

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Bamidbar, 5781
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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
 Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
 ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
 Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
 Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
 Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
 Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
 Passed away on the second day
 of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
 Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
 ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
 Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
 ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF
 Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח"ל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY
 Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Bamidbar

TREASURE, KINGDOM, NATION

The Torah portion of Bamidbar is always read before the holiday of Shavuos. They have an inner connection based on three levels of Divine service. These three levels are alluded to by the three phrases connected with the giving of the Torah: “My special treasure,” “a kingdom of kohanim” and “a holy nation.” These parallel the three accountings found in the portion of Bamidbar. This also parallels the process of Redemption: first the Jewish people are separated from all other nations; then they lead the nations towards G-dliness; finally, knowledge of G-d covers and permeates the world as the waters cover the ocean bed.

If a particular Torah reading always occurs in conjunction with a specific holiday, by Divine Providence there must be an inner connection between the two. The portion of *Bamidbar* – the first reading of the book of Numbers – always occurs just prior to *Shavuos* – the holiday of the giving of the Torah. Also, if two things are connected, clearly the first is a preparation for the second. Thus, the Torah reading of *Bamidbar* prepares us for *Shavuos* – for receiving the Torah.

Obviously, since the Torah is given anew each year, we must prepare to receive it anew as well. Whatever preparations the Jewish people made at Sinai, we must repeat yearly. Indeed, we must prepare ourselves daily, for each day there is a revelation of Torah. In this regard, our actions now foreshadow the Torah of Moshiach. As we are on the threshold of Redemption, we are in a mode of preparation, so to speak. The parallel between the preparations before Sinai and the Torah reading of *Bamidbar* can be applied to our own time, extended to our preparations for Moshiach. Just as

Revelation followed the preparations at Sinai, and *Shavuot* follows Bamidbar, so Redemption must follow our current preparations for Moshiach.

That said, how did the Jewish people get ready to receive the Torah in the wilderness? From the first of Sivan until the sixth of the month, when the Torah was given, each day was designated for a specific part of the process. Rosh Chodesh, the first of the month, is a mini-holiday unto itself. On the second day of the month, G-d introduced the preparatory process with the words, "If you will indeed hearken to My voice, and you will keep My covenant, then you shall be My special treasure from among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be for Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation."

Traditionally, there are two explanations for the phrase "kingdom of kohanim." One explanation takes the phrase as a single unit. All the Jewish people are fit to be kohanim (priests), and therefore be set apart as a holy nation. The other explanation sees each phrase referring to a different aspect of the Jewish people. The second phrase, "a holy nation," indicates the holiness, the special sanctity of the Jewish people. They are all like the kohanim, set aside for Divine service. When, in the first phrase, G-d says the Jews will be a "kingdom of kohanim," it means the Jewish people are to be rulers, leaders, role models for the world. The term "kohen" may also mean a leader.

As G-d prepares the Jewish people to receive the Torah, He describes them with three phrases: "My special treasure," "a kingdom of kohanim" and "a holy nation." Each phrase represents a stage in preparing for the giving of the Torah. First, the Jewish people are separated from other peoples – "My special treasure"; next, they are princes, ruling and leading the nations of the world toward G-dliness – "a kingdom of kohanim"; third, they are

removed from the common and mundane, elevated and dedicated solely to the Divine service – “a holy nation.”

These three stages can be explained on a deeper level: First, G-d chooses the Jewish people. This choice has nothing to do with the status or superiority of the Jews. At this level, there’s no difference between “darkness” and “light.” Since “all the earth” belongs to G-d, He chose the Jewish people simply because He wanted to. We have no voice or option. The phrase “My special treasure” alludes to this stage.

Next comes the stage of service. The Jewish people prepare for – and thus participate in – the giving of the Torah through their actions. But this Divine service has two levels. One involves things permitted by the Torah, which one uses for “the sake of heaven.” In this way allowable actions become sanctified and the nations elevated. They act as a “kingdom of kohanim,” that is, rulers who rule by shaping and molding the spiritual character of the physical world.

The other level of service, the performance of a mitzvah, is not connected with the needs of the world. This last stage parallels the phrase “a holy nation.” At this level, the Jewish people are totally set apart and separated from the world. They are wholly dedicated and devoted to serving G-d.

The middle stage, and first level of service, uses the permitted, that which belongs to us, for “the sake of heaven.” As mentioned, this parallels the meaning of “kohanim” as leaders and the phrase “a kingdom of kohanim.” The unique point of this service is that in performing it we *are not separated* from the world. On the contrary, through involvement with the world, a transformation occurs. The world itself becomes a holy thing, a receptacle for G-dliness.

Which stage or level is the true intent behind the giving of the Torah? Clearly, it must be the middle stage, the first level of service.

To be totally separated from the world, the last stage, is really the province of angels. Since the Jewish people live in the physical world, and were given the Torah in the physical world, that must be the primary location and purpose for the Revelation. That means the Jewish people must deal with the nations of the world, the matters of the world, and the evil inclination that dwells within them. A Jew must be a ruler over his own *yetzer hara* (his evil inclination), his character, and indeed his environment. He must see that all in the realm of the permitted is suffused with G-dliness.

The ability to do this was accomplished with the giving of the Torah.

We can now understand the connection with the portion of Bamidbar, whose content concerns counting. Specifically, it contains three accounts, each obviously corresponding with one of the levels of Divine service.

The first counting is that of the Jewish people as a whole, except for the tribe of Levi. This corresponds to the phrase, "My special treasure." Counting confers an importance, regardless of any inherent value. That G-d counts the Jewish people only shows that G-d has chosen them. It does not reveal any inherent value or service.

Next, the tribe of Levi is counted separately, for a specific reason. They have the special task of guarding and protecting the holy objects associated with the Tabernacle. This corresponds to "a kingdom of kohanim." As guardians, they are "rulers," so to speak, in charge of the items under their care.

Finally, the Levite men over thirty are numbered. They are set aside for service in the Tabernacle – set apart, as indicated by the phrase, "a holy nation." Indeed, the family of Kehos, enumerated at the end of the reading, carried and cared for the holiest articles. And of course Aaron and his descendants, the kohanim, came from this family.

The uniqueness of Bamidbar, the reason why this portion always precedes Shavuot, lies in the middle stage. That G-d chose us, that He numbers the Jewish people, must be the first stage. Obviously, Revelation and the covenant must proceed from G-d's Will and initiative.

What then? The Jewish people are to be a "kingdom of kohanim." They are to be spiritual rulers and leaders. The goal is to be involved in the world, transforming it into a dwelling place for G-dliness. Like the Levites, we have a special task. We are not to withdraw from the world, but lead it and guide it. This is our preparation to receive the Torah – whether for the first time at Sinai, every year following the reading of Bamidbar, or in the immediate, imminent future, when by preparing the world, we will receive the Torah of Moshiach.

Then, after the Divine service of the second stage is complete, we will reach the final stage, that of being wholly dedicated and devoted to G-d. We will be a "holy nation" and, with the coming of Moshiach, the whole world will recognize G-dliness.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 18, pp. 18-27)

לזכות

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