

Each man by his banner according to the insignias of his father's household. (2:2)

Each of the three-tribe formations was distinguished by a distinctively-colored banner which included the tribal colors of each of its three tribes. **Horav Yosef Tzvi Dushinsky, zl**, explains this *pasuk* homiletically. While it is undoubtedly important that a person follow in the footsteps of his forebears (concerning: *nusach ha'tefillah*, version of one's prayer service; specific customs and traditions, and perspective on Jewish life), one should never be satisfied with just "following"; rather, he should be "a man" in his own right: forging his own path, developing his own perspective; innovating his own customs. It is our function to augment the achievements of the previous generation.

Horav Moshe Tikuchinsky, zl, once asked a group of *yeshivah* students if they had thanked Hashem (that day) for the blessing of the Heavenly lumens: sun, moon, and stars. They made feeble attempts at answering the question, but nothing they said satisfied the *Mashgiach*. The reason is that we really do not have a good answer, because much of our *davening* is recited by rote. *Kavanah*, proper concentration, is a luxury for which many neither have the time, nor feel is worth the effort. They think that by reciting the words of prayer as designed by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedolah*, Men of the Great Assembly, we have fulfilled our obligation to pray. There is a difference, however, between *kavanah* and simple recitation, as far as the meaning and focus of the *brachah*.

"All of you *davened* today," the *Mashgiach* said, "and you certainly recited every word. When you said the words, *Yotzer or u'borei choshech*, "(He) Who forms light and Who creates darkness," did you realize that this is not only a blessing of praise to Hashem, but it actually is a blessing of gratitude to the Almighty for giving us the wonderful lumens that have changed our lives?"

The *Mashgiach* looked at the students and said, "You followed the designated *nusach*, version, that was put together when the great Rabbis made the *siddur*, but you added nothing of your own (via your *kavanah*) to its meaning. If you simply recite the words by rote without augmenting it with your innovative concentration, your prayer is deficient in the area of *ish al diglo*, "Each man according to his insignia."

We now have two paths before us. The first is training a child from day one in *mitzvah* performance. This way he will learn to perform *mitzvos* as second nature. On the other hand, it might become *mitzvah* performance out of habit. While he might not perform the *mitzvah* with *kavanah*, at least he will be observant. Perhaps, however, we should wait until the child becomes older and more intellectually inclined so that we can explain to him the profundity of the *mitzvah*. Waiting until intelligence and cogency set in might be too late – for some.

Horav Moshe Soloveitchik, zl, grapples with this question and applies the above *pasuk*, *B'osos*

l'beis avosam, “According to the insignias of their fathers’ household,” as a directive in how to respond to the issue of training children to perform *mitzvos* from a very young age. *Rashi* explains that the word, *osos*/insignias/signs, is a reference to the sign/directive that Yaakov *Avinu* indicated to them prior to his death. He related to them the formation to which they should adhere upon carrying his coffin, designating a specific place for three sons/tribes at each direction (north, south, east, west). The *Degalim* formation was the very same formation used for carrying Yaakov to his final resting place.

Chazal teach that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was concerned lest the individual tribes not be pleased with their designated places. Hashem told him not to worry; they already knew from Yaakov’s funeral exactly where each one belonged. Nothing new was being added to an already present and accepted tradition.

Rav Moshe questions this rationale. What is the commonality between the manner in which the brothers carried their father’s coffin and the formation in which the tribes were to travel for their forty-year journey through the wilderness? Then, it was a few people for a few days. Now, it was hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children for forty years. This teaches us an important principle: when one is trained from an early age in a certain practice, it remains with him many years later, despite the varied challenges that may arise and the changing conditions. Length of time, venue, population and circumstances did not alter Yaakov’s designated formation for placing the brothers/tribes where he felt they belonged. This was their designated position, regardless of the many changes that had taken place throughout the years. This is how they were raised, and, thus, this was the manner they would continue to follow. *Hergel*, routine/habit/tendency, overrides and outweighs change – even if it means that one will have to later focus on developing an understanding of the prayer service, which he had taken for granted for all of these years. Without practice and routine, we fear that overcoming challenge might prove to be too much of a “challenge.”

One must follow his forebears and then augment with his own. It should be *ish al diglo* – after – *b'osos l'bais avosam*. We must never forget which precedes the other.