

SEPARATE BUT TOGETHER

by Rabbi Dovid Green

This week's Torah reading begins with the directive to count a certain segment of the Children of Israel. Immediately after the count, the Jews are directed to arrange their camp in the wilderness in a specific order. All of the tribes excluding the tribe of Levi, would be divided into four groups of three. Each group would have its place around the Tabernacle which would be in the center of the camp. The tribe of Levi would camp around the Tabernacle and service its needs, as well as guard it. It seems somewhat counterproductive to divide up the Jewish nation as such, as it could lead to disunity. However, there is another way to view it, as we shall see.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler expounds on this topic. He says that there are various reasons for putting things in order. One reason is just for its own sake. Order creates the feeling that all is in order, implying that all is well. Another reason for order is practical. We know where to find things in places where order exists. A third reason is that some things need order to work properly, such as machines which depend on all of its parts to work in order.

On the spiritual level there is another aspect. At one extreme, disunity between individuals and groups impedes progress. At the other extreme, even if unity exists, disorder also impedes progress. Indeed, each person realizes his potential through his very individual talents. These talents need to express themselves in a particular context within a specific circle where it can be cultivated. Each circle becomes a conglomerate of the positive forces within it and it makes its contribution to the whole in its unique way. Each circle interacts with neighboring circles. Even if there are many circles expressing themselves in very different ways, in the end each contributes to and gains from the other. In this way each person can realize and express his own individualism in the context of his service to G-d. As we can see, order actually preserves unity by defining roles, direction, and purpose.

A simple analogy for this is the various skills which come together to build buildings. Each group contributes its unique expertise to the project. Each group of workers works in its own way, yet all are working toward the same goal.

This is what we learn from the arrangement of the tribes in the wilderness. Each was recognized in its role. Each was camping in equal proximity to the Tabernacle. The core and focus was doing G-d's will. The approach for each was different. However, each contributed its unique part, and gave what the others could not.

Good Shabbos!

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