



# FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE

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לעילוי נשמת  
יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

## Rearranging Aliyot to Enable a Levi's Aliya

**Question:** This Shabbat (Vayakhel/Pekudei), the *gabbai* called up a *levi* for *shvii*, and as *ba'al korei*, I knew he was going to make a *hosafa* and give *acharon/chazak* to someone else. I quickly told him the *levi* cannot come up, but that they should switch the intended *olim*, having the *levi* wait for *acharon*. After *laining*, someone suggested we should have relied on the Sephardi *minhag* that *kohanim* and *levi'im* can have *aliyot* after the first three. Who was right?

**Answer:** The reason a *levi* gets the

second *aliya* is to honor his status, which is lower than a *kohen's* and higher than a *yisrael's* (Gittin 59b). Once there is a hierarchy, giving a *kohen* or a *levi* a lower than prescribed *aliya*, especially giving an *aliya* after another “tribesmen” can give the impression that one of them is disqualified from his status (see *ibid.*).

All agree that the three *aliyot* during the week and the first three of Shabbat and *Yom Tov* morning are given to *kohen*, *levi*, and *yisrael*, in that order. According to Sephardi practice, starting with the fourth *aliya*, we can give *aliyot* to *kohanim* and/or *levi'im*, as long as it is not to two in a row and that when we call them, we announce “... even though he is a *kohen*” (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 135:10). The Rama (*ad loc.*) says that Ashkenazi *minhag* is that they cannot get *aliyot* until after the required seven. However, Ashkenazi *minhag* has changed somewhat: *kohanim/levi'im* do not get even *hosafot* except for *maftir* and *acharon*, but they can be even back-to-back (Mishna Berura 135:36, based on the Levush). On the side of leniency, even if *acharon* is one of the seven, the importance of its finishing the reading makes it appropriate for *kohanim/levi'im* (*ibid.*).

The Taz (OC 135:9) points out the “self-fulfilling prophecy” element of these matters. If the rule is that a certain *aliya* is appropriate for a *kohen/levi*, then receiving it cannot

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cast aspersions on them. This observation helps justify Sephardic leniency but makes it more difficult (while still possible) for Ashkenazim to rely upon the lenient opinions, when in the *shul* at hand, it is not an *aliya* that *kohanim/levi'im* receive. In your case, since the previous *levi* received an *aliya* long before, aspersions will not go back onto him (see Beit Yosef, OC 135). However, in general, we do not leave it up to the *kohen/levi* to decide if they are willing to put up with possible aspersions upon themselves.

On the other hand, Halacha does consider other factors in this matter, including the embarrassment of coming up for the *aliya* and not being able to receive it (see Mishna Berura 135:35). (It is not fully clear if the embarrassment begins in earnest from the time one's name is called and he is thus expected to get up (see Berachot 55a), or only when he stands by the *bima* – see *ibid.* and Mor U'ketzia to OC 135). Yet, classical *poskim* do see your solution, of giving him a subsequent *aliya*, as a good remedy to embarrassment. The Shulchan Aruch (*ibid.* 6) says that if a *yisrael* was called for the first *aliya* due to absence of a

*kohen* and then a *kohen* comes in before the *yisrael* begins the *beracha*, the *yisrael* waits at the *bima* until he can get the *aliya*. The Mishna Berura (*ibid.*) embraces that idea for our general case. So what you did was an excellent way to deal with the situation, and better than ignoring our *minhag* of not giving *aliyot* before *acharon*.

There may have been other viable possibilities. Even if the *yisrael* was informed about his *aliya*, until he is called up, nothing firmly binds the *shul* to give him one. Of course, decency calls for keeping one's word (see Bava Metzia 49a), but mistakes or changed circumstances can legitimize asking the *yisrael* to forgo his expected *aliya* and “compensating” him in the future. (Which idea was better might depend on a quick appraisal of who is likely to be insulted.) If it was important to give *chazak* to the *yisrael*, it was possible to give *maftir* to the *levi* (when it is fine to split the *berachot* and the *haftara* reading is a good question – see Rama, OC 284:4; Ishei Yisrael 38:56). ■



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