

Parshas Va'eira

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In this week's Parsha, in the midst of the story of the servitude and subsequent redemption from Mitzrayim, the Torah interjects the genealogy of the shevatim, of the twelve holy tribes (Shemos 6, 14).

The Shlelah Hakadosh notes the difference in which the tribe of Levi is introduced in contrast to the other shevatim. By all of the other shevatim the verse begins with, "B'nei Reuvein...the sons of Reuvein are..."; and proceeds to list the names of the children of Reuvein. However, by Levi, the

3) **Mirari**-va'yimorerues chayeihem-they made their lives bitter.

To express the significance of this act of solidarity, the Torah points out, "V'aile shmos b'nai Levi-and these are the names of the children of Levi". The Torah is calling our attention to the names that Levi chose. Levi could have easily ignored the suffering of the Jews and not share in the anguish of his nation, but he recognized the importance of empathizing with the pain of another Jew.

In Parshas Shemos (2,11), we see a similar idea regarding Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah relates,

individual shouldn't say, I'll go home and eat and drink, and I'll live in tranquility." When others are suffering, it is inappropriate to lead our lives in a normal fashion and ignore the suffering of others. Doing so would be lacking in true, V'ahavta l'raicha kamocho, the obligation to love a fellow Jew as yourself.

It is very easy to read the news from afar and go back to our regular lives. We can read about terrible stabbings in Eretz Yisrael and moments later return to our normal routine.

Are we feeling the fear of a child

"The importance of empathizing with the pain of a fellow Jew..."

Torah begins with an introduction, "V'aile shmos bnai levi- and these are the names of the sons of Levi." Why does the tribe of Levi start with an introduction while the rest of the shevatim have no introduction at all?

The Shelah explains that the Torah is teaching us the importance of feeling the pain of other Jews. Although the tribe of Levi was not subject to enslavement in Mitzrayim, the Leviim didn't turn a blind eye and ignore the severe plight of their brethren. In fact, they gave their children names which would serve as constant reminders of the suffering of the Jewish nation. For example:

1) **Gershon**-Ki geirim hayeisim-because we were strangers in a strange land.

2) **Kehas**- shinaihem kaihos-because they blunted the teeth of the Jews.

"Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens". The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 81, 32) explains that when the Torah says, "Vayaar b'sivlosum-he observed their burdens", it is teaching us that Moshe went out and cried over the suffering of his nation. Only after crying, did Moshe go out and help his fellow Jews with their back-breaking labor.

R' Aharon Kotler zt"l, the founding Rosh Hayeshiva of the Lakewood Yeshiva derives an important lesson from this Medrash. Not only is it important that we help a friend when they're in need, but perhaps even more essential is that we cry with them. Before Moshe Rabbeinu physically helped, he cried. He actually felt and internalized their pain.

The Gemara in Maseches Taanis (11a) says, "When the community is in a situation of suffering, an

while she's walking to school in Yerushalayim? Do we have to look over our backs every time we walk outside?

When a meshulach knocks on our door, how do we react? Do we disgrace him and shoo him away like a mosquito or a fly? Or do we really empathize with him? Do we really try to put ourselves in his shoes?

We need to follow the lead of Shevet Levi and of Moshe Rabbeinu, and in our own small ways, connect, commiserate, and empathize with the suffering of our common family. As Jews, we have an obligation to share in their anguish and feel their pain.

Good Shabbos!