

MAKE UNPLEASANT EXPERIENCES AS PLEASANT AS POSSIBLE / HINTS TO LOVE FROM OTHER LANGUAGES

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: CD #990 – Cutting Down A Fruit Tree For Home Expansion. Good Shabbos!

The Lesson of "Count Also The Family of Gershon"

Parshas Naso begins with the instruction to "count also the family of Gershon" [Bamidbar 4:22]. Levi had three sons -- Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. We learned at the end of last week's parsha that the Leviyim were counted separately from the rest of the Jewish people. Parshas Bamidbar contained the description of the counting of Kehas, one of Levi's sons. Our parsha, Naso, picks up where Bamidbar left off, with the instruction to count the family of Gershon. This will be followed by the commandment to count the children of Levi's third son, Merari.

The Abarbanel asks why the Torah split up the counting of Leviim in such a strange fashion. We would expect that either all three branches of the family of Levi should be mentioned in Parshas Bamidbar since they already began there with the counting of the Kehas branch of the family or else Parshas Naso should have begun with the counting of the Leviim and should include all three branches of the family! What is the purpose of splitting up the counting of the Leviyim?

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos point out another anomaly. With the counting of Kehas, the Torah writes "By the word of G-d, in the hand of Moshe" (*al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe*). Likewise, with the counting of Merari, the Torah also writes "*al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe*." However, concerning the counting of the family of Gershon, the Torah only says "*al pi Hashem*" -- it does not mention "*b'yad Moshe*."

The Daas Zekeinim concludes that apparently, the counting of the family of Gershon was done by the family of Gershon themselves! Moshe Rabbeinu just asked them to give him a number. The family performed a self-census and gave the tally back to Moshe, but Moshe himself was not involved in the counting. Why should that be?

With Abarbanel's answer to his question, we can perhaps understand the teaching of the Daas Zekeinim as well. The Abarbanel says a beautiful thought. Levi had three sons -- Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. Gershon was the eldest son. In Judaism (and in the world in general, for the most part) the first born always receives the preeminent position. He receives a double portion of his father's inheritance. He is the *bechor*. He always has special importance.

However, among the sons of Levi, the family of Kehas had the most significant duties. This was the family that was assigned to carry the *Aron* [Ark] and the other *keylim* ["vessels"] of the Mishkan. Gershon did other things, but the second born received the preeminent assignment, not the first born. As the Abarbanel points out, this was somewhat of a slight to the *Bnei Gershon*. The Abarbanel says that even though the Almighty had His reasons for giving the *Bnei Kehas* the more preeminent role, it is still necessary to take into account the feelings of the first born. He must be compensated with some sort of a "consolation prize". It is necessary to make him feel good, in spite of the fact that he has been slighted. Therefore, Parshas Naso begins with the words "Count also the Children of Gershon..." Gershon gets prime billing at the start of the parsha to make him feel good.

The Abir Yosef adds that this could also explain why the counting was done by the Bnei Gershon themselves rather than "through the hand of Moshe," as was the case with the other families of Levi. This is another attempt to compensate them for the "slight" of having their first-born status bypassed in the distribution of assignments. It is telling them "you have special status, you have special integrity. We will trust you to count your own family members and report back to Moshe without requiring Moshe to go around to your tents and count noses." This too was in order to make them feel a little better.

We see this theme in another place in the Torah as well. When Yaakov Avinu gave his blessings to Yosef's sons, he gave the more preeminent *bracha* to Ephraim, rather than to his older brother Menashe. Yaakov wanted to put his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's head, but they were not standing in that direction. Yaakov could have said, "Ephraim, why don't you move over here and Menashe you move over there." However, Yaakov did not do that. Yaakov crossed his arms to place his hands where he wanted them to be without asking the boys to move. He did that because – despite the fact that he felt it was necessary to "slight" the bechor, asking Menashe to "move over" would have been adding insult to injury. Yaakov was sensitive to Menashe's feelings and even though he did need to "slight" Menashe, he insured that this would be done in the gentlest fashion possible.

There is a lesson here for all of us. I will share with you where I use this lesson.

I have students who are in the stage of life where they are going out on dates in order to look for their destined partner in life, their *shidduch*. Many times, a *bochur* will go out with a girl three, four, five times or sometimes even longer and then he will decide "she is just not for me." So, he will need to "deliver the news." He will need to tell the girl "Thanks, but no thanks." I tell the *bochur* that when

he is in that type of situation (For example when a boy from the yeshiva in Baltimore has been dating a girl from New York and now wants to terminate the relationship...) that he should go into New York, look the girl straight in the face, and tell her as gently as possible, "I do not think this is going any further." This is how a person should end such a relationship. It should not be done over the phone. It should not be done through the *shadchan* [matchmaker]. It should be done like a *mentch* [gentleman].

Now, I know that travelling from Mt. Wilson Lane (the location of the Ner Israel campus) to Ocean Parkway (in Brooklyn) involves at least \$100 in car expenses -- gasoline prices being what they are as well as tolls throughout Delaware, New Jersey, and New York. This is not a cheap trip for a "non-date." However, I tell them that it is worth it. It is worth it because phone calls are not the proper way to break up with a girl. "No"s are painful. When you give somebody a "No", you should try to deliver it in the gentlest way possible.

This is of course a mutual thing. When a girl drops a boy, it is very painful as well. So, do it the right way. I do not need to fire people, because I am not a boss. But I am sure that some in my audience have the need to sometimes fire employees. This is a very unpleasant experience. So, you should try to make it as painless as possible. Again, a "no" or a rejection are painful -- but leaving a person a voice mail or a text message that they are fired, is not the way to go. I am not speaking of a case of gross negligence or fraud or something like that. However, there are many situations where an employer just does not need an employee anymore for no fault of the employee. It is sometimes necessary to "cut down expenses." Tough times occur. You cannot afford the person anymore. Do it right!

This is the lesson of "Count the Children of Gershon, also them..." The Torah places their census in this most prominent position in order to lessen the sting of losing out in terms of having the preeminent assignment among the family of Leviyim.

An Unbelievably Love-ly Vort

The second observation I wish to share is an amazing interpretation. It is so amazing that I did not believe it could be true. My lifelong friend Rabbi David Twersky, (editor of my weekly emails) sent me a *vort* [short insight] this week that his son, Mordechai Twersky, saw in a sefer he came across in the library of the Mir Yeshiva in *Eretz Yisrael*. I wrote my friend back that I did not believe the *vort* he sent me. I simply could not believe that it was authentic.

The *vort* was written in a sefer called Shivtei K-ah from Rav Moshe Dovid Valle [1697-1777]. This individual was a foremost student of the Ramchal, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto [1707-1746]. The Ramchal is the author of the classic *mussar* sefer -- Mesillas Yesharim. He also wrote the Da'as

Tevunos and much more. He was an outstanding Kabbalist. He lived in Padua, Italy.

Here is what he says:

"...So shall you bless the Children of Israel, say to them (*amor lahem*)" ...the priestly blessing. When the Kohanim bless the nation, they precede their blessing with a *birkas hamitzvah* [blessing recited prior to doing a mitzvah] "...*asher kideshanu b'kedushaso shel Aharon, v'tzivanu l'varech es amo yisrael b'Ahavah*" [...who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless His nation Israel, with love]. The text of this blessing itself is a halachic anomaly. The Taz writes in Yoreh Deah [28:2] in connection with the blessing made when "covering the blood" following the slaughter of fowl and non-domesticated animals (...*al kisui dam b'afar* [...to cover blood with dirt]) that normally we do not go into details of halachic ritual in the text of a blessing. The Taz explains there why the mitzvah of *Kisui HaDam* is an exception.

Therefore, it is certainly noteworthy that "with love" is specified in the text of the Birkas *HaKohanim* blessing. Apparently, the *kohanim* are required to give over their blessing with love. This emotional requirement at the time of the blessing reflects a firm requirement on the part of the *Kohanim* in their mitzvah performance. (It is *m'akev* proper execution of the mitzvah.) If there is someone in the audience that the Kohen hates, such that he cannot bless him "with love", then he should not *duchen* (i.e. -- not go up to the platform where the priestly blessing is recited). It must be delivered "with love."

The Shivtei K-ah, the foremost student of the Ramchal says, "...and the Torah, by writing '*amor lahem*' (literally 'say to them') implies with great focus and with complete love. And there is a hint in the *pasuk* that it must be said with love." What is the hint? "For the word *amor* in the language of other nations means 'love.'"

How does one say Love in French? Amour

How does one say Love in Italian? Amore

Rav Moshe Dovid Valle, the Italian disciple of the Ramchal, thus interprets the Hebrew expression '*amor lahem*' [literally 'say to them'] as hinting at the idea of expressing the priestly blessing to the Jewish people with love. He then says, "Do not be surprised at this 'foreign allusion' because we find parallel ideas in the words of our Sages in a number of places." This is not the first case of a Biblical word deriving etymologically from foreign languages. The most famous example is the word *totafos* [Devarim 6:8]. The Talmud [Sanhedrin 4b] writes that we derive the fact that the head *Tefillin* are to contain four Biblical chapters based on exegesis of the word *totafos* since "tot means two in the Catfi language and fos means two in the Afriki language."

Rav Valle explains that the Torah is not suddenly speaking Swahili or Italian in describing in describing *Tefillin* or the laws of the Priestly Blessing. However, the Torah sometimes uses foreign words to convey ideas. The reason for this is that our holy language (i.e. -- Hebrew, *lashon*

haKodesh) is the mother of all languages.

The world thinks that "Latin is the mother language of all tongues." The disciple of the Ramchal says, "Heaven forbid!" *Lashon Kodesh* is the mother of all tongues! The nuances of all other languages are derived from it. There is no word in any other language that is not alluded to in some derivation from the holy tongue.

Thus, according to the Shivtei K-ah, the expression *amor lahem* -- from the French amour and the Italian amore -- is a hint at the source of "bless the Children of Israel with love."

As I mentioned, if I would not have seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it!

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Naso is provided below:

- 059 Sheitel: A Woman's Obligation to Cover Her Hair
- 103 Birchas Kohanim
- 148 Sotah: The Case of the Unfaithful Wife
- 195 Birchas Kohanim: Who Can and Who Can't?
- 241 Yichud and the Housekeeper
- 285 Sa'ar B'isha Ervah
- 331 NasoMust A Kallah Cover Her Hair at the Chasunah?
- 375 Ain Osin Mitzvos Chavilos
- 419 Causing the Erasure of Hashem's Name
- 463 Dee'chui Eitzel Mitzvos
- 507 The Faithful Unfaithful Wife
- 551 Being Motzi a Wife in Kiddush
- 595 Chazonim and Chazanus
- 639 The Unfaithful Wife - Is Ignorance an Excuse?
- 683 Shalom Bayis - How Far Can One Go?
- 727 Singing During Davening - Pro or Con?
- 771 Ashkenazim, Sephardim and Bishul Akum,
- 815 The Laws of Sotah - Still Very Relevant
- 859 Walking Behind a Woman
- 903 Shavuus- Fascinating Halachos

- 947 Birchas Kohanim–Whose Mitzva–The Kohain or Yisroel?
- 990 Cutting Down A Fruit Tree for Home Expansion
- 1034 Ba'alas Teshuva Who Was Not Honest With Her Husband
- 1078 The Elderly Gentleman and the Female Nurse – A Yichud Problem?
- 1121 The Enigma of Shimshon HaGibor
- 1163 Avoiding Yichud: Must the Door be Open or Merely Unlocked.
- 1207 Listening to music – as mutar as you think?
- 1251 Sitting Next to a Woman on an Airplane

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