

The Path To Follow

Bamidbar

443

A Hevrat Pinto Publication

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Sivan 5th, 5772

May 26th, 2012

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The Order Of The World

It is written, “The Children of Israel shall encamp, every man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting” (Bamidbar 2:2).

In the Midrash our Sages say, “Holy and great were the Children of Israel beneath their banners. All the nations looked at them with rapt attention and wonder, telling them: ‘Cleave to us, come to us, and we will make you leaders, nobles, and priests.’ The Children of Israel replied, ‘What greatness could you confer upon us? Could you confer upon us anything like the greatness which G-d conferred upon us in the desert by giving us the banner of the camp of Judah, the banner of the camp of Reuven, the banner of the camp of Ephraim, the banner of the camp of Dan? Can you, perhaps, confer upon us anything like the greatness which G-d conferred upon us in the wilderness? For although we repeatedly sinned, He pardoned us again and again, assuring us: “Your camp shall be holy” [Devarim 23:15].’ The wicked Bilam also looked at them and gazed out upon them, but could not touch them, as it is said: ‘Bilam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel dwelling by tribe’ [Bamidbar 24:2]. He said, ‘Who can touch these men, each of whom dwells under his own banner?’” (Tanchuma, Bamidbar 11).

We need to understand the response given by the Children of Israel: “Can you, perhaps, confer upon us anything like the greatness which G-d conferred upon us in the wilderness?” Why is forgiveness of sin mentioned here?

We shall attempt to explain this according to the teaching of the Maharal (Netivot Olam 1), who states that the holy Torah represents the true order of man [seder ha-adam], the way in which he must act, and what all his actions must adhere to. Just as the Torah is the order of man, it is also the order of the world [seder ha-olam], the order of everything that exists. This is what we read in the Midrash, namely that Holy One, blessed be He, consulted the Torah and created the world (Bereshith Rabba 1:1). In regards to this, our Sages have said: “If [a man] feels pains in his head, let him engage in the study of Torah” (Eruvin 54a). This is because when a man experiences physical discomfort, it indicates that he has disturbed the internal order that he should possess. Hence he must study Torah, which is the order of the world. As a result, the proper physical order of his body, which is his health, will automatically return.

Sin Has No Part in the Order of the World

Thus because Jews study Torah, they participate in the order of the world. Along the same lines, the Sages have said: “Whoever studies Torah laws each day is assured of life in the World to Come, for it is said: ‘Halichot [the ways of] the world are his’ [Habakkuk 3:6]. Do not read halichot, but halachot [Torah laws]” (Niddah 73a). From here it follows that Torah laws, halachot, are the ways that every Jew must follow. When Jews study Torah and fulfill mitzvot, they enter into what is the order of the world, and when they do not study Torah, they have no part in the order of the world.

This is why the other nations were jealous of the Children of Israel. When they saw them encamping beneath their banners in an unparalleled way, they immediately wanted to take their Torah from them – even if it meant

turning the Children of Israel into nobles – just as long as they abandoned their Torah. However Israel is a holy nation. Whatever greatness they are given in this world, it counts for nothing in regards to that greatness. In fact when we find ourselves in this order, we are not attacked by either illness or ferocious animals, and furthermore the cloud goes before us, lowering mountains and raising valley before us (Pesikta Rabbati 31). It surrounds us like a walled city is surrounded by ramparts, and nothing in the world can attack us (Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer 42a). Furthermore, the cloud provides us with everything we need, washing and ironing our clothes, and we have no need to do anything (Shir HaShirim Rabba 4:24).

Why does all this happen?

It is because of the holy Torah, which we study and which is the order of the world, as well as the order of our body and the order of our soul. As a result, we do not come to sin, for sin has no part in the order of the world. That is why the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives our sins when we study Torah.

The Praise of the Children of Israel

The Torah only endures with someone if he is organized in his learning, as the Sages have said: “If you see a student whose studies are as hard [to learn] as iron, it is because he has failed to systematize his studies. ... Resh Lakish made it his practice to repeat in systematic order his studies 40 times, corresponding to the 40 days during which the Torah was given, and only then would he come before Rabbi Yochanan. Rabbi Ada bar Ahava made it his practice to repeat in systematic order his studies 24 times, corresponding to the [24 books of] the Torah, Prophets and Writings, and only then would he come before Rava” (Taanith 7b-8a).

Along the same lines, the Sages have said in regards to prayer: “A man must always prepare himself first for his prayer, and then say it” (Rosh Hashanah 35a). This is why the holy Ark went before the Children of Israel, to teach us that the holy Torah is the order of the world, be it in the spiritual or physical realms, and that the entire order of the tribes and banners only had power when the Torah was leading the way.

Generally speaking, the nations of the world were jealous of the banners of Israel because the holy Torah is the order of the world, and whoever cleaves to the Torah becomes part of the order of the world. Nothing harmful can then touch them, for evil is outside the order of the world. Furthermore, when Jews study Torah, the Holy One, blessed be He, forgives their sins, for sin is also outside the order of the world. When the nations saw that the Children of Israel encamped beneath their banners in an unparalleled way, they became jealous and wanted to take this away from them. Hence they told the Children of Israel, “We will make you leaders, nobles, and priests” – all because the nations of the world wanted to destroy that order.

It is for this reason that the Children of Israel are praised by Scripture itself, as it is said: “Every man by his banner according to the banners of their fathers’ household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting.”

The Importance of an Investment in Heaven

The extraordinary story that follows is found in the marvelous book Barchi Nafshi. It concerns a Jew from London whose devotion to the study of Daf HaYomi was without limit. Hashem answered him in a full measure of love, saving him from death. The story is as follows:

This Jew never skipped a Daf HaYomi class. Those who studied in the same class recounted that his devotion to learning was astonishing to his friends, who stressed that financial considerations, meaning thoughts of loss or gain, never entered into his thoughts.

We should mention that this Jew was quite wealthy. He owned several large manufacturing plants, and he was among the richest men of London. Yet when it came time for his Daf HaYomi class, he put everything aside, meaning that all his business concerns vanished.

He often stayed long after class was over, having a discussion with the Rav who taught the class and the other participants regarding the subject at hand. All his clients patiently waited until he had finished his halachic discussions. In fact this wealthy man became a symbol of Torah devotion.

Nevertheless, one day an unavoidable situation arose that forced him to leave before class started. However a man such as himself was not going to forgo Daf HaYomi learning. In our day, with audio tapes and CDs, it doesn't take much to get a recording of a Daf HaYomi class for a given day and to play it in the car, which is what this Londoner did. As soon as he got on the road, he turned off his cell phones, started the tape, and engaged in the "daf" without wasting a minute.

As he was traveling on the highway leading out of London, he saw a large truck in front of him that was moving quite slowly, and he wanted to overtake it. He therefore pulled ahead, only to suddenly hear the sound of police sirens.

He was certain that a police car was behind him and also wanted to pass the truck. The police officers in the car had therefore used their sirens to signal that he should get back into his lane and let them pass the truck first.

Complying with the sirens, he went back into his lane and waited for the police car to pass him.

He waited, but nothing happened. Even in his rearview and side mirrors, it was impossible to see a police car with its flashing red sirens. It had disappeared, as if swallowed up by the earth.

Two or three seconds later, he saw a huge tow truck coming towards him in the opposite lane. It then passed him at great speed, which the law permits on English highways.

His Heart Skipped a Beat

Since the slow moving truck in his own lane was so large, he would not have been able to overtake it in the three or four seconds that were available to him. In other words, if he had not immediately returned to his lane because of the sirens, who knows what would have happened!

Even after the oncoming truck passed him, he continued to look for the police car, but could not find it.

He eventually gave up looking, and in the meantime he realized that in the terror he had experienced from seeing the oncoming truck,

he had not been listening to the tape of the Daf HaYomi class. He therefore decided to rewind the tape by a few minutes and listen to the part he missed.

The Sound of Sirens Once Again

At that point, he no longer looked for the police car, for he suddenly realized the magnitude of the miracle he had just experienced.

The Creator had foreseen the danger of the oncoming truck, and at the exact same moment that he had wanted to overtake the slow moving truck in his own lane, he heard the sound of police sirens on the tape, which had been recorded more than 25 years earlier!

So that things are perfectly clear, and in order to understand the magnitude of the reward that Hashem gives to all who fear Him – and to whom He grants merit – we shall explain exactly what happened:

The audio tape that this wealthy Londoner had purchased contained a recording of a Daf HaYomi class that had been given in Jerusalem more than a quarter century earlier. That class had taken place in a small Beit HaMidrash located in a remote corner of the Meir Shearim neighborhood, and the tape had also been sold in London.

When the Rav of Jerusalem had given this class, a police car was passing outside with its sirens on. Only He Who knows all that is hidden knew under what circumstances those sirens had been heard in Jerusalem, and He alone knew that so many years later a wealthy Londoner would be in a car risking his life trying to overtake another vehicle. The only way to keep him in his lane was to make him hear the sound of sirens.

We must point out another important detail that the man himself recounted once he understood the great miracle that he had experienced.

He said that as he was sitting in his car just before taking to the road, he had paused for a moment to decide whether he should read the headlines in the morning paper that he had taken out of his mailbox, or to start the day by listening to the tape of the Daf HaYomi class, and thus head out onto the road right away.

"I decided to listen to the class, and only then, at the end of the trip, was I going to read the morning headlines," he said.

Rav Zilberstein Shlita adds, "One of the main reasons that he was saved from a terrible accident is because, when Hashem sees the importance that a person places on learning Torah, mastering his emotions by deciding to start off his day by listening to a class, this merit is deposited above, and it defends him before the Creator of the world, Who in this case sent him sirens to personally rescue him."

Guard Your Tongue!

In a Gentle Manner

The Gemara states that a person who is able to instruct the members of his household [but fails to do so] may be held responsible if they sin (Shabbat 54b). Hence a person must always reprimand them in regards to these matters [the various prohibitions relating to Lashon Harah], although in a gentle manner, and he must explain the gravity of the punishment to come, as well as the tremendous reward given to one who carefully observes these laws.

The Importance of Using Each Instant for Learning Torah

I have heard that Rav Moshe Alsheich wrote his entire Torah commentary during the hours that he devoted to earning a living, for his hands were skilled and his thoughts were deep into Torah.

How Can You Live Like This?

The city of Torah scholars and learned men, the Syrian town of Aleppo, saw the birth of Rabbi Avraham Chaim Ades Zatzal into the family of his father, the gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Ades Zatzal. From his earliest years, whenever he mixed among great talmidei chachamim, people could see the seed of great virtues in him. This was accompanied by tremendous diligence in learning, to the detriment of his material concerns, for he abandoned all the vanities and pleasures of this world for the sake of the holy Torah.

Rabbi Avraham's Jerusalem neighbor, Rabbi Raphael Meir Zatzal, who was like a family member to him, said that he once saw what Rabbi Avraham ate: Coffee and cake for breakfast, cake and yogurt for lunch, and a bit of rice and soup for supper. He then worked up the courage to ask him a question: "Rabbi, in our Torah it is written, 'be very careful for your lives' [Devarim 4:15]. How can you live and study Torah day and night like this?"

Rabbi Avraham replied, "Know that I once had a great desire to see Rabbeinu Israel Baal Shem Tov and ask him how he reached such a tremendously high level. In fact, I once had the merit of seeing him and asking him this question, and he replied with the verse: 'You who cleave to Hashem your G-d, you are all alive today' [Devarim 4:4]. This means that one who desires to reach the level of cleaving to Hashem cannot partake of more food or clothing than he absolutely needs. Furthermore, the soul before the Shechinah is like a candle before the wick: Just as a wick breathes life into the candle, the Shechinah breathes life into the soul, which is a spark of light from the Shechinah. That is why I cannot eat and take pleasure in food. That is why I eat little."

The gaon Rabbi Chaim HaCohen, the Rosh Yeshiva of Orchot Moshe in the Berachia moshav, would often meet Rav Bogid Saadon Zatzal, who was among the greatest Torah scholars of Tunisia. He recounted the following story: "During the yeshiva's first years of existence, when I was invited to his home, we were immersed in the study of Torah all day long, and he dealt with raising funds among the members of the community. At five o'clock in the morning, he would wake me up so we could learn together before the morning prayer, and we continued learning in synagogue for several hours afterwards. Next, we went to his home, had breakfast, and continued our learning until the afternoon. I then went and rested, but Rabbi Saadon Zatzal continued to learn. When I woke up, we continued learning until two o'clock in the morning."

He "Forgot" to Return Home

In his eulogy for Rabbi Chaim Shemuel Lopian Zatzal, our teacher the gaon Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita recounted that when a student of Rav Lopian once came to see him, the

Rav asked him: "How are things with you?" The student replied that he was thinking of leaving the Sunderland yeshiva because he had difficulty focusing and memorizing his studies. The Rav asked him, "Do you know Shemoneh Esrei by heart?" The student replied, "Naturally!" Rav Lopian then said to him, "One who knows Shemoneh Esrei by heart can learn a page of Gemara by heart. With the same abilities that one uses to memorize prayer, he can also review a page of Gemara."

The interesting thing is that all of Rav Lopian's students and admirers recounted something that completely typified him: Each time he wanted to consult a certain page in the Gemara, he would always open it up to the exact page he wanted, without having to leaf through it.

Concerning Rav Lopian's power of deep concentration, our teacher Shlita said that oftentimes, when Rav Lopian traveled by bus from the yeshiva to his home in Gateshead, he would "forget" to get off at his stop, returning to the Sunderland yeshiva by bus!

When Rav Lopian was still a young avrech, he published his commentary Ravcha D'Shemateta on the book Shav Shemateta, which was written by the author of Ketzot HaChoshen, a commentary that became a classic in the yeshiva world. Rav Lopian said that he had to completely devote himself to Torah in order to write it. For example, during the long winter nights when his children required supervision, he would attach a string to their stroller in order to rock his crying child with one hand, while writing his Torah commentaries with the other.

Our teacher Shlita also recounted the following story: "Once when I went to see him at his small home, he 'confessed' to me that he suffered from all kinds of aches and pains. Yet he simply added, 'Thank G-d, I feel no pain when I'm immersed in Torah learning. Yet as soon as I stop learning to eat or do something, my pain immediately returns.'"

"We're in Shemateta, Chapter Three"

The Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, the gaon Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz Zatzal, accompanied a group of students from the yeshiva as they traveled by boat from Shanghai to Eretz Israel via France. The crossing itself lasted almost four weeks, and Rav Shmuelevitz carried the book Shav Shemateta with him the entire time, studying it diligently.

He recorded the observations that came to mind during this trip in a collection that he entitled Torah HaSefina, which comprises 32 sections.

At one point the yeshiva students were standing on the ship's bridge, impatiently awaiting the time when they could set foot on firm ground. Rabbi Chaim was also on the bridge, leaning on his elbows and completely immersed in the topic he was studying, his immense powers of concentration being seen on his face. Next to him stood one of his students, who was looking out into the distance. "Where are we now?" the student asked. "We're in Shemateta, chapter three," replied Rabbi Chaim without hesitation.

Consent

It is written, “Take a census [se’u et rosh] of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (Bamidbar 1:2).

Rabbi Yaakov Haim Zatzal of Baghdad, in his Torah commentary Tzitzim U’frachim, finds an allusion in this verse to the leaders of Jewish communities: They are the ones who must take charge of their responsibility, and with the full consent of the public.

The verse means: If you want to name a head (rosh) and a leader, it must be done with the consent of “the entire assembly of the Children of Israel.”

The Promise to Women

It is written, “Every male according to their head count [legulgelo-tam]” (Bamidbar 1:2).

In the book Pnei David, the Chida interprets this according to what is written in the Arizal’s introduction: In general, women do not come back as a gilgul (reincarnation) after their death.

The verse means: “Every male according to their head count [legulgelo-tam]” – this evokes gilgul (reincarnation), which pertains only to men, not women, who are not reincarnated.

In his book Bnei Shlomo, Rabbi Shlomo Amsallem Zatzal notes that this idea is also alluded to in the Gemara: “Greater is the promise made by the Holy One, blessed be He, to women than to men, for it says: ‘Rise up, you women who are at ease. O confident daughters, give ear to my speech’ [Isaiah 32:9]” (Berachot 17a).

The promise made to women is that they will not be reincarnated, but will rest in peace in the World to Come. As Daniel says, “You will rest, then arise for your portion at the end of days” (Daniel 12:13), meaning that they will arise in the World to Come without having been reincarnated. This is the promise made to women, that they will not be reincarnated.

A Two-Headed Question

It is written, “Count the sons of Levi according to their fathers’ household, according to their families, every male from one month of age and up” (Bamidbar 3:15).

How do the sons of Levi differ from the other tribes of Israel, such that for the other tribes we read: “The entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers’ household, by number of the names, every male according to their head count” (Bamidbar 1:2)? As for the tribe of Levi, the expression “according to their head count” does not appear. It simply states “every male.”

In his book Tiferet Yehonatan, the gaon Rabbi Yehonatan Eibeshutz answers this question by citing the Gemara (Menachot 37a), where a question is raised concerning which head a two-headed man must place his tefillin upon. The Gemara replies that the question is moot, for a child born with two heads cannot live for more than twelve months.

Thus in regards to the tribe of Levi, which is counted from the age of one month and up, a two-headed child could still be among them. Therefore if the expression, “every male according to their head count” had been used for the tribe of Levi, such a child would have been counted twice, which explains why the expression is not used for Levi.

As for the other tribes of Israel, who were counted from the age of 20 years and up, since a two-headed child cannot survive for more than

twelve months, there could be no one among them with two heads. Hence the verse uses the expression “every male according to their head count.”

The Dust Before the Ark

It is written, “Begishtam et kodesh [When they approach the holy]” (Bamidbar 4:17).

The first letters in this expression form the term avak (“dust”).

This alludes to a story mentioned in Sefer Chassidim (ch. 128) about Rabbeinu Yaakov, the son of Rabbi Yakar, who would sweep the floor with his beard before the holy ark.

– Ohr Moshe

In the Light of the Parsha

Torah, Offerings, and Deeds of Kindness Enlighten Man and the World

The Shulchan Aruch teaches, “We always read Parsha Bamidbar before Shavuot” (Orach Chaim 428:4). We need to understand the connection that exists between these two, as well as why the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, no other tribes, walked before the Sanctuary. Our Sages have said, “The world stands on three things: On Torah, offerings, and deeds of kindness” (Pirkei Avot 1:2). This is why G-d commanded that these three tribes – which allude to these three things – should walk before the Sanctuary. How do these tribes allude to these three things? It is said concerning Judah, “A lion cub is Judah” (Bereshith 49:9), and he represents offerings. In the Tur we read, “Being strong like a lion corresponds to the heart, for boldness in the service of the Creator is found within the heart, meaning that one must strengthen his heart to serve Him” (Tur, Orach Chaim 1). Issachar corresponds to Torah, and Zebulun corresponds to kindness, for he demonstrated kindness to Issachar so he could study Torah, as our Sages have said: “Issachar was the ninth of the tribes, yet he offered [his sacrifices] the second after the king [Judah], as it says: ‘On the second day, Nethanel the son of Zuar, prince of Issachar, did offer’ [Bamidbar 7:18]. This is because he was learned in the Torah, as it is written: ‘Of the children of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times...’ [I Chronicles 12:33]. ... Issachar produced 200 leaders of the Sanhedrin...and all their brothers agreed to the Halachah as they stated it, while he instructed them as though it were a Halachah of Moshe at Sinai. From where did all this greatness come to Issachar? From Zebulun, who engaged in trade and supported Issachar, who was devoted to the Torah. Thus it is written, ‘Zebulun shall dwell by seashores’ [Bereshith 49:13]” (Bereshith Rabba 72:5).

Hence these three tribes walked before the Sanctuary in order for all the Children of Israel to look upon them and learn that the world endures on account of these three things. This is why it was decreed that Parsha Bamidbar should be read before the festival of the giving of the Torah, in order for every Jew to read it and recall these three things.

There is nothing that is not alluded to in the Torah. The first and last letters of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun have the same numerical value as the expression ner chazach (“pure lamp”). This means that by enabling the world to endure by these three things, the Children of Israel will become a pure lamp, as it is written: “They shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil” (Shemot 27:20). Now the Children of Israel are compared to an olive tree (Menachot 53b), teaching us that these three things lead man into becoming pure and to radiate light.