



**“Each man at his own banner with the insignia of their fathers’ houses”**

## **HKB”H Appeared on Har Sinai with 22 Myriads of Malachim under Banners Created from the 22 Letters of the Torah Studied by the Holy Avos**

In this week’s parsha, parshas Bamidbar, HKB”H commands the twelve shevatim of Yisrael to be divided up into four distinct encampments aligning with the four directions of the compass. Every group was comprised of three shevatim represented by a unique banner—“degal.” Throughout Yisrael’s forty-year sojourn in the midbar, these four distinct banners flew above them gloriously and majestically. This is chronicled in the following pesukim (Bamidbar 2, 1): **”וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר, איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם יחנו וידבר ה' אל משה ואל אהרן לאמר, בני ישראל מנגד סביב לאהל מועד יחנו”**—**Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon, saying: Each man at his own banner with the insignia of their fathers’ houses shall Bnei Yisrael encamp; at a distance surrounding the Ohel Mo’ed, they shall camp.**

The Torah describes in detail the arrangement and alignment of the four “degalim”: (1) The first banner, to the east, was the banner of the division of Yehudah; this division included Yissachar and Zevulun. (2) The second banner, to the south, was the banner of the division of Reuven; this division included Shimon and Gad. (3) The third banner, to the west, was the banner of the division of Ephraim; this division included Menashe and Binyamin. (4) The fourth banner, to the north, was the banner of the division of Dan; this division included Asher and Naphtali.

In the following passage from the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2, 3), Chazal explain the origins of the division of Yisrael into distinct encampments with an array of banners:

**When HKB”H revealed Himself on Har Sinai, 22 myriads (220,000) of malachim descended with Him, as it states (Tehillim 68, 18): “The chariots of G-d are two myriads, two thousands.” And they were all arrayed according to divisions and banners, as it is said (Shir HaShirim 5, 10): “Arrayed by banners among myriads.”** Upon witnessing this magnificent display and array, Yisrael began yearning to have similar divisions. They said, **“Oh that we also could be arrayed in divisions like them” . . .** And thus, it says (Tehillim 20, 6): **“We will sing for joy in Your salvation, etc.”** HKB”H said to them, **“You yearn eagerly to be arranged by banners; as you live, I will fulfill your request,”** as it states (ibid.): **“Hashem will fulfill all of your requests.”** HKB”H immediately informed Yisrael by telling Moshe, **“Go arrange them according to banners as they have desired.”**

We will endeavor to explain the significance of the banners which accompanied the malachim as they descended on Har Sinai and which provoked the envy of Yisrael. Clearly, it is speaking of spiritual banners and not simple, material banners. Additionally, why did HKB”H opt to give the Torah

to Yisrael in this manner—accompanied by 22 myriads of malachim arranged under an array of banners? Undoubtedly, a connection exists between the array of malachim, the banners, and the giving of the Torah to Yisrael.

### Bring Me a Record of Your Genealogy

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by focusing on a teaching of Chazal related to the passuk in this week's parsha (Bamidbar 1, 2): "שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחותם לבית אבותם—take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael, according to their families, according to their father's house." The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Parshas Bamidbar 684) addresses the juxtaposition of the conclusion of parshas Bechukosai and the beginning of parshas Bamidbar. Parshas Bechukosai concludes (Vayikra 27, 34): "אלה המצוות אשר צוה ה' את משה אל בני ישראל בהר סיני—these are the mitzvos that Hashem commanded Moshe to convey to Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai." Parshas Bamidbar begins (Bamidbar 1, 1): "וידבר ה' אל משה במדבר סיני באהל מועד באחד לחודש השני בשנה השנית לצאתם מארץ מצרים לאמר, שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחותם לבית אבותם—Hashem spoke to Moshe in the midbar of Sinai, in the Ohel Mo'ed, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Mitzrayim, saying, "Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael, according to their families, according to their father's house." Here is a translation of the passage in the Midrash:

**The nations of the world were envious of Yisrael when they received the Torah. They protested: "Why are they more deserving than any of the other nations?" HKB"H silenced them. He said to them: "Bring Me your genealogical record . . . like My children bring . . ." Therefore, He counted them at the beginning of this sefer, after recording the mitzvos . . . Because they only merited taking the Torah on account of their genealogy.**

The commentaries struggle to explain the connection between the "sefer yuchsin" (genealogical record, family-tree, line of descent) and the giving of the Torah preferentially to Yisrael. Furthermore, this passage seems to contradict an

explicit teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 2, 12): "וזהתקן עצמוך ללמוד—תורה שאינה ירושה לך—prepare yourself to study Torah, since it does not come to you as an inheritance. In other words, the Torah is not inherited automatically. A person must exert himself and study it diligently; it must be earned. We will endeavor to reconcile these apparent discrepancies.

### The People of Yisrael Were Part of the Makeup of the Holy Avos

We will now focus on a teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 28b): "קיים אברהם אבינו כל התורה כולה, שנאמר עקב אשר שמע אברהם בקולי—Avraham Avinu fulfilled the entire Torah, as it states (Bereishis 26, 5): "Because Avraham obeyed My voice." The commentaries, each in their own way, attempt to explain how Avraham Avinu accomplished this feat prior to the giving of the Torah on Har Sinai. We can propose a novel explanation based on a wonderful insight presented by two illustrious prophets—the great Rabbi of Apta, zy"a, in Ohev Yisrael (Vayeira), and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy"a, in Kedushas Levi (Vayeira). Their explanations relate to the passuk (ibid. 18, 19): "כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו ואת ביתו אחרי: ושמרו דרך ה' לעשות צדקה ומשפט—for I have cherished him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they abide by the way of Hashem, doing tzedakah and justice.

We know that before any fruit emerges, its initial components and potential are present in the roots of the tree or plant from which it comes. Similarly, every child is present in its father's mind before it is born. In the words of the Apter Rav and the Berditchever Rav: "Every Jew was included in the thought and mind of Avraham." Accordingly, they teach us an incredible chiddush: When Avraham performed and observed all of the mitzvos, both those prescribed by the Torah and even those prescribed by the Rabbis, he did so for the sake of all future Jews. He intended for every Jew that descended from him to participate in the fulfillment of those mitzvos.

Two tremendous benefits accrued to the future people of Yisrael as a result: **1)** Every Jew has already fulfilled (potentially) all of the Taryag mitzvos of the Torah and the

seven Rabbinical mitzvos while they were yet genetically within Avraham and 2) as a result, it is easier for every individual Jew to make the fulfillment of those mitzvos a reality upon coming into this world, since an opening has already been provided for them.

In this manner, they interpret the statement in the Midrash (Tanna D’Vei Eliyahu 25): **Each and every Jew must say to himself, “When will my actions equal the actions of my forefathers—Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?”** Now, one might wonder how any Jew can achieve the lofty levels of our holy Avos. But what our blessed sages are suggesting is that every Jew should yearn to fulfill the mitzvos just as he did when he still existed within the beings of the holy Avos. Having already performed all of the mitzvos once, it is much easier to perform the mitzvos again now and to serve Hashem as befits the roots of our neshamos.

This then is the implication of HKB”H’s declaration: **“For I have cherished him, because he commands his children and his household after him that they abide by the way of Hashem.”** When Avraham performed and observed the mitzvos, he did not do so alone; he connected with all of his future descendants. This made it easier for them to follow suit during their lifetimes. This is the gist of their magnificent insight.

## **Avraham Avinu Perceived the Entire Torah from the 600,000 Neshamos within Him**

Now, the Kedushas Levi applies this idea to interpret the statement in the Pesach Haggadah: **“אילו קרבנו לפני הר סיני ולא—נתן לנו את התורה דיינו—had He only brought us near to Har Sinai without giving us the Torah, that would have been enough for us.** This is indeed surprising! What benefit would it have served to be at Har Sinai without receiving the Torah? He asserts in his own inimitable way that the mere proximity to Har Sinai eliminated any corruption that remained within them. Thus, they were capable spiritually of perceiving the entire Torah as “one who is not commanded but does.” Nevertheless, HKB”H gave them the Torah, so that they would qualify as “those who are commanded and do.” For,

the Gemara (Kiddushin 31a) concludes that: **גדול המצווה ועושה—מ שאינו מצווה ועושה—one who is commanded to perform (a mitzvah) and does it is superior to one who was not commanded and does it.** Still, we will endeavor to explain how Bnei Yisrael were able to perceive the entire Torah prior to hearing it transmitted by the voice of Hashem.

To explain the matter further, let us refer to the teaching in the Zohar Chadash (Shir HaShirim 74) that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah. The Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan supports this notion with an amazing “remez”: The name **י ש ש’ שים ר’ בוא א’ותיות ל’תורה** is an acronym for **י ש ש’ שים ר’ בוא א’ותיות ל’תורה**. This indicates that each of the primary 600,000 Jewish neshamos has a corresponding letter in the Torah. Furthermore, as we learn from Rashi’s commentary (Shemos 19, 2): **When Yisrael camped at Har Sinai, they were united as a single person with one heart.**

We are also taught in the Gemara (Shabbas 146a): **ישראל—שעמדו על הר סיני פסקה זוהמתן—Yisrael, who stood at Har Sinai, their contamination ceased.** In other words, 600,000 Jews stood at Har Sinai, free of any spiritual contamination, and they aligned with the 600,000 letters of the Torah. Thus, there was nothing intervening between them and the lights of their neshamos, each with its respective letter in the Torah. This enabled them to perceive the entire Torah even before it was transmitted to them.

As such, the Arugos HaBosem portrays a spectacular scenario: Each person found his letter in the sefer Torah that was transmitted, and they arranged themselves accordingly forming a human sefer Torah. This is how he interprets the passuk (ibid. 20, 15): **“זירא העם וינעו ויעמדו מרחוק”—the people saw and they moved and they stood from afar.**

**The heavens opened up and they saw the Torah written with black fire on top of white fire** (like black letters on white parchment). **Each person identified his own letter above and that of his neighbor, and they aligned themselves accordingly. For instance, the Jew whose neshamah was related to the “reish” of “בראשית” moved to stand next to the “beis”; the “aleph” moved to stand next to the “reish”;**

**and so on and so forth. Thus, Yisrael aligned themselves down below to mirror the letters of the Torah up above.**

This explains fantastically how Avraham Avinu was able to perceive the entire Torah before it was actually given. For, we learned from the Ohev Yisrael and the Kedushas Levi that all of the 600,000 neshamos of Yisrael were present in the genetic makeup of Avraham Avinu; and each of those neshamos was associated with one of the 600,000 letters in the Torah. Therefore, with each of those associations, he was able to perceive the entire Torah.

We also find this incredible concept—that all of the neshamos of Yisrael were present within each of the holy Avos—presented by the Imrei Yosef (Vayeira). Based on this, he explains Chazal’s dictum (Berachos 16b): **“אין קורין אבות—אלא לשלשה—only three are referred to as Avos.** All of the Jewish neshamos destined to be born into the world were part of Avraham Avinu’s genetic makeup; he subsequently transferred all of them to Yitzchak Avinu, who subsequently transferred all of them to Yaakov Avinu. Subsequently, Yaakov transferred them to the twelve shevatim, where they were divided up among them. Thus, the only ones who contained all 600,000 Jewish neshamos were Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov respectively; therefore, they are the only three that can truly and accurately be described as Avos.

Understood in this light, we can understand HKB”H’s response to the nations of the world: **“Bring Me your genealogical record . . . like My children bring”** By purely natural means, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to attain the wisdom and secrets of the Torah, which is vast and without limits. As such, it is beyond human comprehension. Similarly, it is extremely difficult to fulfill its mitzvos and safeguard and abide by all of its prohibitions. After all, a person has an evil inclination from birth. Yet, since the holy Avos already kept all the mitzvos of the Torah with all of the future neshamos within them, it turns out that every Jew has already potentially fulfilled all of the mitzvos of the Torah. Thus, now, during their lifetimes, they are able to receive the Torah and fulfill its precepts in reality. Clearly, this is not true of the nations of the world; they were not part of the makeup of the holy Avos. Hence, they are incapable of receiving the Torah.

## **22 Myriads of Malachim Descended with Banners upon which the Names of the Holy Avos Were Inscribed**

Continuing onward on this enlightening path, we will now address the matter of the malachim that accompanied HKB”H at Matan Torah with banners. They expounded in the Midrash (S.R. 28, 2) on the following passuk related to Matan Torah (ibid. 19, 3): **“ומשה עלה אל האלקים ויקרא אליו ה' מן ההר לאמר”—and Moshe ascended to G-d, and Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying. G-d called to Moshe in the merit of “the mountain”—and there is no mountain other than the Avos—as it is stated (Michah 6, 2): “Listen, you mountains, to the grievance of Hashem.”** The passuk states that **“Moshe ascended to G-d.” He ascended in a cloud and descended in a cloud; and the merit of the Avos ascended and descended with him.**

Additionally, the sages of the Talmud teach (Yoma 28b):

**“מימיהן של אבותינו לא פרשה ישיבה מהם... אברהם אבינו זקן ויושב בישיבה היה, שנאמר ואברהם זקן בא בימים, יצחק אבינו זקן ויושב בישיבה היה, שנאמר ויהי כי זקן יצחק, יעקב אבינו זקן ויושב בישיבה, היה שנאמר ועיני ישראל כבדו מזוקן.”**

**From the times of our forefathers, yeshivot were always present . . . Avraham Avinu was an elder sitting in a yeshivah, as it states (Bereishis 24, 1): “And Avraham was an elder, well on in years.” Yitzchak Avinu was an elder sitting in a yeshivah, as it states (ibid. 27, 1): “It was when Yitzchak became an elder.” Yaakov Avinu was an elder sitting in a yeshivah, as it states (ibid. 48, 10): “And the eyes of Yisrael were heavy from age.”** [Translator’s note: The term “elder” (“זקן”) in these pesukim implies “one that has acquired wisdom” (“זה קנה”).]

These passages reinforce the message HKB”H conveyed to the nations of the world with His response: **“הביאו לי ספר יוחסין: שלכם כשם שבני מביאין”** Yisrael were privileged to receive the Torah solely in the merit of their genealogy—because they descended from the holy Avos. By accessing the Torah before it was given on Har Sinai and by fulfilling its mitzvos, they paved the way for their children, the people of Yisrael in all

future generations, to also be able to emulate them, follow in their footsteps, and fulfill all the precepts of the Torah.

### The Two Letters “Yud” and “Hei” Flew from Banner to Banner

Based on what we have learned, I would like to propose a wonderful explanation for a tremendous chiddush found in Sefer HaPliah (p. 46). He writes that the names of the Avos were inscribed on the banners of the shevatim. How so? On the banner of the encampment of Yehudah, the letters “**aleph, yud, yud**” were inscribed—the first letters of אברהם יצחק יעקב. On the banner of the encampment of Reuven, the letters “**beit, tzadi, ayin**” were inscribed—the second letters of these three names. On the banner of the encampment of Ephraim, the letters “**reish, chet, kuf**” were inscribed—the third letters of these three names. On the banner of the encampment of Dan, the letters “**mem, kuf, beit**” were inscribed—the last letters of these three names. According to this scheme, the letter “**hei**” of אברהם did not appear on any of the banners. Hence, HKB”H added the letter “**yud**” from His sacred name Havaya to join the lone “**hei**.” Together, they formed the name י”ה, with which the worlds were created, as it is written (Yeshayah 26, 3): “**כי בי”ה ה’ צור עולמים**”—for in “**Kah (yud-hei), Hashem, is the strength of the worlds.**” The sages deduce from this passuk that HKB”H formed the two worlds with the name י”ה; Olam HaBa was created with the letter “**yud**,” and Olam HaZeh was created with the letter “**hei**.”

Then the Sefer HaPliah asserts that the two letters “**yud-hei**” flew around from place to place all week long, appearing on all four banners of the shevatim—occasionally on this shevet’s banner, occasionally on this shevet’s banner. On Erev Shabbas, as Shabbas was about to enter, they remained in place at rest for the duration of the Shabbas on whatever banner they were on at that moment. On Motza’ei Shabbas, they resumed their habit of flying around from banner to banner.

I would now like to present to our royal audience a worthy idea. Why did HKB”H choose to have the name “**Yud-hei**” specifically fly around from banner to banner (on which the names of the holy Avos were inscribed)? Let us refer to a teaching in the Gemara (B.M. 85a): “**אמר רבי פרנך אמר רבי יוחנן,**

כל שהוא תלמיד חכם ובנו תלמיד חכם ובנו בנו תלמיד חכם, שוב אין תורה פוסקת מזרעו לעולם, שנאמר ואני זאת בריתי וגו’, לא ימוש מפיה זרעך.” Rabbi Parnach said that **Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who is a Torah scholar, and whose son is a Torah scholar, and whose grandson is a Torah scholar, the Torah will never again cease from his descendants, as it is stated (Yeshayah 59, 21): “And as for Me, this is My covenant . . . they shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of the children of your offspring, says Hashem, from now and forever.”** Elsewhere, the Gemara (B.B. 59a) supports this notion with the passuk (Koheles 4, 12): “**וזה חוט**” —and the three-ply cord will not be severed easily. Tosafos there explain that this only holds true when three generations coexist—i.e., their lives overlapped, and they learned Torah together; only then is it guaranteed that the Torah will never cease from their family.

### The Three Holy Avos Studied Together Fifteen Hours a Day for Fifteen Years

Before we conclude, I would like to introduce a fascinating fact brought down by the Gaon Chida in Midbar Kedeimos (1, 1) citing an ancient manuscript, hand-written on parchment, from the disciples of Rabeinu Yehudah HaChassid, z”l: **The lives of our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, overlapped. They learned Torah together every day and night for fifteen years, fifteen hours a day.** In this manner, our three holy Avos—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—paved the way for the Torah to endure among the people of Yisrael forevermore. Thus, the promise of HKB”H became a reality (Yeshayah 59, 21): “**לא ימוש מפיה זרעך ומפי זרעך אמר ה’**”—they shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of the children of your offspring, says Hashem, from now and forever. We can suggest that this is further confirmation of the Gemara’s pronouncement that “**only three deserve to be called Avos.**” The Torah has remained the eternal legacy of the Jewish people solely because of them.

At this point, I would like to propose a novel idea. The 22 myriads of malachim that descended with HKB”H at Matan

Torah are the malachim generated by the Torah-study and performance of mitzvos of the holy Avos. After all, the Torah is composed of 22 letters, which the Avos studied over and over myriads of times. Thus, they generated 22 myriads of heavenly malachim. As such, HKB”H had them accompany Him when He delivered the Torah to Yisrael, so that they themselves would know why Yisrael were privileged to receive the Torah. It was in the merit of the Avos, who had previously perceived the Torah, studied it, and observed all of its precepts.

With this understanding, we are delighted to explain the significance of the banners that descended from above along with the malachim. We can propose that the names of the holy Avos were etched on those heavenly banners just as they were on the banners of the encampments in the midbar. This informed the malachim that they were generated by the Torah-study and mitzvah-performance of the Avos well before the actual transmission of the Torah at Har Sinai. This is the message taught by the Midrash: **“And Moshe ascended to**

**G-d, and Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying.”** G-d called to Moshe **in the merit of “the mountain”—and there is no mountain other than the Avos.**

This explains very nicely why the name **Yud-hei** flew around from banner to banner. Its gematria—fifteen—alludes to the fifteen hours a day the holy Avos studied Torah together for fifteen years. Thereby, they paved the way for all future Jews to study Torah and perform its mitzvos. Inspired by the spectacle of the array of malachim with banners, the people of Yisrael at Sinai yearned to also have similar banners. For, they realized that if they truly wish to attain and fulfill all the teachings of the Torah, they must bind themselves intimately to the kedushah of the Avos. HKB”H fulfilled their heartfelt request with the words: **“איש על דגלו באותות לבית אבותם”**. The Ohev Yisrael cites a Midrash Pliah that expounds: **Do not read “באותות” but rather “באותיות”**—in other words, Yisrael were able to connect with the kedushah of their Avos via the **letters** of their names inscribed on their banners.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

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