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בס"ד

Parashat Sav Part I On Transmission of Holiness: “All That Touch Them, Yiqdash”

1. On the Meaning of יקדש (*yiqdash*)

In Leviticus 6 and 7 G-d adds details to the five classes of sacrifices that had been described in chapters 1–5 and, for the most part, completes transmission of the basic laws that pertain to them. With that accomplished, Moses has the necessary information to proceed with the next step on the Tabernacle agenda. Accordingly, in Leviticus 8 we read of the installation of the priests, a seven-day procedure that had been prescribed in Exodus 29 in which sacrifices played a most prominent role.

In concluding the discussion of the grain offering (*minḥa*), the Torah ordains a law regarding holiness that is specific to the grain offering and to certain other items associated with the sanctuary: כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִגַע בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ (“all who [or ‘that’] touch them, *yiqdash*” [Lev. 6:11]). The plural בָּהֶם (“them”) indicates that whatever aspect of holiness this *yiqdash* describes or prescribes also applies to the two other sacrifices that were mentioned at the end of the previous verse with which the grain offering was equated. In that verse the Torah had stated regarding the grain offering, קֹדֶשׁ הוּא כְּחֹטְאֵת וְכֹאֲשֶׁם (“it is a most holy [item] like the *hattat* and *asham*”). A few verses later (6:20), when speaking of the *hattat* sacrifice, the Torah states, כָּל אֲשֶׁר יִגַע בְּבִשְׂרָהּ יִקְדָּשׁ (“all who [or ‘that’] touch its flesh, *yiqdash*.”)

Two similar clauses are found in Exodus. In regard to contact with the sacrificial altar, the Torah states: כָּל הַנִּגַּע בְּמִזְבֵּחַ יִקְדָּשׁ (“all who [or ‘that’] touch the altar, *yiqdash*” [Exod. 29:37]) and in regard to contact with the major Tabernacle accoutrements, upon their anointment and sanctification, the text states, כָּל הַנִּגַּע בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ (“all who [or that] touch them, *yiqdash*” [30:29]).

What do these four clauses – the only ones that contain this expression – mandate with the word *yiqdash* as regards coming into physical contact with a sacred item? Is the כָּל (all) that begins each of the clauses all-inclusive, referring to both persons and things, or is it limited to all of one or the other? Does *yiqdash* mean:

- “becomes holy,” that is, through physical contact with a holy item sanctity is transmitted to a person or thing, transforming a non-sanctified into a sanctified, or
- “should sanctify himself” (in the sense of purify himself), that is, any one who intends to or must touch the holy items specified is required to first purify himself or (in a slightly different interpretation), already be purified or sanctified.

Targum Onqelos and *Targum Jonathan* consistently translate *yiqdash* as *yitqadash*, also an ambiguous word. However, on the Exodus verses *Targum Jonathan* provides an expansion that explains his view: “Whoever approaches the altar from the sons of Aaron (that is, the priests), *yitqadash*; however, individuals from the rest of the nation are not allowed to approach lest they be incinerated from the glowing fire that emanates from the Holy” (on Exod. 29:37). In contrasting the permissibility for the *kohen* to have contact with the Holy with the prohibition for the non-*kohen*, he indicates that *yitqadash* is the past reflexive, meaning that one who intends to touch the holy objects should first purify himself. This definition of *yiqdash* is similar to the *q-d-sh* usage in G-d’s instructions to Moses just before the Sinai lawgiving that calls for preparatory purification: וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם הַיּוֹם וּמָחָר (“sanctify them today and tomorrow” [Exod. 19:10]) and וַיִּקְדָּשׁ אֶת הָעָם (“he sanctified the people” [v. 14]). Ibn Ezra on Exodus 29:37 basically agrees with this interpretation, as do Rashbam and Hizquni.

2. Ibn Ezra, the Talmudic Sages

On Exodus 30:29, however, Ibn Ezra takes a different approach. He states: “We learn from [the case of] ‘If a man is carrying sacrificial flesh’ (Hag. 2:12), that our verse is to be understood literally, that [just as] if sacrificial meat touches...foodstuffs they become sanctified, so also with the sacrificial altar, as it also is *qodesh qadashim* (most holy).”

The Haggai case referred to an inquiry addressed to the priests, as follows:

If a man is carrying sacrificial flesh (בֶּשֶׂר קֹדֶשׁ) in a fold of his garment, and with that fold touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any other food, will the latter become holy (הֲיִקְדָּשׁ)? In reply, the priests said “No.” (Hag. 2:12, NJPS)

Ibn Ezra apparently understood the question to be focused on the possible contagious power of the garment that had been in direct contact with the sacrificial flesh to transmit sanctity to third items. That point seems to have been articulated in the verse: וְנִגַּע בְּכַנּוֹפוֹ אֶל הַלֶּחֶם וְגו' (“and with that fold touches bread, etc.”). There was no question as to the contagious power of the sacrificial flesh itself. The questioner took for granted that the garment had become sanctified from contact with the sacrificial flesh, constituting the basis of his query, and this appears to be Ibn Ezra’s proof.

The reason Ibn Ezra associated the transmittal of sanctity with *qodesh qadashim* (higher status holiness) may be because the Torah only mentioned the term *yiqdash* (and the concept we are considering may be its meaning) in connection with *minha*, *hattat* and *asham* sacrifices – all cases of *qodesh qadashim*. *Yiqdash* was not mentioned in connection with the *shelamim* sacrifice, which is holy but not of the highest level.

However, the person in Haggai’s inquiry appears to be a non-*kohen*, since he is described as *ish* (“a man”) and therefore only allowed to have *shelamim* flesh! Perhaps Ibn Ezra did not consider *ish* as excluding a *kohen* or perhaps in his statement regarding the altar being *qodesh qadashim* he did not intend to exclude *shelamim* from sancta communication.

Can we be certain from the language of the inquiry that sanctity had spread to the garment? The man was carrying the sanctified flesh בְּכַנּוֹף בְּגָדוֹ (“in the fold of his garment”) and touched the foodstuffs בְּכַנּוֹפוֹ, perhaps meaning that the flesh that was in the fold essentially touched the food. In any event, from Haggai it appears that the communication of sanctity would apply at most to objects, not to people, since nothing was said about the man contracting sanctity.

The talmudic sages also interpreted the *yiqdash* verses as meaning that, in some settings, sanctity was communicable, but to an extremely restricted degree and of a different order. The inclusive *kol* (“all”) that begins each of the four phrases we are dealing with was understood in each case as “all that is fit” for the particular contact and relevant sanctity of the circumstance. Whatever is not “fit” is anomalous and its having contact is meaningless relative to sanctity and does not enter the picture. This is a nuanced understanding of the principle of transmittal of sanctity consistent with the nature of each context.

Thus, regarding contact with the altar, the sages referred the “all” to what was considered appropriate for the altar, such as a sacrifice that had been acceptable when brought to the sanctuary but was subsequently invalidated due to a technicality. Such an item should not be placed upon the altar but if somehow it was, the sanctity of the altar would communicate holiness to it and it would be allowed to be burnt on the altar (*b. Zebah.* 83a, b). Similarly, the sages interpreted the communicable holiness of sanctuary articles as only relevant to “what qualifies to be fit for them” (*b. Zebah.* 87a).

In the two Leviticus clauses of *yiqdash*, the sages explained the “all” to refer to any foodstuff that touched any of the sacrificial items and the law of *yiqdash* applied only when the foodstuff physically absorbed some substance from the sancta. These were not true cases of “holiness contagion” or the transmittal of abstract holiness from item to item; the transference only applied when the “holy” was sensed to be tangibly present to some degree in an affected item (BT *Zebah.* 97a; *Sifra Sav* 3:6).

Regarding the Haggai inquiry that was addressed to the priests, the talmudic sages took the word *ha-yiqdash* as referring to impurity rather than sanctity,

viewing the language as euphemisms of sorts, and interpreted the question accordingly (*b. Pesah*. 16b-17a).

3. Some Modern Views

A number of modern scholars are of the opinion that the Torah intended the scope of sanctity transmission to be much more inclusive than the limited application assigned to it in the tradition. They translate *yiqdash* as “becomes holy” and apply it even to people; in other words, people may become sanctified through contact with the holy and could then no longer engage in nonholy (standard everyday) pursuits. These scholars cite evidence from language usage and other scriptural passages and point to well-established norms in the ancient Near East as precedent. They are represented in some recent translations. Thus, the NJPS renders Leviticus 6:11 as, “Anything that touches these shall become holy...” without qualification. The Fox translation (Schocken Bible) has: “whatever touches it becomes holy (property)” with a note that it is a matter of dispute. Alter translates, “Whatever touches them shall become holy” with a note to the same effect.

These scholars find support from the many passages that deal with the laws of impurity. A large number of those laws are formulated in phraseology analogous to our sanctity clauses, such as כֹּל הַנִּגַּע בָּהֶם יִטְמָא (‘‘all who touch them shall become impure’’ [Lev. 11:26]; cf. Lev. 11:24, 27, 31; 15:10, 11, 21, 27). In each of these cases of impurity there is no doubt that the ‘‘all’’ includes people who become defiled through the contact. Many other clauses clearly refer to transmission of impurity to people without having the word ‘‘all.’’

Two Ezekiel passages also seem to imply the principle of sanctity contagion.

1. Priests who performed service in the temple and are going to enter the outer court where they will come into close proximity with non-priests are given cautionary instructions: ‘‘They shall remove the vestments in which they minister and shall deposit them in the sacred chambers; they shall put on other garments, lest they make the people consecrated by [contact with] their vestments’’ (Ezek. 44:19, NJPS). (The key Hebrew clause is וְלֹא יִקְדְּשׁוּ אֶת הָעָם בְּבגְדֵיהֶם.)

The NJPS furnishes a note on *consecrated*: ‘‘thereby rendering the people unfit for ordinary activity.’’

2. ‘‘This is the place where the priests shall boil the guilt offerings and the sin offerings, and where they shall bake the meal offerings, so as not to take them to the outer court and make the people consecrated’’ (Ezek. 46:20, NJPS). (The key Hebrew clause is וְלֹא יִקְדְּשׁוּ אֶת הָעָם.)

It is also maintained that the simple stem form of the Hebrew verb (the *qal*) of ק-ד-שׁ in which *yiqdash* is formulated implies ‘‘becoming holy’’ not ‘‘purify.’’ The latter meaning is thought to require *hitpa’el* or *pi’el*.

Other scholars, however, do not consider the above arguments compelling. The similar formulations of the *yiqdash* statements with those articulating impurity contagion are very possibly a quirk of biblical Hebrew and may be vestigial from pre-Torah times reflecting pre-Torah concepts. The Torah’s ritual program is significantly modified and ‘‘sanitized’’ from the neighboring cultures yet not all relevant language applications were revamped. Language cannot be changed quickly or easily. Phraseology that the people were familiar with was often retained long after the words were suffused with new meaning. The Torah often relied on context, as we shall discuss in the next section.

In the Haggai case cited earlier, the priests answered ‘‘no,’’ in *peshat* meaning that sanctity was not transmitted to the foodstuffs. In the next verse, Haggai asked them what is the law if a person who had been defiled by contact with a corpse had touched the foodstuffs. They answered in the positive, that the foodstuffs would be defiled.

Concerning the grammatical argument, the word *yiqdash* in the *qal* may have been the choice word in order to indicate either possible meaning of ‘‘purify himself’’ or ‘‘be in a pure state [beforehand].’’ It is agreed that the Septuagint does not translate *yiqdash* as ‘‘becomes holy’’ but it is a matter of dispute if its rendering is to be understood as ‘‘should purify himself’’ or ‘‘be in a purified state.’’ On Leviticus 6:11, B. Levine (JPS Commentary to Lev. p. 38) commented, ‘‘Our verse simply means that only consecrated persons [that is, priests] may have contact with sacrificial materials, a notion that reinforces the

opening of the verse: Only Aaronide priests may partake of the sacrifices.” (See J. Milgrom, AB, Lev. pp. 443-456).

Proofs from Ezekiel to the meaning of passages in the Five Books are often problematic because his program, particularly as regards sanctuary, priesthood and related rituals differs from that of the Torah in many significant ways. For example, contrary to explicit Pentateuchal legislation, he prohibits the priests from wearing wool when they serve (Ezek. 44:17-18) and from marrying a widow of a non-priest (v. 22); he requires a priest who had been corpse-defiled and who concluded his [seven-day] purification process to go through a seven-day count outside the sanctuary and to bring a *hattat* sacrifice upon his return to the holy (v. 27). His prescriptions often require a full measure of interpretation to reconcile them with Torah law. The Talmud relates that the sages once considered placing his book in *genizah* (“hiding,” or burial) because of its many differences with the Five Books (*b. Sabb.*13b).

4. Upon Closer Reading

A close reading of the Leviticus 6 context yields compelling arguments that our *yiqdash* verses do not refer to sanctity contagion and negate the translating of *yiqdash* as “will become holy.”

The verses that prescribe “all who touch them, *yiqdash*” (Lev. 6:11) and “all who touch its flesh, *yiqdash*” (v. 20) are both speaking of priests eating from most sanctified items (*minḥa* and *hattat* respectively). Eating involves touching the items. If we translate *yiqdash* as meaning “will become sanctified,” it would be saying that the priest who touches his food become sanctified. We cannot convincingly apply such a transformation to the priests since they are already sanctified and the Torah does not define any further category of sanctity for them. What additional sanctity could we expect the ordinary and ever-present act of eating to impart? We must bear in mind that the priests are required to eat from these sacrifices, and do so on a regular basis. It is unreasonable to assume that *yiqdash* refers to a new status of sanctity that is expected to apply to them, virtually from the beginning of their service, yet is left undefined.

To interpret the law as referring to non-priests, coming as it does while speaking about priests, is simply not plausible. In addition, a discussion of priests eating their shares of sacrificial meat is not an appropriate location to tag on a law for non-priests. In any event, the inclusive term “all” at the beginning of the phrase would surely have included priests.

Yiqdash was stated in conjunction with the *minḥa*, *hattat* and *asham*; it was not stated with or applied to the *olah*, the sacrifice that was the topic of discussion immediately prior to the *minḥa* passage (Lev. 6:1-6). Undoubtedly, that was due to the fact that there is no eating associated with the *olah* and the Torah’s specific concern at this point is with eating. *Yiqdash* was also not applied to *shelamim*, obviously because *shelamim* are *qadashim qalim* (sacrifices of lighter sanctity). Unlike the most holy offerings, they are permitted to be eaten by non-priests and are permitted outside of sanctuary precincts. All this indicates that the Torah is concerned that something may go wrong when the priests eat from the most holy offerings. Accordingly, it adjured them to properly purify themselves or be sure they were in a state of purification before they begin to eat, which probably also meant to be fully focused on their responsibilities even when engaged in eating their portions. Without the warning they probably would not have looked upon the natural and necessary act of eating with the same gravity as they looked upon more substantial service.

The continuation of our verse speaks of *hattat* blood that was spattered upon a garment – וְאִשָּׁר יָזָה מִדָּמָהּ עַל הַבְּגָד הַבְּגָד אֲשֶׁר יָזָה עָלָיָהּ תִּכְבֵּס בְּמִקְוֹם קֹדֶשׁ (“and when it was spattered from its blood upon a garment, that which was spattered upon should be laundered in a holy place” [v. 20]). The law prescribes laundering away only the spattered blood (even if for practical purposes the whole garment may be laundered). The blood contains the sanctity of the particular sacrifice it derives from and it should not remain on a garment that will be used for other services. The next verse (21) speaks of vessels in which a *hattat* was cooked. Earthenware pots (invariably porous) cannot be adequately cleansed from their absorption but must be broken, while copper (bronze) pots may be purged clean. At issue is the sacrificial flesh that may not be eaten beyond its time limit that was absorbed in the pot in which it was cooked. If the pot is not

adequately cleansed part of the previous sacrifice will subsequently be absorbed by the next food that will be cooked in that pot. There is no hint of these items communicating holiness.

Once established that in its two Leviticus attestations *yiqdash* denotes an aspect of “should be in a purified state,” we assume it should be so translated in its two Exodus contexts also; it surely appears that we are dealing with one principle. A straightforward reading of the two Exodus contexts does indicate that such is the intention. The first citation (Exod. 29:37) concludes a discussion about the initial sanctification of the priests and of the altar; the last words of the passage are *כָּל הַנִּגַּע בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ יִקְדָּשׁ*, (“all who [or ‘that’] touch the altar, *yiqdash*”). Up until that last clause of the passage there had not as yet been any exhortation prescribing the need to interact with the altar only in purity. Had the passage not contained such a law it would appear to be a glaring omission; thus, that is the most likely meaning of that final clause. A similar consideration applies to the second Exodus citation (30:29).

On our Leviticus 6:11 verse, Meir Paran (*Olam Hatanakh, Vayiqra* p. 42) wrote: “Items of the most holy status (*qodshe qadashim*) have a contagious power. Whatever contracts *qedusha* (holiness) is never released from it. An item that touched *qodshe qadashim* becomes sanctified and its place is in the

sanctuary, whereas a man who is not a priest and became sanctified through contact with *herem* for instance, must be put to death.”

One wonders that Paran could write so confidently on such an ambiguous topic. In addition to the many preceding arguments, the following should be noted. His linkage of *yiqdash* to *herem* legislation (Lev. 27:29), which incurs the death penalty, is arbitrary and extremely doubtful as far as the Torah is concerned. The *herem* case appears to be linked to idolatry, in accordance with Exodus 22:19: “Whoever sacrifices to gods, *yahoram* (shall be proscribed), except [if it be] to Hashem alone.” Moreover, even if communication of holiness applies broadly, it may not apply to people, as “all” may very well fit with “things,” and if it does apply to people, it may have an interpretation other than death.

Paran’s comments reflect a pre-Torah ancient Near Eastern mode of thought. Sancta contagion, *herem* and associated death to humans were then perceived as sanctuary requirements and oftentimes were the norm. Although the Torah adopted some of the relevant concepts and terminology, it substantially modified them to meet its revolutionary, humanistic standards.

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