

“And the princes brought offerings for the inauguration of the mizbeiach” HKB”H Attended to the Kavod of the Twelve Princes Who Policed Yisrael in Mitzrayim and Were Beaten for Them

In this week’s parsha, parshas Nasso, it is worth examining why HKB”H chose to repeat the details of the princes’ korbanos twelve times. Starting with the first day of Nissan, the day the Mishkan was erected, for twelve days in succession, the prince of each respective shevet offered the exact same korban to commemorate the inauguration of the mizbeiach (Bamidbar 7, 10):

“ויקריבו הנשיאים את חנוכת המזבח ביום המשח אותו ויקריבו הנשיאים את קרבנם לפני המזבח, ויאמר ה' אל משה נשיא אחד ליום נשיא אחד ליום יקריבו את קרבנם לחנוכת המזבח, ויהי המקריב ביום הראשון את קרבנו נחשון בן עמינדב למטה יהודה, וקרבנו קערת כסף אחת שלשים ומאה משקלה, מזרק אחד כסף שבעים שקל בשקל הקדש, שניהם מלאים סולת כלולה בשמן למנחה, כף אחת עשרה זהב מלאה קטורת.”

And the princes brought offerings for the inauguration of the mizbeiach on the day it was anointed, and the princes brought their offering before the mizbeiach. Hashem said to Moshe, “One prince each day, one prince each day, shall they bring their offering for the inauguration of the mizbeiach.” The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon ben Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehudah. And his offering was: one silver bowl, its weight a hundred and thirty (shekel), and one basin of silver, weighing seventy shekel in the sacred shekel, both of them filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a meal-offering; one ladle of gold, weighing ten (shekel) filled with incense.

Although, each of the twelve nesiim brought the same items on his respective day; nevertheless, the Torah repeats the specifics for each one. Each brought an “olah,” a “chatat” and a “shelamim,” along with a silver bowl, a silver basin and a golden

ladle. All twelve were identical. The commentaries struggle to reconcile the surprising redundancy.

This is all the more surprising in light of the fundamental principle taught by our blessed sages (Pesachim 3b): “לעולם” -- a person shall always be concise in his teachings. They substantiate this practice by referring to the written Torah, where, for the sake of brevity, it often chooses a term that is but one letter shorter. That being the case, why does the Torah choose to repeat the details of each prince’s offering? It could have described them all together, seeing as they were all identical.

The Ramban’s Wonderful Lesson: HKB”H Honors Those Who Revere Him

We will begin to shed some light on the matter by introducing two possible explanations provided by the Ramban (ibid. 12) for the lengthy narrative. In fact, Rabeinu Bachayei explains the matter in a similar fashion. Firstly, the Ramban explains that HKB”H wished to honor those who revere him:

“והנכון בטעם הכתוב, כי הקב”ה חולק כבוד ליריאי, וכמו שאמר (שמואל א ב-ל) כי מכבדי אכבד. והנה הנשיאים כולם ביום אחד הביאו הקרבן הזה שהסכימו עליו יחד, ואי אפשר שלא יהא אחד קודם לחבירו, וכיבד את הנקדמים בדגלים בהקדמת ימים, אבל רצה להזכירם בשמם ובפרט קרבניהם ולהזכיר יומו של כל אחד.

לא שיזכיר ויכבד את הראשון (במדבר ז-יז) זה קרבן נחשון בן עמינדב, ויאמר וכן הקריבו הנשיאים איש איש יומו, כי יהיה זה קיצור בכבוד האחרים, ואחרי כן חזר וכללם להגיד שהיו שקולים לפניו יתברך, וכן אמרו שם בספרי (פרשת נשא אות נג) מגיד הכתוב שכשם ששוו כולם בעצה אחת, כך שוו כולם בזכות.”

HKBH felt it important to give each nasi his proper due and respect by detailing his offering. In truth, they all presented on the same day, and they all agreed upon the same offerings. However, since there had to be one princely offering per day, it was inevitable that one would be the first and the others would follow. Had the Torah just mentioned the first nasi's offering in detail and not the others, it would have been disrespectful to all of the subsequent nesiim. Hence, HKBH felt it important to enumerate each one. Each one was equal, of the same value, with the same merit (as recorded in the Sifri Piska 53).

According to the proponents of "mussar"—proper, ethical behavior—this passage teaches us a vital lesson. Every Jew should strive to honor Torah-scholars and those who revere Hashem just as HKB"H did during the inauguration of the mizbeiach. Although, the Torah usually opts for brevity, nevertheless, HKB"H felt it important to honor those who revere Him by describing their offerings in detail. Hence, the Torah repeats every detail of the princely offerings twelve times.

This provides us with a very nice interpretation of the following Gemara (Makkos 22b): **“אמר רבא, כמה טפשי שאר אינשי, --דקיימי מקמי ספר תורה ולא קיימי מקמי גברא רבה”** **Rava said: How foolish are some people, who stand up in honor of a sefer Torah, but they do not stand up in honor of a “gavra rabbah”** (a prominent person, such as a renowned Torah-scholar). Seeing as those people stand up to honor a sefer Torah, and we have just seen that the Torah itself honored each of the nesiim individually; there is no greater proof than this that one should stand up in the presence of a distinguished person and to honor his Torah.

The Ramban's Second Explanation

Alternatively, the Ramban provides a second explanation based on the Midrash:

“ועוד בזה טעם אחר במדרשם (במדב"ר יג-יד), כי לכל אחד מהנשיאים עלה במחשבה להביא חנוכה למזבח ושתהיה בזה השיעור, אבל נחשון חשב בשיעור הזה טעם אחד, וזולתו כל אחד מהנשיאים חשב טעם בפני עצמו... שהיה מסורת מיעקב אבינו ביד כל שבט ושבט, כל מה שיארע לו עד ימות המשיח.”

Each nasi contemplated on his own what he should bring for the inauguration of the mizbeiach. Even though each nasi ultimately opted to bring the same exact offerings and gifts, nevertheless, they each had their own individual reasons for bringing those items. Nachshon, the first nasi to bring an offering, had his own reasons, in keeping with his shevet's particular mission and destiny. The other nesiim had their own

respective reasons as they pertained to each shevet's innate characteristics and destiny. Seeing as each nasi truly had a unique contribution from the perspective of his intent, it was important to specify the details of the offerings and gifts of each of the twelve nesiim. For, before Yaakov Avinu passed away, he blessed his sons and revealed to each one his shevet's unique destiny until the coming of the Mashiach.

The Midrash proceeds to explain the intent and destiny of each and every shevet. The prince of shevet Yehudah focused on matters pertaining to the royal house of David and the Melech HaMashiach, who would descend from him. The prince of shevet Yissachar, the pillar of Torah, focused on matters pertaining to the Torah. The prince of shevet Zevulun, the supporters of Yissachar, focused on his tribe's destiny as supporters and benefactors of Torah-study. In similar fashion, the prince of each shevet focused on the destiny and mission of his particular shevet. This is why the Torah repeated the details of each prince's offering. Thus, it conveyed the fact that each of the twelve princes had a novel and distinct intent related to its tribe's destiny, until the coming of the Mashiach.

In truth, we can combine the Ramban's two explanations. Indeed, the Torah described in detail the offering of each of the twelve princes, because HKB"H wished to honor those who revered Him. HKB"H honored them by dispelling the misconception that they merely mimicked one another. In truth, each and every prince foresaw the future destiny of his tribe and made his offer accordingly. This was the ultimate "kavod" accorded them by HKB"H. Thus, we see that the Ramban's two explanations go hand in hand magnificently.

HKB"H Honored the Princes Who Received Beatings on Behalf of Yisrael

I was struck by a fascinating and novel idea that I would like to present to our esteemed readership, demonstrating the wondrous ways of Hashem, the grand orchestrator. We find that before his death, Moshe Rabeinu bestowed the following berachah upon Binyamin (Devarim 33, 12): **“לבנימין אמר ידיד ה' --ישכון לבטח עליו חופי עליו כל היום ובין כתפיו שכן”** **And of Binyamin he said, “Hashem's beloved one shall dwell securely beside Him; He protects him all day long, and He dwells between his shoulders.”** Rashi explains that Moshe Rabeinu prophesied that the Beis HaMikdash was destined to be built in Binyamin's portion of Eretz Yisrael.

As to why Binyamin merited this great honor, more so than any of the other shevatim, we find an alarming passage in the Midrash (Sifri ibid.):

”מפני מה זכה בנימין שתשרה שכינה בחלקו. כל השבטים היו במכירתו של יוסף, ובנימין לא היה במכירתו של יוסף. אמר הקב”ה, אני אומר לאלו שיכנו בית הבחירה, לא כשיהיו מתפללים לפני, איני מבקש עליהם רחמים, איני משרה שכינתי בחלקם, שלא היו רחמנים על אחיהם.”

Why did Binyamin merit that the Shechinah should dwell in his portion? All of the other shevatim participated in the selling of Yosef; but Binyamin was not involved in the sale of Yosef. HKB”H said: “If I tell these to build the Temple, won’t I want to show them mercy when they pray before Me?! Instead, I will not have My Shechinah dwell in their portion, because they did not show their brother mercy.”

Thus, we learn a valuable and crucial lesson. HKB”H only agreed to rest His Shechinah in the Beis HaMikdash on the condition that harmony and solidarity prevailed among the twelve tribes of Yisrael. It was precisely for this reason that HKB”H only consented to rest His Shechinah in the portion of Binyamin; for, only he did not participate in the sale of Yosef. With this understanding, we can comprehend why the second Beis HaMikdash was destroyed on account of “sin’as chinam”—baseless hatred. For, we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 9b):

”מקדש ראשון מפני מה חרב, מפני שלשה דברים שהיו בו, עבודה זרה וגלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים... אבל מקדש שני שהיו עוסקין בתורה ומצוות וגמילות חסדים מפני מה חרב, מפני שהיתה בו שנאת חנם, ללמדך ששקולה שנאת חנם כנגד שלש עבירות עבודה זרה גלוי עריות ושפיכות דמים.”

We learn that the first Beis HaMikdash was destroyed because the people were guilty of the three cardinal sins—avodah zarah, immorality and murder. These sins were not prevalent during the times of the second Beis HaMikdash; the people of that period engaged in Torah-study and performed mitzvot and acts of kindness. It was destroyed because of “sin’as chinam”—baseless hatred. This teaches us that “sin’as chinam” is equivalent to the three cardinal sins. Thus, we have an explicit source stating that the continued existence of the Beis HaMikdash requires that unity and love prevail among the people of Yisrael.

Let us elaborate based on our current discussion. HKB”H chose to build the Beis HaMikdash in the portion of Binyamin, because he was not involved in the sale of Yosef—who was

sold to Mitzrayim due to his brothers’ hatred. Therefore, when “sin’as chinam” became prevalent during the era of the second Beis HaMikdash—a sin equivalent to the three cardinal sins—HKB”H destroyed the Beis HaMikdash.

The Shechinah Dwells in the Beis HaMikdash like a Father Dwells with His Children

It appears that we can explain the wonderful association between the dwelling of the Shechinah in the Beis HaMikdash and the condition of harmony and unity among Yisrael—as exemplified by Binyamin, who did not share in the brothers’ hatred—based on a teaching in the Midrash (S.R. 34, 3). We learn that HKB”H rested His Shechinah in the Beis HaMikdash like a father who comes to stay and spend time with his children. They derive this from the passuk (Shemos 25, 10):

”ועשו ארון, מה כתיב למעלן (שם ח) ועשו לי מקדש, אמר הקב”ה לישראל... אתם בנים ואני אביכם, שנאמר (דברים יד-א) בנים אתם לה’ אלקיכם, ואני אביכם שנאמר (ירמיה לא-ח) כי הייתי לישראל לאב, כבוד לבנים כשהן אצל אביהם, וכבוד לאב כשהוא אצל בניו... עשו בית לאב שיבוא וישרה אצל בניו, לכך נאמר ועשו לי מקדש.”

HKB”H said to Yisrael, “You are children and I am your Father,” as it states: “You are children to Hashem, your G-d.” And I am your father, as it states: “For I have been a Father to Yisrael.” It is an honor for the children when they are with their father; and it is an honor for the father when he is with his children . . . Build a house for the father, so that He will come and dwell with His children. Therefore, it says: “And they should build a sanctuary for Me.”

We can expand on this notion by referring to what the Rambam writes (Hilchos Beis HaBechirah 1, 5): **”מצות עשה לעשות בית לה, מוכן להיות מקריבים בו הקרבנות, וחוגגין אליו שלש פעמים בשנה, -- It is a mitzvat aseh to build a house for Hashem, equipped to have korbanos offered in it, and to host celebrations thrice yearly, as it states: “They shall make Me a Sanctuary.”** We learn from the Rambam that the purpose of building the Mishkan and the Beis HaMikdash was to have a proper place to offer korbanos to Hashem.

To fully comprehend this notion, let us refer to an explicit pronouncement from the navi (Yeshayah 59, 2): **”כי אם עוונותיכם -- rather, your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d.** Therefore, HKB”H commanded the building of the Beis HaMikdash, so

that korbanos could be offered there to atone for Yisrael's iniquities. As a result, the barrier separating Yisrael from their heavenly Father will be eliminated. This, in fact, is implied by the very term “קרבן”; offering a “korban” draws a person closer to Hashem, as it is written (Vayikra 1, 2): **“אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה-- when a person from among you will bring a korban to Hashem.** [Translator's note: The root of the word “korban” means to draw near.] Due to this power of atonement, HKB”H rests His Shechinah in the Beis HaMikdash—like a father who dwells with his children, without any barriers between them. This is the implication of the verse in the Pesach Haggadah: **“ובנה לנו את בית הבחירה לכפר על כל עוונותינו—and build us the Temple to atone for all of our sins.**

It should now be quite clear why HKB”H's Shechinah dwells in the Beis HaMikdash like a father who comes to dwell with his children. For, we have presented many times what the Chida writes in Rosh David (Emor); the reason teshuvah is effective for Yisrael is because they are G-d's children. In the capacity of a father, HKB”H is allowed to waive His “kavod,” as explained (Kiddushin 32a): **“האב שמוחל על כבודו כבודו מוחל.”** In contrast, if He was only Yisrael's king, it states (ibid.): **“מלך שמוחל על כבודו אין כבודו מוחל—”**in the capacity of a king, He is not allowed to waive His “kavod.” Thus, it turns out that the atonement of iniquities in the Beis HaMikdash via korbanos is only effective, because HKB”H is our Father.

You Are Hashem's Children Do Not Separate Yourselves into Cliques

Now, we have an explicit passuk that states (Devarim 14, 1): **“בנים אתם לה' אלקיכם לא תתגודדו—you are children to Hashem, your G-d—you shall not cut yourselves.** Expounding on this passuk, the Gemara teaches us (Yevamos 13b): **“לא תתגודדו, לא תעשו אגודות אגודות—do not split up into factions.** In other words, Yisrael are considered G-d's **“children”** on the condition that they are not divided and rife with controversy. The navi expresses this message quite succinctly (Malachi 2, 10): **“הלווא אב-- אחד לכולנו, הלווא אל אחד בראנו, מדוע נבגד איש באחיו לחלל ברית אבותינו? Have we not all one father? Did not one G-d create us? Why, then, is one person betrayed by another, in order to defile the covenant of our forefathers?** In other words, since we all share the same father, it is not proper to for one brother to oppose or betray another.

It is now quite clear why HKB”H chose to build the Beis HaMikdash in the portion of Binyamin, who was not involved in

the sale of Yosef. After all, the purpose of the Beis HaMikdash is for the Shechinah to dwell among Yisrael like a father visiting his children. This entitles them to bring korbanos to atone for their iniquities—in keeping with the principle that a father is allowed to waive his “kavod.” Therefore, it is imperative that Yisrael follow in the footsteps of Binyamin—sin'as chinam should not prevail among them.

Applying this notion, we can explain very nicely why Yaakov Avinu chose to name his son Binyamin, as it is written (Bereishit 35, 18): **“ויהי בצאת נפשה כי מתה ותקרא שמו בן אוני ואביו קרא לו בנימין—and it came to pass, as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called his name Ben Oni, but his father called him Binyamin.** Rashi points out that the name “בנימין” can be broken down to “בן ימין”. For, Yaakov foresaw via “ruach hakodesh” that Binyamin would merit having the Beis HaMikdash built in his portion of Eretz Yisrael—in the merit of not participating in the brothers' misguided hatred – “sin'as chinam.” Let us explain.

We have explained that it is in this merit that Yisrael qualify as G-d's children, and HKB”H accepts their teshuvah in the Beis HaMikdash—like a father who is permitted to forego his “kavod.” Now, the fact that HKB”H accepts Yisrael's teshuvah is based on the midah of “chesed.” We express this fact in our tefilos (in “V'Hu Rachum, which we recite on Mondays and Thursdays): **“כי ימינך בשוטה לקבל שבים—for Your right arm is extended to receive the penitent.** Therefore, Yaakov named him “בנימין”; for, in his merit, Yisrael were afforded the status of “בן”—children whose teshuvah HKB”H accepts with his right hand--“ימין”.

Thus, we can comprehend why HKB”H insisted that the stone mizbeiach not be made using an axe, as per the passuk (Shemos 20, 22): **“ואם מזבח אבנים תעשה לי לא תבנה אתהן גזית כי חרבך—when you will make Me a mizbeiach of stones, do not build them hewn, lest you wave your sword over it and defile it.** Rashi explains: **Because the mizbeiach establishes shalom between Yisrael and their Father in Heaven; therefore, that which cuts and injures should not come over it.**

According to our current understanding, we can suggest that this is why Rashi purposely began his comment by emphasizing that the mizbeiach establishes shalom **“between Yisrael and their Father in Heaven.”** For, the goal of offering korbanos upon the mizbeiach is to achieve atonement for all

of Yisrael's sins; since they are HKB"H's children, their Father is able to waive His "kavod." Therefore, it is prohibited to use a cutting instrument to hew its stones, because its purpose is diametrically opposed to the shalom and solidarity that must reign among G-d's children.

The Twelve Princes that Suffered Blows in Mitzrayim Rectified the Blemish of Sin'as Chinam

Following this exalted line of reasoning, we will proceed to explain the legacy of the twelve princes. Recall that HKB"H honored them by repeating the details of the offerings they brought for the inauguration of the mizbeiach. Those offerings paved the way for Yisrael to offer their korbanos upon the mizbeiach to atone for their iniquities. Thus, the Torah prefaces the princes' offerings as follows (Bamidbar 7, 2): "ויקריבו נשיאי ישראל ראשי בית אבותם הם נשיאי המטות הם העומדים על הפקודים—the princes of Yisrael, the heads of their fathers' household, brought offerings; they were the princes of the tribes, they were those who stand over the counted. Rashi comments in the name of the Sifri: "They were the princes of the tribes," who were guards over them in Mitzrayim, and were beaten on account of them, as it says (Shemos 5, 14), "And the guards of Bnei Yisrael were beaten."

We learn from here that they were privileged to be appointed as princes of Yisrael in the merit of sustaining the blows of the Egyptians that were aimed at the people of Yisrael who failed to complete their work—as it is written (ibid.): "ויזכו שוטרי בני ישראל אשר שמו עליהם נוגשי פרעה לאמר, מדוע לא כיליתם חקכם ללבוך כתמול שלשום—the guards of Bnei Yisrael, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had appointed over them, were beaten, saying, "Why did you not complete your requirement to make bricks, as yesterday and before yesterday, even yesterday and even today?"

It appears that we can elaborate further on this explanation. To better understand how the appointment of the twelve princes of Yisrael exemplified the principle of "midah k'neged midah," let us refer to what we have learned in the Gemara (Shabbas 10b):

"לעולם אל ישנה אדם בנו בין הבנים, שבשביל משקל שני סלעים מילת [כתונת הפסים] שנתן יעקב ליוסף יותר משאר בניו, נתקנאו בו אחיו, ונתגלגל הדבר וירדו אבותינו למצרים."

A person should never treat one son differently than his other sons; for on account of two selas weight of fine wool that Yaakov gave Yosef in excess of his other sons (the striped tunic), his brothers became jealous of him, and the matter evolved such that our forefathers descended to Mitzrayim. Tosafot add that notwithstanding the brothers' jealousy, they would have descended to Mitzrayim and become slaves in any event, because it was so decreed from above (Bereishis 15, 13): "They will enslave them and they will oppress them." Perhaps, however, they would not have been oppressed to such a degree if not for the brothers' jealousy and their ensuing actions.

Thus, we learn that the reason Yisrael were subjected to the difficult, insufferable galus in Mitzrayim was due to the "sin'as chinam" that infected the brothers, resulting in the sale of Yosef. This explains quite nicely Moshe's reaction upon learning of Datan and Aviram's duplicity, that they informed on Yisrael to Pharaoh (Shemos 2, 14): "ויירא משה ויאמר אכן גודע הדבר—Moshe became frightened and he thought, "Indeed, the matter has become known." Rashi teaches us in the name of the Midrash that Moshe became alarmed upon realizing that there were evil informants among Yisrael; he feared that perhaps Yisrael did not deserve to be redeemed.

Therefore, when Yisrael's guards were beaten, because Yisrael failed to complete their quotas, but they endured the blows instead of blaming Yisrael, they achieved a marvelous tikun for the "sin'as chinam" that led to the galus in Mitzrayim. Selflessly enduring the blows themselves constituted a form of "ahavas chinam." Therefore, when Yisrael left Mitzrayim, they were appointed as the princes of the twelve tribes for their selfless behavior. As tribal leaders, they could continue their sacred work, uniting the people of Yisrael, who had been divided up into twelve shevatim.

Based on what we have learned; we can appreciate why they merited offering korbanos commemorating the inauguration of the mizbeiach. They were paving the way for Yisrael to receive atonement for their sins from HKB"H by offering korbanos on the mizbeiach. As a father, HKB"H can waive His "kavod," but only on the condition that Yisrael are living together harmoniously as His children. Therefore, specifically the twelve princes, who suffered blows on behalf of Yisrael, were worthy of offering korbanos for the inauguration of the mizbeiach; for, they exemplified "ahavas chinam" for all of Yisrael.

Now, this enlightens us as to why HKB”H took care to honor the twelve princes by repeating the details of each one’s offering, even though they were all identical. HKB”H was rewarding them “midah k’neged midah.” They suffered blows in Mitzrayim on behalf of Yisrael’s “kavod”—a selfless act of “ahavas chinam.” In this merit, they were afforded the honor of offering korbanos to commemorate the inauguration of the mizbeiach.

Let us add a precious thought based on Chazal’s statement: “לעולם אל ישנה אדם בנו בין הבנים”-- **a person should never treat one son differently than his other sons.** By treating Yosef differently than his other sons—by giving him the striped tunic—he precipitated the events leading to the descent into Mitzrayim. Now, the twelve princes made amends for this ill-advised deed by enduring blows on behalf of Yisrael. Therefore,

HKB”H took care to preserve their “kavod,” by according them each equal credit and due; the prince of each shevet received equal treatment.

This is the vital lesson we are supposed to learn from the passage of the nesiiim. We are to follow HKB”H’s example by honoring our fellow Jew accordingly, thereby fulfilling the mitzvas aseih (Vayikra 19, 18): “ואהבת לרעך כמוך”-- **you shall love your neighbor as yourself.** We should take care not to belittle the “kavod” of any of our fellow Jews. In this merit, we will merit redemption from the harsh galus caused by the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash, precipitated by “sin’as chinam”; and we will merit the complete geulah, heralded by the coming of the Mashiach, swiftly, in our times. Amen!



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