

B”H

MARCHING TO GEULA WITH OUR FLAGS HELD HIGH!

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

Former president Donald Trump and Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, met (in an imaginary meeting). Trump tells Ahmadinejad about an interesting dream he had.

“In my dream, I saw Teheran rebuilt with a flag waving from every house.”

“Very interesting,” says Ahmadinejad. “Flags? What did it say on them?”

“I don’t know,” says Trump, “I don’t read Hebrew!”

FLAG FORMATION

This week, we begin a new book, the book of Bamidbar. It is also called “Chumash Ha’Pekudim” because of G-d’s command that comes up time and again, to count the Jewish people. This parsha is always read before Shavuos. This year (outside of Eretz Yisrael) we read it erev Shavuos. What connection and message is there between parshas Bamidbar and Shavuos? And what does it teach us about the Geula?

A superficial reading of the parsha reveals to us a new topic never before spoken of in the Torah. In parshas Bamidbar we first discover the topic of flags!

“The children of Israel shall encamp each man by his division with the flag staffs of their fathers' house ...”

We are used to thinking of a flag as a piece of material attached to a pole which generally serves as a symbol, a signal or as a form of identification. We know about flags of nations, tribes, army units, and mainly, flags of Tzivos Hashem and Moshiach flags. However, Rashi gives another meaning to the Hebrew word “degel” (which also includes an actual flag). A degel means order, indicating a unit or organized collective. In this case, the flags represent the special way the tribes camped during their stay in the desert, in a square. They received this from Yaakov Avinu. The 12 tribes were divided into four camps with three tribes in each camp. Each camp dwelt on a different side and together, they surrounded the Mishkan which was in the center.

The commentators on the Medrash explain that the division of the Jewish people into groups was in alignment with the ministering angels who are divided into “the four camps of the Shechina.” In Pirkei D’Rabi Eliezer (chapter 4) we find a description of the supernal chariot as it is surrounded by four camps of angels: the camp of Michael on the right (chessed); the camp of Gavriel on the left (gevura); the camp of Uriel in the front (east-tiferes); and the camp of Refael in the back (west-malchus).

This unique “degel” arrangement for the encampment of the Jewish people is very much connected with the holiday of Shavuos. First of all, many of the commentators explain that the Jewish people saw the supernal chariot for the first time at Mattan Torah. At that time, G-d descended on Har Sinai along with myriads of angels. The Medrash Raba describes 22,000 chariots of angels that descended along with G-d on Har Sinai. The Jewish people saw this formation of angels surrounding G-d on four sides as they praised G-d.

In the haftorah of Shavuos, we read the vision of the prophet Yechezkel ben Buzi. He describes how “the heavens opened and I saw visions of G-d ...” Yechezkel goes on to describe in spectacular terms the chariot which includes supernal man and the holy chayos surrounding him. (1:10) “And the likeness of their faces was the face of a man, and the face of a lion was on their right, to the four of them, and the face of an ox to their left, to the four of them, and the face of an eagle [was] to the four of them.” It’s the same division of four camps of angels (the face of a man, lion,

ox and eagle) that surround the heavenly throne on four sides.

So we've found the connection between the parsha and Shavuot. The connection can be summed up in one word: "degel". Parshas Bamidbar raises the flag for the first time and on Shavuot we wave the flag twice, at Mattan Torah and in the haftarah [although this is not the "flag" we are used to, made of material on a pole, but the Torah scriptural "degel" which represents the Jewish system of traveling and camping as a unit].

VICTORY FLAG

However, what is so important about this encampment that we make such a big deal about this "degel" system? And in general, how is this connected to and how does this help bring the true and complete Geula?

In an amazing sicha to children, the Rebbe explains the idea of a flag. This way of camping, with the Ohel Moed in the center and the tribes surrounding it on all sides, comes to highlight that the job of the Jewish people throughout the generations is to protect the Mikdash. The real purpose of the flag is to show us what is truly important and what we need to defend with our bodies and souls. Obviously, G-d does not need our protection. If anything, we need His protection (now, more than ever). G-d wanted "to provide merit for the Jewish people" and gave each of us a part in defending the Torah and Judaism! The encircling that the Jewish people did around the Mishkan represents the eternal work each of us has to protect the Luchos, protect the Sefer Torah, and to protect the spiritual Mishkan and Mikdash that is within our hearts, Torah and mitzvos. This is the Jewish flag!

The Rebbe says that if we pay attention we see that the Jewish people did not only surround the Ohel Moed when they camped but also when they traveled. This means that this protection of the Torah is not only when we are at rest, when all is well. We also need to surround the Mishkan when we are on the road, even when we travel from place to place, from exile to exile, from problem to problem, one distress to another. Even when we are in a desolate desert and it is very hard to preserve a high morale, we cannot give up!

Elsewhere, the Rebbe explains that the four directions represent four dangers that make it hard, that interfere, with a Jew doing his mission in this world. The north side represents coldness and apathy (the north is cold). The south side represents the heat of material passions (the south is hot). The east side represents the self-satisfaction of a person who has become learned. He feels that he already lit up the entire world (the east is the source of light). The fourth side represents the Shechina as our Sages say, the Shechina is in the west.

The protection needed to preserve the Jewish spark is insufficient if it's only from one direction. It needs to be on all four sides. A person needs to beware coldness in Torah and mitzvos in the same way he is careful from excessive passion for worldly matters, and with precisely the same force to be wary and careful of inappropriate pride and self-absorption even about the good things that he does. Then, we reach the fourth side, the side of the Shechina. Man merits to be a partner with G-d in Creation.

This is precisely the connection with the Geula. In Medrash Tanchuma we find this interesting statement: "And in the Future, in the merit of the flags, I will redeem you." Which flags is the Medrash talking about? Why will be redeemed because of them?

Based on what was said above, we understand the Medrash. The flags represent our protection of that which is sacred to our people. The flags represent protecting our inner Mikdash. "In the merit of the flags" - in the merit of keeping the Torah (and fulfilling mitzvos) at all times, in every place and situation, we will quickly merit the coming of Moshiach and the Geula!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story that teaches how to get out of coldness and apathy (north), overcome passions (south), to not be imprisoned within the "self" (east) and to reach for the Shechina (west).

On Shavuos 5704, the Rebbe Rayatz called in three tmimim. He appointed them as a beis din and gave them a special mission, to be makerev bachurim from the "oilemishe yeshivos" to the teachings of Chassidus.

Ten years went by and on Shavuos 5714 the Rebbe told about this at a farbrengen.

"Those three yungeleit chosen by my father-in-law, the Rebbe, belong to three different categories. One is a big lamdan, one is average, and one is a simple person. The same division applied regarding Chassidus: one is a big maskil in Chassidus, one is average, and one is less than that.

"The two learned ones (great and average) afterward began to become busy with their own personal matters, in the material things of this world or even matters of the World to Come, and did not work on their shlichus. It was the simple one, who was not a lamdan or a maskil like them, who also did not have parnassa, and nevertheless, he is involved till this day and will certainly continue to be involved in the mission assigned to him by my father-in-law, the Rebbe. Ten years (a complete cycle) since that farbrengen, we already see the fruits accomplished by that Jew."

It is specifically simplicity which will triumph!

Good Shabbos!