



**“Safety First!”**

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*Rav of The Bridge Lane Beis Hamedrash*

**When I was young the mantra we were taught about road safety was “safety first”. “Look right, look left, look right again!” was another saying which stood us in good stead. Those one-liners are still relevant today. Observing our current road safety habits one cannot fail to wonder how it is that we manage to negotiate our way across major highways safely. We are all witnesses to the commonplace scenario of our brethren weaving their way between the cars and buses at strategic points on Golders Green Road.**

Then there are the ball games blithely played on the side roads, the lads scattering like cats when cars race past with similar carefree abandon.

Meanwhile, groups of primary school boys or girls, riding either conventional or up market bicycles or scooters, career round corners at full tilt. How many of them are wearing protective headgear? Regrettably in the extreme, hardly any. Where are the parents? Aren't they aware of the dangers that only need a second or two of inaction to bring grief, *chas v'shalom*? Have they no power or some degree of influence over their young charges? Or is it that they just don't care enough? “The kids will be alright, won't they?” Then again they might come up with the defensive tactic of “You know you're paranoid about these things. How will my child learn to spread his wings unless he's given a smidgeon's worth of freedom?”

Have I got it totally wrong? Are my views about parental leadership and responsibility relics of a bygone era when a father was “patriarchal” and when a mother was “matriarchal”?

Anyway, what does all that have to do with *Parshas Bamidbar*?

This *Sedra* highlights the centrality of the family unit in reckoning the numbers of the Bnei Yisrael. “*L'mishpechosam l'vais avosam*”. The census seems to have incorporated the family unit as an essential feature.

Rashi, however, instructs us that “*l'mishpechosam*” actually refers to the *shevatim*, the tribes, and not to family units. As the *Sifsei Chachamim* explains, only the tribes are actually numbered in the Torah but not individual families.

That begs the question: why were families mentioned in the first instance?

Perhaps one could close in on an answer by attempting to define the meaning of *Klal Yisrael* and its smaller manifestation, namely the *Shevatim*. The *Klal*, be it the entirety of *Am Yisrael* or the *Shevet*, is not so much comprised of a large body of individuals as it is formed by family units.

The *Shevet* is essentially a large family, at the head of which stands the *Nosi*, a descendant of one of the sons of *Yaacov Avinu*. He has imbibed the tone and character of the *Shevet* from his predecessors and passes it on to his “children”, the members of the *Shevet*. The *Shevet-Family* is a proud and distinct entity. It flies its own *degel*, or flag, to which the faithful rally.

Thus, the strength of the structure of the nation lies, first and foremost, in the family. If the family unit breaks down, that heralds the decline and fall of the *Klal*, *chailah*.

This brings me to a painful subject. Protection of one's children is not restricted to training them in road safety. All sorts of “maltreatment” of children are happening all the time. From lack of parenting, through to anger and violence, and on to worse...

What's the advice? Never allow children to wander around Shul premises unsupervised. Never leave them alone with strangers or even home visitors while you take a Shabbos afternoon nap. And remember to examine your own *hanhagah* towards your children, and those of older siblings towards younger ones. Let's be “*emesdik*” about this matter. Tragically, the majority of instances of “maltreatment” are perpetrated by family members, be it within the “nuclear” family or involving uncles or cousins. No apologies for the frankness.

The “*Shema Koli*” confidential helpline was founded in order to give a voice to sufferers of all types of maltreatment. Callers remain anonymous and can offload their anxieties in confidence. “*Shema Koli*” is there for the *tzibbur*. Users are reassured by an empathetic listening ear and words of *chizuk*. All *shaaylos* are referred to a team of *Talmidei Chachamim* who have great experience in the field.

Whilst it is true that some victims have it within themselves to shrug off their awful experiences, a far greater number try to bury the trauma, but find themselves unable to “move forward”. They go into a shell and drag themselves through a living *Gehinnom*. They lose the ability to function normally and if they marry, find their new situation almost unbearable. The results are sometimes an unmitigated disaster.

Let's resolve to adhere to true Torah values and behaviour, creating a safe environment for our children.

Remember - “Safety first!”

**HELPLINE**  
**020 3670 1818**  
www.shemakolihelpline.org  
info@shemakolihelpline.org

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**HELPLINE HOURS**  
Sunday 6.00-8.30pm  
Monday 3.00-5.30pm  
Tuesday 11.00am-1.30pm  
Thursday 11.00am-1.30pm

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