

מטות

SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND — A SINGULAR NUMBER

The *Shevatim* of Reuvein and Gad had extremely large flocks of livestock, and therefore they petitioned Moshe to allow them to lay claim to the captured territories of Sichon and Og. They rejected their rightful inheritance in *Eretz Yisrael*, and chose not to cross the Yardein with their families and their herds. Moshe was incensed with them. He accused them of sabotaging the entire effort of settling *Klal Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Bamidbar* 32:1-13).

Sheivet Reuvein and *Sheivet* Gad responded to Moshe: “With all due respect to your Torah scholarship, you have missed our point” (Abarbanel *ibid.*; see Ramban *ibid.*). The two *Shevatim* explained that they would merely deposit their children and their flocks in the new territory, and then they would assume their place in leading *Klal Yisrael* into battle. They even offered Moshe more than he asked; not only did they offer to lead in the conquering of Canaan, they also offered to remain in Canaan “until each person of *B’nei Yisrael* takes possession of his hereditary property” (*Bamidbar* 32:18).

Moshe then relented and declared that if they would truly fulfill their promise, then they would be “vindicated from Hashem . . . and [then] this land will become yours permanently” (*ibid.* 22). The commentaries all ask: what was Moshe’s initial objection? What made him change his mind? Did Moshe retreat from his original position, or was it Reuvein and Gad who did the retreating?

There was a similar bone of contention between Yehoshua, Moshe’s successor, and the *Shevatim* of Reuvein and Gad, subsequent to the division of *Eretz Yisrael*. After they had successfully led their brethren in conquering Canaan, *Sheivet* Reuvein, *Sheivet* Gad and half (actually only a small part) of *Sheivet* Menasheh, reluctantly departed from their kinsmen with Yehoshua’s blessings (Redak, *Yehoshua* 22:7). Yehoshua charged them to remain loyal to Hashem and to devoutly “cling to Him,” an obvious reference to the lure of idolatry: “Nor shall you make mention of their deities, nor cause to swear by them; and you shall not serve them nor bow to them; but cling to Hashem, as you have done to this day” (*ibid.* 23:7,8).

As soon as those *Shevatim* reached their region of the Yardein, they constructed a great altar. *Klal Yisrael* heard about this, and prepared to go to war against Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh in order to impress upon them the need to rectify their error. The sacrificial service of *Klal Yisrael* was to be performed in one place only, in Shiloh, where the *Mishkan* had been constructed. This was in order to impress upon the people the Oneness of Hashem. A violation of this ordinance was certain to lead to idolatry, which could very well have spread to the rest of *Klal Yisrael* (*ibid.* 22:12, Ralbag). Pinchas and a group of *Nesi'im* were dispatched over the Yarden to effect a repentance.

The delegation beseeched Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh not to break with the rest of *Klal Yisrael* by getting involved with idolatry; and even if their intention was to sacrifice to Hashem, it would still be regarded as a rebellion against Him (ibid. 22:19, Rashi). After all, each member of *Klal Yisrael* is responsible for the rest of the congregation (*Yehoshua* 22:20). The concept of *areivus* —mutual responsibility— transforms the sin of a single individual into the sin of the entire congregation.

Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh then reassured the delegation that their intention was certainly noble; they would never dream of using it as an active altar. It was to be a memorial for future generations to declare their oneness with their brothers across the Yardein. It would serve to prevent the future generations of the inhabitants of *Eretz Yisrael* from saying to the descendants of Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh, “You have no part in Hashem” (ibid. 22:27). The replica of the altar of Hashem was designated to be a “witness” between the inhabitants of both sides of the Jordan. Pinchas and his entourage were impressed with what they heard, and complimented Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh on their foresight (*Metzudas David* ibid. 22:31).

In order to understand these dialogues involving Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh it is important to understand the relationship of each individual member of *Klal Yisrael* to each other. The *Gemara* in *Berachos* (58•) states:

הרואה אוכלוסי ישראל אומר ברוך חכם הרזים שאין דעתם דומה זה לזה, ואין פרצופיהן
דומים זה לזה

If one sees a crowd of Israelites, he says, “Blessed is He who is wise in secrets [i.e. the secrets of each one’s heart] for the mind of each is different from that of the other, just as the face of each is different from that of the other.”

Rashi (ibid.) explains that a “crowd” means six hundred thousand people. The sighting of six hundred thousand Jews merits a special *berachah*. Each one of these six hundred thousand individuals has diverse “secrets of the heart,” and Hashem understands each of their secrets; therefore a blessing is directed to the One Who discerns these secrets.

The Maharsha (ibid.) explains why this blessing is directed specifically to the number six hundred thousand. Why not a higher, or perhaps a lower number? The Maharsha explains that this number corresponds to the membership of *Klal Yisrael* during *Yetzias Mitzraim*. This is the number of individuals who stood at *Har Sinai* at *Kabalas Hatorah*. In the Torah proper, there are exactly six hundred thousand *dei’os* — facts, principles, or other points of knowledge. Each member of *Klal Yisrael* represented a different particular point. The significance of the *berachah* now becomes apparent. Just as each of the six hundred thousand faces are different from one another, so too is every mind. Nevertheless, Hashem discerns the secrets of their hearts. For each one of the six hundred thousand is identified with a unique point of the Torah — which in turn will total six hundred thousand points of knowledge.

The *Zohar* (*Acharei Mos* 73•) states:

קודשא בריך הוא אורייתא וישראל חד

“Hakadosh Baruch Hu, The Torah and *Klal Yisrael* are One.”

The Torah is actually the written thought of Hashem. Our Torah represents and contains all the thought which Hashem invested in this world — the world of *Olam Hazeih*. Each one of the

original six hundred thousand members of *Klal Yisrael* represents a single thought of the Torah, hence their interdependent relationship. Hashem, *Klal Yisrael* and the Torah are actually One.

The Maharal (*Gevuros Hashem* 12) takes this concept one step further. The number six hundred thousand represents the totality of what Hashem revealed to *Olam Hazeih*, and thereby it might be said that it reflects a totality of Hashem. The gathering of six hundred thousand Jews personifies the unity with Hashem. The six hundred thousand *dei'os* of Torah, coupled with six hundred thousand Jews, together with Hashem is in effect Unity.

It is easily apparent why this *berachah* is invoked only upon sighting six hundred thousand Jews, and not six hundred thousand Gentiles. Granted, they each look different from one another, but their *dei'os* are not necessarily different from each other. For they were not invested with the Torah; they are not in possession of the Divine thought. The secrets of their hearts are human in nature; mundane and not Divine.

Klal Yisrael represents a “community of commitment,” while the nations represent a “community of circumstance.” The community formed by the nations is tangible and practical in nature. They have a common bond of economy, climate, geography, and perhaps a common enemy. Their unity stems from the fact that they have a substantial material need for each other. When that need no longer exists, then their unity will no longer survive. Unity dependent upon a common goal is a “community of circumstance” (Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveichik).

Klal Yisrael, on the other hand, began as a community of commitment. Their common threads are not mundane goals and accomplishments. The glue that binds *Klal Yisrael* together is its treaty with Hashem.

שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד

“Hear, oh Israel, Hashem is our G-d; Hashem is One” (*Devarim* 6:4).

Hashem, the Torah and *Klal Yisrael* signifies Unity. The commitment to Hashem is *Klal Yisrael's* starting point. Six hundred thousand independent, diverse, divergent ideas are still unity — if they are properly directed *lesheim Shamayim*. Six hundred thousand independent, diverse, divergent individuals represent unity — if their hearts are properly directed *lesheim Shamayim*.

Moshe *Rabbeinu*, prior to the conquest of Canaan, and Yehoshua after the conquest of Canaan, understood the importance of unity. *Klal Yisrael* was comprised of six hundred thousand individuals, broken down into groupings of twelve *Shevatim*. Each individual, each *Sheivet* represented the successful unity with Hashem. If Reuvein and Gad were to settle away from *Eretz Yisrael*, their distance would undermine the viability of this unity. If they were to erect an altar away from the central point of Shiloh, commit an act that would lead to idolatry, or secede from the union, then the unity with Hashem would be broken. *Klal Yisrael* would be just another natural nation; they would not be the reflection of the Unity.

גמירי דלא כלא שבטא [מישראל]

“We have learned that no *Sheivet* shall cease [from Israel]” (*Bava Basra* 115:).

It is imperative that *Klal Yisrael* remain as a unit of twelve *Shevatim* for eternity, otherwise there will be a disintegration of the ideals and *dei'os* invested in the original six hundred thousand.

The concept of “*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh bezeh*” — “Each member of *Klal Yisrael* is responsible for the other” (*Shevuos* 39*), articulated by Pinchas to Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh

(*Yehoshua* 22:20), now becomes understandable. Achon, the son of Zerah, committed a trespass in Yericho, all by himself; nevertheless Hashem's wrath fell on the entire nation (*ibid.* 7:1). One individual committed a sin, yet all the congregation was held culpable. If two or three *Shevatim* would commit a transgression, all of *Klal Yisrael* would be held accountable. Each Jew is responsible for the spiritual well-being of his fellow Jew. For this was Hashem's premise in allocating His six hundred thousand Torah ideas to the six hundred thousand individuals of *Klal Yisrael*. The unity, the entity called *Klal Yisrael* is composed of six hundred thousand separate organs. If one organ suffers, the entire body suffers. The unity of *Klal Yisrael* with Hashem and His Torah means that no man, no *Sheivet*, can be an island unto itself. Any trespass committed by Reuvein, Gad, or Menasheh would impact upon all of *Klal Yisrael*.

It now becomes apparent as to why the Torah could not be given to the generations of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Hashem had to wait for the "*uchlusei*" — "crowd." Without six hundred thousand individual recipients of the Torah, the unity between Hashem, Torah and *Klal Yisrael* could not have been achieved. The significance of the six hundred thousand individuals is underlined by the *Gemara* (*Berachos* 7•). Although Hashem's promise to make Moshe into the nation of Hashem in place of *Klal Yisrael* was fortunately not carried out, the benefits of that *berachah* were realized. For Hashem blessed Moshe with six hundred thousand great-grandchildren. For the number six hundred thousand is significant in identifying the nation with the Torah. In fact the number of *Klal Yisrael* remained constant throughout the tenure of the *midbar* (Maharal, *Gevuros Hashem* 12) to demonstrate this constancy.

The bond of the six hundred thousand remained intact when Reuvein and Gad led *Klal Yisrael* in its conquest. Without them it would have been yet another mundane military confrontation; with Reuvein and Gad, *Klal Yisrael* enjoyed the commitment of the Torah and ultimately, Hashem. The altar that these *Shevatim* built across the Yardein was to guarantee their loyalty to the bond of the six hundred thousand.

The noble intentions of Reuvein, Gad, and Menasheh notwithstanding, they were nevertheless punished for rejecting *Eretz Yisrael* and electing to abandon their brethren. The *Midrash* (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 22:7) states that they were the first of the *Shevatim* taken into exile by Sancheriv (*ibid.* 23:14). Since they were on the outer perimeter of the land, away from the main body of the nation, they were the most vulnerable; their vulnerability and ultimate capture were actually a punishment for distancing themselves from their brethren for material gain.

By isolating themselves they were cut off from the mainstream, far from the *Makom Mikdash*, and separated from their teachers.

לעולם ידור אדם במקום רבו שכל זמן ששמעי בן גרא קיים לא נשא שלמה את בת פרעה

A man should always reside in the district of his teacher; for as long as Shimi son of Geira lived, [his disciple] Shlomo did not marry the daughter of Pharaoh (*Berachos* 8•).

On the far side of the Yardein they were more apt to assimilate, with no one present to reprove them. In fact, Moshe *Rabbeinu* was buried in Gad's territory (*Targum Yonasan, Devarim* 33:21), but live people need instruction from live teachers. Due to the fact that they were led by their materialistic inclinations, they found it appropriate to ignore the above teaching. Without the

constant, vigilant supervision of a live teacher, they ultimately traveled downhill spiritually in a much quicker descent than their brethren.

Although Moshe *Rabbeinu*'s and Yehoshua's fears and accusations against Reuvein and Gad were unfounded, they did have legitimate concerns. Moshe and Yehoshua were uncomfortable with the idea of a *Sheivet* physically distancing itself from the main body of *Klal Yisrael*. The unexpressed aspect of their concern was unfortunately ultimately realized.

aA