

PARSHAS BEHAALOSCHA

by Gedalia Litke

Rashi points out that the words 'B'nei Yisroel' occur five times in a single pasuk (8:19) and that this teaches us that B'nei Yisroel are so dear to HKB'H as to warrant being mentioned the same number of times, five, as there are books of the Torah.

If this is teaching the fundamental idea that B'nei Yisroel has a special relationship with the five books of the Torah it would seem to be redundant or out of place.

This idea is covered amply elsewhere. Rashi says on the first pasuk in Chumash that the world was created for Klal Yisroel and for the Torah, both of which are referred to as 'reishis' (first or choicest). Chazal say elsewhere that the Jewish people and the Torah and HKB'H are one, that Klal Yisroel alone among the nations of the world accepted the Torah, etc.

If this idea nonetheless needs further emphasis it would seem more appropriate to mention B'nei Yisroel five times in Parshas Yisro at the events of ma'amad Har Sinai (the giving of the Torah at Sinai). Why is it emphasized here in the context of a pasuk which deals with the role of the levi'im?

The context of our pasuk is that HKB'H is investing the levi'im with their role in the Mikdash. They are in place of the b'chorim (first borns). (8:18) Unlike first borns who come from all tribes and therefore represent a cross-section of all of the Jewish people, the levi'im are a single tribe. Because the levi'im are invested with a special role in lieu of the b'chorim the rest of the Jewish people might be tempted to conclude that they now are less represented and therefore have less connection to the mikdash and, consequently, HKB'H. To address this concern the pasuk mentions B'nei Yisroel five times to remind us that we always have an eternal and direct connection to HKB'H through the five books of the Torah. (See also Gur Aryeh and Maskil L'Dovid on this pasuk.)

[It would be interesting to further analyze the pasuk to determine how each appearance of the word B'nei Yisroel corresponds specifically to a particular book of the Torah, something Rashi clearly intends, as he concludes his comment with a reference to the Midrash Rabbah in Breishis (3:5) which explains how each of five occurrences of the word 'ohr'/light refers specifically to a particular book of the Torah. See Gur Aryeh.]