of the gifts is a *mitzvah*. (61:10-11)

The giving of the foreleg, cheeks, and abomasum is obligatory in all places, both in *Eretz Yisrael* and outside of it, with and without the existence of a Holy Temple. Some say that the *mitzvah* is not applicable outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, and so they have become accustomed. (61:21) Rashi, in his *Sefer HaPardes* published in Kushta, differentiating between the words *nohagu* and *minhag*, directs that in responding to a query in regard to the giving of these gifts, one should not quote the lenient opinion as an option. ❖

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