



Likkutei Sichos

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Raise Their Heads

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1.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Following the Torah's narrative¹ of the census of the family of Kehas, the family of Gershon, and the family of Merari — “everyone who comes to the brigade for the *avodah*² in the Tent of Meeting”³ — the Torah says:⁴ “All those counted whom Moshe counted... from thirty years of age... until fifty years of age, everyone who comes to perform the *avodah* of *avodah* and the *avodah* of carrying in the Tent of Meeting. Their tallies were...”

Rashi explains: “*The avodah of avodah* — This refers to the music performed with cymbals and harps, which is an *avodah* for {the sake of} another *avodah* {the sacrifices}.” Meaning, “the *avodah* of *avodah*” does not refer to the performance of a Temple service; rather, it refers to an *avodah* that was performed for the sake of another *avodah* — the *avodah* of the music, which was performed for the sake of the sacrificial *avodah*.

We need to clarify:

- a) The wording in the *Talmud*⁵ (the source of Rashi's commentary) is: “Which *avodah* necessitates another *avodah*? You must say that this refers to music {שירה, or song}.”⁶ The Talmud does not **name** the musical instruments; why does Rashi add “cymbals and harps”?
- b) Why does Rashi say, “This refers to the music performed with **cymbals** and **harps**”? After all, many types of musical instruments were used in the music-*avodah*!

¹ *Bamidbar* 4:34 ff.

² {Lit., “work,” it connotes a service in the Temple.}

³ *Bamidbar* 4:35, 39, 43.

⁴ *Bamidbar* 4:46-48.

⁵ *Arachin* 11a; see also *Midrash Lekach Tov* on our verse.

⁶ This wording seemingly implies that the *avodah* (of sacrificial libations) is subordinate to the music — the opposite of Rashi's explanation.

c) Why doesn't Rashi mention **vocal** music?⁷ This difficulty is compounded when we compare this music to the music that we read of earlier {in the Torah}:⁸ “Then Moshe... sang, יָשִׁיר, ...and they said the following,” which was vocal music.

We cannot posit that Rashi mentioned these two types of musical instruments because they are {representative of} the general categories of musical instruments, for we find in Scripture (in *Divrei HaYamim*)⁹ that there are **three** general categories of musical instruments: ***nevalim***,¹⁰ harps, and cymbals.¹¹ But however you look at it, Rashi should have either mentioned all **three** categories (including “*nevalim*”), or mentioned only one category as an example,¹² and added (as we find in *Divrei HaYamim*):¹³ “(cymbals) **and musical instruments**”!

2.

WHO MENTIONED MUSIC?

We also need to clarify: True, the Torah's **wording** (“the *avodah* of *avodah*”) refers to music (which is “an *avodah* for {the sake of} another *avodah*”). However, Scripture itself is unclear: At this point in its narrative, the Torah has not yet mentioned the musical *avodah* of the levites. The Torah has only spoken of the levites' *avodah* of carrying, disassembling, and assembling the *Mishkan*, and guarding the *Mishkan* (and the Temple). However, the **command** regarding the musical *avodah* (based on ***pshat***)¹⁴

⁷ This omission is especially glaring in light of (the *halachah* that): “All agree that the primary music was vocal.” (*Sukkah* 61a; *Arachin* 11a; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Klei HaMikdash*,” ch. 7, par. 3.)

⁸ {*Shemos* 15:1.}

⁹ *Divrei HaYamim* 1:15:16; 1:16:5; 1:25:1; 1:25:6; 2:5:12; 2:29:25; *Nehemiah* 12:27.

¹⁰ {This will be defined below at the end of sec. 9 as a type of wind instrument, in contrast to other translations that translate *nevel* as a “lyre,” a string instrument used in the ancient world primarily to accompany singing and recitation.}

¹¹ We can posit that “*nevalim*” includes all instruments played by mouth {wind instruments}; “harps” includes all string instruments; and “cymbals” includes all percussion instruments.

¹² Or, Rashi could have written succinctly, “this refers to music,” as the *Talmud* does, as mentioned in the body of the *sichah*.

¹³ *Divrei HaYamim* 2:5:13; see *Ezra* 3:10, and Rashi's commentary thereon.

¹⁴ {The plain meaning of Scripture.}

in only given **later** in *parshas Behaaloscha*:¹⁵ “{For they are} *given, given* {to Me} — given over for {the *avodah* of} carrying; given over for {the *avodah* of} music.”

Also unclear: Why here {in *Naso*}, after the census of the levites (“everyone who comes to the brigade for the *avodah*...”), our verse mentions only the musical *avodah* (and not the other *avodos* of the levites, aside from carrying {the *Mishkan*})? This difficulty is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that command regarding the music has not yet been recorded at this point in the Torah.

3.

CARRYING — LOADING THE WAGONS?

In his subsequent remarks on the words “the *avodah* of carrying,” Rashi comments: “{This is to be understood} literally.”¹⁶ Simply understood, Rashi’s intent in making this remark is to inform us of the following: Since Rashi interpreted earlier that “*The avodah of avodah*” means “an *avodah* **for {the sake of} another *avodah***,” we might have mistakenly interpreted “the *avodah* of carrying” to mean “an *avodah* **for** carrying — an *avodah* that is **performed for the sake** of carrying (and not “carrying” itself). Therefore, Rashi informs us that “the *avodah* of carrying” is to be understood literally — “an *avodah* **involving** carrying.”

However, we need to clarify: Why would we have initially thought to explain “the *avodah* of carrying” to mean “an *avodah* {performed} **for** {the sake of} carrying”? For (as *Re'em* says,) “there is no other *avodah* that is performed for the sake of carrying”!

Seemingly, this difficulty could be resolved as follows: It would be possible to explain this “*avodah* of carrying” to mean *loading the wagons*, which isn’t carrying {i.e., transporting the beams of the *Mishkan*} as such,

¹⁵ *Bamidbar* 8:16; Rashi’s commentary thereon.

¹⁶ Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 4:47.

but rather an *avodah* done for the sake of carrying (loading the beams, etc., onto the wagons, in preparation for the wagons transporting the beams).

[The Torah issues this command specifically here because this verse comes to introduce those *avodos* that were **not** mentioned in the previous verses: the *avodah* of *avodah* (music), and the *avodah* of carrying (loading the wagons).]

However (in addition to the difficulty in understanding Rashi's intent as precluding "carrying" to mean *loading the wagons*, which is mentioned for the first time **later** in our *parshah*),¹⁷ in light of the above solution, the converse difficulty emerges: Why *does* Rashi interpret this verse as precluding "carrying" to mean **this** *avodah* {loading the wagons} (by saying that "the *avodah* of carrying" is to be understood "literally")? After all, loading the wagons was part of the *avodah* of the family of Gershon and the family of Merari!

4.

RAISED UP TO A POSITION OF IMPORTANCE

This difficulty will be clarified by prefacing with Rashi's explanation in his commentary at the beginning of the *parshah*:¹⁸ "*Take a census of the sons¹⁹ of Gershon, them as well* — as I commanded you regarding the family of Kehas, to see how many there are who have reached the category of those fit for *avodah*." The reason for Rashi's lengthy remark, "to see how many there are who have reached the category of those fit for *avodah*," is puzzling: The command regarding "the sons of Kehas"²⁰ can be understood simply; the rationale for counting the Gershonites ("from thirty... until fifty

¹⁷ *Bamidbar* 7:3 ff. This despite the *parshiyos* being recorded in the Torah out of chronological order, for the inauguration of the *nesi'im* took place in Nissan {the first month}, **before** the census of the levites (in the second month).

¹⁸ {*Bamidbar* 4:22.}

¹⁹ {The Torah's says "sons of..." when referring to each of the three levite families.}

²⁰ *Bamidbar* 4:2.

years of age”²¹ is as Rashi explains there:²² “Count those among them who are fit for the *avodah* of carrying, and are from the age of thirty until the age of fifty....”

Maharal (in his commentary, *Gur Aryeh*) explains: Rashi’s intent is to inform us that the Torah’s command to “take a census of the sons of Gershon, **them as well**” does not imply counting the family of Gershon in **the same** way that the family of Kehas was counted, “from thirty... until fifty years of age.” For the phrase “them as well” does not refer to the verse that follows, “from thirty years of age...,” but to the preceding verse, “**take a census** {נשא את ראש, lit., ‘**raise the heads**’}.” Meaning (not a conventional census, but rather, a census that involves) **raising the head** {of,} and **ascribing importance**²³ {to those who are counted}. That is, those among the family of Gershon who were counted were also raised up and elevated by having “reached the category of those fit for *avodah*.” Thus, with respect to the family of Gershon, the Torah also writes “נשא את ראש — **raise the heads,**” and not “count....”

On this basis, however, the Torah’s wording “them as well” (that equates the family of Gershon and the family of Kehas) needs to be clarified. The phrase “them **as well**” implies that the family of Gershon was subordinate to the family of Kehas with respect to “נשא” (raising their heads). But seemingly, the family of Kehas and the family of Gershon were **equal** in being “raised up” — in order to see “how many there are who have reached the category of those fit for *avodah*.”

An even stronger question: The Torah doesn’t say “נשא את ראש — raise the heads” regarding the family of Merari (but rather, “תפקוד אותם — count them”),²⁴ even though their census only included those “from thirty... until

²¹ *Bamidbar* 4:3.

²² *Bamidbar* 4:2.

²³ See also *Abarbanel*, end of his commentary on *parshas Bamidbar*; *Beiurei Maharai* (by the author of *Terumas HaDeshen*), beg. of *parshas Bamidbar*, quoted in *Tzeidah LaDerech* (who explains that Rashi’s intent in his remark “**count** {מנה, lit., ‘**appoint**’} those among them” (*Bamidbar* 4:2) is to interpret נשא to mean *appointing someone to a position of authority*, and not counting). See *Maskil l’David*, “*Bamidbar*,” loc. cit. (and *Re’em*).

²⁴ *Bamidbar* 4:29.

fifty years of age... everyone who comes to the brigade to perform {the *avodah*}...”²⁵ Ostensibly, if “נשא את ראש — raise the heads” means to *raise the heads* {i.e., elevating} those who “have reached the category of those fit for *avodah*,” the Torah should also have used the phrase “נשא את ראש — raise the heads” regarding the family of Merari!

5.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CENSUSES

Seemingly, the distinction between the family of Kehas, the family of Gershon, and the family of Merari (regarding *raising of their heads*) could be explained²⁶ based on the different carrying tasks with which each family was charged:

The family of Kehas, charged with carrying the “holy of holies”²⁷ (the Ark, the table, the *menorah*, the altars, etc. — the holiest items in the *Mishkan*), as the **principal** and foremost beneficiary²⁸ of this *raising of heads*. The family of Gershon, also charged with “holy *avodah*... {the curtains and the clasps} which could be seen in the Holy of Holies,”²⁹ also experienced this *raising of heads*. However, since the sacredness of their carrying-task was less than the task of the family of Kehas, their *raising of heads* was also of a lesser degree (“them **as well**”) when compared with that of the family of Kehas.³⁰ In contrast, the family of Merari was not charged with carrying any items visible “in the Holy of Holies,” so the Torah never says “raise the heads” regarding the family of Merari.

²⁵ *Bamidbar* 4:30.

²⁶ See *Bamidbar Rabbah*, beg. of parshas *Naso*; *Abarbanel*; *Keli Yakar*; *Alshich*; and others, ad. cit. See also *Likkutei Torah*, “*Naso*,” end of s.v. (“*Vayedaber*) *Naso*,” 1st discourse (and its elucidation), and 2nd discourse.

²⁷ *Bamidbar* 4:4 ff.

²⁸ {Of the three Levite clans, they were elevated the most by the “raising of the heads.”}

²⁹ {Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 8:11.}

³⁰ This explains why the Torah discusses the family of Kehas before the family of Gershon, despite Gershon being the firstborn.

Seemingly, this explanation is compatible with **Rashi's** explanation later on in *parshas Behaaloscha*³¹ regarding the three wavings of the levites:³²

The first verse³³ refers to the family of Kehas... since they were responsible for the *avodah* involving the most holy objects.... The second verse³⁴ refers to the family of Gershon... for even they were assigned holy *avodah*... {of carrying the curtains and the clasps} which could be seen in the Holy of Holies. The third {waving} was for the family of Merari.³⁵

However (aside from the fact that we cannot presume that Rashi expects his readers to compare his remarks here with his explanation **later** in *parshas Behaaloscha*; moreover), Rashi **does not at all** correlate their qualification to carry {which he sees as being contingent on their physical ability} to the inherent **sacredness** of their respective tasks. For on the phrase “גשאו את ראשם — raise the heads” written regarding the family of Kehas, Rashi remarks,³⁶ “Count those among them who are fit for the **avodah of carrying....**” (For *carrying* requires **strength**, as Rashi continues): “A person under thirty has not reached the peak of his strength... and over the age of fifty, his strength begins to wane.”

So, the question remains: What is the reason for the distinction between the family of Kehas, the family of Gershon, and the family of Merari, **regarding the raising of their heads?**

We must say that according to Rashi, there were two different types of censuses to count the levites “from thirty years... until fifty years of age”:

³¹ *Bamidbar* 8:11.

³² {To assume their new status, the levites were inaugurated by offering sacrifices. They were brought to Aharon, who waved them as part of this inaugural service. This waving is mentioned in three separate verses.}

³³ {*Bamidbar* 8:11.}

³⁴ {*Bamidbar* 8:13.}

³⁵ {*Bamidbar* 8:15.}

³⁶ {Rashi's commentary on *Bamidbar* 4:2.}

- a) One type of census involved *raising of heads*. This related **primarily** to the family of Kehas, and also {secondarily} to the family of Gershon, which was subordinate to the family of Kehas (“them **as well**”), but **not** to the family of Merari.
- b) {A second type of census} counting the levites: “Everyone who comes to the brigade for the *avodah*³⁷ in the Tent of Meeting.”³⁸ **This** type of census did not involve *raising of heads*, and was conducted identically with all the levites “from thirty years... until fifty years of age,” who performed *avodah*.

6.

NOT ON THEIR SHOULDERS

The explanation: (The census referred to as) “raise the heads” indicates the rise in status and prominence implicit in the census of able-bodied people,³⁹ fit for **the *avodah of carrying*** (as Rashi says, “Count those among them who are fit for the *avodah* of carrying”). This is the reason for the above-mentioned distinction (regarding the *raising of heads*) between the families of Kehas, Gershon, and Merari, in accord with the distinction between them regarding “the *avodah* of carrying.”

Regarding the family of Kehas, **only** (the *avodah* of) carrying is mentioned in the Torah.⁴⁰ Since carrying was their **entire *avodah***, they played a principal role in the census of the *raising of heads*.

Regarding the family of Gershon, it says,⁴¹ “This is the *avodah* of the Gershonite clan: to perform ***avodah*** and to carry.” They had another type of *avodah*, **aside** from “carrying.” Thus, regarding the *raising of heads*, which was related to the *avodah* of **carrying**, they were subordinate to the

³⁷ {Lit., “work,” it connotes a service in the Temple.}

³⁸ *Bamidbar* 4:35, 39, 43.

³⁹ Note *Shabbos* 92a; *Nedarim* 38a (“{The Divine Presence} only {rests upon a person who is...} mighty.”)

⁴⁰ *Bamidbar* 4:15.

⁴¹ *Bamidbar* 4:24; similarly, *Bamidbar* 4:27.

family of Kehas. [Thus, Rashi uses nuanced wording, “how many there are who have reached the category of those fit for *avodah*”⁴² (without specifying the type of *avodah*), rather than “{fit for} the *avodah* of **carrying**” (his wording regarding the family of Kehas).

Concerning the family of Merari, the Torah never says “this is the *avodah*...”; rather, it says,⁴³ “this is the **charge** of their carrying.” Meaning, “carrying” was not considered an *avodah* for them (because they did not have to carry items on their person — on their shoulders). Instead, they were **charged** with “carrying” [as Rashi explained **earlier**,⁴⁴ “a charge” is “a commission to which a person is appointed”].

Meaning, they were tasked with ensuring that the *avodah* was performed, but it didn’t specifically have to be done by them (on their shoulders). When actually performing this *avodah*, they did not carry the articles on their shoulders; rather, they transported them on wagons (as is described later in the *parshah*).⁴⁵

Since their principal task was not the “*avodah* of carrying,” they weren’t party to the *raising of heads* nor to the importance associated with those who were “fit for the *avodah* of carrying.”

7.

ALSO ON THEIR SHOULDERS

Nonetheless, the family of Merari were also counted “from thirty years of age... until fifty years of age,” because their being tasked with “the charge of their carrying” (and not “the *avodah* of carrying”) did not rule them out from also carrying items on their shoulders in certain instances. Because although they used wagons for the bulk of what they had to

⁴² {Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 4:22.}

⁴³ *Bamidbar* 4:31.

⁴⁴ *Bamidbar* 3:7.

⁴⁵ *Bamidbar* 7:8; regarding the family of Gershon, see sec. 8, below.

transport, they had to carry items to load on the wagons. Also, there is room to say that {while journeying through the desert} they didn't transport **all** of “the utensils that they were charged to carry” in wagons. {Rather, there may have been some articles that they carried themselves.}

In light of this, we can posit that by his remark, “*the avodah of carrying* — {This is to be understood} literally,” Rashi's intent is to preclude us interpreting “the *avodah* of carrying” to mean “an *avodah for* carrying,” understood similar to “the charge of their carrying,” written regarding the family of Merari: “The charge of their carrying” doesn't mean that they were tasked with actual carrying; rather, it means that they were **commissioned** with as those responsible for carrying.⁴⁶

The intent of Rashi's remark is to negate this interpretation, for to receive **such a commission** does not require a person to be strong, nor is it relevant {only} to those “from thirty... until fifty years of age.”⁴⁷ The reason the family of Merari was counted “from thirty years...” was in order to ascertain how many people were fit to carry items on their shoulders — the *avodah* of carrying (as mentioned above, they also carried items on their shoulders).

8.

HOW FAR DID THEY CARRY?

However, we need to clarify: The family of Gershon also used wagons to transport their cargo!⁴⁸ So how were they different from the family of Merari (who also transported goods on their shoulders, as mentioned above)? Yet regarding the family of Gershon, it says,⁴⁹ “This is the ***avodah*** of the Gershonite families... and to **carry**.” Meaning, for them, “carrying” (on their shoulders) was considered an ***avodah!***

⁴⁶ {Similar to a ministerial portfolio in government — the minister himself does not perform the service that his department delivers, but he is responsible for the delivery of that service.}

⁴⁷ Note the commentaries of Rashi and *Bartenura* on *Avos* 5:21, s.v. “*ben chamishim*.”

⁴⁸ *Bamidbar* 7:7.

⁴⁹ *Bamidbar* 4:24.

The explanation: **Seemingly**, it stands to reason that the *avodah* of Gershon and Merari assembling and dismantling the *Mishkan* was done in the following order:

First, the family of Gershon dismantled the parts of the *Mishkan* related to their tasks: the lace-hangings of the Courtyard, the curtains, etc. (that covered the planks and the pillars, and were hung upon them). They immediately loaded them onto their wagons.⁵⁰ Only afterward⁵¹ the family of *Merari* began their *avodah* — dismantling the columns of the courtyard, the planks of the *Mishkan*, etc., and loading them onto their wagons.

[The reverse order applied when they assembled the *Mishkan*: First the family of *Merari* removed the boards and the columns, etc., from their wagons, and set them up immediately. Afterward, the family of Gershon unloaded the lace-hangings and the curtains, etc., from their wagons, and affixed them to the boards and columns, etc.]

As a result, when the family of Gershon took down the curtains from the *Mishkan* (and the courtyard’s lace-hangings from the columns), the Courtyard columns remained standing in place. Consequently, the family of Gershon **had to** carry the curtains (on their shoulders)⁵² for the entire length of the *Mishkan*’s Courtyard in order to exit the Courtyard (for it wasn’t possible to pass the wagons through the Courtyard columns⁵³ in order to lead them closer to the *Mishkan*). Therefore, their *avodah* was called, “the *avodah* of carrying.”

⁵⁰ For it is clear that they did not leave the curtains, etc., on the ground until the family of *Merari* had dismantled the courtyard columns, etc.

⁵¹ Note Rashi’s wording (*Bamidbar* 10:17, quoted from *Beraisa d’Melech HaMishkan*, ch. 13): “The family of Gershon and the family of *Merari* dismantled the *Mishkan* and loaded it onto wagons.”

⁵² See *Alshich*, beg. of *parshas Naso*.

⁵³ See *Shabbos* 99a: The width of each wagon was 5 *amos*, and there was a space of “five *amos* between each column” (Rashi’s commentary on *Shemos* 27:14, based on *Beraisa d’Melech HaMishkan*, ch. 5), and an item whose width is one cubit, cannot fit into a space whose width is a cubit (based on *Pesachim* 109b). This is so especially in light of Rashi’s remarks that the 5 cubits also included the **width** of the column, as *Reem* explains, loc. cit.

In contrast, the family of Merari had no need to carry the boards, etc., themselves, over a long distance, because they were able to draw the wagons up close, next to the *Mishkan's* boards.⁵⁴ As a result, the only carrying they did involved loading the wagons.

[On this basis, we can further elucidate why the *raising of heads* of the family of Gershon is {described as} “them, as well” (subordinate to that of the family of Kehas). This was (not only because, aside from “carrying,” the family of Gershon was assigned “to perform *avodah*,” but) also due to the nature of their task of “carrying”: They only had to carry items on their shoulders to the wagons outside of the courtyard. In contrast, the family of Kehas had no wagons at all — “they carried on the shoulder”⁵⁵ exclusively.]

However, some of the above details {of the order in which they assembled the *Mishkan*} are only **conjecture**. For the order in which they assembled the *Mishkan* (from which we can also extrapolate the order in which they dismantled the *Mishkan* — opposite to the way it was assembled) is described **explicitly** in *parshas Pekudei*:⁵⁶ They started with the sockets, the boards, etc., and **only** at the end, they assembled the Courtyard.

In any event, the family of Gershon was more physically involved than the family of Merari. For the covering-curtains, the screens, and silk-hangings had to be spread (or removed) after the boards and columns were already set in place: They had to clamber up the columns to bring the curtains up with them, etc., fasten the loops, and tie the ropes, etc.

⁵⁴ Note that on this basis, they first dismantled the Courtyard columns, and only afterward, the *Mishkan's* boards. See further in the *sichah*.

⁵⁵ *Bamidbar* 7:9.

⁵⁶ *Shemos* 40:18 ff. See also *Bamidbar* 10:17-21.

9.

ABLE-BODIED MUSICIANS

In light of all the above, we can clarify Rashi's intention in remarking: “*The avodah of avodah* — This refers to the music performed with cymbals and harps....”:

In light of all the above, something still remains unclear: Since the census “from thirty years old...” (able-bodied people) relates to their ability to carry, why were those among the family of Gershon whose *avodah* was (not *carrying*, but) “to perform *avodah*” also included in this count (from thirty years old...)?

Understood simply, “to perform *avodah*” refers to⁵⁷ the *avodah* of dismantling and assembling the *Mishkan*, and loading the wagons, for which a person also had to be able-bodied.⁵⁸

Although to perform these tasks, a person didn't have to be as strong as one assigned to *transportation*, yet he certainly needed to be able-bodied. [Therefore, it was not apropos to extend to one who performed these tasks the distinction of {the command to} “raise the head,” to attribute to these tasks the qualities special distinction or importance.]

Therefore, this census included specifically those who were of an age (from thirty years to fifty years of age) at which a person is at the peak of his strength.

However, the verse, “from thirty years of age... everyone who comes to perform the *avodah of avodah*” refers to “*avodah* for {the sake of}

⁵⁷ See (several explanations of “performing *avodah*”): *Ibn Ezra*, *Abarbanel*, *Seforno*, *Alshich*, and others, commenting on our verse.

⁵⁸ Perhaps *guarding* is also included. This also requires an able-bodied person, “so that no stranger {i.e., a non-Kohen} approaches” (Rashi's commentary on *Bamidbar* 3:6). For it is possible that a stranger would approach out of a great desire to come close to Hashem, etc. (similar to the two sons of Aharon — **when they drew close to Hashem**). Specifically an able-bodied person would be able to prevent him from approaching.

another *avodah*” (**music**). This raises the question: Why is **music**, in particular, relevant to those at an age when one is strong?

To address this question, Rashi says, “*This* refers to the music performed with cymbals and harps,” and he **omits** “*nevalim*” and **singing**. Since this verse refers to music, Rashi’s wording is precise — **this** allusion in the verse to music refers to instruments that required people to be robust in order to play them — “music performed with cymbals and harps.” These instruments are **actively** played **by hand**,⁵⁹ and playing them entails considerable exertion. In contrast, a *nevel* — etymologically related to *nevel yayin* {a wine skin}⁶⁰ — is {a wind instrument} played by blowing into it {not requiring much muscular strength and exertion}. All the more so does ordinary singing not require the same degree of exertion.

10.

THE NEED FOR STRENGTH

This also explains why the Torah says “*avodah of avodah*” in this verse specifically, at the end of the census:

By placing this verse at the conclusion of the census and saying that the census of the levites included only those “from thirty years of age... everyone who comes to perform the *avodah of avodah* and the *avodah of carrying* in the Tent of Meeting,” the Torah teaches us that there are only two reasons why this census was specifically limited to those in this age range: It was based on “the *avodah of avodah* (music performed with cymbals and harps) and the *avodah of carrying*,” and **not** based on other *avodos*⁶¹ performed by the levites (such as dismantling and assembling the

⁵⁹ See (regarding cymbals) **Rashi’s commentary** on *Arachin* 13b, s.v. “*avideta*”; see *Tosfos Yom Tov*, “*Arachin* 2:5,” s.v. “*vehatzaltzal*.”

⁶⁰ *Shemuel* 1:10:3; see Rambam’s *Peirush HaMishnayos*, on *Arachin* 2:3, which indicates that a *nevel* is similar to a wine skin (although it had been assumed to be a string instrument).

⁶¹ On this basis, “to perform *avodah*” (*Bamidbar* 4:24) said regarding the family of Gershon denotes (only) music. Rashi does not explain that verse the same way as here because here this interpretation is only **necessitated** by the words “*avodah of avodah*.”

Mishkan, or loading the wagons) which could also have been performed beyond “fifty years of age.”

As Rashi says explicitly in his commentary on *parshas Behaaloscha*:⁶²

And he shall do no more avodah — the *avodah* of carrying on the shoulders; however, he {i.e., the aged levite} can return to locking the gates, music, and loading the wagons. *To keep the charge* — to camp around the Tent, and to assemble and dismantle it at the time of the travels.

11.

EMPLOYMENT IN “RETIREMENT”

On this basis, a great halachic novelty, in the realm of “wondrous ideas,”⁶³ emerges from Rashi’s remarks:

In light of the above conclusion — that “music performed with cymbals and harps” was limited to those up to fifty years of age — we must presume that when Rashi writes, “he can return to... **music**,⁶⁴” he is referring to singing and playing the *nevel*, etc., but **not** to “music performed with cymbals and harps,” which (according to *pshat*) was limited to those “from thirty years... until fifty years of age”!

Additionally: Since a levite past the age of fifty was not permitted to perform music with cymbals and harps because “his strength begins to wane”⁶⁵ and playing these instruments becomes strenuous, there should be no difference in this regard between the *Mishkan* and the Temple. Consequently, according to *pshat*, “{advanced} age” also disqualifies the levites in future generations (from performing “music with cymbals and

⁶² *Bamidbar* 8:25-26.

⁶³ Wording of *Shelah* in his *Maseches Shavuos*, p. 181a {in describing the incredible depths of Rashi’s commentary}.

⁶⁴ {The word שִׁיר can mean either *song* or *music*.}

⁶⁵ Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 4:2.

harps”)! That is, unless the prohibition to play these instruments {in the *Mishkan*} was dictated by scriptural decree.⁶⁶

12.

MOVING FORWARD

From the *wine of Torah*⁶⁷ in Rashi’s commentary:

In light of the above analysis explaining the distinction between the families of Kehas, Gershon, and Merari, we are afforded additional insight into a teaching of the Alter Rebbe on this topic in *Likkutei Torah* on our *parshah*:

The Alter Rebbe explains⁶⁸ the distinction between the families of Kehas, Gershon, and Merari, regarding *raising of the head*: *Raising of the head* connotes an unbounded *avodah* [raising and elevating the head to the level of *ratzon*⁶⁹ and *kesser*⁷⁰].⁷¹ The family of Kehas and the family of Gershon represent the two levels and modes of {spiritual} progression (descending from Above and ascending from below). Therefore, regarding the families of Kehas and Gershon, the Torah says “raise the head.” In contrast, the family of Merari “**stood**” {i.e., they did not progress} (as we see, their *avodah* involved carrying the boards, which the Torah describes as “acacia wood, **standing** upright”).⁷² For this reason, the Torah does not say “raise the head” concerning the family of Merari.

⁶⁶ {If the exclusion of older Levites from a service in the *Mishkan* was because of a scriptural decree, גזירת הכתוב, then a law may not logically be deduced from it regarding the Temple.}

⁶⁷ {The deeper ideas in Torah.}

⁶⁸ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” s.v. (“*Vayedaber...*) *Naso*” 2nd discourse (end); see also s.v. “*Naso*” 1st discourse, and explanatory remarks following both discourses. {A law cannot be extrapolated from a scriptural decree.}

⁶⁹ {The Kabbalists explain that *ratzon*, connoting will and desire, is the most powerful force within a human being. *Will* has the power to control the other faculties and unleash their dormant potential.}

⁷⁰ {*Kesser* — literally “crown,” is the most exalted level of the *sefiros*, similar to the crown, which sits on the top of the head. In a human being, the two components of *kesser* — *ratzon* and *taanug* (delight) — control and motivate the other faculties. See Rabbi J.I. Schochet, “Mystical Concepts in Chassidism,” Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, 1988, pp. 59-71.}

⁷¹ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 21b; 23c (end).

⁷² *Shemos* 26:15.

This is puzzling: After all, the entire **journey** through the desert was in order for the Jews to engage in the *avodah* of **walking** {i.e., spiritual advancement}.⁷³ How can we say that this *avodah* did not apply to the family of Merari?

In light of the above idea — that Hashem’s instruction to “raise their heads” was connected to the *avodah* of carrying — we could posit, based on the deeper ideas in Torah, that the family of Merari also engaged in the *avodah* of unbounded *walking* (“raise the heads”). However, their *walking* was connected with {the deeper idea symbolized by the} wagons (with which the family of Merari performed their *avodah* of carrying).

The explanation: The *avodah* of unbounded *walking* conveys three ideas:

- a) Unbounded walking itself, which alludes to the love of Hashem inherent in a person’s animalistic soul (after its refinement).⁷⁴ Since the source of the animalistic soul is the world of *Tohu*⁷⁵ (beyond the source of the G-dly soul), boundless love for Hashem is specifically the purview of the animalistic soul {as expressed by the verse}, “abundant produce comes by the power of the ox.”⁷⁶

⁷³ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 88d (top); 89b; 96a.

⁷⁴ {The animalistic soul is one of the two souls possessed by every Jew, the other being the G-dly soul. A fundamental element of the animalistic soul is that it desires physicality, and all negative traits are rooted in the animalistic soul. The primary objective of a Jew’s divine service is to subdue the desires of the animalistic soul, to direct its powers for more noble objectives. Ultimately the righteous are given the ability to transform it.}

⁷⁵ {*Tohu* and *Tikkun* — (Kabbalistic terms; lit. "chaos" and "rectification"); *Kabbalah* explains that the world was initially in a spiritual condition called *Tohu* (chaos), an elevated realm of spiritual existence in which there was an over-abundance of Divine Light, and a paucity of vessels to contain this Light. This former spiritual world, therefore, lacked the balance that characterizes our current world of *Tikkun* (rectified). *Tohu* collapsed in an event called *sheviras hakeilim* — the breaking of the vessels, when the light departed from them. This “break” was planned by Hashem in the first place, for it was a “destruction for the purpose of building,” since only then could there exist the orderly world we are familiar with, the world of *Tikkun* (“rectification” or “order”). This world possesses lesser lights, but the vessels are plentiful. The sparks of holiness that “fell” when the vessels were broken are hidden within various parts of our world, and awaiting their “correction” through mankind’s divine service.}

⁷⁶ *Mishlei* 14:4.

- b) The intent of boundless *walking* is in order to fulfill {the verse} “**we** (in the plural) **will run** after you”⁷⁷ — so that even the G-dly soul (of *Tikkun*) will progress in an unbounded manner.
- c) After the G-dly soul achieves its unbounded advance (“we will run after you”), the G-dly soul ascends to its true source, which is exclusive to it: “The king brought **me** (in singular) into his chamber.”⁷⁸

This is the distinction between the families of Kehas, Gershon, and Merari: Regarding the family of Merari, the Torah says, “the **charge** of their carrying.” However, they used wagons to carry. (Even when they carried on their shoulders, this was not considered an *avodah*.) Meaning, spiritually, this *avodah* entailed unbounded *walking* only with their animalistic souls (symbolized by “wagons”). But their *walking* did not become ingrained within their very selves, in their G-dly souls.

The family of Gershon exemplified {the verse} “we will run after you,” connoting unlimited *walking* {progression} with both their animalistic souls (transporting on wagons) and their G-dly souls (alluded to by the verse, “This is the *avodah*... and to **carry**”).

The family of Kehas represented an even more sublime level, alluded to by the verse, “The king brought me to his chamber”: Their unbounded *walking* was propelled by the true root of their G-dly souls, totally unrelated to their animalistic souls (wagons).

Therefore, their primary task was transporting the Ark — the **Torah** — for the ideal expressed in the verse “the king brought me to his chamber” was actualized at *Matan Torah* on the holiday of Shavuos.⁷⁹

-Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Naso*, 5725 and 5734⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *Shir HaShirim* 1:4.

⁷⁸ *Shir HaShirim* 1:4.

⁷⁹ See the beg. of {the Chassidic discourse,} “*Moshcheini 5701*” (first discourse).

⁸⁰ {1965 and 1974.}