

Bamidbar - Rabbi Lerner - May 22, 2011

4:2-3: *Take a census ("Lift up the heads") of the children of Kehas from amongst the children of Levi, according to their families, according to the heads of their fathers' households. Kehas was the most important (not the eldest) of the children of Levi. The count is from 30-50, the ones who do the work of the Ohel Moed.*

Earlier in 3:24 there was a count of the entire tribe of Levi, from the age of one month and up; the count of all of the nation was from 20 years old and up, those who would join the army. The Torah tells us in 3:39 that despite counting from a much earlier age, the whole count of the Leviyim was only 22,000. This number was much smaller than each of the other tribes. Why was it so much smaller? **Kli Yakar**: Several possible reasons: 1) They are holier than the rest of the tribes with special duties in the Mishkan where the shechinah dwells - the three families of Leviyim were on three sides, on the fourth was Moshe. The shechinah does not come down unless the proper numbers of Jews are there to give proper honor - and that number is a minimum of 22,000. We get this from the phrase *Alphei Rivevos Yisrael* - each word is plural, one means 1000, 1 means 10,000 - two of each adds up to 22,000. So God manipulated the numbers of the tribe of Levi to reach this number. 2) As the **Ramban** said, when the slavery of the Jews began in Egypt, the Torah said that as they were persecuted, the more they would reproduce; the Leviyim were not persecuted because they were already known as holy people, a family of priests, and Pharaoh left them alone; therefore, since they were not persecuted, they did not warrant extraordinary multiplication. As a rule, God does not want to go against nature; but when the goyim go out of their way to decimate us, He will foil their plans; if they plot against us, God will override nature so they do not succeed. But with Levi, He left them to procreate the normal, natural way, without divine intervention, since they were not persecuted. 3) The Leviyim were given 10% of the GNP through Ma'aser since they had no fields and produce, as they were the teachers of Torah. God did not want to burden the nation with too many Leviyim to support - but this is a lame explanation - if God wanted to take care of His holy nation, He could take care of that easily by increasing crops. 4) The Leviyim were under great danger in the handling of the Mishkan, and they were decimated and killed by doing things wrong. We see this in the final pasukim of the parsha, where it says in 4:18-20 that you should bend over backwards to help the family of Kehas so that they should not die from things they see in the Mishkan. 5) God looks ahead and sees that many Leviyim will not be such great tzadikim, and He wanted to purge those who will not be so good - Hashem weeded them out. 6) The best reason in his eyes is that we know from Shemos that Amram had divorced Yocheved and remarried, with the subsequent birth of Moshe. Amram was the leader of the tribe of Levi, and many Jews separated from their wives. The Kli Yakar says that after Amram separated from his wife, it was for a few years; when he did this, it was only the tribe of Levi that had followed Amram - the other Jews who were being tortured actually did not separate - their righteous wives would entice their husbands to continue to have children. Most husbands and wives did not separate, but the Leviyim were not being tortured and did not need the same encouragement from their wives. During those few years, the other tribes grew astronomically while Levi did not grow.

4:2: Kehas is singled out first; the other two families of Leviyim are counted afterwards. In 4:22, with Gershon, it doesn't say count from amongst the tribes of Levi; in 4:29 with Merari, it doesn't even say lift their heads. **Abarbanel**: Kehas' family was the highest elevation, as they had the greatest jobs. What was this elevation? They were the movers, the shleppers of the vessels and the entire Mishkan. It was a great honor, depending upon what they were carrying;

the biggest honor was given to Kehas, because they carried the holiest of objects, from the Aron to the Shulchan, Menorah, etc. The Kohanim first cover all of the objects for the Leviyim to then move; if the Leviyim tried to do the wrapping, they would die as soon as they see the vessels.

Who are the Leviyim who carry the objects? Only from the age of 30 to 50. **Rashi**: only those who are strongest will carry the vessels - less than 30 they are not strong enough - from here we learn in Pirkei Avos that the age of strength is 30. **Abarbanel**: but this doesn't make sense, as the nation is counted from 20 - that is the age of greatest strength, with these being the warriors of the nation. Fighting apparently is a different kind of strength. **Oznayim LaTorah**: physical strength begins at age 20 - they are strong enough to chase the enemy; the age of 30 is a different kind of strength - it is about being at one's prime spiritual strength - you have to be fully developed in terms of spiritual strength and maturity to carry the holy vessels - this first comes at the age of 30.

There is great detail given in the pasukim in how each move has to take place. First, the Aron is covered. Aharon and his children pack the vessels - first the Aron is covered. The Paroches that separates the Mishkan into the kodesh and kodesh kadashim is taken down and used to cover the Aron; that was the first layer of covering. This is then covered with seal skin covering, which is weather-proof and is used to cover all the other vessels. Finally, it was covered with a third layer, turquoise wool cloth over it - this color was the symbol of godliness, and this is what could be seen by all of the Jews. It was only after the third covering was placed that the Leviyim could come in. **Rav Nissan Alpert**: how could the kohanim go in to see the Aron if it only allowed to be seen by Moshe and once a year by Aharon? For purposes of moving and fixing things, Jews could go in to the Kodesh Kadashim.

Why is it called the Shulchan Hapanim? Because it has the Lechem Hapanim on it. The bread has to always remain on the Shulchan; the dishes and spoons were placed on top of the first covering cloth; the Lechem Hapanim could not have a covering separating it from the Shulchan - they remained on the table. The Shulchan represents the king's table; the job of the king of Israel is to sustain the Jewish people; this concept represents the sustenance of the people, and that is why the bread always has to remain on the table. There was an elaborate service where the new loaves replaced the old ones before each shabbos; it could not be taken off without the new ones in place - it would be a breach in the flow of sustenance from Hashem to His people. This is in contrast to the other vessels. The shulchan is covered with three clothes again - after first covering it with a turquoise wool cloth, the dishes and other supporting vessels are placed on top of that; this is then covered with a scarlet cloth, and then the seal skin covering. The menorah has one covering of turquoise wool - the Menorah represents Torah, and its supportive vessels and light cannot be separated from the remainder of the menorah - that is then covered with seal skin.

These vessels are holy and require the proper covering - if the Leviyim should touch the actual vessel, they would die. It was a dangerous task - it was the burden for the children of Kehas. They had tremendous holiness and had to be treated accordingly. Why does the final warning given to the *tribe* of Kehas - it is Levi that is the tribe, not Kehas? **Rev Nissan Alpert**: an entire tribe cannot be extinguished; Kehas is called a shevet even though they are not so that they are protected and can never be lost from amongst Bnei Yisrael.