

# פ' במדבר ושבועות תשפ"ה

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## 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 *bnei 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 than 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, *bnei 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*.

# SHAVUOS

On *Erev Shavuos* it is forbidden to let blood since it is a time of danger. The *Machatzis Hashekel* explains that this is because 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. This shows how important this period of the year is for us.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how his Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Schneider, would sometimes come into the *Beis Hamedrash* in the middle of the *sheloshes yemei hagbolo*. He would bang his fists on the *bimah* and shout that there was not enough *chizuk* in learning yet, and that during this period more intense learning was required.

It is worthwhile investing all our efforts into Torah learning during the period leading up to *Shavuos* and on *Shavuos* itself, even if the evil inclination tries to convince us that we are tired and so on, because those who are successful in this endeavor will enjoy success in their Torah learning throughout the year.

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

Although we actually received the Torah on the 7<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan*, because Moshe Rabbenu added a day on his own accord, since the original plan was for us to receive it on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan*, and that was the day on which Hashem agreed to give us the Torah, that day can appropriately be termed “*zman matan Toraseinu*” (“the day on which our Torah was given”), as opposed to *zman kabolat Toraseinu* (“the day on which our Torah was received”). Every year Hashem gives the Torah anew on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan* to each person, based on the extent to which he has prepared himself for this event and is deserving of it.

Why did we have to be forced into accepting the Torah by having the mountain held over us like a barrel if we had already said *na’ase venishma*? Thunder and lightning lead to fear of Heaven, and Hashem wanted us to keep the Torah with *yiras shomayim*.

Moreover, the barrel held over us symbolizes the fact that although we voluntarily accepted the Torah, Hashem did not want our acceptance to make this arrangement resemble a voluntary contract between two parties, but rather wanted us to be subjected to the “yoke of Torah,” so that we would feel obligated to observe it.

It is very important to set aside a fixed time for learning every day. This time should be sacrosanct, and should not be violated even if one can earn a lot of money during that time (*Orach Chaim* 155:1). That way the person demonstrates that he has accepted the yoke of Torah upon himself. This is the preferred and genuine way to learn Torah, and the Torah quality of someone who is successful in keeping to this regimen cannot be compared to that of someone who learns only after he has nothing else to do, or only after he has finished all his other activities.

*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 universal laws, but only voluntarily, since 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*. This is not meant literally, but 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 complete *mesirus nefesh*, and Torah too calls for self-sacrifice. We stay up all night learning Torah, to show that we are ready to learn even with self-dedication and difficulty.

*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.

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* (literally "weeks") reminds us of our current ability to elevate even our weekdays through *mitzvos* and good deeds.

Fruit is distributed on *Shavuos*, because it is a time when the judgment takes place regarding fruit, and the Torah compares man to a fruit tree. The *Shlo* brings in the name of "Tola'as Yaakov" that on *Shavuos* every person is judged to determine what portion he will have in Torah for the coming year. 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.

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.

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 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. In addition, *Shavuos* itself is a day pregnant with much potential, and fortunate are those who make the effort to tap it.

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. 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 hagbolas*.

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.