



Bamidbar – Demolition and Determination

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, and you shall not reckon their sum among the children of Israel. But you shall appoint the Levites over the Tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its vessels and over all that belong to it; they shall carry the Tabernacle and they shall minister to it, and they shall encamp around the Tabernacle. When the Tabernacle is set to travel, the Levites shall dismantle it; and when the Tabernacle camps, the Levites shall erect it; any outsider [non-Levite] who approaches shall be put to death.”
(Bamidbar 1:48-51)

Every tribe, every Jew, every man, woman and child is important in the eyes of God. We each have a unique mission and destiny. We each have different roles and responsibilities. The Tribe of Levi was chosen by God to serve in the *Mishkan* (and later in the *Beis Mikdash*) and dedicate their lives to the service of God and the Jewish people. During the 40-year sojourn in the desert, the Tribe of Levi had an additional role: to carry the *Mishkan* from location to location. The Baal Shem Tov comments that when the Torah describes the role of the Leviim it says, “*u’vinsoa ha’mishkan yoridu oso*, when you travel, they shall dismantle it.” The primary role of Levi was to show the people how to take down and deconstruct. Throughout life we spend time and energy building a life edifice and framework. Then one day we look at it and realize that it is not as it should be. We are not living the way we need to be living, we are not the kind of person we know we can and should be. But we have invested so much time and resources into “building” this life. We are too sacred and unsure to knock it down and start again. Sometimes, “when the Tabernacle is set to travel,” when we know we need to make changes and start living the life we should be living, “the Levites shall dismantle it,” we must find the courage to knock down what we have built and start again.

King Solomon writes: “There is a time for all things A time to give birth and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot that which is planted.” (Koheles 3:2) The wise King Solomon doesn’t say, “there is a time to plant and a time to harvest.” Instead he tells us that there is a time to “uproot.” There are times in life when we must uproot what we have planted because it is no longer the right fit. It may have seemed appropriate when we began the endeavor, but we change, the world changes and sometimes the very things which once were acceptable and good, must be deconstructed and uprooted.

It is then after we dismantle, like the tribe of Levi, we must rebuild. Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook zt”l wrote:

יש עבודת ה' מיוחדת, לקחת דברים מפורקים ולבנות אותם. כל דבר מפורק בהתחלה היה שלם. נעים לראות דבר שלם, אבל יש עבודה מיוחדת לקחת את המפורק ולהחזירו לשלמותו.

“There is a special form of Avodas Hashem (service of God), to take things which are in pieces and make them whole. Everything which is broken was initially whole. It is beautiful to see something which is complete and whole, but there is a unique privilege to in taking that which is in pieces and returning it to completion.”

We are just a few days away from the Yom Tov of Shavuot, the day on which we celebrate the great miracle of Sinaitic revelation. But we are not merely observing a historical event. Shavuot offers us the opportunity to reaccept and reaffirm our commitment to our Torah, the opportunity to start again. If we are broken, Shavuot gives us the strength to rebuild. If we are blemished, Shavuot gives us the chance to heal. If we need to make changes, Shavuot gives us the strength to start changing. But starting again, healing and changing are exceptionally difficult because often they require us to knock down certain life structures. At times, the life or personality we have built doesn’t provide the proper framework for who we really want to be. There are things in our lives that we must knock down, emotional or personalistic structures we must raze because they are getting in the way of growth. Let us find the strength of Levi. To move our *Mishkan* to the next location often requires some deconstruction and demolition. Let us be ready to deconstruct the things which are holding us back and we can look forward to great wave of joy we will experience when we put the pieces back together.