
פרשת בהעלותך

פרק ח פסוק כד

זאת אשר ללויים מבן חמש ועשרים שנה ומעלה יבוא לצבא צבא בעבודת אהל מועד:

רש"י

מבן חמש ועשרים. ובמקום אחר אומר "מבן שלשים שנה", הא כיצד? מבן כ"ה בא ללמוד הלכות עבודה ולומד חמש שנים, ובן שלשים עובד, מפאן לתלמיד שלא ראה סימן יפה במשנתו בחמש שנים ששוב אינו רואה.

מושג

כ"ה ללמוד, ול' עבודה. מפאן לתלמיד שלא ראה סימן יפה במשנתו חמש שנים שוב אינו רואה (חולין כד).

Translation:

25 (years old) to learn and 30 (years old) to serve. From here we learn that a student who has not seen success in his studies for five years, will no longer see (success).

Explanation:

From the age of 25 until the age of 30, Kohanim were to learn the laws and intricacies of the service in the Mishkan and at the age of 30 they were to begin working. The 5 year maximum time that was allotted to mastering this skill teaches us that if one does not master a particular skill after 5 years, it may be assumed that he will no longer be able to do so¹.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The major thrust of our Musag is focused on an obvious contradiction in Pesukim as to what age a Kohen was to begin his service. Our Pasuk mentions the age of 25 while a previous Pasuk (ג:ד)² mentioned the age of 30. The Gemoroh that Rashi quotes answers by differentiating between the age they began to study the laws of service and the age they actually began to serve. A textual proof to this answer can be found in the fact that in the previous Pasuk it tells us that the Kohen בא לצבא, while our Pasuk mentions לצבא צבא, which refers to an initiation into the service³. In addition, the Pasuk dictates that these Kohanim will be involved בעבודת אהל מועד, in the service of the אהל מועד, but never says לעבוד, that they will be actively included in the service⁴.

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Kohanim began their five year initiation into the Mishkan service at age 25 and began serving at age 30.

Understand: The Torah mandated a maximum of 5 years of education, implying that if the skills were not mastered at that point, they would no longer be mastered.

Think: Solving contradictions between Pesukim can be accomplished by careful reading of text, frequently leading to multiple solutions.

1 See note #3

2 מבן שלשים שנה ומעלה ועד בן-חמשים שנה כל-צבא לצבא לעשות מלאכה באהל מועד

3 See note #1

4 See note #2

NOTES

1. The Gemoroh⁵ explains that the meaning of לצבא צבא would be to congregate next to those who did the service in order to learn by example⁶. The fact that the term לצבא צבא is used here instead of לצבא seems to prove the point of the Gemoroh, i.e. that they were apprentices.

A difficulty that is raised is that the term לצבא צבא is used one other time, and the context does not refer to the training the Kohanim. By the service of Bnei Gershon (ד:כג) we read: מִבְּנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְנִמְעָלָה עַד: מִבְּנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה תִּפְקֹד אוֹתָם כְּלִי־הַבָּא לְצִבְאָ צָבָא לְעִבְדָּה עֲבָדָה בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד. why is the term used by Bnei Gershon? The מלבים answers that Bnei Gershon were the oldest and were the first to serve, therefore all others would gather where they had already gathered. In effect, they caused all others to be לצבא צבא, to gather next to the existing gathering⁷. The אברבנאל answers that the double wording reflects the fact that they were the oldest born, thereby receiving a double portion⁸.

Other commentators (רשב"ם, אבן עזרא) agree with the hesitations of the רמב"ן regarding the above explanation chosen by Rashi to solve the conflicting ages. They explain differently, pointing to the fact that only עבודת אהל מועד is mentioned in our Posuk, while the Pesukim in פרק ד, speak of carrying the Mishkan and its vessels as well. Therefore, they claim, at age 25 one would begin serving in מועד, however they would have to wait until reaching age 30 to carry the Mishkan. The אברבנאל develops this idea by commenting that the younger Kohanim were better suited as guards and singers, while only when reaching age 30 had they developed the strength and endurance necessary to carry the Mishkan.

2. This point is made by the רמב"ן and is echoed by the מלבים who compares the wording used in פרק ד: מבן חמש ועשרים שנה ומעלה, ולמעלה כשצוה למנות את הלויים הראוי לעבודה לא מנה רק מבן שלשים, רק שם אמר אצל בני קהת לעשות מלאכה באטם ואצל בני גרשון לעבוד עבודה באטם ואצל בני מררי לעבוד את עבודת אהל מועד, מבואר שבני שלשים יש להם חיוב וחלק במלאכה ובעבודה עצמה, וכאן אמר לצבא צבא בעבודת אהל מועד.

3. The Gemoroh understands the 5 year waiting period to be the maximum time needed to master a specific skill, leading to the conclusion that if one did not master the skill in that time period they would no longer do so. However the commentators mentioned above seem to understand that the ages listed in the Pesukim are the *minimum* ages at which the Kohen would be allowed to work. Even the Gemoroh requires a *minimum* of 5 years of study until one may serve. How, therefore, can the Gemoroh draw its conclusion regarding the maximum time required to master a skill?

Possibly, according to the Gemoroh a Kohen could begin work from the age of 25 as soon as he indeed had mastered the necessary skills. The age of 30 that is mentioned in פרק ד, does not tell us that he must wait until that age, but rather informs us that he is expected to have achieved mastery by that age. In fact, we might go so far as to propose that even the age of 25 is not a minimum age, but rather a suggestion of the Torah as to the most cognitively appropriate time to begin preparing for service in the Mishkan⁹. And, as above, the age of 30 as the time for that preparation to come to an end. The Torah is thus providing educational insight, not relaying laws regarding the service in the Mishkan.

4. Questions for further thought:

- Why do you think this lesson was taught by the service of the Kohanim?
- Do you think that this 5 year rule applies to all learning? Does it apply to the learning of Torah?

5 The רמב"ן however, ultimately rejects the apprentice explanation put forward by the Gemoroh as being only an individual Tanna's opinion. He solves the contradiction in Pesukim differently, allowing all those who reached the age of 25 to serve, but explains that most people do not really pay attention to the fact that they have reached 25 until they turn 30.

6 וא"כ יהיה פירוש "יבא לצבוא צבא" שיבא להקהל בנקהלים בעבודת אהל מועד, שיעמוד עמם ויראה תמיד עבודתם ביום ובלילה כדי שילמוד הלכות עבודה בתלמוד ובמעשה

7 ואצל קהת ומררי אמר כל הבא לצבא כי גרשון מצד שהיה הבכור היה הוא המצביא בראש והם באו לצבא שהצביא גרשון

8 ונאמר בגרשון לצבא צבא מפני שהיה בכור ונוטל פי שנים

9 This would help explain the question from the Pasuk in (כג:כד) דברי הימים א in which the age of 20 is mentioned:

אלה בני לוי לבית אבתיהם ראשי האבות לפקודיהם במספר שמות לגלגלתם עשה המלאכה לעבדת בית ה' מבן עשרים שנה ומעלה: