

## All the countings of the Leviim... every male from one month of age and up, were twenty-two thousand. (3:39)

The *Ramban* asks why *Shevet Levi*, the tribe most dedicated to serving Hashem in the *Mishkan* and later in the *Bais HaMikdash*, the tribe synonymous with Torah study and consummate devotion to the spiritual realm of Judaism, numbered far fewer in the census than any of the other tribes. Why should not Hashem's devotees be as equally blessed as the rest of the nation?

*Ramban* explains that *Shevet Levi* had not been enslaved. In Egypt, they were permitted to study Torah unabated. During this time, while *Shevet Levi* was sitting in the *bais hamedrash*, their brothers were out in the field, being beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters, as they forced them to perform back-breaking labor. The Egyptians sought to break the Jews' will, to destroy their enthusiasm for life. By embittering them, the Egyptians hoped that their members would commensurately decrease. Hashem said, "No". For every bit of suffering – their numbers would increase exponentially. Hashem pays us all back relative to our "input" – suffering.

Indeed – whether collectively as a nation or individually, we Jews suffer, but we ultimately gain from it. In the secular world, this is a well-known cliché: "no pain – no gain". It is no different in the spiritual world. Hashem tests us, because He knows that we are able to pass. If we pass or fail is up to us. If we fail, we should not give up. We just did not perform according to our capacity. *Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl*, teaches, "Serving the Almighty properly involves constant challenges, which demands consistency and persistence to achieve success... Only fools give up hope." Why do we often give up? Because we do not have faith in ourselves to succeed. The *Sifrei Chassidus* teach that just as one must believe in Hashem, he must also believe in himself. Obviously, Hashem believes in him – otherwise, he would not have tested him. We all have the capacity to overcome evil, to rise above challenge, to make ourselves great again!

*Chazal (Pirkei Avos 5:22)* teach: *Le'fum tzaara agra*, "According to the effort/pain is the reward." We expend great effort to achieve a goal – and we succeed beyond our dreams. Our greatest source of enjoyment (and conversation) is to recount our early struggles, the toil, the pain, the sleepless nights, etc. We realize now how crucial to our success was every bit of the pain that went into realizing our dream. Indeed, when one is in the "race," the "climb," he does not even think about the pain – so focused is he on his goal. The one who feels pain, who kvetches about the "time," "effort," "troubles," is not focused on his goal, and he will probably fall short of achieving anything of enduring value.

We live in envy of those who "made it," but we refuse to take the same path they took toward realizing their goal. *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, teaches that one of our greatest fears – indeed, a fear that we must overcome in order to succeed – is the fear of confronting life's challenges and conflicts. We would rather live in denial than wake up to reality. The reason for this is quite simple. We refuse to entertain the notion that change is necessary if we are to succeed. Change often

means conceding that we were wrong, that what we contended was correct was not, that there might be a flaw in our reasoning, that our children are not perfect – or worse – we are not perfect. In order to succeed, we must be open to suggestion, to sincere advice, to trust people: parents, true friends, spouses; to acknowledge that there is a problem that we are refusing to confront. Regardless of how much accepting the critique will hurt, the pain of not listening and falling flat on our face will be much worse.

*Rav Weinberg* suggests that changing focus – from taking our mind off the challenge and instead focusing on the pleasure and satisfaction of success – will ultimately eliminate the pain. One has pain only when he thinks about it. If his mind is elsewhere, he forgets about the pain. *Rav Weinberg* offers a meaningful analogy. Imagine the members of a basketball team running around the court, exerting themselves to the limit of their endurance for one purpose: to score a shot, to put that ball through the hoop. They must be in extreme pain; yet, they do not seem to notice. Why? Because the excitement and pleasure of scoring that basket supersedes all discomfort. It is all about the game. A great game makes up for all the pain.

Now, take that same group of players, same scenario, but with one item missing: the ball. No ball, no basket, no score, no fun. They will play for a few minutes, and then they will stop, spent, exhausted. Why? There is no ball, no game, no goal, to distract them from the pain.

The same idea applies to life. We must keep our eye on the goal, the satisfaction, the success. When we focus on the positive we forget about the pain. People who tune themselves in only to the negative will feel the pain. Those who focus on the positive will not notice the pain along the way. I guess it all depends on whether we look forward – or backward.