

NASO (NUMBERS 4:21-7:89)

Once Upon a Bus Trip

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz



I wrote last week ("Hair Today -- Gone Tomorrow") about a comparison between yesterday's Levites and today's Jewish women. The Levites set an example for the Israelites by ignoring the peer pressure to follow the crowd and worship the Golden Calf. In a similar vein, the Daughters of Israel provide the necessary leadership for the rest of our nation to follow. Little did I suspect as I wrote those words how true I would soon find them to be.

The Levites, descendants of Jacob's third son Levi, are divided into three families -- Kehas, Gershon, and Merari. These three families are named after the three sons of Levi. This week's and last week's Torah Portions describe some of the responsibilities of these Levitical families. Each group was responsible for transporting different parts of the Tabernacle as they traveled through the desert.

Last week we read that the family of Kehas (Moses' grandfather) was in charge of carrying the Ark and all the holy vessels that were used in the Temple Service. There was a miracle associated with this task. The Ark should have been quite heavy. It was a large wooden box, lined inside and outside with gold. It contained the two tablets of the Ten Commandments that Moses had broken, and the replacement set as well. Yet, as we read in the Book of Joshua, the Ark, rather than being too heavy to carry, actually carried its carriers!

(Like the Levitical family of Kehas, the women of Israel have "carried the Ark." The "*Yiddishe Mammias*" have always served on the front line of Torah Tradition. They have served as the loyal transmitters of genuine Torah values to their children. Even when the men of Israel strayed from the

proper path, worshiping the Golden Calf or challenging the authority of Moses, the women always maintained their unquestioning devotion. Rather than viewing their role as a burden, they have always seen Torah observance as a privilege; as something that uplifts them. The Ark carries its carriers!)

This week's Torah Reading describes the assignments of the other two families. The Gershon family was in charge of carrying "covers."

There were many curtains, covers, and screens in the Tabernacle. The inside of the Tabernacle was not open for all the world to see. The beauty and splendor of the holy vessels of the Tabernacle were hidden from plain view. There were multi-colored tapestries, goat's-hair covers and animal hides. Covers rested on top of other covers. The "Gershonites" were in charge of carrying those covers.

(Our "Levites," the women of Israel, also specialize in "covers." If I may take the liberty of quoting myself, last week I wrote:

"The women of Israel have always inspired their families by doing the right thing. Wearing appropriate attire isn't always easy. Dressing modestly isn't politically correct. One of the ways of gaining notoriety in today's society is by appearing in extreme levels of 'dis-dress.' While the rest of the world looks for new ways to show as much as possible, the Jewish woman knows that true beauty comes through modesty and grace.")

Have a great Shabbos.

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