

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Bamidbar

How Does Our “Yetzer Hara (Negative Impulse) Teach Us About Our Mission in Life?

What is the Connection Between Knowing our Mission and Receiving the Torah?

I feel very fortunate that I found my place and purpose in life at a relatively early stage in life. I always knew that I was sent into this world for a purpose, I just wasn't yet aware of the purpose. As a teenager, when I was searching the world to find myself and my mission, Hashem guided me to the Western Wall and the Yeshiva, where I ended up staying for seven years while learning Torah, getting married, and having my first son. I experienced a strong exhilarating homecoming, as I climbed the rocks of Mt Tzion and danced to the country music of The Diaspora Yeshiva Band. Yet, it has not been smooth sailing since then. I recall my 30-year birthday in the exile of Memphis TN, feeling lost again and without a purpose, just groping in the dark to learn what Hashem wanted of me. Baruch Hashem I'm so grateful that Hashem led me back to the land where I could find myself and flourish, although not without bumps on the way. I experienced many stages of finding my true mission in the world, each more refined and specific than the other. Even now I'm still torn between my involvement in the administration of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin and my yearning to learn Torah and write books. There are truly so many rungs on the ladder of achieving our true purpose in the world. Today, it seems that there is even more and more confusion in the world than ever, and teenagers and adults alike are struggling to find their place in the world. How I wish I could help more and show them their way, but everyone must go through their own journey of self-discovery, just as I have done. Parashat Bamidbar points us on the way. This Torah portion teaches us how each of us belongs to a specific camp with its unique flag. Even during a leap year, we read *Parashat Bamidbar* on the Shabbat prior to Shavuot, because to truly receive the Torah in the deepest way we must know our place, and mission in life.

Why are the Flags so Important that Parashat Bamidbar describes them in Such Detail?

ספר במדבר פרק ב פסוק ב

אִישׁ עַל דָּגְלוֹ בְּאֶתֶר לְבַיִת אָבֹתָם יִחַנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנֶּגֶד סָבִיב לְאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יִחַנוּ:

“The children of Israel shall encamp each man by his division with the flag staffs of their father's house; some distance from the Tent of Meeting they shall encamp” (*Bamidbar 2:2*).

The Netivot Shalom asks why we need so many details about the order of the flags, since the Torah is eternal, how do these details relate to our serving G-d today? He begins explaining the inner meaning of the flags so relevant to our times by quoting the following midrash:

The Holy One blessed be He loved the Children of Israel with great love, as He arranged them according to banners like the ministering angels so that they would be distinguishable. From where is it derived that it was love for Israel? It is as Shlomo says: “He brought me to the banquet house, and his banner (flag) of love is upon me” (*Song of Songs 2:4*). When the Holy One blessed be He appeared upon Mount Sinai, twenty-two myriads of angels descended with him, as it is stated: “The chariots of G-d are myriad, thousands upon thousands of companies” (*Tehillim 68:18*), and they were all arranged according to banners, When Israel saw that they were all arranged according to banners, they began desiring banners. If only we could be arranged according to banners like them...The Holy One blessed be He said to them: “How you have desired to be arranged according to banners, by your life, I will fulfill your wish’ - ‘May Hashem fulfill all your wishes” (*Tehillim 20:6*). Immediately, the Holy One

blessed be He informed Israel and said to Moshe: 'Go and arrange them according to banners, as they desired (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:3).

What is the Purpose of the Flags of the Tribes of Israel?

What is the connection between the banners (flags) and Hashem's love of Israel? What is the connection between the flags and the giving of the Torah? The purpose of flags is to unify each nation under their flag. Likewise, each particular kind of soldier is unified under the unique flag of his unit. The flag is the symbol of each person's specific mission. Since each of the angels has a unique way of serving Hashem, they are unified under their specific flag according to their levels and categories. The Children of Israel upon seeing the myriads of angles - each under their particular banner - desired their own flags as well. Since each Jew has his unique role, they desired clarification to know their role and mission like the angels. The worst thing in the world is when a person is unaware of his purpose and mission, without knowing why he is alive and for what purpose Hashem sent him into this world. The banners symbolize the greatest love that Hashem showers upon us by clarifying our individual purpose and role in this world. The eternal message that the flags teach us is the importance of knowing our specific mission in this world.

The Flags Indicate our Personal Mission

Just like the Levites play a special role in their service in the Temple (may it be rebuilt soon!), the rest of our tribes too, contribute their unique abilities to the general community. Some belong to the Tribe of Torah and fulfill roles of Torah learning, teaching, and writing Torah books. There are others whose role is performing deeds of chesed, always looking for new ways to reach out and help others. Others again, came into the world to finance and support Torah learning. We all have in common that we each have a specific role and mission to fulfill, for which we were sent down into this world. *Parashat Bamidbar* teaches us that there is no Jew who doesn't have a special name and doesn't belong to a tribe with its own banner. Hashem imbued us all with certain talents and circumstances from which we can learn to identify the flag with which we are affiliated and recognize our personal mission in the world. We are called upon to remain connected to the flag of our tribe to fulfill our specific role in the world. Since we, Jews are all considered children of the King, we must beware of not soiling ourselves through coarse behavior that doesn't suit our standing. The Ohr Hachayim explains that if we don't measure up to our G-d given role in this world that is a way of transgressing the mitzvah: "You shall not swear falsely by the name of your G-d" (*Shemot* 20:7). Likewise, if we raise ourselves above the role we are meant to play in this world, our lack of authenticity is considered as swearing falsely, because although on the surface a person may look like a G-d-fearing Jew, behind the façade he may far from what he pretends to be. The abilities and life circumstances in which Hashem places each of us imbue us with a certain mission in life. Therefore, we must adjust our ways to live up to the flag we carry.

Playing our Specific Role in Hashem's Master Plan

We read *Parashat Bamidbar* before receiving the Torah, to teach us that it is not only through the unity of Israel that we merit Torah, but also, through each of us finding our place within our specific camp and flag - tapping into our personal mission in the world. The greatest preparation for receiving the Torah is knowing our purpose in the world - "Each person under his flag" (*Bamidbar* 2:2). Our underlying foundational emunah is that Hashem created the entire world. We believe that nothing within Hashem's world was made without a divine purpose. If every stick and

stone has its unique purpose, how much more so does every Jew – Hashem’s chosen people? Even if it may seem that there are so many Jews, we believe that each of us is needed to play our specific role in Hashem’s master plan.

What are Some Pointers Helping us Discover Our Unique Mission in the World?

How do we know what our unique role is in this world? In the place that we notice that our Yetzer Hara is especially overpowering, that is a sign that our purpose is explicitly to rectify this matter. Since the yetzer hara is created to be our obstacle, it tries to prevent us from fulfilling our purpose in this world. Therefore, when we are involved in fulfilling our mission in the world, the Yetzer Hara comes out strongest in its attempts to overcome us. Yet, this negative impulse is a blessing in disguise – It is nothing but Hashem’s banner that helps us discover our true mission. The Yetzer Hara is thus an expression of Hashem’s special love that He offers us by making us flags through which we can know our personal mission in the world. Let us be grateful for the banner of the Yetzer Hara because the most important thing in the world is to reveal why we are here, and our particular Yetzer Hara points us on the way! (Based on Netivot Shalom, *Parashat Bamidbar*, “and let His banner over me be love”).

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Bamidbar – Some Tips for Finding Our Personal Mission in the World

Hashem created everything in His world for a purpose. The wise Solomon thus teaches us, “G-d made everything for His purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil” (*Mishlei* 16:4). According to Arizal, no one has ever or will ever come into this world with the exact same mission as yours. The light you are meant to shine into the world is yours alone, as individual as your fingerprint, as personal as your voiceprint. Many of us go through life by following the route laid out by society, with no clear sense of the mission entrusted to us. We are pulled in many different directions, feeling compromised in what we do and guilty for what we don’t do. Identifying our mission is the first step in leading a life of vibrancy and joy.

It is especially possible to tap into our personal mission in the world on Shabbat. This is because we are preoccupied and confused during the regular weekdays without a settled mind. This prevents us from having the clarity of knowing our camp and flag. On Shabbat, however, when we keep it properly, our minds settle to have the clarity to become “A person in tune with our personal camp and flag.”