

The Leviim, according to their father's tribe, were not counted among them. Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, "You shall not count the tribe of Levi." (1:47,48,49)

Apparently, Moshe *Rabbeinu* did not count the Leviim even before Hashem instructed him to exclude them from the census. *Ramban* and *Sforno* rationalize Moshe's decision. Every *shevet*, tribe, had a *Nasi*, leader, who represented the tribe. *Shevet Levi* did not, because Hashem did not tell Moshe to appoint one. As a result, Moshe deduced that Hashem had other plans for the tribe of *Levi*. While this is all well and good, we wonder why Hashem did not preempt Moshe's decision by telling him up front that *Shevet Levi* was not to be counted.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl, explains this with a lesson in human cognition. The human mind grasps ideas best after it works them out itself. Deliberating an idea, analyzing it on one's own, is much more beneficial than when the individual is spoon-fed the same idea. In other words, thinking, exercising one's brain, in the end achieves better results than being taught the same idea. While it is clear that some ideas are often impossible to comprehend without a mentor's explanation, many concepts are best understood only after one has personally processed and cogitated the idea and arrived at his own lucid understanding.

Hashem told Moshe that *Shevet Levi* possessed an elevated status *vis-à-vis* the rest of the nation. They demonstrated their spiritual mettle during the sin of the Golden Calf when, they not only did not fall under the influence of the sinners, but they supported Moshe and carried out Hashem's punishment of the idol worshippers.

The Almighty did not simply exclude them arbitrarily. They earned and warranted this distinction. Nonetheless, it was critical for the nation to understand their earned privilege. Thus, he did not appoint a *Nasi* from *Shevet Levi*, as he did all the other tribes. This prompted the nation to wonder: Why this? What was so special about *Shevet Levi*? When they gave it some thought, they realized on their own that indeed *Shevet Levi* was unique. When Hashem later instructed Moshe not to count the *Leviim*, the nation fully understood their supremacy.

Having said this, we will elaborate upon this idea. Distinction is earned. Respect is given when one deserves it. *Shevet Levi's* rectitude – both spiritual and mundane – elevated them above the rest of the nation. The people were not envious; they understood their overall impeccability. It was essentially a two-way street. *Shevet Levi* acted in a manner that demonstrated their ascension to a higher spiritual plane. The nation respected and admired them for their distinction. If the *Leviim* would not have acted in an elevated manner, however, it is questionable whether the nation would have acquiesced to their preeminence without a specific Divine directive. Sadly, we look for ways to rationalize our lack of esteem and admiration for those who devote their lives to serving as *klei kodesh*, disseminators of Torah to the masses. A well-known *Rambam* posits that the uniqueness of *Shevet Levi* is not reserved only for those whose lineage is from that tribe. "Each and every

person who the openness of his heart dictates him to rise above the mundane materialism and bankrupt morality of this world and make Hashem his portion and his inheritance, to dedicate himself to the study of Torah and its dissemination, is included in the concept of *Shevet Levi*.”

The following vignettes underscore the meaning of *kavod haTorah* and how one becomes worthy of it. One *Isru Chag*, the day following *Simchas Torah*, *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, visited his close friend, *Horav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, zl*, *Rav* of Kovno, Brisk, and later Yerushalayim. *Rav* Yisrael commented that he was saddened over the sorry state of affairs concerning *kavod HaTorah*, the honor one should have for and give to the Torah. *Rav* Yehoshua Leib asked to what specific incident he was referring. *Rav* Yisrael replied, “This happened with me. On *Simchas Torah* I *davened* in the large *shul*. The *gabbai*, sexton, was engaged in the bidding process to see the various honoraria. When he came to *chassan Torah* (which usually is an honor reserved for the *Rav* of the *shul*) I offered two *zuz*, two dollars. That is all I could afford at the time. I waited and waited for another bidder to raise the price (which was ludicrous for such an honor), and no one came forth! Apparently, no one felt the Torah was worth much. I ended up purchasing the *aliyah*, because there was no one else.”

Rav Yehoshua Leib responded immediately, “His Honor is mistaken. No one bided because, here in Kovno, we do not take *kavod HaTorah* lightly. When the congregation noted the *Rav*’s desire to purchase *chassan Torah*, they each refrained from bidding.”

A stigma surrounds the Israeli taxi driver concerning his patience and courtesy. His foot is on the gas waiting for the second that the light turns green. When a fare has reached his destination, the driver expects him to exit the vehicle as soon as possible. At times, the moment the person places his feet on the ground and is about to close the car door, the taxi is already picking up another fare. There is, however, a time when the driver shows the greatest respect, exhibiting superhuman forbearance. A *hachnosas Sefer Torah*, welcoming a new Torah scroll into a *shul*, is a festive ceremony carried out with music, dancing and joy. The *Sefer Torah* is carried under a canopy, held by individuals. The people walk through the streets to bring the *Sefer Torah* to its new home. Understandably, walking through the streets is only possible if the streets leading up to the *shul* are closed off to traffic.

The surprising thing is that the taxi drivers pull over and join in the festivities. They sing, dance, engage with the people, and stand in line to kiss the *Sefer Torah*. This incident took place on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* in Bnei Brak. A member of one of the larger *shuls* was donating a *Sefer Torah*. The procession route was to begin at Rabbi Akiva Street (a primary thoroughfare) and move along until the primary street which led to the *shul*. Traffic was snarled throughout the city. Out of the blue, a non-practicing *monit* (taxi) driver, whose taxi was stuck in traffic got out of his taxi with two young boys – neither of whom was wearing a *yarmulke* – and joined in the procession. He said to his sons, “Look! This is a procession welcoming a new *Sefer Torah*. It is a shame that we have no *kipot* to put on our heads.” They stood off to the side with other like-minded co-religionists who were not wearing head coverings, all singing along with the music, eyes transfixed on the *Sefer*

Torah with which the men were taking turns dancing.

The policemen, who were present to maintain order, were out in force to serve and protect. One of the participants, himself *chareidi*, religious, asked a policeman, "Can you explain to me how men who are not observant, who are known for lack of patience and intolerance of everyone but themselves, are all standing here transfixed by the spectacle. Is this not an anomaly?"

The policeman replied, "I have noticed this altered attitude exhibited by the non-observant. True, under different circumstances, they would have been screaming and yelling to move it along. Nothing stands in the way of earning their daily *shekalim*, currency, but a *Sefer Torah* is different. Who says that one who is non-observant cannot have respect for the Torah? We may not be observant, but the Torah belongs to all of us." We cannot explain their behavior or rationale other than what the policeman said, "The Torah belongs to all of us."

Once, during *Simchas Torah*, *Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl*, was dancing with the Torah, singing out loud as tears streamed down his face. His *talmidim*, students, asked, "*Rebbe*, how can you cry as you dance?" *Rav Yisrael* replied, "When a person has two distinct emotions, unrelated to one another – one joyful, the other sad – invariably, the joyful news will in some manner mitigate the man's feeling of sadness. If both joy and sadness are intertwined, however, the joy will not have an effect on the sadness. On the contrary, the joy might even create greater sadness. For instance, a father has an extraordinary son – brilliant, diligent in his studies with character traits equally refined. The father's soul is bonded with his only son; his love for him has no bounds. Simultaneously, this same son is afflicted with a grave illness which threatens his life. Do you think that the *nachas* diminishes the father's pain? Indeed, it makes it worse!

"Today is *Simchas Torah*, a time when we rejoice with the Torah. We have all maintained an inexorable bond with the Torah and with its *mitzvos*. At this same time, however, feelings of grief and pain for those of our brothers and sisters who are distant from the *osher*, happiness, that suffuses our lives awaken within me. Yes, I feel joy, but I also feel pain. One does not negate the other."

Rav Yisrael's attitude, his love for each and every Jew, was real. He did not go through the motions of outreach for the various reasons which motivate those who did not succeed in this holy task. This is not the forum for discussing some of the grave errors committed by those who dabble in this area and end up doing more harm than good. Rather, we should focus on those whose boundless love for the Jewish People, Hashem's children, spurs them on to reach out with love, empathy and respect in order to bring them back. No one says that it is easy, especially upon dealing with someone who was *frum* from birth, went to all the right schools, comes from a good home, and yet, has turned his back on Jewish observance. We must overcome our feelings of dismay, exercise self-control and extend ourselves to them. He must know that we care, that we empathize with his inner struggle and believe in him.

Children struggle. Even in the finest Jewish homes, we may sadly find a boy or a girl who is conflicted. He/she was raised with the correct values, but something happened along the way. The parents cannot help but feel the profound anguish of failure. A child that strays is a tragedy for both the parents and *Klal Yisrael*, but, above all, for the child. We look for reasons. We check everything off that we could have done – and that we did. We tried – yet the child fell victim to the allure of the outside world. The worst mistake is to play the blame game: father, mother, friends, school, etc. It happened, and now we must swallow our pride and reach out with love. There is a secret that perhaps we, as parents and grandparents, should undertake to learn and apply with fervor.

Horav Matisyahu Salomon, Shlita, relates that, when he was *Mashgiach*, ethical supervisor of the *yeshivah* of Gateshead, England, he was aware of a student who, despite his diligence and effort, remained less than average. Nonetheless, he was relentless in seeking out and finding a good *chavrusa*, study partner, to help him. Unfortunately, the *chavrusa* lasted for only one *z'man*, semester. To the amazement of everyone, he was able to find another *chavrusa*. Everyone marveled at his ability to succeed in finding a *chavrusa*.

One day, *Horav Moshe Schwab, zl*, who was the senior *Mashgiach*, burst into the conference room where the *Rebbeim* were congregating and declared, "I have discovered the secret to his success. I was walking through the hall, and I heard him talking loudly to his mother. He said, 'Mommy, you may stop saying *Tehillim*. I found my *chavrusa* for next *z'man*.'"

The *Tehillim* of a parent made the difference. We can do all the right things, but they must be accompanied with our heartfelt prayers. Preemptive praying can prevent the need for remedial prayers later.