

NOT THE SAME THING

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

Parashat Naso is the longest weekly Torah portion containing 176 verses. The usually concise narration of the Torah is "padded" with a repetitious itemization of the offerings brought by the heads of the 12 tribes at the celebration of the dedication of the alter in the Tabernacle. Each brought the identical list of gifts of gold, silver and sacrifices in honor of the grand event. Why didn't the Torah list the items once, on the first day, and then inform us that all the other tribes also offered the same items?

There are several answers offered by our great Torah commentators including one that can be understood if we begin at the start of the fourth book of the Torah - Bemidbar. At the inception of the book that relates many of the incidents that occurred during the 40 years that our people wandered through the desert until the generation that left Egypt died and left their children to enter and inherit Eretz Yisrael, Hashem commands Moshe Rabenu to conduct a census. Nachmanides - Ramban - points out something very significant about this count. "Hashem told Moshe: 'Count each and every member of Israel with honor and dignity. Do not merely ask the head of each household how many children he has. Rather, everyone should pass before you with honor, and you should count them.'"

Why did Hashem command Moshe to conduct his survey in such an inefficient manner? It certainly would have been much easier to ask the head of each family to submit family details to a central point where the numbers could be tallied. Using census takers as his representatives would have left Moshe free to handle much more difficult community matters. The result certainly would have been the same total!

Hashem wanted to teach Moshe the value and the uniqueness of each and every Jew. One who deals with a group must always remember that even the largest congregation is made up of individuals. Each was created by G-d to perform a certain task unique to that person in fulfillment of Hashem's master plan. Each must be treated with respect and dignity equal to his or her status as a soldier in G-d's army for whom the entire creation could have been made. No one is just a number!

When we read the offerings brought by the leader of each tribe the quantities and the items all look the same to us. However, our sages teach that each leader infused his gift with special intents that expressed the unique qualities and character of his tribe. All of us have the same Torah and the same commandments to observe yet each individual has the opportunity to infuse his or her performance of G-d's commands with one's unique, personal touch. Every day Jews pray from a

standard text called the siddur. Our Shemoneh Esreh contains the same words repeated 3 times a day. That is how it looks on the surface. Through study of Torah and performance of misvot each of us has an opportunity to grow and develop our relationship with our Maker and our service to Him. Each person in a way unique unto himself can please our Creator by complying with His will in a manner unique unto oneself. One's special status as a son or daughter of the King obligates each one of us to treat others royally and to perform our duties with dignity. May we all meet the responsibility in our own special way.

Shabbat Shalom

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