Eternal Lessons from a Temporal Encampment

I. The Physical Encampment

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

The Israelites shall camp each with his standard, under the banners of their ancestral house; they shall camp around the Tent of Meeting at a distance.

מחנה ישראל: Outer Encampment; Four Formations of Three Tribes Each; Led by Yehuda, Reuven, Ephraim, Dan
מחנה לוי: Inner Encampment; Leviim
מחנה שכינה: Innermost Encampment; Sanctuary

A. Balance - Unity and Diversity

Having journeyed from Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the wilderness. Israel encamped there in front of the mountain.

Ibn Ezra: The physically powerful tribes of Reuven and Dan were situated at the head and rear of the encampment for strategic purposes. [The Abravanel adds that these sections of the camp were also the most heavily populated].
Rabbi Shmuel Goldin: Parshat Bamidbar - Shiur 2020-2021

Rabbeinu Bachya: Introduces lengthy discussion of parallel encampments in heaven and on earth... He then notes how each of the four leaders of tribal clusters only individuals listed with א-ל in their names. HaShem’s presence woven into the encampment.

C. Balance-Familiarity and Distance-Recreating Sinai

Ramban, Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, and others: Divinely ordained recreation of the scene at Har Sinai.

Ramban: HaShem roots the concept of hagbala in the encampment, as He did at Sinai. Parallel pesukim reflect this phenomenon

Benno Jacob: “God moves His presence from the mountain to the Mishkan, from the location sanctified by His hands to the sanctified location built by the Israelites... The Sanctuary is the Sinai which travels in their midst, is the heavens and the vault of heaven which has been uprooted and lowered to earth.”
II. The Societal Encampment

The Blueprint

- Continued counting of the *Leviim*
- The temporary exile of individuals afflicted with specific forms of *tuma*, ritual impurity, from various sections of the camp.
- Laws concerning theft and false denial of financial obligation. *Respect for private property*
- The regulations governing a *sota*, a married woman suspected of adultery. *HaShem breaks the rules for shalom bayit*
- The laws of a *nazir*, an individual who vows to undertake more rigorous religious observance.
- The rules of *Birchat Kohanim*, the priestly blessing.
- The *korbanot* of the *nessi’im*, tribal leaders.

The Plan

**Continued Count:** *Carry-over of ideas of individual value, etc.*

**Temporary Exile:** *Individual sacrifice for communal benefit; preservation of the varying sanctities of the specific encampments; personal need to deal with limiting life experiences; possible divine response to personal failing.*

**Theft and Denial:** *Respect for Personal Space and Possession; extension to Geirim; atonement requires confession; sin against man–sin against God.*

**Sota:** *HaShem breaks the rules for shalom bayit.*

**Nazir:** *Creating the “box” for the spiritual overachiever; Complexity of religious search*

**Birchat Kohanim:** *The role of the Kohanim-creators or conduits (bracha b’ahava); connection/contrast between Kohen and Nazir; The bracha for the Kohanim*

**Korbanot hanessi’im:** *Participatory leadership; individuality within uniformity*