



“Each man at his banner according to the signs of their fathers’ house” The Three Letters דג”ל Provided an Amazing Tikun for the Three Levels of Not L’shma

In this week’s parsha, parshas Bamidbar, HKB”H commands the twelve shevatim of Yisrael to be divided up into four distinct encampments aligning with the four directions of the compass. Every group consisted of three shevatim represented by a unique banner—“degal.” Throughout Yisrael’s forty-year sojourn in the midbar, these four distinct banners flew above them gloriously and majestically. This is chronicled in the following pesukim (Bamidbar 2, 1): **“וידבר ה’ אל משה ואל אהרן: לאמור, איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם יחנו בני ישראל מנגד סביב לאהל—מועד יחנו—Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: Each man at his own banner with the insignia of their fathers’ houses shall Bnei Yisrael encamp; at a distance surrounding the Ohel Mo’ed, they shall camp.**

The Torah describes the order of the “degalim” and their respective encampments: (1) The first banner, to the east, was the banner of the division of Yehudah; they were accompanied by Yissachar and Zevulun. (2) The second banner, to the south, was the banner of the division of Reuven; they were accompanied by Shimon and Gad. (3) The third banner, to the west, was the banner of the division of Ephraim; they were accompanied by Menashe and Binyamin. (4) The fourth banner, to the north, was the banner of the division of Dan; they were accompanied by Asher and Naphtali. The passage concludes (ibid. 34): **ויעשו בני ישראל ככל אשר צוה ה’ את משה כן חנו—Bnei Yisrael did everything that Hashem had commanded Moshe; so, they encamped according to their divisions (banners), and so they journeyed—each man with his family, according to his fathers’ house.**

What was the basis for this intriguing division? Why were Bnei Yisrael privileged to receive this honor? Chazal provide us with the answer. At the revelation of Matan Torah, HKB”H descended onto Har Sinai with two hundred and twenty thousand malachim arranged according to divisions and flags. Upon witnessing this magnificent display and array, Yisrael began yearning to have similar divisions. HKB”H acquiesced to their request and immediately informed Moshe to make the arrangements for the divisions and flags that they requested. Here is a pertinent passage from the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2, 3):

“בשעה שנגלה הקב”ה על הר סיני, ירדו עמו כ”ב רבבות של מלאכים, שנאמר רכב אלקים רבותים אלפי שנאן, והיו כולם עשויים דגלים דגלים שנאמר דגול מרכבה, כיון שראו אותן ישראל שהם עשויים דגלים דגלים, התחילו מתאווים לדגלים, אמרו אלואי כך אנו נעשים דגלים כמותן... וכן הוא אומר נרננה בישועתך וגו’. אמר להם הקב”ה, מה נתאוותם לעשות דגלים, חייכם שאני ממלא משאלותיכם, ימלא ה’ כל משאלותיך, מיד הודיע הקב”ה אותם לישראל ואמר למשה, לך עשה אותם דגלים כמו שנתאוו.”

When HKB”H revealed Himself on Har Sinai, two hundred and twenty thousand angels descended with Him, as it states (Tehillim 68, 18): “The chariots of G-d are two myriads, two thousands.” And they were all arrayed according to divisions and banners, as it is said (Shir HaShirim 5, 10): “Arrayed by banners among myriads.” Upon witnessing this magnificent display and array, Yisrael began yearning to have similar divisions. They said, “Oh that we also could be arrayed in divisions like them” . . . And thus, it says (Tehillim 20, 6): “We will sing for joy in Your salvation, etc.” HKB”H said to them, “You yearn

eagerly to be arranged by banners; as you live, I will fulfill your request,” as it states (ibid.): “Hashem will fulfill all of your requests.” HKB”H immediately informed Yisrael by telling Moshe, “Go arrange them according to banners as they have desired.”

We will endeavor to explain why HKB”H chose to descend onto Har Sinai—to give Yisrael the Torah—with an entourage of 22 myriads of malachim, arranged according to divisions and banners. Furthermore, what is the connection between Matan Torah and the array of “degalim.” Lastly, why were Yisrael so envious of the malachim, prompting HKB”H to acquiesce to their request?

The Names of the Avos Were Inscribed on the Degalim

We will begin to shed some light on the matter by introducing the words of the Ohev Yisrael (Likutim, parshas Bamidbar). He cites a Midrash Pliah related to the passuk in this week’s parsha: **“איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם, אל תקרי באותות אל.”** **“Each man at his own banner with the insignia of their fathers’ houses”—** **“איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם”** (with insignias) **but rather “באותיות”** (with letters). **Therefore, Bilam exclaimed** (Bamidbar 23, 8): **“How can I curse? G-d has not cursed.”** He explains in his own sacred, inimitable way, based on what he brings down from the Sefer HaPliah (page 46, column 2), that the letters of the names of the Avos were inscribed on the four “degalim.”

They were inscribed as follows: On the “degel” of the division led by Yehudah, the first letters of the names **אברהם** **אי”י** were inscribed—**יצחק יעקב**. On the “degel” of the division led by Reuven, the second letters of the names of the Avos were inscribed—**בצ”ע**. On the “degel” of the division led by Ephraim, the third letters of the names of the Avos were inscribed—**רח”ק**. On the “degel” of the division led by Dan, the last letters of the names of the Avos were inscribed—**מק”ב**. We see that the letter **“hei”** of **“אברהם”** was omitted, i.e., it was not inscribed on the banners. It pervaded all four encampments, protecting Yisrael from Bilam’s curses. Additionally, that **“hei”** was the source of berachah, blessing Yisrael with children and “parnasah,” as alluded to in the passuk (Bereishis 47, 23): **הא”ז** **לכם זרע**—translated literally, this states that the **“hei” will**

provide you with seed—referring both to grain (sustenance) and to offspring (an enduring lineage of children).

Based on this, the Ohev Yisrael interprets the meaning of the Midrash: **“איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם”**—**do not read “באותות”** (with insignias) **but rather “באותיות”** (with letters). The passuk informs us that the letters of the Avos’s names appeared on the “degalim.” Bilam, however, noticed that HKB”H changed the order of the letters on the fourth banner; the **“mem”** of **“אברהם”** was inscribed instead of the **“hei”** (which was actually the fourth letter of his name). For, had the **“hei”** been inscribed, the letters related to the names of the Avos would have been **קב”ה**, meaning to curse. Hence, Bilam exclaimed: **“How can I curse? G-d has not cursed”**—**לא”ל**. In other words, by altering the letters on the fourth banner, HKB”H prevented Bilam from cursing Yisrael. This concludes his sacred remarks.

Four Levels of Torah Scholars corresponding to the Four Letters **אגד”ל**

Now, I would like to present a novel idea to our esteemed audience explaining why HKB”H commanded: **“Each man at his own banner with the insignia of their fathers’ houses”**—to inscribe the letters of the names of the holy Avos on the “degalim.” To begin with, we will introduce a precious teaching from the Maharsha (Eiruvim 54b). The Gemara there teaches us that when the Torah was given, Moshe learned the Torah that he had learned directly from HKB”H with Aharon four times. Hence, the Gemara deduces: **“מכאן אמר רבי אליעזר, חייב אדם לשנות לתלמידו ארבעה פעמים, וקל וחומר, ומה אהרן שלמד מפי משה—** **from here Rabbi Eliezer deduced that a person must review each lesson with his pupil four times.** This is based on a **“kal vachomer”**: **Since Aharon who learned from Moshe** (who was the preeminent teacher), **and Moshe learned directly from the Almighty in this manner, then an ordinary person who learns from an ordinary person, all the more so** that he must hear each lesson four times.

The Maharsha explains the matter as follows: If we examine all 22 letters of the “aleph-Beis,” we find that there are only four letters—**אגד”ל**—whose names contain the letter **“lamed.”** As we know, the letter **“lamed”** connotes **“limud”** (“לימוד”)—learning and teaching. Thus, these four letters allude magnificently

to four levels of Torah-study. The first three letters—אל"ף ("aleph"), גימ"ל ("gimel") and דל"ת ("dalet")—allude to the three levels of those who engage in Torah-study with less than pure intentions—"lo l'shma." Whereas the fourth letter, למ"ד, alludes to Torah-study "l'shma."

How so? The letter אל"ף, related to the word "אלוף" (master; leader), alludes to a person who studies Torah for the sake of honor and respect—so that he will be addressed as Rabbi or Master. The letter גימ"ל, related to the word "גמול" (reward; benefit), alludes to a person who studies Torah so that he will reap benefits and reward in Olam HaBa. The letter דל"ת, related to the word "דלות" (poverty), alludes to a person who studies Torah, because he is poor; he studies Torah for the sake of his livelihood, by teaching Torah to others. The letter למ"ד, however, related to the word "לימוד", alludes to a person who engages in Torah-study "l'shma"—solely for the sake of Hashem, without any ulterior motives.

It appears that we can contribute a delightful tidbit to the Maharsha's intriguing idea. Besides the simple fact that the letter "lamed" is the first letter in the word "l'shma" (ל'שמה), why, in fact, does the letter "lamed" allude to Torah "l'shma"? The Shela hakadosh writes in the name of the Ramak in Pardes Rimonim (21, 1) that the letter "lamed" is formed from the letter "chaf" with a "vav" on top. These two letters—כ"ף (26)—possess the numerical equivalent of the name Havaya.

Furthermore, when we examine the letters of the aleph-Beis, we find that the letter "lamed" is taller than all of the other letters. The part of the "lamed" that extends above the written line is shaped like a finger pointing heavenward towards HKB"H. This illustrates very nicely the Maharsha's contention that the letter "lamed" alludes to one who studies Torah "l'shma." Its very shape indicates that the person studying Torah on this "madreigah" intends solely to please our Father in Heaven.

The Letter "Aleph" Alludes to HKB"H the Master of the Universe

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to elaborate on the words of this great luminary, the Maharsha, zy"a. Of the four letters mentioned that allude

to the four levels of Torah-study, the "aleph" alludes to the lowest level of study that is not l'shma. As explained, this level corresponds to someone who studies Torah, so that he will be acknowledged and addressed as a Rabbi and a Master—an "aluf." Yet, our sacred sefarim teach us that the "aleph" is the most spiritual of the 22 letters of the aleph-Beis, because its name alludes to HKB"H, the **Aluf of the World**.

Additionally, the Tikunei Zohar (Intro. 7a) points out that the structure of the א alludes to the sacred name **Havaya**, because it is formed by the three letters יו"י. It has a "yud" at its top right and another "yud" at its bottom left. A diagonal "vav" in the middle of the "aleph" connects the two "yuds." The gematria of these three letters (10+6+10) equals the gematria of the name **Havaya** (26). This fact can be used to interpret the passuk (Mishlei 16, 28): "וַיַּרְגֵן מַפְרִיד אֱלֹהִים"—and a trouble-maker (contentious person) alienates the Lord (Aluf). For the Zohar hakadosh (Vayikra 12a) teaches that a sinner alienates HKB"H, the Aluf of the World.

A related teaching is found in the Toldos Yaakov Yosef (Bereishis) in the name of his mentor the Ba'al Shem Tov hakadosh, zy"a. The letter "aleph," which is the first letter of the aleph-Beis, alludes to the highest degree of revelation that HKB"H, the Aluf of the World, reveals in this world. "Beit," the second letter of the aleph-Beis, represents the fact that the Aluf of the World is concealed within two levels of cover—and so on and so forth. The farther away a letter is from the "aleph," the greater the degree of divine concealment. Hence, the letter "tav," the last letter of the aleph-Beis, represents the highest degree of divine concealment in the entire universe.

Accordingly, the Ba'al Shem Tov hakadosh asserts that the goal of serving Hashem is to believe wholeheartedly—"be'emunah sheleimah"—that even in situations of the greatest degree of divine concealment—"hester panim"—represented by the letter "tav," that the **Aluf of the World** is present but merely concealed. After all, the letter "beis" is two "alephs"; the letter "gimel" is three "alephs"; and so on and so forth until the letter "tav," which is 400 "alephs." Even in the ultimate degree of divine concealment represented by the letter "tav," the **Aluf of the World** is present; however, He is clothed and concealed by 400 coverings, the numerical value of the letter "tav."

The Letter “Aleph” Represents Someone Who Learns Torah L’shma

Now, since it is the nature of Torah to be expounded in seventy different ways, I would like to propose a novel, alternate approach to understanding the four levels represented by the letters אֵלֶּף גִּימַל דָּלֵת לַמִּיּוֹד. As mentioned above, the names of each of these letters are the only ones in the aleph-bet that contain the letter “lamed”; thus, they allude to the four categories of “limud-Torah.” I would like to suggest that it is actually the “aleph” (the supreme letter of the aleph-Beis)—and not the “lamed”—that represents someone who learns Torah l’shma, solely for the sake of the **Aluf of the World**.

This concurs magnificently with what they expound in the Gemara (Shabbas 104a) in relation to the letters of the aleph-Beis: “אלף בינה, אלהי בינה”—the letters “aleph” and “beis” stand for “alaph binah.” Rashi explains: “אלף בינה, אלהי בינה”—these first two letters of the Hebrew alphabet allude to the study of Torah. Let us suggest an explanation in keeping with our current discussion. HKB”H, the **Aluf of the World**, intentionally began the 22 letters of the aleph-bet and the Torah with the letters “aleph, Beis,” to impress upon us the message “אלף בינה”: If we wish to achieve knowledge and insight, it is essential to study Torah l’shma, for the sake of the **Aluf of the World**. This is alluded to by the letter “aleph.”

The other three letters, as mentioned above, represent Torah-study that is not l’shma. The Maharsha explained that the “gimel” represents those who learn for the sake of reward and compensation in Olam HaBa. The “dalet” represents those who learn out of necessity to earn a livelihood from their Torah. According to this scheme, the “lamed,” even though it is related to the term “limud,” also represents a category of those who learn Torah not l’shma but only for honor and stature. This is alluded to by the fact that a “lamed” stands taller and above all of the other letters.

We can find support for this scheme from a teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 25b) related to a passuk about the generation of the dispersion (Bereishis 11, 4): “ויאמרו הבה—**they said, “Let us build a city for ourselves and a tower, whose head reaches the heavens.”** This passuk is interpreted as a reference to those who study Torah and perform mitzvos not l’shma.

They seek honor and stature in their communities. In other words, their Torah and mitzvos are not l’shma but are aimed at their own promotion and advancement—as alluded to by the letter “lamed” that is shaped like a tower reaching for the heavens.

This coincides with a teaching in the Gemara (Nedarim 62a): “עשה דברים לשם בעלם”—**fulfill the words of the Torah for the sake of their Maker**—as alluded to by the letter “aleph,” for the sake of the **Aluf of the World**. Learn Torah l’shma; (ibid.) “אל תעשם עטרה להתגדל בהם”—**do not make them into a crown in order to be glorified through them**. In other words, do not emulate the lofty letter “lamed” reaching for the heavens by learning Torah not l’shma but only to attain a crown of glory and stature.

Let us add a fascinating tidbit. They expound in the Gemara (ibid. 37a) on Moshe’s remark to Yisrael (Devarim 4, 14): “ואותי צוה ה’ בעת ההיא ללמד אתכם”—**Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you**. Targum Onkelos renders “ללמד אתכם” as “לאלפא יתכוון”. In keeping with this discussion, we can interpret the Targum as an encouragement to emulate the letter “aleph.” For, we have learned elsewhere in the Gemara (Pesachim 50b): “לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצוות אף על פי שלא לשמה”—**one should always strive to engage in Torah-study and the performance of mitzvos even if one’s intent and purpose are initially insincere or misguided**—“lo l’shma.” For, by performing mitzvos in this less-than-ideal manner, one will eventually come to perform mitzvos in the desired, ideal manner—“l’shma.”

Additionally, in the introduction to the sefer Teshuos Chen, the esteemed author Rabbi Gedaliah of Linitz, zy”a, focuses on the Gemara’s use of the word “לעולם” in the admonition above. This implies that one should **always** study Torah not l’shma. Clearly, when a student is first beginning to serve Hashem, it is inevitable that his service and studies will initially be not l’shma. Nevertheless, it is imperative that he persists. For, by so doing, he will eventually be able to serve Hashem and study Torah l’shma.

This then is the implication of Moshe Rabeinu’s remark: “ואותי צוה ה’ בעת ההיא ללמד אתכם”. He was encouraging Yisrael to learn Torah based on the letter “lamed.” As we have learned, this letter only appears in the names of the following four letters of the aleph-Beis: אֵלֶּף גִּימַל דָּלֵת לַמִּיּוֹד. In other words, he

was encouraging Yisrael to study Torah even not l'shma. Now, we can interpret the words of Targum Onkelos "לאלפא יתכון" as follows: Moshe Rabeinu was impressing upon them that the goal of Torah-study is to rise from the category of not l'shma of the "lamed" with its projection pointing upward—learning for self-promotion and self-advancement—to the category of the "aleph"—learning Torah l'shma, exclusively for the sake of the **Aluf of the World** without ulterior motives.

HKB"H Descended onto Har Sinai with 22 Myriads of Malachim in an Array of Banners corresponding to the Three Letters דג"ל

Following this sublime path, we will now focus on the Midrash. Chazal taught us that the notion of the banners that flew over the four encampments of the shevatim in the midbar was inspired by the revelation at Har Sinai: **When HKB"H revealed Himself on Har Sinai, two hundred and twenty thousand angels descended with Him, as it states: "The chariots of G-d are two myriads, two thousands." And they were all arrayed according to divisions and banners.**

Let us elaborate. When HKB"H came down from above to give Yisrael the Torah composed of 22 letters, 22 myriads of malachim (22 times ten thousand) accompanied Him. This indicated that every single letter of the Torah should resemble the letter "aleph," which can expand up to the number "eleph" (1,000). According to the Bnei Yissaschar this is the key to understanding the passuk (Devarim 32, 30): איכה "יִרְדּוּף אֶחָד אֶלֶף"—**how could one pursue a thousand?** This means that the one can become one thousand. By descending upon Har Sinai to give the Torah with this array of malachim, HKB"H informed Yisrael that even the letter "tav," the letter farthest away from the "aleph," is composed of 400 "alephs." And it is the mission of every Jew to study Torah and elevate the learning that starts out as not l'shma to Torah l'shma as represented by the letter "aleph"; Torah-study should be for the sake of the **Aluf of the World**.

In this manner, we can comprehend the matter of the 22 myriads of malachim arrayed according to divisions and banners. Due to their extreme kedushah, when the malachim perform the will of Hashem, they nullify all the ulterior motives associated with service and learning not l'shma represented by the three letters דג"ל. After all, they can only

serve Hashem l'shma, as represented by the letter "aleph." We express this fact in the formula recited in Shacharis: יוצר משרתיו ואשר משרתיו, כולם עומדים ברום עולם, ומשמיעים ביראה יחד בקול דברי אלקים חיים ומלך עולם, כולם אהובים, כולם ברורים, כולם גיבורים, כולם קדושים—**Who creates His servants (malachim), all of whom stand in the heights of the universe, proclaiming together, in awe, aloud, the words of the living G-d, the King of the Universe. They are all beloved, all flawless, all mighty, and they all perform the will of their Maker with awe and reverence.**

This sheds light on the continuation of the Midrash: **Upon witnessing this magnificent display and array, Yisrael began yearning to have similar divisions. They said, "Oh that we also could be arrayed in divisions like them."** It dawned on them that the malachim serve Hashem without the interference of the yetzer hara. As such, it is easy for them to serve Him l'shma, without any ulterior motives. But we, mere mortals, burdened with a yetzer hara from our youth, what are we to do?! How can we withstand the improper thoughts, not l'shma, that the yetzer hara introduces into our hearts and minds?

This prompted the following response from HKB"H: **"You yearn eagerly to be arranged by banners; as you live, I will fulfill your request,"** as it states: **"Hashem will fulfill all of your requests."** HKB"H immediately informed Yisrael by telling Moshe, **"Go arrange them according to banners as they have desired."** As a result of the kedushah of the banners waving over their encampments, HKB"H enabled Yisrael to serve Him like the heavenly malachim. This empowered them to elevate the three categories represented by the letters דג"ל and to serve Hashem l'shma, as represented by the letter "aleph"—exclusively for the sake of the **Aluf of the World**.

It Is Our Goal to Rectify and Elevate the Three Letters דג"ל

Let us embellish this thought. As explained, the three letters דג"ל represent the three categories of those who serve Hashem not l'shma. Nevertheless, it should be clear to all of us, that we have the choice and power to transform these three letters, so that we only serve Hashem l'shma. Now, we have learned in the Gemara (A.Z. 17b): ככל העוסק בתורה בלבד דומה כמי שאין לו אלוך—**whoever only studies Torah** (but neglects to

perform acts of chesed), **resembles someone who has no G-d**. In other words, if one wishes to study Torah l'shma, it is essential that he also perform acts of chesed.

This concurs magnificently with the Gemara cited above concerning the letters of the aleph-Beis (Shabbas 104a): אל"ף "אל"ף—the letters **"aleph beit"** stand for אל"ף בינה, i.e., studying the Torah; the next two letters, **"gimel dalet,"** stand for גימול דלים, assisting the needy. The message is clear—to study Torah l'shma, for the sake of the **Aluf of the World**, one must also perform acts of chesed.

Based on this teaching in the Gemara, we can propose that if a person studies Torah and performs acts of chesed, he is able to rectify the two letters **"gimel"** and **"dalet"** of דג"ל. To rectify the third letter, the **"lamed,"** one must strive to learn Torah for the sake of HKB"H. As mentioned above, this is alluded to by the shape of the **"lamed."** Its upper portion resembles a finger pointing heavenward, as if to say that its only intention is to study Torah exclusively for the sake of Hashem.

Following this enlightening path, we can now explain how in fact the kedushah of the "degalim" in the midbar helped Yisrael elevate the three categories of not l'shma—represented by the letters דג"ל. We learned previously from the Sefer HaPliah that the letters of the names of the holy

Avos were inscribed on the banners. This is alluded to by the instruction HKB"H issued to Moshe Rabeinu: איש על דגלו "באותות לבית אבותם". Recall that they expounded in the Midrash that we should interpret the word "באותות" (with insignias) as "באותיות" (with letters). Based on this exposition, the Ohev Yisrael deduced that the names of the Avos were inscribed on the "degalim."

Based on what we have learned, we can suggest that HKB"H intended to connect the service of Yisrael with the service of the holy Avos, who served Hashem without any ulterior motives. Now, the Tur (O.C. 417) teaches us that the "Shalosh Regalim" correspond to the three Avos—Pesach is associated with Avraham, Shavuot with Yitzchak, and Succos with Yaakov. Hence, it was instituted that we recite in the Mussaf service of these festivals: שובה אלינו בהמון רחמיך, בגלל אבות שעשו "שובה אלינו בהמון רחמיך, בגלל אבות שעשו"—**return to us in Your abundant mercy for the sake of the Avos who did Your will**. Therefore, the letters of the names of the holy Avos that were inscribed on the "degalim," imbued Yisrael with abundant good and kedushah. This enabled them to also serve Hashem and study Torah l'shem Shamayim and by doing so to rectify the three letters of דג"ל, thereby elevating them to the level of the letter **"aleph"**—acting solely to satisfy the will of the **Aluf of the World**.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of אחינו בני ישראל

Family Madeb - לעילוי נשמת
their dear mother
Lea bat Virgini ע"ה

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות
of their wonderful parents, children and grandchildren
לעילוי נשמת His Father ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע"ה

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com