

Hashem spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying: "The Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household." (2:1,2)

The *Midrash* discusses the remarkable level of sanctity achieved by *Klal Yisrael* as a result of their *degalim*, banners. Indeed, *Chazal* cite a dialogue between the gentile nations in which they attempt to dissuade *Klal Yisrael* from maintaining their allegiance to Hashem. *Klal Yisrael's* response to the gentiles' negativity was the beauty and sanctity of the *degalim* that evoked their pride in being Jewish. We must endeavor to understand what it is about the *degalim* that engendered such feelings of self - esteem and pride.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, offers two responses to this question. He explains that *Torah* and *mitzvos* are not merely religious observances and traditions that we keep; they comprise our life! They are our standard that we display with pride and dignity. Every tribe presented his individual banner, his banner of *Torah* and *mitzvah*, proud to be a Jew and prepared to offer his life for its observance. No one can take away our banner of Judaism.

We find a similar thought expressed in regard to the words of the *Midrash* on *Megillas Esther*. In *Esther*, 4:5 the *pasuk* states, "*Esther called to Hasach...to learn what this was about and why.*" *Chazal* explain that Esther questioned the origin of this *tzarah*, distress/anguish. Perhaps it was because the Jewish people had denied the concept of "*zeh Keili v'anveihu*," "*This is my G-d, and I will beautify Him.*" Why would Esther attribute the tragic decree to annihilate the Jews to a lack of beautifying *mitzvos*? *Hidur mitzvah*, going out of our way to beautify *mitzvos*, should not be a reason for such a terrible decree. Would it not have made sense to ascribe the *churban*, destruction, to a lack of *mitzvah* observance? *Horav Rogov* explains that once *Klal Yisrael* lose their sense of pride in *mitzvos*, once they do not give proper honor and beauty to the *mitzvos*, they will soon refrain from actual *mitzvah* observance. If we do not raise up our banner of Judaism with pride, we will soon reject it - totally. The Jewish People respond to the gentile nations: "The *Torah* is our banner; it is our pride and self-esteem. Nothing that you do or offer can encourage us to rescind our commitment.

Horav Rogov suggests a second area of significance which is indicated by the *degalim*. *Klal Yisrael* takes pride in the fact that each tribe maintained its own banner, fulfilling the goals and objectives that each individual *degel* mandates. Each man, each tribe, accepted his banner's mandate with enthusiasm. They did not dissent their position; they did not protest. They did not attempt to exchange their responsibility for that of another Jew's. There was no jealousy; there was no envy. Each person performed what was expected of him and did not attempt to infringe upon anyone else. *Horav Rogov* cites a noteworthy story that occurred with the *Bais HaLevi*, which reinforces this idea. One *erev Yom Kippur* after *Maariv*, the *Bais HaLevi* noted that one of the community's wealthy men remained afterwards to recite *Tehillim*. One would think that this act of devotion was to be commended. The *Brisker Rav*, however, did not seem to think so. He went

over to the man and asked him, "My friend, what is the punishment for a soldier who deserts the army?" "He is put to death," the man quickly responded. "What about an infantryman who decides one day to leave his post and join the cavalry?" "He is also a deserter and deserves a similar punishment," answered the man emphatically. The *Brisker Rav* looked with penetrating eyes at the wealthy man and said, "You are such a man! Hashem has various divisions of Jews. There are foot soldiers who do not have the ability to support others. They must go by foot from door to door seeking support for their families. There are also the cavalry who ride upon horses and in fancy chariots. They are the ones who are mandated to support and sustain others. Now, on *erev Yom Kippur*, is a time for someone of your financial capacity to be out on the streets, seeking out people in need whom you can help. You should not have the strength left to sit down and recite *Tehillim*. If you do - then obviously you deserted your company. You reneged your responsibility. Leave the *Tehillim* for somebody else, while you go out and perform your duty!"

In *Pirkei Avos*, Chazal teach, "*Who is a strong man? One who has defeated his evil inclination.*" The *Bais HaLevi* notes that Chazal say his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, not someone else's. The rich man must overcome the challenge of not giving *tzedakah*, while the poor man must defeat the *yetzer hora* that downplays his recitation of *Tehillim*. The wealthy man who performs the poor man's task is only deferring to his *yetzer hora*'s "suggestion."