



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS

Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Nasso | Sichah 1

The Verse:

After the Torah reports the findings of the census of all three Levite clans, the Torah summarises:

“All those counted of the Levites, whom Moses, Aaron, and the leaders of Israel counted, according to their families and according to their fathers’ households, from thirty years of age and up, until fifty year of age, everyone who comes to perform the service of the service and the service of carrying, in the Tent of Meeting.” (*Bamidbar* 4:46-47)

What is meant by that curious phrase, “the service of the service?” Rashi explains:

The Rashi:

To perform the service of the service — This refers to the music with cymbals and harps, which is a service for another service [the sacrifices].

And the service of carrying — As it [the phrase] means literally.

The Questions:

- 1) Rashi’s interpretation is sourced in the Talmud. (*Erchin* 11a) Yet there, no mention is made of instruments, only “song.” Why does Rashi find it necessary to specify the instruments?
- 2) Once specifying the instruments, why only mention the two categories of “cymbals and harps,” and not the third category mentioned by King David, “the *nevel*?”

- 3) Why doesn't Rashi mention the obvious meaning of "song" — vocalization?
- 4) In the second comment of Rashi: What interpretation does Rashi negate by saying that the phrase "the work of carrying" should be taken literally? Carrying is carrying. In what other way can it be understood?

The Groundwork for the Explanation:

To understand this we need to look at a comment of Rashi in the beginning of the *parsha*. On the verse, "Take a census (lit., "lift the heads") of the sons of Gershon as well," (*Bamidbar* 4:22) Rashi comments: "As I commanded you with regards to the children of Kehas, to see how many there are who have reached the category of [those fit for] service."

Maharal understands Rashi to be explaining the meaning of "as well." Just as the command to count the family of Kehas was introduced with the phrase, "lift up," implying a certain importance to their role, so too the family of Gershon was distinguished and deserving of being "lifted up" because of their service.

Two questions can be asked regarding this explanation:

- 1) By saying "as well," the verse implies that the family of Gershon is secondary in importance to Kehas. Why is that so?
- 2) The command to count the family of Merari is not introduced with "lift up," but with a simple command: "count them." Why is the family of Merari the exception?

The Explanation:

The census, introduced by the phrase "lift up," is meant to convey the importance of the physical prowess of those whose work consisted of carrying the items of the *Mishkan*.

The service of the family of Kehas is described exclusively as being the work of lifting. (*Bamidbar* 4:15) The role of the family of Gershon is to “serve and to carry.” (*Bamidbar* 4:24) Meaning, carrying is only one part of their work. And the family of Merari was responsible for ensuring that the items were loaded onto wagons for transport — but they were not commanded to do any service involving carrying, per se. (*Bamidbar* 4:31).

Thus, Kehas is the most distinguished of the “carriers,” and Gershon is a clear second. But Merari was not distinguished at all.

Nonetheless, Merari is still counted in the census even though their work was not as strenuous, because there was still some carrying involved. Namely, the carrying of the items from their place to the wagons. Additionally, there were likely small items which were not placed on the wagons, but carried by Merari.

Returning to the Original Questions:

This explains why Rashi defines the work of song as being “cymbals and harps” and not vocalized singing or the winds instruments (*nevel*): Cymbals and harps require physical exertion to move and play. Singing and wind instruments, on the other hand, can be done without such exertion, even by those over the age of fifty.

This is also why Rashi felt it necessary to comment that the *work of carrying* in the context of Gershon’s service is to be taken literally. It would be possible to understand the “work of carrying” in the same way it is meant by Merari — not an actual responsibility to carry, but a responsibility to make sure that the items would be transported.

Rashi rejects such an interpretation because this role does not demand physical strength. Therefore, it cannot be meant in this context of counting those physically fit enough to do the work of actual carrying.

The Inner Dimension of Rashi:

The Alter Rebbe explains the difference between the three Levite families in terms of spiritual advancement. Kehas and Merari are superior in that they achieved true spiritual growth. They were “walkers,” constantly striving upwards in divine service. Merari, on the other hand, stayed still without meaningful progress.

But the journey through the desert was a journey of the entire Jewish people’s unlimited spiritual advancement. How can we say Merari remained stagnant?

The explanation is that the family of Merari did not carry items themselves, but loaded them on wagons; their journey was by means of wagons.

To explain: A soul descends to this world so that it can: a) refine the animal energy, repurposing it for spiritual causes; b) this in turn elicits greater passion from the naturally tranquil divine soul; and 3) this ultimately brings the divine soul into a union with G-d that it could not have experienced previously.

Merari only “carried” objects on “wagons.” Meaning, they only achieved the first step of the journey, the repurposing of the “wagons,” the external animal soul. They did not carry on their person — their divine selves remained unmoved.

Gershon *did* carry on their shoulders, lifting up their divine souls as well.

And Kehas carried the Ark, bringing their souls into a union with G-d in a manner that can only be expressed in Torah study.