

These were the heads of their fathers' houses: the sons of Reuven... the sons of Shimon... These are the names of the sons of Levi in order of their birth: Gershon, Kehas and Merari. (6:14,15,16)

The *Shlah HaKadosh* wonders why, concerning Reuven and Shimon, the Torah states simply: *Bnei Reuven u'Bnei Shimon*, the sons of Reuven and the sons of Shimon, while with regard to Levi it says, *V'eileh shemos Bnei Levi*, "And these are the names of *Bnei Levi*." Why does it not simply say *Bnei Levi* – why the extra word – *shemos* – names of? The *Shlah* explains that Levi knew that his *shevet*, tribe, would not be subjected to the Egyptian slavery. He was quite aware that while the rest of the nation would be suffering under the cruel subjugation of the Egyptian taskmasters, his *shevet* would be ensconced in the *bais hamedrash* studying Torah. True, *Bnei Levi* were preparing for their G-d-given mission in life. Furthermore, as a result of their non-participation in the work detail, they lost out on the precious rations that their cousins received. Thus, they had to rely on the good-heartedness of their cousins, who shared their meager rations with them. This, too, set the tone for the future in which *Shevet Levi* would not receive a portion of *Eretz Yisrael* and would be relegated to be supported by the nation. Nonetheless, *Bnei Levi* were in the *bais hamedrash*, while the rest of the Jewish People were suffering under the Egyptians.

This troubled Levi. Therefore, he decided to give each one of his sons a name that corresponded in some manner to the Egyptian bondage. Gershon: "I was a *ger*, stranger in a strange land"; Kehas: "Their teeth became dulled because of the many *tzaros*, troubles, which they had endured"; Merari: "Their lives were embittered by the slavery to which they were subjected." It was these names that helped *Shevet Levi* to be *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, carry the yoke with his friend or, in other words, empathize with his fellow Jews. Thus, the Torah underscores the names of the sons of Levi, because these names were special.

The answer is powerful. Nonetheless, I would like to supplement it with a personal observation. Viewing Levi's actions with regard to naming his sons through the lens of contemporary society, one might ask: How does one stigmatize his child with a name that implies and calls slavery, troubles and bitterness to mind? I am certain that today's psychologists would claim that Levi was setting his sons up for failure, making them prone to depression and negativity. After all, is that not what their names implied?

Baruch Hashem, we are not bound by the views and norms of contemporary society. A powerful lesson can be derived from the manner in which Levi named his sons, giving them names which showed empathy with the suffering the Jewish People had endured. He was conveying a message to his children: As *Klal Yisrael's* future Torah leaders, you must bear the yoke with the community. Never forget who you are and from whom you descend. I think this is why, when after the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe *Rabbeinu* called out, *Mi l'Hashem elai*, "Whoever is for Hashem, join

me!" (*Shemos* 32:26), *Shevet Levi* came forth. In order to be so connected with Hashem, one must demonstrate an inextricable affinity for his fellowman. Levi's naming of his sons imbued them and their descendants with a sense of responsibility for their brethren. As a result, they were able to ascend the ladder of spirituality to reach the pinnacle of "*Mi l'Hashem elai!*"