

But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take a census of them. (1:49)

Shevet Levi, the tribe of Levi, had proven their fidelity to Hashem during-- and after-- the sin of the Golden Calf. This earned them the appellation *ligyono shel Melech*, the legion of the King/Hashem, which was an elevated status. This new status warranted them being counted separately and differently from the rest of the nation. While the rest of the nation was counted from the age of twenty-years old, *Shevet Levi* was counted as infants, thirty days and older. In commenting on *Rashi's* statement: "It is appropriate that the King's legion be counted alone," *Sifsei Chachamim* writes that this is also the reason why *Shevet Levi* was counted from the age of thirty days old, in contrast to the rest of the nation, which was counted from age twenty. Being part of the *ligyono shel Melech* grants distinction even to infants. This, I feel, is how we should raise our children – as members of an august group – *ligyono shel Melech*. We do not wait until they become adults to give them distinction. A Jewish child is distinguished from day one.

Horav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zl, was a brilliant *gaon*, as well as the consummate *mechanech*, educator. He felt strongly that every Jewish child be educated as if he were a potential *Moshe Rabbeinu*. He quoted the *Rema* in his gloss to *Yorea Deah* 71:67, who rules that an infant should not nurse from a non-Jewish woman if there is any possibility of obtaining milk from a Jewess. The **Gaon, zl, m'Vilna**, posits that the *Rema's* source is the well-known *Midrash* that states that, as an infant, Moshe refused to nurse from an Egyptian woman, because he would one day speak with Hashem. *Rav Yaakov* asked, if Moshe's reasoning had been based upon the premise that he would one day speak with the *Shechinah*, how does this relate to every other Jewish child? Clearly, Moshe was in a league all to himself. Thus, *Rav Yaakov* derived that every Jewish child must be educated as if he would one day speak with the *Shechinah*. Being a member of the august fraternity called *ligyono shel Melech* explains why this is a status to which every Jewish child should aspire.

On a similar note, we observe that *Sefer Vayikra* is a *sefer* which is long on *halachos* that apply to ritual in the Sanctuary and laws concerning holiness and purity, yet short on narrative. It certainly has none of the stories found in the other *Chumashim*, which spark so much interest – especially in the mind and imagination of a child. Therefore, it is surprising that *Chazal* insisted that a young child begin his Torah education with *Sefer Vayikra*. To paraphrase *Chazal*, "Let the holy, young and innocent children of *Yisrael* come to commence their education with the study of *Vayikra*, the book of holiness and purity." It has been asked – and practically so – what does holiness and purity have to do with knowledge and the real world? Contemporary society is anything but holy and pure. Should we not take a more practical approach to educating the next generation?

This might be the approach of secular practicality and of those who insist on remaining ignorant concerning the holy nature of the Jewish child. We are *ligyono shel Melech*, and, thus, educating our children becomes the process by which we induct those young souls into Hashem's legion.

Our history, the lives of our leaders, the adversity which we have endured, the successes and miracles that we have achieved and experienced of which our very existence is of the greatest proof, all have no meaning if we do not view them through the lens of holiness and purity, as members of *ligyono shel melech*.