

"Count the sons of Levi, according to their fathers' household, according to their families, every male from one month of age and up shall you count them" (3:15)

The *Leviim* were counted in a completely different manner than the rest of *Klal Yisrael*. While the other tribes were counted between the ages of twenty and sixty, the *Leviim* were counted from the age of one month. Indeed, no minimum age requirement restricted the counting of a *Levi*; the one month minimum was to ensure the viability of the newborn. In addition, no maximum age limited the counting of the *Leviim*. Regardless of their advanced age, they were counted. This indicated that the sanctity of *Shevet Levi* transcended the constraints of physical age and strength. At the end of the *parsha*, the *Leviim* between the ages of thirty and fifty are counted again. This census focused on the period of peak emotional and physical competence, when the *Leviim* would be best suited to perform the service in the *Mishkan*.

The *Midrash* questions the idea that *Shevet Levi* was to be singled out to be counted from the age of one month and above. *Chazal* respond that this tribe was unique in innate sanctity. Reflecting deep love for them, Hashem desired to increase their reward by counting them as infants, thereby prematurely ascribing to them their status in the community even prior to their formal participation. A basic difficulty still must be addressed. How does one proclaim that an infant who has just been born will one day serve in the *Mishkan*? One goes through so many obstacles and trials in raising a child; is it not "presumptuous" to immediately designate this young Levi as a future *gadol* and caretaker of the holy Sanctuary?

Horav Shimon Schwab, z.l., derives from here that dedicating a young *Levi* to a life of sanctity and service to Hashem was a near surety. Obviously something was unique about their educational "system" that guaranteed the virtue of their children. What was their secret, and how can we aspire to merit such success with our own children? *Horav Schwab* explains the singular success of *Shevet Levi* in the following manner: In blessing *Shevet Levi* before his death, Moshe *Rabbeinu* described their unparalleled devotion to Hashem by citing the *pasuk*, "The one who said of his father and mother, 'I have not favored him,' his brothers he did not give recognition and his children he did not know" (*Devarim* 33:9).

This *pasuk* refers to the selfless manner with which *Shevet Levi* performed their duty to Hashem, without regard to family connection. They slew those idolators who worshipped the Golden Calf. Their extreme allegiance to Hashem transcended the "natural" filial love parents feel for children and vice versa. What greater love exists than that between a parent and a child? *Shevet Levi* exhibited that special love and devotion to Hashem.

This love, posits *Horav Schwab*, is what the young *Leviim* perceived in their fathers. When a child sees that his father "chooses" Hashem even over his dear son, then the child is imbued with an impression that is as indelible as it is profound. He becomes aware of a multi-leveled truth: His

father's love for Hashem is all encompassing; there is nothing that can tear him away from Hashem; and lastly, his father loves Hashem even more than he loves him! When children see such conviction on the part of a parent, they realize that their parent's religious intensity is "for real." Consequently, they become infused with a spark of truth. This seed of unshakeable belief in Hashem germinates and blossoms, nurturing the young man to become a man of conviction, dedicated to serving Hashem with his entire essence. Hence, we understand why *Shevet Levi* were counted as infants. We should learn a lesson from these paragons of parenthood and apply the same concept to our own lives.