

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

תשפ"ה

As we prepare for kabbolas haTorah one should always keep in mind the following Mishna in Pirkei Ovos, which says, למדת תורה הרבה, אם לא תחזיק טובה לעצמך, כי לך נוצרת.

Don't think you are so superior because you learn a lot of Torah. This is what you were created to do.

This is a critical message because it tells us why we are here on planet Earth. Learning Torah isn't just a good idea. It is the reason Hashem put a neshomo into your body. Your neshomo was created pure and it was brought into this world to learn Torah while it exists in this world.

It is like having lungs to breathe and having a heart to pump blood through your veins. A person who breathes normally, doesn't look down on someone who has asthma and can't breathe normally. He shouldn't feel he is superior just because his lungs are functioning normally as they should. So too, you have a brain to learn Torah – it is why you were created!

Hashem put you in this world to learn Torah. The gemara says a ben olom haboh is someone who 1) enters quietly, 2) exits quietly, 3) is constantly learning, and 4) doesn't give himself credit for his learning. He doesn't think he's special, because he knows this is why Hashem brought him into this world.

We are here to serve Hashem and everything else is just a means to that end. It is true that by learning we are fulfilling the purpose of the world and we are defending the country, but this only increases our responsibility to learn. It doesn't give us the license to feel superior to anyone else.

As Shevuos approaches, there is a fear and a dread in creation. Because now at the time of Matan Torah, Hashem is assessing if the purpose for which He created the world is being fulfilled. Should He grant another year of existence to the world? Hashem doesn't care what the billions of people in China or India or Argentina or the Congo do. He cares about what Klal Yisroel are doing. The gemara says that the existence of the world during the days of creation hung in abeyance until Matan Torah. It was depending on one factor – if the Torah which will be given on Shevuos will be fulfilled by Klal Yisroel. The gemara in Shabbos says the same thing is true every year before Shevuos.

This week's parsha, Parshas Bamidbar, is a form of preparation for kabbolas haTorah.

The haftarah says the Jewish People are like the sands of the sea – they cannot be measured or counted. Now is this a physical impossibility? We know that Jews have been counted in various censuses in the Torah! The gemara in Yoma learns from here that you may not count Jews. Why not? Because the uniqueness of each and every Jew must be preserved. You violate a Jew's uniqueness by reducing him to a number.

You can count a bunch of apples in front of you and say there are ten of them here on the table. The most important aspect to us is that they are all apples and we don't care about the unique features each apple may have individually. Those unique features aren't important enough to prevent us from replacing them with a number. And non-Jews are treated the same. But each Jew has a unique neshomo with a special task and is given special kocho hanefesh to fulfill that task. No Jew can be replaced by another Jew, because each of us were given a job in life that only we can fulfill and it cannot be fulfilled by others.

Yet we find that in this parsha, Jews are counted! Why?

Rashi says Hashem counted them in their lifetime 'by their names'. The name is unique to the person. By counting their names, Hashem preserved their individuality. They are like stars – there may be billions of them, but Hashem has a special name for each one – even though we can't tell them apart. Rashi emphasizes that there is a number together with a name. Only Hashem is able to keep both simultaneously and not sacrifice the individual when he is counted in a group.

We human beings lose individuality when we convert people into numbers.

We throw around the number six million when talking about those who were killed in the Holocaust. But it cheapens the enormity of the loss to use that number – when you stop and realize that every single one of those people was an entire world unto himself.

The Mishna in Ovos says don't disrespect any human being, because each person has his time in history to fulfill a task that only he can do. No-one can replace him and his unique abilities. All human beings have a tzelem Elokim, and Jews have a unique kedushas Yisroel above the tzelem Elokim that is shared by all people.

There is a very important Rambam in Hilchos Geirushin about the unique kedushah of the neshomo of every Jew. When a Jewish man is obligated by a beis din to give his wife a get and he refuses, the halacha says you can beat him up until he says he is willingly giving his consent. But this is a paradox – a get cannot be forced, because the husband has to give it to his wife of his own free will. So how can it be valid to beat him up until he says he is "willing"? How can his "willingness" be sincere if he is being beaten up to say so?

The Rambam answers that deep down in the neshomo of each Jew, there is a basic desire to do the right thing and follow the halacha. But he has pressures from his yetzer horo which prevent him from doing what his neshomo really wants to do. So beis din beats him up to offset those pressures from the yetzer horo – physical taivos and social pressures – not to follow halacha, and subsequently his real desire – to do the rotzon Hashem and give his wife a get – is able to be sincerely expressed.

The Rambam tells us that every Jew walking around in the world has a pure neshomo that wants to connect to Hashem. This is why you find Jews who weren't exposed to Yiddishkeit disproportionately finding their way to gurus and ashrams in the East looking for spirituality. It is because their unique Jewish neshomos know they are missing something essential in their lives and they are trying to fill that void with any kind of spirituality they can find.

The Rambam writes that all Jewish neshomos are combinations of the 600,000 root Jewish neshomos that stood at Har Sinai. So in a sense, all our neshomos were present for kabbolas haTorah. Each of us has a unique combination of those 600,000 neshomos, and each of us were there at Har Sinai.

There are very interesting midrashim about the flags of the shevotim. It says the day the shevotim received their flags was a simcha like kabbolas HaTorah. Why was it so important to have a flag? It was precious to them because through their unique flag, they were shown what their unique avoda was among the various ways that there are to serve Hashem. The flags had symbols and colors which identified the core kocho hanefesh of each shevet, and this gave the shevotim the

guidance they needed to channel their unique kochos properly. This knowledge gives a person a tremendous simcha – knowing what your unique contribution is to avodas Hashem that only you can do. This was the function of the brochos of Yaakov Ovinu and the brochos of Moshe Rabbeinu. Each shevet was shown his proper derech in avodas Hashem. It was the completion of kabbolas haTorah.

This is why the story of the Ben ish Mitzri is so tragic. He couldn't discover his unique place in avodas Hashem. He didn't belong to any shevet and he suffered tremendously because of that.

Then the parsha describes the exact formation of the shevotim vis-à-vis the Mishkon. Three were in the north, the south, the east, and the west. And they were all equidistant from the Mishkon which was at the center. It was made very clear that each shevet has its own unique place in Klal Yisroel and his own unique derech avodo, and it couldn't be switched for another shevet.

Surrounding the Mishkon from the inside was Shevet Levi. They have their own unique, elevated status in avodas Hashem – above all the other shevotim. But the Rambam in Hilchos Shmitoh v'Yovel tells us that any individual can upgrade his level of avodas Hashem and join Shevet Levi. He can't join any other shevet around the periphery, but he can get closer inside the circle if he is willing to devote his life to avodas Hashem exclusively.

Chazal tell us that in the end of days, Hashem will make a dancing circle of the tzaddikim with Hashem in the center, and everyone will say זה ה' קיונו לו. Why are these tzaddikim in a circle and not any other shape? The answer is that every point of a circle is equidistant from the center. So while each tzaddik thinks his maximum avodas Hashem is totally unique and special, he will realize at the end of days that other tzaddikim with their maximum unique avodo are equally valuable before Hashem Who is at the center of all of them.

Our preparation for kabbolas HaTorah begins with the brochos and k'loos of the Torah – realizing the awesome responsibility we were

given to fulfill the Torah. And the disastrous consequences in store for us if we don't fulfill it. But then there is a need to reflect on the unique neshomo we were given and the unique set of kochos hanefesh by which we go about fulfilling our unique mission that only we can do.

No-one else can do the job that I have been chosen to fulfill. And I'm not special, I'm just doing what I was created to do – to learn Torah with those intellectual capabilities that Hashem gave me. This is why it is a fallacy to think you are superior to anyone else, by just doing what you were designed to do with the unique neshomo you were given. You don't take pride in having these capabilities, just like you don't take pride in having a working set of lungs to breathe and a beating heart.

All our neshomos were at Har Sinai and we all were mekabel the Torah, each in a unique way with our unique darkei avodo.

The gemara says the posuk in Tehillim starts by saying it is Hashem's Torah, and we finish by saying it is our Torah: כִּי אִם בְּתוֹרַת ה' תִּפְּצוּ וּבְתוֹרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה יוֹקֵם וְלִלְיָהּ

How does that happen? It happens by working on understanding the Torah with your unique kochos and your unique perspective and then it becomes your personal Torah. You acquire the Torah through the unique kochos that Hashem gave you.

We are preparing for kabbolas haTorah and a lot of cheshbon hanefesh should go into it. We need to ask ourselves: are we using all the unique kochos hanefesh that Hashem gave us to fulfill the job each of us were given? Hashem decides on Shevuos morning – when we listen to the krias haTorah of ma'amad Har Sinai – if this world is worthy of another year of existence. Is Klal Yisroel fulfilling their job of keeping the Torah which is the whole purpose of creation? Is each unique individual doing his job?

We should all be zocheh to be mekabel the Torah this Shevuos, and fulfill the purpose that Hashem gave each and every one of us – a purpose that only we can do.