

"And the charge of Elazar the son of Aharon the kohen shall be the oil for the light, and the sweet incense, the meal offering and the anointing oil, the oversight of the Mishkan and all of that is in it, as to the sanctuary and as to its vessels." (4:16)

At the end of the *parsha*, the *Torah* records in minute detail the various functions delegated to *Bnei Levi*. Each member of the tribe was given specific tasks to execute. Most notable is the multi-faceted charge allocated to Elazar. He was assigned the position of *Nasi*, prince, of the *leviim*. He also undertook to carry the vessels mentioned in the above *pasuk*.

Chazal question Elazar's ability to carry everything himself. Indeed, it seems logistically impossible to perform all of these duties at once. The *Midrash* explains that he carried the oil in his right hand, the incense in his left, the meal offering slung over his arm, and the flask of anointing oil suspended from his girdle! *Chazal* question the rationale behind this. Elazar was a dignified person, surrounded by *kohanim* who were ready to help. Yet, he was required to do it all alone! *Chazal's* response is "*There is no pride before Hashem.*" The *Nasi* must carry these vessels and march at the head of the people.

Horav Moshe Swift z.l. expounds on this *Midrash*. Imagine if dignity and pride were the dominating factors in the *leviim's* decisions to perform the service. The *Mishkan* would never have been carried across the desert! The *leviim* did not say, "Our hands are full; it is beneath our dignity to perform labor." "No," says the *Midrash*. There is no pride before Hashem. Jewish service demands able bodied service and whole hearted devotion. It requires that burdens be carried alone at times without help and without even moral support. If pride had been the principle criterion for our forebearers, we would have no *shuls*, no schools, no Jewish communities. They channeled all of their energies, sat on committees, knocked on doors and worked the "trenches" to build *Torah* in *Klal Yisrael*. This is the way that they achieved success in their endeavor.

The *Midrash* emphasizes the unique *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, of *Bnei Kehas*, whose duty it was to carry the *Aron Ha'kodosh*. Their family started out in large numbers, more numerous in fact than all the other families. Due to their constant exposure to such sublime duty, they were risking error, which was punishable by death. Their tribe was noticeably diminished during their trek in the desert. Yet, *Bnei Kehas* did not shirk their responsibility for an "easier" or "safer" duty. In spite of their depleted numbers, they continued. This was *mesiras nefesh*. They did not abandon the *Aron*. Individuals of this calibre were the ones who merited to carry the holiest of the *Mishkan's* appurtenances.