

The Out of Order Message

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The book of Bamidbar starts with a description of the encampment around the Tabernacle on the first day of the month of Iyar, the second month in the second year since leaving Egypt. Eleven months earlier the Jewish people received the Torah. They then sinned by building a Golden Calf and attained forgiveness by building the Tabernacle. In the seventh chapter of Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah goes backwards in time and describes the sacrifices of the tribal leaders on the day of the dedication of the Tabernacle. According to the Book of Shemot (50:17), these sacrifices took place on the first day of the month of Nissan, the first month. The obvious question is – why is Sefer Bamidbar not written chronologically?

The Torah portion of Numbers, “Parshat Bamidbar”, starts with counting the people who left Egypt, according to the names of the families. The goal of the counting was to organize the setup of the camp in the desert, in order for all the tribes to camp around the Tabernacle. Every person would feel connected to the Mishkan, and especially to the Ark of the Covenant and the tablets. Hence, each person would enjoy a special connection both with their tribe and with the Torah.

After the census, the parsha continues to describe the encampment in the desert. Just like the tribe of Levi whose duties are listed, each tribe has its unique location and flag. The Torah goes on to discuss what to do in the event of impurity, when a person must leave the camp. This person, as well as the person who steals, is given a way to receive forgiveness. Even within the family there is a ritual whereby an accused wife can clear her name. On the other hand, those who desire to come closer to God can make a vow and become a Nazarite. All of these scenarios are brought to show that in spite of being born to a predesignated tribe, each person has the free will to get closer or farther away from the Tabernacle.

Now that this message is clear, the events that were skipped earlier can be understood in a new light. The tribal leader's sacrifices, brought as part of the dedication ceremony, prove that even those who were not born to the tribe of Levi can be given a unique role in the Tabernacle. Next, the significance of the request to not miss out on bringing the Paschal sacrifice can be appreciated. The bringing of this sacrifice establishes membership in the Jewish nation, and hence the disappointment of those who were denied bringing it. At their request, the Torah gives a second chance to bring the Paschal sacrifice, so that all can proclaim their connection to the people of Israel.

Today, the State of Israel is continuing to fulfill the message of the Book of Numbers and define the importance of each individual. I am proud to be a part of the Shekel organization, which helps special needs adults find their place in the community of Jerusalem. They, too, have a role in the Torah and the nation, and Shekel helps each person feel proud of that role. Torah MiTzion likewise works hard to enable Jewish communities all over the globe to feel connected to the Torah of the land of Israel, through its Shlichim who inspire other Jews to appreciate the distinctive role they can play in the nation of Israel.

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