



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 18 | Bamidbar | Sichah 2

## Counting the Levites' Infants

---

Translated by Rabbi Shmuel Kesselman

Edited by Rabbi Eliezer Robbins

A note on the translation: Rounded parentheses and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; squiggly parentheses are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in squiggly parentheses are those of the translators or editors, and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: [info@projectlikkuteisichos.org](mailto:info@projectlikkuteisichos.org)**

## 1.

### WHY THE RATIONALE

The Torah says,<sup>1</sup> “Count the sons of Levi... every male from one month of age and up shall you count them.” Rashi quotes the words, “from one month of age and up” and explains, “Once he leaves the category of *nefalim*,<sup>2</sup> he is counted to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge.’”

Understood simply, Rashi emphasizes the following: We do not count the *levi'im* from one month of age because at this age, a child reaches some sort of important milestone (in contrast with the reasoning for the count of *yisra'elim* “from twenty years of age...,”<sup>3</sup> because at this age, a person becomes eligible to go out to war). Rather, until a child reaches the age of one month, we suspect that the child may be non-viable. However, ideally, the *levi'im* are eligible to be counted immediately from birth (as Rashi continues, “This tribe is accustomed to being counted from the womb...”).<sup>4</sup>

But we need to clarify: In his commentary on Torah, Rashi does not generally present reasons for *mitzvos*, and certainly not details of particular *mitzvos*. Thus, whenever Rashi does provide a rationale, we must conclude that he does so only to answer a question that might be raised regarding the *pshat* of a verse. What is the question here that led Rashi to present the rationale for the Torah’s instruction in this verse?

On the other hand, regarding other subjects in Torah, we find a similar law to the one mentioned here, and yet Rashi does **not** provide the reasoning. **Prior** to our *parshah*, on the subject of valuations,<sup>5</sup> the Torah says, “And if from one month... the valuation of a...,” and there Rashi does **not** explain the reason why a child less than a month, in this regard, has no monetary value. Similarly, in the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:15.

<sup>2</sup> {Certain infants who are presumed to be not viable until they prove their viability by living for thirty days.} *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 3, end of sec. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:3.

<sup>4</sup> {I.e., from birth.}

<sup>5</sup> *Vayikra* 27:6. {*Arachin*, lit., values or valuations. If a person pledged the value of an item, animal, or person to Hashem, they had to pay a fixed amount as outlined by the verses, *ibid.*}

context of the instruction,<sup>6</sup> “When an ox or sheep... and from the eighth day on, it is acceptable as an offering...,” Rashi does **not** explain why we must wait until the eighth day. (*Targum Yonasan* does, though, offer a rationale, “to determine that it is not a stillborn.”) As such, why specifically in this verse must Rashi offer a rationale?

## 2.

### QUESTIONS ON RASHI'S REASONING

Even more perplexing: Why does Rashi add “(Once he leaves the category of *nefalim*,) he is counted to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge’”?

- a) Rashi here attempts to explain why we count the members of the tribe of *Levi* from the age of one month. How could this census {of such young children} have been in order to determine who was “to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge’”?

Moreover, later in our *parshah*, regarding the census of the firstborns, the Torah also says,<sup>7</sup> “Count... from one month of age and up...” **In general**, the reasoning behind both of these verses is the same, as Rashi clarifies there: “once he leaves the category of possible *nefalim*.” However, the census of the firstborns was not performed in order to determine who was “to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge,’” and Rashi does **not** give any additional rationale for the census!

- b) What **new insight** does Rashi afford by his remarks? The Torah had already written in the preceding verses<sup>8</sup> that the task of the tribe of *Levi* was to “safeguard his charge... to perform the service of the *Mishkan*”!
- c) If, for whatever reason, Rashi must mention the task of the tribe of *Levi* in his commentary on our verse, why does he deviate from the wording of the

---

<sup>6</sup> *Vayikra* 22:27.

<sup>7</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:40.

<sup>8</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:6,7; 1:50.

earlier verse,<sup>9</sup> mentioned above, and instead quote a verse appearing **later** in Torah, “one who safeguards the holy charge”?<sup>10</sup> Even more surprising, the verse that Rashi quotes from later in the *parshah* is written only about the **sons of Kehas**<sup>11</sup> and **not** about all the *levi'im*?

[Although, in fact, regarding the verse,<sup>12</sup> “The leader of the Levite leaders... {whose task was} the assignment of the guardians of the holy charge,” Rashi explains, “And in regard to what was he the leader? ‘The assignment of the guardians of the holy charge,’ i.e., they were **all** appointed by him.” That is, this verse refers to all the *levi'im*.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, it unclear why Rashi quotes a phrase (from the Torah) that was said primarily regarding the family of Kehas, when he could have quoted **many** similar phrases said about all the *levi'im*.]

- d) On an earlier verse,<sup>14</sup> which also discusses the uniqueness of the census taken of the tribe of Levi, “But you shall not count the tribe of Levi {...among the children of Israel},” **Rashi** offers the rationale that “**the king’s legion** is worthy of being counted by itself.” But here, Rashi diverges from his earlier explanation and writes, “one who safeguards the holy charge,” instead of, “they were counted as the king’s legion”!

### 3.

#### LEVI'IM IN PLACE OF FIRSTBORNS

Seemingly, what compelled Rashi to write, “once he leaves the category of *nefalim*” is as follows: The instruction, “count the sons of *Levi*,” is a continuation of Hashem’s statement:<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> {“Safeguard his charge... to perform the service of the *Mishkan*” (*Bamidbar* 3:6).}

<sup>10</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:28.

<sup>11</sup> {The *kohanim* and *levi'im* were divided by families and thus given specific responsibilities. The family of Kehas, son of Levi, of which Moshe and Aharon were members, was given the most sacred of responsibilities.}

<sup>12</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:32. {The verse mentions Elazar, son of Aaron as the leader.}

<sup>13</sup> {Seemingly, Rashi should have quoted this verse, “the guardians of the holy charge” that was said about all of the *levi'im*, rather than “one who safeguards the holy charge,” that was said about the sons of Kehas!}

<sup>14</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:49.

<sup>15</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:12,13.

Behold! I have taken the *levi'im* from among the children of Israel, in place of every firstborn... and the *levi'im* shall be Mine. For every firstborn is Mine: On the day I struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt.

Meaning, “the *levi'im* shall be Mine” “in place of every firstborn.” This includes **all** firstborns, even those **younger** than “one month of age” (just as the clause, “I struck down every firstborn in the land of Egypt,” in the above-quoted verse refers to **all** firstborns). So the command to “count the sons of Levi,” following the verse “the *levi'im* shall be Mine,” should also include all *levi'im*; they should all become “Mine,” even those younger than one month of age. Therefore, Rashi had to clarify that it really would have been appropriate to have counted the *levi'im* from birth; nonetheless, we must wait until they leave “the category of *nefalim*.”

However, based on the above that the command, “count the sons of Levi” is a continuation of Hashem’s statement, “I have taken the *levi'im*... in place of every firstborn...,” the reason Rashi offers for counting the *levi'im* “from one month of age and up” – on account of a reason (and a virtue) associated with the *levi'im* **themselves** – becomes problematic:

- a) Since the *levi'im* were taken “in place of every firstborn... of the children of Israel” (as mentioned later in our *parshah*),<sup>16</sup> the census of the firstborns (and the redemption of the firstborn by the *levi'im*) had to include only those “from one month of age and up.” Consequently, the *levi'im* (who were “in place of every firstborn”) **naturally** had to be counted only “from one month of age and up.”

As such, why does Rashi maintain that the *levi'im* were counted from “from one month of age and up” because at that age a *levi* “leaves the category of *nefalim*”? Why does Rashi reject the position held by many other commentators (taken from *Bamidbar Rabbah*)<sup>17</sup> that the *levi'im* were counted “from one month of age and up” because they were

---

<sup>16</sup> *Bamidbar* 16:40-51.

<sup>17</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 3, sec. 8 (end).

exchanged for the firstborns who were counted “from one month of age and up”?

[It is true, though, that the firstborns were counted “from one month of age and up” because at that age, a child “leaves the category of *nefalim*” (as **Rashi** explains there, and as mentioned in section 2). But based on the above, this reason does **not** apply to the tribe of Levi.

- b) According to this reasoning, Rashi’s words, “(Once he leaves the category of *nefalim*) he is counted **to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge,’**” pose an even greater difficulty”: Seemingly, the reason why a member of this tribe is counted “once he leaves...” is (**not** only in order “to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge,’” but also) because of the exchange with the firstborns. And (on the contrary), this reason is given explicitly later in our *parshah*!

#### 4.

#### QUESTIONING RASHI’S CONTINUATION

Rashi<sup>18</sup> continues:

Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom, said: This members of this tribe is accustomed to being counted from birth, as it says,<sup>19</sup> “{Yocheved} who was born to Levi in Egypt.” She was born upon entering Egypt, yet she was counted among the seventy souls.<sup>20</sup> For if you count them,<sup>21</sup> you find only seventy minus one, but she completed the count {of seventy}.

Here, too, we need to clarify:

---

<sup>18</sup> *Bamidbar* 3:15.

<sup>19</sup> *Bamidbar* 26:59. {“The name of Amram’s wife was *Yocheved*, daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram, Aaron, Moshe and their sister Miriam.”}

<sup>20</sup> *Bereishis* 46:27, and Rashi, ad loc.

<sup>21</sup> As set forth in *Bereishis* 46:8-27.

a) As mentioned, Rashi does not explain the reasoning behind a passage unless doing so answers a difficulty within *pshuto shel mikrah*. Why, then, does Rashi quote, “This tribe is accustomed to being counted from birth<sup>22</sup>...”?

b) The novice student (of Scripture)<sup>23</sup> does not need to be taught that “this tribe is accustomed...,” for he has already learned this **previously**:<sup>24</sup> “But you shall not count the tribe of Levi... among the children of Israel,” and **Rashi** comments:

The King’s legion is worthy of being counted separately. Alternatively, Hashem foresaw... against those who had been counted from twenty years of age and above....<sup>25</sup> He therefore said, “Let these not be included....”

Both these interpretations imply that just as “the King’s legion” is distinct from the rest of the Jewish nation, so, too, is its census {the census of the *levi'im*} **different** from the Jewish nation’s census.

c) On the other hand, how can Rashi prove anything regarding the count of the *levi'im* from Yocheved? In counting the *levi'im*, Torah counts “every **male**,” in order to “be called, ‘one who safeguards **the holy charge**.’” In contrast, regarding the entry {of Yaacov and his family} into Egypt, the Torah counts “seventy souls,” in order to establish how many people “came to Egypt.”

---

<sup>22</sup> {Lit., “from the womb.” The significance of this idiom is examined later.}

<sup>23</sup> {“*Ben chamesh lemikra*,” in the Hebrew original; meaning, “a five-year-old beginning to study Scripture.” This is a term borrowed from *Pirkei Avos*, which teaches that the appropriate age for a child to begin studying Scripture is at the age of five. Rashi wrote his commentary on *Tanach* to solve problems that a 5-year-old student would encounter in understanding the simple meaning of a verse. Additionally, Rashi never expects the student to know more than the plain meaning of the earlier verses in the Torah.}

<sup>24</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:49. {Rashi, *ibid.*, writes, “Another explanation: Hashem foresaw that a decree was destined to be enacted against those who had been counted from 20 years of age and above, condemning them to die in the desert. He therefore said, “Let these not be included, for they are Mine, since they did not sin by worshipping the Golden Calf.”}

<sup>25</sup> {I.e., he saw that those from 20 years of age and above would die in the desert as punishment for the Sin of the Spies.}

## 5.

### QUESTIONING RASHI'S WORDING

Additionally, there are many noteworthy nuances in Rashi's **wording**:

a) "Counted from the **womb**" — Rashi deviates from the wording used by Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom in the reference source for Rashi's remarks (*Midrash Tanchuma*,<sup>26</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*,<sup>27</sup> and others): "{This tribe was accustomed to being counted} as **children**."

Perhaps Rashi deviates from the wording of the *Midrash* in order to emphasize that the Torah even counts children who have **just** been born (i.e., even younger than one month).

This would then explain why Rashi adds, "as it says, {Yocheved} who was born to Levi in Egypt; as she entered the gateway of Egypt, she gave birth to her" (even though this detail is not mentioned by Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom as quoted in the *Midrash*). Rashi mentions this in order to emphasize that the *levi'im* can be counted immediately after birth.

However, this cannot be the case, for if so, the term "from birth" would have been more appropriate, for this refers to a levite infant who can now be counted {himself}, rather than "from the womb" — {wording that emphasizes} his **mother's** womb.

c) Why does Rashi specifically write "as she entered the **gateway** of Egypt," and not just, "as she entered Egypt"?

d) Why does Rashi bring proof that Yocheved was counted among those who descended to Egypt from her being "counted among the **seventy** souls"? Rashi could have brought proof from an **earlier** verse:<sup>28</sup> "These are the sons of

---

<sup>26</sup> In our *parshah*, 16. *Tanchuma*, Buber ed., sec. 19.

<sup>27</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 3, sec. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Bereishis* 46:15.



Leah... all the people... numbered thirty-three.” As Rashi comments there, “But if you count them individually, you will find only thirty-two.” Rashi should have brought his proof from this verse.

[Although Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom also writes as Rashi does: a) This, too, must be explained; and b) as mentioned many times, Rashi’s practice is not to quote interpretations of our Rabbis unless they relate to *pshuto shel mikra*. Thus, Rashi did not have to quote Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom; he could have relied on the proof from the earlier verse. Moreover, the proof from the earlier verse can also be found in the teachings of our Rabbis.]<sup>29</sup>

e) Why does Rashi choose the *Tanchuma*’s version of this statement, “you find only **seventy minus one**,” and not the (condensed) version of the *Midrash Rabbah*, “that is sixty-nine”?

f) Why does Rashi conclude his interpretation by **repeating**, “but she completed the count,” after he already said, “she was counted among the seventy souls”? Moreover, this addition is **not** found in the *Midrash*!

g) Why does Rashi quote the author of this teaching by name, Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom? As mentioned many times, Rashi only does so if this adds further clarity to his interpretation.

## 6.

### DISPARITIES WITH *PARSHAS PINCHAS*

These difficulties with Rashi’s nuanced wording are amplified by the following: In *parshas Vayigash*, Rashi already mentioned that the Torah counts Yocheved among those who descended to Egypt.

But there:

---

<sup>29</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 13, sec. 20.

- a) Rashi addresses (and quotes the statement of our Rabbis on) the verse, “These are the sons of Leah... all the people... numbered **thirty-three**.”
- b) He writes, “But if you count them individually, you will find only thirty-two,” and **not**, “thirty-three minus one.”
- c) He writes, “Rather, this is Yocheved who was born ‘between the walls’ just as they entered the city.”
- d) He does **not** repeat “but she completed the count” at the end of his remarks.
- e) He does not mention by name the author<sup>30</sup> of the following teaching: “But if you count them individually, you will find only thirty-two.”

This is even more astonishing:

In *parshas Pinchas*, regarding the verse,<sup>31</sup> “who was born to Levi in Egypt,” Rashi also mentions that the Torah counts Yocheved among the count of **seventy** souls. But there, Rashi writes in short, “She gave birth to her as they entered the {gateway in the} walls, and she completed the count of seventy, because in their enumeration you will find only sixty-nine.”

Thus, even if Rashi {here is *parshas Bamidbar*} must bring proof from the phrase, “she was counted among the **seventy**,” he should have written it more succinctly, like **Rashi** does in *parshas Pinchas* (indeed, the wording used there is very similar to that of the *Talmud* in *Bava Basra*):<sup>32</sup> a) “you will find only sixty-nine,” **not**, “seventy minus one”; b) Rashi should not **repeat**, “she was counted among the seventy souls... she completed the count”; c) Rashi should not mention the author by name.<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> “Rabbi Berachya” (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 13, sec. 9).

<sup>31</sup> *Bamidbar* 26:59.

<sup>32</sup> 123a. But there it says, “seventy minus one.”

<sup>33</sup> Rabbi Chama Bar Chanina.

## 7.

### NOTHING TO DO WITH REDEMPTION

The explanation:

As mentioned above (in section three), our verse is subsequent to the verse, “I have taken the *levi'im* from among the children of Israel... and the *levi'im* shall be Mine.” Rashi comments there:

That the Jewish people should hire them for My **service**. For originally the service was performed by the firstborns.... The *levi'im*... were chosen in their stead.

Meaning, Rashi understands that, “I have taken the *levi'im*... in place of every firstborn...” does not mean that the *levi'im* redeem the firstborns (as in fact many other commentators understand).<sup>34</sup> For the instruction regarding the redemption appears much later in the Torah, after the census of the *levi'im*. Rather, this is an independent issue; that is, Hashem chose the *levi'im* “in place of every firstborn,” so that “**the Jewish people should hire** them for My **service**.”

Consequently, Rashi cannot assume that the reason why the *levi'im* were counted “from one month of age and up” was in order for them to redeem the firstborns “from one month of age and up,” for Torah only **introduces** and commands this later.

## 8.

### COUNTING AS PART OF THE AVODAH

Since the census of the *levi'im* appears in the Torah immediately after the verses that discuss the **avodah** of the *levi'im*, Thus, it is reasonable to posit that this census correlates to their **avodah**. This is perplexing! The *levi'im* only

---

<sup>34</sup> *Seforno*; see *Ibn Ezra*, verse 13.

began their *avodah* “from thirty years of age...”;<sup>35</sup> accordingly, their counting also should have only begun at thirty years of age. How is the ***avodah*** of the tribe of Levi relevant to a one-month-old levite?

To address this, Rashi is compelled to add, “he is counted to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge.’” The ***avodah*** of the tribe of Levi relates even to a child from one month of age and up. For from that age and up (although he does not **perform** any form of *avodah*) he is **called** — “to be called ‘one who safeguards the holy charge.’”

## 9.

YOCHAVED COMPLETED THE SEVENTY

However, in light of this explanation, we must clarify:

Indeed, we understand why Torah counts the tribe of Levi **separately**, and we understand why they were counted from one month of age and up: They are the King’s legion, they are distinct from the rest of the tribes. But why, from one month of age and up, are they referred to as “guardians,” a description which indicates an activity in the present, “of the holy charge”?

To address this, Rashi quotes, “Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom said: This tribe is accustomed....” Rashi clarifies immediately that not only does Torah count *Yocheved*, it even includes her in the count of, “**seventy** souls”; moreover, she **completed** the count.

This nuance indicates to even the novice student that the verse emphasizes the number of people, “{the total} of Yaakov’s household who came to Egypt was **seventy**” in order express the idea of perfection of the Jewish people as a complete whole. Yocheved **completed** this number, meaning, she brought about the perfection of the **entire** “household of Yaakov,” i.e., through her, they reached {the state of completion implicit in} the number seventy.

---

<sup>35</sup> *Bamidbar* 4:3.

“This tribe is **accustomed...**,” meaning, right from birth, members of this tribe have the ability to bring about a state of completion for the entire household of Yaakov; thus, the Torah can count them from one of age and up. Moreover, the Torah can already call each member of this tribe, “one who safeguards the holy charge” — a task which affects all the Jewish people (as Rashi writes, “the **Jewish people** should hire them...,” as mentioned above).

[On this basis we can appreciate: a) why Rashi brings proof from “seventy” and not from “thirty-three”; and b) why Rashi repeats, “she **completed** the count.”]

## 10.

### RABBI YEHUDAH BEN RABBI SHALOM AND NAMES

The novice student, or at least a more seasoned student, may still be troubled: If a levite cannot act as “one who safeguards the holy charge” in a practical sense until the age of thirty, why is giving him this title significant? It is just a title!

To address this, Rashi also mentions the sage who authored this teaching by name, “Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom,” whose teaching here is consistent with his opinion that calling something by a particular name is significant.

The *Jerusalem Talmud*<sup>36</sup> asks: Scripture says,<sup>37</sup> “The days that David reigned over Israel were forty years....” But a different verse states,<sup>38</sup> “In Chevron he ruled over Yehudah for seven years and six months, and in Yerushalayim he ruled for thirty three years...,” indicating that he actually ruled for forty years and six months! The *Jerusalem Talmud* suggests numerous answers:

---

<sup>36</sup> *Rosh Hashanah* 1:1.

<sup>37</sup> *Melachim* 1 2:11.

<sup>38</sup> *Shmuel* 2 5:5.

Rabbi Yudan<sup>39</sup> ben Rabbi Shalom said: The verse says,<sup>40</sup> “Yoav<sup>41</sup> and all of Israel stayed there for six months {until he had destroyed all the males in Edom}.” Hashem said to him {David}, “I told you that<sup>42</sup> ‘you shall not provoke them {Edom},’ and now you have decided to provoke them. I swear that these days shall not count for you.”

This informs us that Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom maintains that Scripture not calling David “king” during those six months constituted a punishment in and of itself, even though during that time (according to this opinion) he had the legal status of king.

“The measure of good is always greater....”<sup>43</sup> Thus, referring to each of the *levi'im* as “one who safeguards the holy charge” itself expresses the stature of the *levi'im* and ascribes importance to them.

## 11.

NOT BECAUSE THE CHILD IS NAMED AFTER THE FUTURE

But a difficulty remains [aside from the nuanced wording (mentioned above in section 5): a) “counted from the **womb**”; b) “upon entering Egypt”; c) “seventy minus one”]. Why does Rashi choose to mention specifically the virtue of “one who safeguards the holy charge”?

Additionally, we need to clarify: At the end of the day, how can Torah even give the *levi'im* “from one month of age and up” the title, “one who safeguards the holy charge,” if they practically did **not** guard at that time?

Perhaps we can propose that (also) for this reason, Rashi mentions the author of this teaching by name, Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom, for he

---

<sup>39</sup> {An alternate spelling of “Yehudah” in the *Jerusalem Talmud*.}

<sup>40</sup> *Melachim* 1 11:16.

<sup>41</sup> {Yoav ben Tzruyah was David Hamelech’s nephew, a fierce warrior who served as general of David’s army.}

<sup>42</sup> *Devorim* 2:5.

<sup>43</sup> *Sotah* 11a.

maintains that we can refer to a new-born child by a name that relates to their future actions.

The *Mishnah* in *Nedarim* states:<sup>44</sup>

If a person says, “the property of the offspring of Avraham is forbidden to me,” he is prohibited from deriving benefit from Jews, but permitted to derive benefit from gentiles.

The *Talmud Yerushalmi* asks, “Is Yishmael<sup>45</sup> not included in ‘the offspring of Avraham’?” (The *Talmud* answers that the verse states,) “In Yitzchak {*beYitzchak*} will offspring be **called** yours.”<sup>46</sup> (The *Talmud* inquires further:)

Is Esav not included in “the offspring of Yitzchak”? **Rabbi Yudan bar Shalom says:** The verse says, ‘In Yitzchak,’ implying only part of Yitzchak’s descendants. Rav Huna says: The letter *beis* (in the word “*beYitzchak* {in Yitzchak}”) corresponds numerically to the number two. Thus, the verse refers to Yitchok’s son who would inherit both worlds, this world and the World to Come.

Seemingly, Rabbi Yudan ben Rabbi Shalom’s interpretation, “‘*in Yitzchak*,’ implying *only part* of Yitzchak’s descendants,” is unclear. Esav was also Yitzchak’s descendant, particularly before he took on a depraved lifestyle. (In contrast, regarding Yishmael, the Torah goes on to clarify, “(As for) **the son of the slave-woman**”<sup>47</sup> — and not Avraham’s son).

Furthermore, “The intent of the verse is not to conceal, but to explain.”<sup>48</sup> Where does Scripture indicate that Yaakov was that “part” of Yitzchak’s descendants rather than Eisav? We must therefore conclude that because Esav

---

<sup>44</sup> Ch. 3, *mishnah* 11.

<sup>45</sup> {And his descendants.}

<sup>46</sup> *Bereishis* 21:12.

<sup>47</sup> {*Bereishis* 21:13.}

<sup>48</sup> *Rashi*, *Bereishis* 10:25.

adopted a depraved lifestyle<sup>49</sup> at the age of thirteen,<sup>50</sup> he is already not considered at birth to be Yitzchak's progeny.

“The measure of good is always greater.” Since each levite would, in future, serve as “one who safeguards the holy charge,” we can already give a levite this title from birth.

This solution, however, is insufficient. [It would be unreasonable to suggest that Rashi would **hint** at this lengthy exposition by merely quoting the author of this teaching by name. Moreover:] The *Talmud Bavli* also records this answer, “in Yitzchak,’ implying only part of Yitzchak’s descendants,” and there, this statement is **unattributed**. Meaning, the *Talmud Bavli* (which the *halachah* follows) maintains that this statement was not specifically made by Rabbi Yudan ben Rabbi Shalom; rather, being unattributed, it is unanimously agreed upon.

Furthermore and **more importantly: Rashi** had already quoted this teaching previously,<sup>51</sup> “in Yitzchak,’ implying {only part of Yitzchak’s descendants and} not through all of Yitzchak’s {descendants},” and there, Rashi writes this statement unattributed, and not in the name of Rabbi Yudan ben Rabbi Shalom.

## 12.

### THE GUARDS ENCAMP AROUND

The explanation:

In writing, “one who safeguards the holy charge,” Rashi refers to guarding in the most basic sense. For the *levi'im* protected the *Mishkan*, “so that no stranger should approach it.”<sup>52</sup> As the Torah says, “The *levi'im* should safeguard the watch of the Tabernacle of the Testimony.” This explains (according to

---

<sup>49</sup> Rashi, *Bereishis* 15:15.

<sup>50</sup> Rashi, *Bereishis* 25:27.

<sup>51</sup> Rashi, *Bereishis* 28:15

<sup>52</sup> Rashi, *Bamidbar* 3:6.



*pshat*) why Hashem commanded, “The *levi'im*, shall **encamp** around the Tabernacle of the Testimony.”<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, each of the *levi'im* can be called “one who safeguards the holy charge” right “from one month of age and up.” Since they encamped around the *Mishkan*, they **already served as** “those who safeguard the holy charge,” although they could not yet perform the actual **avodah** of guarding the *Mishkan*.<sup>54</sup>

[In contrast, regarding other *avodos* of the tribe of Levi (based on which they were called “the king’s legion”), it would be unbecoming to refer to someone who does not **actually** perform these *avodos* as “the king’s legion” because of their future *avodah*.]

### 13.

#### YOCHAVED'S INDIVIDUAL VALUE

The novice student of Scripture may yet ask: Counting the *levi'im* from “one month of age and up” indicates a virtue particular to **each member** of the tribe. However, the virtue of a one-month-old as one who “safeguards the holy charge” is not his **own** virtue; he does nothing! He simply depends on his mother, who gave birth to him and takes care of him (for a child needs its mother)<sup>55</sup> in the encampment of the *levi'im*, “around the Tabernacle of Testimony”?

Additionally, we may ask: Just as the *levi'im* guarded the *Mishkan* by **encamping** around the *Mishkan* and thus preventing any stranger — *yisra'elim* — from entering, so, too, the entire Jewish people also guarded the *Mishkan* by encamping around (the *levi'im*, who encamped around) the *Mishkan*, thereby preventing gentiles from entering. What, then, was the unique virtue of the tribe

---

<sup>53</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:53; See *Bamidbar* 8:26 and Rashi’s commentary.

<sup>54</sup> See *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 3, sec. 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Eruvin* 86b.

of Levi, in that they served to “guard the holy charge,” in the merit of which they are counted from one month of age and up?

To address this, Rashi quotes Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shimon’s teaching, “This tribe is accustomed to being counted from the womb...,” for this teaching answers both questions. Members of the tribe of Levi (“this tribe”) are counted “from **the womb**,” meaning, even when a child has just emerged from his mother’s womb, at an age when his virtues are all contingent upon **his mother**, he can already be **counted** individually, as his own independent person.

In order to emphasize that Torah counts Yocheved as part of the seventy souls **before** becoming her own independent person, when she was still had a connection to “her mother’s womb,” Rashi employs nuanced wording: a) “as she **entered the gateway** of Egypt, she gave birth to her”; and b) “you find only seventy minus one.”

The explanation is as follows:

We cannot consider Yocheved to count as her own **independent** person, after she was born, among the “children of Israel **who descended** to Egypt,” for she was only born “as she **entered** the gateway of Egypt.” However, if we consider her as she was “from the womb,” then, contingent on **her mother**, she would have been considered among those “who descended to Egypt,” since she was already in her mother’s womb **before** she entered Egypt.

This explains the nuanced wording, “as she entered the **gateway** of Egypt, she gave birth to her.” If she had been born earlier, she would have already been her own independent person, just like all the others who were included in the count of seventy people (and thus, being “counted from the **womb**” would not be relevant to her). If she had been born later, we would not be able to count her as part of those “who descended to Egypt,” for as long as she remained in her mother’s womb, she could not have been considered her own independent person; rather, she would have been considered to be “a limb of her mother.” Since, however, she was born “as she entered the **gateway** of Egypt” — and the

function of a gateway is to connect that which is **outside** a city to that which is inside the city — her being in her mother’s womb **before** they entered can be connected to her birth, “as she entered the gateway of Egypt.”

This also explains the nuanced wording, “you find only seventy minus one.” Even before Yocheved’s birth, they numbered seventy people, for Yocheved was already completely developed in her mother’s womb. However, they were described as “seventy **minus** one”: There were seventy, but they **lacked (practically)** one. “But she **completed** the count”; by her birth, the “seventy (who were) **missing** one” reached a state of **completion**, and they became seventy that were *not* lacking — they were complete.

## 14.

### SHLEIMUS MEANS COMPLETION

From the ‘wine of Torah’<sup>56</sup> in Rashi’s commentary:

Scripture says,<sup>57</sup> “I {represent} the loyal, faithful people {*shelumei*} of Israel.” *Chassidus*<sup>58</sup> teaches (based on the *Zohar*)<sup>59</sup> that this verse refers to the *sefirah*<sup>60</sup> of *malchus*,<sup>61</sup> “which completes {*shemashlemes*} each of the other *sefiros*.” The explanation is: (Not only does *malchus* complete the **number** of ten *sefiros*, for this is not a unique virtue of *malchus*; every *sefirah* completes the number of ten *sefiros*. Rather,) in addition to *malchus* being one of the ten *sefiros*, *malchus* also brings **completeness** to all of the other *sefiros*.

---

<sup>56</sup> {The deeper parts of Torah.}

<sup>57</sup> *Shmuel* 2:20:19. {Sheva ben Bichri committed treason against King Dovid. Dovid sent Yoav to the city of Avel where Sheva hid, to kill him. Yoav and his men besieged the city. A wise woman held a conversation with Yoav and convinced him to spare the city as the members would kill Sheva and throw his head over the wall. This verse is her opening words to Yoav.}

<sup>58</sup> *Biurei HaZohar* 142c; *Biurei HaZohar of the Tzemach Tzedek*, p. 441; *Or HaTorah* on this *parshah*.

<sup>59</sup> Vol. 3, 180b.

<sup>60</sup> {*Sefiros* are divine emanations. There are ten *sefiros*, which are various phases in the manifestation of Divinity.}

<sup>61</sup> {*Malchus*, lit. kingship, the last of the ten *sefiros*.}

On this basis we can appreciate the statement of our Rabbis<sup>62</sup> on this verse: “I {represent} the loyal, faithful people of Israel — this refers to Serach the daughter of Asher, who said, “I **completed** {*shehishlamti*} the count of the Jewish people in Egypt.” Meaning, *hishlamti* is etymologically related to *completion* {*shleimus*}. [Particularly based on the explanation in *Or HaTorah*.<sup>63</sup> “We can posit that Serach the daughter of Asher is *malchus*.”]

We can apply the same idea to Rashi’s wording, that Yocheved “**completed** {*hishlimah*} the count,” i.e., she brought completion to (the count of) all the Jewish people.

## 15.

### TAKING FROM HIGHER TO GIVE LOWER

The reason why *malchus* brings completion to all the other *sefiros* is that *malchus* draws G-dly revelation into the worlds of *beriah*, *yetzirah*, and *asiyah*,<sup>64</sup> and this was “the primary intention of the Emanator.”<sup>65</sup> However, since *malchus* invests itself into the worlds of *beriah*, *yetzira* and *asiyah*, it is unable — based on its own power — to bring G-dly revelation to these worlds, for “a prisoner cannot free himself from prison.”<sup>66</sup> Rather, *malchus* is given this ability because the light of the other *sefiros*, which are beyond (being invested in the worlds, as is) the *sefirah* of *malchus*, illuminates *malchus*.

This is the deeper reason why Yocheved completed the number by being born, “as she entered the gateway of Egypt.” Bringing about **completion** in the (number of the) Jewish people was accomplished specifically by her being born “as she **entered...**” (similar to the descent of *malchus* into *beriah*, *yetzirah* and

---

<sup>62</sup> *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 94, sec. 9; *Koheles Rabbah*, ch. 9, sec. 18 (2); *Midrash Shmuel*, ch. 32; *Psikta de’Rav Kahana* (Buber ed.), *parshas Beshalach*.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> {*Atzilus* is the highest and most exalted of the four spiritual ‘worlds’ emanated by Hashem. When we refer to the ten *sefiros* simply, we refer to those of *atzilus*, although in truth each world is composed of ten *sefiros*. *Malchus d’Atzilus* also serves as a bridge between the conclusion of the sublime world of *Atzilus* and the successive three lower worlds. Following *atzilus* are the worlds of *beriah*, *yetzira* and *asiyah*, each reaching further from the revealed experience of Hashem.}

<sup>65</sup> *Or Hatorah*, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Berachos* 5b.

*asiyah*). On the other hand, her mother's entire pregnancy took place **before** they entered Egypt [and specifically for this reason she was counted as part of the total, as mentioned above in section 13, regarding the nuanced wording, "as she entered **the gateway** of Egypt"]. For the ability to descend and bring **redemption** in Egypt [as it says,<sup>67</sup> "they caused the boys to **live**,"] was drawn forth from a place "outside" (and beyond) Egypt {*Mitzrayim*} (i.e., a place beyond boundaries and limitations {*meitzarim*}).<sup>68</sup>

This is also alluded to in the name of the author of this teaching, Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom: "Yehudah" {son of Yaakov, was given this name for at his birth, when his mother Leah said} — "This time let me acknowledge {*odeh*},"<sup>69</sup> connoting submission, *malchus*. "Shalom" refers to Torah (which "was given to bring peace to the world"),<sup>70</sup> i.e., the *sefirah* of *tiferes*.<sup>71</sup> Thus, Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Shalom represents the fusion of *malchus* and *tiferes*, i.e., *kabalos ol*<sup>72</sup> and Torah.

Furthermore, within Torah itself, this represents the fusion of the revealed parts of Torah, *malchus*, with the inner dimension of Torah, *tiferes*,<sup>73</sup> "which contains no questions... and no disputes."<sup>74</sup>

This fusion brings the master, king Moshiach, may it be soon.

-Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Bamidbar*, 5729 (1969) and 5731 (1971)

---

<sup>67</sup> *Shemos* 1:17. See Rashi there 21:4,5.

<sup>68</sup> {For the word Egypt in Hebrew, *Mitzrayim*, is etymologically related to the word *meitzarim*, meaning boundaries and limitations.}

<sup>69</sup> {*Bereishis* 29:35.}

<sup>70</sup> *Mishneh Torah*, conclusion of "*Hilchos Chanukah*"; *Gittin* 59b; *Rashi's* commentary on *Berachos* 8a, s.v. "*padah*."

<sup>71</sup> {The third of the ten *sefiros*, lit., "beauty" or "splendor."}

<sup>72</sup> {*Kabalos ol*, lit., "acceptance of the yoke," refers to the commitment to follow G-d's commands under all circumstances.}

<sup>73</sup> See further detail, *Kuntres Etz Hachayim* pg. 27 and on, and pg. 39 and on.

<sup>74</sup> *Raya Meheimna*, "*Parshas Naso*," p. 124b. Explained at length in *Tanya*, "*Iggeres Hakodesh*," epistle 26. {The writings of the inner dimension of Torah, being pure unfiltered G-dly energy, contain no questions, debates, or disputes, represented by *tiferes*, beauty and purity.}