

Parshas Bamidbar (Reprinted) – Jonathan Sykes

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In this week's sedra there are many lessons that can be learnt about Bnei Yisrael; the relationships between the Shevatim, how they encamped and why they were counted again. Also the characteristics and roles of each Shevet and their Degalim. The important lesson of their Achdut cannot be overstated during the remaining days of the Omer period. However, one seemingly innocuous passuk is where I will focus this Dvar Torah - "Ve'samu badim" [you shall] put poles (4:6)

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch beautifully elucidates the symbolism of many aspects of Jewish life with a particular focus on the mitzvot of Eidut or testimonies of Hashem. Rav Hirsch throughout his book 'Horeb' and his peirush on the Torah, goes to great lengths to interpret the symbolic meaning of each mitzva, suggesting what it could represent. According to Rav Hirsch our passuk highlights a particular question cited by Tosfot on Yoma 72a (D.H Kesiv) Did the poles used to carry away the Ark have to be placed within the rings of the ark at the time of removal or were they a permanent feature of Ark, even when not in transit? On another occasion in Shemot (25:15) the Badim are referred to as being permanently attached, yet Shemot 25:12 appears to support our passuk, that they needed to be added.

Rav Hirsch explains that the Ark symbolises the Torah. Throughout the journeys of the Bnei Yisrael the Torah was always with them, and by virtue of the fact that the poles should not be separated from the Ark, it was the Bnei Yisrael's responsibility to ensure, that the ark could be picked up and carried away with them if need be, from one place to another. Thus the Torah is not confined to the soil where it is standing. It is the Bnei Yisrael's responsibility to take it with them wherever they maybe.

As a comparison, the Menorah, and the Shulchan, representing the spiritual and materialistic aspects of Judaism had a fixed holy place within the Mishkan/Beit Hamikdash. The inspiration and success of Bnei Yisrael in these areas which will flourish under the protection of Hashem was related to their fixed place. They were ultimately to be bound to Eretz Yisrael. The encampment of Bnei Yisrael faced the Ark. The Badim attached to the Ark enhanced this permanent relationship to the people wherever they maybe and from whichever direction. The Ark was an enormous weight of gold. It was all the more heavy together with its contents. When in transit, it was carried by the Kohanim.

How could the Kohanim do this? According to the commentaries either the Kohanim whilst holding the Badim needed extreme strength or the Ark actually carried the Kohanim who were supposed to be lifting it.

The symbolism of the Badim is very apt considering the closeness of the Sedra of Bamidbar to Shavuot the celebration of the gift of Torah. This symbolic approach should help our collective focus on the Torah which lifts us on our own journey through life.

Ref: The collective writings of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch Volume III Jewish Symbolism, Feldheim
