



שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחתם לבית אבתם במספר שמות כל זכר לגלגלתם: מבן עשרים שנה ומעלה כל יצא צבא בישראל תפקדו אתם לצבאתם אתה ואהרן: (א:ב-ג)

**Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' house, by the number of the names, every male according to their head count. From twenty years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the army in Israel, you shall count them according to their armies, you and Aharon. (1:2-3)**

This counting was of 'everyone who goes out to the army'. The 'army' mentioned here is not a 'soldier of war', rather, the real meaning is this: Many people gather together and operate under the same regime or order, doing as instructed by the leader standing over them. When we speak of 'tzavah Hashem' – 'the army of Hashem' – we can say that the Torah is referring to those going out for 'avodas HaKadosh Baruch Hu', and they impose on them the tasks needed for the sake of Hashem Yisbarach, similar to what we find further on (8:24) 'לצבא צבא בעבודת אהל מועד' – 'he shall join the army in the service of the Ohel Moed'.

In light of what was said, we learn that a person is not categorized as an 'oved Hashem' until he is twenty years old, as one is only counted with those going out to the army standing to serve in sanctity when he is twenty. The reason given is that just as the service in 'general' is not done by anyone under twenty years old, so it is with the service in 'particular'. But we know that when a boy reaches thirteen, he is categorized as an adult and is obligated in all the mitzvos, and if this is so, then we must understand the difference between the general service and a particular service. Why is there a distinction between the private *avodah* which is incumbent on the person in regard to him and his Creator, and the communal *avodah* for Hashem Yisbarach that is imposed on him? Why is he obligated for the particular right away, but we do not let him do the general even if he wants to?

The answer to this is that until he reaches the age of twenty, he is not experienced enough, even though he might have the mental capacity, and he knows what he is doing and to Whom he is doing it for, he is still not given the right. He still needs an adult standing over him to show him how to battle the *yetzer* that wants to conquer him. If he chooses a path that is easy on his own, he might be turned away from the right path even if his intent is proper, since he still does not have the experience with dealing with the angel standing before him. But if an adult is standing by his side, he can correct his way and serve his Creator properly. Therefore, it is appropriate that from the age of thirteen he should be trained to go in the path of his parents and teachers before him.

This is not so in *avodah* in general! General *avodah* is imposed on one based on 'levais avosav ulemishpachto' – 'to their fathers' house and their families'. That is, he understands and he can see a new link in the chain of the generations, although we are still in doubt if he is strong enough to go in their ways against the strange winds that the *yetzer* blows his way. The *avodah* that helps the general public, must be imposed on one that they are sure will not make them stumble.

What emerges is that the Torah testifies that as long as the person has not reached the age of twenty, he is not experienced enough, and the testimony is that the young sheep must nullify their views before their parents and trainers. They are not allowed to rely on their own wisdom and weak common sense. Rather, with every situation that presents itself before them, they must go and ask advice from their parents or trainers. They must do what they say without veering right or left. Even if in their minds they think their parents and teachers are mistaken *chalilah*, they must negate their views to those who are older than they are.

Even if they tell them something which to them seems to be left and it is right, he must trust them and do as they say, and then Hashem will make their ways successful.

In truth, this is not an easy task for a boy to negate his view for that of his parents or teachers, and not because of arrogance, but rather, for the reason that they are sure that they are right. Rav Yoel Moshe of Satmar pointed this out jokingly, "That the sons think they are smarter than their fathers is possible to fathom, but that they think they are older than their fathers is too hard to fathom." That is, they think they know more about life than their fathers and they think they have more life experience.

However, they must internalize this understanding for the truth of the matter is that even if it seems to them that they are right, it is only because they are smallminded. If they are aware of this, then it gives them the strength to suppress their view and take the advice of those standing above them.

The proof to our words that during youth the mind of the person is not complete, is that even the Heavenly Court thinks like this. We see in the Gemara (Shabbos 89b) that a person is not punished until the age of twenty. It is for this reason, as long as the person has not reached half his years of understanding, it is not possible for him to know. It is also hard for him to align his views to those smarter than him, since he is smallminded, he thinks he is smarter than everyone else, therefore, even if he goes against the law, it is not possible to punish him. Still, the young man can learn from this that his intellect is not complete, therefore, he must accept proper guidance from his parents and his rabbis.

It is only when he reaches twenty years of age, then his intellect has matured, and even though his intellect is not complete, still, at least he realizes that he has much to learn and he knows to negate his view to those more experienced than he is. The result of this will be that he can be sure that he will straighten his ways according to the path of the true Torah. Do not be embarrassed by this realization as this is the beginning and the main wisdom in that a person realizes that he has more to know, and this will bring him success.

Even after a person is old and he has attained knowledge and understanding, it is incumbent on them to know that even then the wisdom of those older than him is preferred. There is a proof to this as well in the Torah. We see that Yitzchak Avinu made no effort for his *shidduch*. Avraham appointed Eliezer to seek out a match for Yitzchak, even though Yitzchak was already forty years old at that time, and his intellect was mature enough to know what he wanted. Still, he negated his view to the view of his father who thought it better that Eliezer go. We see that after this he brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah and he loved her, and he had no remorse as a result of negating his view to the view of Avraham. In contrast to this, we see how Yaakov Avinu exerted himself for his *shidduch*, and he chose Rachel by himself, and because of this he had much anguish, for Lavan tricked him and gave him Leah in her stead, and he had to work another seven years for Rachel. Even though this was for the best, for he also merited to have Leah and most of the *shevatim* through her, still, there is a sign that whoever heeds the advice of elders does not lose out.