

The Weekly Daf



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Week of 2-8 Tamuz 5757 / 7-13 July 1997

Tamid 26-32

Rav Weinbach's insights, explanations and comments for the 7 pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle

Races and Lotteries

The first sacred service performed daily in the *Beis Hamikdash* was the ceremonial removal of some of the ashes from the altar by a single *kohen*. The first Mishnah in *Mesechta Tamid*, which deals with the regular system of service, informs us that any *kohen* who was interested in performing this service would purify himself by immersion in a mikveh before the arrival of the *kohen* in charge of delegating duties. When he arrived he would announce that anyone who had already immersed himself in anticipation of the privilege to perform this first service should come forward and participate in a lottery to choose the privileged one from amongst all who were candidates.

Conflicting signals seem to emerge from this Mishnah. The initial indication is that no lottery was used to determine who would perform the service, because if a lottery would decide the matter why should an interested *kohen* bother with immersion before he even knew whether he would be chosen. The concluding words of the Mishnah, however, indicate that a lottery was definitely required.

Two resolutions are proposed. The Sage Rava explains that even though each *kohen* who immersed himself realized he might lose out in the lottery, he did so in order to be immediately ready to perform the service if he indeed was privileged to be chosen. But the Sage Abaye offers a different approach based on a Mishnah in *Mesechta Yoma* (22a) which describes two stages in the selection process. At first, if more than one *kohen* applied for this service they were told to race up the ramp leading to the altar and whoever reached the top four cubits of this ramp first would win this privilege. It once happened that two *kohanim* were running neck and neck and one caused the other to fall from the ramp and break his leg. When the Sages saw that this method was dangerous they decreed to eliminate the race and to decide only by a lottery which heretofore had been employed only when two *kohanim* reached the finish line together. The first part of our Mishnah, therefore, refers to the first stage of selection when the lottery was not the deciding factor and each *kohen* who felt he could outrun his colleagues would immerse himself in preparation. The concluding part refers to the later stage when everything depended on the lottery.

Why was the race considered proper at one stage and later abandoned? It has been suggested that in the earlier years when *kohanim* were on a higher spiritual level the enthusiasm of each *kohen* to perform the service for the sake of Heaven would motivate him to run as fast as possible but would not make him so envious of another *kohen* getting the job that he could cause him to become injured. In later generations there were already *kohanim* who felt that what was most important was not that the service of Hashem was done but that he had the honor of doing it.

Tamid 28a

Incense, Riches and the Sandek

The third lottery of the day was to determine which *kohen* would offer the incense upon the golden altar. This lottery differed from the other three in that it was restricted to those *kohanim* who had never before had the privilege of offering incense.

Why were all *kohanim* offered a chance to be selected in the lotteries for all the other services regardless of how many times they had already been privileged to perform them, and only in regard to offering incense was this opportunity restricted to those who had never done so before?

The answer is supplied in *Mesechta Yoma* (26a). The *kohen* who offered incense was rewarded by Heaven with the special role of the Tribe of Levi to which the *kohen* belonged. The *kohen* therefore insisted on everyone having an opportunity to gain this reward and would not permit one who had already offered incense to participate in a lottery when there were others who had not yet had this opportunity.

An interesting echo of this is found in our custom today in honoring someone to be a *sandek* who holds the baby when he is circumcised at a *bris milah*. In Shulchan Aruch *Yoreh Deah* (265:11) we find that it is customary for a father not to honor the same person to be a *sandek* for more than one of his children. The explanation offered by some authorities for the custom is that the role of the *sandek* is symbolically similar to that of the *kohen* offering incense, and therefore this privilege to gain riches should not be given to one who has already enjoyed it.

The Gaon of Vilna challenges this explanation. First of all, why is the custom limited to more than one child in a family and not extended to withholding this privilege from anyone who has ever been a *sandek*? Secondly, the Gaon notes that we have yet to see the *sandek* who became wealthy! The custom, he concludes, is based on a mystical reason and its source is in the Will of Rabbi Yehuda Hachasid.

Tamid 32b

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