

BEMIDBAR 1 - THE TRIBES ENCAMP AS THE CELESTIAL ARMIES ABOVE

Moshe and Aharon are commanded to take a tally of the men of Israel over the age of twenty who are thereby fit for spiritual and physical war. Through this counting the people were to be raised spiritually - as the verse states שאו - "elevate" - from a lowly state to return them once again to their previous exalted one as spiritual host of the Divine Presence. At the time of the Exodus the Torah informed us of their lofty state as it describes them as צבאות - hosts or carriers of the Divine Presence. "I will bring forth from Egypt my hosts - צבאתי - my people Bene Yisrael." 1 Further on we read - "At the end of 430 years all of hosts of Hashem left Egypt". After the sin of the Golden Calf the Angels had replaced Israel in this capacity as the spiritual host of the Shehina. At this point on Rosh Hodesh Iyar - 30 days after the return of Divine Presence to the Mishkan - Bene Yisrael would be counted and raised once more to this position of "celestial host" or in other terms as "carriers of the throne." According to R. S. Hirsch the word צבא hosts etymologically might satisfy our elucidation - as it perhaps connotes joining or unifying.

COUNT THEM ACCORDING TO THEIR HOSTS

In order to restore Israel to their former position the Torah uses the same expression of שאו "raise up" as Yoseph used to inform the שר המשקים that he would return to his previous work as Chief Steward of Par'o. In order to accomplish this Moshe and Aharon would first have to detail (count) all of the spiritual hosts above. Next they would position the tribes in a certain formation mimicking these hosts above and at that point - declare the parallel count of the children of Israel. R. Bahya says that the initial fulfillment of the command found in verse 3 "to count them according to the host above" can be found towards the end of our first perek. Here when the Torah declares that "All the numbered ones amounted to 603,550" 3 it is not a reference to Israel but rather to the count of the heavenly host. For we do not find Israel mentioned in the verse. However In the second chapter we see each triad of tribes taking up their positions in the East South West and North paralleling the host above or the four carriers or host of the סמרכבה of the Throne. Moshe and Aharon were then ready to give the count as it relates to Israel. Towards the close of our second perek Israel is mentioned as we read "These then are the tallies of Israel...603,550." 4 This physical count of Israel below is the vehicle whereby we were raised to take on once again the spiritual position as the hosts of Hashem. It should be noted that this concept of a host above and a host below has its roots in the minor Talmudic tractate of Avot DeRibbi Natan. 5

ACCORDING TO THE ENSIGNS OF THEIR FATHERS

The Midrash expounds 6 on the spiritual significance of the term "according to their ensigns of their fathers". It relates that Hashem told Moshe to advise the tribes that they will once again occupy the same spiritual positions as they had when instructed as such to carry the bier of Yaakov to burial into the Cave of Mahpela. Yaakov had specifically instructed his sons to carry the bier in the exact formation they would now encamp and travel through the desert. Yehuda, Yisakhar and Zevulun would support its eastern side... As the verses in Beresheet testify "His sons did just as he had commanded them; his sons carried him all the way up to the land of Canaan." 7 Evidently the physical position assigned here around the Mishkan would mimic the position of their fathers during the Levaya of Yaakov. These in turn will correspond to their spiritual position above as "Hosts" of the Kavod of Hashem upholding his Merkava. The Midrash affirms 8 that the entire encampment was patterned after the celestial entourage of the Shehina. The Divine Presence was in the center "seated" on a throne and the throne was elevated.

THEY CAMPED UNDER THEIR FLAGS IN THE PRESCRIBED MANNER

Yehazkel depicts four images or חיות who support the throne of God. These are the Lion, Ox, Eagle and Adam. Located beneath this level are four Angels who parallel these חיות- The four in each of these levels reflect four general spiritual categories or forces. In this lower world these are revealed as the four directions of South which is associated with the force of Hesed; North associated with Din; East a synthesis of these two forces or Tiferet; West the receptacle of these three forces. A number of Midrashim note 9 that Israel desired דגלים- flags- similar to those raised by the Angels at Sinai. Directly surrounding the Mishkan were the Levi'im situated in all four directions. Moshe and Aharon and his sons were situated to the east, the sons of Gershon in the west... There were 22000 Levi'im surrounding the Mishkan corresponding to the Angels of superior rank in the celestial hierarchy. 10 R. Bahya describes the four outer camps of Israel and their דגלים flags which reflected their relationship with the חיות above. Embroidered upon the flag of Reuben were דודאים (a reflection of אדם of the Merkava); Upon that of Yehuda was an אריה (a reflection of the lion of the Merkava); Upon that of Dan a Serpent (others Say Eagle) - (a reflection of the נשר of the Merkava); and a Bull on that of Ephrayim - (a reflection of the שור of the Merkava) - 11 Evidently the דגלים were the physical manifestation as to which spiritual force of the Merkava a tribe or set of tribes had been rooted in.

THE TRIBAL LEADERS REPLACE THE ANGELS AS HOST LEADERS

The Shevatim were placed in positions around the Mishkan - the physical place where the Shehina resided. This corresponding to their place above in a higher realm as Hosts of Hashem or surrounding and upholding the Shehina's residence above. We in affect replaced the contingent of Angels and then rightly earned our title as the Lord's celestial armies. The Torah details the respective triad of tribes that encamped and traveled as one of the four camps surrounding the Mishkan. The Torah also details the names of the tribal princes who led each tribe. In the east - the central tribe was Yisakhar and their leader was Netanel. In the south the central tribe was Shimon and their leader was Shelumiel. In the North it was Asher who was led by Pagiel and finally in the West it was Gamliel who led the tribe of Menashe. R. Bahya points out that it was exclusively these four princes who had names concluding with the suffix EL - אל who occupied the central position of each triad. 12 This suffix is obviously associated with Angelic forces. This he writes was to provide the linkage to the Angels who occupied similar positions in the celestial camps. He also calls out that these 4 princes had initially offered their inaugural korbanot on the 2nd 5th 8th and 11th days of the Mishkan ceremony. 13 These add up coincidentally to 26 or YHVH. Maybe we can now understand the Halakha that the portion of Bemidbar should be read by the Sibbour on the Shabbat preceding Shavuot. 14 Prior to experiencing Matan Torah we must all ascend and take up our spiritual positions as Hosts of the Divine presence through the reading of this parasha. We can then merit to once again to permanently take up our exalted positions both above in the celestial world and below in the physical world as King David announces - "There, the Tribes. The Tribes of the Lord ascended." 15

Shabbat Shalom

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