

**Naso: Holy Shleppers**  
**Amanda Goldstein, Class of 2027**

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In *parshat* Naso, we are privy to many seemingly disparate accounts of intimate service between the Jewish people and God. The service of the Levites and the model of connecting to God by carrying holy vessels is worth further exploration. Coming as it does on the heels of Shavuot, one wonders whether there might be a connection between the wisdom contained in *parshat* Naso and that of *chag matan torateinu*, the holiday of the giving of the Torah.

In both last and this week's *parshiyot*, God assigns specific *Mishkan*-related tasks to each of the three Levite families: Kehat, Gershon, and Merari. Kehat, as first born, was responsible for the *Aron* (altar), the holiest part, while second and third born, Gershon and Merari, were assigned portions in decreasing *kedusha* (holiness). As Moshe concluded the sanctification of the *Mishkan*, Hashem commanded him that the wagons which he had received as gifts from the heads of each tribe be turned over to the families of Gershon and Merari for use in their service. The families of Kehat, the group responsible for the most precious and holy objects in existence at that time, however, were not offered this help. The Torah specifies:

*V'livnei ki'hat lo natan ki avodat hakodesh aleihem bakateif yisa'u*

But to the Kehathites he did not give any; since theirs was the service of the [most] sacred objects, their portorage was by shoulder (Bamidbar 7:9).

The job of Kehathites was not only to carry these sacred objects, but to do it “on their shoulders.” It is reasonable to assume that this was not only a tremendous emotional pressure, but also a heavy physical task, for inside the *Aron* were both sets of Tablets given by God to Moshe, the full second set and the shards of the broken first. Quite literally, shouldering the burden of these objects was the *mitzvah* that *bonei* Kehat had received upon themselves and that with which they toiled throughout the desert. How did they physically endure this task and what can we learn from their literal shouldering of this burden?

The Gemara in Sotah 35a tells us:

*Nasa aron et nos'av*

The *Aron* carried those who carried it.

The author Mark Twain once famously stated that if you “choose a job that you love, you will never work a day in your life.” Just as many people do not have the privilege to truly choose a job based on their passion and what evokes joy in their lives, so too the job of *bonei* Kehat was

chosen for them. However, *benei* Kehat loved their role and connected it to the greater mission of Levites as outlined in the Rambam's Mishnah Torah:

*Shehuvdal la'avod et hashem l'sharto, u'lhorot darachav hayisharim u'mishpatav  
ha'tzadikim larabim shehne'emar yoru mishpatekha l'yaakov v'toratkha l'yisrael*  
...they were set aside to serve God and minister unto Him and to instruct people at large  
in His just paths and righteous judgments, as [Devarim 33:10] states: "They will teach  
Your judgments to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel" (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shemitah  
V'Yovel 13:12).

The Levites were tasked with modeling how to connect with God and the three families whose jobs it was to carry the sacred objects of the Mishkan, exemplified how to relate to God through care of holy items and spaces. *Bnei* Kehat embodied the idea that doing hard things in service of Hashem can serve as a conduit for connection to God which can make the hard feel easier to bear.

Why, though, is this an essential message so close to Shavuot? Perhaps during this season of Torah giving and receiving, we are enjoined to take on some learning, or a new *mitzvah* that may seem challenging, with the full support of the insight gleaned from *benei* Kehat: that the more we connect to our Divine purpose, the more the Divine will elevate us. We can be carried by that which we carry.

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