

Much of this week's *Parashah* is devoted to taking a census of *Bnei Yisrael* and establishing the order in which they would camp and travel. Moshe is commanded (1:2), "Take a census of the entire assembly of *Bnei Yisrael* according to their families, according to their fathers' household." And we read later (1:18), "They established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers' household."

We read in the *Pesach Haggadah*, "Our burden"--This refers to the children, as it says, 'Every son that is born you shall cast into the river'. R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) comments: The Egyptians wanted to imbue in Jewish parents a feeling of cruelty towards their children and thus disrupt Jewish continuity. In this way, they hoped to break as well the bond between *Bnei Yisrael* and their Father in Heaven. In response to this, the commandment to bring the *Korban Pesach* specifically includes an injunction to take "one of the flock for your families." And, after the Exodus, Moshe was commanded to count *Bnei Yisrael* "according to their families, according to their fathers' household."

This explains, as well, concludes R' Charlap, why the *Mitzvah* of relating the story of the Exodus at the *Seder* is primarily from father to son--so that children will become closer to their parents and accept their influence and, ultimately, become closer to their Father in Heaven. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.41)

Shabbat

R' Menachem Mendel Hager z"l (1886-1941; rabbi, *Rosh Yeshiva* and *Chassidic Rebbe* of Oyber Visheve, Hungary) writes: "Shabbat" is an acronym of (*Devarim* 24:15), "B'yomo tee'tain secharo" / "On that day shall you pay his wages." (This verse commands us to pay hired workers on the day they work.) Although we are taught, in general, that the reward for *Mitzvot* is not paid in this world, only in the World-to-Come, that is only so that a person does not lose out in *Olam Ha'ba*. However, the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 118b) states that the reward for *Shabbat* observance is infinite; thus, a person can be rewarded in this world (so-to-speak, the same day) for his *Shabbat* observance, and his reward in *Olam Ha'ba* will not be diminished thereby.

Also, writes R' Hager, *Shabbat* observance is an expression of *Emunah*/faith, and, for that, a person deserves to be rewarded in this world (see below). (*She'eirit Menachem Al Tehilim* 92:1)

Why does a person deserve to be rewarded in this world for *Emunah*? R' Heschel of Krakow z"l (died 1663) explains:

The *Halachah* is that the *Mitzvah* of "B'yomo tee'tain secharo" / "On that day shall you pay his wages" does not apply if an employer hired the worker through an agent. The Torah was given to *Bnei Yisrael* through an agent (Moshe). Therefore, *Hashem* is not, so-to-speak, obligated to pay us on the same day we work (perform *Mitzvot*); rather, He can wait for *Olam Ha'ba* (which, as noted, is to our benefit). However, *Hashem* spoke the first two Commandments to *Bnei Yisrael* directly, not through His agent Moshe. Therefore, *Hashem* is obligated to pay us for those *Mitzvot*, which include the *Mitzvah* of *Emunah*, on the "same day." (*Chanukat Ha'Torah*)

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– Continued from facing page –

R' Moshe Schick z"l (1805-1879; a leading rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Hungary) writes: The ultimate purpose of the Jewish People is to publicize faith in, and service of, *Hashem* in the world. Even if the entire world rises up against us, we will stand up for the truth. Indeed, that is why we are called "*Yisrael*," meaning: "For you have wrestled with the Divine and with man and have overcome" (*Bereishit* 32:29), *i.e.*, you have fought and been a "fortress" for the truth. When we fulfill this mission we will see the fulfillment of the verse (*Yeshayah* 54:17), "Any weapon sharpened against you shall not succeed, and any tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servant of *Hashem*, and their righteousness is from Me, so says *Hashem*."

R' Schick continues: Perhaps this is why *Hashem* arranged *Bnei Yisrael* in encampments under flags, like soldiers ready for war. And, perhaps this is why *Hashem* imbued in a Jew's nature the trait of *Azut* / being strong-willed. *Azut* can be a very bad trait--indeed, we learn in *Pirkei Avot* (ch.5), "A person with a face of *Azut* is destined for *Gehinnom*." However, that refers only a person who uses *Azut* in his personal dealings. When it comes to standing up for the ultimate truth, *Azut* is a good trait.

Along with that *Azut*, however, another trait is necessary: *Shalom*. Although all people think differently, every person approaches *Mitzvah* observance from a slightly different perspective, and every tribe camped under a different colored flag, we must be joined together like one in order to accomplish our mission, R' Schick writes. Thus, at the same time that *Bnei Yisrael* were divided into multiple camps, each at a different point on the compass, they formed a closed unit that kept out strangers and offered mutual protection to all of *Bnei Yisrael*.

Moreover, continues R' Schick, there are some people who tend more toward the trait of *Azut*, while others who tend more toward *Shalom*. By joining together, they can teach each other to moderate and modulate their natural tendencies to use each trait in its proper time and proper measure.

Thus, concludes R' Schick, our verse should be understood as follows: "Each man under his banner"--a symbol of readiness to fight for one's principles using one's *Azut*, "according to the insignias of their fathers' household"--even though each person and family is different, nevertheless, they shall be a "man," united like one person, and "*Bnei Yisrael* shall encamp," then they will endure, and be deserving of the name "*Yisrael*." Lest you say that these words express contradictory goals, the verse reassures us, "Surrounding the *Ohel Mo'ed* / Tent of Meeting shall they encamp," *i.e.*, if their "center" is a focus on *Hashem*, that will unify them and protect them from the ill effects of *Azut*.

(Maharam Schick Al Ha'Torah)

"*Bnei Yisrael* shall encamp, each man under his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the *Ohel Mo'ed* / Tent of Meeting shall they encamp." (2:2)

Midrash Rabbah relates: When *Hashem* revealed Himself at *Har Sinai*, twenty two myriads of angels descended with Him, and they were all arranged in encampments under flags. When *Bnei Yisrael* saw this, they yearned for flags as well, and they said, "If only we could have flags like them."

In another place, *Midrash Rabbah* relates: The Jewish People were holy and great under their flags, and all the nations looked at them and wondered about them. The nations said to them, "Return to us and we will make you rulers, dukes, leaders, etc." The Jewish People replied, "Can you give us greatness like *Hashem* gave us in the desert?" [Until here paraphrased from *Midrash Rabbah*]

What was so special about the angels' encampment and flags and about *Bnei Yisrael's* encampment and flags in the desert?

R' Menachem Mendel Stern z"l (1759-1834; rabbi of Sighet, Hungary) explains: The *Gemara* (*Menachot* 29b) relates that this world is like the letter *Heh* (ה). If a person wants to leave (*i.e.*, he does not want to serve *Hashem*), he can fall out through the large opening on the bottom. If he thereafter wants to return, he can enter through the small opening on the side. *Olam Ha'ba* is different, however, writes R' Stern. In that world, there is no free will, so it is like a square, with no exits or entrances. The same is true of the world of the angels, for they also have no free will.

The greatest use of man's free will is to nullify his desires to *Hashem's* Will--in effect, to use one's free will to eliminate one's own free will. This is what it means that *Bnei Yisrael* yearned for flags (*i.e.*, an encampment) like the angels have--a "square" world where man's free will is nullified to *Hashem's* Will. (Derech Emunah)

"Formerly this was done in *Yisrael* in cases of redemption and exchange transactions to validate all matters--one would draw off his shoe, and give it to the other. This was the process of ratification in Israel." (Ruth 4:7)

R' Eliezer Dovid Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Oyber Visheve, Hungary and other towns) writes: This can be an allusion to a *Mussar* thought regarding the importance of honesty and integrity. The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 129a) teaches that a person should sell whatever he owns, if necessary, in order to buy shoes. Thus, a shoe is symbolic of a person's last possession. By handing over one's shoe when making a business deal, it is as if he is saying, "I will honor my commitment even if I lose everything I own, even my shoe." (Keren Le'David)