

**"For the maaser (tithe) of the Bnei Yisrael ... I have given to the Leviim as a heritage; therefore I have said to them, among the Bnei Yisrael they shall not inherit a heritage."
(18:24)**

The *Levi* receives no portion in *Eretz Yisrael*. He is, consequently, absolved from the labor and toil involved in working the soil and other "mundane" material pursuits. He is to devote himself totally to the service of the Almighty. Hence, he receives the *maaser* gifts from his fellow Jews to sustain him in his spiritual vocation. In his commentary to *Sefer Devarim 10:9*, *Rashi* states that since the *Leviim* were set apart for the service of the Altar and are not free to plow and to sow, they are to receive a designated gift (*maaser*) from the house of the King (Hashem). The *Levi's* preoccupation with the Sanctuary precludes his involvement in the prosaic affairs of everyday routine. The *Leviim* constitute Hashem's private legion, standing in service to Him at all times.

Horav Meir Bergman, Shlita, cites *Horav Meir Simcha, z.l.*, who calculated that, in truth, the *Levi* worked only two days a year! The *Leviim* were divided into twenty four *mishmaros*, watches, each one serving two weeks a year. These *mishmaros* were, in turn, subdivided according to individual families, which were, in turn, subdivided into yet smaller groups. Hence, if an individual *Levi* had worked a maximum of two days a year, he would be extremely fortunate. If so, why couldn't they receive land? Were they so busy the remaining days of the year that a little work would make them ill prepared to work in the *Bais Ha'Mikdash*? After all, do we not all take vacations during the course of a year? Should the *Levi* live off *maaser* just because he must work two days a year?

Horav Bergman derives a profound lesson from this exemption. In order for the *Levi* to maintain the highest and strictest standard of devotion to Hashem, he must prepare himself during the whole year. To serve Hashem with impeccable allegiance, to maintain a religious observance that is earnest and untainted, one must be totally immersed in a hallowed state of spiritual absorption at all times, without interruption. There can be no respite in commitment. The *Levi's* effort must be unceasing; he must be constantly seeking greater opportunity for spiritual advancement. Any lapse in this area will not effect the same result as devotion without interruption.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, z.l., uses a similar approach in interpreting *R' Akiva's* behavior when he returned for the first time after twelve years of *Torah* study. *R' Akiva's* wife, demonstrated unstinting devotion to and faith in her husband's ability to master the *Torah* even late in life, which encouraged him to engross himself in the study of *Torah*. Upon his return after twelve years of uninterrupted study, prior to greeting his wife, he overheard someone deriding her for permitting him to stay away from home so long to engage in *Torah* study. She responded to the ridicule by saying, "For my part he may continue to study another twelve years!" As soon as *R' Akiva* heard these words, he immediately turned around and continued to study for twelve more years! *Horav*

Shmeulevitz questions R' Akiva's action. Is this the manner in which one treats a wife who gave up so much for his advancement. Could he not have stopped for awhile and greeted her before returning to the *yeshiva* ? After all, twelve years had elapsed since he had last been home.

Rav Chaim responds that R' Akiva knew that had he entered his home, even momentarily, it would have created a break in this *Torah* study. Who knows if during the second twelve year period he would have been able to study with the same zeal and enthusiasm which had previously been his hallmark? Once he had experienced an interruption, the new learning might not be the same. *Rav Chaim* also adds that *Torah* study during one twenty-four year period is different and much more effective than two twelve year periods. Constancy and continuity are not simply jargon words; they are the standard by which *Torah* study and spiritual development are measured.