

פ' במדבר ושבועות תשפ"ד

Based on droshos by Maran HaGaon Rav Moshe Sternbuch shlita, Gaavad of Yerushalayim. To receive these weekly divrei Torah email ravsternbuchtorah@gmail.com

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 one 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. 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 *bnos 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, *bnos 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 a public activist 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 bochur* 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 hamikdosh* would make him haughty. To prevent this, he wanted to engage in a physically difficult task 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*.

SHAVUOS

The *parshiyos* of *Bamidbor* and *Noso* are read before *Shavuos* so that when we read about the census of the *bnei yisroel* we will realize how important each individual is in the eyes of Hashem, and that will cause us to be *mekabel* the Torah properly in the knowledge that each person’s *limud* is treasured by Hashem, and we will be inspired to conduct an account of our actions to determine whether we are fulfilling our obligations.

Shevet Levi was not included in the census of the other tribes. Although every *yid* is expected to learn Torah and keep all the *mitzvos*, a different level of *avodas Hashem* is expected of *shevet Levi* and of *bnei Torah*. They are expected to subject every moment and every movement to fulfilling the Will of Hashem and accepting the yoke of Torah.

On *erev Shavuos* it is forbidden to let blood because during that time a *shed* called Tavoach was waiting to kill the Jews if they did not accept the Torah (see *Shabbos 129b* and *mishna berura* OC end of *siman 468*). In each generation one must refrain from bloodletting on *erev Shavuos* because the *soton* acts as prosecutor during a time of danger, and we must not subject ourselves to danger by bloodletting.

However, once we have accepted the Torah, why do we have to worry again every year on *erev Shavuos*? The *Machatzis Hashekel* explains that when certain events happened to our forefathers, whenever the same period recurs some element of the same events reawaken again.

This means that although the *shed* does not reappear every year the reasons for his original appearance do recur, as each year the nation is supposed to be *mekabel* the Torah again, and Hashem waits to see whether we will strengthen ourselves and reaccept the Torah in the days leading up to *Shavuos*. In other words, the three days prior to *Shavuos* contain great potential for growth in Torah and coming closer to Hashem, and if we do not prepare ourselves as much as we should, Hashem becomes upset with us that we are not utilizing the opportunity to accept on ourselves the yoke of Torah. Hence, *erev Shavuos* is a time of potential danger every year.

In any case, this shows how important this time of the year is for us, and that is why *yeshivos* and *am yisroel* as a whole are accustomed to adopt special *chizzukim* in learning from *rosh chodesh Sivan* and even more so during the *shloshes yemei hagbolo*.

Bikurim were brought from the first fruit. Similarly, Hashem checks to see what a person looks like after his preparations during the *sheloshes yemei hagbolo*, whether these preparations have borne any fruit.

After *matan Torah* we were able for the first time to sanctify every day of the week by performing *mitzvos*. Before *matan Torah* only Shabbos could be sanctified properly. The name *Shavuos* ("weeks") - as well as the fact that we mention the number of weeks when counting the *omer* - reminds us of our current ability to elevate even our weekdays and hints at the fact that when we received the Torah, we became connected to Hashem throughout the week, 24 hours a day. The Torah teaches us what to do, say, or even think in every conceivable situation. Since Torah and Hashem are one, the Torah brings us closer to Hashem.

Milk and honey are ready to be consumed without any additives or improvements. We have milk and honey on *Shavuos* to remind us that the Torah too is complete and perfect just as it is, without any additions or changes.

Chazal tell us that the nations were offered the Torah, but declined, feeling unable to observe even basic commandments, such as the prohibitions against murder and stealing. However, were they not already liable to observe these commandments as part of the *sheva mitzvos bnei Noach*? The nations did not want to be forced to keep even fundamental laws, insisting that they wanted to keep them only voluntarily, because they believed in democracy. Only we agreed to be bound by the Torah and keep it mandatorily, without any conditions.

Tosfos say in *Masseches Taanis* that the Torah was given on *Har Hamoria*. Of course, this is not literally true, but it means that the *Shechino*, which usually dwells on *Har Hamoria* was temporarily transferred to *Har Sinai* for the duration of *matan Torah*. Also, *Har Hamoria*, on which the *akeido* took place, symbolizes utter *mesirus nefesh*, and Torah too calls for self-sacrifice.

Many people stay up all night learning, to show that we are ready to learn even with self-dedication and difficulty. However, although staying up all night learning is of course a very praiseworthy custom for anyone who is capable of doing so, it is not mentioned in the *gemoro* or *Shulchan Oruch*, and if it comes at the expense of concentrating properly during *davening* or not learning properly during the daytime, then it should be dispensed with. The main priority is to utilize every moment to the maximum extent.

Fruit is distributed on *Shavuos*, because it is a time when judgment takes place regarding fruit (*Rosh Hashono* 16a), and the Torah compares man to a fruit tree. The righteous are compared to a palm tree, which produces fruit. If someone dedicates himself to producing "fruit" by teaching others, he will receive divine assistance.

The *Shelo hakodosh* noted that *Shavuos* is the Day of Judgment for Torah. He says that on *Shavuos* judgment takes place for the fruit of the tree and those fruit are the souls which have flown away from the tree of Hashem, and the world is judged on this day for the Torah which was given on it, which the *neshomos* have been *mevatel*. The souls are judged for not having perfected themselves properly with Torah and *mitzvos*. That is the judgment of the fruit of the tree which *Chazal* refer to.

Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer said that he had a tradition from his *rov*, the *Netziv*, that on *Shavuos* every person is judged to determine what portion he will have in Torah for the coming year. This means that our level and portion of Torah for the entire year is fixed on this day, so this is the time to transform ourselves into vessels worthy of receiving the Torah and to undertake to improve the quantity and quality of our learning.

Kabbolas Hatorah requires much preparation. A person must be aware of the significance of every moment of Torah, during which he performs the most important *mitzvah*. If a person realizes that he is in the Army of Hashem he will not be tempted to leave it, despite any inducements dangled before his eyes.

Before the coming of Moshiach Hashem gives the *Soton* special power to attempt to lure us away from the Torah through decrees such as the current one about recruitment to the army. The

army has no need for chareidim; in fact, they would prefer it if they were not drafted. The politicians' real goal (which they sometimes admit themselves) is to acculturate and assimilate us into their way of life. There can be no room for any deals or "compromises". If we remain resolute and steadfast to our principles, Hashem will protect us from their machinations.

The Torah commands us to be happy on all the *regolim*, but this commandment is mentioned explicitly only with regard to *Sukkos* and *Shavuos* and not with regard to Pesach, because we had not yet received the Torah then. On *Shavuos* we have a special commandment to be happy, because when we accept the yoke of Torah on *Shavuos* morning with joy, we demonstrate to the Gentiles and to our erring brethren who pity us because of all the restrictions imposed by the Torah, that we accept the yoke of Torah happily, since the Torah is the only real source of happiness.

Shavuos is a day pregnant with much potential, and fortunate are those who make the effort to tap it. Even if our financial situation leaves much to be desired, the biography of Rus should inspire us as to how far a person can go with complete dedication to the Torah, irrespective of *parmosoh* problems, and even if one was used to a luxurious lifestyle in the past.

Rav Sternbuch recalls seeing Rav Elchonon Wasserman in London on the second day of the last *Shavuos* before World War II. Rav Elchonon was in such a joyous state of mind that he started singing and dancing uninterruptedly for maybe one and a half hours on the second day of the last *Shavuos* before World War II. They say that Rav Boruch Ber Leibovitz was seen acting likewise on *Shavuos*.

However, as we said, *Shavuos* is also the day on which we are judged to determine what our portion in Torah will be. The entire period of *sefiras ha'omer* constitutes a preparation for receiving the Torah, the climax being the *shloshes yemei hagbolo*.

The Torah instructs us to count the *omer* for 50 days, but in practice we do so for only 49 days. This is because the *Seder* night, which instills us with complete *emunah*, is actually the beginning of the period in which we prepare ourselves for *kabbolas Hatorah*. The commentators explain why it is not in fact included *halachically* within the Omer period, but, be that as it may, it is the 50th day which the Torah has in mind conceptually speaking.

But to the sons of Kehos he did not give, for incumbent upon them was the work involving the holy [objects], which they were to carry on their shoulders (7:9)

The *leviyim* had to hold the *oron* on their shoulders, and not with their hands. With this much more strenuous method they could involve their whole body in this holy *mitzvah*, and thereby also accord greater honor to the holy vessels. For us it symbolizes the efforts we have to employ when learning Torah. If we appreciate the indispensability and sweetness of Torah, the tremendous efforts required to delve its profundity will come naturally.

Torah and Hashem are one, so Torah too requires us to "rejoice with trembling". It is for this reason that Hashem forced the Torah upon us with "thunders and lightning", even though we had already said *na'ase venishmo*, in order to instill the message that Torah must be learnt with *yiras shomayim*.

Success in Torah is, of course, dependent on ceaseless toil. However, since it is not just another secular discipline, we cannot hope to enjoy our portion without *davening* for *siyata dishmaya*. In *birkas ahava rabbo* we say that our forefathers did not rely on their studies, but "relied on You, and You taught them the laws of life to fulfill Your Will wholeheartedly", and we also ask for *siyata dishmaya*: "so too, grant us even though we are unworthy, and teach us...".

Let us make the most of the time allotted to us, and let us also remember that the goal of Torah study is *ahavas Hashem* and *yiras Hashem*, as we say every day in *ahava rabbo*: "enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and that our hearts cling to Your commandments, and make us single-hearted to love and fear Your name".