



PARSHAS BAMIDBAR 5777

The gemara in Megillah instructs us to read Parshas Bechukosai before Shevuos. Why is our minhag to interrupt the tochocho with the reading of Parshas Bamidbor right before Shevuos?

Two answers are given.

One is to have a buffer between the harsh punishments of the tochocho and kabbolas HaTorah to avoid a feeling of despair upon entering Shevuos. The other reason says the message of Parshas Bamidbor is quite relevant for kabbolas HaTorah in a positive sense. The midrash tells us that the day Klal Yisroel received their degolim was a day of simchoh as great as kabbolas haTorah. This has to be understood. What is so special about degolim?

Later in the parsha we have the census of the Bnei Levi and each family is given a specific task in dealing with the Mishkon. Each job was restricted to those people and supervisors were enlisted to make sure no-one's job is switched.

The midrash says that when the sons of Yaakov carried Yaakov's bier from Egypt to Cana'an, they carried it in a specific formation -- with each son taking up a particular position around the aron. It would be the same formation as the Shevatim would take when being camped around the Mishkon in the Wilderness. The route they took to bring Yaakov from Egypt to Cana'an was repeated by Klal Yisroel as they went to Eretz Yisroel from Egypt.

There seems to be something very special about this formation of the Shevotim around the Mishkon.

Hashem gave us a Torah—a tremendous Torah with many nuances and pathways that are available for fulfilling the Torah. Those different paths of serving HaShem represent different types of people and different approaches to spirituality because the Torah is all-encompassing. It is not limited to just one type of personality or temperament. The idea of the different degolim is that each shevet was given his unique path in avodas Hashem.

The Ari hakadosh went further. He says that each Shevet has their own unique nusach hatefillah because each shevet represented a different path in serving Hashem.

So when we say the 12 Shevotim surrounded Yaakov Ovinu in different positions, it is symbolic of the fact that each son of Yaakov has his own unique personal qualities and personality. This is why the brochos that Yaakov gave them reflected the differences in each one's personality, and that Moshe Rabbeinu's brochos traced how each of Yaakov's brochos to their ancestors developed and expressed itself through their descendants to give them guidance for the future.

Having such guidance which integrates the unique aspects of one's personality into their avodas Hashem is a great source of enlightenment and gives one tremendous simchoh. People are often confused and wondering what their proper derech in avodas Hashem should be. The symbol on their degel reflected their path, and when the shevotim received it they felt they were now able to identify with confidence what the proper approach was for them. That is a cause for rejoicing like kabbolas haTorah

because now they have the tools with which to successfully fulfill the Torah according to their unique potential.

The shevotim camped around the Mishkon—all being the same distance from the Mishkon. What does this symbolize? The gemara at the end of Taanis says that in the future Hashem will make a circle of all the tzaddikim with Hashem in the middle. The tzaddikim will say the posuk—"Zeh Hashem Kivinu Lo". The Ba'alei Hadrash comment—why is a circle and not a square or any other shape? In a circle, every point is equidistant to the center. Very often, people want to tout their unique path as being superior to all the others. But in the future Hashem will reveal that everyone is the same distance from Hashem and no-one path is closer.

But the encampment around the Mishkon had an additional feature. Though all the shevotim were the same distance all around, there was an inner circle of Shevet Levi and Moshe Rabbeinu. This aspect of the encampment would seem to preclude any other shevet from entering this inner circle. But the Rambam tells us that while each shevet has his own path, individual members of each shevet can decide to join Shevet Levi.

Each shevet as a whole is supposed to be fulfilled and content with its unique path of serving HaShem and not seek to exchange it for another. Each shevet's path plays an important role in the overall avodas Hashem in Klal Yisroel. Zevulun's activity of engaging in business was a partnership approach to avodas Hashem which was to facilitate the Torah learning of Shevet Yissochor. It wasn't as if he was in business for himself and then as an afterthought decided to support Yissochor with the surplus. It was the contract he made with Yissochor going in to Eretz Yisroel from the beginning. It was a 50-50 partnership with each getting an equal share of both the spiritual and the material wealth produced by both. That is how Klal Yisroel as a whole needs to function.

But for individuals, the Rambam says each person can pick himself up from his shevet's path and merge with the mission of Shevet Levi. The Rambam asks: why did Shevet Levi not get a portion of land in Eretz Yisroel or a share in any spoils of war? It was in order to free them of all worldly preoccupations because they have been set aside by Hashem to do the avodah in the Beis Hamikdash and teach Torah to Klal Yisroel. They don't go out to war and do not develop themselves economically. They are Hashem's portion and He takes care of them.

Additionally, this path is not limited to Shevet Levi. Anyone in the world can join if they attain the requisite inspiration and insight. These are two different aspects.

One is to have a penetrating insight into the world to see through the falsehood of all the meaningless distractions that people make for themselves. He understands the purpose of human beings in this world is to make a special bond with Hashem. He realizes that this is what makes life valuable and gives life meaning. If I'm essentially a body like any other body, then on a fundamental level I'm no different than the cats and the dogs on the street. What makes me different is the neshomo that Hashem breathed into me - the tzelem Elokim.

When you stop and think what makes us unique as human beings, it is that tzelem Elokim—the ability to make intelligent choices, the ability to speak, and the unbelievable powers that human beings have elevates them far above the animal kingdom. That tzelem Elokim is also what enables me to connect to the Creator of the Universe and enables me to become a part of a mamleches kohanim ve'goy kodosh. I'm not just a body looking to indulge and satisfy my physical urges.

But it is not just a dry, detached intellectual understanding. This insight into the sublime nature and purpose of a human being has to inspire you, it has to excite you and animate you. The possibility that I can connect to Hashem through limud haTorah is a thrilling thing to contemplate. It brings a person to separate himself from the preoccupation of economic life and stand and serve before Hashem.

The Shulchan Aruch begins with the ideal of Shivisi Hashem Linegdi Tomid. To have Hashem in the forefront of your mind in everything you do throughout the day. This is the natural state-of-mind of every member of Shevet Levi. He is to serve Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash and all the forms of avodah she'bilev. And then there is something else. There is the element of “knowing Hashem”. What is this?

The Nefesh Hachayim and the Ba'al Hatanya as the question: If the greatest way of connecting to Hashem is through limud haTorah, and it doesn't matter which aspect of Torah you learn, then how is one expected to connect to Hashem when learning Bava Basra? Much of Bava Basra involves understanding all the aspects of migo—that if I was a swindler I could make this false claim and be believed, so believe me when I make a different claim. So is the highest form of avodas Hashem include getting into the mind of a swindler to appreciate how one can lie and win a claim?

They answer that Torah is a translated form of daas Elokim. It is really something that is beyond human grasp but translated in to this-worldly terms. When I assess that certain conditions in the world produce a certain halacha and my mind comprehends that system of cause and effect, it means I connected my mind to daas Elokim and I orient my mind to think in the pattern of the daas Elokim.

The posuk in Mishlei says if you search and investigate the ideas of Torah like one searches for gold and silver, then you reach daas Elokim. The Tanna DeBei Eliyahu says this is referring to halacha. That means if I can figure out what the halacha is in this situation and that situation—in any area of Torah and any area of life, I align my thought process with daas Elokim and I connect my mind to daas Elokim.

But then the Rambam throws in another criterion. A person has to decide if he is going to be a holech yoshor. You can't be a member of Shevet Levi and join that inner circle of extra connection to Hashem unless there is also yashrus.

Yashrus means you think straight and you act straight, there is no twisting, no spinning. Yashrus is a natural middoh for every human being. The Rambam paraphrases a posuk in Koheles to back this up. HaShem made the human being straight and all non-straight activity comes from the human being himself. But it is difficult to get back to that original state when the whole world is running around pursuing all the calculations that they created for themselves. But you can't become kodesh kodoshim without all these elements together. Understanding what the purpose of a human being is, connecting to Hashem through every aspect of Torah and mitzvos, being motivated by that understanding and excited by it. And then you have to say I can't involve myself with all the deception and self-delusion that goes on in the world, I'm going back to being a holech yoshor the way I was created. I can't belong to a twisted world.

Then the Rambam says, he becomes kodesh kodoshim and he will get what he needs from Hashem and be zoche to eternity.

The Rambam is saying we have this circle of the 12 Shevotim surrounding the Mishkon and the Schechinoh. Each one is equidistant from Hashem in the center. Each has his own unique path of serving HaShem which is valid and symbolized by his degel. But then there is one shevet which is closer in. That is Shevet Levi—but it isn't exclusive. There is a difference between Shevet Levi and the other shevotim. Individuals cannot decide to switch their path of service of HaShem to that of any another

shevet—except for that of Shevet Levi. Everyone can switch over to join them. Anyone can get to that level of deeper connection, but there is a price. The price is leaving the cheshbonos of the world behind and getting inspired and understanding deeply enough to have Hashem in front of you at all times.

It is a very democratic system—everyone has an equal opportunity to move into the inner circle if they so choose.

The Rambam in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah writes that the wisdom of the Torah is unique among all other forms of wisdom. Other forms of wisdom aren't always accessible to all minds. Some disciplines are too difficult for many people to grasp. But because Hashem wanted the highest levels of avodas Hashem to be accessible to all Jews, the Torah is knowable to all—everyone can connect to Hashem through limud haTorah at his own level of comprehension.

That is the other reason the system is so democratic. Anyone can join Shevet Levi and anyone can connect to Hashem on the highest level through limud HaTorah through whatever he understands.

Some people nowadays get upset that there are so many people devoted to full time learning and feel they should be doing other things with their time. But the Rambam says there is no such thing. There is no such thing as a mind that isn't cut out for learning. Hashem made your mind and He made the Torah accessible to everyone's mind on some level.

The Torah is a very democratic system—it is available to everyone to get as close as he wants. This is why we read Parshas Bamidbor before Shevuos.

Twelve shevotim accepted the Torah one way—all equidistant from the center. But one shevet accepted the Torah on a different level. They were on the inside of the circle. They were given special privileges and rights and were promised by Hashem that He will take care of them. But these privileges came with some serious restrictions regarding their standard of living. But if you work at it and you make do with the basics, it happens. It is all part of kabbolas haTorah.

Shevuos is a very unique Yom Tom—much different than Pesach. On Pesach, Seder night, I have to psychologically think I'm leaving Egypt. On Shevuos, I don't have to imagine that I'm on the bottom of Har Sinai—but in reality, I am accepting the Torah anew every year. I am accepting upon myself each of the Asseres Hadibros upon myself. And I can accept it on many different levels. I can accept it while remaining on the periphery of the circle, or I can accept it as a part of the inner circle. It depends on what you want to get out of life.

The Rambam says if you want to move into the inner circle, the first step is to have a deep understanding of what the purpose of a human being is and what it is that Hashem created with a tzelem Elokim. He took a separate people whom He made into His own Am Seguloh to be a mamleches kohanim. Stop and think about what that means and be inspired and thrilled by that infinite potential of closeness to Hashem.

It is an entire avodah, not a simple process, but the opportunity to become part of Shevet Levi is open for everyone.

Im Yirtzah Hashem, we should be able to think through the entire process of kabbolas haTorah and be zoche to have a proper kabboloh and rise to our rightful level.