

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

Adapted from the discourses of *Rabbi Henschel Lebowitz ZT"l*

by Rabbi Avi Rubin

In Parshas Bamidbar we learn about the different jobs the Levi'im had during the forty years in the desert. There were three families of Levi'im. Each family had its own job. The family of Gershon carried the cloth parts of the Mishkan. Merrari's job was to carry the heavy boards of the Mishkan. The family of Kehas carried the menorah, the shulchan, the gold mizbeach, the copper mizbeach and the Aron Kodesh.

After telling us about the Levi'im's jobs, the Torah commands the Kohanim to make sure that the family of Kehas does not die out. Why is the Torah worried that they might all die? The Seforno explains that the answer has to do with how they chose which Levi'im carried the Aron Kodesh. It was a big mitzvah to carry the Aron and the entire family of Kehas wanted the job. They would race to the Aron and whoever got there first won the right to carry it. This caused problems. Many times they would push and shove while racing to be first. They would fight with each other at the finish line, right in front of the Aron. The Aron is so holy, that if people fight in front of it, they die. The Aron needs to be treated with the proper respect. Unfortunately, many Levi'im died. To stop this from happening again, Hashem commanded that there should be no more races to the Aron. Aharon and his sons were to tell each Levi when it would be his turn to carry the Aron.

It seems strange that such holy people could act like this. The Levi'im were chosen by Hashem to work in the Mishkan because they were such great tzadikim. They understood how important it is to treat the Aron properly. They also understood how dangerous it could be to carry the Aron, many Levi'im had already died because they had not acted properly while carrying the Aron. These Levi'im were running to do a mitzvah, they wanted to give honor to the Aron. How is it possible that they would fight in front of the Aron?

We see that even great tzadikim can sometimes forget what they are trying to do. They may have the best intentions, but they end up doing the opposite of what they wanted. The Levi'im wanted to do a big mitzvah and to honor the Aron. They set this as a goal for themselves. They became so focused on achieving their goal but they did not pay attention to how they were trying to do it. They were so busy trying to give the Aron honor, that they started fights to do it. They did not stop to think that acting this way was in fact not an honor, rather a disgrace. They also totally forgot how dangerous it could be to not act properly in front of the Aron.

Here are some examples of ways that our actions could end up causing the opposite of what we wanted:

- Children who fight with each other about who gets to help a parent are not a help at all.
- Sometimes a classmate is making noise when a teacher is trying to get quiet. Yelling at the fellow student to be quiet just makes more noise and does not help one bit.
- Visiting a sick person is a big mitzvah and helps the person feel better. Many times, the visitors are trying so hard to help the sick person feel better that they visit for longer than they should. The sick person ends up feeling worse than before.

We should always try to keep in mind what our goals are. That way we are less likely to end up doing something we did not want to do.

Have a good Shabbos!!

Rabbi Rubin

In Bamidbar we find the source for...

שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדֻת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אָבוֹתָם... (במדבר א', ב')

“Count the entire congregation of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers’ household...”

Moshe was told to count Bnei Yisroel, each shevet separately. If someone’s parents came from different shevatim, which shevet did the children belong to? Moshe was told to count them according to בֵּית אָבוֹתָם, their fathers’ house. The children follow their father for which shevet they belong to. This is relevant nowadays to know if you are a Kohen, Levi or Yisroel. You follow your father. (ב"ב קט:)

וְאֵלֶּה תוֹלְדֹת אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה... וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן... (במדבר ג', א'-ב')

“These are the children of Ahron and Moshe...
These are the names of the sons of Aharon...”

A man who teaches his friend’s son Torah is considered like he is the child’s father. The Torah says, “These are the generations of Moshe and Aharon,” meaning, these are their children. The next pasuk tells that these were in fact Aharon’s children. Why were they also considered Moshe’s children, because he taught them Torah. The biological father helps bring a child into this world. The child’s Torah teacher helps bring him into the World to Come. (סנהדרין יט:)

וּפְקֻדַת אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן שְׁמֹן הַמָּאֹר וּקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים וּמִנְחַת

הַתְּמִיד וְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה... (במדבר ד', ט"ז)

“The charge of Elazar son of Aharon the Kohen is the oil of illumination, the incense spices, the meal-offering of the continual offering, and the anointment oil...”

We learn what we may not do on Shabbos from the Mishkan. These actions are known as the melachos. One of the melachos is that we may not carry outside on Shabbos, without an eruv. It does not matter whether you are carrying an object in your right hand, your left hand, on your shoulder or by tucking something into your clothes. These are considered normal ways to carry something and therefore are not permitted. We learn this from Elazar the Kohen. Elazar had a special job in the Mishkan. He personally carried a number of items for the Mishkan. In his right hand he carried the oil for the menorah. The incense he carried in his left hand. He carried the flour that was offered each day as part of the Korban Tamid in a sack, slung over his shoulder. He tucked into his clothing the bottle of the special anointing oil, used to dedicate the Mishkan and new Kohanim Gedolim. Since this is how Elazar carried these items throughout the trip in the desert, we learn that this way of carrying something is considered normal and we may not do so on Shabbos. (ירושלמי פ"י ה"ג)