

## CHASAM SOFER

### NASO

#### *An Elevation for All Jews*

נשא את ראש בני גרשון גם הם לבית אבתם למשפחתם

*Take a census of the sons of Gershon, them as well, according to their fathers' household, according to their families (4:22).*

Why does Hashem say that the sons of Gershon, “*them as well,*” should be counted? Would there be a reason to exclude them from the count? It is also of note that here the verse states לבית אבתם למשפחתם, *according to their fathers' household, according to their families*, while in regard to the sons of Kehas (above, v. 2) and the sons of Merari (below, v. 29) it uses the opposite order: למשפחתם לבית אבתם, *according to their families, according to their fathers' household*. Why is the order different for the sons of Gershon?

The names of Levi's sons may be understood homiletically as allusions to the Jewish People, at various stages in history. The name “Kehas” connotes an ingathering or an assemblage, as in the verse ולו יקהת עמים, *and his will be an assemblage of nations (Bereishis 49:10)*. This refers to the times when the Jews were together, serving Hashem in Eretz Yisrael. The name “Merari,” on the other hand, connotes bitterness, as in וימררו את חייהם, *and they embittered their lives (Shemos 1:14)*. This refers to the many countries where Jews have been subject to misery and suffering. Despite this, they built communities and institutions that remained loyal to Hashem and the Torah. Both the “Kehas” and the “Merari” Jews brought glory to our forefathers, all the way back to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

But there were other Jews, symbolized by “Gershon,” a name that connotes expulsion, as in ויגרש את האדם, *and He expelled Adam (Bereishis 3:24)*, but does not include a connotation of bitterness. This alludes to Jews who have been banished from their Land and dispersed throughout the nations, but have flourished in their host

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countries. They felt “at home” in their lands of exile, and began to blend into their surroundings, gradually assimilating and losing their Jewish identity.

Our parashah tells us that all three categories of Jews are to be counted. Now, the term נשא, in addition to “count,” can be interpreted as “elevate.” When Israel serves Hashem loyally, that is a source of merit even for the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The “Kehas” and “Merari” Jews are themselves elevated, and moreover, bring credit to their forebears. Thus, the Torah says, למשפחתם לבית אבתם — their elevation begins *according to their families*, and then brings credit *according to their fathers’ household*. But what of the “Gershon” Jews, the ones who have drifted away. Do they have a share in elevation?

The Torah tells us that not only are the “Gershon” Jews to be counted, they can be elevated. How is this possible? In response to this, the Torah says לבית אבתם, *according to their fathers’ household*, which refers to the Patriarchs. Indeed, these Jews are unable to provide merit to their forebears, and they even lack the merit for their own elevation, but nevertheless, they are able to be elevated through זכות אבות, *the merit of our forefathers*. A person’s forebears can be a source of benefit to him, and allow him to gain merit despite his own limitations. Thus, our verse says, *Elevate the sons of Gershon, them as well* — no less than the virtuous “sons of Kehas” and “sons of Merari.” How are the “sons of Gershon” elevated? It is *according to their fathers’ household*, by virtue of their previous generations, which will bring merit even למשפחותם, *to their [own] households*. Although these Jews have little merit of their own, they will be elevated “as well,” through the merits of their forefathers (*Toras Moshe HaShalem*, p. 25, ד”ה נשא).

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