



Parashat Bamidbar 5771 - #188

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On the Parashah...

Military Service and Family Units

[Tal Chermon]

The Book of Bamidbar connects the story of how we became a Nation, received the Torah, and built the Mishkan, so that the Shechina could dwell in our midst (i.e. the ideals taught us in the first three books) - with the fulfillment of our destiny in Devarim. Bamidbar is the book of transition, of being “on the way.”

In this week’s Parashah, we read of the census that was taken. The Nation of Israel crosses the desert in military formation, each tribe encamping in its own special area. The people are counted according to the number of men “able to go forth to war” (Bamidbar 1:3), all men from twenty to sixty years old. In contrast to the war with Amalek, in which only a chosen

few fought on behalf of the entire nation (Shemot 17:9), in this case everyone age twenty or older must be prepared to go to war. As it says in Pirkei Avot (5:21), "Twenty is the age of pursuit". That pursuit may be the pursuit of money, of a wife, or of the enemy.

The fact that The Nation of Israel travelled in military formation reflects our need to be prepared for war. Pacifist philosophy formulates a world in which, with a little bit of good will, all problems can be solved. If there were no armies and no weapons, the reasoning goes, everyone would live peacefully together. This is not true. Conflict between nations leads to violence. Until these conflicts are resolved, the nation must be able to defend itself.

In the desert, as we begin preparations for the journey to Eretz Israel, the Nation assumes the form of a military camp. We must be ready to defend ourselves and to conquer the Land if necessary. Although Hashem promised us that we would inherit the Land, "one does not depend on miracles" (see Ramban on Bamidbar 1:45). It is up to us to implement the Divine Promise. Similarly, King David fought for Jerusalem, even though it had been promised to him (Shmuel 1 chapters 8-9). He fought because of the promise, and not despite it. The Divine Promise is not a replacement for our actions, rather it forms the basis and validation of them.

The Children of Israel number 600,000 men of army age - a number which represents the complete Nation (Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem*, chap .3), and they are counted according to their families and houses of their fathers. As Maran HaRav Kook explains: "In order to comprehend the spiritual meaning of the concept of 'Klal' (the Nation as a whole), this 'Klal' must be enabled as a real nation The qualifications are: land and number Along with territory [of its own], it must have the requisite number of members... which is 600,000. Proof of this is the fact that we became a Nation in Egypt only when we had attained that number. This national requisite has not changed. That same number, encompassing all possible variations of personality and opinion, is sufficient today too to give us the character of a nation, so that no individuals may dare to set national values according to their own personal opinions" (*Olat Re'eyah* vol. 1, pp. 387-388). When the War of Independence broke out in 5708, there were only 600,000 Jews in Eretz Israel. By 5728, when the Six-Day War erupted, there were about 600,000 soldiers in the army.

The Nation as an army is the very embodiment of the concept of a Nation as one united entity. The individual, his desires, his personal ambitions, his family ties - lose their independent existence and significance within the whole of the "Klal". As the Rambam states, "When he goes out to war, he is to depend on the Savior of Israel, and realize that his battle is to sanctify G-d's Name. It is incumbent upon him to risk his life, not fearing anything nor thinking of his wife or children, but rather erasing their memory from his heart and concentrating solely on the battle" (*Hilchot Melachim* 7:15). In King David's time, the soldiers divorced their wives before going to battle. It is not clear whether the divorce was unconditional or whether it took effect only if they did not return (*Shabbat* 56a). In any case, this is a very tangible expression of the obliteration of all personal and familial considerations in time of war.

At the same time, the national census is taken according to family membership. The family unit forms the basis of the Nation, a 'sub-culture' of our national culture. Our Nation's power derives from our family units, as our Sages declared, "'Strength' refers to Seder Nashim [that section of the Mishna dealing with family law]" (*Shabbat* 31a). The existence of family units

means that the individual relinquishes a purely personal framework and lives within the framework of a certain group. The family is a miniature nation, and within it, the individual acquires group values. This framework imbues one's personal life and home with national values. It is the natural, essential way to create a common set of values. All the same, "the whole is no more than the sum of its parts" (Baraita De-Rabbi Yishmael). The family is the basic national unit whereby the individual learns to identify with the nation and to accept its values.

For this reason, our Parashah notes that "Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered strange fire...and they had no children" (Bamidbar 3:4). Our Sages commented, "Had they had children, they would not have died - anyone who does not attempt to fulfill the Mitzvah of having children deserves the death penalty" (Yevamot 64a). Detachment from the family framework implies isolation from the whole and aloofness and individualism in a negative sense. Great as Nadav and Avihu may have been, their personalities were private, not joined to the Nation. It is the family which brings the Nation into the home, into the heart and soul of each individual.

Rav Aviner on... Hey Bear, It's Our Place

Question: The political world and the media are engrossed with the threat that the Arabs will declare a State in September following a vote in the UN. What is Ha-Rav's opinion?

Answer: The suggestion to establish a Palestinian state has arisen once again, and we therefore need to understand once and for all: This Land belongs to us, all of it, in the borders stated in the Tanach. As our history books write, we had a Kingdom here for thousands of years which the Romans destroyed, as mentioned in the Balfour Declaration and approved at the San Remo Conference. In brief: This Land is ours.

A friend, who went on vacation in Alaska, told me that he sat by the sea, fishing. During the flight in the small plane that brought them there, someone jokingly asked: "What happens if a bear approaches us?" Yet the group leader didn't laugh. He answered: "Look it straight in the eye and say to it: 'Hey bear, this is my place!'" Later on when my friend was fishing, he heard a rustling behind him. He turned around and saw a terrifying sight – a bear was threatening him. He had the courage to look it in the eye without blinking and to say: "Hey bear, this is my place!" The bear growled, turned around and left.

We have to state clearly to the Arabs and the entire world: This Land is our place. It is all ours. This Land was, is and will always be, our place.

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #58-59

[adapted by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

#58

The blessing of "Chonen Ha-Da'at" - you give man knowledge, is the first blessing specifically for the weekdays. Knowledge is a special gift given to human beings. The Rambam says that when the Torah says we were made in Hashem's Image, it is talking about

having knowledge. Because this is what makes us special among Hashem's creations, it is the first blessing for the weekdays. We can use our knowledge for many things. We want to use our knowledge for that which is holy. When we say our wisdom comes "Mei-Itcha- from You" - we are recognizing that Hashem is the One who gave us any smarts we have. We did not earn it. It's a gift from Hashem. So we have a special responsibility to use it to serve Hashem in every way that we can.

#59

In the blessing of "Hashevenu" we ask Hashem to return us to His Torah. We are asking Hashem to help us return - which means to do Teshuvah. The first part of Teshuva comes from learning Torah. First we need to learn and understand that there is Hashem. Once someone understands this fact, they can begin to return to Hashem. And this return is to Hashem as our Father. Once this happens, Hashem can draw us near to His Avodah - His service. This is as our King. He has given us the Mitzvot and wants us to perform them. Then we can get to the highest level - complete Teshuvah before Hashem. This is when we have a close relationship with Hashem. Hashem wants us to achieve this. He wants us to perform Teshuvah and come close to Him. He wants this relationship. And so we ask Him for His help to truly return to Him.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Megillah Reading by Women

Question: Is it appropriate for women to organize a Megillah reading and read for themselves?

A: Certainly not. There are many problems with doing so. Some authorities rule that a woman should not read for herself but hear it from a man (Magen Avraham #689). There is a doubt as to whether she can fulfill the Mitzvah for other women (Sha'ar Ha-Tziyun ibid.). There is doubt as to the correct formula of the blessing (Shulchan Aruch ibid.). And we should not change the established order of the prayers as has been done over the generations (Shut Rashba 1:323). Perhaps there is also a rebellion against the Halachah in doing so (see Shut Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:49). There is also a problem of immodesty even though they are alone (Shut Eretz Tzvi #12 of Ha-Rav Tzvi Schachter).

It is therefore preferable to act in the same manner as all the wise and righteous women throughout all the generation (Be-Ikvei Ha-Tzon, pp. 21-37 and Ha-Rav Yosef Soloveitchik in "Mi-Penini Ha-Rav", p. 68). But there are many other blessings that women can recite throughout their lives without any problem, and may a blessing come upon them.

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