



Parashat Bamidbar

We read in Parashat Bamidbar of the special status of the tribe of Levi among *Benei Yisrael*, particularly their special role in attending to the *Mishkan*. At one point in this *parasha* the Torah refers to the Levites as *shomerei mishmeret ha-kodesh* – "guards of the watch of the sacred [domain]" (Bamidbar 3:38). Maimonides cites this verse in the *Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira* section of *Mishneh Torah* (8:3) as the source for the *Levi'im*'s designation for the role of guarding the Temple. The Torah requires that members of this tribe stand as guards around the Temple, as Maimonides writes (ibid. 8:1), "for a palace with guards is not the same as a palace without guards." Meaning, the guards were not actually necessary for the protection of the holy site, but they were nevertheless required as a demonstration of honor towards the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. Maimonides informs us that *kohanim* would stand guard inside the Temple, whereas *Levi'im* would guard the area outside.

Later in this chapter (8:6), Maimonides describes how the *kohanim* standing guard inside would sleep in the Temple during the night. (Several commentators explain that there was a rotation among the guards that allowed each guard to sleep for some portion of the night.) He writes, "The *kohanim* who guarded would not sleep in the priestly garments; rather, they would fold them and place them near their heads, wear their personal clothing, and sleep on the floor – like all guards of royal courtyards, who do not sleep on beds."

Maimonides' ruling that the watchmen would sleep specifically on the floor, and not on beds, has given rise to some discussion concerning the halakhic propriety of bringing a bed into a synagogue. The *Magen Avraham* (famous halakhic work by Rabbi Avraham Gombiner, Poland, 1637-1683) ruled (in *Orach Chayim* 151) on the basis of Maimonides' comments that even when sleeping is permitted in a synagogue, one may not sleep on a bed. Since the laws of reverence for a synagogue are modeled after those concerning the proper respect and reverence for the *Beit Ha-mikdash*, the prohibition against sleeping on beds in the Temple establishes a corresponding provision regarding a synagogue. Just as sleeping on a bed constitutes an infringement upon the honor of the site of the Temple, so is such conduct inappropriate in a synagogue.

However, the *Peri Megadim* (Rabbi Yosef Te'omim, Germany-Poland, 1727-1792) disputes the *Magen Avraham*'s position, and allows bringing a bed into a synagogue. The *Peri Megadim*'s ruling is based on a careful reading of Maimonides' comments. Maimonides required that the watchmen sleep on the floor "like all guards of royal courtyards, who do not sleep on beds." As the *Peri Megadim* observes, Maimonides does not forbid bringing a bed into the Temple for the reason that this would constitute a display of irreverence. Rather, the *mitzva* of *shemirat ha-Mikdash* (guarding the Temple) requires that the *kohanim* stand guard in a manner resembling the watchmen of royal palaces, who customarily slept on the floor. This *halakha*, then, does not relate to the laws of *mora Mikdash*, the obligation to act reverently in the holy site of the Temple, on the basis of which we determine the laws governing proper conduct in a synagogue. The requirement to sleep on the floor involves instead the proper manner for fulfilling the *mitzva* of guarding the Temple, a *mitzva* which of course does not apply in

the context of synagogues. Accordingly, the *Peri Megadim* argues, it would not, at least in Maimonides' view, be forbidden to bring a bed into a synagogue.