

A LESSON IN COMMUNITY SERVICE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 103, Birchas Kohanim. Good Shabbos!

Count Also them: A Great Lesson in Community Service

In this week's Parsha, we find two important lessons regarding a person's approach to communal work. The Parsha begins by saying "Count **Also** (gam) the heads of the family of Gershom. What does the pasuk [verse] mean when it says **Also** here?

We know that in the previous parsha we had the command to count the members of the family of Kehas. The descendants of Kehas had the job to carry the utensils of the Mishkan. They carried the Menorah, the Table, the Altar, the Ark, and so forth. Those vessels constituted the essence of the Divine Service in the Mishkan.

What was left for the family of Gershom? They were like, l'havdil, the "second team." They carried the boards, the curtains, and the other "less essential" items. The Torah is saying, by using the word **Also** here, as follows: Lest we think that only the people charged with carrying the important items, are themselves important; lest we think that only for them is it appropriate to use the terminology "Naso es Rosh" (literally 'lift their heads' or 'elevate') in reference to counting them -- the Torah tells us otherwise. The Torah says, "Elevate **Also** the family of Gershom." Don't make the mistake of thinking of them as mere porters. Do not think that they are any less important because of their apparently more menial task.

This is a great lesson in community service. When people work for an organization, invariably there are jobs that have to be done that are the more glamorous jobs -- the jobs that get the publicity and the honor. When a person is the Dinner Chairman of an organization, he is the fellow that sits on the dais; he is the fellow who says a few words to the assembled guests; he is the fellow that receives the 'kavod.'

However, in preparation, leading up to that final dinner was a person that made calls and a person

that schlepped and a person that ran to the printer and all the numerous items that go into making any type of affair.

The Torah tells us that with G-d, what counts is that the job gets done. For the job to get done requires a team effort. With G-d the person who schleps chairs is no less significant than the person who gets to present the plaque. To G-d, it was the same whether one was carrying the Ark of the Mishkan or the wood boards of the Mishkan. The Torah makes that point by stressing here -- elevate **Also** the heads of the children of Gershon.

The Menachem Zion compares this to what we find by the tribes of Zevulun and Yissachor. We see there, that those who help financially are mentioned ahead of those who sit and learn ("Rejoice Zevulun in your going out and Yissachor in your tents" [Devarim 33:18]) because G-d knows that in order for there to be Torah in the Jewish People there have to be both Learners of Torah and Supporters of Torah. With G-d they are equally important. So too here, the family of Gershon are just as important as the family of Kehas in the carrying out of their Mishkan related duties.

Whether it is a glamorous job or a menial job, whether it gets honor in this world or not, when a person does something for the community, it is always important in G-d's eyes.

One Must Carry a Tune, Not a Chip on His Shoulder

Rav Gedaliah Schorr draws another lesson in communal service from a second verse in this week's portion. It states (Bamidbar 7:9) regarding the transporting duties of the children of Kehas, "And they should carry it (yisa-u) on their shoulders." And yet, there is an interesting Gemara in tractate Eruchin [11a] which interprets the word "yisa-u," not in relationship to carrying but in relationship to singing.

How ironic, says Rav Gedaliah Schorr, that the same word, which means they should schlep on their shoulders, also means that they should sing. There are two ways one can schlep something -- one can schlep with a sigh or one can schlep with a song. When one is working for an organization one can schlep and complain and be bitter about the difficulties encountered. On the other hand one can keep in mind the importance of the work and can work with a smile and indeed even with a niggun.

The weight of community service has to be borne with a tune and with enthusiasm. That must be the approach to Avodas HaTzibbur. Anyone who has ever worked for any communal organization knows that the work is full of aggravation. People rarely come up and say "Yasher Koach, it was a beautiful job." They come with complaints and critiques. One can put on a dinner for a thousand people. Everything can be beautiful and one fellow comes up and his only comment is "Why did you sit me next to the door?" That is his whole commentary on the entire evening. The chairman has worked for weeks, and this is all he gets? "Why did you put me next to the door?"

"On their shoulders they should lift it (yisa-u)". As the Talmud says, the word yisa-u refers to song. In

other words, forget about it! The reward awaiting community service is very great. It should be borne with a song, not with a sigh.

Peace Begins at Home

This week's Parsha contains the Priestly Blessing. Each of the Priestly Blessings [Bamidbar 6:24-27] is said in the singular. The reason is because a Bracha always has to be tailor-made for the recipient. This makes perfect sense throughout the Priestly Blessing, until we come to the final blessing "And may He grant Peace to you."

We recently mentioned that Peace is the most important of all blessings. "Without peace there is nothing" [Sifra Bechukosail. "G-d did not find a vessel that could hold blessing other than Peace" [Uktzin 3:12]. A person can have health, wealth, children, everything. But if he doesn't have Shalom, he doesn't have anything.

Maseches Berachot, the first tractate of the Talmud, ends with the words "G-d grants strength to His nation; G-d will bless His nation with Peace" [Tehillim 29:11]. The last tractate in Talmud, Uktzin, contains the above quoted Mishneh (G-d did not find a vessel that could hold blessing other than Peace). Shalom is the key to everything.

Peace and the lack thereof always involve more than one person. If a person doesn't have peace with his wife or his neighbor, there are at least two people involved. If there is no peace in the world it is between countries. Why then, is the blessing for Peace in the singular.

The Menachem Zion says that the premise of the question is a mistake. Indeed, a person needs Shalom. But the most primary need for peace is between a person and himself. One must be at peace with oneself.

If we look at people and talk with people throughout various stages of their lives, we invariably find that people are torn about what they should do and what they should not do. There is sometimes inner conflict and inner turmoil about how people should lead their lives.

This is something that affects young and old, Jew and non-Jew. The whole matter of "mid-life crises" is that a person has no inner peace. He reaches 40 or 45 and asks himself "Is this what I really want to do? Is this what it is really all about?" Again, there is no peace.

The place where Peace has to begin is "at home" -- a person has to be at peace with himself. People who are always upset, always fighting, never happy with everybody else, are ultimately and essentially not at peace with themselves. People who are disappointed; people who are dissatisfied with themselves -- are dissatisfied with everything else, as well.

Therefore, when the Torah gives us the blessing of Peace, G-d knows where to start. He starts with

the individual. "V'Yasem **Lecha** Shalom." Once a person has inner peace, he can have peace with his wife, peace with his family, and ultimately peace with the entire world. But it starts with himself.

Personalities & Sources:

Rav Gedaliah Schorr -- (1910-1979) Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, Brooklyn, NY.

Menachem Zion -- Rabbi Menachem Ben-Tzion Zachs

Glossary

Mishkan -- Tabernacle

l'havdil -- to distinguish (between a secular and a sacred example)

kavod -- honor

schlep -- (Yiddish) carry a burden from place to place

niggun -- melody

Avodas HaTzibur -- Service of the Community

Yasher Koach -- (idiom) Job well done

Bracha -- blessing

Shalom -- peace

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