



לקוטי שיחות  
PROJECT  
LIKKUTEI  
SICHOS

## **Sicha Summary**

Chelek 18 | Bamidbar - Beis Sivan

### **The Context:**

In the days leading up to the Giving of the Torah, Moshe prepared the Jewish people through a variety of instructions and actions. The Alter Rebbe describes the preparation of the third day of preparation as follows:

“After Rosh Chodesh, Moshe began to prepare the people to receive the Torah.... On Tuesday, Moshe conveyed to them G-d’s words, “You will be a kingdom of priests for Me...” (*Shemos* 19:6) (*Shulchan Aruch Harav, Orach Chayim* 494:20)

### **The Questions:**

- 1) G-d conveyed several things to Moshe on the third day. Just prior to the verse cited by the Alter Rebbe, “You will be a kingdom of priests,” G-d said, “you shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples, for Mine is the entire earth.” Why does the Alter Rebbe only quote “you shall be a kingdom of priests...” to illustrate the spiritual preparations of the third day, rather than quoting everything G-d said?
- 2) The major commentators disagree about the meaning of “a kingdom of priests.” Ramban maintains it refers to the Jewish people in their role as servants of G-d. Rashi, however, defines “priests” as “princes,” suggesting worldly power and influence. According to Rashi’s interpretation, why would the Alter Rebbe select this verse, describing worldly power, in reference to the people’s spiritual preparations?

### **The Preface to the Explanation:**

In His message to the Jewish people on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Sivan, G-d outlined three ascending qualities of His people.

- a) *You shall be to Me a treasure from among all peoples* — this refers to G-d’s essential choosing of the Jewish people from all other nations, not because of any virtue that the people possessed, but because of His innate, immutable bond with them.
- b) *And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests/princes* — this refers to the work the Jewish people do in the physical world to transform their private material lives into vehicles for Divine revelation.
- c) *And a holy nation* — this refers to the Jewish people’s purely spiritual advancement, divorced from involvement with the physical.

In the *Talmud’s* narrative of Moshe’s confrontation with the angels in the days leading up to the Giving of the Torah, Moshe argued that the fundamental purpose of the Torah is to empower human beings to transform their baser instincts and the physical reality that they inhabit into a vehicle for holiness. (*Shabbos* 86b)

This explains why Rashi interprets the word “priests” as “princes” and not in the convention sense of spiritual servants: In the context of G-d preparing the people for accepting the Torah, it is important to stress their role as “princes” who have the power to shape and transform the physical world as they desire.

For the same reason, the Alter Rebbe chose to cite only this fragment of the verse to describe the people’s preparation on the third day. On the eve of the Giving of the Torah, the Jewish people’s role as those who transform the material world is paramount.

### **Timely Reading:**

*Parshas Bamidbar* is always read in the week preceding Shavuos, and therefore, there must be a thematic connection between the preparation for the Giving of the Torah and *Bamidbar*.

There are three censuses recorded in *Bamidbar*:

- a) The general census of the entire Jewish people, except for the tribe of Levi; (*Bamidbar* 1:1)

- b) A census of all members of the tribe of Levi from “one month and above”; (*Ibid* 3:15)
- c) A census of members of the Kehos family aged thirty until fifty who were fit to serve in the *Mishkan*. (*Ibid* 4:2-3)

These three censuses correspond to the three qualities of the Jewish people enumerated by G-d prior to the Giving of the Torah.

- a) When someone counts something, it reveals that they believe that thing possesses significance and importance, even if the value of those items is sometimes not discernable on the surface. G-d counting the Jewish people reveals His essential love of them. This corresponds to G-d’s first statement, “You shall be to Me a treasure out of all peoples,” referring to His choice of the Jewish people regardless of any external, discernable quality.
- b) The separate counting of the Levites was for the purpose of appointing them as masters over the *Mishkan* and all of its vessels. (*Bamidbar* 1:50 and *Rashi*) This corresponds to G-d’s statement, “And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests/princes,” referring to the Jewish people’s ability to master and transform the material world.
- c) The counting of the family of Kehos was for the purpose of entrusting them with the responsibility of caring of the holiest elements of the *Mishkan*, the Holy of Holies. (*Ibid* 4:3-4) This corresponds to the final clause of the verse, “and a holy nation,” referring to the Jewish people’s self-contained spiritual advancement.

Of these three censuses, the counting of the Levites is the most unique, and therefore, it is the central feature of the *parshah*. The Jewish people had been counted several times prior to this census, and the counting of the family of Kehos is not unique because the families of Merari and Gershon are also counted separately in *parshas Nasso*.

Thus, reading about the appointing of the Levites as masters over the *Mishkan* in the days leading up to Shavuot highlights the most vital role of

the Jewish people — “princes,” who are charged with transforming the physical world into a home for G-d.