

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

PARSHA BOOKLET

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Parshat Bamidbar

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai in the tent of meeting. (1:1)

The wilderness is a large area. One would expect the Torah to specify the place in the wilderness that Hashem's dialogue with Moshe Rabbeinu occurred. Chazal derive from here that the word midbar, wilderness, imparts to us a lesson concerning the attitude one must manifest when studying Torah. A midbar is a makom hefker, ownerless property. It is also desolate, indicating humility and lowliness. One must make himself as hefker, give himself up, so to speak, for the Torah. He relinquishes his ownership of himself, declaring himself null and void, so that he is able to dedicate himself totally to the pursuit of Torah study.

There is a limit to how far one can go being hefker. As Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa would say, "I value and appreciate one who declares himself hefker for Torah. I am very wary, however, of the one who is mafkir others." This means that the demands we make on ourselves must not be the standard which we apply to others. One should be eager to give someone the shirt off his own back. He should never, however, give away the shirt off someone else's back. Do chesed, perform acts of kindness, with your time, your energy, your money. Do not do it with other people's time, energy and money. Volunteer yourself. Do not volunteer others.

Moshe was the symbol of kabbolas haTorah, accepting the Torah. His humility was exemplary. He made himself hefker to all. He was there for everyone whenever he was needed. Har Sinai was selected to be the mountain upon which the Torah was given because it was the lowest of all mountains. This was its distinction. It achieved eminence because of its diminutive size.

The Noam Elimelech cautions us not to get carried away with being hefker and acting humble. Unrestricted humility, unregulated passiveness, and uncontrolled self-abnegation can lead to depression and hopelessness, which will cause the Shechinah to depart from him. This is why the Torah "counters" the word midbar with Ohel Moed, Tent of Meeting. Moed is the Hebrew term used to describe the Moadim, Festivals, which symbolize festivity and joy. The Shechinah only resides in a place which is the seat of simchah, joy. A person should make himself as a midbar, but he should concurrently see to it that he brings himself into the Ohel Moed - tent of happiness.

The Baal Shem Tov says that everything that can be achieved through fasting and self-denial can be achieved more quickly by performing mitzvos with simchah. The Shomer Emunim writes that the yetzer hora, evil inclination, directs all of its forces to weaken a person's simchah, because it leads to negligence of mitzvos and greater vulnerability to sin. Indeed, the Arizal said that his enormous spirituality and monumental achievements were the result of his performing mitzvos with simchah.

This does not mean that one should laugh in the face of disaster. The antonym for simchah is atzvus, depression, not sadness. The Baal HaTanya explains atzvus as an absence of feeling. One who is depressed is beyond sadness. He has no feeling whatsoever. Sadness is the state of feeling sad. One who is sad about a situation can be motivated to do something about it. Thus, this awareness and sensitivity can be the source of simchah. We see people who are seemingly sad who say they cannot express their emotions; they cannot cry. This is not sadness. This is depression.

The Baal Shem Tov once visited a town in which the people complained that their chazzan, cantor, behaved strangely. It seems that on Yom Kippur, he would chant the Al Cheit, Confession of sins, in a merry melody, rather than in a more appropriately somber tune. When questioned by the Baal Shem Tov, the cantor explained, "Rebbe, if I was the janitor in the king's palace, would I not be happy that I was sweeping away the dirt and beautifying the king's palace? Likewise, the neshamah, soul, within me is G-dly. When I confess my sins I feel that I am cleansing myself and making a better, more appropriate place for my neshamah. Is that not a reason to rejoice?" Needless to say, the Baal Shem Tov praised the chazzan for his attitude.

David HaMelech is the symbol of simchah, reiterating his feelings of gladness and joy throughout Sefer Tehillim. Yet, according to the Midrash, David HaMelech did not have a single good day throughout his entire life! It was his faith and trust in the Almighty that gave him the ability to triumph over adversity with the feeling in his heart that Hashem is taking care of everything. I will just have to wait and see how it all works out. Since Hashem is in control, the outcome will ultimately be good.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski tells the story of a recovering addict that explained why she had succeeded in her recovery program. She explained that she is a devout football fan who never misses watching her team play. She is either there or finds some way to see it. One weekend she had to be away, so she asked her friend to tape the game for her. Upon returning, the friend handed her the tape and said, "By the way, your team won."

Later that day, she watched the game in horror as she saw her team behind by twenty points at halftime. Under all circumstances, at this point, she would normally have been a nervous wreck, looking for different ways to assuage her nerves. This time, however, she was perfectly calm, because she knew the outcome of the game; her team had won.

That was the reason for her success in the addict recovery program. She had made a conscious decision to give her life over to the will of G-d. Knowing fully well that the Almighty will do what is best, she knew that she was ultimately going to win. Even though there would be a number of situations in which she would feel lost and confused, she trusted in G-d.

This is the story of life. We believe; we are faithful; and we trust in the Almighty. Thus, even when things seem not to be going in our favor, we do not lose hope. That is simchas ha'chaim. Is it easy? No. Is it necessary? There is no other way.

Take a census of the entire assembly of the Bnei Yisrael. (1:2)

Rashi writes that because of Hashem's love for the Jewish People, He counted them frequently. He counted them when they left Egypt; after the sin of the Golden Calf, to see how many remained after the sinners died; and now, when He rested His Presence. The Mishkan was erected on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and they were counted on Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl, wonders why a human emotion which motivates a person to count something which he cares about should play a role with regard to the Almighty. Man counts that which is precious to him, because he is fond of it and, thus, wants constantly to be aware of its existence. Hashem, however, is aware of everything. There is no secret before Him. Why does He "need" to count? Certainly, it is not because He needs to be made aware of its existence.

Apparently, one can count something merely because he is fond of it - not because he needs to know its amount. Nonetheless, he is still counting it because he wants to concretize the number in his mind. When one cares, he counts because it increases his awareness of the subject. This concept does not apply in any way to the Almighty. Doubt never enters into the equation, because the word "doubt" does not exist regarding Hashem. Why, then, did Hashem instruct that the Jewish People be counted?

Horav Nossan Ordman, zl, cites the Midrash which states: "Come and see how beloved Klal Yisrael is to Hashem. Hashem counted them a number of times, individually, as tribes and collectively, as a nation. This was done l'hodia, to make known, how much they are loved by Him. One always counts and recounts that which is precious to him, receiving great pleasure from every count." This teaches us that Hashem counts the Jewish People simply out of love. Once again, the question arises: How do we attribute a physical emotion to the Almighty? Hashem knows the number of Jews there are. Reiterating this number will certainly not increase His feelings towards us.

Rav Ordman understands this Midrash from a different perspective. He suggests that the word l'hodia, to make known, means to make known to Klal Yisrael. Hashem does not need this knowledge. We do! When we realize how much we mean to Hashem, how much He loves us, how precious we are to Him, we will be ennobled to act better, to be more observant, to develop a closer relationship with Hashem. It is all for us. Is it any different in the human sector? When children feel that their parents love them, they act differently. When students feel that their teachers care about them, they respond concomitantly.

For the sons of Yosef, for the sons of Efraim, for the sons of Menashe. (1:32,33)

The Baal HaTurim notes the use of the words, l'bnei Yosef, for the sons of Yosef; livnei Efraim, for the sons of Efraim. Usually, when the Torah mentions Yosef's two sons who achieved tribe status, it would write, l'bnei Yosef, l'Eraim; for the sons of Yosef, for Efraim. Why does the Torah add l'bnei Efraim, for the sons of Efraim, as if to exclude Yosef entirely? He explains that Yosef did not participate together with his brothers in carrying Yaakov Avinu's coffin, because he was a melech, king, and it was not kavod malchus, respect for the monarchy. Therefore, he is not counted among the Degalim, tribal banners. The banners are attributed solely to his two sons, Efraim and Menashe.

It seems implied by the words of the Baal HaTurim that Yosef's exclusion in the Degalim was some form of punishment for not carrying Yaakov's coffin. This is enigmatic. It is not as if Yosef refused to participate. He surely would have participated had he not been a melech. It was an oneiss, an accident, and he should not be blamed. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm explains that while it is true that Yosef is

not to be faulted for not carrying his father's coffin, regardless of the reason, he did not carry it. Therefore, he was not personally included in the Degalim. An accident may relieve one of culpability; it may ameliorate the circumstances for one's non-participation in an endeavor, but, after all is said and done - he was not there! An accident does not fill the void; it excuses it.

We derive an important lesson from here. There are times when we are asked to participate in a certain endeavor or project for which we have a way of excusing ourselves. While our excuse may suffice to explain and even justify our non-attendance, we cannot demand at a later date to be included among those who served, who were involved, who participated. We cannot have our proverbial cake and eat it. Accidents do happen, and circumstances do arise when one cannot be at a given place, but we cannot expect to be included among those who made something happen, if, in fact, we "legitimately" had not been involved.

*And these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe...And these are the names of the sons of Aharon.
(3:1,2)*

Rashi notes that the Torah begins by stating, "These are the generations of Aharon and Moshe," and goes on to list only the children of Aharon. This is because Moshe was their rebbe, Torah teacher. We are to infer from here that whoever teaches another person's children Torah is considered as if he gave birth to him. The lesson, aside from its simple message, also implies a rebbe's obligation to his student. If he is like a parent, then he must maintain a parental obligation to his student. In other words: it goes both ways. The student is not the rebbe's son unless the rebbe acts like a father.

There is a distinct difference between the nature of Torah studies and that of secular knowledge. The instructor of science -- or any other area of secular knowledge -- discharges his responsibility as long as he successfully imparts the lesson to the students. He is not obliged to take an interest in his student's personal life. As long as his students excel academically, he is considered to be an excellent teacher.

In Torah education this will not suffice. While scholastic achievement is important, it remains only one aspect of a rebbe's responsibility and ultimate success. He is required to take a parental interest in his student, demonstrating an interest similar to what he would manifest for his own child. Torah is more than a utilitarian endeavor; it provides a goal for one's life. If a student has been provided with the tools for living, but has not been taught how to actively assimilate these tools into life, then the teacher has not successfully carried out his mission. Teaching someone how to start a car, but not how to drive it, does not help much. Knowing how to drive on a straight road, without the ability and know-how to maneuver in traffic, will also not serve the student very well. Just as a parent is concerned about his child's ability to adjust to life in the world, so, too, should a rebbe take great pains to see to it that his student will be able to function successfully in confronting life's challenges.

Now that we have some idea of the awesome responsibility placed on our rebbeim, we must ask ourselves: Are we demanding too much from them? Are their classes too large, too demanding? Are they being compensated commensurately, or are they forced to augment their salaries with other sources of income? We must remember that all these diversions deplete their energy and deter them from their primary focus of addressing the totality of their student's life. Let me take the liberty of adding one more item to the list. It is probably not my place, and perhaps this is not the forum, but given the popularity of this publication, I want to bring a need to the attention of my readers: life

insurance. Yes, tragically it happens. A young rebbe is stricken, a family is left bereft of a father and breadwinner. Because of his previous financial situation, he just did not have the money to purchase insurance. So, a tragedy occurs, and as rachamanim bnei rachamanim, compassionate sons of compassionate fathers, we provide for the family. What about preventive medicine? What about seeing to it that rebbeim are provided with the means to protect themselves al kol tzarah shelo tavo? After all, they are raising our children as if they were their own a little hakoras hatov, appreciation, would be in order.

Returning to Rashi's statement, we wonder whether every rebbe is considered to be as a parent, or are there specific criteria concerning the manner and approach of his teaching? Perhaps the words of the Maharal m'Prague can enlighten us. He asks: Was not Moshe Rabbeinu the Rabbon Shel Kol Yisrael? If everyone was his student, why are Aharon's sons emphasized more than anyone else? He explains that while Moshe taught all of Klal Yisrael, he spent extra hours studying with Aharon's sons. When a rebbe goes beyond the call of duty, when he does not look at the clock waiting for the bell to ring, then he is koneh, acquires, the students. They become his, because he has shown that he cares - about the student - nothing else, just the student.

The Chasam Sofer notes that Aharon's sons are mentioned because Moshe taught them, but what about Moshe's own sons, his flesh and blood? Are they any less significant than Aharon's sons? His answer is frightening and should serve as a wake-up call for those of us whose priorities are not in order. He says that Aharon's sons are considered Moshe's spiritual children, because he taught them and devoted his time to them. Moshe's sons were his flesh and blood, but, because of the constraints of leadership, he did not supervise his sons as much as he would have liked. The sons that one watches over and with which he spends time are his sons. The others are his physical offspring, but, in the spiritual sense, there is a failure in their father-son relationship! The Chasam Sofer goes on to suggest that when the opportunity to be mevakesh Hashem, seek Hashem's word, arose and one only had to turn to the Ohel Moed, Moshe's sons did not go of their own volition, and Moshe was not there to motivate them. Therefore, they did not achieve the spiritual distinction that Aharon's sons developed.

The Chasam Sofer emphasizes that educating one's children demands that one dedicate time and effort. "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people" (Shemos 19:14). Rashi notes that Moshe, the quintessential Jewish leader, ignored his personal affairs completely; he went directly to the people. On that day, Moshe's students became his spiritual children, while his physical offspring did not. Children cannot be raised on "five minutes here" and "five minutes there." Perhaps we can add that when children see how much time and effort their parents put into their education, it tells them how much their parents value their education. This sends a powerful and compelling message to a child - one that will hopefully engender a positive reciprocity.

In closing, Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the Mishnah Berurah, who cites the Tur, who discusses two berachos, blessings: Hashuveinu Avinu, Return us our Father; and Selach lanu Avinu, Forgive us, our Father. They both include the word Avinu, our Father, because a father is obligated to his son, and a father has compassion for his son. We, therefore, ask Hashem to do what a mortal father would do. Rav Zilberstein asks: If a father does not find the time to learn with his son; if his son's educational development does not fit into his scheme of things, how can he ask Hashem to do the same for him? This is a question that should make us think. After all, how can we ask Hashem to do for us what we will not do for our own children?

Moshe and Aharon took these men who had been designated by (their) names. They gathered together the entire assembly. (1:17,18)

As a rule, Parashas Bamidbar is usually read on the Shabbos preceding the Festival of Shavuos. Chazal state a number of reasons for this. The Alshich HaKadosh, zl, suggests that this parsha is uniquely geared towards Kabbolas HaTorah, the Giving of the Torah, and its acceptance by Klal Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu was commanded to count the nation. Assisting him in this endeavor were to be the Nesiim, Princes, whom Moshe was to appoint based upon Hashem's designation. These Nesiim did not become the heads of their respective tribes overnight. They had already assumed positions of importance, having distinguished themselves in areas of leadership prior to this appointment. Their wisdom and piety had gained them access to positions of status. Despite all of this, Moshe was not prepared to select the individual leaders until Hashem had first designated them by name. Moshe did not want the responsibility of selecting one Jew over another. By selecting Reuven, he would inadvertently cause Shimon to feel bad. Furthermore, even after the Nesiim had been designated by Hashem, Moshe did not use the public gathering of the nation as a venue for announcing their appointment. This declaration was done in private, in order to avoid calling attention to one person over another.

Thus, this parsha is read prior to Shavuos to emphasize that derech ertz kadmah laTorah, maintaining human decency, respect and obedience for one's fellow man precedes the study of Torah. Derech ertz plays a pivotal role in the life of a Torah Jew. Indeed, if he studies Torah, he should epitomize derech ertz. If he does not manifest this character trait, something is wrong with the manner in which he is studying the Torah.

We find that when Nevuchadnetzar cast Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah into a roaring, fiery furnace for not acceding to his demand that they worship idols, they remained unscathed, even strolling about with the angel who had protected them. Why did they not leave the inferno? Does it say anywhere in halachah that once someone is thrown into the fire, he must remain there? The Midrash Tanchuma on Parashas Noach enlightens us and gives a rationale for their actions. They said, "We will not leave the flames without the king's permission, so that people will not accuse us of running away. By his dictum, we entered the flames; by his permission, we will leave."

Likewise, we find that Noach did not leave the Ark until Hashem told him to leave. He said, "Since I entered only with Divine permission, I will leave only with Divine permission." Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah were in a purgatory of flame. Yet, they would not leave without permission. Noach had spent an exhausting year during which he ceaselessly tended to the animals. He did not even allow himself the luxury of rest or sleep. He refused to leave, however, until he was granted permission by Hashem. What prompted these people to act in this manner?

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that the root of this behavior is derech ertz. No amount of hardship or suffering can justify a breach in derech ertz. Moreover, Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah remained amid the flames, defying death, because they believed that, just as one who enters the furnace to sanctify Hashem's Name will not be harmed, likewise, he who remains in the flames due to derech ertz will also not be harmed. No cause, worthy as it may be, can justify disregarding the imperative of derech ertz. Derech ertz does not and cannot contradict Hashem's dictate. Rather, the principles of derech ertz explain and elucidate the manner in which one should carry out Hashem's command.

Thus, when Moshe was instructed to count all of the Leviim from the age of one month and older, we find that he questioned the Almighty: "How can I enter their tents and intrude upon their privacy?" In order to verify the number of children, someone would need to visit the homes of the Leviim. Hashem told Moshe, "Do your share, and I will do mine." Therefore, Moshe stood in front of each tent. The Shechinah preceded him, calling out the number of Leviim in the tent. If the norms of derech erez did not allow Moshe to enter the tent, then the Divine command could not mean that he should personally enter. Moshe carried out the command with assistance from the Divine in a manner which did not preclude his adherence to the rules of derech erez.

Rav Chaim notes that the obligation to act with derech erez applies in all relationships - even with wicked and evil people. Thus, after being accosted by Potifar's wife, Yosef fled her home and even left her clinging to his jacket. Why? Did she not immediately use that jacket to accuse him of making advances towards her? The Ramban explains that it would have been an affront to her honor and dignity to tear the jacket away from her. It was better to risk his reputation, even his life, rather than to violate the obligation of derech erez.

The Talmud Sanhedrin 11a relates that once, while Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi was delivering a lecture, he noticed a smell of garlic. He said, "Let he who has eaten garlic go out." Rabbi Chiya arose and left. Immediately, all of the disciples arose and left. The next day, Rabbi Shimon, Rabbi's son, asked Rabbi Chiya, "Was it you who caused the annoyance to my father yesterday?" "Heaven forbid that such a thing should happen," replied Rabbi Chiya. This means that he arose in an effort to encourage everyone to leave, thereby sparing the real offender humiliation.

This is very commendable. Rabbi Chiya did not want to see the individual who had annoyed Rabbi embarrassed publicly. What about the lecture? He caused a walkout, which halted the Torah lecture for the day. Derech erez takes precedence. Sensitivity to one's fellow is one of the kinyanei Torah, acts of acquisition by which one acquires Torah. Without derech erez, the lesson would have accomplished very little. In his commentary to the Talmud Berachos 19b, the Meiri writes that the quality of human dignity is the most endearing and beloved quality in all of Judaism. Maintaining this dignity is not just commendable; it is an obligation. Indeed, in the Talmud Moed Katan 9b, we find one Tanna blessing another with the following blessing: "May you never cause anyone else embarrassment, and may you never be caused any embarrassment yourself." What a wonderful course for all of us to follow.

What is the rationale behind the dictum of derech erez kadmah laTorah? The concept of derech erez as a prerequisite for Torah is discussed by Horav Mendel, zl, m'Rimanov. He points out that the Manna was given to Klal Yisrael prior to their receiving the Torah. The people were instructed to gather a measure of Manna daily as a test of whether or not they would observe the Torah (Shemos 16:4). What relationship is there between the Manna and the Torah?

Rav Mendel explains that the basic concepts of decent human behavior, respect for the rights of others and the avoidance of greed and envy, are based upon the premise that Hashem provides each individual with his total needs. Greed, envy and theft are the result of an individual's unjustifiable belief that he can benefit by such miscreant behavior. If he would realize that Hashem provides what is necessary for his optimum welfare, he would not resort to such base behavior. Thus, decent behavior, derech erez, is synonymous with trust in Hashem. The Manna taught Klal Yisrael this lesson: Every day you will receive whatever you need. Therefore, do not take more, because it will spoil. Even if for some reason you have received less, do not be concerned. Hashem will provide. That was the message of the Manna: Hashem will give you exactly what you need.

When Klal Yisrael became aware that their needs were being met by Hashem, they had no reason to develop any undesirable character traits. They were able to devote themselves completely to accepting Hashem's Torah. The precondition for receiving the Torah was no longer an issue. The principles of the Manna apply today, as well. We must learn to realize that we will receive what we individually need - no more, no less. One who has received an abundance of material benefits should realize that Hashem has selected him to be a conduit to convey these benefits to the others in the way of tzedakah, charity.

In summation, derech erez kadmah la'Torah means that in order to receive the Torah, one must place his trust in the Giver of the Torah. This trust is indicated by his character development.

Bnei Yisrael did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe, so did they do. (1:54)

Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 4:28 that jealousy, desire and the pursuit of honor cause a person to be removed from this world. These obsessions can drive a person to do things that will ultimately catalyze his downfall. In order to have a clearer perception of the evils of kinah, jealousy, and how it transforms a happy person into a miserable, depressed and obsessive individual, we cite a penetrating analogy from the Orchos Tzaddikim. A kind and benevolent king, who sought every possibility to satisfy the needs and desires of his subjects, once met two men and asked them, "How can I help you? Each one of you should state his request, which I promise to fulfill. There is one condition, however. Whatever I grant the first petitioner, I will give doubly to the second."

The first man began to contemplate the offer in his mind: "If I ask the king for a large amount of money, then my friend will amass twice as much. Thus, regardless of how wealthy I will be, he will be twice as wealthy." This idea began to obsess him. The thought that he and his friend would no longer be equals bothered him no end. It obsessed him to the point that he made a ludicrous request to the king: to take out one of his eyes. This way his friend would lose his sight completely! This is the extreme to which petty jealousy can lead.

While this may be an analogy, it reflects a reality that occurs all of the time. We have become intolerant of our friend's success, of our neighbor's good fortune, of our peer's nachas, satisfaction. This intolerance leads to jealousy, which is usually the precursor for animosity and discord. It all originates with one's obsession that his friend not have more than him. We find Chazal in the Talmud Sanhedrin 102a relate that Hashem spoke to Yaravam ben Nevat, urging him to repent and return to the fold. Hashem said, "If you repent, then I, you and Ben Yishai (David Hamelech) will stroll in Gan Eden." Yaravam asked, "Who will be at the head?" Hashem replied, "Ben Yishai will be at the head." "If so," Yaravam said, "I do not desire it."

Yaravam had the chance to turn his life around. Hashem had granted him the opportunity to return and achieve an unparalleled relationship with Him. Yaravam had it all, but he refused because it would mean that David would supersede him. No longer was it worth it. He was willing to have his name recorded for all time as the man who led Klal Yisrael to sin, to be reviled for his evil, as long as David Hamelech not be elevated above him. This is the effect of kinah.

In our parsha, we note how Klal Yisrael were able to expunge the trait of jealousy from their hearts, as they continued to relate well to, and respect the members of, Shevet Levi, even after the Leviim had been elevated to perform the service in the Sanctuary, to the point of placing their tents in closer proximity to the Mishkan. Despite the newly-acquired exalted status of Shevet Levi, the rest of

the Jewish nation continued to maintain a harmonious relationship with them. Chazal teach us in the Midrash that when the instructions were given for Shevet Levi to move closer to the Mishkan, Klal Yisrael moved away, in order to allow space for the new "tenants" to camp around the Mishkan. This is the meaning of, "Bnei Yisrael did everything that Hashem commanded Moshe."

The Shem MiShmuel explains that this was an enormous test for the people. It is not as if the rest of Klal Yisrael were simple people. They were also on an elevated spiritual plane. Their involvement in the construction of the Mishkan and its Keilim, vessels, purified and ennobled their spirituality, so that they, too, wanted to camp next to the Mishkan. When the Leviim's appointment was made known to them, however, they acquiesced and moved - without fanfare, without grumbling, without jealousy. This was their distinction. This was the indication of their true spiritual status. It was because of their submission that they merited the Degalim, individual Tribal Banners, which delineated and underscored the character virtue and essence of each tribe, granting them the unparalleled opportunity to cling to Hashem personally and individually.

I conclude with the powerful words of the Ramchal in the Mesillas Yesharim II, "Envy, too, is the result of ignorance and foolish thinking. The envious person gains nothing, and the only loser is the person who envies... Envy eats away at a person to the point that he cannot enjoy what he has. Some feign happiness for others, while internally they seethe with envy." Envy is irrational and frequently lethal. Furthermore, it accomplishes nothing - other than destroying the one who is envious. It may go so far as to destroy whatever good feeling he has about himself, his achievements, or his possessions.

A contemporary writer notes the irrational nature of envy when, at a recent visit to a critically ill patient, someone remarked, "Look at all the attention he is getting!" This is absurdity at its nadir. Imagine being envious of one who is seriously ill. That is the essence of envy: no reason - no rationale - only insecurity.

On the day I struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified every firstborn in Yisrael for Myself. (3:13)

The Jewish firstborn were sanctified to Hashem at the time that the Egyptian firstborn perished during the tenth plague that struck Egypt. This is enigmatic. Just because the Egyptian firstborn died does not seem to be sufficient reason for the Jewish firstborn to be sanctified. What does one have to do with the other? The Alter, zl, m'Slabodka gives us a penetrating insight. The night of the exodus from Egypt, which was also the night of the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn, was a night of terror for the Jewish firstborn. Everywhere they saw their Egyptian counterparts in the throes of death. They were struck promptly at midnight and lay writhing in pain during the entire night, as they waited to die at first light. The images, the screams, the wailing, were overwhelming. The Jewish firstborn felt this terror, as it struck a chord of fear in their own hearts.

True, Hashem had promised them that nary a hair on their heads would be touched. They were only human, however, and to say that they were comfortable that night when every other firstborn was dying a miserable death would not be reasonable. As a result of this discomfort, Hashem consecrated the Bechorim, firstborn, assigning to them the lofty role of performing the service in the Sanctuary.

What a powerful lesson there is to be derived from here. Nothing - absolutely nothing - goes unrequited. Every bit of pain and irritation, every unpleasantness that a Jew sustains, is measured by Hashem - so that this person can be repaid.

There is another aspect to this reward. Since Hashem takes note of every action that we take, then every positive endeavor that we do will be a source of blessing for us. Regardless of its unsophistication and lack of adornment, any positive act will be recognized. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, related that he once heard from the Brisker Rav, zl, a story that has been a tradition in their family throughout the generations all the way back to Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl. The story is told about the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna's wife, who, together with another woman in the city of Vilna, made it her business to go from door to door in their community to raise money for poor families. During one of their conversations, they agreed that whichever of the two would pass away first, she would appear to her surviving friend and relate to her the proceedings in Heaven. A number of years went by, and the Vilna's Rebbetzin's friend was called to Heaven. Rebbetzin Chana, the Gaon's wife, waited anxiously for her friend to appear, but nothing happened. After awhile, the friend appeared in a dream and said, "I have not been granted permission from Heaven to reveal to you what is going on over here. However, since we have an agreement, I have been given permission to relate one thing to you.

"Do you remember once when we went to the home of a woman to ask for money, but she was not home? As we were walking down the main street, you noticed her walking on the other side of the street. You immediately raised your hand and pointed her out to me. We then crossed the street and received a donation from her. Now, let me open for you a window into the Heavenly approach towards reward. We were both rewarded equally for raising charity from this woman. We were both rewarded for the time and effort we put in going to her house and then meeting her on the street. For noticing her walking down the street, however, and pointing her out - only you were rewarded."

That small effort, which was probably nothing more than an afterthought, was recorded in Heaven on behalf of the Vilna Rebbetzin as a merit. Every action that we discharge, every bit of effort that we expend, is recorded in Heaven and later reimbursed to us. Nothing is ignored. Nothing goes to waste.

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

Rashi explains the reason that yet another census is attributed to Hashem's great love for the Jewish People. He counted Klal Yisrael when they left Egypt, after the sin of the Golden Calf, to see how many had survived, and again when He was about to rest His Shechinah among them. Furthermore, in his commentary to Shemos 1:1, Rashi cites the pasuk in Yeshayah 40:26 that likens Klal Yisrael to stars, which Hashem brings in by number and by name. Likewise, Hashem counts and enumerates His children when they come out and again when they are "gathered in." What is the significance of being compared to a legion of stars?

Horav Simchah Wasserman, zl, explains that an army of stars is different from a standard army of soldiers. In an army, the officers and heads of divisions are known and referred to by their names. The simple soldier, however, is known only by a number. The reason for this is that since there are so many soldiers, the individual soldier becomes inconsequential. Only after the entire legion is counted by number do they achieve significance as part of the larger collective group. The officers, however, have singular relevance as leaders and are, thus, referred to by name.

Stars are certainly a mighty legion; the universe is filled with millions of them. For this reason, they are referred to by number. Due to their individual impressiveness, however, each star is a world in

itself, the smallest star larger than the entire earth. Thus, they are also referred to by name. This is the meaning of Yeshayah 40:26, "He who takes out their hosts by number; He calls them all by name." Stars have a dual quality: individual and collective significance.

Hashem ensured the Patriarchs that their descendants would be like the stars of the universe. They will be many like the stars, but they will, nonetheless, never lose their individual significance. Every individual Jew is like the stars of the sky: each is an entire world onto himself.

When a person realizes his incredible personal value, when he becomes aware of the esteem in which Hashem holds him, he will think twice before acting foolishly and becoming involved in sinful behavior. The reason most people sin is low self-esteem, which tells them "Who cares what you do?" When a person realizes that, Bishvili nivra ha'olam, "The world was created solely for me," that Hashem is machshiv him, cares about him, he will act with greater dignity. When we think that we are inconsequential, we regrettably act as if there is no consequence to our actions.

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

The Midrash notes the Torah's emphasis on the place where the Torah was given to Klal Yisrael. Chazal say, "The Torah was given through three media: fire, water and wilderness." What is the significance of these three? Just as these three are accessible and free to everyone, so, too, is the Torah. Furthermore, one must make himself hefker, ownerless, like a wilderness, devoid of all self, in order to acquire Torah. Horav Yehudah Tzedaka, zl, suggests that these three items allude to the criteria through which one will achieve success in Torah study. Fire is a reference to the passion and enthusiasm one must manifest when learning Torah. Water symbolizes humility, since it always flows downward to the lowest area. The wilderness represents the will of Hashem Who gave the Torah and wants that the individual who studies His Torah give up everything - himself and his possessions - in the pursuit of his studies. The lomeid Torah, one who studies Torah, must be satisfied with a simple life, devoid of luxury and excess.

While each of the above qualities deserves particular attention, I would like to focus on the aspect of humility. In a classic exposition of humility, we find Moshe and Aharon exclaiming V'nachnu mah, "For what are we?" This is probably one of the most insightful statements concerning humility. What am I? One must be introspective and ask himself: What am I - really? Take off the mask that others see and view yourself with uncompromising honesty. Are you as you present yourself, or are you someone else - entirely? Are you a giver - or a taker? Do you really care about others, or do you simply put on a facade of concern? This question applies to every area of our daily endeavor, both in our relationship with Hashem and in our relationships with our peers. The difference is that Hashem knows the true you.

While this self-examination is difficult, and for some it might even be painful, nonetheless, one emerges a different person, purged of self-deceit. When one confronts his "real self" he becomes more human and, ultimately, ascends to a higher level on the ladder of spirituality.

I recently read a thesis on the character trait of humility that focuses on the question: "Who am I?" Moshe Rabbeinu, the anav mikol adam, humblest man on earth, refused to go to Egypt as Klal Yisrael's leader, arguing with the words, "Who am I?" This question has a double connotation. On the one hand, it is an expression of humility: "Who am I to take the Jewish People out of Egypt? I am not distinguished enough for this monumental task. Choose someone else, more worthy than 'I.'" On the

other hand, it is a statement that bespeaks pride in being Hashem's creation, His handiwork: "I am not a simple earthly creature. I possess a Divine soul, which grants me incredible potential. I am created in the Divine image, as well as being a descendant of the Avos HaKedoshim, Holy Patriarchs." Yes, the question, "Who am I?" leads to pride, but it is a pride built on self-knowledge and awareness of one's capacity for achieving spiritual success.

Humility is an important character trait that must be managed with great care. It offers one the potential for greatness when he recognizes that he is the repository of wonderful Divine gifts, which he must work at maintaining. He must strive to be worthy of Hashem Who granted him these gifts. When humility obscures one's potential for success, when it becomes a validation for lack of spiritual growth, when it casts doubts on his ability to ascend the spiritual ladder, it becomes a dangerous negative character trait. Rather than being a motivation for positive growth, it becomes a negative factor in his life.

Our gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders - from Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader of our People, down to his contemporary spiritual heirs - are clearly cognizant of the qualities they possess, qualities which catalyze their greatness. They realize that these attributes are G-d-given gifts granted to them for a specific purpose. When they asked, "What am I?" it conveyed their inner feeling of inconsequence and nothingness. Yet, it never negated their feeling of self-worth. One must be aware of his strengths and potential, yet not let it totally define him. This is the humility of "What am I." "I know what I am, and this awareness increases my feelings of "What am I?" Humility is a character trait necessary to the achievement of true greatness. Misplaced humility, however, can lead to disaster, both personal and collective.

*They established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers' households.
(1:18)*

There is a fascinating Yalkut Shimoni on the beginning of the Parshah that gives us a compelling insight into the merit of yichus, distinguished lineage. Chazal teach us that when Klal Yisrael received the Torah, the nations of the world were envious. They complained, "Why did the Jews, more so than any other nation, merit to receive the Torah?" Hashem replied to them, "Bring Me your Sefer Yuchsin, genealogical records, as My children, the Jewish People, did. They were given the Torah in the merit of their distinguished pedigree."

We must endeavor to understand Chazal. Is the Torah to be given only to those who have a distinguished lineage? Why does yichus play such a primary role in receiving the Torah? The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno explains that when Hashem offered the Torah to Klal Yisrael, the people responded with a resounding, Kol asher diber Hashem naas'e, "Everything that Hashem has spoken, we will do" (Shemos 19:8). The Yalkut in Parashas Yisro explains that Klal Yisrael were telling Hashem, "All that You will command us to do in the Torah has already been carried out by our forefathers. Thus, we are especially worthy of receiving the Torah. It is our heritage." It would seem, explains Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cited in the newly translated version of Ateres Avraham by Rabbi Sholom Smith, that the Yalkut's interpretation is based on a play on the word naas'e, "we will do." It should be read as naasa, "it was already done (by our forebears)."

Rav Pam explains the reason for this radical departure from the simple pshat, meaning. There is an obvious question to be asked with regard to Klal Yisrael's unequivocal statement. How can a rational

people undertake to do whatever they are commanded? How can they be certain that they will be able to honor this commitment? The response is that since their forefathers had kept the Torah, even under the most difficult circumstances, it rendered it possible for them, the children, to make this commitment. Torah observance was in their blood. They were going to continue the commitment that had already been accepted by their ancestors.

Avraham Avinu initiated it with his unstinting conviction. At an advanced age, after waiting an entire life for a child, he was prepared to offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice, in response to Hashem's command. This commitment was imbued in Yitzchak Avinu, who demonstrated total obedience as he lay there willing and ready to be the Olah Temimah, perfect sacrifice. Yaakov Avinu was tested a number of times by Hashem, and he emerged triumphant, because mesiras nefesh, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice, ran in his blood. It was his heritage, and it became his legacy.

Thus, the actions of our ancestors throughout the ages, their commitment to Hashem and His Torah, have been the symbols, and ultimately the foundation, of our commitment. It is deeply-rooted in our souls. The gentile world that claimed the Torah did not have such yichus. Therefore, they could not say, "All that Hashem has spoken, we will do!" It was not an intrinsic part of them.

Rav Pam suggests that this concept, this unique heritage which is endemic only to Klal Yisrael, has practical significance in our own time. The baal-teshuvah movement, recent returnees to religious observance, movement is one of the greatest phenomena of our generation. Young men and women, from all walks of life and from various nationalities and cultures, are flocking to special Torah centers to study Torah. They rapidly develop the skills necessary for mastering areas of Torah knowledge that had until now been foreign to them. Many become erudite Torah scholars. What caused this overnight sensation? How do they come from backgrounds in which Torah was compared to ancient hieroglyphics to complete proficiency? The answer is yichus. Jews are endowed with a unique pedigree. As descendants of people who dedicated their lives to Torah and mitzvah observance, their neshamos, souls, are the repositories of long-dormant traits and talents that have come to the fore when the Pintele Yid, that Jewish spark, is awakened within them. This spark is stoked into a brilliant flame, which burns brightly as they go from strength to strength.

There is another aspect to yichus which merits mention. It is important to know from where we originated, who our forebears were, what type of lives they led and their level of commitment to Hashem and His Torah. This catalyzes within us a sense of pride as it empowers us to triumph over adversity and the challenges which confront us. With regard to the laws of Yovel, fifty-year Jubilee, all ancestral plots of land that have been sold between one Jubilee and the next revert to their original owners. The Meshech Chochmah writes, that over time, people disperse throughout the country in search of their livelihood. It is important that families return to their origins and strengthen their bonds. Renewing family ties is important because it strengthens each individual's resolve as he sees the commitment of other members of his own family. In the famous tzavaah, final will, of Rabbeinu Yehudah ben HaRash, he writes about his ancestors, so that his descendants would never forget their origins. He hopes that when his descendants delve into the achievements of their forebears, they will be ashamed to deviate from their practices and commitments and that this awareness will increase their level of observance. When we realize upon whose shoulders we stand, we are inspired and encouraged. It also obligates us to follow in their footsteps. Generations come and go, but as long as we remain connected to a common source, we continue to survive collectively as a nation.

And the Nasi for Bnei Gad is Eliyasaph ben Re'uel. (2:14)

The name of this Nasi is spelled in two different ways. Here he is called Eliyasaph ben Re'uel, with a raish, while earlier, in 1:14, he is referred to as Eliyasaph ben De'uel, with a daled. What was his real name? The Imrei Noam derives from here an important ethical lesson. When Shevet Dan was selected as the head of the Degel, Banner formation, Shevet Gad, of which Eliyasaph was the Nasi, could have easily complained. After all, just as Dan was Zilpah's bechor, firstborn, Gad was Bilhah's firstborn. Why should Dan precede Gad? Despite his apparent taaneh, justified complaint, Eliyasaph was me'vater, willing to concede and comply. His name was, therefore, changed to ben Re'uel, an acronym for re'a-Keil, friend of Hashem, just like Moshe Rabbeinu. Indeed, Moshe's burial site was located in Gad's portion. One who acquiesces and accepts upon himself Hashem's judgment becomes a friend of Hashem. So great is the reward for one who is me'vater.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita relates a fascinating story about a young boy who received a wonderful reward for an act of generosity on his part. It was recently that a young man, a talmid chacham, Torah scholar of note, became engaged to a young woman from a fine family in Bnei Brak. The people of the community who knew this young man from the time he was a teenager marveled at his constant good fortune. He was eminently successful in Torah study. He was lucky to find a wonderful shidduch, match, almost immediately, and the wedding plans seemed to be progressing very smoothly. In short, everything that he touched seemed to be blessed. Everyone wondered at the special z'chus, merit, this young man had in order to catalyze this good fortune.

The rav of the community explained that they had to go back in time, eight years to be exact, to discover the reason for his success. "There were two boys rapidly approaching bar-mitzvah," said the rav, "who were both destined to celebrate their bar-mitzvah on the same Shabbos. One of them had to concede the Shabbos, the Haftarah, and the use of the shul's social hall. I decided that the only way to determine who would have the Shabbos was by goral, a lottery. Both boys drew lots, and our chassan won. He could celebrate his bar-mitzvah in the shul.

"Now what would one expect from a young bar-mitzvah boy? We would expect him to jump for joy and celebrate his triumph. Not our chassan. He was concerned for the other boy. Knowing fully well that his friend would have to travel across the city to locate a shul to celebrate his bar-mitzvah, our chassan made a decision that demonstrated an ethical character far beyond his young years. He was me'vater the Shabbos, giving the rights to the bar-mitzvah in that shul to the other boy. When asked why he was so compliant, he responded, 'I could not sleep that night knowing the hardship my friend would have to sustain as a result of my winning the lot.'

"I can only tell you," said the rav, "that the look of joy on the face of the other boy upon hearing the good news was awesome. By nature a sensitive boy, the other bar-mitzvah boy beamed and was obviously ecstatic that he could celebrate his bar-mitzvah in the community shul. The joy that the boy manifested, however, was nothing compared to the feeling of ecstasy that our chassan enjoyed from the satisfaction he had received from helping another Jew.

"I followed this chassan's life from that day on," said the rav, "and he was met with success after success, becoming the recipient of overwhelming good fortune. It is my feeling that it was all due to his ability to be me'vater, to empathize with the plight of another Jew and concede his own portion in order to help his less fortunate friend."

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Ohel Moed. (1:1)

The Midrash notes that great significance is accorded to the fact that Klal Yisrael received the Torah in the wilderness. The midbar, wilderness thus, becomes the setting for receiving the Torah, which is intrinsic to the Jewish national character. What characteristic of the midbar evokes such consideration? Chazal derive from here that one must make himself like a midbar, whereby he is hefker, ownerless, giving up his rights to possession, totally relying on Hashem without a care in the world for himself. Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, in his Darkei Mussar, expounds upon this concept. He explains that one who is situated in a desolate wilderness is alone - without food and drink, prey to the animals that roam there. He is there without hope for salvation. Such a person realizes that he can rely on only one Being for salvation: Hashem. For Hashem is there for all, under all instances and circumstances.

This must be the perspective of one who seeks to acquire Torah - complete and unequivocal trust in the Almighty. Indeed, we say this every day in the Ahavah Rabbah prayer preceding Krias Shma, "For the sake of our Forefathers who trusted in You and whom You taught the decrees of life, may You be equally gracious to us and teach us." It was our ancestors' bitachon, trust, that warranted the Torah for them.

One who worries about his sustenance cannot conceivably apply himself wholeheartedly to Torah study. On the other hand, one who trusts in Hashem and studies Torah has nothing to worry about; Hashem will sustain him. In his commentary to Pirkei Avos 3:5, the Chasid Yaavetz, cites an incredible thought from one of the distinguished leaders of his time. The pasuk in Tehillim 1:2,3 says, "But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree deeply rooted alongside brooks of water, that yields its fruit in due season, and whose leaf never withers, and everything that he does will succeed." What is the meaning of a tree planted alongside the river? Such a tree cannot bear fruit, because of the moisture at the side of the river. Although it is true that its leaf never withers, it is extremely weak and wilting. What success can such a weak tree hope to enjoy, to the point that David Hamelech analogizes the talmud chacham, Torah scholar, to such a tree? We must say to the individual who studies Torah day in and day out, night and day, without thinking about parnassah, a livelihood: Hashem will provide for him. He will be like a tree, which - although it is firmly rooted on the banks of the river, a place not suitable for producing healthy fruit - Hashem, nevertheless, sees to it that it bears fruit. So, too, will the Torah scholar be miraculously sustained by Hashem.

A talmid chacham living in Manchester, England, studied diligently for many years despite his abject poverty. Many times he was offered a position that would guarantee him a set income, yet he refused to accept. He would always give the same response, "Hashem is the One Who sustains; I have nothing to worry about." His family grew. With each child, his parents would insist that it was already enough; he must go to work. He responded in his usual calm manner, "Hashem is taking care of me." This happened at the birth of his tenth child, the birth of his eleventh child and again when his twelfth child was born. He did not worry, as he ignored everyone and continued his devotion to Torah study.

Shortly after the Bris, circumcision, of his thirteenth child, he received an express letter from a distinguished law firm requesting his presence at the reading of the will of a Mr. John Klabari. He could not understand the meaning of this. He neither had any idea who the deceased was, nor did he have any interest in wasting a day in a lawyer's office. He quickly sent a letter to the attorney notifying him of his error in inviting the wrong person to the reading of the will. The lawyer returned a note to him to the effect that there was no error, and by law he was required to attend the reading. The court date arrived, and our hero left the bais hamedrash to attend the reading. He was shocked to discover that John Klabari had been a very wealthy man who had died childless. Prior to his death, he had asked

that his entire estate by given to the family in the city who had the most children. Apparently, when number thirteen was born, it brought this young man's family "over the top," granting him the status necessary for inheriting the entire estate, which was valued at millions of pounds. What did the young man respond when he heard the exciting news? "Hashem sustains everyone. There is nothing to worry about."

Their count, for the tribe of Dan; sixty-two thousand, seven hundred. (1:39)

The tribe of Dan was considerably larger than most of the other tribes. This phenomenon is all the more notable given the fact that Dan had only one child. Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl, takes this idea further. Binyamin had ten sons. One would assume that, allowing for the course of "nature," Binyamin's tribe should be fairly sizable. Dan, on the other hand, who had only one child, should have a much smaller number of descendants. When we look at the final tally, Binyamin's tribe was half the size of the tribe of Dan. What happened? Rav Chatzkel derives from here that Hashem listens to the pleas of the weak and downtrodden who have no one upon whom to rely but Hashem. One who foolishly relies on his own talents and attributes quickly discovers that, without Hashem's Divine Assistance, his G-d-given gifts are of little use. One has only to look back at those in his generation/class who have succeeded. Were they the individuals whom everyone expected to succeed? Success in every endeavor is from Hashem, and the sooner one accepts this fact, the quicker envy and its ensuing consequences will be relegated to the past.

Hashem helps the weak. When life seems to push an individual up against a wall, with no place to turn, suddenly salvation occurs. One should never give up hope, for Hashem's salvation can come in a moment's notice. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, related the following story. It was the custom in Galicia that Jews would assemble in the shul on Shabbos shortly before Maariv to recite Tehillim. As the kedushah, holiness, of the day ebbed away, these people would entreat the Almighty with their heartrending pleas, employing the time-honored medium of Tehillim. One Shabbos, a Jew entered the shul and noticed that in one corner that another Jew was reciting Tehillim with extreme devotion and intense fervor. One could sense the fiery passion and extreme emotion emanating from this person. This was no usual Tehillim recitation. To see another Jew pour out his heart to the Almighty with such zeal was truly inspiring. Thus, the second Jew decided to stand next to this person as he also began to recite Tehillim.

Soon, both Jews were crying out to Hashem, each supplicating Him for his own individual needs, each elevated by his deep concentration and expression of emotion. After Maariv, the second Jew turned to the first and asked, "I know it is not my business, but I see that you are obviously anguished. What is it that bothers you so? Perhaps I could be of some assistance."

The man responded with a deep sigh, "Yes, I have what to cry about. I have a daughter who is of marriageable age, and I have no dowry for her. She sits at home all day, depressed and dejected. During the week, I am not home to witness her sorrow. On Shabbos, however, I am home and when I look at my child, it breaks my heart that I can do nothing to help her. So I go to shul and cry out my heart to the Almighty. Perhaps He will listen to my entreaty."

When the second man heard this explanation, he said, "I have a son who excels in middos tovos, exemplary character traits, and yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Regrettably, I have no money. If you are willing to make a shidduch, matrimonial match, with me, I am ready and willing."

The wedding took place, and the young couple was blessed with incredible nachas, Jewish bliss.

Among their descendants were four gedolei Yisrael, preeminent Torah leaders: Horav Yehudah Hakohen, author of the Kuntros Hasfeikos; Horav Chaim Hakohen; Horav Aryeh Leib Hakohen Heller, author of the Ketzos Hachoshen; Horav Mordechai Hakohen, who was rav in the city of Chodrov. From the depths of despair and hopelessness, a future of shining hope bloomed forth that illuminated Klal Yisrael for generations to come. One should never give up hope.

And the leader of Bnei Gad is Eliyasaf ben Reuel. (2:14)

Interestingly, in 1:14 above, this same Nasi is called ben Deuel. Rambam comments that he actually held both names, both of which they described his essence. Reuel is a contraction of daas Keil, knowledge of God. Both names reflect the Nasi's engrossment in understanding Hashem and in getting closer to Him. The Chida cites the sefer Imrei Noam who asserts that Moshe Rabbeinu was buried in Gad's portion because Gad displayed a remarkable attribute. When Dan was selected to be the leader of his degel, flag, Gad remained silent and did not dispute his selection. He could easily have contended that he was the firstborn of Zilpah, while Dan was the firstborn of Bilhah. Why should he not have been chosen as leader of the degel? For maintaining his silence, the raish, Reuel was added to denote that he had become a reia Keil, friend of G-d, which is a reference to Moshe, who was buried in his portion.

The lesson from here is powerful. Had Gad claimed that he wanted to be head of the degel, what would he ultimately benefit from his dispute? He would have become the leader. What kavod, honor, however, would he ultimately have taken with him to the grave? Nothing! His silence, on the other hand, earned him an honor for posterity - the Adon ha'Neviim, master of Prophets, the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael would be buried in his portion. This distinction outweighs anything he could have received had he spoken up. This is what Chazal mean when they say in Pirkei Avos (1:17), "I have found nothing better for oneself than silence."

The author of the Sdei Chemed, Horav Chizkiyah Medini, zl, was a renowned Talmudic genius. He was proficient in every area of Torah knowledge and Talmudic jurisprudence. His encyclopedic knowledge is manifest throughout the seforim that he authored. He writes that, as a young man, he excelled in neither brilliance nor acumen. It was only after an episode that occurred, coupled with his reaction to it, that Hashem blessed him by granting him his extraordinary abilities.

When he was a young man, he studied in a kollel together with a group of distinguished bnei Torah. One member of the group, regrettably, was deficient in his ethical character. For some reason, he was envious of Rav Chizkiyah. He bribed an Arab woman to assert that when she would come to clean the bais hamedrash in the early morning, Rav Chizkiyah was there and would make inappropriate advances to her. Word spread, and Rav Chizkiyah was humiliated and scorned. His reputation was besmirched. The Rosh Kollel, knowing the impeccable character of Rav Chizkiyah, did not believe the girl, so he relieved her of her position.

After a while, the money that financed her lies ran out. The girl then went to Rav Chizkiyah and begged his forgiveness, pleading with him that she badly needed the money. She was prepared to acknowledge her miscreancy publicly in order to clear Rav Chizkiyah's name. She concluded by asking Rav Chizkiyah if, after his name was cleared, it would be possible for him to intercede on her behalf with the rosh kollel, so that she could regain her position.

At that moment, Rav Chizkiyah was in a quandary. What should he do? On the one hand, he

had the opportunity to vindicate himself. On the other hand, at what expense! To clear his name meant to condemn the other kollel fellow. A chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name, of epic proportion would result from this. It would be better for him to continue suffering in his humiliation than to catalyze a further chillul Hashem. Rav Chizkiyah replied to the Arab girl, "What you ask of me, I agree to do. I will speak in your behalf to the Rosh Kollel. I forbid you, however, to ever relate to anyone any information concerning the bribe that you accepted!"

Rav Chizkiyah concluded by saying that at that moment in which he accepted upon himself a vow of silence, he felt that the wellspring of wisdom opened up, and he absorbed a spiritual flow of wisdom that enabled him to achieve proficiency in all areas of Torah erudition. All this was granted to him as a reward for maintaining his silence.

Do not allow the tribe of the family of Kehas to be cut off...This is what you shall do for them so that they shall live...Aharon and his sons shall come and assign them, each man to his work. (4:18,19)

The Midrash comments that the members of the family of Kehas were assigned to carry the Mishkan and its keilim, vessels. Recognizing that the Aron Hakodesh was the preeminent component, they neglected the Shulchan, Menorah and Mizbachos in order to run to carry the Aron. The result was contention, bickering and, eventually, a lack of respect. Hashem punished them, and members of that family died prematurely. Thus, Hashem issued the command that each family member of Kehas be assigned a specific task, thereby preventing any dispute over who had the privilege to carry each specific item in the Mishkan. The Mesillas Yesharim devotes a chapter of his magnum opus to the topic of Mishkal hachassidus. A chasid is defined as one who goes beyond the letter of the law, who truly loves Hashem and is not satisfied with merely getting by. He always endeavors to do more. Mishkal hachassidus focuses on weighing one's actions, especially those that are laudatory, to be sure that what appears to be a positive gesture is truly what it seems. The yetzer hora, evil-inclination, is crafty and has the ability to paint a sin as a mitzvah. What begins as a righteous deed can sometimes end as a tragedy. The classic case is the reaction of Bnei Kehas to transporting the Mishkan. What should have been noble, lofty and honorable was transformed into a chillul Hashem, desecration of Hashem's Name. Had they weighed their good intentions, it would be apparent that Hashem's will could not be fulfilled by bickering and in-fighting.

In his inimitable manner, Horav Avraham Pam, zl, dedicates a shmuess, ethical discourse, in The Pleasant Way, to this malady. He first cites a number of narratives in which the father of the Mussar movement, Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, demonstrates the importance of thinking before one acts piously. In these instances, to act piously would have meant taking advantage of someone else. The Rosh HaYeshivah then concentrates on some practical issues to which, regrettably, many could relate.

Hachnosas orchim, welcoming guests to one's home, is one of the benchmarks of the Jewish People which we inherited from our Patriarch Avraham Avinu. Yet, the husband and father should take into consideration that he also has a wife and children at home. His wife also puts in a hard day, and his children would like his attention at the meal. The number of guests and their frequency should be considered. Another example is that when the Chafetz Chaim had guests at his home on Friday night, he would first recite Kiddush, make Hamotzi, eat, and only then, after his guests had eaten, did he sing Shalom Aleichem. He felt that his guests, who were usually poor Jews who had not yet eaten, should eat. The Heavenly Angels could wait for their Sholom Aleichem.

Reciting Kaddish for a parent is a halachah. It is a merit for both the parent and the son. To contend in shul about who and when one says Kaddish is not only demeaning for the son, it also detracts from the parent's merit. It is probably a greater zchus, merit, for the parent if his son is mevater, concedes, and does not compete for the Kaddish.

While rejoicing with a chassan and kallah at their wedding is a great mitzvah, those who have young children at home should not do so at the expense of the grandparents, who are usually the babysitters. Even when the babysitter is a teenager who can use the money, she still has to go to school the next day. In addition, bachurim who insist on dancing into the wee hours of the morning should consider the fact that the parents of the chassan and kallah are undoubtedly exhausted and would like to conclude the festivities.

Last, is sholom bayis, matrimonial harmony. Rav Pam describes a scenario in which a young wife prepares a special dinner for her husband. I might add that she, herself, has put in a full day at two different jobs, so that she can support him in kollel. Supper is called for 7:00PM. At 8:00PM, her husband comes home. He probably has forgotten about using his cell phone for something as insignificant as notifying his wife that he was occupied with a mitzvah, so that he would be late coming home. Is this a mitzvah, or is it a lack of sensitivity?

Shabbos Bamidbar is usually the Shabbos before Shavuous, the time that we received the Torah. As we prepare to embrace Hashem's gift to us, let us remember to properly implement the lessons the Torah teaches us.

Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to their fathers' household. (1:2)

The Torah pays great attention to the individual pedigree of each Jew. Indeed, the Yalkut states that when Klal Yisrael received the Torah, the nations of the world became jealous: "Why did Hashem give the Torah to Klal Yisrael more so than to any other nation?" Hashem responded to them, "Bring Me your Sefer Yuchsin, Book of Lineage, as My children did." This is a reference to pasuk 18, "And they established their genealogy." Since the count was done according to tribe, the people had to establish the tribe to which they belonged either by written documents or valid witnesses. One reason for this strict requirement of family purity was so that the zchus, merit, of their forefathers would bring Hashem's Divine assistance during the impending wars. This is why Klal Yisrael was counted when they came to Midbar Sinai, to teach that the reason they received the Torah was their yichus, pedigree.

The words of Chazal beg elucidation. First, why were the nations envious of Klal Yisrael? They had the same opportunity to receive the Torah as Klal Yisrael. Hashem went to every nation - and they rejected the Torah because it did not coincide with their moral character. Second, what is the meaning of the idea that Klal Yisrael merited the Torah because of their Sefer Yuchsin? Should pedigree play such a critical role in receiving the Torah?

Horav Simchah Hakohen Shepps, zl, in his Sefer, Simchas HaTorah, explains that the nations remonstrated, "Why did Hashem compel Klal Yisrael to accept the Torah and not us?" Chazal describe the scenario as Hashem raising Har Sinai above the heads of Klal Yisrael and declaring, "If you accept the Torah, good. If not, here will be your graves." This is what the gentile nations envied: this unparalleled relationship, this unprecedented love. Why were they not coerced into acceptance?

Hashem responded, "Bring Me your Sefer Yuchsin. Show me that you descend from a lineage of commitment, devotion and self-sacrifice as do the Jewish people. As Bnei Avraham, Yitzchak v'Yaakov, they have kedushah, holiness, in their blood. Mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, for Torah and mitzvos, for the lofty ideals represented by Judaism, flows in their veins. They deserve to be encouraged to accept the Torah because it is their heritage implanted in them by their forebears.

Kedushah is an inherent part of our essence. It is an innate component of our psyche, which commenced with Avraham Avinu, was ingrained through Yitzchak Avinu, and subsequently transmitted via Yaakov Avinu and the Shivtei Kah. In order to bring the Jewish potential into fruition, Hashem raised Har Sinai over their heads to engrave in their hearts the legacy of their august lineage.

Each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Ohel Moed shall they encamp. (2:2)

After Klal Yisrael was counted, Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu concerning their order of encampment, each tribe in a specific place with its own individual banner. This order was not merely good advice; it was a Divine edict that no member of the tribe of Zevulun reside next to the tribe of Yissaschar, etc. Hashem determined who should be neighbors with whom. Afterwards, Hashem made known where the ligoono shel Melech, King's legion, Shevet Levi, should camp. The three Levite families are listed according to the place of their encampment - one directly to the north of the Mishkan; one to the west; and one to the south. Every person was placed according to the place most appropriate for him, personally and spiritually.

Yet, in his commentary to pasuk 3:29, Rashi writes that the placement of the family of Kehas, who resided to the north of the Mishkan, near the tribe of Reuven, ultimately was to the detriment of the members of the tribe of Reuven. When Korach, of the family of Kehas, rebelled against Moshe, impugning his leadership, he negatively influenced members of the Tribe of Reuven to follow him in his iniquity. Chazal declare, "Woe is to the wicked, and woe is to his neighbor." We wonder how this could have occurred. If Hashem designated everyone's place of encampment according to what was spiritually correct for them, how did the tragedy of Reuven falling under the influence of Korach occur? Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, derives from here that even under the most ideal circumstances one must take great care with whom he associates. As soon as Reuven saw Korach's insolence, when he sensed his rebellious nature, he should have immediately approached Moshe Rabbeinu and entreated his help in warding off this dangerous influence.

Chazal demand of us, "Distance yourself from a bad neighbor, and do not associate with a wicked person." This implies that a shochein ra, bad neighbor, is even worse than a rasha, wicked person. Regarding the bad neighbor, Chazal say that we should not even be in his proximity, while concerning the rasha, we are only told not to be his friend. The influence of a bad neighbor has greater constancy and is, therefore, more-enduring. One meets a friend upon occasion - even regularly, but a neighbor - one lives with him! They are together all of the time. I cannot break away from my neighbor unless I move away and he is no longer my neighbor.

Rav Nebentzhal elaborates on the damage sustained by a bad neighbor and how it plays out. Regarding Amalek's incursion against Klal Yisrael, the Torah writes, Asher karcha baderech, "That he happened upon you on the way." (Devarim 25:18) The word karcha can also be derived from kar, cold/to cool off. Amalek suppressed the great enthusiasm Klal Yisrael had for Hashem. He also cooled

off the fear that the surrounding nations had of Klal Yisrael. How did he do it? By attacking us, by demonstrating to the world that the Jewish people can be attacked. True, Amalek lost the battle, but the damage was done. The awe and fear of Hashem that was imbued in Klal Yisrael, that overwhelmed the nations, was mitigated by Amalek's aggression.

A similar phenomenon takes place when one is exposed to the evil perpetrated by a bad neighbor. Imagine living in a neighborhood that is not observant. When my neighbor decides to wash the car on Shabbos or takes a spin with the family - it leaves an impression. My Shabbos is no longer the same. My attitude towards Shabbos has been cooled. Suddenly, I see another lifestyle - one much different than the one to which I have dedicated my life.

We wonder if this is so bad. Whoever said that serving Hashem would be easy? There are challenges that must be overcome, and a bad neighbor is one of those challenges. Rav Nebentzhal explains that rather than garnering together one's strength to overcome evil, it would be much more appropriate to elevate one's spiritual status by focusing on the positive. When we are exposed to the negative, it wears down our resolve. The story is told that when an episode of chillul Shabbos once occurred in Radin, the Chafetz Chaim assembled the community in the Bais hamedrash and poured forth his heart with bitter tears. A while later when another instance of chillul Shabbos occurred, the Chafetz Chaim once again called together the community and wept as he spoke about the holiness of Shabbos. Yet, as the Chafetz Chaim himself attested, it was not the same weeping. He did not cry as bitterly the second time - because his affront at chillul Shabbos had been reduced.

A bad neighbor can have an influence on even the most devout and committed Jew. Avraham Avinu was told by Hashem to distance himself from his nephew, Lot, because Lot was a bad influence. Lot was not even that bad. He was a baal chesed, kind and caring person. Avraham Avinu was his rebbe, his spiritual mentor. He was effective, but it was not sufficient for Hashem. The Almighty did not want Lot's misconstrued perspective of religion to rub off on Avraham. Lot did not show his true colors until after Avraham had separated from him. He declared, "I want not Avraham, nor his G-d." Lot wanted to separate himself from kedushah. Avraham clung to kedushah. This dichotomy was not repaired until a descendant of Lot came along with a burning desire to cling to Hashem. Her name was Rus, the mother of monarchy, matriarch of Malchus Bais David and Moshiach Tzidkeinu. A shachain ra wants to undermine kedushah. A shachain tov seeks to embrace it. Rus exemplified this concept.

Those who encamped before the Mishkan to the front, before the Ohel Moed to the east, were Moshe and Aharon and his sons. (3:38)

Rashi cites the Midrash Tanchuma which declares, "Fortunate is a tzaddik and fortunate is his neighbor." Because the tribes of Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun encamped on the east near Moshe Rabbeinu, who was constantly engaged in Torah study, they themselves became great in Torah.

A tzaddik has the ability to leave an indelible impression upon those who are in his proximity. Chazal address the concept of a neighbor with whom one spends quite some time, one who, while in a tzaddik's presence, falls under the impression and influence of a tzaddik. This is a phenomenon that occurs even during a short meeting.

The Ahavas Yisrael of Vizhnitz was known for his love of all Jews and his ability to reach out to even the most assimilated Jew. His warmth and love, his sensitivity and caring for a person - regardless of his level of observance - would find their way into a person's heart. Many Jews who had acculturated

and turned their backs on the religion their ancestors had died for returned as a direct result of his "open-heart" policy. One Shabbos, Rav Yisrael was in a small town and was joined by many townspeople for his Friday night Tish, table, which he conducted in the local shul. A free-thinking member of the community decided to attend out of curiosity. When he came close to the Rebbe, one of the chasidim attempted to discourage the Rebbe from getting too friendly with him. "Rumor has it that he smokes on Shabbos," the Rebbe was told by a zealous chasid. When the man came forward to greet the Rebbe, another chasid asked, "What are you doing here?" As soon as the Rebbe heard this, he immediately silenced the indignant chasid and personally greeted the Jew with a warm smile. Years later, the now-observant Jew would relate that every time his desire to light up a cigarette on Shabbos began to ignite within him, he reminded himself of the Rebbe's warm, friendly smile that night. After that, he could no longer smoke. That was the genesis of his return to observance.

I have a similar story to relate, one for which I can vouch. Twenty-five years ago, I assumed my first position in Torah chinuch, Jewish education, by opening a yeshivah high school in a community which was then far from the beaten Torah path. For the most part, the students - although very sweet - were far-removed from Yiddishkeit. It was our hope and goal to introduce them to Torah, and the Torah would do the rest. Baruch Hashem, we achieved moderate success. There was one student who hailed from a small community in southern California, who had heretofore a minimal knowledge of Yiddishkeit. Yet, he acclimated nicely and became a frum ben Torah - despite the objections of his parents.

Towards the end of the school year, there was a pseudo contest whereby a number of the yeshivah high schools in the West Coast would submit the name of a student whom they felt would receive the greatest inspiration from a trip to New York with a special visit with the gadol hador, the preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl. This young man, who was sixteen years old at the time, won the prize, and off to New York he went. I might add that his parents, especially his mother, were far from overjoyed with this trip. We were endangering their child. He might become frum. The trip was a success. The high point of the journey, meeting Rav Moshe, was an experience that changed his life and forever remained indelibly ingrained in his psyche.

He graduated and went on to a yeshivah gedolah, regrettably without his parents' best wishes, and he began to shteig, succeed, as a ben Torah and yeshivah man. I subsequently lost touch with him as we both moved on - I to Cleveland and he to greater heights in Torah learning. Then, tragedy struck. While in yeshivah, he was diagnosed with Hodgkins disease. The prognosis was hopeful, but he would have to undergo serious and, at times, very painful treatments. Hashem Yisborach sent him a refuah sheleimah, and after months of treatment, the doctors felt that he had reached survivor status.

A number of years later, during one of my trips with school, I had occasion to be in his yeshivah, where he was now a distinguished member of the kollel, a post-graduate fellow, and lo and behold we met. The meeting was emotional, as we recounted the many years that had gone by since graduation. He excitedly told me that his parents had become frum and were very supportive of his current lifestyle, as well as his desire to pursue a lifelong career in Torah chinuch. I then asked him what had given him the courage to undergo the pain and travail of his treatment, while still maintaining the steadfast belief and trust in Hashem? He said that it had not been easy. What made it more difficult was that his mother, who was not a fan of yeshivah and frumkeit at the time, would stand by his bed in the hospital, when he was partially comatose and ask, "Where are your rabbis now?" He said that every time the pain became unbearable or the nausea was too much to handle, and the anger welled up in his mind, he saw Rav Moshe in his study shaking his hand and giving him a berachah, blessing, to excel in Torah study. Rav Moshe's eyes pierced through the pain and gave him hope and courage to go on!

This young man is today a successful principal and mashpiah. He has inspired and helped many children of all ages and backgrounds. He overcame scorn, despair, and pain, all because of that one meeting with the gadol hador. He never forgot those eyes; he never forgot that look.

Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to their father's house. (1:20)

Rashi explains that as a result of Klal Yisrael's dearness to Hashem, He counts them all of the time. The Mishkan, the site of the Revelation of the Divine Presence, was erected on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. On the following month, Rosh Chodesh Iyar, Hashem counted them. The Commentators struggle with the thirty-day lapse between the time the Mishkan was erected and the time Hashem counted Klal Yisrael. One would think that because of Hashem's great love for Klal Yisrael, He would count them on the most auspicious day, the day the Mishkan was erected. A number of reasons are given for this delay. Sifsei Chachamim explain that in order to establish residence, one must reside in a home for a minimum of thirty days. Thus, Hashem reposed in the Mishkan for thirty days before counting Klal Yisrael.

Horav Shmuel Vosner, Shlita, offers a practical reason for waiting until Chodesh Iyar before counting the Jewish people. By doing so, Hashem demonstrates their exalted position. During the month of Nissan, everyone is on a high spiritual plateau due to their involvement in the Festival of Pesach. Hashem waited until the completion of this month to show that the Jewish people possessed their own personal status.

Nachlas Tzvi cites the Slonimer Rebbe, zl, who explains Klal Yisrael's distinctiveness, even when they do not reflect the appropriate Jewish image or act in a manner that is spiritually correct, with the following analogy. It happened once that someone stole a chicken from a private yard. The owner searched everywhere, to no avail; the chicken was nowhere to be found. He decided that he would wait at the slaughterhouse, so that when the thief came to have the chicken slaughtered, he would confront him and retrieve his chicken. He waited for awhile until someone approached with a chicken that had some resemblance to his chicken. Its appearance had been severely altered: its feathers had been plucked, and its hair had been cut. The thief apparently wanted to make sure that the owner could not identify his chicken. Immediately, the owner began to scream accusingly, "Thief! It is my chicken. You are a thief. Return my chicken!" The thief was nobody's fool and he quickly retorted, "This is not your chicken. It is mine. How could you claim this chicken? Is this the way your chicken looked?" "It is my chicken," exclaimed the owner. "You did some cutting and some plucking, but it is still mine. Put it down on the floor, and we will see where it will run - to me or to you. "

The yetzer hora, evil inclination, makes a similar accusation concerning Klal Yisrael. He turns to the Malach, Angel, Michael, who as our advocate, seeks to defend us from the criticism that is regrettably very condemning. "How can you identify these people?" asks the yetzer hora. "Do they look like Jews? Do they dress like Jews? Do they act like Jews? They look no different than many of the gentiles they cavort with regularly. How can you possibly claim them as yours?"

The Malach is not fazed. He responds, "Yes, you are right. Without Tzitzis they do not look like Jews. Without Torah and mitzvos, they do not act like Jews. You have presented them devoid of their spiritual adornment. Let us put them to a test. Leave them alone for a moment. Halt your blandishments

and evil influence, and we will see to whom they will turn!"

We are a holy People. While some of us have become alienated from the way of life for which our ancestors have lived and died, it is only superficial and temporary. Our essence remains holy and true to its source: Hashem.

The Bnei Yisrael shall camp each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household. (2:2)

The tribes camped around the Mishkan in a manner designated by Hashem. They were organized into formations of three tribes each. Their place around the Mishkan corresponded to the places which Yaakov Avinu designated to his sons when he instructed them on how to escort his bier to its final resting place. The Moinistritcher Rebbe notes that Parashas Bamidbar, which includes the chapter detailing the order of the degalim, banners, is always read on the Shabbos immediately prior to Shavuos. He posits that this is appropriate, especially given the fact that one of the forty-eight qualities by which Torah is acquired is hamakir es mekomo, being a person who recognizes his own place. In the order of the banners, each tribe took its designated place in accordance with Hashem's dictate. Indeed, as the Sefas Emes comments, there might have been some individuals who took offense by this predesignation. Undoubtedly, there were some among the tribes who felt that they were superior in wisdom and in their Torah knowledge to some of the Leviim. They might have contended - and even demanded - a closer spot to the Mishkan than those Leviim who were inferior to them. The Torah however, tells us that this did not occur. They assumed the position given to them by Hashem. The only democracy in those days was determined by Hashem.

What is the meaning of knowing one's place, and why is this considered a significant quality for the student of Torah? In the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos 6:6 the Tanna lists forty-eight qualities, or steps which lead to an individual's acquisition of Torah. These are forty-eight endeavors, matters that require work, application and perseverance with one's whole being. One who masters these forty-eight steps to Torah has achieved the zenith - he has acquired Torah. It is not easy. It is a long, perhaps difficult, road that can only be mastered with determination and commitment to achieving its goal.

The Commentators note a difference in syntax in the Mishnah. Up until now, for the first twenty-four steps, the Tanna lists what seems to be character traits that the Torah student must acquire if he is to succeed in his quest. In the Hebrew, each quality has the letter "bais" as a prefix, meaning "by" or "with," - e.g. - with reverence, by humility, by cheerfulness, etc. When the Tanna lists the remaining qualities, each one begins with the letter "hay". Thus, hamakir es mekomo, one who recognizes his place, implies that the following qualities are not qualities to be gained, but are traits already in one's possession. The resulting impression is that there are actually only twenty-four qualities to be gained and developed through deliberate, conscious effort. Until this point, the road to Torah mastery has been uphill. The rest of the journey will be downhill. Having acquired the previous twenty-four traits, the emerging Torah scholar, whose character has thus far been refined by the Torah, will become one who knows his place. Intuitively, he will realize his proper role in relationship with those around him, his privileges as Torah scholar and consequent responsibilities. Among those greater than he, he will keep silent. When he is the one who is the greater scholar, he will step forward and speak his mind, taking the lead.

Rabbi Shmuel m'Ozedah explains that it is a rare individual who can acquire more good traits

than those heretofore mentioned. To know one's place means to know oneself. How difficult it is to look at ourselves in the mirror and see what is really there, not merely what we want to see. Few people are capable of evaluating the true significance and value of their achievements, uninfluenced by those who flatter them and unmoved by public opinion. It is a natural tendency to overestimate one's achievements. Indeed, self-criticism is one of the more difficult skills to acquire. On the other hand, one should not be overly humble, allowing anyone and everyone to step over him.

Right from the onset of our People's nationhood it was essential that everyone literally be put in his place, realizing that one's value is not determined by his place on the mizrach vont, eastern wall, which is normally reserved for nobility. One's value is determined by his ability to carry his individual role in the scheme of life. Knowing our place in the scheme of things helps us to concentrate better on the Torah and its precepts, rather than on our foolish egos.

Count the sons of Levi...every male from one month of age and up...(3:15)

Rashi explains that the little infants of Bnei Levi were counted from the tender age of one month and up. Already at this young age, they were called by the title of honor and distinction that they would achieve as adults. Why grant such an esteemed title to a young child? Are we so sure they will live up to the title? Apparently, Shevet Levi had this "track record." Those thirty day old infants were sure to grow up to become Shomrei Mishmeres HaKodesh, Guardians of the Holy Watch.

How can we be so certain of their outcome? We see regrettably, how all too often children from the finest and most observant homes, whose parents are dedicated and devoted to everything Jewish, seem to drift away. What traits do members of the tribe of Levi manifest that makes them different, that ensures that their children will grow up b'derech Yisrael sabbah, the path of our ancestors?

Horav Shimon Schawab, zl, explains that the Leviim of old knew the secret of successful Torah chinuch, education. They knew and understood the primary ingredient that would guarantee that there would not be a break between father and son, that each ensuing generation would commit to the legacy transmitted to them by their forebears. In the end of Sefer Devarim, when Moshe blessed Shevet Levi, he detailed their praise saying, "He who could say regarding his father and mother he did not see them and, as to his children, he did not know them, for they [the tribe of Levi] kept Your word, and Your Covenant did they guard" (Devarim 33:9). Rashi explains that this refers to the sin of the Golden-Calf, when Klal Yisrael faltered and rebelled against Hashem. Moshe Rabbeinu exclaimed, "Mi l'Hashem elai," "Who is for Hashem, should come to Me!" Shevet Levi were those who took the stand for Hashem. They were commanded to slay those who had worshipped the Golden-Calf - regardless of their filial relationship to them. The Leviim's love for, and commitment to, the Almighty transcended family relationships. Their maternal grandfather, their daughter's son, their brother from the same mother who was not a Levi - all these relatives had no distinction in their eyes. Their love for Hashem took priority. The love for a grandchild, for a brother, for a grandfather, deferred to their love for Hashem.

A child growing up in such a home was conveyed a profound message: "I love you more than anyone in the world except - Hashem." When a child grows up knowing that his father loves him

dearly, yet, if the situation should arise in which he must choose between his love for Hashem and his love for his son, he will choose Hashem, the son will understand and respect both his father and Hashem. The son will realize that Hashem is paramount in his father's eyes, that He is above all else. This will inspire the son to respect and ultimately serve Hashem in the correct and proper manner. This is the key to successful Jewish parenting. Parents must transmit a clear message to their child - not the mixed messages so many of your youth receive today. When children see their parents' blatant hypocrisy, when they see them acting one way in public and another way at home, it does very little to encourage their esteem for the Almighty.

Horav Schwab further illustrates this point with the following powerful incident. He remembers himself as a child of eight years old, the eldest of five brothers, sitting at the Pesach Seder table. When they came to the section of the Hagaddah which relates the questions of the four sons, his father asked each one of his brothers, "Which one of the four sons do you want to become?" Of course, each one responded that he hoped to be the ben chacham, wise son.

Suddenly, his father became very serious and said in a very loud voice, "If one of my children ever became a rasha, evil, even disregarding one mitzvah, I would tell him, li v'lo lo, for me and not for him. You no longer will have a place at my Seder table, because I love Hashem more than I love you." He immediately returned to the recitation of the Haggadah in his normal gentle manner. Ostensibly, this episode left an indelible imprint on each of the sons. They had no doubt as to Hashem's position of priority in their father's mind.

This is, undoubtedly, a powerful story, one which will invoke the wrath and, at least, consternation of the liberal-minded contemporary parent. How could a father talk like that to his children? How does a parent make such an implacable statement to a young child? How could a parent be so unyielding, so uncompromising? This is the American society within us that is talking. This is the questioning of a society dominated by hypocrisy, where the artificial is venerated and the charlatan lauded. This question emanates from the parent who refuses to take responsibility, who would rather lay blame than seek a cure; who expects parenting to be instant, who dresses up his children for the public view, disregarding their inner problems and hurt.

In another lecture, Horav Schwab shares with us a glimpse of what parents of old, people who truly loved Hashem - more than their own flesh and blood - were like, and how they reared children in such a manner as to guarantee spiritual success. The chinuch of a child began in the crib. As soon as a child was able to understand, he was told about the Creator Who created each of us; Who knows us; Who watches over us; and Who gave us mitzvos to observe. As soon as the child was able to talk, the parents taught him the fundamentals of our faith, of emunah in Hashem, and the paramouncy of the Torah. The first stories a child heard were the life stories of the Avos, Patriarchs, the exodus from Egypt and the Giving of the Torah. The parents sang to their children at night, songs of faith, of Torah and of love for Hashem. In short, they personally related to their children the primacy of Hashem and His Torah to the Jewish People. A child recognizes and senses sincerity. Parents who are earnest in their relationship with their children, who are frank and honest, who give, but expect a return, who demand out of genuine love and concern, whose own actions are consistent with what they demand of their children, can hope to see the fruits of their labor.

*And they established their genealogy according to their families, according to their father's house.
(1:18)*

Rashi explains that they brought their documents of lineage and witnesses to the status of their birth, in order to trace their ancestry to the particular tribe to which they claimed to belong. Chazal tell us that the other nations also claimed their stake in the Torah and were rebuffed by Hashem due to their lack of yichus, lineage. This is problematic, because surely Bnei Yishmael can trace their lineage back to Avraham Avinu and Bnei Eisav can trace their pedigree to Yitzchak Avinu. Apparently, a deeper meaning supports the idea of presenting their documents of lineage.

The Pupa Rav zl, takes a practical approach towards explaining this Chazal. He posits that zechus avos, the merits of one's ancestors, are credited to the children only when one sees the avos in the children, if their good deeds are reflected in the actions of their progeny. Chazal teach us that the Jewish People were redeemed from the Egyptian exile because they did not change their Hebrew names, their Hebrew language or their traditional manner of dress. They adhered to the legacy which their ancestors had transmitted to them. While they were spiritually deficient in many areas, they still maintained a filial bond with their forebears.

When the other nations came to complain that they had no part in the Torah and Eretz Yisrael, Hashem asked them to produce their documents of lineage. Hashem was telling them that in order to stake a claim, to be part of the Jewish nation, they had to show that they carried on from their ancestors. One cannot expect to invoke the memory of his forebears if, indeed, he does not in any way, shape, or form demonstrate a relationship with them. An individual cannot dress, speak and act like the nations of the world and expect to be part of the Jewish destiny just because he is able to trace his lineage to the Patriarchs. There is more to being Jewish than simply having a Jewish surname.

This is the penetrating meaning of vayisyaldu al mishpechosam l'beis avosam, "and they established their lineage according to their father's house." The word "vayisyaldu" actually means "they gave birth to themselves," as the verb "vayisyaldu" is the hispael form of the root word "yalod," to give birth. Generally, verbs in the hispael are reflexive, suggesting a definition which is an obvious impossibility. Therefore, we must say that they made a peulah, action, in themselves, in their nafshius, spiritual/moral dimension, which bound them with the source of their own essence - their ancestors. They strengthened their relationship with their past by continuing to maintain the unique spiritual persona that distinguished their ancestors.

In his commentary to the mitzvah of Peru Revu, "Be fruitful and multiply," Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains that it is not enough to simply "peru," bear the products of the human fruit, children. It is important that these children achieve independence and ripen into human beings who carry within them the noblest traits of G-dliness and humaneness which are innate in the father and mother. Also, revu, the family should multiply, duplicate itself in the children. The mere physical increase of the human race presupposes something more than just begetting children. Revu is something higher than mere multiplication. The parents are to multiply themselves in their children, replicate and repeat themselves in their children. The children are to be not only replicas of the physical bodily traits, but also, of the spiritual, intellectual and moral characteristics of the parents. Accordingly, the parents have to implant their best spiritual and moral traits in their children, carefully and lovingly nurturing their development. They have to leave their imprint upon their children's persona. This, we suggest, is the meaning of vayisyaldu, the parents are the progenitors of themselves in their children.

These are offspring of Aharon and Moshe...These are the sons of Aharon. (3:2,3)

Rashi notes that while the Torah begins by saying, "These are the offspring of Moshe and Aharon," it only mentions Aharon's sons - not Moshe Rabbeinu's. He explains that Aharon's sons are also referred to as Moshe's offspring, since he taught them Torah. We derive from here that whoever teaches his friend's sons Torah, the Torah views it as if he had fathered them. This idea is reiterated throughout Chazal. Indeed, the Noda B'Yehudah writes in his Sefer Ahavas Tzion that one fulfills the mitzvah of Peru u'Revu, "Be fruitful and multiply," from a spiritual perspective when he teaches Torah, causing it to be transmitted to yet other Jews. This idea also applies to one who authors a sefer, or any form of Torah-oriented literature, through which others can, and will be, inspired by his ideas.

The Kli Yakar gives an alternative explanation for the fact that Aharon HaKohen's sons were also considered Moshe's offspring. He explains that it was Moshe's tefillos, prayers, that saved them from the Heavenly decree that imposed death upon their brothers. When Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem wanted to punish him by taking his sons from him. Moshe's entreaty helped - halfway, and Elazar and Isamar were spared. Consequently, since they were granted continued life as a result of Moshe's intercession on their behalf, they were considered Moshe's sons. Because Moshe had taught them Torah they were no longer affected by the decree, since the decree was only on Aharon's sons.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, expounds upon the idea that through the medium of teaching Torah to a student, one develops a "keshar avahi," fatherly bond/relationship. In a lecture to the students of the high school of the Yeshiva of Eastern Parkway in 1963, Rav Hutner, said the following: "First of all, I would like you to know that the fact that I am speaking to all of you publicly is not by choice. I would much rather speak to each and every one of you - personally and individually. But, because time does not allow for this, I am compelled to speak to you all together.

"Let me explain why I would rather speak to you individually. You all know that Horav Chaim Volozhiner zl, was the father of the Yeshivah movement. When he founded Yeshivas Volozhin, he engendered a new concept in relation to the yeshivah. He tried to do away with the expression of talmidei ha'yeshivah, students of the yeshivah, and change it to bnei ha'yeshivah, sons of the yeshivah. What compelled him to make this change? Why not leave it as it had been before?

"In many instances we find stories in the Talmud where a great Tanna would meet a young boy and, after speaking to him, would be so impressed with the boy's responses that he would say, 'I am sure that one day he will become a great moreh horaah, halachic arbiter, in Yisrael'. I recently had a similar experience which I would like to share with you. I questioned a young Mesivta student, 'You have a rebbe from whom you study Torah. You also have a teacher who teaches you secular studies. Do you have the same relationship with both, or do you sense a difference? If you do feel a difference, what is it?'

"The boy thought for a few moments and looked up at me and said, 'My relationship between myself and my secular studies teacher is comparable to one who receives food from the cook, while my relationship to my rebbe is like one who nurses from his mother. The food that I receive from the one who nurses me is a part of his/her life. She gives me her life! The cook, on the other hand, gives me something external, not an intrinsic part of her essence.'

"When I heard these words, I declared, 'I am sure that this young boy will be a great Torah leader.' Indeed, it was this underlying logic that motivated Rav Chaim Volozhiner to change the title of the yeshivah student to ben, son, of the yeshivah. The yeshivah is not the place where the food is prepared and doled out. The yeshivah is the place where a student nurses; where he receives a yenikah

ruchnis, spiritual imbibing. You may now understand why I feel I should speak to each one of you individually. To nurse is an individual endeavor - it is not a collective activity that is performed for a group. One dishes out food to a group. I come not to teach you; rather, I come to give you an opportunity to absorb, to imbibe, to nurse the Torah that I seek to impart to you."

A tragedy occurred in Yeshivas Knesses Chizkiyahu in Kfar Chasidim that a young bachur, student, passed away suddenly. The Rosh Ha'yeshivah, Horav Refael Mishkovsky, zl, spoke at the graveside about his close, fatherly relationship with his beloved student. He declared, "The Torah demands of a shomer, guardian, when he returns an object to make two shavuos, oaths. One, that he was not negligent in its care and second, that he did not make personal use of the object. One would think that parents who send their son away to yeshivah might expect the same oaths from the Rosh Ha'yeshivah. After all, he is their son's guardian. But, the Rosh Ha'yeshivah declared brokenheartedly, this is not true. I was never a shomer. I was like his father, and a father does not make an oath." What a powerful statement by a rebbe who "felt" that his relationship extended beyond the extrinsic and reserved, to a fatherly bond of love.

Bring near the tribe of Levi and have it stand before Aharon HaKohen. (3:6)

The Midrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim 92, "A righteous man will flourish like a date palm... planted in the house of Hashem, in the courtyards of our G-d they will flourish," as reference to Shevet Levi. They were the tzaddikim, righteous, who opposed the rest of the nation during the sin of the Golden Calf. They are considered the shesulim, planted. Even as little children, they are sent to the bais ha'sefer, school, to study Torah. It is peculiar that Chazal single out the tribe of Levi as unique because they attended school at an early age.. After all, all Jewish children were sent to school as soon as they were ready to study Torah. Torah study is the staple of our People, without which we would be nothing. Education distinguished a committed Jew from one who is not. What is the meaning of Chazal's statement?

The Satmar Rebbe, zl, explains that veritably the pasuk's reference is not only to Shevet Levi, but, rather, to all Jewish children who were inspired by the kedushah, holiness, that was inherent in Shevet Levi. He cites the Talmud in Bava Basra 21a which traces the genesis of formalized, structured Jewish education. At first, they had teachers only in Yerushalayim whose function was to teach Torah from the spiritual center of our People. Afterwards, they appointed teachers in every province, until Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla decreed that every city should have a teacher, in order to avail a Torah education to all children. Regarding the original establishment of teachers only in Yerushalayim, the Talmud supports this tradition based upon the pasuk in Yeshaya 2:3, "From Zion will go out Torah and the word of Hashem from Yerushalayim." Tosfos explains that the significance of Yerushalayim was founded in the fact that when the young student was exposed to the incredible sight and unparalleled holiness which was manifest by the Kohanim and Leviim who served in the Bais Hamikdash, he was greatly motivated to apply himself to his studies with greater fervor and diligence.

Implied in Tosfos' statement is that the merit and virtue of the young Jewish children were dependent primarily upon the impression imbued in them by the Kohanim and Leviim. In other words, they determined the moral/spiritual compass of the young children. We now understand the meaning of the pasuk which Chazal have explained, as a reference to the young Leviim who attended school. Shesulim is a reference to all of our children who are the young "seedlings" in the house of Hashem. Their inspiration is derived from Shevet Levi. In fact, even after Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla

established the total network of schools which reached out throughout the length and breadth of the land, the light of kedushah that emanated from Shevet Levi in Yerushalayim impacted the entire country.

Take a census of the sons of Kehas from among the sons of Levi. (4:2)

Although Kehas was Levi's second son, his descendants take precedence in the census because of the distinguished members of his family - Moshe and Aharon. Kli Yakar feels that because Moshe Rabbeinu was the quintessential teacher of Klal Yisrael and Aharon HaKohen was the standard bearer of peace and ethicality, they merited that the members of their family be given the distinct honor of carrying the Aron HaKodesh. By giving the honor of carrying the Aron to the most laudable of Levi's families, Hashem was indicating clearly that true honor is due to those who struggle to acquire Torah scholarship, not merely to those who are older or more privileged.

Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, supplements this by differentiating between those who work for an ideal, who attach themselves to an exalted mission, and those who are born into a position. The Torah carries those who carry/hold on to it. When the Leviim attempted to raise the Aron HaKodesh, the Aron raised them, as if to say that the Aron does not need anybody; rather, everybody needs the Aron.

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Ohel Moed...in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt. (1:1)

Hashem purposely gave us the Torah in the wilderness, a place devoid of all material comfort. We are to glean from the "setting" in which the Revelation took place that we must liken ourselves to a midbar, wilderness, in our quest to gain proficiency in Torah. An individual should place no value on material comforts. If he becomes like a wilderness, he will succeed. He must make priorities in life. For a Jew, Torah study is the highest priority. Everything else -- all material and secular achievements -- comprises a distant second.

In our daily endeavor, we must distinguish between what is major and what is relatively minor. Otherwise, we might waste our time on trivia, neglecting major issues. Wanting to teach his employees the importance of time management, an executive of a large firm hired an instructor whose success in this field was impressive. The instructor walked into the makeshift classroom with a large wide-mouthed jar. He then proceeded to fill it with large rocks. "Is this jar full?" he asked the group. They all quickly responded in the affirmative. He then took a few fistfuls of small stones and poured them into the jar. Once again, he asked if the jar was full. "Of course," they all responded. He then picked up a small bag of gravel and poured it into the jar. "Is it now full?" he asked. "Yes," they responded in unison. Continuing, he poured sand into the jar to demonstrate to them how full the jar really was. "Now is it full?" he asked. "Yes! It is finally full," they answered. Well, this did not deter the instructor, who took out a pitcher of water and poured it into the jar. "Now it is full," he said. "Can you tell me the lesson I taught you today?" he challenged. Knowing full well the purpose of his lecture, they all responded, "You taught us about time management." "No," he said, "the lesson I taught you is that you should always put the large rocks in first." This lesson applies equally to us as well. We must learn to prioritize our time, our values, our focus in life. Hashem tells us what is important. He shows which are

the large rocks. Regrettably, at times we confuse our priorities.

Nachlas Tzvi relates a powerful story that demonstrates the devotion and commitment which a young yeshivah student demonstrated, as well as the reward he achieved for his sacrifice in order to facilitate his Torah study. During World War I, Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, decided to close his yeshivah in Kletzk, stating that he could not take responsibility for the safety of his students. He, therefore, sent everyone home for their own benefit. Upon returning home, one young student was asked by his mother, "Why have you come home?" He said, "The Rosh Yeshivah sent everyone home for their own safety." The mother began to raise her voice, "Do you think that you are safer here than in the yeshivah? I want you to return to the yeshivah to study Torah." "But Mother, I have no money with which to purchase a ticket," he said. "Then you will walk," retorted the mother. "Return immediately to the yeshivah; the Torah will protect you!"

The young student listened to his mother, and he began to walk the few hundred kilometers back to the yeshivah. After almost a week of walking, the young student appeared before Rav Isser Zalman and said, "Rebbe, I have come to study Torah!" "Why are you here?" asked the Rosh Yeshivah. When the student related his dialogue with his mother, and his walk back to the yeshivah, Rav Isser Zalman became overcome with emotion. He was impressed with a Jewish mother's self-sacrifice to risk her child's life for the sake of Torah; to have such amazing faith in the Almighty was incredible. To see this devotion transmitted to her son, who was willing to walk hundreds of kilometers to learn Torah, was overwhelming. Rav Isser Zalman turned to the student and said, "I wish to purchase your shoes. I will treasure the shoes that were worn by a young yeshivah student who evinced such remarkable devotion for Torah study."

Hashem repaid this student for his unparalleled devotion to Torah study. Indeed, he became the gadol hador, preeminent Torah sage of our generation, Horav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, Shlita. This is but one vignette of the nature of the devotion one must manifest for Torah study. If one models his life to be like a wilderness in order to study Torah, he will one day merit to see the wilderness bloom!

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

Chazal attribute great significance to the fact that the Torah was given in the midbar, wilderness. In one statement, they say that Hashem selected the wilderness to teach us that unless one makes himself like a desert, completely devoid of all material benefits, he is not able to acquire the essence of Torah. Indeed, in his commentary to Sefer Shemos 19:2, the Ohr Ha'Chaim Ha'Kadosh, emphasizes that one of the primary criteria which refine and prepare a person for Torah study is the tempering of his arrogance. One must make himself as humble and unpretentious as a wilderness, ready to accept Hashem's special gift. The medium for receiving the Torah is humility; in fact, it is a necessary condition for its acceptance.

The Torah states, in Bamidbar 21:18, "U'mimidbar matanah," "A gift from the wilderness." Chazal derive herein that when one is like a midbar, the Torah becomes a matanah, a gift from the Almighty. In the Sichos Mussar, ethical discourses, of Yeshivas Bais Shalom Mordechai, it is explained that the Torah is referred to as a matanah, gift; therefore, the act of transferring the Torah from Hashem to Klal Yisrael is called nesinah, giving. Logically, in order to "accept" a "gift" one must be a keili, receptacle, so that he can retain this gift. Hence, by devoiding himself of all arrogance, the individual

makes room within himself to accept the Torah, to become a container, prepared and dedicated to assimilate its inspiration. One who is "filled" with himself has no "room" for the Torah. He has no place in which to contain Hashem's gift.

Pirkei Avos begins, "Moshe received the Torah from (Hashem at) Sinai, and handed it over / transmitted it to Yehoshua." In order to "give over" the Torah in its pristine, complete essence, it was essential that its receiver be divested of anything that would impede this transfer. Thus, Hashem selected Har Sinai, the smallest mountain, to be the place where He would give the Torah. Hashem appropriately chose Moshe Rabbeinu, the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael, and also the "anav mikol adam," humblest man on the earth, to accept the Torah, to be the Lawgiver.

Moshe transmitted the Torah in its entirety, as he received it from the Almighty, to his disciple, Yehoshua, the one who "never left the tent," who was always near Moshe, thirsting for more Torah, for deeper insight, for more penetrating lessons. Yehoshua transformed himself into an empty vessel in order to receive the Torah from Moshe. Chazal compare Yehoshua to the moon, while they liken Moshe to the sun. Like the moon which does not have its own illumination and receives its light from the sun, Yehoshua negated himself in order to prepare to transmit the Torah to Klal Yisrael. He viewed himself as nothing more than a tzinor, conduit, to pass on the Torah he received from Moshe to the next generation.

Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, distinguishes between a heritage and an inheritance: an inheritance is a bequest that belongs to the recipient, while a heritage is something that one acquires for one purpose - to pass it on to the next generation. "Torah tzivah lanu Moshe morashah kehillas Yaakov," "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov;" (Devarim 33:4) is a well-known pasuk with a profound message. The Torah is our heritage to be handed down from generation to generation in the pristine, unaltered form in which we received it at Har Sinai. This occurs through the rebbe-talmid, teacher-student, relationship in which the student divests himself of any character trait that would impede the smooth flow of this transmission.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, once remarked regarding two incidents that occurred in his life: one was the happiest night in his life; and the other was the happiest day of his life. The first incident happened as he was travelling through Poland. As nightfall approached, he found himself in a small town with no hotel. He was obliged to stay overnight at the home of an alumnus of the Mirrer Yeshivah. As was his nature, Rav Chaim began speaking in learning with the host. As he began to relate a mussar, ethical thought, he noticed that the host had closed his eyes. Rav Chaim quickly stopped speaking and said, "If you are tired, I will not continue." "No, no rebbe please go on," said the host. Rav Chaim continued with his ethical discourse only to see that his host had once again closed his eyes. "Please let me stop, so that you may rest," implored Rav Chaim. "Rebbe, please go on," reiterated the host. This continued for a little while. Rav Chaim spoke, and the man closed his eyes, always refusing to let Rav Chaim end his lecture. Finally, when Rav Chaim completed his lecture, the alumnus told him, "It is not because of weariness that I closed my eyes. It was because of concentration. When the Rosh Hayeshivah spoke and I closed my eyes, I envisioned before me that I was listening to the Rebbe." He was referring to Horav Yerucham Levovitz, zl, the legendary Mashgiach, spiritual advisor and mentor of the Mirrer Yeshivah. "This," said Rav Chaim, was the happiest night of my life. I was a conduit to transmit Rav Yeruchem's mussar shmuess, ethical discourse, to this talmid."

The second incident occurred in Eretz Yisrael when a student related to Rav Chaim a profound shiur, lecture, that he had himself delivered a while back. "Do you think," asked Rav Chaim, "that this student had the nerve to review my shiur and relate it back to me as if it was his own original novella?"

No, he heard the shiur from me and interpreted the Talmud in accordance with the way I taught him. He did not discern what I had contributed to the thought process, but after awhile, it was ingrained in his mind. He 'arrived' at this interpretation on 'his own'. This was the happiest day of my life, because I had discovered a talmid; I had seen how my shiur had been integrated into this student's thought process." This constituted joy to Rav Chaim. To be able to transmit Torah from teacher to student in the manner that Moshe handed it over to Yehoshua; to see Torah ingrained in a student in its totality, exactly as it was taught by the rebbe - that was joy. May we all one day appreciate and experience this form of simchas haTorah.

And they established their genealogy according to their families. (1:18)

The Yalkut Shimoni relates that when Klal Yisrael received the Torah, they became the envy of the gentile nations. Why should they have been more deserving of this unique gift than all of the other nations of the world? Hashem quieted them when He asked them to bring forth their sefer yuchsin, book containing their lineage. Klal Yisrael established their pedigree; their lineage was not only impressive, it was an essential component in their individual and national character. Sforno writes that this strict requirement of family purity was essential, so that the merit of their forefathers could be invoked before Hashem in order to protect them during the impending wars.

Menachem Tzion notes that the words "sefer" yuchsin, book of their lineage/genealogical document, have special meaning. Klal Yisrael does not just view their pedigree as something to discern, to fall back on, to transmit eminence. Rather, it is to glean a "sefer," book from which to study, to draw inspiration and to glean lessons for the future. We learn from our ancestors. Their lives serve as our book of lessons that guide and influence our lives. Moreover, it is a book to which we also add our own chapters, the stories of our life's successes and achievements.

This may be the underlying meaning of the pasuk in Bereishis 5:1, "Zeh sefer toldos Adam," "This is the account (book) of the descendants of Adam." Man's life of endeavor, his activities and deeds, should be so virtuous that they are appropriate for inclusion in a sefer from which people study to attain inspiration. Throughout life, man should prepare himself for the day when ultimately, "All your deeds are written in a book." The book that is inscribed with our deeds should be worthy of being read and emulated. Is there a greater legacy to transmit to our children?

We should not be satisfied only with the sefer yuchsin of our forebears. We should live our lives in such a manner that we bequeath to our children our own book, our own yichus. Thus, when they are confronted with the challenges that life has to offer, they will have a place to turn, and standards to live up to. In this manner they, too, will be encouraged to add their own chapters to the book recording their family tree.

Each Jew is instructed to write his own Sefer Torah. Indeed, Chazal say that even if one's father wrote a Sefer Torah which the son inherited, the son should nonetheless write his own Torah. In accordance with our thesis, this would suggest that a son must add to his father's Sefer Torah. He must record his Torah, his life's story, in his family's sefer yuchsin.

The story is told that when Horav Yisrael m'Ruzin's daughter became a kallah to Horav David Halperin, the mechutan, Horav Yaakov Yosef Halperin, spoke very highly of his family's prolific pedigree. This did not faze the Ruziner, who said, "In many families it is not unusual for one to glorify himself with his exemplary yichus avos, ancestral pedigree. Our custom is to speak about our yichus

banim, the pedigree of our sons.

Indeed, my great-grandfather, the Mezricher Maggid, would be meyaches, attribute his illustrious lineage to his son, the famous "Malach." My grandfather, the "Malach," would be meyaches himself to his son, my father. I, too, exalt myself in my yichus - my son, who will one day be a great leader." Indeed, his son became the great tzadik of Sadigere. The Ruziner was wont to relate in the name of his father, "From my sons you will know who I am." This is the type of yichus to which we should all aspire.

Each one by its standard with signs according to their father's house. (2:2)

Each tribe had a flag upon which was a design that indicated the character of that tribe. Yehudah had a lion, the king of the animals, on his flag. Yehudah was king of the shevatim, tribes, and Jewish monarchy descended from him. Yissachar's flag showed the sun, moon and the stars, because Yissachar's descendants were heads of the Sanhedrin, who made the astronomical calculations on which the Jewish calendar was based. Zevullun's occupation was sailing and seafaring, which enabled him to support Yissachar. Hence, a ship was depicted on Zevullun's flag.

We may note that Zevullun received great reward for his support of Yissachar. This would ostensibly indicate that he was a very special righteous person. Why was it necessary for him to earn a living through such dangerous means? Why did he have to be alone on the high seas, away from his family, away from his friends, at the mercy of the weather and prone to various hazards?

Horav David Feinstein, Shlita, cites Chazal in the Talmud Kiddushin 82a who say that sailors, because of the nature of their work, tend to be G-d-fearing. Because their lives are constantly in peril, they are reminded often that they are in the Almighty's Hands. This catalyzes prayer and devotion on their part. People who are close to G-d have a greater appreciation of Torah and all things spiritual. This is why Zevullun was so generous in his support of Yissachar. He had a profound understanding of Yissachar's achievements on behalf of Klal Yisrael. One who, because of his profession, comes in daily contact with the Almighty, should have a greater awareness of what life's really all about. Therefore, he should hold dear those whose affiliation with Torah sustain their brethren. Zevullun understood - do we?

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying, "The Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Ohel Moed shall they encamp." (2:1,2)

An inconsistency seems to be manifest in the text of this pasuk. Hashem enjoins Klal Yisrael to camp "mineged," at a distance, and "saviv", surrounding. Are they to camp mineged or saviv? If it is opposite it is not close. The Satmar Rebbe, zl, cites his father in his sefer, "Yetev Lev." He explains this apparent contradiction in light of Rashi's interpretation of the phrase, "b'osos l'bais avosam," "according to the insignias of their fathers' household," as a reference to the signs that Yaakov gave his sons, regarding the formation of his sons when they were to serve as his pallbearers. When Yaakov

placed Efraim before Menashe -- the younger broter before the older brother -- he was apparently indicating that his perspective was oriented to the future. Efraim would one day succeed Menashe in spiritual status and prestige. Yaakov subsequently selected Efraim to precede Menashe.

With this idea in mind, we can understand the Torah's intention in using two terms that seem to contradict each other. In the Talmud Megillah 29, Chazal state that one day the Houses of Study and Worship situated in Babylon will be reinstated in Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, in the Midrash it is stated that the future Bais Hamikdash will be the size of Yerushalayim. The Maharshah attributes this to the fact that one day all of the shuls will combine with the Bais Hamikdash. In other words, the shuls and yeshivos in galus, exile, are considered part of the future Bais Hamikdash. What an incredible statement! The Batei Medrash and Batei Knesses of today are the Bais Hamikdash of the future! This should give us something to think about the next time we enter a makom Torah.

Thus, while the m'komos ha'Torah of the Diaspora may presently be "distant" in a spiritual and physical manner from the Bais Hamikdash, if we ascribe to Yaakov Avinu's perspective of looking to the future to become the present, then what is far is really near. This is why the Torah says each person rested nearby the Mishkan while it says they were m'neged, distant. They rested "b'osos l'bais avosom." according to the charge and legacy of their ancestor Yaakov, who integrated the future with the present.

We may suggest an alternative reason for the discrepancy of the words describing Klal Yisrael's geographic placement vis-a-vis the Ohel Moed. Rashi interprets the word "mineged" as implying "distant from." We find in the Mishnayos Peah, Chazal enumerate a number of wonderful mitzvos which focus on social, humanistic and religious areas of communal life. The Mishnah concludes with the words, "V'talmud Torah k'neged kulam," "and/but the study of Torah is greater than/supercedes all of them." We are confronted with a textual question: If the purpose of this Mishnah is to convey to us that Torah study is greater than all these wonderful mitzvos, then rather than use the word "k'neged," which is usually translated as "opposite," they should have said, "oleh al kulam," goes above them. Why use a word which has a contradictory connotation? My rebbe, Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, explained that the Mishnah uses the word k'neged, opposite, by design. Chazal are teaching us that every mitzvah or good deed, regardless of its noble intentions and social benefits, must stand up to the Torah's purview, to its criteria for establishing the veracity of this endeavor. It must be stood up opposite the Torah, to see what the Torah "says" about the manner in which we perform this mitzvah, our true goals and objectives. Only after it has passed the Torah's approval does it become a mitzvah. A similar thought may be expressed in regard to those people situating themselves in close proximity to the Ohel Moed. People may say, and even think, they are doing the right thing. They may believe that they perform mitzvos with the greatest integrity. Their actions and intentions must be stood up opposite, k'neged, the Torah, however, to determine if they are really misaviv, close by or mineged, far removed from the Torah. In other words, it is possible to be close by and actually be distant simultaneously.

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: "The Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household." (2:1,2)

The Midrash discusses the remarkable level of sanctity achieved by Klal Yisrael as a result of their degalim, banners. Indeed, Chazal cite a dialogue between the gentile nations in which they attempt to dissuade Klal Yisrael from maintaining their allegiance to Hashem. Klal Yisrael's response to the gentiles' negativity was the beauty and sanctity of the degalim that evoked their pride in being Jewish. We must endeavor to understand what it is about the degalim that engendered such feelings of

self - esteem and pride.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, offers two responses to this question. He explains that Torah and mitzvos are not merely religious observances and traditions that we keep; they comprise our life! They are our standard that we display with pride and dignity. Every tribe presented his individual banner, his banner of Torah and mitzvah, proud to be a Jew and prepared to offer his life for its observance. No one can take away our banner of Judaism.

We find a similar thought expressed in regard to the words of the Midrash on Megillas Esther. In Esther, 4:5 the pasuk states, "Esther called to Hasach...to learn what this was about and why." Chazal explain that Esther questioned the origin of this tzarah, distress/anguish. Perhaps it was because the Jewish people had denied the concept of "zeh Keili v'anveihu," "This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him." Why would Esther attribute the tragic decree to annihilate the Jews to a lack of beautifying mitzvos? Hidur mitzvah, going out of our way to beautify mitzvos, should not be a reason for such a terrible decree. Would it not have made sense to ascribe the churban, destruction, to a lack of mitzvah observance? Horav Rogov explains that once Klal Yisrael lose their sense of pride in mitzvos, once they do not give proper honor and beauty to the mitzvos, they will soon refrain from actual mitzvah observance. If we do not raise up our banner of Judaism with pride, we will soon reject it - totally. The Jewish People respond to the gentile nations: "The Torah is our banner; it is our pride and self-esteem. Nothing that you do or offer can encourage us to rescind our commitment.

Horav Rogov suggests a second area of significance which is indicated by the degalim. Klal Yisrael takes pride in the fact that each tribe maintained its own banner, fulfilling the goals and objectives that each individual degel mandates. Each man, each tribe, accepted his banner's mandate with enthusiasm. They did not dissent their position; they did not protest. They did not attempt to exchange their responsibility for that of another Jew's. There was no jealousy; there was no envy. Each person performed what was expected of him and did not attempt to infringe upon anyone else. Horav Rogov cites a noteworthy story that occurred with the Bais HaLevi, which reinforces this idea. One erev Yom Kippur after Maariv, the Bais HaLevi noted that one of the community's wealthy men remained afterwards to recite Tehillim. One would think that this act of devotion was to be commended. The Brisker Rav, however, did not seem to think so. He went over to the man and asked him, "My friend, what is the punishment for a soldier who deserts the army?" "He is put to death," the man quickly responded. "What about an infantryman who decides one day to leave his post and join the cavalry?" "He is also a deserter and deserves a similar punishment," answered the man emphatically. The Brisker Rav looked with penetrating eyes at the wealthy man and said, "You are such a man! Hashem has various divisions of Jews. There are foot soldiers who do not have the ability to support others. They must go by foot from door to door seeking support for their families. There are also the cavalry who ride upon horses and in fancy chariots. They are the ones who are mandated to support and sustain others. Now, on erev Yom Kippur, is a time for someone of your financial capacity to be out on the streets, seeking out people in need whom you can help. You should not have the strength left to sit down and recite Tehillim. If you do - then obviously you deserted your company. You reneged your responsibility. Leave the Tehillim for somebody else, while you go out and perform your duty!"

In Pirkei Avos, Chazal teach, "Who is a strong man? One who has defeated his evil inclination." The Bais HaLevi notes that Chazal say his yetzer hora, evil inclination, not someone else's. The rich man must overcome the challenge of not giving tzedakah, while the poor man must defeat the yetzer hora that downplays his recitation of Tehillim. The wealthy man who performs the poor man's task is only deferring to his yetzer hora's "suggestion."

So did they encamp by their standards, and so did they journey, each one according to his families, by the house of his fathers. (2:34)

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains the practical/symbolic meaning behind the formation of the tribes as they camped and traveled. In the front, to the east, under the degel of Yehudah, were the tribes of Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun. To the right, in the south, under the degel of Reuven, were Reuven, Shimon and Gad. To the left, in the north, under the degel of Dan, were the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naftali. Last, in the back, opposite Shevet Yehudah, under the degel of Efraim, were Efraim, Menashe, and Binyamin. Each of the three tribes which form the leading camp is characterized for its material and spiritual attributes, thereby maintaining a balance of sorts.

Yaakov Avinu visualized Yehudah as the most prominent tribe, symbolized by his shevet, scepter, and mechokkek, leadership in Torah law. Yissachar was the tribe devoted to agriculture, who consequently had leisure time for study. Zevulun was devoted to commerce, but also seems to be a leader in cultivating literature. Hence, in the leading tribes, the areas in which the material and spiritual welfare of the nation were to depend, were united. The scepter and the law, agriculture and science, commerce and literature. These two factors, the spiritual and material, combined in the leading camp and separated right and left in the subordinate camps behind it. The camp to its right consisted of Reuven, the bechor, firstborn. He was endowed with the intelligence and sensitivity for what is right and just, yet with a softness of character which ultimately denied him the firmness necessary for leadership. In conjunction with him were Shimon, quick and impulsive, the avenger of honor, and Gad, who struck swift as an arrow to avenge any unjustified attack. In other words, on Yehudah's right there was the courage and temperament to ward off humiliation and attack - but under the aegis of moderacy and calm.

To his left, he was flanked by Dan, the tribe of deft cleverness, the consummate politician; Asher, representing refinement of taste; and Naftali, noted for his eloquence. While on the right, Reuven represented strength and force, Dan on the left symbolized a rich development in the area of culture.

On the side opposite to the eastern camp, to the west, were the tribes of Efraim, Menashe and Benyamin. Efraim and Menashe essentially represented Shevet Yosef. Based upon Yaakov Avinu's blessing to his sons prior to his demise, Horav Hirsch suggests that Efraim and Menashe were to develop greatness and might. Bravery would be their primary attribute, which would be a wonderful supplement to Yehudah in the east in terms of national welfare. Regrettably, history indicates that instead of complementing Yehudah, the house of Yosef opposed their leadership, catalyzing a tragic rift in Klal Yisrael. Instead of planting their degel/standard behind Yehudah, they chose to go to the forefront and claim leadership. When they broke the G-d-given formation, they brought ruin upon themselves and all the other tribes that had attached themselves to them.

Count the Bnei Levi (according to their fathers' household, according to their families) every male from one month of age and up shall you count them. Moshe counted them according to the word of Hashem as he had been commanded. (3:15,16)

Rashi cites a dialogue between Moshe Rabbeinu and Hashem. Moshe asked the Almighty, "How do I enter the tents to determine the number of infants in their home?" It would have been improper for Moshe to enter the Levite tents to count the number of suckling infants. Hashem responded, "You do yours and I will do mine." Moshe would go to the entrance of each tent and wait outside while the Shechinah preceded him, after which a Heavenly voice would proclaim the number of babies in the tent. We must understand how it was that Moshe decided to do things "his way." What prompted him to imply that he could not enter the tents of women with infants? Hashem instructed him to take a census; he should assume his responsibility and do what must be done!

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, posits that the middah, character trait, of derech erez, proper manners and behavior, is an integral component in Torah study. Human decency and moral behavior demand that one does not enter a private home where there is a nursing mother and child. Consequently, this cannot be Hashem's command. If it is against the rules of derech erez, then obviously Hashem meant for Moshe to count the infants from outside the tent. Proof of this thesis is the fact that the Torah recognizes Moshe's act as consistent with Hashem's command. Although we do not find Hashem commanding him to remain outside, if it is not derech erez to enter, then it is as if he were commanded to remain outside.

Perhaps if we would all realize that derech erez is not simply something we learn about in a mussar sefer, but rather an integral component of our Torah study and achievement, we would present ourselves in a different manner and view others in a different light.

Count the heads of the whole of the congregation of Bnei Yisrael. (1:2)

When it was necessary to conduct a census, the vehicle of counting was the contribution of a half – shekel coin to be used for the construction and maintenance of the Mishkan. The people elevated their status by contributing to charity. Hence, we understand the word "seu", "raise up/elevate the heads". The counting also served as a means to elevate the people. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, supplements this idea with a profound thought. By using a contribution as the symbol of counting, the Torah is telling them that a Jew is 'counted' as belonging to the congregation of Klal Yisrael only when he contributes something. Regardless of whether he makes a material or spiritual donation, he must give of himself. That is how he expresses his desire to be counted.

Horav Hirsch focuses on the significance of the individual as a member of Klal Yisrael. At the end of the previous Sefer, chumash Vayikra, the Torah addresses the concept of Nidrei Hekdesh: One who feels the need to express his personal relationship to the Sanctuary vows to undertake a symbolic consecration of his own person. Alternatively, he consecrates a portion of his possessions to benefit the Mishkan. Sefer Bamidbar follows closely with the census, in which each individual is counted as an important member of the congregation, upon whose conscious devotion and faithfulness to duty rests the national mission of our people.

As Sefer Vayikra ends with the laws of Maaser behemah, the animal tithe, in which each animal passed beneath the shepherds' crook to be counted individually, similarly, each Jew is counted as an individual. Although every tenth sheep is Maaser, consecrated, when it comes to the Jewish census, every Jew is holy. Every Jew has his mission, both personal and collective. He must rise to the occasion and be counted, as he is elevated through his contribution to the Klal.

Their count, for the tribe of Menashe; thirty two thousand, two hundred. (1:35)

The count for shevet Menashe was about thirty-two thousand men. There is no doubt that every census was determined by Hashem. Consequently, there must have been a reason that the number thirty-two played such a prominent role in Menashes' census. Horav Chaim Pardes, Shlita, expounds on the significance of the number thirty-two through the perspective of Chazal. The Talmud Yevamos 62b states that Rabbi Akiva's twenty four thousand students died during the period between Pesach and Shavuous because they were not accustomed to showing proper kavod, honor/esteem, one for another. The Maharal M'Prague makes a profound statement in regard to the time frame of their death. On the thirty-third day of the Omar, Lag B'omar, the Heavenly decree that they should die ceased. What is the implication of this brief cessation in their tragic demise? He explains that they died because of laxity in observing proper kavod, which in the Hebrew language, *sucf*, is the *gimatriya*, numerical equivalent of thirty-two. Hence, they perished during a thirty-two day period! The Talmud states that they died during the entire period between Pesach and Shavuous. However, the decree ended on the thirty second day of the period. After that no one else became ill; only those who were already ill died after the thirty second day.

To explain this idea further, Horav Pardes cites Maharal in his commentary on Meseches Avos 4:1, where the Mishnah says: "Who is honorable? – He who honors his fellow man." Maharal explains that just because others give honor to an individual, it does not necessarily make him honorable. Plaudits given by others do not imbue one with honor. These are only superficial expressions, which do not become ingrained in the person. It does not change the person in any way. It does not create an honorable person from one who previously was not a man of distinction. On the other hand, when one demonstrates whom he considers honorable, when one gives honor to others, he takes an active role. In other words when one dispenses kavod he shows that he is a *mechubad*, honorable person.

One who receives kavod is dependent on others. He does not himself necessarily possess kavod. Hashem is referred to as *Melech Hakavod*, the King of Honor. Hashem reveres those that fear Him. Since He is *cholek kavod*, dispenses kavod, He is a *mechubad*. The same idea can be noted further in Mishnah 7 where the Tanna says, "Whoever honors the Torah will himself be honored by people." Maharal explains that Torah is kavod, it is the essence of honor and reverence. One who connects with Torah by honoring it, studying it, and observing its commandments, will receive the reciprocal reward that his entire person will be honored by those around him. Interestingly, one is not deemed honorable simply by studying or observing Torah. Only by honoring Torah, does one become honorable.

What is inferred from Chazal, as seen through the interpretation of Maharal, is that one who attaches himself to honor, who sees to it that others receive the respect they deserve, will himself be honored. One who represents the opposite of kavod, who profanes kavod haTorah, denigrates the honor due the Torah and its disseminators, is not and will not be honorable. Kavod is determined by one's attachment to Torah via the honor he accords to it. Consequently, one who does not exhibit the proper kavod haTorah is himself no longer an honorable person. Rabbi Akiva's talmidim, students, died during a period of thirty two days equivalent to the Hebrew word kavod, for they did not reflect the proper kavod one accords a Torah scholar. Not giving kavod is tantamount to denigrating a talmid chacham. This sin, in accordance to their lofty level of spiritual devotion was considered grave enough to warrant such severe punishment.

The unique census of the members of Menashe's tribe, Horav Pardes suggests, may be attributed

to Menashe's nature. Menashe was the bechor, the elder of Yosefs' two sons. He was Yosefs' honor, hope and source of confidence in the dark Galus of Egypt. He represented Yosef's kavod in Egypt. The number of men in his tribe reflected this unique status.

Applying the initial idea that Menashe symbolized kavod, we suggest another reason for his tribes' number. Menashe, although being the elder brother, deferred to Efraim out of respect for his scholarly status. Rather than become upset when his grandfather, Yaakov, gave precedence to Efraim, his younger brother, he wholeheartedly accepted the "demotion" and gave kavod to Efraim. His ability to give kavod where it was due is recognized by the unique census of his tribe.

These are the offspring of Moshe and Aharon... These are the names of the sons of Aharon... (3:1,2)

The Torah is about to enumerate Moshe and Aharon's offspring. The pasuk, however, mentions only the sons of Aharon. In the Talmud Sanhedrin 96, Chazal infer that one who teaches Torah to someone else's children is regarded as if he has begotten them. Moshe was their rebbe; he taught them the Torah, which would sustain them. He was like their father. This idea applies to anyone who imparts his Torah knowledge to others. Our influence is far-reaching; our ability to inspire is unlimited. Moshe was mentor and spiritual father to Aharon's sons.

What about the rest of Klal Yisrael? Moshe was also their rebbe? Why are Aharon's sons singled out from the rest of Klal Yisrael? The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh says that as a result of Aharon's participation in the sin of the golden calf, his sons should have died. Moshe, however, saved them through his supplication to Hashem. He, therefore, was regarded as their father.

Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, interprets Chazal's words in a different manner. Moshe did not merit seeing his sons follow in his footsteps. Torah is not a possession that can be bequeathed or inherited. One earns the kesser Torah, crown of distinction, for Torah scholarship through his own amelus, diligence and perserverance in Torah study. Aharon did enjoy incredible nachas from his sons' Torah achievement as a result of Moshe's teaching them Torah. This is the Torah's intention in mentioning Moshe as surrogate father to Aharon's sons. Aharon's nachas, his merit to see banim talmidei chachamim, was because of Moshe.

Horav Yitzchok Hutner, zl, contends that only a rebbe muvhak, one who taught most of an individual's Torah to him, is considered as if he had begotten him. Horav Shmuel Truvitz, Shlita, comments that while all of Klal Yisrael certainly learned Torah from Moshe, Aharon's sons had exceptional opportunity to hear Moshe repeat the lesson three times. This gave them prominence over Klal Yisrael. We suggest that since Moshe was their uncle, there was an exceptional affiliation between Aharon's sons and Moshe. A student must feel this closeness in order to sustain an enduring bond in the Rebbe – talmid relationship. One does not necessarily have to be related to his rebbe, but the love and affection that is, and should be, prevalent among family should be inherent in a teacher – student relationship. A student learns when he feels that there is love and caring for him.

After all is said and done, we maintain that the rebbe has a parental obligation towards his student. He must concern himself about the student's scholastic, moral and spiritual achievement. Torah is life – the rebbe that teaches Torah provides the student with tools for living. Is it any wonder that one who teaches Torah is regarded as if he had begotten the student? If we agree with the above, it would serve us well to hold in greater esteem those who play such a critical role in our children's lives.

The families of Bnei Kehas would encamp on the side of the Mishkan, to the south. (3:29)

Rashi notes that shevet Reuven camped nearby. This close proximity between Shevet Reuven and shevet Kehas is what caused Dasan and Aviram of the tribe of Reuven to be "pulled" along, to be influenced by Korach. His vilification of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohen gave him the distinction of being the first one to rebel against Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership. Dasan and Aviram stood at the forefront of Korach's ill-fated group of followers. They were "nimshach", pulled along, by Korach because they were near him. Rashi's use of the word "nimshichu", they were pulled, as opposed to any other phrase denoting their being influenced by and following Korach tells us something. He could have said, "they agreed", "they followed"; what is the significance of being "pulled along"?

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, infers a profound lesson from here. To be pulled along is to follow slowly, one step at a time, at times without thought or malice, just simply being attracted to follow the one who is pulling. This teaches us that one can be influenced unwittingly. He is privy to an occurrence, or is in the proximity of someone or something that leaves an impression on him – without realizing it. Over time, this impression impacts him so that his entire perspective changes.

The Navi tell us that, in his later years, Shlomo Hamelech's wives catalyzed a change within him to the point that he turned to idol worship. Chazal explain that Shlomo definitely did not worship idols, but when he married Pharaoh's daughter he did not protest the various musical instruments that she brought with her which were used for idol worship. This is enigmatic. Did he worship idols or not? If he did not worship idols, why does the Navi ascribe this terrible sin to him? Horav Yaakov Moshe Lesin, Zl, explains that the actual distance one is from sin is determined by the degree one is removed from sin. One's ability to tolerate any form of evil brings him closer to that evil. There are those for whom the mere thought of involvement in a sin would be devastating. There are others who are not so far – they will merely laugh it off – but will not be revolted by the sin.

The manner in which one reacts to another who sins is also a determining factor in his own reservations to evil. The story is told that Rav Chaim Brisker, zl, was once walking with his father, the Bais Halevi, zl, on Shabbos, when they saw a Jew who was desecrating Shabbos. Rav Chaim was shocked, while the Bais Halevi fainted! Rav Chaim said afterwards, "Look at the difference between my father's degree of "richuk min ha'cheit", distancing himself from sin, and mine. I saw chillul Shabbos and was terribly upset. My father was so distraught that he fainted. He could not handle observing the sin of chillul Shabbos."

This is what Chazal mean in regard to Shlomo Hamelech. True, he did not sin, but he came closer to evil when he tolerated its presence in his home. Shlomo Ha'melech was no longer the same. He theoretically, according to his spiritual level, acquiesced to idol worship. Bnei Reuven, because of their proximity to Korach, were "pulled" closer to sin and rebellion. Everytime one sees an aveirah, sin, being flagrantly committed, he becomes closer to that sin. His distance from evil becomes that much shorter.

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