

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON PARSHAS NASO - 5757

B'S'D'

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drasha@torah.org DRASHA PARSHAS NASO -- SMALL TALK

This week's parsha contains a number of exciting episodes. It details the sordid tale of the adulterous women, her fate and that of her illicit adulterer. It illustrates the rules and regulations of the nazir, one who has abstained from worldly pleasures by eschewing wine in addition to leaving his hair unshorn. However, tucked away in the midst of the controversial episodes are the priestly blessings -- five verses that shine an encouraging light in the midst of a difficult portion. Those verses contain the priestly blessings that are well known to many of us. "May Hashem bless you and keep you. May Hashem shine his countenance on you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift his countenance upon you and establish you in peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)" Less celebrated, however, are the verses that appear immediately before and after the actual blessings. "Thus shall you bless the children of Israel, speak to them." What is the importance - even the meaning -- of the extra words, "speak to them"? After Hashem charges the priests with the actual verses of blessing, He ends with an additional command. "Place My name upon the children of Israel and I shall bless them." Again, the verse leaves us wondering - of course, it is Hashem that will bless them but what does His name have to do with it? Didn't He just prescribe the formula? Why aren't the three verses enough to spur G-d's blessings?

A few months after moving to Woodmere, a lovely young Israeli couple with two young children moved next door to us. After conversing with them, my wife and I realized that in Israel they had not been the least bit observant of Jewish tradition. They had not even observed Yom Kippur, let alone kept Shabbat or kosher. It seemed that the reason they moved to America because Israel was becoming to Jewish for them. My wife and I felt a responsibility to bring these fine people closer to the Torah, yet we also did not feel comfortable telling them about laws that they must have known about, but chose not to observe. Fortunately in our neighborhood lived the great Rosh Yeshiva who brought thousands of people close to Torah, Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld, of blessed memory. I explained our situation to him and basically asked him, "Rebbe, what do you in order to make someone frum (religious)?" He smiled and put his large hand on my shoulder. "Do absolutely nothing!" I stood shocked and confused as he continued. "Be a mensch: Never miss a 'good morning' or a 'good afternoon'. Make sure your lawn is neat and your children are well behaved. And just be friendly." Then he quoted the words of our sages, 'make sure that the name of Hashem is cherished through you.' He paused, looked me in the eye, and proclaimed confidently, "follow that advice and you will not have to do a thing. They will get closer to the Torah." We followed his advice. We invited them for meals, and our children played together. I talked politics with him while my wife discussed gardening with her. We spoke about everything -- except religion. I was therefore shocked, when, in October, our neighbors asked us where the closest synagogue was. They decided to go to shul for Yom Kippur. I was even more surprised when days later they asked for my help in building a Sukkah. I am sad to relate that recently we lost some very good neighbors. After 5 years of living in the US, they decided to move back to Israel. America was becoming too goyish (gentile) for them.

Before it enumerates the actual blessings, the Torah teaches us the true way to bless Jews - speak to them. The words, "speak to them" may be more important than the actual blessing. The saintly Chofetz Chaim charged my wife's grandfather Rabbi Laizer Levin, who was Rabbi of Detroit for 50 years, with a simple message. "Laizer, gei rehd tzoo Yidden." (Reb Laizer go and speak to Jews.) And the actual priestly blessings do not end much

differently. "Place My name upon the children of Israel and I shall bless them." (Numbers 6:27). When Hashem's name is placed upon His nation, then blessing is sure to follow. A smile, a hello, a Good Shabbos, or Shabbat Shalom may be the key to forging a different attitude to an otherwise skeptical Jew. To paraphrase a man who reached great heights, "One small word to man can produce giants for mankind." The true blessing does not come from theological incantations; it comes from the simple smiles of the heart. Good Shabbos. Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Elliot Lauer HaRav Eliezer ben Rav Ahron Dovid of blessed memory

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weekly-halacha@torah.org WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5757
COPYRIGHT 1996-7 SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO
PARSHAS NASSO By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

The kohen shall bring her near and have her stand before Hashem (5:18)
We tell her... wine causes sin, excessive frivolity causes sin... (Sotah 7a)

MECHITZAH IN A SHUL: WHY AND HOW?

The halachah that requires men to be separated from women while davening in shul has its origins in the procedure followed in the Bais Hamikdash. Our Sages in the Mishnah(1) report that a major "adjustment" was made in the Bais Hamikdash during the festive holiday of Sukkos. The Talmud explains that the adjustment consisted of building a balcony over the men's section so that the women could witness the festivities of Simchas Bais Hashoeivah. Had they stood where they normally did, the mingling of the crowds and the festive holiday air would have led to kalus rosh, excessive frivolity. The Talmud attests that the need for a balcony was so pressing that its construction was approved even though it is generally prohibited to expand or modify the original structure of the Bais Hamikdash. The Biblical source for the separation of men and women, says the Talmud, is found in the verse in Zechariah in which the prophet foretells the eulogy of Moshichah ben Yosef, where men and women will be seated separately. If separate seating is required even at so solemn an affair as a eulogy, how much more so must separate seating be required on a joyful occasion! Following the example set by our Sages in the Bais Hamikdash, the age-old tradition has been to make a clear division and a separation between the main sanctuary and the women's section. Some shuls built a balcony, like the Bais Hamikdash had, while others constructed a thick wall that completely separated the two sections. This arrangement was so taken for granted, so undisputed, that it is not even explicitly cited in the Shulchan Aruch as a requirement(2). About a hundred years ago, when some shuls in Germany and Hungary began to question the need for a mechitzah, all the leading Rabbis(3) strictly prohibited davening in any shul that lowered or removed the traditional separation between the two sections. With the mass immigration of Jews to the United States in the late 1800's, many modern synagogues did not insist upon a mechitzah that completely blocked out the women's section. First Reform and Conservative temples, and then even more traditional ones, began to openly defy our hallowed tradition and gradually lowered or removed the barrier which separated the men from the women. The following questions were then posed to the venerable poskim in the U. S.: Is this practice justified? Is a mechitzah halachically required? How high does a mechitzah have to be?

REASON FOR THE BALCONY IN THE BAIS HAMIKDASH In order to answer these questions correctly, we must first examine what, exactly, was the purpose of the balcony in the Bais Hamikdash. We explained earlier that a balcony was constructed to prevent kalus rosh,

excessive frivolity. The Talmud does not, however, elaborate on how the separation was effective in guaranteeing that kalus rosh did not prevail. There are two possible ways to understand this: Kalus rosh prevails when the men can freely gaze at the women. It interferes with their concentration and profanes the sanctity of the Bais Hamikdash. By seating the women on a balcony over the men's section, the men can no longer view the women(4). To accomplish this purpose, the balcony was constructed in one of two ways: 1) The men's section was directly underneath the balcony, hidden from the women's line of vision. The women were nevertheless able to see a small clearing in the middle of the men's section where the few dancers would perform(5). (The majority of the men did not actively participate in the festivities; they were merely spectators(6).) 2) The balcony was built above the sides of the men's section, but it was enclosed with a curtain or a one-way mirror. This permitted the women to watch the men from above but completely blocked the men's view of the women(7); Kalus rosh prevails when men and women are free to mix socially with one another. By relegating the women to a balcony and physically separating them from "mixing" with the men, the proper decorum and sanctity of the Bais Hamikdash was duly preserved(8). According to this understanding, then, the balcony did not completely block the men's view. Rather, it separated the two sections and prevented them from communicating or interacting with each other in any way. The question, then, as it applies to present day mechitzos, is as follows: Do we follow the first interpretation and require a mechitzah that completely blocks the men's view, or is it sufficient to have a mechitzah that divides the two sections in a way that prevents frivolity?

THE TWO VIEWS OF THE POSKIM There are two schools of thought among contemporary authorities as to the practical halachah. Many poskim(9) hold that the purpose of the mechitzah is that the men should not be able to view the women. Accordingly: The mechitzah must be high enough to completely block the entire women's section; The mechitzah must be made entirely from an opaque material. Glass, flowers and decorative wood slats are not acceptable for any part of the mechitzah; Even a balcony must be completely encircled by a curtain, etc. As stated previously, this practice was universally accepted, wherever Jews davened. The women's section, whether in the balcony or at the back of the shul, was totally partitioned from the men's. Such a separation was a fundamental feature of shul architecture, as basic as positioning the amud in front of the shul and a bimah in the middle. It was and still is part of the standard model for a Jewish place of worship. Harav Moshe Feinstein(10), however, after establishing that the basic requirement for separating men and women during prayer services is a Biblical obligation, holds that the basic halachah follows the second approach that we mentioned earlier. Although he agrees that it is commendable and praiseworthy to maintain the age-old traditional mechitzah, he nevertheless rules that the widespread practice of many shuls to lower the mechitzah somewhat is permitted according to the basic halachah. As long as the mechitzah is high enough to effectively block out any communication or interaction between the men's and women's sections, it is an halachically valid mechitzah. Accordingly: The minimum height for a mechitzah is shoulder-high, which the Talmud(11) calculates to be 17 to 18 tefachim high. Allowing for a difference of opinion concerning the exact size of a tefach, Harav Feinstein rules that a 66 inch mechitzah is permitted(12), while in extenuating circumstances 60 inches will suffice(13). Any mechitzah lower than that, however, is not considered a mechitzah at all. A balcony does not need to be encircled with a partition or a curtain. It is preferable and recommended, however, to do so if possible(14). Although, technically, the upper part of the mechitzah may be made out of glass since it serves as a physical barrier between the sections, it is self-defeating and inadequate to use glass as many women, unfortunately, come to shul improperly dressed and /or with their hair not covered properly(15). A mechitzah which has sizable gaps towards the top is not acceptable since it does not effectively guard against kalus rosh(16). A mechitzah which has tiny openings in the lattice work is permitted(17). The mechitzah must reach the required height (60") in both the men's and women's sections. Raising the floor of the women's section - which in effect lowers the height of the

mechitzah - defeats the purpose of the mechitzah and should not be done(18).

FOOTNOTES: 1 Sukah 51a. 2 Tzitz Eliezer 7:8. 3 Led by R' Shlomo Ganzfried, author of Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and M'haram Ash, disciple of Chasam Sofer, and countersigned by the Divrei Chaim The proclamation is published in Leiv Haeavri. See also M'haram Shick 79 and Zichron Yehudah 1:62 who a! Iso voiced strong objections to any tampering with the traditional mechitzah. 4 Rambam (commentary to the Mishnah Suka 5:2) 5 Tosfos Yom Tov (commentary to the Mishnah Suka 5:2). 6 Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:14. 7 Piskei Rid Suka 51; Meiri Midos 2:5; Korban Eidah (Yerushalmi Sukah 5:2) as explained in Divrei Yoel 1: 8 Rambam Hilchos Lulav 8:12 and Hilchos Beis Habchirah 5:9; Meiri Suka 51a; Tiferes Yisroel Suka 5:6; Aruch Hashulchan Ha'aasid 11. 9 M'haram Shik 77; Divrei Yoel (Satmar Rov); Harav E. M. Bloch (Taharas Yom Tov vol. 6); Shevet Halevi 1:29. 10 Igros Moshe OC 1:39 and in various other responsa throughout his works; Sridei Eish 2:14. See also ruling of Harav E.E. Henkin (quoted in Teshuvos Bnei Bonim pg. 12). 11 Shabbos 92a. 12 Igros Moshe OC 4:31. 13 Igros Moshe OC 3:23; 3:24; 4:30; 4:31. 14 Igros Moshe OC 1:42. 15 Igros Moshe OC 1:43; 3:23. 16 Igros Moshe OC 4:29. 17 Igros Moshe OC 4:32. 18 Igros Moshe OC 3:23; 3:24; 4:31.

***This issue is sponsored by Dr. and Mrs. Louis Malcmacher on the occasion of the Bar Mitzvah of their son, Shmuel, n"y May they see only Nachas from the entire family.

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* TORAH WEEKLY * Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion Parshas Nasso

Armored Blessings "Hashem should bless you and keep you." (6:24) Once there was a king who had a beloved friend who lived in Syria. The king wished to honor his friend and so he summoned him to his palace in Rome. The king feted his friend in royal style and gave him a hundred pieces of pure gold to take back home with him. On the way home, the king's friend was beset by bandits who stole not only the hundred pieces of gold, but also everything else he possessed. A king of flesh and blood can give extravagant presents, but he has no means of guaranteeing that his blessings will remain with the recipient. When Hashem blesses us, however, He has the power not only to bless us, but to guard the blessing so that it will stay with us. It's burglar-proof. That is the simple meaning of this verse: "May Hashem bless you and guard that blessing from all loss." There's no 'Brink's' van in the world that can guarantee you that! Midrash Tanchuma Nasso 10, Rabbeinu Bachya; ... Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman Production Design: Lev Ohr Somayach International

"RavFrاند" List - Rabbi Frاند on Parshas Naso - Parshas Naso:

Count ALSO them: A Great Lesson in Community Service In this week's Parsha, we find two important lessons regarding a person's approach to communal work. The Parsha begins by saying "Count ALSO (gam) the heads of the family of Gershom. What does the pasuk [verse] mean when it says ALSO here? We know that in the previous parsha we had the command to count the members of the family of Kehas. The descendants of Kehas had the job to carry the utensils of the Mishkan. They carried the Menorah, the Table, the Altar, the Ark, and so forth. Those vessels constituted the essence of the Divine Service in the Mishkan. What was left for the family of Gershom? They were like, l'havdil, the "second team." They carried the boards, the curtains, and the other "less essential" items. The Torah is

saying, by using the word ALSO here, as follows: Lest we think that only the people charged with carrying the important items, are themselves important; lest we think that only for them is it appropriate to use the terminology "Naso es Rosh" (literally 'lift their heads' or 'elevate') in reference to counting them -- the Torah tells us otherwise. The Torah says, "Elevate ALSO the family of Gershom." Don't make the mistake of thinking of them as mere porters. Do not think that they are any less important because of their apparently more menial task. This is a great lesson in community service. When people work for an organization, invariably there are jobs that have to be done that are the more glamorous jobs -- the jobs that get the publicity and the honor. When a person is the Dinner Chairman of an organization, he is the fellow that sits on the dais; he is the fellow who says a few words to the assembled guests; he is the fellow that receives the 'kavod.' However, in preparation, leading up to that final dinner was a person that made calls and a person that schlepped and a person that ran to the printer and all the numerous items that go into making any type of affair. The Torah tells us that with G-d, what counts is that the job gets done. For the job to get done requires a team effort. With G-d the person who schleps chairs is no less significant than the person who gets to present the plaque. To G-d, it was the same whether one was carrying the Ark of the Mishkan or the wood boards of the Mishkan. The Torah makes that point by stressing here -- elevate ALSO the heads of the children of Gershom. The Menachem Zion compares this to what we find by the tribes of Zevulun and Yissachor. We see there, that those who help financially are mentioned ahead of those who sit and learn ("Rejoice Zevulun in your going out and Yissachor in your tents" [Devarim 33:18]) because G-d knows that in order for there to be Torah in the Jewish People there have to be both Learners of Torah and Supporters of Torah. With G-d they are equally important. So too here, the family of Gershom are just as important as the family of Kehas in the carrying out of their Mishkan related duties. Whether it is a glamorous job or a menial job, whether it gets honor in this world or not, when a person does something for the community, it is always important in G-d's eyes.

One Must Carry a Tune, Not a Chip on His Shoulder Rav Gedaliah Schorr draws another lesson in communal service from a second verse in this week's portion. It states (Bamidbar 7:9) regarding the transporting duties of the children of Kehas, "And they should carry it (yisa-u) on their shoulders." And yet, there is an interesting Gemara in tractate Eruchin [11a] which interprets the word "yisa-u," not in relationship to carrying but in relationship to singing. How ironic, says Rav Gedaliah Schorr, that the same word, which means they should schlep on their shoulders, also means that they should sing. There are two ways one can schlep something -- one can schlep with a sigh or one can schlep with a song. When one is working for an organization one can schlep and complain and be bitter about the difficulties encountered. On the other hand one can keep in mind the importance of the work and can work with a smile and indeed even with a niggun. The weight of community service has to be borne with a tune and with enthusiasm. That must be the approach to Avodas HaTzibbur. Anyone who has ever worked for any communal organization knows that the work is full of aggravation. People rarely come up and say "Yasher Koach, it was a beautiful job." They come with complaints and critiques. One can put on a dinner for a thousand people. Everything can be beautiful and one fellow comes up and his only comment is "Why did you sit me next to the door?" That is his whole commentary on the entire evening. The chairman has worked for weeks, and this is all he gets? "Why did you put me next to the door?" "On their shoulders they should lift it (yisa-u)". As the Talmud says, the word yisa-u refers to song. In other words, forget about it! The reward awaiting community service is very great. It should be borne with a song, not with a sigh.

Peace Begins at Home This week's Parsha contains the Priestly Blessing. Each of the Priestly Blessings [Bamidbar 6:24-27] is said in the singular. The reason is because a Bracha always has to be tailor-made for the recipient. This makes perfect sense throughout the Priestly Blessing, until we come to the final blessing "And may He grant Peace to you." We recently mentioned that Peace is the most important of all blessings. "Without peace

there is nothing" [Sifra Bechukosai]. "G-d did not find a vessel that could hold blessing other than Peace" [Uktzin 3:12]. A person can have health, wealth, children, everything. But if he doesn't have Shalom, he doesn't have anything. Maseches Berachot, the first tractate of the Talmud, ends with the words "G-d grants strength to His nation; G-d will bless His nation with Peace" [Tehillim 29:11]. The last tractate in Talmud, Uktzin, contains the above quoted Mishneh (G-d did not find a vessel that could hold blessing other than Peace). Shalom is the key to everything. Peace and the lack thereof always involve more than one person. If a person doesn't have peace with his wife or his neighbor, there are at least two people involved. If there is no peace in the world it is between countries. Why then, is the blessing for Peace in the singular. The Menachem Zion says that the premise of the question is a mistake. Indeed, a person needs Shalom. But the most primary need for peace is between a person and himself. One must be at peace with oneself. If we look at people and talk with people throughout various stages of their lives, we invariably find that people are torn about what they should do and what they should not do. There is sometimes inner conflict and inner turmoil about how people should lead their lives.

This is something that affects young and old, Jew and non-Jew. The whole matter of "mid-life crises" is that a person has no inner peace. He reaches 40 or 45 and asks himself "Is this what I really want to do? Is this what it is really all about?" Again, there is no peace. The place where Peace has to begin is "at home" -- a person has to be at peace with himself. People who are always upset, always fighting, never happy with everybody else, are ultimately and essentially not at peace with themselves. People who are disappointed; people who are dissatisfied with themselves -- are dissatisfied with everything else, as well. Therefore, when the Torah gives us the blessing of Peace, G-d knows where to start. He starts with the individual. "V'Yasem LECHA Shalom." Once a person has inner peace, he can have peace with his wife, peace with his family, and ultimately peace with the entire world. But it starts with himself.

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From jr@sco.COM Tue Jun 10 15:27:18 1997 naso.97 Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Parshas Naso (Shiur date: 6/15/76)

Parshas Naso presents the Chanukas Hamizbeach, the consecration of the altar in the Mishkan. Even though the leader of each tribe brought the same sacrifice, the Torah repeats the details of for each one. The Ramban asked why was it necessary to repeat the specifics for each one? It would have been straightforward to summarize that all the tribes brought the same sacrifice. Also, if there was a need to mention each individually, why does the Torah summarize the total sacrifices that were offered during the consecration at the end of the Parsha?

The Ramban offers 2 explanations. The first, is that the Torah wanted to honor each leader by specifying his tribe and his sacrifice on his appointed day. Since it was impossible for each to be the first to bring, each was honored with his own day to bring his tribes' offering. The second reason offered by the Ramban is that the leaders, simultaneously on their own, all decided to bring the same sacrifice in honor of the consecration and Hashem, kvayachol, agreed with their initiative. We find similar cases where Hashem, kvayachol, agreed with initiatives taken by Moshe and Bnay Yisrael. For example, the idea that a daughter inherits the property of her father was first noted by the story of the daughters of Tzlafchad. We also find that the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini comes after the people who were unclean and could not bring the sacrifice requested from Moshe that they not be excluded from the mitzvah.

The Ramban says that each leader had a different Hashkafas Olam, associated with his sacrifice. For example, Shevet Yehuda was interested in Malchus, while Shevet Zevulun was praying for success in business, while Shevet Yisachar was praying for success in learning Torah. From the external view, they all brought the same sacrifice. However the Korban Shebelev,

their internal perspective and approach, made each leader's Korban unique to his tribe.

We usually find the name of Hashem (tetragrammaton) associated with Korbanos. We do not find the name Elokim. According to a strict application of Midas Hadin, man should have to sacrifice himself in order to atone for his sins. It is only through the Midas Hachessed of Hashem that man brings an animal in his place. For instance, when Hashem tells Avraham to bring Isaac as a sacrifice, he appears to Avraham with the name Elokim, connoting Midas Hadin. Only after Avraham shows his readiness to sacrifice Isaac in order to show his commitment to Hashem, does Hashem call out to Avraham with the name that connotes Midas Hachessed Vrachamim. Chazal interpret Adam Ki Yakriv Mikem that man must be prepared to sacrifice himself as required by Midas Hadin. Each person has a different reason for bringing a sacrifice. It is only through the Midas Hachessed of Hashem that man may substitute an animal to be sacrificed in his place. The Kavanas Halev that is associated with an individual's self sacrifice is transferred to his Korban and makes it uniquely his.

Each tribe had a separate identity and unique talents and strengths. This uniqueness was symbolized by the unique flag and color associated with each tribe. Together, they comprised the complete spectrum of color, which in total made up Klal Yisrael. Though externally all the elders brought the same Korban, each was as important and unique as the flag and color of the tribe that offered it.

The term Knesses Yisrael is used instead of Am Yisrael. The word Knesses derives from the root to "bring in". Each Jew and tribe brings along and contributes something to the overall mosaic that makes up Knesses Yisrael. This is what the Ramban meant when he says that after specifying the sacrifice for each leader, the Torah summarizes the total number of sacrifices brought during the consecration. The consecration represents the contributions of each of the tribes which must be viewed together to appreciate the complete united Knesses Yisrael. The Torah says that Hashem blessed Avraham Bakol, with everything. Avraham, the first Jew, possessed all the talents and attributes that that Knesses Yisrael jointly represented. The Ramban comments that Bakol as it refers to Avraham is similar to the term Kallah found in Shir Hashirim, which describes Knesses Yisrael, for it includes everyone. Every Jew is an integral part in the whole of Knesses Yisrael.

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The Levite Service Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig

The tasks assigned to the Levi'im, which are detailed in our parshiot, seem to be temporary tasks, limited in their duration. However, the Levi'im in fact teach and demonstrate the paths of Divine service for all generations.

The Levi'im had three principal roles in the desert: carrying, dismantling and erecting the mishkan; guarding the mishkan and singing; and teaching the nation Torah ("They teach your judgements to Ya'akov").

The first task - carrying the mishkan - exemplifies and characterizes the nature of the Levite service. They are responsible for carrying the place where the Shekhina is revealed, bearing this holy site and building this edifice at each station. With each journey the nation reaches a new destination, each complete with its own new environment and new challenges. In each place they build this holy edifice. While the Kohanim are responsible for those aspects which are static and fixed - "And the Kohanim stood in their place" (Divrei Ha-Yamim II 35:10), the Levi'im take charge of that which changes - "And the Levi'im in their divisions" (ibid.) -

i.e. the various different situations, places and times. At the same time, despite the feeling of transition and change, they are commanded to build the edifice each time as a permanent and eternal building. "If a matter for judgement be beyond you... you shall come to the Kohanim and the Levi'im... and they shall tell you the judgement" (Devarim 17:8-9). The Kohanim teach God's judgements, while the Levi'im "caused the people to understand the Torah" (Nechemia 8:7) - they explain the words of Torah to the masses, facilitating the acquisition of Torah by the nation as a whole, each person according to his ability and capacity.

From here we can understand the nature of their second task, too - that of guarding. The Levi'im guard the mishkan from outside forces. These forces change and renew themselves from time to time, and the Levi'im are continually forced to deal with new currents, to fight new battles and to approach new challenges. We tend to believe that not every task uplifts its performer. With regard to those who carried the aron (ark), the Torah teaches us that the aron "carried its bearers" - their work uplifts them; their task elevates them, advances and develops them. But when it comes to the other associated tasks, much physical effort is required, and one may fear that the task limits and blocks the possibility of spiritual elevation. God's command at the beginning of the parasha comes to combat this conception: "And God spoke to Moshe saying, 'Count ("naso" - literally, "lift up") the number ("rosh" - literally, "head") of the sons of Gershon, them too...' - they, too, lift their heads proudly. The most important thing is the readiness to perform any task and any job, with the recognition that this is holy work. With such an attitude - one of readiness to perform work which would seemingly represent an obstacle to development and personal progress - every task elevates. This attitude in Divine service is particularly emphasized in the service of the Levi'im. We are taught that a Levi who was supposed to sing, but chose to guard the gates because he felt that the job of singing was too elevated for him, was deserving of death; and a Levi who accepted all the mitzvot pertaining to the Levi'im except for one, was not accepted.

In a famous passage at the end of Hilkhos Shemitta ve-Yovel (13:13), the Rambam writes: "And not only the tribe of Levi, but any individual in the world whose spirit and understanding drive him to separate himself in order to serve God and to know God, and who walks straight as the Lord made him, and removes from himself the yoke of all the various mortal concerns - this person is sanctified as Holy of Holies, and God will be his portion and his inheritance for ever and ever, for all eternity. And God will cause him to receive all that he requires in this world, as He did for the Kohanim and Levi'im." Anyone who wishes to join in Divine Service in fact enlists in the ranks of the Levi'im, and must learn from them how the task is to be performed. (Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Naso 5733. Translated by Kaeren Fish.) VISIT YHE'S WEB SITE:
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