

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת במדבר

שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחתם לבית אבתם במספר שמות כל זכר לגלגלתם
“Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by number of the names, every male according to their head count” (1:2)

Rashi says that this count was done by counting the people with coins, just as the previous counting was conducted. However, many commentators disagree and say that this counting was done by counting actual people rather than coins. To support this position, they point to the word "by their head count," indicating that actual heads were counted. If this is so, asks the Kli Yakar, why was there no concern for Ayin Hara the second time around? Why did they not have to use coins this time to avoid any problems? He answers that Ayin Hara is only a problem when the counting results in a new, previously unknown number. When the Jews left Egypt initially, they were a weak nation, just freed from slavery. When their numbers were found to be 600,000 strong, there was a potential for an Ayin Hara had they been counted normally because this astounding number was previously unheard of. However, now that everyone knew about their size and strength, it was not new so there was no problem of Ayin Hara this time. Therefore, it was safe for Moshe to count them in a normal manner.

מטה זבולן ונשיא לבני זבולן אליאב בן חלון

“The tribe of Zevulun - and the prince of the tribe of Zevulun is Eliav son of Chelon” (2:7)

Why does the Torah not write "and the tribe of Zevulun" as it does for all the other tribes? The Baal HaTurim, quoting the Midrash Tanchuma, writes that by removing the word "and" the posuk indicates a connection between Zevulun and Yissachar, the previous tribe, as if they were one combined tribe. This is because Zevulun was engaged in business and would support the Torah study of Yissachar with their earnings. By combining the two tribes, the Torah indicates that the reward of Zevulun was equal to that of Yissachar. This is alluded to in the posuk that states, "It is a tree of life for those who support it." The Torah is not necessarily a source of life for those who study it, but for those who support and uphold it as well. However, support of Torah is not a substitute for Torah learning itself. Even those who receive merit for Torah study through those whom they support are not exempted from their personal obligation to study themselves.

Rabbi Friedman suggests that the same can also be said regarding the different and equally important roles of a husband and a wife in a Jewish home. Even though they have different roles and responsibilities, they are equal partners in their home and bringing the Divine Presence into it. Together, they can share the rewards of their partnership, just like Yissachar and Zevulun.

ונסע אהל מועד מחנה הלויים בתוך המחנות כאשר יחנו כן יסעו איש על ידו לדגליהם
“The Tent of Meeting, the camp of the Levites, shall journey in the middle of the camps; as they encamp so shall they journey, everyone at his place according to their banners” (2:17)

The Chofetz Chaim says that the Ohel Moed, which represents the Torah, was in the middle. This represents the idea that Torah has to be at the center of a person's life. Similarly, the bimah should be placed in the middle of the shul, centrally located, for this reason. This placement shows that Torah is the focal point of life. R' Moshe Sternbach writes in Sefer Taam Vadaas that those who learn Torah have to recognize their responsibility to be among the people

to influence others. It is inappropriate for them to remain separate from the people. The Torah belongs among the people where all can benefit from it. It is the responsibility of those who dedicate themselves to learning Torah to share it with the people around them. Many communities have benefited greatly by having Kollelim in their cities because of the positive influence that their Torah has on the other people. That is why the Aron and the rest of the Mishkan traveled in the center of the camp. Torah should not be relegated to its own corner, it should be in the midst of the people, easily accessible to all.

The posuk notes that the nation traveled in the same way that they camped. There is an important lesson contained in this statement. The way that one acts in the comfort of his home should be the same when he is on the road. There should be no distinction between a person's behavior inside the home and outside of it. Even when not in the shul, beis medrash or yeshiva, even while on vacation, one's dedication to Torah and mitzvos should remain at the same high level at all times.

כל פקודי הלויים אשר פקד משה ואהרן על פי ה' למשפחתם כל זכר מבן חדש ומעלה שנים ועשרים אלף

“All the counting of the Levites, which Moshe and Aharon counted by the word of Hashem according to their families, every male from one month of age and up, were twenty-two thousand” (3:39)

There were only 22,000 Leviyim, the least of all the tribes. This was true even though they were counted from the age of one month while everyone else was counted from twenty and above. What caused Levi to be so much smaller than all the others? Ramban writes that the other tribes multiplied rapidly because they had six children at a time. However, the Leviyim who were not enslaved in Egypt, did not have as many children as the other tribes.

R' Moshe Sternbach says that Levi, the spiritual leader of the Jewish nation, was meant to be the smaller tribe because it teaches us that greatness is not always found in numbers. It is quality and not quantity that Hashem seeks in his people. The tribe that became the leaders was the smallest of the tribes. This is true on a global scale as well. Although as a nation we may be vastly outnumbered among the other nations, we know that one day the whole world will recognize Hashem and will see us as spiritual pioneers who always remained steadfast in our beliefs.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

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