

## **Bamidbar-Machane Yisroel and Machane Shechina**

### **By Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh**

The very first Rashi in Sefer Bamidbar states that because Hashem loves Am Yisroel, he counts them. While on the surface Rashi is explaining the purpose of the counting which is the opening chapter of Sefer Bamidbar, Rashi can also be setting the tone for the entire Sefer Bamidbar. The people Am Yisroel, despite their shortcomings and even their misbehaviors that are recorded in this sefer, remain Hashem's chosen nation. Additionally, we find that throughout their years in the desert, Am Yisroel followed Hashem's commandments in regard to the arrangement of the camps and in the instructions for traveling.

Where did this arrangement for the camps discussed in this Parsha come from? The midrashim record for us that there was a mesorah that they should follow the same arrangement of the sons that was used in carrying Yaakov back to Eretz Yisroel for burial. That format was Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun on the east side, Reuven Shimon and Gad on the south side, Ephraim, Menashe and Binyamin on the west side and finally Dan, Asher and Naftali on the North side. Just as for Yaakov's casket, Levi did not carry, so too, the tribe of Levi was separate from the other tribes. The leveiim were encamped separately closer to the mishkan. Yaakov did want Levi to be a pall bearer since his descendants were going to carry the Aron. Also, Yaakov did not want Yosef to be a pall-bearer since he was a king so Menashe and Ephrayim carried instead. So in the end, twelve descendents of Yaakov carried his casket and it was the same formatting of the tribes that was to be used in determining how they should be positioned around the Mishkan, both in travel and at rest. Rabbeinu Bachaya Al Ahatorah alludes to this idea of Am Yisroel being a replica of the camps of malachim a number of times throughout his commentary but it would seem that here is his main description since here is the source for this entire subject. Here

Rabbeinu Bachaya elaborates on the concept of Am Yisroel consisting of four camps, each consisting of three sub-groups making a total of twelve subgroups. He explains that around the *Kisai Hakavod*, Hashem's throne of glory, we find twelve groups of malachim three on each of the four sides. Rabbeinu Bachaya further elaborates on the idea that there is a correspondence of the twelve camps of malachim to the twelve tribes and twelve constellations. Of course, the true meaning of all of this is very esoteric and not to be understood in the physical sense since anything physical does not apply to Hashem or malachim. Rather these are borrowed terms to help us visualize these concepts. The main point, however, is that there is this parallel of the camp of Am Yisroel to the camp of malachim.

This parallel of the two camps, Am Yisroel and the malachim is discussed in detail in the Tanya: Lekutai Amarim Chapter 46 by the Alter Rebbe of Chabad, Zt"l as well as the know liturgical poem, the Akdamus. Both describe the parallel of Am Yisroel to the Malachim. Both also bring out how in truth, despite the fact that the malachim are completely holy and pure with no imperfection of any kind, nevertheless Hashem prefers the praises of his beloved nation Am Yisroel. The malachim have to be silent when Am Yisroel praises Hashem. This is because malachim have no free will and praise Hashem like machines that are designed to do so. When Am Yisroel, whose members have free will praise Hashem it is done with a willing heart and mind and this is so beloved to Hashem. This should inspire us to a higher level of kavana in our davening. Truthfully, Hashem loves am Yisroel and wants to hear from us. Let us cherish that special relationship we have with Hashem through our Torah and Tefillah.