



REBBETZIN SHIRA

SMILES

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Encampment Elucidation

The Torah recounts an enormous amount of detail as it describes *Am Yisrael's* encampment in the desert. Three tribes camped in each of the four directions, north, south, east and west. Within each group, one tribe was designated as the leader of that side. Each tribe had its own unique flag that reflected their unique character. All the tribes surrounded the *Mishkan*, clearly everyone's focus was the service of Hashem.

In a fascinating comment, the *Ba'al Haturim* explains why Yehudah, Reuven, Yosef, and Dan were chosen to be the leaders of their set. When Yaakov Avinu blessed his children, he spoke to these four sons directly, addressing them in the second person. This reflects the idea that each person must see himself as personally

responsible to fulfill his mission in life. The Kuzari compares the Jewish people to a symphony wherein each player has his instrument and specific notes to play. Some instruments are loud, others are soft, some play continuously, some every few minutes. Each person must focus on his unique contribution to the symphony to create the exquisite musical masterpiece.

Each flag had its own symbol and color. These flags model a life perspective that we can follow. Rav Brazil in *Beshvili Nivra Haolam* explains that the letters of the word *tzeva*, color, can be rearranged to read *etzev*, sadness or *betza*, profit. One can look at his unique color, his particular strength and mission with a sense of sadness and ask, "Why was I given something different than my friends?" Or he can view his circumstance with a sense of pride, "Hashem gave me exactly what I need to be me, and I will utilize it to the fullest!"

We can keep in mind, notes Rav Hirsch, two fundamental ideas. Firstly, we are

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each special with our own distinct mission. Secondly and simultaneously, we are all focused on the one goal of serving Hashem and keeping His Torah. This is the imagery each tribe conveyed having its own flag, yet all encamped equally around the *Mishkan*.

Interestingly, the placement of the tribes only went into effect after the *Mishkan* was built, not when *Am Yisrael* left Egypt. In *Emet L'Yaakov*, Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky explains that the flags highlighted each tribe's singular, original identity. Such a focus could easily lead to dissension and competition among the tribes. However, after building the *Mishkan* each tribe was able to take its position around it and use their specialness toward the collective focus of serving Hashem. Thus, a paradigm was established, diversity that leads to unity. A unity of purpose and direction.

Parashat Bamidbar is always read around the time of *Chag haShavuot*. The Slonimer Rebbe explains that appreciating one's uniqueness and specific contribution to the Jewish people is a prerequisite to receive the Torah each year. *Ke'ish echad belev echad*. None of us is merely part of a crowd. We all have equal responsibility to contribute something unique to the whole. ■

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