

Parsha Ponders

Bamidbar/Shavuot | June 7, 2024 | 1 Sivan 5784

*Hashem's students; Hashem's children*¹

אלה תולדות אהרן ומשה ביום דבר יקוק את משה בהר סיני

These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe on the day that Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai²

Rashi notes³ that our verse purports to introduce the offspring of Aharon and Moshe, but only mentions the offspring of Aharon. We learn from here that since Moshe taught Aharon's children Torah, they are considered by the Torah to be his children as well. Anyone who teaches another Torah, it's as if they birthed them. Now, the verse ends by mentioning **the day** that Hashem spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai. If we connect this idea to the end of the verse, then it means they became considered like Moshe's children on the day that Hashem first spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai.

However, this requires investigation. We don't have any indication that on the day that Hashem started speaking to Moshe, he had already taught Aharon's children. Why then would they be considered his children, already on that day? Even if we suppose he did teach them, the verse is stressing the reason they were considered his children was because it was the day that Hashem started speaking to Moshe. It doesn't mention because he started teaching them that day.

Our Sages teach us⁴ that the prophet Shmuel was quite an intelligent child. Already at the age of two⁵, he ruled on a matter of Jewish law. His teacher Eli, the Kohen Gadol, was present at the time. This was considered a violation of the principle of not ruling in front of one's teacher. However, Tosafos ask⁶ that this was the day that he first came to Eli. He hadn't yet learned from him. Why then was this considered ruling in front of one's teacher?

Tosafos answer that nevertheless, Eli was the greatest scholar of the generation, and Shmuel came before him to learn. Some understand⁷ this to be really two answers. It's enough for Eli to be the greatest of the generation for this principle to apply, despite not having yet learned from him. Or, since Shmuel came before Eli to learn from him, he was already considered his teacher. This is despite not yet having learned anything from him.

Now we can understand the children of Aharon. The day that Moshe went to Mount Sinai to accept the Torah, the children of Aharon were already designated to receive it directly from Moshe. Therefore, from that day on they were considered his students, and thus his children.

¹ Based on MiShulchan Rav Eliyahu Baruch to Numbers 3:1

² Numbers *loc. cit.*

³ *Ad. loc.*

⁴ Berachos 31b

⁵ Maharsha *ad. loc.*; Moshav Zekeinim to Genesis 38:7. Note that the Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe *parshas Nitzavim Drush L'Chaf Zayin Elul 5597 *s.v.* ויגמל quotes the Maharsha as saying he was **seven** years old. This is seemingly a typo. The correct quotation is in Derashos Chasam Sofer II p. 369 col. 1. In Derashos Chasam Sofer Hashalem *ad. loc.* note 1 they write that the *derasha* in Toras Moshe was clearly written by a student, based on an oral tradition*

⁶ Berachos *loc. cit.*

⁷ Terumas HaDeshen 1:138, cited by Gilyon HaShas *ad. loc.* Tosafos Rabbeinu Peretz *ad. loc.* also implies its two answers. This is not like the Maharik § 169, who understands both reasons together are necessary

Before the Torah was given, the Jews famously declared, “We will do and we will listen”⁸. Since they preceded doing to listening, showing their unconditional devotion to Hashem, our Sages say⁹ that they were called the firstborn children of Hashem¹⁰. According to the above principle, it sounds like the reason they were considered Hashem’s children was because Hashem had taught them Torah. But this was before they were taught the Torah! Based on what we already said, there’s no contradiction. Since they came before Hashem to receive the Torah, they were already considered His students, and thus His children¹¹.

Now, Rashi comments¹² that they were called Hashem’s firstborn because it was known before Him that they would eventually say, “We will do and we will listen”. Rashi was bothered that the verse which calls the Jews Hashem’s firstborn was said while the Jews were still slaves in Egypt. Whereas, they said, “We will do and we will listen” at Mount Sinai. To this, Rashi explains that it was known before Hashem that they would say this, even before the Exodus. As already explained, when a student comes before the teacher, they are already considered their child. Since Hashem knew they would stand before Him at Mount Sinai, even in Egypt they were considered His students, and thus His children.

We can say further that the whole purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was so the Jews could serve Hashem on Mount Sinai¹³. It comes out then that the Exodus was on the condition to accept the Torah. This is similar to what Tosafos wrote, that once a person goes to learn Torah, they are already considered a student. So too, the Jews were called Hashem’s children immediately when they left Egypt¹⁴.

Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach

⁸ Exodus 24:7

⁹ Shabbos 89b

¹⁰ Exodus 4:22

¹¹ See Sha’arei Teshuva 2:10

¹² Shabbos *loc. cit.*

¹³ Exodus 3:12

¹⁴ Although, Hashem called them His firstborn even before Moshe went to Egypt to free them