

SHAVUOS

תשפ"ג

A Jew comes into this world for a reason. It is to be a member of a mamleches kohanim and goy kodosh. This is the essence of being a Jew. The first bris between us and Hashem was made by Avrohom Ovinu at bris bein habesorim, the second was bris miloh. A bris means we have a special function in this world. Hashem gave Klal Yisroel unbelievable kochos hanefesh and we have a bris to commit those kochos to serving Hashem. Hashem runs the entire world, and our job is to represent Him in this world.

We have a bris miloh on our very bodies and this sign is with us our entire lives. It is to remind us of the bris with Hashem always. The midrash tells us that when Dovid Hamelech went into the bathhouse, he got nervous that he has no signs of his identity as an eved Hashem – no tzitzis, no tefillin! Who is he? Then he realized he has a bris miloh which reminded him who he is.

When the Shivtei Koh wanted to establish their unique identities, they received flags to remind them of their kochos hanefesh and the unique derech avodoh they can develop with those kochos hanefesh.

It is very instructive to compare and contrast the brochos Yaakov Ovinu gave to his sons and the brochos Moshe Rabbeinu gave to the shevotim. Yaakov Ovinu realized that Shimon and Levi had tremendous passion. They destroyed Shechem and persecuted Yosef with that passion. Yaakov told them they need to channel it in the proper direction if they want to succeed. It is very dangerous to have strong passions unchecked. In the end of the Chumash, Moshe Rabbeinu blesses shevet Levi by saying Levi used his special kochos in Egypt for limud haTorah, and they were the only shevet who stood firm against assimilation and remained free from servitude as a result. Egypt was the most advanced culture in the ancient world and the Jews wanted to be a part of it. Shevet Levi rejected it all, and never suffered because of it. They were even supported by the Egyptian government!

When they left Egypt and Klal Yisroel made the eigel, again shevet Levi was the only shevet who stood firm and refused to go along. Moshe Rabbeinu noted that shevet Levi used their passions to remain strong and steadfast in their avodas Hashem. They will be teachers of Torah to Klal Yisroel because they are passionate about Torah.

Yehudoh has leadership qualities and showed responsibility. He has emes. Yosef also had leadership qualities. They clashed in Egypt when Yehudoh confronted Yosef over Binyomin. Yerovom Ben Nevot, who descended from Yosef, decided to split off from malchus Yehudoh at the time of Rechovom, and became the king over the ten shevotim. This is another challenge over the malchus between Yehudoh and Yosef. The challenge often is: how much is your desire to rule really about your ego and your talents, and how much is it about the good of Klal Yisroel? The gemara in Chelek says Hashem came to Yerovom ben Nevot in a dream and pleaded with him not to split off from malchus Yehudoh. Hashem promised that he and Ben Yishai will be together with Hashem in Gan Eden. How did Yerovom respond? "Who will be first? Me or Dovid?" Hashem says, Dovid will be first. Yerovom says he isn't interested.

Dovid Hamelech had unbelievable leadership qualities, but he was deeply aware that it is not for his own personal ego – it is to lead Klal Yisroel as Hashem's representative. He is called Hashem's eved, despite all his leadership capabilities.

What is the role of a Jewish king? We read in the haftorah to Parshas Zochor: Shmuel said to Shaul – "you are a king over Hashem's

people." A melech cannot forgo on his kovod. Why? The Maraham of Ruttenburg explains that Hashem bestows kingship to kings. Human kings serve as surrogates for Hashem's kingship over the world. Their kingdom isn't their own personal business. This is why a major part of Shaul's failure was his timidity before the will of the people. He represents Hashem and cannot afford to be humble.

Yehudoh was zoche to malchus as well as Yosef. Yosef had tremendous leadership talents and ruled Egypt very successfully. Yehudoh was zoche to malchus when he admitted his involvement with Tomor. A Jewish king has to keep a sefer Torah with him at all times so that he will not lose focus. He is a representative of Hashem.

One can do a lot of things with one's kochos. They can be used to serve Hashem or to serve one's own ego.

Zevulun was given a lot of talent in business. He could make a lot of money and be fabulously wealthy. It would stoke his own ego, or he could use it to support his brother's learning.

What is Yissochor's talent in Torah which makes him different than Shevet Levi? Yaakov describes Yissochor as a hard-working donkey. He doesn't rest. He wasn't given a portion of land on the coast – that was for Zevulun. Hashem gave this shevet a great nisayon. He was given a very fertile portion of Eretz Yisroel and he could have used his serious work ethic to develop and cultivate his own land. He could have been independently wealthy. But instead, he used his hard-working nature to assume the burden of learning and paskening sheilos for Klal Yisroel.

The difference is the source of parnossoh for shevet Yissochor and the source of parnossoh for shevet Levi. It started when the shevotim came down to Egypt. Levi was appointed to be the Rosh Yeshiva for the yeshiva that Yehudoh set up. Levi took the mussar of Yaakov Ovinu. He used his passion to devote himself totally to limud Torah with a single-minded focus, without being distracted by anything around him. He wasn't interested in the Egyptian culture that everyone else was so enamored by. He wasn't concerned about not being integrated in Egyptian society. Hashem would take care of his needs if he remained devoted to avodas Hashem exclusively. And this is exactly what happened.

In Parshas Eikev there is a posuk that talks about shevet Levi being in charge of carrying the Aron and serving Hashem. It doesn't mention doing the avodoh specifically. The Netziv explains it beautifully with the Rambam at the end of Hilchos Shemittah v'Yovel. Yissochor gave up independent wealth only when Zevulun picked up the burden of parnossoh for him. But shevet Levi didn't need any guarantees or arrangements to have a secure parnossoh. They rely exclusively on Hashem. Their passion for avodas Hashem eclipses all other considerations and places them in the center. This is what it means to carry the Aron of the bris of Hashem. The Rambam says anyone who understands what is really important in life and is inspired to throw away all the cheshbonos of the material world to pursue it, can rely on Hashem taking care of his physical needs. Shevet Yissochor is described as producing poskim and talmidei chachomim. Not teachers. Only shevet Levi teaches their Torah to Klal Yisroel – they don't just sit and learn by themselves. Their passion is needed to convey this idea that avodas Hashem is the most important thing in the world, and this can ignite that passion in their talmidim as well, and guide them in life.

This isn't only when they were getting direct support from terumos and maaseros and bikkurim supplied to them by the rest of Klal Yisroel.

The Rambam says it continues till this day. Somehow, the olam of limud Torah survives, despite all the people saying this lifestyle is not sustainable in the long-term. They said this same thing 20 years ago, and that will keep saying it 20 years from now. But we see that it still goes on because Hashem runs the world.

Shevet Levi were separated to do the avodah in the midbar. But before Klal Yisroel entered Eretz Yisroel, Moshe Rabbeinu gave each shevet their special job for when they settle the land. Here is where Moshe Rabbeinu says shevet Levi must become the teachers of Klal Yisroel. The Netziv shows that when you go through Nach, you see that in every period, it is the Levi'im who were dedicating their lives to teaching Torah to Klal Yisroel. They were separate in Egypt and in the desert and did not participate in all the aveiros of the rest of Klal Yisroel, and they are scattered throughout Eretz Yisroel in order to share that drive and that passion to influence all Jews.

Initially this passion was misdirected at Shechem and at Yosef. But, then Levi took the mussar and worked on himself and channeled his kochos to avodas Hashem. This is why shevet Levi is on the inner circle around the mishkan. And this is what all of us have to do with the unique kochos hanefesh we are given. We use them in our service of Hashem. This is what makes us Jewish – a mamleches kohanim and a goy kodosh.

In Parshas Re'eh, there is an idea of a double-kedushah. Rashi explains that we initially get our kedushah from our parents and our ancestors as members of Klal Yisroel, but then Hashem chooses each and every one of us as individuals. We take that kedushah we inherited and make it our own with our unique kochos.

Rav Meir Simchah, on the haftorah of Parshas Bamidbar, quotes the gemara in Yoma which says we may not count Jews. We are all unique and special and cannot be reduced to a number. Where does this issur come from? It is from the posuk in the haftorah of Bamidbar that says we are compared to the sands of the sea which cannot be measured or counted. But sometimes the Torah compares Klal Yisroel

to the dirt of the land. What is the difference? He answers that dirt can be mixed with water and be made into a single clump of mud. There is no distinction between particles of dirt within the clump. But sand doesn't bind together with water like dirt. Each grain of sand remains distinct and separate from every other grain of sand even when mixed with water. This is why Klal Yisroel are compared to sand and cannot be counted.

Hashem is able to take a number and retain the individuality of the person at the same time. Hashem gave each shevet their own unique kochos, and their flag represents their unique avodas Hashem that comes through with their unique kochos.

Although we don't know which shevet we belong to today, we can still recognize which kochos hanefesh we are given. Some are given leadership qualities, some are given extreme passion, some are given a serious work ethic some are given business acumen, etc. And some time down the line, Hashem is going to ask each and every one of us how we used those kochos towards maximizing our avodas Hashem.

The gemara says ever since the churban, Hashem only has the dalet amos of halacha. The Rambam explains that, of all the various things there are in the world, Hashem is only interested in Torah. Everything else that exists in the world is only there in order to further serve the interests of Torah. Even a factory in China somewhere that someone uses to become a billionaire, is somehow going to serve the interests of Torah.

These are the parshiyos which we read before kabbolas haTorah – Parshas Behar and the end of Parshas Bechukosai declare that we are Hashem's avodim. Bamidbar has the flags and the individual talents of the shevotim. We are proud of our unique kochos, but they are given to us in order to serve Hashem with them. We weren't given these kochos in order to simply relax. Everyone has to make their own cheshbon hanefesh to assess how they are using their kochos to serve Hashem and be mekabel the Torah with their unique personality.