



Parashat Korach
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The latter half of Parashat Korach deals with various aspects of the *kehuna* (priesthood), specifically, the laws concerning the responsibilities of the priestly tribe (and of the tribe of Levi generally) and the other tribes' responsibilities toward them.

We find in this section the following command issued to the *kohanim* and *Leviyim*: "They shall observe the guard of the Tent of Meeting" ("*Ve-shameru et mishmeret Ohel Mo'ed*" – 18:4). Maimonides, in his *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (*asei* 22), cites this verse as one of the Biblical sources for the obligation of *shemirat ha-mikdash* – guarding the Temple. The *kohanim* and *Leviyim* were required to stand guard at certain locations around the area of the Temple as an expression of honor to the sacred site.

The next verse presents a slightly different admonition: "You shall observe the guard of the sacred [site]" ("*U-shmartem et mishmeret ha-kodesh*"), which Maimonides claims also refers to the obligation of *shemirat ha-mikdash*. Later in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (*lo ta'aseh* 67), Maimonides cites a rabbinic tradition that the Torah here imposes a *mitzvot lo ta'aseh*, a "negative command," forbidding the neglect of this responsibility. Thus, the Torah not only commands the people to appoint guards around the Temple, but also commands the people not to be negligent in this regard.

Maimonides' precise formulation in describing this prohibition is subject to some debate among the translators of *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (which, like most of Maimonides' works, was written originally in Arabic). Rabbi Yosef Kapach translates this passage as, "We are warned not to discontinue the guarding of the Temple" ("*she-lo le-hashbit shemirat ha-Mikdash*"). Similarly, the *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (395), which generally follows Maimonides' view in categorizing and defining the *mitzvot*, describes this prohibition as "not to cancel [*she-lo le-vatel*] the guarding of the Temple."

However, Moshe Ibn Tibbon, author of the more prevalent translation of *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* (and son of Shmuel Ibn Tibbon, translator of other works by Maimonides), translates this phrase as, "We are warned not to be indolent [*she-lo le-hitatzel*] with regard to the guarding of the Temple." According to this translation, Maimonides' definition of this prohibition focuses not on the actual discontinuation of the Temple guard, but rather on "laziness," on displaying negligence and slothful indifference toward this responsibility.

The issue at hand (as explained in the "*Tziyunim*" in the Frankel edition of *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*) is the Arabic word *t'atil*, which lends itself to both meanings – discontinuation, and indolence. (Throughout *Sefer Mishlei*, for example, the Aramaic *Targum* translates the word *atzel* as *atla*, presumably a term related to the Arabic *t'atil*.) Interestingly enough, in other instances in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, including in the context of Shabbat observance (*asei* 154), Ibn Tibbon himself translates this word as *nishbot*, or "cessation." In the context of *shemirat ha-mikdash*, however, Ibn Tibbon felt that Maimonides referred not to the actual discontinuation of the Temple guard, but rather to

the attitude of laziness. In his view, even if throughout *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* Maimonides employed this word to mean "cessation," here he focused on the element of "laziness."

In introducing this *mitzva* in *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira 8:1), Maimonides emphasizes that the purpose of the Temple guard is to give honor to the sacred site of the *Mikdash*. The guards stood not to protect the *Mikdash*, but rather as an expression of respect, like guards standing around a royal palace. For this reason, perhaps, Maimonides (according to Ibn Tibbon's translation) chose to focus on the element of "laziness" in defining the prohibition of neglecting the Temple guard. We violate this prohibition not through the absence of guards as much as through an attitude of indifference. We give honor to the Almighty by displaying zeal, alacrity and exertion in fulfilling His commands, by affording them such importance as to warrant intense concentration, enthusiasm and fervor. Hence, if the affirmative command of *shemirat ha-mikdash* requires giving honor to the Almighty by positioning guards around the Temple, the converse negative command forbids dishonoring God through a lax, apathetic attitude toward the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.