

## Parshas Bolok – Benjy Lebrecht

י"ז תמוז תשע"ט – 20<sup>th</sup> July 2019 – שבת פי בלק

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In perhaps the most famous possuk in this week's Sedra, Bilaam proclaims the famous words. 'Mah tovu oholecho Yaacov; Mishkenosecho Yisroel'. 'How goodly are your tents, Yaacov, your dwelling places, Yisroel'.

Upon reading this line, we should be struck by two separate issues regarding the wording of this possuk.

Firstly, the opening phrase refers to 'oholecho' – 'tents', whereas the closing phrase mentions 'mishkenosecho' – 'dwelling places'. It would seem that both these terms are pretty similar. Why does the Torah see fit to change the description of the abode being discussed?

Secondly, the possuk mentions two names 'Yaacov' and 'Yisroel'. These names as we know, are interchangeable, and both refer to the same person i.e Yaacov, the third of the Ovos. Once again we can ask why it is necessary to use both names in one possuk. Surely, the possuk could have adopted a more consistent approach and used the same name throughout!

A possible answer to both these questions could be as follows:

An ohel is understood to be something transient and temporary in nature. It has no fixed abode and no permanent place where it can be found. On the other hand, a Mishkan can be understood as a more permanent structure, something that could exist in a designated place for a significant time. In fact, the Mishkan did survive for centuries and was used until the Beis Hamikdash was erected.

It is interesting to note that the name found next to 'oholecho' is 'Yaacov' and the name aside 'mishkenosecho' is 'Yisroel'. The name Yaacov represents struggle both in the spiritual and physical realm. It is the name given when Yaacov and Eisov fought in the womb of their mother to gain the birthright. In contrast, Yisroel represents the higher level of ruchnius, at a point when the struggle has finished. Hence Yaacov received the name Yisroel once he had defeated the Angel of Eisov in battle and emerged unscathed (both physically and spiritually).

With the aforementioned information, perhaps the possuk can be understood as follows:

There are Jews who are able to spend their lives in a 'Mishkan'. A fixed abode of ruchnius, totally focused on Avodas Hashem in its purist and most refined form. A level very much represented by the name 'Yisroel'.

However, there are Jews whose spiritual lives are representative of an 'Ohel'. They don't manage to forge a strong connection to ruchnius be it in a qualitative or quantitative way. Just like the 'ohel' is an unfixed and transient structure, so too their Avodas Hashem shares a similar fate. The good intention is certainly there but all too often they find themselves unable to develop and grow like their aforementioned counterparts. In comparison to 'Yisroel', 'Yaacov' is very much lower in his perceived connection to Hashem. One could even start to wonder whether these two very different individuals can be considered part of the same group!

Bilaam comes to tell us otherwise. Every Jew is precious in Hashem's eyes and has a deserving place in the nation. Whether he/she is the highest calibre Yisroel-Jew in the Mishkan soaring to the highest spiritual heights or even the Yaacov-Jew in an ohel who tries his best in the situation in which he finds himself. They all deservedly inhabit their rightful place in the Jewish nation and are beloved in Hashem's eyes.

It is for this reason that the two names of Yaacov as well as 'Ohel' and 'Mishkan' appear in the same possuk.

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