



## SIBLING SENSITIVITY

Dear Parents,

*Erev Shabbos Parshas Naso, 5782*

This week's *Parsha* begins with *Hashem* commanding *Moshe* to take a census of the family of *Gershon*, who along with *Kehas* and *Merari* were the sons of *Levi*. (*Bamidbar* 4:22) The tribe of *Levi* had special tasks to perform in the service of the *Mishkan* and therefore their count was separate from the rest of *Klal Yisrael*.

**"...Gershon was older than Kehas, and ... should have been counted first."**

The specific language that the Torah uses is ...גם הם... *count the sons of Gershon, also them...* The *Midrash* and many *Mefarshim* (commentators) point out the unusual expression of "also them" after *Gershon's* name. They point out that *Gershon* was older than *Kehas*, and presumably *Gershon* should have been counted first. They offer various reasons as to why *Kehas* was counted before *Gershon*.

One could ask – what is the big deal about the order in which they were counted? With the *Klal Yisrael's* census, *Moshe* moved from tent to tent – seemingly in no particular order? What seems to matter is the information being gathered, and in the end, no one would have been left out.

It seems apparent from the focus given to this deviation from following the birth order in the counting process, that the Torah is going out of its way and adding extra words to protect the honor and standing of *Gershon*. It is not a trivial thing to ignore the potentially hurt feelings caused by slighting the honor of an older sibling. *Hashem* concerned himself with preserving the honor of *Gershon*, who were incredibly great people who would seemingly be above the pettiness of focusing on who is older.

**"The Torah is going out of its way ... to protect the honor and standing of Gershon.."** When it comes to protecting another's honor and dignity, we go to great lengths. When it comes to sensitivity to our older children's *kavod*, we need to pay close attention. The *Halacha* states clearly that one must show honor to an older brother (*Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 240:22), even where the younger brother is a greater *Talmid Chacham* (*Rema*). This is something parents need to keep in mind.

So many sibling squabbles and more serious conflicts could be avoided if parents consistently and matter-of-factly gave precedence to the children in simple birth order. If this is done all the time as part of the family routine, many issues would never arise. I would suggest to consistently give *Kiddush* wine out in birth order; consistently give *Hamotzi* bread out in birth order. If you bless your children Friday night, do it in birth order. You might hear protests from the younger ones, but there's no denying the reality of age. (Caution: This may not work with twins!)

The key to peace and harmony at home is respect. By showing consistent regard to the children utilizing an objective standard such as birth order, they will all, at least begrudgingly, appreciate knowing where they stand and understand it is not based on any subjective feeling of the parent. This will give all the children the security and confidence that the world is an understandable and safe place. That security is the foundation of a happy childhood and a mutually respectful relationship and atmosphere in your home.

**"When it comes to sensitivity to our older children's kavod, we need to pay close attention"**

Best wishes for a wonderfully harmonious *Shabbos*,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann