



Published by Mosdot "Mikdash Le'David", Israel

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maskil Le'David

Banners – a Sign of Unity

"The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp" (*Bamidbar* 2:2).

Only one year had passed from when Bnei Yisrael were enslaved under Pharaoh's rule in Mitzrayim. In this short period of time they grew into a structured nation, organized into formations of three tribes each, known as banners, with each banner led by a designated tribe.

Chazal tell us (*Midrash Rabba* 2:3), "When Yisrael saw the angels arranged according to banners (groups), they too desired banners. They said, 'If only we too could be arranged according to banners like them.' Hashem said to them, 'You desired banners; in your lives, I will fulfill your request.' Immediately Hashem told Moshe, 'Go and arrange them according to banners as they desire.'"

The Midrash continues, "Moshe became distressed. He said, 'Now arguments might erupt between the tribes. If I tell the tribe of Yehuda to dwell in the east they might say, we can only dwell in the south, and similarly Reuven and Ephraim and all the other tribes. What should I do?' Hashem said to him, 'Moshe, it is of no concern to you. They do not need you, they are familiar with their dwelling places by themselves since they possess a tradition of how to encamp from their father Yaakov. In the same way that they carried him and surrounded his coffin when he passed away, in that order they will surround the Mishkan.'"

How did this answer placate Moshe Rabbeinu? At that time of Yaakov's passing, his children numbered a total of twelve tribes (sons), but now after multiplying greatly in Mitzrayim, we are talking about myriads of Jewish people. When they left Mitzrayim they numbered 600,000 men, and this was besides woman and children. So if now they approach Moshe with claims and arguments, how in fact will Moshe Rabbeinu handle them?

I remember once an argument erupted during *shacharit* in the *beit kneset*, concerning the tune of the *Az Yashir* prayer. Some of the congregants wanted a certain melody, while others demanded a different tune. The commotion grew until it was impossible to restore peace. If this is the way of disputes, how could Moshe Rabbeinu prevail over the arguments that the delegation of banners and encampments might engender, G-d forbid?

Furthermore, the holy Arizal, *zy"ta*, says that there are twelve gates in Heaven for receiving prayers, corresponding to the twelve tribes. Each tribe has his fixed version of text which he may not stray from due to the dictum, "Do not forsake the teaching of your mother." Here too, it is difficult to understand this concept, for if peace and unity are so important why should there not be one universal text?

The verse, "The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp," answers these questions. Although it is true that Am Yisrael are divided into different camps, when they all encamp around the Ohel Mo'ed (Tent of Meeting), when they all dwell around the holy Torah, minor differences and disputes disappear. If they all share one goal – fulfilling the Will of their Father in Heaven – disagreement will never erupt between them.

Rabbeinu Nissim Ravivo, *zy"ta*, the Av Beit Din of Paris, France, was of Moroccan descent yet all his teachers were Ashkenazic sages. Similarly, the Rif and the Rambam, *zy"ta*, were Spanish sages yet all the Ashkenazic sages follow their rulings.

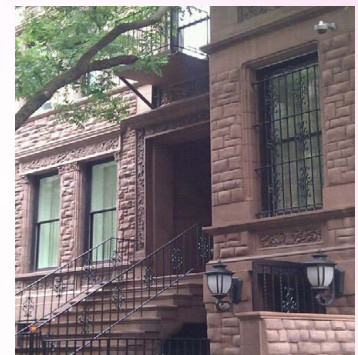
My father, *zt"l*, too, as was his holy custom, would tell us stories about the Ba'al Shem Tov *a"h* (a Chassidic Master) to impart the lesson that when one camps "surrounding the Ohel Mo'ed," meaning around the holy Torah, then there are no rifts and no controversies, for a wonderful sense of unity reigns amongst us all. This unity does not differentiate between land of origin or different cultural groups, for all of us are sons of one nation. We are all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and our joint goal is to fulfill the Will of our Father in Heaven. On the contrary, each one assists the other with his *avodat Hashem*, as in the concept, "Each man should help his fellow, and tell his brother, 'Be strong!'"

4 Sivan 5785

31 May 2025

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Bamidbar



Hilula

4 Sivan

Rabbi Mantzur Marzok

5 Sivan

Rabbi Yosef Ezra Zalicha

6 Sivan

David Hamelech, *a"h*,
sweet singer of Israel

7 Sivan

The Ger Tzeddek, Avraham
ben Avraham, *hy"da*

8 Sivan

Rabbi Zalman Rotbarg,
Rosh Yeshiva of Beit Meir

9 Sivan

Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer,
author of *Kaf Hachaim*

10 Sivan

Rabbi Yishmael Hakohen,
Av Beit Din of Modena





FROM THE TREASURY

Based on the teachings of Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

The Creator Waits for Man to Repent

“And as for the redemptions of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the Children of Israel who are in excess of the Levites” (Bamidbar 3:46).

Why did Hashem not make the total number of *levi'im* correspond exactly to the number of firstborns? What lies behind the excess firstborns who then needed to be redeemed?

It seems that the Torah wishes to teach us an important foundation. Even if a person sins and does not act in accordance with Hashem's Will, he should not despair by saying, “I have fallen to such a low level; I can no longer rectify my ways.” For it is just like the excess firstborns had no corresponding *levi'im*, yet nevertheless Hashem found a remedy for them through redemption. Similarly, the sinner should know that for him too there is a way to rectify his deeds. The Creator, Blessed be He, does not take His creations to task; He knows that “The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth,” and if he repents fully he can rectify his wrongdoings and return to his previous virtuous state.

Someone approached me, most distraught. For the last ten years he had been laying tefillin every day and he just found out that there were no *parshiot* in them. He was utterly distressed and wished to know how he could rectify all these years of not fulfilling the mitzvah.

I explained to him that nothing stands in the way of repentance as the Creator is forgiving. If he accepts upon himself to lay a quality pair of tefillin, and when wearing them he undertakes not to talk about any worldly matters (which will add to the tefillin's holiness), then I guarantee that the mitzvah will be considered as if he had laid quality tefillin all those years. For the Creator waits for man's repentance which removes and atones for sins.



WALKING IN THEIR WAYS

Tidbits of faith and trust penned by Moreinu v'Rabbeinu Hagaon Hatzaddik Rabbi David Chananya Pinto, *shlita*

Torah Scholars Work Hard

One day a wealthy Jew approached me for a blessing for several matters.

As a merit for the blessing to come to fruition, I asked him to donate in support of yeshiva students who study and toil in Torah; in this way he will be using his wealth to support Torah.

The rich man refused my request with the following justification, “Honorable Rav, I am a hard working fellow. My wealth is a result of the considerable time and effort that I invest in my business, so I will not donate even one cent for yeshiva *bachurim* who do not work for their living and squander their time on nothing but Torah study. From my point of view, they are lazy time-wasters and I am not in the habit of distributing my hard-earned cash to such people!”

These scornful words that he allowed himself to utter, out of complete ignorance and misunderstanding of the elevated status Torah learning holds for Am Yisrael, were directed toward the most treasured sector of Am Yisrael! Those who invest their entire beings in the holy Torah. On hearing his position, I suggested

he try and study Torah for just one day, and if he succeeds I will bless him with whatever he desires.

The wealthy individual laughed at my suggestion and replied: “No problem, I am prepared to sit and study Torah for an entire week!”

He sat in the Beit Medrash for quite some time and tried to concentrate on what was being studied, just like the yeshiva students. But just as I expected, his attempts were unsuccessful. He quickly gave up and came to the clear conclusion that Torah study is something essentially difficult which demands toil and great effort, and there is no place to belittle those who tirelessly toil in Torah study. After all, it is in their merit that the entire world exists.

From then on, he held yeshiva students in great esteem and merited donating considerable sums to our distinguished Yeshiva and other Torah institutions. He merited becoming a “Zevulun,” one who supports those who study the holy Torah and thereby merits a share in their learning.



GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Praising One's Friend

There are various forms of speech that are forbidden because they are considered *avak lashon hara*. For example, “Who would have believed that so and so would turn out this way,” or, “Let's not talk about so and so, I don't want to go into details about what happened and what will be,” and

other similar references. Although nothing derogatory has been said, they have negative connotations.

Additionally, praising someone in front of his enemy is considered *avak lashon hara*, because this may cause the enemy to counter negatively.



WORDS OF THE SAGES

Forgetting About the Sandwich and the Coffee

On the verse in this *parsha*, “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai,” the Midrash expounds: “From here our Sages learnt, the Torah was given within three parameters: fire, water, and the desert. Why were these three necessary? To teach us that just as these are free for all, so too the words of Torah are free.” The Midrash continues to explain the implication of desert: “One who does not make himself ownerless like a desert, cannot acquire [spiritual] wisdom and the Torah.”

Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman, *shlita*, points out that this concept seems to oppose rational thinking. If someone wishes to train in a certain profession, he is first assessed for suitability. A potential trainer will verify that the applicant is mentally stable and capable of handling the project, otherwise any training would be a waste of time and effort. If an unkempt individual shows up for a job interview, it is likely that tomorrow he will find himself at yet another interview. No employer seeks to hire a disheveled worker.

However, concerning the Torah we are told, “For you can have no freer man than one who engages in the study of the Torah.” Desert is land that is neither owned nor cultivated. Only if a person makes himself ownerless and has no preconceived “cultivated” ideas or demands is he able to acquire Torah and wisdom. For the Torah is a G-dly wisdom, and if man will approach it with his own superficial opinions, he will not be able to grasp the Torah.

The great Gaon Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, *zt”l*, was sitting and delving into the holy words of the Torah, together with a young *bachur* who had come to study with him. At midday, the righteous Rabbanit, Baila Hinda, *a”h*, returned from the Machaneh Yehuda market loaded with baskets of provisions in honor of the approaching festival of Pesach. She had bought horseradish for the *maror* and radishes for *karpas*. As she entered her home, she noticed the coffee, bread, and vegetables that she had prepared for her husband lying neglected on the dining room table. She approached her husband and enquired, “Why did you not yet eat?”

The Rosh Yeshiva shook himself out of a trance, so to speak, and answered innocently, “Do you not see, Rabbanit, the distinguished guest who is sitting here with me? He is a young Torah scholar who wished to discuss Torah matters. How could I interrupt our learning for something so mundane?”

But the Rabbanit persisted: “My dear husband, what would have happened if you would have told the young *bachur* to wait a few moments while you tasted something?” Rabbi Isser Zalman did not understand and explained with the utmost modesty: “Am I some kind of professor who can keep people waiting?”

This is a wonderful demonstration of Chazal’s explanation of, “One who does not make himself ownerless like a desert cannot acquire [spiritual] wisdom and the Torah ...”



PARSHAH PEARLS

Inspiring Reflections

To Avert Embarrassment

“Moshe and Aharon took these men who had been designated by [their] names” (*Bamidbar* 1:17).

Moshe Rabbeinu could have chosen the men himself since their greatness was clearly recognizable; these were the leaders of the tribes who were summoned when important matters were discussed by the assembly. However, so as not to offend those who were not chosen, Moshe Rabbeinu asked Hashem to name them.

Furthermore, Harav Tzvi Polias points out that when taking these men it first says, “Moshe and Aharon took these men,” and only after that, “They gathered together the entire assembly,” so that no one should be embarrassed when his friend was called upon, while he himself was not chosen.

There is a fascinating story told on this topic. After Rabbi Akiva Eiger’s engagement, his father-in-law invited him to his home town, eager to introduce his gifted son-in-law to the townsfolk. The *talmidei chachamim* gathered in the *beit midrash* and the father-in-law looked forward to his son-in-law the Gaon addressing the audience with words of wisdom.

To his dismay, the son-in-law stood there in silence. The astounded father-in-law, very shocked and disappointed, wished to break off the engagement. His son-in-law asked for a reprieve of two days and then agreed to enlighten the participants with his Torah thoughts.

When asked why he had risked his engagement, Rabbi Akiva Eiger answered that there was another *chatan* present in the Beit Midrash, whose father-in-law was also very proud of him. Had he agreed to speak, this would have diminished the other *chatan*’s value in his father-in-law’s eyes. For that reason, he kept quiet.

Counting People Without Reason

“As Hashem commanded Moshe, he counted them in the Wilderness of Sinai” (*Bamidbar* 1:19).

Why did the Torah see fit to point out that the counting of Yisrael was “as Hashem commanded Moshe” — is this not obvious?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein *zt”l* explains: Normally, there is benefit in a country knowing the exact number of its citizens. This knowledge can be used to estimate the different needs of the citizens, for example the amount of food required and so forth. However, when Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, they ate and drank as much as they desired. They ate manna that fell from the heavens, they drank water from the well and they were surrounded by Clouds of Glory which washed and ironed their clothes. Even the young, growing children did not require new clothing since their clothing grew with them! Therefore, they were not in need of food, drink, or clothing, nor did they require protection from enemies. This being the case, there was no practical benefit of knowing the exact number of Bnei Yisrael while they were in the desert.

This is the implication of the verse, “As Hashem commanded Moshe, he counted them in the Wilderness of Sinai.” Had this not been a G-dly command, it would not have seemed necessary to count them. But once Hashem gave over this command it must be obeyed completely, even if belies our understanding.

a NOVEL LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Why Was the Torah Given in the Desert?



A Life of Torah

Sefer Bamidbar begins by saying that Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness. The obvious question is, why was the Torah given specifically in a desert?

A desert is an ownerless and uncultivated place, lacking all basic living conditions. No water, no electricity, no air conditioning. How can one survive in the desert? There is only one way: by lifting one's eyes to Hashem and trusting that He will provide man with all his needs and protect him from the dangers of the desert.

So it was with the generation who lived in the Wilderness. They merited the Pillar of Cloud that straightened the path for them, the manna, Heavenly food, and a well of water that travelled with them wherever they went.

The reason why the Torah was given in the desert is to teach us how to live a life of Torah. A person who studies Torah needs to ignore all that is happening around him and not pay attention to the conditions. He must place his trust in Hashem and cast his burden on Him.

Concerning this David Hamelech writes (*Tehillim*, 55:23), "Cast upon Hashem your burden and He will sustain you; He will never allow the faltering of the righteous." If you trust in Hashem, you will lack nothing!

"One Who Trusts in Hashem, Kindness Surrounds Him"

Morning arrives, the father wakes his son for another day of Torah study in his Talmud Torah. Today, as always, his mother prepared a fresh, nutritious sandwich for him and placed it in his lunch bag. The hour is getting late, the child leaves the house in a rush and makes his way to the Talmud Torah. Upon arrival, he enters his classroom, sits down in his place and then suddenly remembers – he forgot to take the bag with his sandwich.

"What will be?" he worries, "I am in school for so many hours, I will starve if I have to wait until I go home to eat!"

For a moment he is filled with concern, but this feeling immediately makes way for a genuine feeling of tranquility and trust. "I know my parents, they will do anything to make sure I won't remain hungry."

Sure enough, at the very moment the child is deep in these thoughts, his father notices the lunch bag on the kitchen table. He thinks to himself, "Oh no! What will be? There's no way that my dear son can go without food an entire morning. How will he have the

strength to learn?"

What will be? The solution is clear. Despite being pressed for time, the father grabs the bag, hails a taxi and hurries to the Talmud Torah to bring his child the nutritious sandwich. Now he can have a productive morning of Torah learning.

What is the conclusion? The child was right! He had nothing to worry about. He was certain that his father would do anything for him and this was indeed the case.

Returning home from the Talmud Torah, the father reasons: "It is true that the trip took up my precious time and even involved a considerable expense. But what doesn't a father do for his child? What doesn't a father do to ensure his son will be able to study diligently without any hindrance?"

We all understand that this story is nothing out of the ordinary. This is how every devoted father will react and this is the feeling of every son who relies on his father and trusts in him.

All this is only an illustration to demonstrate the relationship of our merciful Father in Heaven to His beloved children, who studiously devote themselves to Torah and Avodah. The Creator of the World will not leave us to survive on our own. He will worry for us and fill every need. How? Don't worry! Hashem has many ways. All that is required of us is faith and trust in Him. "One who trusts in Hashem, kindness surrounds him."

Not always are parents able to send their child to the Talmud Torah with a fresh, appetizing sandwich. What happens when poverty strikes and there isn't even a plain piece of bread for the child?

About this the Torah says: "Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai." Those who travel through the desert do not come with preconceived conditions. They know that in order to arrive at their destination they must travel through the desert, come what may. They have no stipulations and no expectations.

So too with the holy Torah! Torah study is not dependent on any external factor. Our Torah is a Torah of life; it is the elixir of life. Whatever the circumstance, one studies Torah. Without stipulations and without expectations!

Activating the Inner Voice

The *sefer Pri Amalenu* offers a different reason as to why the Torah was given in the desert.

One year, at the end of the semester in the Lomzha yeshiva, twenty-six students went to take leave of their master and teacher, the Gaon Rabbi Yechiel Michel Gordon zt"l. Each student would now set off on his own path, wherever life would lead him.

The Rosh Yeshiva wished to provide them with "provisions" for their journey, something that would be suitable for each and every one of them. And indeed he inspired them with the following insight.

"My sons," he turned to his beloved students, "Many of you will no doubt merit receiving rabbinical positions, while others may not. Let me tell you a story that will serve each of you as a guide for life."

"The Russian Czar, Nikolai the first, once went on a tour of all the countries under his reign. When he arrived at the first country, he was warmly welcomed by the local governor. The Czar turned to him and asked: 'How do you administer the country's affairs?'"

"Exactly according to the law!" was his reply.

"The Czar treated him to a menacing look and declared, 'You are dismissed from your position as governor!'"

"The thousands of citizens standing there were in shock. They could not understand what had happened. Where did the governor go wrong?! But not one person dared question the Czar's decision, especially since this was Nikolai the first *ym"sh*, known as a cruel tyrant, nicknamed 'The Iron Czar.'"

"That evening at the festive dinner, after the Czar had downed several cups of vodka and was in good spirits, one of the royal entourage plucked up the courage to ask the Czar to explain his strange behavior. Why was the governor fired from his position because he was particular to keep the laws?"

"This was the Czar's answer: 'To govern a country exactly according to the letter of the law, there is no need for a ruler. For this a police sergeant is good enough.'"

The message of this story is clear: In order to live as a Jew the Torah must be our "Torah of life" and we must live according to its laws, as stated in the Shulchan Aruch. However, there is a 'fifth section' of Shulchan Aruch which was never printed. In order to understand the correct conduct every step of the way, one cannot behave like a police sergeant, simply "going by the book," excusing oneself with the fact that one is behaving "according to the rules." Rather, in addition to keeping to the laws, a person must seek *da'at Torah* to guide him as to the correct way to behave in each questionable situation.