

Cup of Coffee and a Quick Thought

by Spark of Jewish Experience

Parshat Bamidbar

candle lighting 8:06 Shabbat ends 9:15 June 7, 2024, Sivan 2, 5784

SHAVUOT IS TUESDAY EVENING!

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Family Bonding is the Jewish Way

This article was constructed with the help of either writings, lectures or shiurim of Rabbis Baruch Dopelt, Henoach Leibowitz z'l, Yissachar Frand, Yochonon Zweig, Yitzchak Aminov z'l, Yosef Kalatzky, Berel Wien, Yossi Bilus, Asher Hurtzberg and Dr Abba Goldman

It was a few days before Pesach and I was waiting in line at the neighborhood bagel store. The line was out the door and into the street. Perhaps, I should have brought a lounge chair. There is a line for everything here in New York, the bank, food shopping, clothing, take-out food, especially closer to a major holiday. Although, in my opinion, it happens to be the best bagel in New York, I decided to listen to my daughters' advice and instead ordered myself a whole-grain tuna wrap. I am unsure if it has fewer carbs than the bagel, but it feels healthier than the hot, delicious bagels I will buy for my family.

As the tuna wrap was being prepared, it reminded me of the Pesach Seder and what we do after we eat the maror. The great sage Hillel would make a sandwich combining the three: lettuce, charoset, and matzah (our custom), and eat it while reclining. To commemorate Hillel's sandwich ("korech"), Jews do the same today, eating the Hillel sandwich while reclining. It seemed like he would describe the sandwich more like a wrap. However, one cannot do that with Matzah. Did you ever see a Matzah wrap kosher for Pesach?

Interestingly, I had spoken to my aunt's husband, Eli. He mentioned that at Tu'b Shvat, a few months before Pesach, there begins the production of an unusual matzah. In Jerusalem, there is a family, the Sharabani family, that sells kosher mehadrin soft Matzah that fits the prime directive of what Hillel would do. The family has this secret recipe and has been selling it for five generations. Right after Purim, they would rent out the store next door and that would be a place where people would walk in and fill in their name on a sheet of paper with their phone number and when their order was ready in the days ahead, they would get a call to come and pick up.

It was a family thing, exclusively owned by the Sharabani clan. You see, national pride is not enough to progress us as Jews. One needs more. One must feel good about his family.

This week's parsha marks the beginning of our reading of the fourth book of the Torah. The book concerns itself with the travels and travails of the Jewish people during their sojourn in the desert of Sinai. The book is replete with the names of the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the count of the number of people in the camp of Israel, and many events that shaped the future of Israel for many generations to come. All of the commentators on the Torah are perplexed by the great detail recorded in the book of Bamidbar. Of what value is it to know the names of the leaders of the tribes of



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Israel? And what do the numbers of the count of the individual tribes and families of the Jewish people teach us? In a Torah where every word and nuance is important, why are all of the long details and the names and numbers mentioned when they are seemingly unimportant facts?

"...and they established their genealogy according to their families, according to their father's household..." (1:18)

Rashi teaches that before the census, which is recorded in this week's parsha, each Jew was required to produce a Sefer Yuchsin, a book of his lineage or pedigree. The Sages add that producing this Sefer Yuchsin was also required as a prerequisite to receiving the Torah, which is G-d's pride and treasure. The Sages note that since none of the nations of the world were able to produce a book of their lineage and thus could not identify who their parents were, they were not worthy of receiving the Torah. It was so important to produce such a book that Moshe himself waited outside each tent to greet them as they came out to be counted. Everyone explained his genealogy briefly.

Why is receiving the Torah dependent upon having a book of lineage?

"The sons of Reuvein: of Chanoch, the family of the Chanochite..." (Bamidbar, Pinchas,26:5)

Before Bnei Yisroel entering the land of Yisroel, God commanded Moshe and Elazar (Aharon's son) to conduct another census. To all the family names, the letter "hey" was added as a prefix and "yud" as a suffix. For example, the family of Chanoch was referred to as "HaChanochi". Rashi cites a Midrash, which explains that those letters formed the name of God. The reason for this addition is that



the nations of the world cast aspersions regarding the purity of the Jewish lineage, saying that the Jews' tracing their genealogy according to their tribes was a farce. They claimed that since the Egyptians had had complete control of the Jews, surely, they had violated the Jewish women. Therefore, God attached His name to the names of the Jewish families to attest to the purity of Jewish ancestry. It isn't easy to understand how adding two letters to Jewish families' names deflects the claims of the nations. The only possible answer is that Hashem had no intention of deflecting the nations' claims. Rather, this was done to appease the insecurities of the Jewish nation themselves. The Israelites were recovering from a plague that decimated a significant portion of the nation. This plague came as a punishment for their involvement in licentious behavior and acts of depravity, characteristics precisely attributed to Egyptian nature. Therefore, these events instilled within the nation of Yisroel the notion that some basis for the claims of the nations of the world did exist. What still needs to be understood is why God needs to attest to the purity of the Jewish lineage. An important principle is being taught here. Knowing who one's parents are is of the utmost importance. A person who has a strong sense of his root's approaches life with confidence. The reason for this is that we define ourselves by our parents. A person



must focus on the positive attributes of his parents. Even if he does not approve of the choices his parents have made, he still must recognize and concentrate on their positive potential, for this potential is what he gleans from them. Hopefully, he will couple this potential with the correct decisions. Today, there is a trend to place responsibility for all our shortcomings on our parents. This may offer us short-term consolation, but in the long run, unless we

can define ourselves by our parents in a positive light, we will not achieve the balance in life for which we are searching. By attesting to the purity of the Jewish lineage, God is offering the Jews the ability to recapture this balance.

Each Jew must see himself or herself within the context of one's family and always keep the image of one's father and grandfather in mind. When contemplating any action, one must consider whether it will embarrass his or her ancestors or increase respect for them.

A key to good Yichus is to continue the practice of one's family lineage. A person who is the first in his family to receive a college education will be elated when he is accepted to a community college. However, a person who descends from a family that boasts ten generations of Harvard graduates will be completely devastated if the only college willing to accept him is a community college. Surpassing the expectations that have been defined by one's social upbringing is what gives a person a sense of accomplishment. If a person is unable to identify his parents, this indicates that they were people who did not take responsibility for themselves. Conversely, if a person can identify his lineage, we conclude that he stems from individuals who took responsibility for



themselves and had honorable standards.

We read in the prayer UVA L'TZION found at the end of the services. If we continue three generations of Torah observance, G-d guarantees protection in this world and the next.

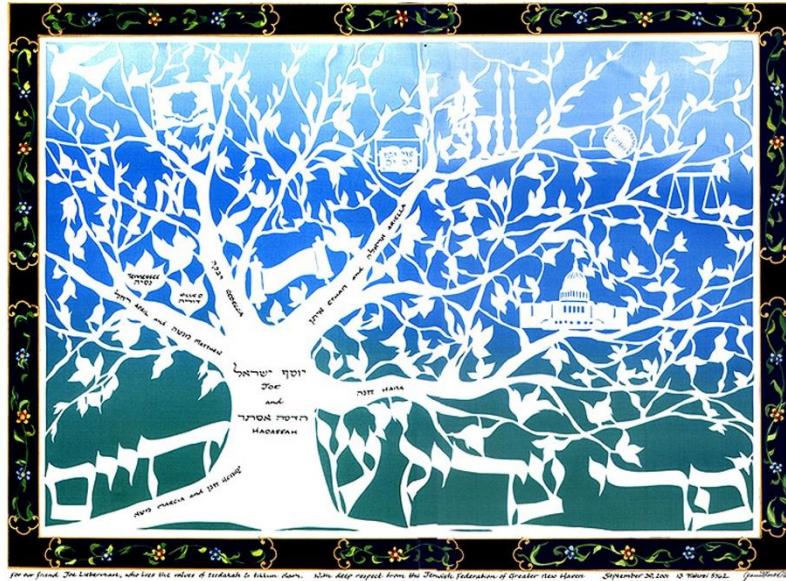
We have to put things in the proper perspective. Our sense of pride doesn't come from being professionals (though it is very important to have a career and properly support our families, it shouldn't be the main source of satisfaction and dignity) The success of the Jewish sense of pride in our history has always been our Torah. We identify our Jewishness with the Torah. This is our guide to life; this is our tradition; this is our lifeline; this is our survival.

Don't Embarrass Your Ancestors

"Take a count of the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their heads of households, with the number of their names, every male by head." [1:2]

Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Hertzberg z"l looks at two elements of the counting – that it was done by family (specifically, by the heads of households), and by "head," or, as Rashi explains, by a coin—one half-shekel given for each head.

Why was a coin needed? Because the act of giving indicated that the giver was a Jew, a descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The children of Israel share three traits: they are “bayshanim,” modest and sensitive to embarrassment; “rachmanim,” merciful; and “gomlei chasadim,” doers of acts of kindness and generosity. By giving willingly and lovingly, the giver provides a sign that he is part of this nation.



The Torah is determined to emphasize to us the importance of each and every person in this world. Merely stating that there were approximately six hundred thousand male Jews from the ages of twenty to sixty only gives us a statistic. Most statistics are faceless, impersonal, and sometimes even meaningless. They never convey a moral or even educational lesson to the reader. They are cold numbers. The Torah therefore personalizes the numbers in this week's parsha and in the book of Bamidbar generally. It does give us the names of the leaders of the tribes, their fathers, and their families, and it traces for us their lineage. It tells us that some of them had large families and others had much smaller ones. It points out the difference in numbers and in leadership of each of the tribes so that we should not view the Jewish society then—and certainly not now—as being monolithic. Through the numbers that are now flesh and blood people, the stage is set for understanding some of the later events that occurred in the desert—the rebellion of Korach and the behavior of Pinchas towards Cozbi and Zimri for example. The challenges of Moshe in leading the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai are more understandable to us when we see the wide variety and great numbers of people who he had to deal with day in and day out for forty years. Once the numbers are personalized and broken down, the story becomes much clearer and more relevant to every age.

Rav Hertzberg then goes on to offer a deeper understanding of counting by family. He says that each Jew must see himself or herself within the context of one's family, and always keep the image of one's father and grandfather in mind. When contemplating any action, one must consider whether it will embarrass his or her ancestors or increase respect for them.

The Torah tells us that we learn to fear God from the fear of our parents—and specifically, our fathers, who most often seem to take ultimate responsibility for discipline in the home. If a person turns out badly, he embarrasses not only himself but also his parents and ancestors, and those who see him will denigrate the parents who brought up such a child (especially the father who didn't discipline him well).



One must see this at every level. The Midrash says that Yosef saw the image of his father before him, and this kept him from sinning with Potiphar's wife. Even in private, we must look not only at our immediate family but at our glorious ancestors and our line back to Sinai—and behave in a way that brings respect not only to ourselves but to the entire extended family of the House of Israel.



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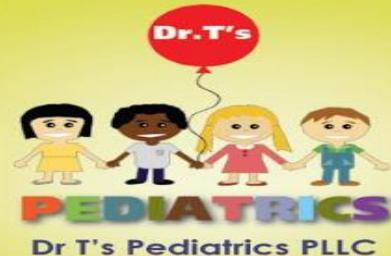
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Parsha Highlights

The source for quick Shabbat table D'var Torah

- * Why is the 4th book of the Torah called Bamidbar - Desert? One can also ask, why is it also called the Book of Numbers?
- * Did G-d test our weakness before rewarding us with the Torah?
- * Interestingly, the tribe of Levi were not oppressed like the other tribes and yet they were few in numbers. How is that?
- * Why were the nations so amazed by the flags? What is so unique about a bunch of people traveling under a bunch of flags?

* Why is the 4th book of the Torah called Bamidbar - Desert? One can also ask, why is it also called the Book of Numbers?

As one knows a bit of our history, we received the Torah, our pride and joy, and the primary reason why we survived all these years in the desert. The Torah is the pulse of our great nation. So, the desert had the privilege to host such an important event and therefore it was named Bamidbar - in the desert.

Perhaps one can ask, why? Out of all the places to receive the Torah - why the desert? Furthermore, there is an obvious question of a famous Midrash (Rabbinical teachings); that when G-d was offering the Torah to the other nations, He asked them to accept it through their biggest weakness. For example, when asked by the Arabs "what's in it?" G-d replied "Do not steal." He replied to Edom "do not kill." This is the main weakness of those respective nations. It didn't seem like He approached the Jews at their weakness. Could it be G-d didn't play a fair game? Perhaps He shuffled the deck in favor of the Jews; after all, He was a big fan of our forefather Abraham. By the way, does anybody know our weakness? Do we have one?

This was the fourth time the Israelites were counted. Initially, the Torah records the descendants of our forefather, Yaakov, who traveled to Egypt. Then, later the Torah states that 600,000 men left Egypt, quite a jump from the seventy that left with Yaakov. After the sin of the Golden Calf, the Jews were counted a third time. Now, seven months after the last census, the people were counted again.

Why is it called the Book of Numbers?

Apparently, G-d wanted to show a lesson to the world how pure and untainted the Jewish genealogy was. Adultery was non-existent; so was marriage outside the faith. It was not for naught that the Jews of that generation were considered the best ever. Their purity was impeccable and G-d was proud of them that they had the ability to preserve the family.

Did G-d test our weakness before rewarding us with the Torah?

Rabbi Baruch Dopelt, who quotes the Chedushai Harim, maintains that G-d did offer the Jews the Torah testing their weakness. G-d had instructed the Jews to maintain boundaries among themselves. In many ways, this was a big test since everyone was eager to show their love for G-d. Every individual\tribe wanted to show their strong capability in serving G-d. Their competitiveness is inherited in all of us today. Although it manifests itself in different aspects of life, did you ever wait on line in Israel? You couldn't have; a line doesn't exist. The Jews, our ancestors in the desert, were instructed to line up with flags. Each tribe with their own flag (some opinions hold a flag was designated to three tribes each). Everything had an order and the tribes, each one, had to serve G-d in the proper time, accordingly. They didn't have the "I did it my way attitude." Apparently, they passed the test in controlling themselves and were rewarded with the prize - the Torah.

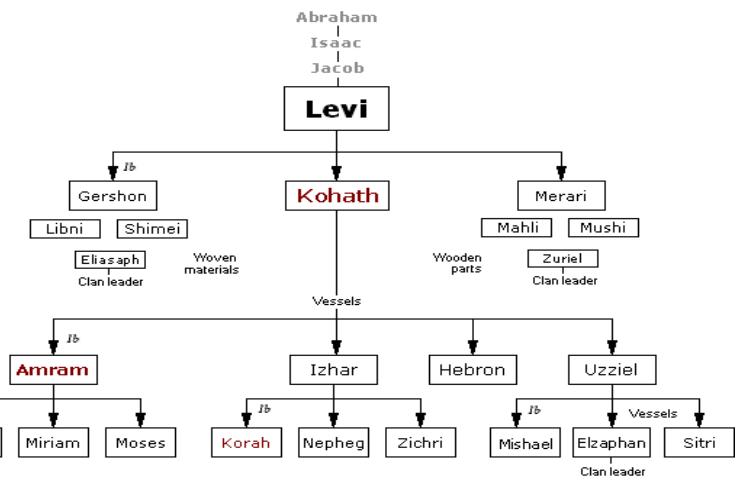
Second Portion: *We read about the counting of Klal Yisrael as a whole, as well as a separate counting of the Tribe of Levi. The number of Levites from one month and older totaled 22,000. The Ramba'n (and many other Torah commentaries) is bothered by the fact that there so few Leviim. We read in the census of the other tribes (who were counted from the age of 20 and above) that there were tribes with 70 or 80 thousand individuals. Why were there -- relatively speaking -- so few Levites?

Interestingly, the tribe of Levi were not oppressed like the other tribes and yet they were few in numbers. How is that?

Their wives were not frightened and affected psychologically by the Egyptian enslavement. Those women presumably did experience menstrual periods, because of lack of fear; but unfortunately, they had a problem. There were no Mikvahs available for the Jewish women to use in Egypt. Thus, ironically, although we would expect their lack of oppression, a calmer environment, to allow them to become more numerous than other tribes, in fact, the situation was exactly the reverse. The Levi women were in need of a mikvah more so than the other tribes. Why did other tribes not need a mikvah.....see feature article

Third Portion: * Why were the nations so amazed by the flags? What is so unique about a bunch of people traveling under a bunch of flags? The Nations of the world were not amazed that each of the tribes of the Jewish people had their own flags. There is nothing special about that. So, what was special? Despite the fact that there were 12 flags, representing 12 unique sets of personalities and individuals, there remained a certain unity that permeated the entire encampment in the wilderness. The Nations could have duplicated the flags. They could not duplicate the peace and unity that existed amongst our nation.

What, in fact, was the secret of the Jewish people? Why, in fact, could they all dwell together in harmony? The answer is in a pasuk: "May we sing for joy at Your salvation, and raise our banner in the Name of our G-d" (u'b'Shem Elokeinu Nidgol) [Tehillim 20:6]. The Shem Hashem [name of G-d] is the 'flag' that everyone salutes to -- the Flag of G-d. All twelve



flags pale and become insignificant because there is a greater flag out there -- the Flag of the Honor of Heaven. When one has such a commonality of purpose, then one can have unity. However, when my flag must be Number One, and I cannot submerge it for the welfare of a greater good, then we have a situation like the "United Nations" with all its controversy.

Fourth Portion: * We see through history that the first born, the well-respected elder, receives double the inheritance, losing, on many occasions, the status in which he inherited. This was apparent in the first generation of the world; Cain was the oldest; however, Hevel got the reward. We know that Shem, (where our ancestors come from) one of three sons of Noach, was not the first-born. Abraham passed the baton to Isaac, the youngest, and not to Yishmael. The same is said about Isaac's sons, Eisav, who was the bechor, but Yaakov was the brother chosen. Reuben, the eldest of the twelve tribes, neither got the first-born rights, the kingdom nor the kehuna (high priest).

Here, the Levites replace the first born as the kohanim-high priests of the nation.

Fifth Portion: Levites genealogy:

Sixth Portion: Pidyon haben - redeeming of the first-born son. It's special because it has enhanced the status of man to father; there is a continuity of the new father where he has the opportunity to pass down the Jewish tradition which he has received from his father. The precious valuable commodity firstborn belongs to G-d and the father proudly redeems the boy. The ceremony consists of the father purchasing back his son from any Kohen (they are G-d's representatives) for five silver coins. The ceremony is conducted on the 30th day from birth. If one is not redeemed on the 30th day, he can still do the procedure in his lifetime regardless if his father is alive; he can redeem himself.

Seventh Portion: * G-d commanded Moshe and Aharon to organize kohathites for the services they would perform when the Tabernacle was transported

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We regret to inform you of the passing of Yosef ben Bachim z'l the grandfather of our friends Mr. and Mrs. Johnathan Shalom...the family should not see any more Tza'ar-anguish.

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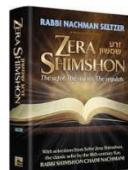
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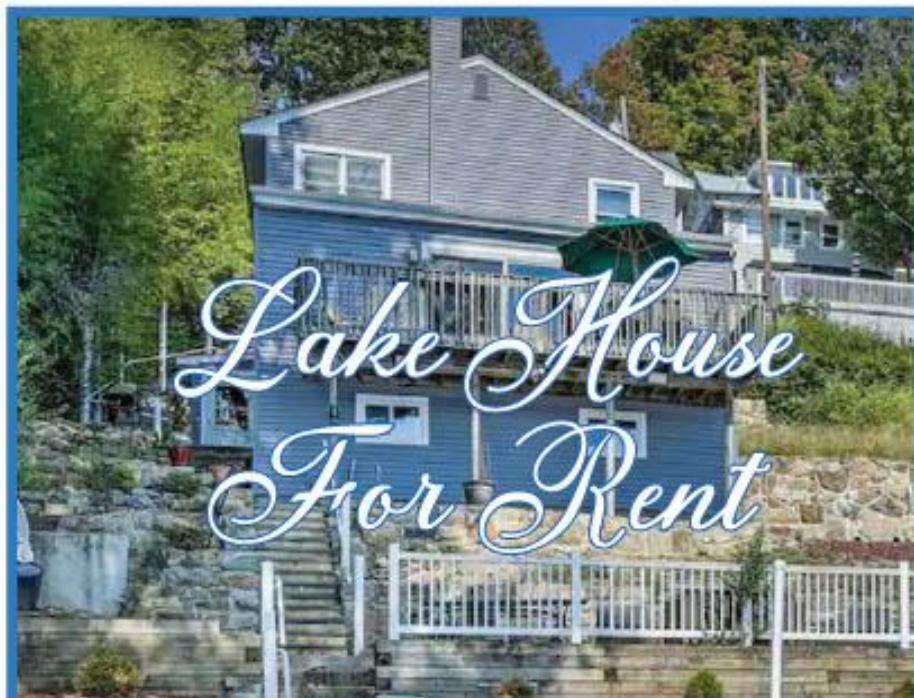
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אמרות שמישון

Why the Jews Merited to Be Arranged in Banners Similar to The Angels

איש על דגלו, אתה לבית אביכם, יהנו בני ישראל וכו' (בב)

The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man at his division, according to the banner of their fathers' house...

The Midrash (מדרש ב' ח) expounds on a Passuk in Shir Hashirim, and calls attention to these banners, under which the Jews encamped while traveling in the desert. איזימה ננדגולות, ובמה אתם ננדגולות, בדגלים שנחתה. [The Midrash understands the word 'like angels who are arranged in this Passuk to mean 'like angels who are arranged by banners'.] King Shlomo states that Hashem praises the Jewish People as follows. "You Israel are awe inspiring as an army with banners. And in what way are you as an army with banners? Through the banners that I gave you". David Hamelech in his prophetic vision saw this arrangement of banners that Hashem gave the Jews, and he said, "He did not do so for any other nation, but only for His People".

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This Midrash is hard to understand, for the Passuk that the Midrash brings as referring to the banners says as follows; מגיד דבריו ליעקב, חוקיו ומשפטיו לישראל. לא עשה כן כלל גוי, ומשפטים כל דעתם וכו'. *He relates His words to Yaakov, His laws and His commandments to Yisroel. He did not do so for any other nation; such commandments He did not relate to them.* Accordingly, in the context of this Passuk, it would clearly seem that Dovid is discussing the laws and commandments that Hashem taught the Jews, but did not teach the other Nations. Thus, where does the Midrash see in this Passuk that it is referring to the rules governing the banners under which the Jewish people camped while traveling in the desert? Furthermore, even if we were to say that Dovid wasn't necessarily referring to the general laws and commandments, nevertheless we can still understand him to be referring to some other

advantage which the Jews had over the other nations; i.e. the presence of Hashem's shechinah in their midst, the Torah that only the Jews merited to receive at Har Sinai, or the Holy Bais Hamikdash.

בשעה שנגלה הקב"ה על הר סיני, ירדו עמו כ"ב נCMDח"ר כ"ג) tells us רבבות של מלאכים שנאמר רכב אליהם רבותים אלף שnan, והיו כולם עשוים דגלים וככ' כיון שראו אותן ישראל שהם עשוים דגלים דגלים, התחילה מתאותים לדגלים, אמרו אלואיךך אנו העשויים דגלים ממוון וככ' אמר להם הקב"ה מה מתאותים לעשوت דגלים, חיכם שאני מלא מshallותיכם וככ' מיד הודיע הקב"ה אותן לישראל, ואמר למשה, לך עשה אותן דגלים כムן שנתנו לך. When Hashem revealed Himself at Har Sinai, 220,000

angels descended with Him, as it states, 'Hashem's entourage is twice ten thousand, thousands of angels, Hashem is among them at Sinai...', and all these angels were arranged in orderly camps, banner by banner. When the Jews saw that the angels were arranged banner by banner, they, too, began to desire to be arranged by banners. They said, "If only we too would be arranged according to banners surrounding the Divine Presence, just like the angels!" Hashem said to the Jewish People, "What do you desire? To be arranged according to banners? I swear that I will fulfill your request". Thereupon, Hashem made known His love for the Jewish People and said to Moshe, "Go and arrange them into banners around the Mishkan, as they desire".

Accordingly, we can understand where the Passuk indicates that Dovid Hamelech was referring to the banners which only the Jewish Nation merited to. For when Dovid said, **לא עשה כן לכל גוי ומשפטים כל דעומ**,

- *He did not do so for any other nation; such judgements He did not relate to them*, it implies that the reason that 'He did not do so for any other nation', was because 'such judgements He did not relate to them'. This alludes to - something that Hashem 'did for the Jewish People' because 'His judgments He did relate to them' - the bannered camps that the Jewish People yearned for at the time of their receiving the Torah, when they saw the angels descending in bannered camps. It was then and there that Hashem swore to the Jewish People that they will merit those banners as well, while the other nations who hadn't accepted the Torah did not merit these banners.

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