

Everyone who goes out to the legion in Yisrael – you shall count them according to their legions, you and Aharon. (1:3)

Tifkedu osam, count them. The root of *tifkedu* is *pakod*, which means to appoint. While it does have other connotations, its root (as explained by *Ramban*) usually has the implication of concern for something or taking cognizance of the individual under discussion. It can be used as “remember,” as in “Hashem remembered Sarah” (*Bereishis* 21:1) or *U'b'yom pakdi u'pokaditi aleihem*, “And on the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them” (*Shemos* 32:34), following the sin of the Golden Calf. *Ramban* feels that in the context of the census, *pakod* implies that the count should be made through half-*shekel* contributions, which atone for the contributors. The *Malbim* suggests that herein they are counted as members of the legion, as soldiers, part of the Jewish army. The counting is, thus, an appointment.

I recently came across a poignant story which inspired me to interpret *tifkedu osam*, count them, to mean: present them with their *tafkid*, purpose, *raison d'etre*, in life. Each and every Jew has his own unique *tafkid*, purpose in life. There is, however, one *tafkid* that is endemic to every Jew across the board – regardless of background, religious affiliation or level of scholarship. The following story (which is taken from the preface to *Rav Yissachar Frand's* commentary to the *Haggadah*) expresses this idea.

A *Rosh Yeshivah* who was spending *Shabbos* in a small *Moshav* in *Eretz Yisrael* was asked to deliver the *Shabbos Hagadol drashah*, lecture. The populace was not very erudite, but, nonetheless, quite sincere and wanted to hear words of Torah. While *rabbanim* usually expand on the intricacies of the laws of *Pesach*, the *Rosh Yeshivah* felt that the following inspirational story was more in tune with the crowd.

An Austrian Jew, who, as a child in war-torn Europe, was able to make it on his own to Germany, was providentially saved from death when he was able to obtain safe passage to England on one of the Kindertransports. Thousands of Jewish children were saved in this manner – most of them alone – never again to see their parents. Eventually, this resourceful youth made his way to the Holy Land, where he settled in Petach Tikva. Spending much of his childhood on the run, he did not have the opportunity to receive a formal Jewish education. *Davening* and some *Chumash* selections comprised the sum total of his Jewish educational *repertoire*.

After finding a job, the man sought an avenue for spiritual sustenance. Learning was out, but spending time in *shul* helping others to learn was more within his realm. He found a *shul* that did not have a *shamash*, sexton, and he volunteered for the “job.” He saw to it that there were *shiurim*, Torah classes, in the *shul*, and he also took care of minor maintenance. His job was his vocation and source of livelihood; the *shul* was his life. Somehow, he raised a beautiful Torah family of sons, *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, and saw to it that every one of his daughters was likewise married to a distinguished *ben Torah*.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* (who related this story) was close with the family (having himself attended *yeshivah* with the sons of this man). Thus, when the man passed away, he came to be *menachem avel*, comfort the bereaved. He sat there looking at the family and, in wonderment, he turned to the deceased's eldest son and asked, "Your father never had the good fortune of receiving a Torah education. Yet, he raised such a beautiful Torah family. How did he do it? He was able to triumph over life's spiritual challenges. He not only maintained his own fidelity to Hashem, but he also saw to it that the next generation was more than aptly prepared for Torah scholarship and its adherence."

The son's reply provides serious food for thought for all of us. "We take our parents for granted," the son began. "They each have a story, a history, a heritage upon which he has built his life. Some had it easy, and some experienced great difficulty before achieving and realizing their lives' missions. As children, we grow up with our parents, never stopping for a moment to ask them, 'What was your life like growing up?' One day, I asked my father, 'How did you do it? How were you able to achieve so much, to raise such a family? You had no Jewish education to speak of. You were an orphan on your own, first in England and then in Petach Tikva. How did you remain an *ehrlische yid*, observant Jew, and raise your children to be *talmidei chachamim*?"

"My father replied, 'Originally I was supposed to leave Austria together with my father. There was a problem with his passport, so he had no choice but to have me travel alone by train to Germany. Sadly, the last time I saw my father was when he put me on the train.

"As the train pulled out of the station, my father began to run alongside the train to say goodbye. He called out, "*Zei a gutteh Yid*, be a good Jew!" He kept on running as the train began to pick up speed, screaming those words, "*zei a gutteh Yid; zei a gutteh Yid!*" The train moved faster and my father tripped and landed flat out on the platform, all the while screaming to me, "*zei a gutteh Yid!*"

"This was the parting message my father received from his father," the son continued. "You should (always) be a good Jew!" My father concluded his 'life story' saying, 'I did not know how to learn, but one thing I knew and always remembered, I had to be a good Jew!'"

This was a father's legacy to a son whom he would never see again. How many parents throughout the generations wanted to impart this most fundamental message, but for some reason never got around to it? We are always conversing with our children – at times it is a dialogue – more often, it is a monologue, but do we ever share our yearnings, aspirations, outlook on life, our legacy with them? We see here how a father's parting words influenced his son's life with a message that resounded for future generations!

I think this might (homiletically) be interpreted into the words, *tifkedu osam*. Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to look each and every Jew in his face and inform him of his *tafkid*, *raison d'etre*, as a Jew. We each have this *tafkid* – to be a good Jew. Those who continue to debate the meaning of "good" just do not seem to get the message. Why? Well, that is a critical

point for discussion.