

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

תש"פ

This week is parshas Bamidbar—it is the parsha always read before kabbolas haTorah. But let us first look at the parsha on its own. It is all about counting Klal Yisroel and it is puzzling. What is the necessity? It has been only a year since the half shekel for the adonim was collected for the mishkon and Klal Yisroel were counted—why count them again so soon afterward?

The Ramban quotes the midrash which raises a different problem. When you look at the numbers of both tallies, there is no difference. Exactly the same! How can that be? Does it make sense that after an entire year, the exact number of people who turned 20 exactly matched the number of people who died?

Another striking feature about this counting of Klal Yisroel is that the term tzeva'ah is used repeatedly when referring to the men over twenty. Is the ability to enlist in an army the only point of reference for men who have reached the age of 20 in Jewish society?

The Netziv explained that at this stage, Klal Yisroel are ready to move on with their journey to Eretz Yisroel. They have lived through a number of stages until now. They had kabbolas haTorah, they had the eigel hazahav, and then building the mishkon. Now Klal Yisroel had to get ready to move on to the next stage of their journey—going through the midbar on the way to conquer Eretz Yisroel. It is a daunting task: They have to travel with an entire population through a very harsh desert with no natural resources. They needed a very high level of hashroas haShechinoh to be able to survive. For this level of hashroas haShechinoh, they need a certain number of people who were absolutely committed to being Hashem's army.

Why this number and no fewer? Don't we find that there can be hashroas haShechinoh with much less people?

The answer is that if all Klal Yisroel wanted from leaving Egypt was to be a nation that was free from Egyptian slavery and to conquer some territory to settle their people, they wouldn't deserve any special nissim and protection and guidance from Hashem to get through the midbar. If we are dedicated to being Hashem's people—to learn His Torah, perform His mitzvos, and follow His instructions as our King leading us to the land He is giving us, then we are deserving of that Divine intervention and protection. Klal Yisroel in the midbar need to function as an army camp—where Hashem is the Commander leading His legions to conquest. It acts with the structure of a military camp.

At the counting of the adonim, it was established how many people are needed to make up the ranks of Hashem's military camp. When one person died, he had to be replaced to maintain the exact military formation that was necessary for hashroas haShechinoh.

The Netziv says that this replacement process wasn't automatic! It is too fantastic to say that just as people became 20, that exact amount of people died. It makes no sense. No—not every male over 20 was counted in this tally. Any person who was part of the original numbers who died created a vacancy in Hashem's army. Only those who were committed to this purpose of maintaining hashroas haShechinoh and reached the age of 20 were allowed to join the ranks and replace those who died. It was enlistment into an army—a core of 600,000 men dedicated to maintaining Klal Yisroel's level of kedushoh to justify Hashem providing them with open nissim throughout the midbar. This changed the whole mentality of the nation.

This theme extends to the chatzotzros. They weren't just trumpets that

would be needed for a future war. Trumpets are sounded to rally an army to go out to war. But here, Klal Yisroel is already functioning as an army—in the midbar, marching to Eretz Canaan. So there was already a need for chatzotzros to rally Hashem's army which was needed to keep the Shechinoh in their midst. The chatzotzros were also sounded when they sang shiroh on a korbon. It was a form of shevach to Hashem. These trumpets signaled that Hashem was with them in all situations.

When Klal Yisroel entered Eretz Yisroel to fight the seven nations, they didn't just have an army fighting battles and conquering territory. It wasn't an ordinary military camp. It was something else entirely. Hashem is dwelling within their camp. There was an aron hakodesh, there was a Kohen mashuach milchomo. We aren't just people fighting. We are fighting Hashem's wars against evil—against Amalek and the seven nations—and He is fighting with us. We represent Him in these battles. The Mishnah in Rosh Hashono tells us that Klal Yisroel only won the battle with Amalek because they saw Moshe Rabbeinu's hands lifted to shomayim and they were meshabeid their hearts to Hashem. Then Hashem became part of the battle and they won.

So specifically at this point, after they got the Torah and built the mishkon, when Klal Yisroel are starting to move into a position to take over Eretz Yisroel, they need to prepare. They need to make sure there are 600,000 men who were capable of keeping the Shechinoh within a military camp. They were anticipating the imminent battles with the seven nations and didn't know that the chet hameraglim was about to delay their arrival for 38 years.

The parsha then testifies that all these Jewish soldiers were born into their family lineage with no infidelity. People were skeptical of this claim that the Egyptian masters did not take advantage of the Jewish slave women they were in charge of. And the Jewish women didn't offer themselves to get better treatment by their masters. Hashem testified that Klal Yisroel kept their gedorim against znus and maintained their tznius. The Torah recorded the single exception in Parshas Emor which proved the rule.

The military camp of Klal Yisroel were comprised of soldiers who had a pure lineage and no connection to znus. This was necessary to represent Hashem to settle His people and Hashem's presence in the battlefield to conquer Eretz Yisroel. But Shevet Levi are excluded. They are never involved in military conflict. They are a separate army with a separate mission. In Egypt, Shevet Levi never got involved in the national service to become enslaved. They always kept bris miloh and didn't worship the egel. They became a different type of army—guarding the kedushoh of the mishkon—not involved with war and conquering territory.

The parsha then goes on to describe the degolim. The midrash tells us that the day the degolim were given to the shevotim was a day as joyous as the day that the Torah was given. Each shevet had their own degel with its own insignia. There were four groups of shevotim which surrounded the mishkon in a specific formation on four sides, with each shevet's degel waving with them.

What did these insignias represent? It represented the fact that each shevet had a different derech of avodas Hashem. Hashem gave us one Torah with 613 mitzvos that all of us has to keep. But, each mitzvah can be observed with very different emphasis and nuances. The day the shevotim were given degolim was the day each shevet understood

what their unique derech avodoh was. It was a tremendous simchah because this awareness eliminated the confusion that people have when trying to discover what their unique derech avodoh is. The brochos of Yaakov Ovinu and Moshe Rabbeinu alluded to each shevet's unique form of avodas Hashem.

The formation of the shevotim around the mishkon teaches some important lessons. The mishkon was in the center. All the shevotim were equidistant from the mishkon, but they were in different positions. There was no mixing between different shevotim—each one has his designated place. No one from shevet Reuvein could go over to shevet Shimon and try to adopt Shimon's derech avodoh. Each one was given a derech avodoh. There was no reason to switch. These are all equally valid and therefore equidistant from the center.

But shevet Levi was inside an inner circle, closer to the mishkon than all the shevotim. They are the only one whose derech avodoh is on a higher level.

The gemara says that in the future, the tzaddikim will form a circle around Hashem, Who is in the middle. The idea of a circle is that all the tzaddikim are equidistant to Hashem—no tzaddik can claim his derech avodoh is more important than another. No tzaddik was inferior to another. This is a central idea that is necessary for a proper kabbolas haTorah. Why? Because each shevet was mekabbel its unique derech avodoh and could not replace the role of any other shevet. Each shevet was vital and necessary to fulfill their unique tafkid that no-one else could replicate. The proper fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos by Klal Yisroel requires that each person does his part that he is uniquely suited to do. There are twelve separate tafkidim.

This concept of the twelve shevotim having different darkei avodoh goes all the way back to Yaakov Ovinu. The midrash tells us that when the twelve sons of Yaakov carried the aron of Yaakov from Egypt to Eretz Canaan, they carried him in the same formation that the shevotim formed around the mishkon when they went through the midbor. This means each shevet had his special place and Yaakov had already identified their unique derech avodoh. It is a well-structured military camp with different divisions—representing Hashem in many different aspects. Each section had its own job and no-one could switch jobs—because there would be no point. Each job was equally valuable.

But there was one exception. Each individual could decide to move from the periphery and into the inner circle and join shevet Levi. There was no advantage to move from one shevet to another since each was equidistant to the center. But to move further in and upgrade to become kulo kodosh was always an option. This is why Shevet Levi

did not have a monopoly on their form of avodoh—it was open to everyone.

This is the parsha we read right before kabbolas HaTorah. After we read the brochos and kolos and the commitment we made to keep the bris and consequences of violating the bris, we now have to understand what kind of avodoh we have to invest our unique personalities in. As we prepare for kabbolas haTorah, we have to stop and think about what the nature of our own avodoh needs to be. There are twelve derachim to choose from. The Ari Hakodosh says each shevet had their own nusach hatefillah which expressed their unique derech avodoh, and one nusach is available for everyone to use.

Shevet Levi and Shevet Yissochor are two shevotim who are dedicated to limud haTorah. Hashem promised Yissochor a very fertile portion of Eretz Yisroel, but they passed it up for learning Torah. Yet, they are still on the periphery of the circle and do not occupy that special place closer to the mishkon like Shevet Levi. Why not?

The answer is that while it is true that Shevet Yissochor passed up the opportunity to invest in their portion to pursue their own wealth independently, they struck a deal with Zevulun to have a source of guaranteed financial security in order to learn Torah. They made that commitment to learn Torah based on a guaranteed income. And that arrangement is 50-50.

Shevet Levi made no such arrangement. They trusted completely that Hashem will provide what they need with no guarantees. When you join an army, you don't worry where the meals come from. You know the king will feed his soldiers and keep them in proper fighting condition. All of Klal Yisroel were part of Hashem's army in the midbor and Hashem took care of them with the man and the be'er. But Shevet Levi enlisted in Hashem's army for life. Not just in the midbor. They said they are putting themselves totally in Hashem's hands, and the Rambam says that bitochon means they reached a level of kodesh kodoshim—beyond shevet Yissochor who wanted that guaranteed income. This is why they are inside the circle and not on the periphery. And Yissochor and everyone else has the potential to decide to put himself further inside, to put themselves in Hashem's hands and join Hashem's special forces.

Hashem needs all parts of the army in separate units doing unique missions. Each one is equally important and there is no advantage in moving from division to division. But if you join Levi and you move inside the circle, you are elevated to be kodesh kodoshim.

We should be zoche to accept the Torah even in these difficult circumstances and Hashem should be our chelek.