

פ' במדבר תשפ"ג

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita, raavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email benipray@netvision.net.il.

INDIVIDUAL JUDGMENT

Take [Se'u] the sum of all the congregation of the bnei yisroel. (1:2)

Se'u also means “elevate”. The very fact that every Jew was included in the census and is not “swallowed up” within the public indicates how important each individual is.

Each person has to “lift up his heart in the ways of Hashem” in the knowledge of how much Hashem yearns for his *avoda*. Each *neshomo* has come down to the world in order to fulfil a task that is uniquely his, based on his specific abilities.

When a person will be brought before the Heavenly Tribunal after departing this world he will not be able to excuse his evil deeds by claiming that everybody behaved this way, because Hashem judges each individual for his private actions based on his specific abilities and irrespective of his society and environment.

Each person has his own unique *shoresh haneshomo* and potential, and Hashem determines whether he has met it. If we have been given children as custodians in our capacity as parents or teachers, it is our duty to help them to maximize their specific potential. Once we are adults, we must do this on our own.

BROCHOS FROM TZADIKIM

According to the number of names, a head count of every male from twenty years old and upward (1:18)

The Ramban (on 1:45) cites a *medrash* that Hashem told Moshe that when the heads of households would pass in front of him during the census he should behave regally and not engage them in conversation, and they, for their part, should conduct themselves with awe and respect. Why did they have to behave with awe and respect?

The Ramban (ibid) says that when the Jews passed in front of Moshe and Aharon, Moshe and Aharon prayed for them. Rav Dessler explains that that is why they had to pass in front of them with awe and respect, because the blessing of a *tzaddik* is only effective if he feels that the person being blessed has a connection with him. Hence, the Jews who were receiving *brochos* as they were being counted had to behave with awe and respect, because if someone behaves lightheartedly in the presence of a *tzaddik* his *brocho* can have no effect.

UNIQUE ROLES AND FIXED PLACES

“The Bnei Yisroel shall encamp, each man by his own camp and each man by his division” (1:52)

The Torah designated a specific place for each tribe to encamp in, warning each tribe not to camp anywhere else. When a person does not have a specific place and role within *klal yisroel* he feels like a private person who lives for himself, and automatically loses the merits of the *tzibbur*. Therefore, the Torah was particular that each tribe should only camp at its designated

place, so that it should feel as part of the nation with its own unique role, and thereby become united with the entire nation and enjoy the merit of the *tzibbur*.

In a similar vein, *Chazal* tell us that “Whoever fixes a regular place for his prayers, the G-d of Avrohom assists him” (*Brochos* 6b). This quality may stem from the fact that in order to enjoy the advantages of prayer with a *tzibbur* one has to feel a part of the public, and by fixing a regular place to pray, the person feels like a permanent member of the *tzibbur*, and not like a private individual who happens to be praying together with a group of other individuals.

Unfortunately, not everybody follows *Chazal's* instruction to fix a regular place for prayers, and they thereby lose out on *Chazal's* promise that anyone who does this will enjoy the assistance of the G-d of Avrohom.

CREATING STUDENTS

Rashi: *Whoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellow man, the Torah regards it as if he had begotten him*” (3:1)

The Vilna Gaon said that this principle only applies if the teacher has been responsible for the spiritual development of the student, and the Gaon himself only agreed to accept students if they would derive their main spiritual stature from him.

In a similar vein, Yehoshua is called *bin Nun* and not *ben Nun* because he was Moshe's spiritual progeny and not his father's.

Gedolim are called the “father” of the nation since they take care of the nation's needs like a father. Moshe *Rabbenu* too saw to the entire spiritual and material needs of Aharon's sons, and is therefore considered to have "created" them.

FIGHTING THE WICKED

“I have taken the Leviyim from among the bnei Yisroel in place of all firstborns” (3:13)

When *Moshe rabbeinu* declared *mi laHashem elay* after the *chet ho'egel* only *shevet levi* rallied to his call, and had no hesitation in killing even relatives. Due to this act of self-sacrifice the *Leviyim* replaced the firstborn in serving Hashem in the *avodas hamikdosh*.

The Chofetz Chaim said that maybe we can judge favorably those who do not fight the wicked, but the same cannot be said of those who fawn to them.

Rav Moshe Schneider used to say that even if we are not in a position to protest against the wicked, we are at least obliged to be anguished about the desecration of the Divine Name when the wicked become leaders of the nation, and the honor of the Torah becomes so besmirched.

INNOCENT BY LACK OF ASSOCIATION

In the time of the *egel*, *shevet levi* demonstrated supreme dedication. The whole nation witnessed a golden calf, which had been created seemingly out of nothing, miraculously talking and eating. Nevertheless, only 3000 actually worshipped it and had to be killed for their sin. When *Moshe rabbeinu* declared *mi laHashem elay* most of the nation was reluctant to take up his call, because they felt that the miracles accompanying the golden calf had led the sinners astray. Only *shevet levi* separated themselves from the rest of the nation, having no hesitation in killing even relatives. Due to this act of dissociation, *shevet levi* was counted in a totally separate census. During the time of the spies too, *shevet levi* was the only tribe which did not send a representative, because they had complete trust in Hashem, and did not feel any need to investigate the country. All the other tribes were punished because they did not protest the

statements made by their representatives, who acted as their agents. Only *shevet levi* was spared the punishment of all male members more than 20 years' old having to die before entering *Eretz Yisroel*.

When faced with a choice between maintaining “peace” with erring brethren for the sake of “unity” and completely dissociating ourselves from them, we know which route to take, both for the sake of the nation as a whole, and for the sake of our own future.

SHIDDUCH REVOLUTION

Count the children of Levi... count all males from the age of one month and upward (3:15)

The males of all the tribes were counted from age 20 upwards, but the members of *shevet levi* were different. As soon as a boy was 30 days' old, at which age it is presumed that he will stay alive (see Rashi *ibid*), they were already included in the count. As with any royalty, the next generation has to be inducted into their obligations from an early age, and to be taught that they are obligated to serve in Hashem's army. Similarly, anyone who wants his son to grow up to be a *ben Torah* must start educating him from the earliest possible age, and inculcate the message that being a *ben Torah* calls for a great degree of self-sacrifice and dedication.

In the case of girls too, if a father wants to ensure that his daughter marries a *talmid chochom* he must instill in her a love of Torah from the youngest age. Rav Dessler would call girls who want to marry a *ben Torah* "*bnos Torah*", and would bewail the fact that many *bnai Torah* did not succeed because they married girls who were willing to marry a *ben Torah* but were not *bnos Torah* themselves yearning with *mesirus nefesh* for their husbands to be immersed in Torah.

In order to reach the level of a *bas Torah*, girls have to be educated from the earliest possible age to a life suffused with *ahavas haTorah* and that there is no greater happiness than setting up a Torah home and having a husband sitting and learning. Nothing in the world should be greater in their eyes that they should want to give up their husband's Torah for it.

Rav Sternbuch tells someone who has had a girl the following. It used to be the case that when someone had a girl people would comfort him because he did not have a boy. Just two or three generations ago, *bnai Torah* often ended up marrying at a very late age due to the shortage of girls willing to marry them. Eventually they would find a girl, who would often have some physical defect. In fact, one of the *gedolim* said, “If you see a woman with a physical defect, stand up for her, because she is either an *eshes chover* (the wife of a *talmid chochom*) or destined to become an *eshes chover*”. However, in the generations preceding the coming of *moshiach* Hashem has created a revolution, turning the whole situation on its head, so that nowadays it is considered a disgrace for a girl not to marry a *ben Torah*, and girls will not settle for anything else.

Therefore, when a girl is born, one should be as happy as when a son is born, because if she has been born into a Torah home, that girl is destined to become an *eshes chover*, whose status is equivalent to that of a *chover*, and so it is as if a son has been born.

LIFE MISSION

Count the children of Levi according to their fathers' house (3:15)

The descendants of the three sons of Levi were each assigned their own unique tasks, which were not interchangeable. For example, someone who was meant to sing could not decide that he was better suited to guarding the *oron*.

In the time of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld there was a public activist who told him that he felt it was time to sit and learn without any disturbances, but Rav Yosef Chaim responded that that would not be a good idea, and he should continue with his current position, as that was his mission in life, unless he finds someone suitable to replace him.

Conversely, the task of a *yeshiva bochurim* is to sit and learn, and not to engage in activism. Their sole mission is to learn Torah and any *askonus* should be left for after they get married. Hence, we bless a child at his *bris*, “Just like you have entered the covenant, so should you enter into Torah, *chuppah*, and good deeds”: good deeds are only mentioned after “*chuppah*”. Although there are many irreligious people, and we are obligated to take steps to save them and bring them closer towards religion, this cannot take place at the risk of endangering our own spiritual future. Whilst they are still *bochurim*, they have other opportunities for *chesed*, such as volunteering their time to teach other boys.

WILLPOWER

“The charge of Elozor... oil for lighting, the incense of spices, the continual meal offering, and the anointing oil; the charge for the entire Mishkan and all that is in it, of the kodesh and its furnishings” (4:16)

The Ramban writes that although Elozor had to carry a very heavy load he was strong and courageous and “those who wait for Hashem renew their strength”. In other words, his physical strength was not enough without his faith in Hashem’s assistance, coupled with strong willpower.

Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer said that his *rov*, the Netziv became conversant in the entire Torah not by virtue of his talents, but only due to an intense desire to master the entire Torah. Due to his self-dedication, he achieved success beyond his natural abilities.

Alternatively, Elozor carried the heavy load on his own because he was worried that his task of being in charge of the *avodas klei hamikdash* would make him haughty. To prevent this, he wanted to engage in a physically difficult task duty on his own, to remind himself that the task he had been appointed to perform was not merely one that granted him honor, and that his actions should be for the sake of Heaven, not for his personal benefit.

BEN TORAH

“Do not cause the tribe of the families of Kehos to be cut off from among the Leviyim. Do this for them, so they should live and not die” (4:18-19)

The task of the tribe of *Kehos* was capable of killing them if they did not fulfil it properly, whereas if they did, it would be a source of life for them. Similarly, the Torah is either an elixir of life or of death (*Yomo* 72b). Someone who learns Torah like a student without improving his *midos*, and without acting like a *ben Torah* in his prayers and *brochos*, with fear of Heaven and *dikduk bahalocho*, not only desecrates the sanctity of the Torah, but also causes a *chilul Hashem*, since people will say that the Torah does not refine a person, and his punishment is great.

Rav Schneider would always stress in his talks that only someone whose entire behavior is worthy of that title can be called a *ben Torah*, and not anybody who happens to be a “student” in a *yeshiva* or *kolel*.