

# WHO'S ON FIRST?

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Who's On First?

**By Shlomo Katz**

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring**  
**Edited by Shlomo Katz**

**Nasso: Who's On First?**  
**Volume XVIII, No. 31**  
**9 Sivan 5764**  
**May 29, 2004**

**Sponsored by**  
**Yitzchok and Barbie Lehmann Siegel**  
**in memory of father Dr. Manfred R. Lehmann a"h**  
**and brother, Jamie Lehmann a"h**

**Today's Learning:**  
**Mikvaot 7:7-8:1**  
**O.C. 216:4-6**  
**Daf Yomi (Bavli): Chullin 127**  
**Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sotah 42**

Our parashah opens: "Take a census of the sons of Gershon also." Why "also"? R' Avraham Saba z"l (Spain; 1440-1508) explains that Gershon was the oldest son of Levi, and his descendants had a claim to be counted before the descendants of Gershon's younger brother Kehat. Since the family of Kehat was already counted at the end of last week's parashah, our parashah says, "Take a census of the sons of Gershon also."

And why were the descendants of Kehat counted first? R' Saba explains that the Torah honors Kehat for his Torah knowledge, just as we read in Divrei Hayamim I (4:9), "And Yaavetz was honored more

than his brothers." As the Gemara explains, Yaavetz was one of the greatest Torah scholars of the generation following Moshe Rabbeinu.

Similarly, Kehat's family was honored over the family of the firstborn Gershon because of the former's association with the Torah. On the verse (Mishlei 3:15), "It [the Torah] is more precious than peninim / pearls," the Midrash comments: "More precious than a firstborn" (a play on "lifnim" / "earlier," i.e., the firstborn, who is the early one). The family of Kehat carried the Ark which contained the luchot. Moreover, Kehat used to assemble crowds and teach them Torah. [Ed. note: The publisher of R' Saba's work notes that the source for this fact is unknown.] Kehat's name alludes to his assembling crowds, just as King Shlomo is called "Kohelet" because he also assembled large audiences; however, King Shlomo has an additional letter "lamed" ("Kohelet" vs. "Kehat") because the Mishnah (Avot ch.6) states that a king has 30 special attributes. (The gematria of "lamed" is 30.) (Tzror Hamor)

---

*"Uplift the sons of Kehat . . ." (4:2)*

*"Uplift the sons of Gershon also . . ." (4:22)*

*"The sons of Merari, . . . you should count them." (4:29)*

In these verses, Moshe was told to count the descendants of each of the three sons of Levi. Why did Hashem use the expression "nasso" / "uplift" in connection with two of them, but not the third? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (Yerushalayim; died 1951) explains as follows:

We read in Breishit (2:15), "He put him [Adam] in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it." Our Sages interpret "to work it" as a reference to keeping positive commandments and "to guard it" as a reference to observing negative commandments. The idea, writes R' Charlap, is that in Adam's state before his sin, any action that he might have taken would have been either a mitzvah or a sin. It either would have contributed to furthering G-d's purpose in creating the world or it would not have contributed to that purpose. If we lived in the ideal world which Hashem envisioned (as Adam briefly did), this would still be true. No activities would fall into the neutral category of "reshut" / "optional."

However, we live in a world where the force of spirituality is diminished. Some of our actions are neither mitzvot nor sins, they are only "reshut." (Nevertheless, a memory of the "old world" exists in Eretz Yisrael, where "optional" activities such as planting and harvesting are intimately bound up with numerous mitzvot.) In the future, we will again live in the ideal state where all of our actions have a spiritual effect.

In last week's and this week's parashot, Hashem assigns jobs in the Mishkan / Tabernacle to the levi'im. The Mishkan was the place where our ancestors got a taste of the spirituality which will again be revealed when the world reaches its ideal state. That Mishkan had three parts: the courtyard, the Holy, and the Holy of Holies. So, too, Bnei Yisrael have three parts: Kohanim, Levi'im and Yisraelim. There are also three ways of serving Hashem: through Torah, through prayer, and through work. However, "work" is only a service to G-d in the ideal world (such as in Adam's world). For us, it is a reshut / optional. [Each set of threes parallels the other set - (a) Torah, Kohanim and Holy of Holies (where the Torah was kept); (b) prayer, Levi'im (who sang / prayed in the Temple), and the Holy; (c) work, Yisraelim, and the public courtyard.]

There were also three parts to the tribe of Levi, i.e., the families of Kehat, Gershon and Merari. Kehat attained the greatest holiness of the three - his family carried the holiest vessels of the mishkan, including the Holy Ark. Gershon achieved the second highest level. Merari was third, and he thus paralleled service of Hashem through work. However, since, until the time of mashiach, work is not necessarily spiritually uplifting, the Torah did not use the expression "nasso" / "uplift" in connection with Merari.

(Mei Marom Vol. 11, No. 11)

---

The Chafetz Chaim (died 1933) once visited the town of Slonim, and a certain wealthy resident, R' Yosef, asked the sage to review his (R' Yosef's) will. R' Yosef wanted the Chafetz Chaim's opinion of whether he had divided his assets properly. The Chafetz Chaim looked at the will and saw that R' Yosef had divided his money into four equal shares - 10,000 rubles for each of his three sons and 10,000 rubles for his wife. In addition, R' Yosef had willed all of his sefarim / Torah library to various yeshivot. The Chafetz Chaim returned the will to R' Yosef and said, "You find the errors."

R' Yosef reviewed his will and replied, "I do not see any errors. It looks to me like it is all in order."

"No!" said the Chafetz Chaim. "Firstly, I am amazed that you left all your money to your family and your sefarim to yeshivot. Your children, too, will need sefarim, while yeshivot lack money for food more than they lack sefarim.

"Secondly, you have transgressed the verse (Yishayah 58:7), 'From your own flesh do not turn away.' True, 'your flesh' refers to your relatives, but you are your own closest relative, and you have made no provision for yourself. You worked hard for this money, and you should give yourself an equal share. Create another share of your assets," the Chafetz Chaim said, "and then divide it again - one-half for Torah scholars and one-half to chessed organizations, for example, for bikkur cholim, for poor people, and so on. The portion that is for Torah scholars also will help feed and clothe poor

people such that you will have a share not only in their Torah study but in their very livelihoods."

R' Yosef agreed and promised that he would change his will forthwith.

"Wait," said the Chafetz Chaim. "My advice to you is that you take your 8,000 ruble share and distribute it to appropriate institutions in your lifetime. You know how it is; when children see that their father has left a large portion of his estate to charity, they hire a lawyer to prove that their father was insane. Imagine the reaction in the Heavenly Court if you come there and they hear that, not only were your pledges to charity not fulfilled, but you were insane to boot!

"This," concluded the Chafetz Chaim, "is the lesson of the verse in Parashat Nasso (5:10), 'A man's holies shall be his.' Only what a person sets aside for holy uses will ultimately remain his."

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

---

*"May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you." (6:24-26)*

R' Shlomo Zalman Ulman z"l (20th century Hungarian rabbi) notes that all of the Priestly Blessings are phrased in the singular. They are addressed to each individual separately. How then can the last blessing speak of peace? Isn't peace a collective concept - peace between nations, peace between neighbors, etc.?

He explains: A Jew is commanded (Devarim 6:5) to love Hashem with all his heart and with all his soul. But man has other interests, and his organs are at war with each other. Some want to love and serve Hashem, while others may not. How can man win this war? Our Sages teach that one who wants to purify himself receives Divine assistance. This is the meaning of the blessing that the Kohanim utter: "May G-d establish peace for you," i.e., within you.

(Quoted in Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

---

*"Whoever hallows the Shabbat as befits it, whoever safeguards the Shabbat 'me-chalelo' / from desecrating it, his reward is exceedingly great 'le-fi' / in accordance with his deed."*

(From the Shabbat hymn: Kol Mekadesh)

The phrase "whoever safeguards the Shabbat `me-chalelo' / from desecrating it" comes from Yishayah (56:6). However, the word "me- chalelo" seems to be redundant. Obviously, one who safeguards Shabbat does not desecrate it!

R' Yitzchak Meshulam Feish Moskowitz z"l (1887-1981; prominent lay leader of the Sao Paolo, Brazil community) explains: Besides the melachot / physical activities that are prohibited on Shabbat, there are also certain types of speech that are prohibited on Shabbat. [Ed. note: Although the laws are complex and there are exceptions, a general rule of thumb is: If you can't do it on Shabbat, you can't talk about it either.] Why, asks R' Moskowitz, is speech regulated on Shabbat? The answer is that when G-d "rested" on the original Shabbat, it was His "speech" that rested. For six days, G-d had used "speech" to create the world (G-d said, "Let there be light," etc.), and when Shabbat came, He stopped speaking in that same way.

The same root that refers to desecration can refer to creation. Specifically, G-d is referred to in Devarim (32:18) as the "mecholel." Thus, the above phrase from the Shabbat zemirot can be read, "Whoever safeguards the Shabbat [as did the] `me-chalelo' [similar to `me- cholelo'] / as the Creator did" -- refraining even from inappropriate speech - "his reward is exceedingly great `le-fi' / in accordance with [literally, `according to the mouth of'] his deed."

(Yitzchak Yeranen p.46)

---

Copyright © 2004 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and **Torah.org**.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

*Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. Did you know that the low cost of sponsorship - only \$18 - has not changed in seventeen years? Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.*