

Bamidbar, Rabbi James Proops

The *parasha* of *Bamidbar* contains intricate details of the jobs that were given to *Shevet Levi* when they departed from one place to another. Some were given the task of carrying the *Aron*, others the *Menorah* and others the *Keilim* of the *Mishkan*. We are also told in great detail, the duties of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen,

וּפְקֻדֹת אֶלְעָזָר | בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן שֶׁמֶן הַמָּאוֹר וּקְטֹרֶת הַסַּמִּים וּמִנְחַת הַתְּמִיד וְשֶׁמֶן הַמִּשְׁחָה פְּקֻדֹת
כָּל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ בְּקֹדֶשׁ וּבְכֵלָיו

“And the charge of Elazar the son of Aharon HaKohen shall be the oil for the light and the sweet incense, the meal offering and the anointing oil, the oversight of the *Mishkan* and all that is in it and its vessels”.

The medrash in *Bamidbar Rabbah* asks, וְהֵיכָן הָיָה טָעוּן כָּל אֵלוֹ how is it possible that he could possibly carry all these things and at the same time supervise the entire transport? It goes on to explain that he carried the oil in his right hand, the incense in his left hand, the meal offering slung over his arm and the flask of oil suspended from his girdle! Could he not have asked someone to help him with? Was it appropriate for the וּנְשִׂיא נְשִׂיאֵי הַלְוִי the prince of princes of the *Leviim* to bear such a load? The medrash continues שָׂאִין גְּאוּהָ לְפָנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים there is no pride before God and the prince of the *Leviim* must carry these things and march ahead of the people.

How would the *mishkan* be carried through the desert if the *Leviim* had said “We have our hands full or it is beneath our dignity?”. To serve Hashem and to lead the Jewish People often demands the carrying of burdens alone.

The job of the *Leviim* was a particularly difficult one. The carrying of the *Aron* fell to the family of *Kehat* who started out more numerous than all the other families in *Shevet Levi*. When the first census was taken they numbered 2,900 but when the last census was taken they were greatly reduced. Despite lacking in numbers we are told that they didn't abandon the *Aron* and run to take an easier task. That is one of the reasons for this detailed description of the allocation of duties in the *parasha*. When it comes to *avodat Hashem*, no job can be abandoned.

It would have been very easy for us to throw off the yoke of our religious obligations with the onset of the 'Corona crisis'. Forced to daven on our own, prevented from attending shiurim in person, our ability to prepare for Pesach greatly hindered. However we as individuals, as a community and as a people, did not turn our back on our responsibility. We struggle through the challenges, we have garnered technology in ways most of us had little prior-experience and we have become creative in ways to ensure that our Judaism stays alive. In truth this is not surprising given that Jews throughout the ages have long held the mentality that whatever is thrown at them, some times considerably worse than what we are experiencing now, Jewish practice and the Torah are carried with them.

We must continue to follow the example of Elazar, marching ahead of the Kohanim with full load. We must continue to follow in the example of the Leviim who carried the *Mishkan* and it's *Keilim* with pride through difficult terrain and conditions. We must not depend on others to carry and maintain our Judaism for us, but we must take responsibility upon ourselves. To a large extent many of us have lived up to these ideals in the past few months, but as we look to emerge from our isolation the terrain we must traverse is again unknown and we will again have to adapt to a new reality. The only certainty is that our role, just like that of *Shevet Levi*, will never change. We will continue to carry the Torah in all its forms with us throughout our journey wherever it may lead.