

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

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פְּרֻשֵׁת נְשֵׂא תִשָּׁפוּ

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מִבֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְעַד בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה כָּל הַבָּא לַעֲבֹד עֲבֹדַת עֲבֹדָה וְעֲבֹדַת מִשָּׁא בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד. (פרק ד'
(מד)

From thirty years of age and up, until fifty years of age, everyone who comes to perform the work of service and the work of burden in the Ohel Moeid.

Our pasuk is part of a closing overview of this Parsha which provided a counting as well as the services performed by the three Levite families, *Kehas, Gershon, and Merari*. What do עֲבֹדַת עֲבֹדָה and עֲבֹדַת מִשָּׁא refer to? Rashi, as well as many other Mefarshim, based on ערכין יא, explain that עֲבֹדַת עֲבֹדָה denotes “the song, which is performed, with cymbals and harps, for it is the service which is done for another service i.e., it is the song-service of the Leviim which accompanies the sacrificial-service of the Kohanim.” With regards to עֲבֹדַת מִשָּׁא, Rashi tells us “בְּמִשְׁמָעוֹ-understand it as it sounds, the service of carrying i.e., it should *not* be similarly interpreted as a service which *accompanies* carrying, but rather refers to the transporting of the *Aron, Menorah, Shulchan* and the two Altars-as the pasuk later tells us וְשָׂאוּ *they carried on their shoulder.*” These items were carried via their poles directly on the shoulders of the *Kehatites*. Real labor.

Rav Meir Simcha, in a short piece on our pasuk, offers a different approach to עֲבֹדַת עֲבֹדָה which he tells us וּפְשׁוּט-is simple and straightforward. He takes us to שבת צט. where the Gemara reviews a statement from the Mishna: On Shabbos, if “two balconies were on the same level and on the same side of a רְשׁוּת הָרֵבִים, and the רְשׁוּת הָרֵבִים separated the two, one who passes an item from one balcony to the other is liable... as that method, passing, was the service of the Leviim who carried the beams of the *Mishkan.*” The Gemara explains that the Mishna is referring specifically to the service of *Merari* which was to place the beams of the *Mishkan* onto cattle-driven wagons to be transported when the Camp traveled. The wagons moved in parallel pairs and the total width from the far side of one wagon to the far side of the other was fifteen *amos*. The Gemara then asks: “If so, we, who maintain that a thoroughfare in רְשׁוּת הָרֵבִים must be sixteen *amos* wide and derive it from the *Mishkan*, have a difficulty: The thoroughfare associated with the *Mishkan* (as we have just shown) was only fifteen *amos* wide? The Gemara answers: There was an extra *amah* where a member of the tribe of Levi stood so that if the boards should begin to slide off one another, he could take hold of them to set them right. Therefore, the total width was no less than sixteen *amos.*” This job of *these* Leviim, and likewise the *Gershon* and *Merari* families who worked with the wagons, was therefore an עֲבֹדַת עֲבֹדָה-a service which was an accompaniment to their *own* עֲבֹדָה of moving the *Mishkan's* כְּלִים onto the wagons and making sure they did not dislodge. So that while Rav Meir Simcha appreciates Rashi's explanation of עֲבֹדַת עֲבֹדָה as an עֲבֹדָה to an עֲבֹדָה, Rashi introduces *another* group's service, the *Kohanim's*, as the עֲבֹדָה which the Leviim,

through their song, were accompanying. Rav Meir Simcha prefers to keep it “in the family” i.e., both עֲבֹדַת עֲבָדָה refer to the *Gershon* and *Merari* Leviim who were “on call” while their בָּלִים were on the wagons, to make sure that none fell. עֲבֹדַת עֲבָדָה.

With this in mind, Rav Kupperman זצ"ל refers us to במדבר ד' ג where the pasuk presents the assignments of the family of *Kehas* and tells us מִבֶּן נְשָׁלִשִׁים נְשָׂה וְעַד בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים נְשָׂה כָּל בָּא לְצִבְיָה לְעֲשׂוֹת מְלָאכָה בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד / *From thirty years of age and up, until fifty years of age, everyone who comes to the legion to perform work in the Ohel Moeid.* Rav Meir Simcha notices that it is only with regards to the work of *Kehas* that the Torah uses the word מְלָאכָה. The work of *Gershon* and *Merari* is repeatedly called עֲבֹדָתָם, but never מְלָאכָה. Why so? He explains that מְלָאכָה hints to the “work” of Shabbos; as we know the מְלָאכָה הַמְשֻׁבָּן are the source for the thirty-nine מְלָאכָה שֶׁל שַׁבָּת. Clearly, the service of *Kehas* paralleled the Shabbos מְלָאכָה of הוֹצָאָה, carrying items from a public to a private domain and vice versa and so rightfully “deserved” to be called מְלָאכָה. The work of *Gershon* and *Merari* was loading the vessels onto the wagons and having them pulled by cattle. This is מְחַמֵּר-driving a laden animal and other labor performed by means of animals on Shabbos-and is discussed at length in שבת קנג. Rambam concludes that “it is forbidden to transfer a burden on an animal on Shabbos, as it states, וַיִּמְצְאוּ יְבוֹהַּ וְחֲמֹרָה / (...on the seventh day, you shall cease activity,) so that your ox and donkey may rest and this includes not only an ox and a donkey, but all animals, beasts, and fowl. Although a person is commanded to have his animals rest, he is not liable for causing them to work (even if done intentionally)... Therefore, הַמְחַמֵּר אַחֵר בְּהִמְתּוֹ בְּשַׁבָּת while it is carrying a burden, is not liable.” Rashi, in שבת קנד: adds that there is not even מְלִקוֹת given. For these reasons, according to Rav Meir Simcha, the Torah never describes the work of *Gershon* and *Merari* as מְלָאכָה but only as עֲבָדָה!

(Interestingly, referencing the liability of transgressing מְחַמֵּר and why it is a lower-level prohibition, Rav Meir Simcha writes, דְּגַבֵּי שַׁבָּת לֹא חַיִּיב בָּהּ רֶק מְלִקוֹת. But there is no punishment for מְחַמֵּר? Rav Kupperman זצ"ל says that what should have been written is דְּגַבֵּי שַׁבָּת לֹא חַיִּיב בָּהּ, not even lashes. I would say that perhaps he is alluding to the lone opinion in שבת קנד: which is ultimately refuted, that feels that there *would be* a מְלִקוֹת punishment for מְחַמֵּר but even so, with no סְקִילָה or חֲטָאת penalty, it would certainly not be placed in the category of a שַׁבָּת.)

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