

פרשת במדבר begins in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt with a command from Gd to count the Jewish People in preparation of entering The Land of Israel. The census was to include all males that were of military age, twenty years. Moses was commanded to count tribes with the aid of the tribal elders. A consistent, two verse format records the count for each tribe, stating the name of the tribe and the constraint that the census was limited to count those going to battle on behalf of the Jewish People. The second verse presented the actual numeric count, introducing it with the word פקודיהם, their count. There is one departure from this format, the tribe of Shimon. In the introductory verse to the census for tribe of Shimon, the Torah adds the word פקודיו, his count. Why add this extra word only for the count of Tribe of Shimon?

If we fast forward 38 years to פרשת פנחס, The Torah records another census taken after the sin of the spies and the subsequent death of the generation of the exodus. The second census also served the dual purposes of counting the number of soldiers from each tribe, as well as providing the count that would be used to partition the land. In this census, the Torah groups the members of each tribe by Jacob's grandchildren. A consistent format is used here as well, where the last verse of each tribe's census includes the word לפקודיהם or ופקודיהם. There is one exception: the tribe of Shimon does not include either form of the word, the verse simply says these are the Shimoni families, totaling 22,200. Why is an extra derivation of the word פקד included for Shimon in פרשת במדבר, yet omitted entirely in פרשת פנחס?

I would like to offer the following answer based on ideas developed by the Rav ZT”L in various Shiurim. In the house of Jacob, Shimon and Levi were inseparable. The Torah describes their joint action against the city of Shchem and their hatred of Joseph. They were so linked, that after Joseph separated Shimon from Levi prior to sending his brothers back to Canaan, Levi is subsequently referred to as האחד, the one who remained, separated from his partner. Over time, their relationship with each other and with Joseph changed. Levi, selected to serve in the Temple, and who also, through Miriam, was the ancestor of Jewish royalty, drifted closer to Joseph. He began to understand and appreciate Joseph’s significant role and mission in the unfolding drama that was the formation of the Jewish People. The Rav noted that on the night of the redemption, when everyone was busy gathering gold, silver and precious articles from the Egyptians, Moses was nowhere to be found. Where was he? Moses searched for the casket of Joseph. Why was Moses so involved in this search? After all, Joseph had two sons, Menashe and Efrayim, who were now counted among the tribes of Israel. They should have taken the lead and responsibility to locate and retrieve Joseph’s bier.

Moses and the tribe of Levi had come to appreciate what Joseph did for the Jewish People. Without Joseph laying the foundation for them in Egypt, they never would have survived the exile spiritually intact. Joseph showed them that it was possible to remain committed to Gd while participating in Egyptian society. He cared for them, fed them and due in large part to his dedication and self-sacrifice, the Jewish people blossomed in Egypt and ultimately left as a nation of 600,000 men above the age of 20 years. Moses felt obligated to express **הכרת הטוב**, recognition and thanks, to Joseph, and it was time to fulfill that obligation. Moses himself took responsibility for locating and retrieving Joseph, the highest honor that could be given to Joseph. This demonstrated that the rift between Joseph and Levi was healed. Joshua, the grandson of Joseph, now became his inseparable disciple, in whom Moses entrusted the transmission of the precious Mesorah he received from Gd.

With his rapprochement with Joseph, Levi became estranged from his partner Shimon. The inseparable pair now inexorably drifted apart. There was a tension between them. Shimon associated with an undesirable element while Levi climbed the highest peaks of **קדושה**, sanctity. Levi, as trustee of the Mishkan, separated not only from Shimon, but from the rest of the Jewish Nation. His tribe was not counted with the rest of Israel, but in a separate census ordered by Gd in recognition of their status as the King's legion.

Throughout the various parts of the census, the word **פקד** appears in various forms. The word **פקד** is among the most interesting and nuanced in the Hebrew language. At various times it indicates counting, remembering, charging with responsibility. For example, we find **פקד את שרה** וד', prior to the birth of Isaac Sarah is remembered by Gd. Joseph uses the words **פקד יפקד** when charging Jacob's children with the responsibility of removing his remains from Egypt when they are ultimately redeemed. A form of **פקד** is used in the **פרשיות** of **במדבר** and **פנחס** to refer to those that were counted. We find it used to indicate officers and high officials in the army and in government. Perhaps we can say that a common theme to its various uses is a sense of the importance of the individual referred to. When used in relation to Sarah, the Torah stresses the importance of Sarah to Gd and to the destiny of the Jewish People. Joseph tells the people that they will always be important to Gd, and because of that Gd will keep His promise to ultimately redeem them. Each and every individual member of the Jewish People is important with a great role to play and potential to fulfill. Hence each one is counted separately, like precious gems, and charged with a sacred mission to conquer the land.

I would adapt this idea to answer our question regarding the extra פקודיו in פרשת במדבר and the missing פקודיהם in פרשת פנחס. In פרשת במדבר, the time arrived for the Tribe of Levi and the Tribe of Shimon to separate. Moses charged the Tribe of Shimon to reach their vast potential, but he told them that they now need to stand on their own, without the support of their comrade in arms, the Tribe of Levi. Levi has a new mission. Shimon must assume the same role as the other individual tribes, and participate as an independent equal in the mission to successfully conclude the Exodus. Moses told Shimon, you must be poised, like any other tribe, to realize the imminent fulfillment of Gd's promise of a land flowing in milk and honey. But to do this Shimon, you must stand up and be counted on your own, as a fully participating member of the שבטי י-ה. The Torah adds an extra פקודי in the census for Shimon to charge him with stepping up to that responsibility.

Unfortunately, with the sin of the spies, the dream of imminent entry ultimately became the enduring nightmare of exile that we suffer from to this day. At the end of the 38 year period of death in the desert, when the people were preparing again to finally enter the land, disaster strikes in the form of the Daughters of Moab. The Tribe of Shimon, Levi's former inseparable brother, becomes his greatest enemy. Zimri, the leader of the Tribe of Shimon, challenges Moses with the episode of Kazbi. Moses and the elders are reduced to tears, perhaps because Moses realized that Shimon failed to live up to the charge he was given in that original census. Shimon demonstrated that unlike his other brothers, he was still rebellious and incapable of being a full participant in Jewish destiny.

After the plague and the courageous act of Pinchas, another census is taken. In this one, the realization takes hold that Shimon will now be reliant on Judah and his other brothers. In this census, the word פקודיהם is not associated with Tribe of Shimon, for he abrogated the charge of פקודיו, the responsibility and mission he was charged with 38 years ago in the original census. He lost his right to have that word, פקודיהם, associated with his tribe in the second census. That census would be used not only for military purposes, but ultimately for distribution of the land after the conquest led by Moses's closest disciple, Joshua, the son of Joseph. Shimon indeed paid a heavy price for not fulfilling his potential and mission.

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