

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## Parshas Bamidbar

### A Taste of Brisk: Encamping and Journeying

כְּאִשֶּׁר יָחֲנוּ כֵן יִסְעוּ

*As they encamped, so did they journey.*<sup>1</sup>

#### BACKGROUND: LEVITE FAMILIES – LOST IN TRANSIT?

The Jewish people are counted twice in our parsha:

1. Chapter one counts them as tribes.
2. Chapter two counts them as the four camps of three tribes each that encamped around the Mishkan.

Within the second count, in addition to saying on which side of the Mishkan each camp was, the Torah also states the order in which they would travel. For example, the camp of Yehuda would travel first, the camp of Reuven second etc. Of particular interest in this regard is verse 17, which describes what happened after the first two camps of Yehuda and Reuven had travelled:

וְנָסַע אֶהָל מוֹעֵד מִחֲנֵי הַלְוִיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּחֲנֵה

*The Tent of Meeting, the camp of the Levi'im, shall journey in the middle of the camps.*

The reason this is so intriguing is because, as Chapter ten of Bamidbar will outline in detail, it is only some of the Levi'im that would travel after the second camp, namely, the family of Kehas. The other two Levite families, Gershon and Merari, would already travel between the first two camps. Yet in our parsha, these two families are not mentioned. Why are they missing from our parsha, leaving the description of how the Jewish people travelled seemingly incomplete?

#### ENCAMPMENTS AND JOURNEYS – SANCTITY IN MOTION

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik, the Rav of Brisk,<sup>2</sup> explains this anomaly by first raising a more basic question: Why is the order of travel of the camps mentioned in our parsha at all? Our parsha is

<sup>1</sup> Bamidbar 2:17.

<sup>2</sup> *Chiddushei Maran Ri'z HaLevi Al HaTorah, Parshas Bamidbar.*

describing the people as they are encamped; they are not going anywhere! When they finally travel, as related in chapter ten, that is the place to discuss the order of travel – which the Torah does – but why is it mentioned in our parsha?

The Brisker Rav explains that the reason the order of travel is mentioned in our parsha dealing with the camps is because *it is part of the discussion of those camps*. How so?

The Jewish people in the wilderness comprised three camps:

3. *Machaneh Shechinah* – the Camp of the Divine Presence, i.e. the center of the encampment where the Mishkan was.
4. *Machaneh Leviyah* – the Camp of the Levi'im, who were encamped immediately around the Mishkan.
5. *Machaneh Yisrael* – The Camp of the Israelites, who were encamped around the Levi'im.

Each of these camps had a certain status and sanctity. Thus, for example, people with certain forms of *tumah* (impurity) were prohibited to enter those camps.<sup>3</sup>

The question is: What about when the people were travelling? Did the various groups while in transit also enjoy their status of the respective machanos? The Gemara in Maseches Zevachim<sup>4</sup> states that the sanctity of these *machanos* did indeed remain even as the people were journeying, so that all those who were restricted from entering those machanos when they were encamped were likewise restricted when they were travelling. This, says the Brisker Rav, is why the order of travel of the people is mentioned in our parsha dealing with the *machanos* – for it pertains to the status of the *machanos* when they were travelling! Moreover, this is the full meaning of the phrase: “בְּאֶשֶׁר יִחַנוּ בְּכֵן יִסְעוּ” – *as they encamped, so did they journey*,” mentioned in verse 17. This is not merely referring to the *order* in which they travelled, but also to the fact that *the status these groups enjoyed when they were encamped stayed with them even as they travelled*.

### LEVI: AN “INTERSPERSED CAMP”?

All this brings us to consider a fascinating question: What about Levi?

When the people were encamped, the three families of Levi surrounded the Mishkan on three sides.<sup>5</sup> As such, they all enveloped the Mishkan equally and hence all enjoyed the status of *Machaneh Leviyah*. When they travelled, however, the two families of Gershon and Merari were between the first and second camps of Yisrael (Yehuda and Reuven). It was only the family of Kehas, who carried the Aron (Holy Ark), who remained in the center – after the first two camps and before the second two. In this situation, did all the families of Levi retain the status of *Machaneh Leviyah*, or was it only the family of Kehas? Based on a comment of Rashi in *Maseches Zevachim*,<sup>6</sup> the Brisker Rav concludes that, in fact, only the family of Kehas

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3 Specifically:

- A person who had been in contact with the deceased (*tamei meis*) could not enter *Machaneh Shechinah*.
- A person who had experienced certain emissions, known as *zav* and *ba'al ker*i, could also not enter the *Machaneh Leviyah*.
- A person who had *tzora'as* could not even enter *Machaneh Yisrael*.

See Bamidbar 5:2, with Rashi's comments there, based on Pesachim 67a.

4 61b.

5 With Moshe, Aharon and their families encamping on the fourth side.

6 60b s.v. *kodashim*.

represented *Machaneh Leviyah* while the people were travelling, for that status is a function of their setting as immediately surrounding the Aron.

Now we can understand why our parsha mentions only the order of travel of Kehas, and not that of the other Levite families. Once we remember that the entire reason any order of travel is mentioned in our parsha in the first place is specifically as it relates to retaining the sanctity of the machanos, we will understand why only those segments who indeed retained that status are mentioned. The full list of the order of travel is left until chapter ten when that order itself is the topic at hand.

A classic example of Brisk analysis applied to the study of Chumash!