

From fifty years of age, he shall withdraw from the legion of work... He shall minister with his brethren... to safeguard the charge. (8:25,26).

The *Levi* “retires” at age fifty from bearing the holy vessels on his shoulders. He continues to function in all their Levite services, such as singing, closing the Temple gates and loading the wagons. The Torah writes: *V’sheireis es echav*, “He shall minister with his brethren”. This refers to giving them wise counsel. The *Mishnah* in *Pirkei Avos* (5:24) teaches *Ben chamishim l’eitza*, “The man of fifty is capable for counsel.” *Rav Ovadiah Bartenura* explains that this (fifty-year function) is derived from the *Leviim* who no longer did any “heavy” labor once they reached fifty years of age. They ministered to their brethren, however, by advising them. *Rabbeinu Bachya* remarks, “As the flesh grows too weak to bear the burdens of physical labor as before, the intelligence grows clearer to see consequences accurately; then, he is eminently suited to give counsel.”

The *Imrei Emes, zl*, related that he met an elderly *chassid* who had heard from the *Chidushei HaRim, zl*, that he had visited a certain *Rebbe* who told him the following analogy. A fellow was walking through a forest when he lost his way. The farther he journeyed, the more lost he became. Days passed, and he felt that he was in a maze. Everywhere that he went, which according to his calculations would bring him to an exit, only left him more lost, more entangled. During this whole time, he neither heard nor saw a soul. Finally, one day he met an elderly man. His excitement knew no bounds. He would finally locate the exit and leave this miserable place.

He ran over to the man and declared, “*Baruch Hashem*, Thank G-d, I will finally be able to leave. Tell me, my friend, where is the exit from this forest. How do I get out of here? The old man replied, “Young man, I have been lost in this forest for seventy years! I have traveled every direction: north, south, east and west. Everywhere I went, I thought I was on the correct path to the exit. Every time, I was unfortunately wrong. This has been going on for seventy years. Young man, I cannot tell you how to get out of here. One thing, however, I can tell you: I can show you where not to go. I can tell you which paths and roads are dangerous and which end up at a dead end. I am willing to share with you my seventy years of experience. I can provide you with the roads that will maintain your safety.”

This is what is meant, explains the *Gerrer Rebbe (Imrei Emes)*, by the words *lishmor mishmeres*; “to safeguard the charge.” The best advice about how to protect oneself from evil is to stay away from the roads/paths that lead to trouble and no good. Which roads are those? For that answer we must turn to those who have been on the journey longer than we have and trust their experience. They know where we should not go.