

All their countings were six hundred and three thousand, five hundred and fifty. The Leviim according to their father's tribe were not counted among them. (1:46,47)

In *Parashas Pekudei*, when the nation brought the *machatzis ha'shekel*, half-shekel for the *Mishkan*, they numbered 603,550, as cited here. On the surface, it appears that an overt miracle took place which did not result in any change in the census. A difference, however, exists between the numbers: In *Parashas Pekudei*, the entire nation, *Shevet Levi* included, was counted. In *Parashas Bamidbar*, the *Leviim* had already been separated/designated for their sacred service. They were now counted from the age of one month (as opposed to those in the rest of the nation who were counted from the age of twenty years old and up). Nonetheless, even though *Shevet Levi* was not included in the *Bamidbar* census, the total remained the same. Apparently, during the six months from the *Pekudei* census to the *Bamidbar* census, the number of men over twenty-years in *Klal Yisrael* increased sufficiently to coincide with the exact number of *Leviim* who were excluded from the census.

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, derives an important message from this idea. In the beginning, all Jews over the age of twenty-years-old were designated to serve in the national army. Afterwards, once the *Mishkan* was erected and *Shevet Levi* was excluded due to their new role in serving in the Sanctuary – night and day – the number of Jews able to join the army diminished. Nonetheless, “somehow”, the number remained the same. The Torah is teaching us that, when *Shevet Levi* is removed from the Jewish camp, it will not affect the number. Hashem will compensate for the difference.

Indeed, the criteria for the census of *Shevet Levi* differed from that of the other tribes. *Leviim* were counted from the age of thirty days. This teaches us, explains *Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl*, that since *Shevet Levi's* entire life was devoted to serving Hashem, it was incumbent that the members be counted/included as early as they became viable members of *Klal Yisrael*. Once one's life is designated to serve Hashem, he has no time to wait. He is consecrated for this position at the earliest possible time.

The well-known words of the *Rambam (Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel)*, in which he characterizes those who devote themselves to Torah study as the modern-day *Shevet Levi*, come in to play. These children should be raised from the earliest moments of childhood for this goal. Parents whose aspirations for their sons are to see them become *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, and their aspirations for daughters are to see them reflect the highest ideals and values of *bnos Yisrael* must make every effort to raise their children as such. One does not become great overnight. It is a process which involves imparting the religious teachings in a manner that will draw the child's attention, fostering a strong and proud sense of identity and instilling within each child the highest level of moral and ethical values. It also involves isolating children from negative influences, while simultaneously creating a wholesome and supportive environment. This includes

selecting the right institution that aligns with the requisite religious beliefs (rather than what is in vogue or what will advance the parent's social standing), monitoring media consumption-which today can be quite destructive, and encouraging positive peer relationships. Parents should communicate their expectations to their children clearly. Likewise, parents must represent the highest level of role model for their children to emulate. "Do as I say, not as I do" has never worked, and it certainly does not work concerning Torah values.

This dvar Torah is not a primer for how to raise children to become Torah Jews in accordance with Hashem's imperative. This is why we have gedolim and morei derech to guide and support our decisions. We have no dearth of stories relating the foresight and devotion that Torah giants have demonstrated in raising their own children. A child does not become great overnight. The well-known maxim of the Brisker Rav, zl, who was blessed with extraordinary descendants, would attribute his z'chus, merit, to tefillah and treren, "prayer with tears." He understood that, while we as parents must follow the Torah directives and see to it that our personal input be in line with them, ultimately, it all comes down to sincere, emotional prayer to the Almighty. It is His blessing that determines the end result. May we all be worthy of it.

Horav Matisyahu Salomon, zl, related a very practical and critical approach which he heard from *Horav Moshe Soloveitchik, zl*. *Rav Matisyahu* was addressing a group of parents confronting the *tznius* challenge in modern society. He posited that children are attuned to the *kedushah* of their *neshamos*. If we project *tznius* in this manner; if we tell our children that they should be proud (and show it) of who they are and whom they represent, we will likely elicit a positive response. This works when the children are young. As they grow older, the restrictive nature of the *tznius* imperative becomes more of a challenge. At that point, introducing the inner concept and beauty of *tznius* is necessary.

Rav Matisyahu asked *Rav Moshe Soloveitchik* why we do not make *bas mitzvah* celebrations/parties for girls, as we do for boys when they reach their milestone age of adulthood. The *Yam Shel Shlomo* says the *bar mitzvah* is the greatest *seudas mitzvah* because it celebrates the milestone of another Jew in *Klal Yisrael* beginning to perform *mitzvos*. Does the same concept not hold true for girls? Why should we not make a *seudah* for them as well?

Rav Moshe replied with an explanation that bespeaks his extraordinary insight and greatness. "I have only one daughter," he began. "I, too, had this question. I could not find a reason not to do it, but, since it is not in our *mesorah*, tradition, I did not make a party. Therefore, on the day of the *bas mitzvah*, I called her aside and said to her, "This is a big day for you. You have become *bas mitzvah*. It is also a big day for your mother and me. We are very happy and, indeed, we should make a *seudah*, as we did for your brothers. It appears to me, however, that the first lesson a girl should learn when she becomes *bas mitzvah* is the idea that *kol kevodah bas melech penimah*, 'The complete glory of a princess is within.' The *bas Melech* does not call attention to herself. Seclusion is her esteem. A true princess celebrates with inner joy and without public fanfare.' This is what I told her. Then I brought forth a bottle of liquer and two little cups, and we drank a *l'chaim* –

just the two of us.”

The lesson is obviously the manner in which this revered *Rosh Yeshivah* conveyed the spirit of *tznius*. It is not a set of restrictions, but rather, a testament to the glory befitting the *bas Melech*. Perhaps I might add another lesson to be derived. He did not just tell his daughter what to do or not to do. He sat her down as an adult and spoke to her. When one speaks to/with children, he conveys the message more clearly, and the child is more likely to absorb the message.