

A POSITIVE CHOICE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Vayikra

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #3, The Korban Pessach Today.
Good Shabbos!*

Levites Make A Positive Choice to Serve in Beis HaMikdash

The pasuk [verse] says, "The rest of the meal offering shall belong to Aharon and his sons..." [VaYikra 2:3]. The Medrash connects this verse with one in Psalms [Tehillim 17:14], interpreting the pasuk in Psalms as follows: "There are mighty people, who took their portion from Your hand." The Medrash identifies these mighty people who took their portion from G-d's hand as the Tribe of Levi. This tribe was so strong, the Medrash says, that they declined to take their portion in the Land of Israel, but instead, took their portion directly from G-d.

The Ateres Mordechai, by Rav Mordechai Rogov, zt"l, offers a beautiful interpretation of this Medrash, which teaches us a great moral lesson for our time. The Ateres Mordechai says that a person could perhaps think that Leviim, who historically were employed in the Beis HaMikdash and who were the teachers of the children of the Jewish people, were a tribe of 'nebachs'. [Nebach is a Yiddish descriptive phrase for someone who is to be pitied; also used as "What a pity."] Yaakov Avinu had 12 sons. Thank G-d, eleven of them were successful and talented children; one was a 'lemech'. [Lemech is a Yiddish descriptive phrase for someone who is not too bright.] So what does one do with a son who is unfortunately a little awkward? That son stays in the Beis HaMikdash; he becomes a teacher; he becomes a Rebbe.

There is an expression in the secular world "Those who can, do, those who can't, teach." This means that one who has any brain in his head and any head on his shoulder will go out and become a

doctor or a lawyer or an accountant or computer analyst -- something important! At least work for the government! But, 'nebach', if you can't do anything else, then, and only then, you teach.

The Medrash is telling us that this was far from the case concerning the Tribe of Levi. Do not imagine for a minute that the Tribe of Levi were a bunch of nebachs. The Tribe of Levi was mighty. They were talented and capable. They could have done anything. They could have had the job of Zevulun or Naftali or any other tribe. But they were mighty. They made a conscious decision not to take a portion in the Land. They gave up the transitory and temporal world, for the sake of a lasting world that is 'chai v'kayam' [living and permanent].

What is the proof that they were happy with their decision? A doctor usually wants his son to go into medicine. A businessman wants his son to take over the business. If one is pleased with what he is doing, he wants his son to follow in his footsteps. But one who is not pleased with what he is doing, chas v'sholom, does not want his child to continue in his profession. "I had it rough, I could not go to school. But you? You are going to have something decent in life."

The Medrash is telling us that the Tribe of Levi was not a cop-out. They did not do what they did because they had no other choice. Rather, they made a positive decision and were attracted to the spirituality of the job for themselves and for their children. The Tribe of Levi did not choose to teach because they had nothing else to do. They chose to teach because they knew which profession had true value.

Elementary School Teachers are the new Tribe of Levi

Today, we have a new generation of Leviim. These are our Rebbeim and Teachers. I particularly refer to the Day School teachers of the elementary grades. Teachers in primary grades receive very little respect. Here are people that could have become lawyers or accountants or computer analysts, but they chose to educate Jewish children. They chose to stay and provide a new spirit to a new generation of children, to stay and spend 6-8 hours a day with little kids. We all know that this is no simple task.

They are the new Tribe of Levi. They are not teaching because they could not do anything else. These are people who voluntarily chose "Not to take a portion in the Land". We all know of the crying shame that our educators receive sub-standard wages.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (1891-1986) once said that both the president and the janitor have keys to the bank. The way to tell which one is the president and which one is the janitor is to look at their paychecks. The money tells us. (HaDamim Modi'im.) We pay for that which we consider important. If, because of our many sins, we cannot show our appreciation to the educators of the generation through their paychecks, we should at least give recognition and appreciation and show our gratitude without limit to these people, who have, on a daily basis, devoted their lives to experience the hardships of elementary school education, thereby passing up the transitory world and acquiring a world that is Chai v'Kayam [alive and permanent].

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayikra are provided below:

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