

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Bamidbar

Solid Start

As we study the weekly Torah portion our goal is to learn the timely and relevant lessons that the Torah provides. Let us explore an aspect of this week's parsha that at first glance may seem totally irrelevant and simply historical. Our goal is to understand its timely message and how it relates to each one of us.

Unique Counting

In counting the Jews, the census counted people from the age of twenty and above. This applied to all tribes except for one. G-d commanded that the tribe of Levi should be counted from one month and older (this age is given because according to Talmudic law a baby is not seen as fully viable until it has lived for one full month). This is very strange. More so, is this simply a historical recounting or is there a lesson for us to learn?

Education

The Levites held a unique job in the Jewish nation. Their occupation was that of the Torah scholars and leaders. Although any other tribe member could dedicate himself to this occupation, the Levites were the only tribe whom as a whole held this job collectively. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt"l (1895-1986) points out that there is a most timely lesson that can be learned here regarding Jewish education. The tribe of Levi was comprised of people whose lives were dedicated to Torah study and practice. They wished to pass on this appreciation and ideal and thus they began to educate their children about G-d and His Torah from a very young age. It was for this reason that G-d reciprocated by commanding that the Levites should be counted from one month old. The Levites gave special care and attention to their youth and thus G-d counted them from the youngest age.



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Education begins from the youngest age. Children can be taught about the importance of Torah study, morals, fulfilling commandments and displaying *derech erez*, ethical and respectful treatment towards others. Children are highly impressionable. If we put in an effort to be cognizant of this fact and to therefore provide children with an atmosphere that will educate them, many great lessons can be powerfully transmitted. Their effect will last a lifetime. We can serve as living role models for proper Jewish behavior. Indeed, studies have indicated that children, even as young infants are able to pick up things and learn powerful scripting lessons from their surroundings. Hence, the lesson of counting the Levites from one month old teaches us the importance of providing our children with the best education at the earliest time possible.

To Clarify

One should not read this and be disheartened by thinking that it is too late. No matter what age a child or adult is, Torah study can enhance and uplift one's life. Our great patriarch Abraham first got his circumcision at age ninety-nine so that no one should ever say, "I'm too old to change!" Rabbi Akiva began to study Torah at the age of forty. Rabbi Avi Shulman states, "People tell me that they can't change because, 'you can't teach an old dog new tricks'. My response is to recognize that we are humans, not 'dogs', and Torah, mitzvot (commandments) and emunah (faith) aren't 'tricks', they are fulfilling life goals!" The Levites' counting teaches us the importance of an early start, but not to the exclusion of never starting at all.

Shabbat Shalom!

