

# פרשת במדבר Parshat Bamidbar

## אשרינו Ashreinu

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION



### JUST LIKE A WAVING FLAG

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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CHANA SCHANDELSON (22')

ADAM DENNIS (21')

ELIAS BENABOU (24')

NAVA SHEKHTER (24')

The Midrash Rabbah (Bamidbar 2:3) at the beginning of this week's parsha tells us that when Hashem revealed Himself to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai, angels descended with Him arrayed in flags. When Bnei Yisrael saw the angels arrayed in flags they began to desire their own flags and they said, "Oh that we also could be arranged in flags like them!"

Hashem said to them: "How eager you are to be arranged in flags as you live, I shall fulfill your desire!" Hashem immediately answered Bnei Yisrael's request by telling Moshe, "Go, arrange them in flags as they have desired."

Why did Bnei Yisrael have such a strong desire for

flags? Furthermore, if there was such a strong desire, why didn't Shevet Levi have a flag? Did they run out of colors?

The Shemen HaTov explains that every angel knows very clearly what their jobs and tasks are. Every *shevet* had their own flag which reflected their specific talents, aspirations, and goals. Looking at their flag would give them the proper direction in life. Every *shevet* had to know what their goals should be and where they should be heading. Whenever they would lose sight of that direction, they would look at their waving flag. That flag symbolized their goals in life.

Shevet Levi didn't need the flag to remind them of their goal in life. Their lives were completely enveloped in serving Hashem. Their job was to serve Hashem in the Mishkan. They carried upon themselves the "flag of Hashem" on a daily basis.

Even though all the *shevatim* had their own flags, in the center of it all was the Mishkan. Their goals were built upon spirituality and serving Hashem.

What is our flag? What do we look at for our inspiration and to reach our goals? Do we just ride through life without any direction? Do we have a “making brachot” flag? “Putting on tefillin” flag? “Finding time to learn Torah” flag? “Chesed” flag? As the summer approaches, we should all do our best to create those flags that will enable us to accomplish our goals all while keeping Hashem at the forefront of our mind.

## RAISE YOUR BANNER

CHANA SCHANDELSON (22')

Parshat Bamidbar begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a second census of the Jewish people according to tribe. Once Moshe is done counting, Hashem begins to describe the encampment of the Leviim and Jewish people with the following words:

אִישׁ עַל דָּגָלוֹ בָּאֹתָת לְבֵית אֲבָתֶם יְחִינֵּנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנְגָּד סְבִיב  
לְאָהָל מוֹעֵד יְחִינֵּנוּ

“The Israelites shall camp each with his standard, under the banners of their ancestral house; they shall camp around the Tent of Meeting at a distance” (Bamidbar 2:2)

The Torah provides precise instructions for each tribe’s location within the encampment. However, the Torah doesn’t directly explain the purpose of each tribe’s banner. Why is that?

Rashi explains that the purpose of each banner was to differentiate the tribes from one another. Each tribe had its own colored banner and this allowed everyone to recognize which tribe was which.

The Kli Yakar takes a different approach and explains that the banners were a symbol of victory at war. Other nations carried similar flags that proved their success and, similarly, the Jewish people had flags that showed their accomplishments. The Kli Yakar points out an important difference between the other nations and the Jewish people: the Jewish people were not only taking pride in their victories but also that they had Hashem on their side.

Each banner was placed within the tribe’s encampment surrounding the Mishkan, which showed the other nations that HaKodesh Baruch Hu lived with

them. The Kli Yakar continues by quoting the Midrash Rabbah that says that at Matan Torah the Jewish people saw the angels holding banners, and Klal Yisrael wanted to emulate those *malachim*. The *malachim* were hosting Hashem through the symbolism of their flags, and Klal Yisrael wanted to emulate them even more by having similar flags which would proclaim that they host Hashem!

There is a crucial lesson to draw from the Kli Yakar’s explanation. The Jewish people wanted to have banners to show that Hashem was with them and that they, in turn, hosted Hashem. So too, HaKodesh Baruch Hu is within each of us. All of us carry a spark of Hashem in our *neshamot*, and it is important to look at our fellow Jews as Godly people. Chas V’Shalom, if we forget this, we may be quick to judge one another and not show the proper *kavod* we need to treat each other with. May we all be *zocher* to truly love each and every Yid we come across and iy”H, Hashem should bring the *geulah*! A *Gutten Shabbos*!

## DESERT YOURSELF

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִזְכָּרְבָּר סִינֵּי בָּאָהָל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לְחֶדֶש  
הַשְׁנִי בְּשָׁנָה הַשְׁנִית לְצַאתְכֶם מִאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לְאָמֹר

“On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, saying” (Bamidbar 1:1).

Sefer Bamidbar starts by telling us that Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert. The Midrash Rabbah asks why the Torah specifies that this conversation happened in the desert. He answers by saying that the Torah was given with fire and water in a desert and adds that if a person does not act like a desert he will not be able to become absorbed in the Torah. However, this is a little complex (*shver*). Where do we see anything about fire and water in the word “desert,” and what do we mean by saying that a person should make himself like a desert? Rav Chizkiyahu Eliezer Kahan suggested the following: the Torah is made up of two different kinds of laws, positive and negative ones. In order to best serve Hashem, we need to have both aspects become a part of us. We need a fiery side that strives for growth, and a cooler side

that knows what things to avoid. However, this alone is not enough. The Mesilat Yesharim says that, “one’s evil inclination can distance many matters which can be made to look evil but in reality are good. It can also embrace many things that appear to be good but in reality, are evil. One needs his heart to be completely straight with no motive to do anything other than what is pleasing to God.”

This means that a person must realize that his own agenda may cause him to mix up what’s truly good and evil. The pasuk specifies that the conversation took place in a desert because a desert is typically empty and barren, symbolizing humility. A Yid must “desertify” himself, clearing all biases and personal desires. It is only once this is achieved that a person will be *zocher* to know when to use his active fiery side or more passive cool side. The Torah was given in the desert to give us a message on how we should be acting as people. We must throw away our biases and search for truth. Only then will we be able to truly make a *kinyan* on the Torah. Good Shabbos!

## YOU ARE PRECIOUS

ELIAS BENABOU (24')

Baruch Hashem! This week we begin a new *sefer* of the five books of the Torah, the book of Bamidbar. We could ask ourselves the following question: what is the reason Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to count Bnei Yisrael?

Rashi gives a very nice answer to explain the reason why Hashem counts Bnei Yisrael. He explains that Hashem counts us all the time because we are precious to Him. Hashem counted us when we left Egypt, when we committed the *aveirah* of the *egel hazahav*, and when Hashem made His *Shechinah* rest on us. Moreover, he explains, on the first of Nissan the Mishkan was established, and on the first of Iyar Hashem counted us. This indicates to us that as a Jewish people we have a special responsibility. We were created to study Torah and to serve Hashem. Hashem took us out of Egypt to receive His Torah, and we prepared for 49 days until Shavuot. Hashem gives us all these things to do, and we should always say we want to accomplish more, which will help us to elevate ourselves. He counts us because we are so precious to Him. Unfortunately, nowadays, we forget

how precious we are to Hashem, and we pride ourselves in thinking only of ourselves. We don’t appreciate His Torah the way we are supposed to, and we try to make it “easy” for people to practice it, putting less effort into *avodat Hashem*.

When someone receives a nice sum of money, he decides to count every bill, showing how precious money is to him. The same is true for us. We are so precious to Hashem that He counts us as if we were special gold coins or special treasure. We are the people who must behave in a special way, that is, like Hashem.

In davening we read the 13 Middot of Hashem, and we learn how to be like Hashem by doing this. As we mentioned above, Hashem took us out of Egypt to receive His Torah. The gemara (Shabbat 88b) teaches us that Moshe had to argue with the *malachim* in order to receive the Torah. Despite the fact that it was not easy for Moshe to bring Torah down to this world, Hashem made sure that we received it. The Torah contains everything we need, and the world and Am Yisrael was created for the Torah.

How should we serve Him? *Ivdu et Hashem Besimcha!* We are to serve Hashem with joy and love. The Torah also tells us that Hashem asks us only for *Yirat Shamayim*. These things will help us to serve Hashem and above all to realize His greatness and the greatness of His Torah.

Of course, that might sound difficult, but you can just act as if you were a villager who is going to visit the king in the king’s palace. There, the villager will not behave the same as with his family members or friends. Instead, he will fear the king and he will be joyful at the reward that the king will give him. So we too must have fear of Hashem, Who is the King of all Kings, and do so, in order to follow His commandments more meaningfully and realize that Hashem thinks we are precious.

May Hashem help us to do so, and may He help us do *teshuva*, to continue to rise to higher levels. May Hashem bring the Mashiach and the *geula b’mihera b’yameinu, amen ken yehi ratzon!*

# HASHEM LOVES YOU

## NAVA SHEKHTER (24')

This week's parsha, the first in Sefer Bamidbar, begins with a census of the Jewish people. Rashi points out (Bamidbar 1:1) that having counted Bnei Yisrael on the way out of Egypt and after the sin of the Golden Calf, this census is the third time in a row that Hashem is counting them. Why all the counting? Rashi suggests that because Bnei Yisrael are dear to Him, Hashem counts them often. In other words, counting is an expression of Hashem's love towards the Jewish people.

At the same time, there is a halachic prohibition against counting Jews directly. For example, when counting worshipers for a minyan, the custom is not to say, one, two, three, etc. but to use a pasuk that contains ten words such as "*Hoshiah et amecha..*"

Noting this apparent contradiction, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l, asks an interesting question: if we are supposed to emulate Hashem ("*v'halachta b'drachav*") and Hashem's counting of Bnei Yisrael is an expression of love, then why can't we emulate Hashem by counting our fellow Jews?

According to Rabbi Sacks, when people count other people, there is a risk of devaluing the individual. For example, when we say 1.4 million people serve in the US armed forces, or that 347,000 employees work for Target, or that the Marlins have the capacity to fill up their home stadium with 36,742 fans (*halevai!*), we don't care about each individual person and their role in the world, all we care about is what number they add up to.

In contrast, when Hashem counts the Jewish people, He uses the language of **שאו את ראש**, which means "lift up his head".

This shows how Hashem cares about each person and their role and purpose in life. To emphasize this idea, Rabbi Sacks notes that when we see 600,000 Jews in one place we are supposed to say a bracha: "ברוך אתה ה' חכם הרצימ... -- "Blessed are you, Hashem...who knows the secrets." This shows that He values the struggles and dreams of each Jew in a crowd.



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