

Points to Ponder Bamidbar 5778

סיני In the Midbar of Sinai (1:1) – The Midrash comments and notes that the Torah was given in the Midbar at Sinai to teach us that to properly receive the Torah, one needs to be as open to it (hefker) as a Midbar but also as humble as Sinai to be Zocheh to the Torah. **Rav Shlomo Levenstein Shlita** related a story about the **Chazon Ish** who had come to Warsaw to visit. He stopped into a Beis Hamidrash and opened a Gemara and was learning. When the Chevra Shas entered the Beis HaMidrash and needed the volume he was using, the Gabbai took it away from him and told him that a simple Jew who comes to Shul can make do with the recitation of Tehillim. The next day when “the simple Jew” was offered an Aliya and gave his name to the same Gabbai who immediately recognized that he had offended the famous Chazon Ish. He set to beg Mechilah to which he was told “the Chevra Shas had first rights and a Jew DOES need to say Tehillim. You did nothing wrong...” That’s making oneself like a Midbar for Torah.

ה As Hashem commanded Moshe, they were counted in the Midbar (1:19) – What is added with this phrase? Everything the Jews did, they followed Hashem? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** explained that usually when a census is undertaken, it is undertaken because the government needs the numbers for taxes or to know how to properly provide for programs for its citizens. However, the Jews were not paying taxes at this point. The Manna and Be’er made the need for a census for programs superfluous. The only reason the Jews were undertaking the census was because Hashem told them to. This becomes a special proof that Bnei Yisrael was motivated purely to do the Ratzon HaBorai.

י The Jews shall camp, each on its camp and each by its flag surrounding the Mishkan they shall camp (2:2) – **Rav Meir Shapiro ztl.** noted that the beauty of diversity of Bnei Yisrael is that no matter where they plant their flags, it is always surrounding the Mishkan – the Torah. He used this idea when establishing the Daf Yomi noting that the Mishna may have originated in Eretz Yisrael, the Talmud in Babylonia, Rashi in France, Tosafos in Germany, Rif in Fez, Morocco and Rambam in Spain but one thing united them -- and us -- that no matter where we are, we are surrounding the Mishkan and the Torah that brings us together.

These are the children of Aharon & Moshe...Nadav and Avihu Elazar and Itamar (3:1-2) – **Rashi** explains that they were called the future generations of Moshe because Moshe taught them Torah. The **Maharal** explains that even though ALL of Bnei Yisrael learned Torah from Moshe and thus are his children, Moshe went the EXTRA mile to learn with his nephews. **Rav Neriah ztl.** points out that when one commits himself without limit to his students, he becomes a parent to them, and they, in return become his sons.

The job of Elazar the son of Aaron the Kohein was the Shemen HaMaor, the Ketores, Minchas Hatamid, and Shemen HaMishcha (4:16) – **Yirushalmi** (Shabbos 10:3) explains that Elazar carried his responsibilities on him at all times. **Ramban** notes that the sheer weight he would be expected to carry would have been enormous. How could he have carried the weight? **Ramban** explains that Elazar must have possessed the strength of Yaakov Avienu, who despite being a single individual facing a need to move a boulder that required all of the shepherds of the area, was able to move it. **Rav Nossan Tzvi Finkel ztl.** explained that we learn the value of having שאיפות – aspirations. Through the power of aspiration, one can achieve way beyond that which is normally assumed to be possible for a person. Elazar didn’t give up, Yaakov Avienu didn’t give up. We cannot

either. (When one considers the personage of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel ztl. who was stricken with debilitating Parkinson's Disease and continued to deliver Shiurim & Schmoozin, studying Torah and inspiring his personal students and lovers of Torah around the world all while leading the world's largest Yeshiva with a monthly budget of millions of dollars despite his illness -- these words become all the more powerful).

ובו הכהן שמן המאור ובו **The job of Elazar the son of Aaron the Kohein was the Shemen HaMaor, the Ketores, Minchas Hatamid, and Shemen HaMishcha (4:16)** – Rav Schachter Shlita used this possuk to answer a major difficulty in our Parsha. After all, the encampments in the Parsha are clearly a Horaas Shaah. But the question is for what? Generally, it was assumed that this was a Horaas Shaah for how to travel. However, Rav Schachter suggested that this Possuk shows that it was more of a Horaas Shaah for the building of the Mishkan. After all, we learn the rules of Hotzaah from the Mishkan building. Rashi in Shabbos shows that one who carries with his weaker hand is still guilty of Hotzaah. His proof is the fact that for the building of the Mishkan, Elazar was able to carry in either hand at the same time.

וזאת עשו להם וחייו ולא ימותו **This is what you shall do that they will live and not die: when they approach the Kodosh HaKodashim Aharon and his sons will come and assign each one to his job (4:19)** – Why was it so dangerous to let the people enjoy the splendor of the Aron and the Kedusha of Hashem? Rav Soloveitchik ztl. noted that in contrast to the Greek culture that appreciated and glorified superficiality and revealed nudity, the Jewish style is to prefer the holiness in the mysterious -- the non-revealed. Hence, the most holy of our Keilim are kept under wraps.

י יחדיו ושמו להם ראש אחד ועלו מן הארץ ונקבצו בני יהודה וכן **The children of Yehuda and Yisrael will gather together and have one leader and go up from the land for the day of Jezre'el is great (Hoshea 2:2)** – The Alshich notes that this time speaks of the time of Techiyas HaMeisim when the dead will ascend and come up in Eretz Yisrael. This is the reason that Jews want to be buried in Israel even if they never lived there. The Ponovehzer Rav ztl. explained that at the time of Techiyas HaMeisim, the process will begin in Eretz Yisrael. Getting the chance to perform Mitzvos even if but for a few extra minutes is reason enough to plan on burial in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Pam ztl. thought that this message was especially poignant in the week prior to Shavuos when we see how privileged we are to learn Torah and to make the most of the time and the opportunity.

Some questions for personal or family thought for Parshas Bamidbar:

- 1) Hashem commanded Moshe (1:3) to count every male over the age of 20 who was fit to go out to battle. Does this mean that the elderly and sick, who were unfit for war, were not included in this count?
- 2) The Torah relates (1:47) that in counting the total number of Jews, Moshe did not count the Levites. Immediately thereafter, Hashem commanded Moshe (1:49) not to count the tribe of Levi together with the rest of the Jews. If he was only commanded not to do so at this time, why did he previously refrain from doing so of his own accord, and how did he know that this was Hashem's Will?
- 3) The Parsha tells us of the counting of Shevet Levi (3:16) whose numbers were smaller than all of the other Shevatim. Despite being counted from 30 days and above (as opposed to 20 years and older as by the other Shevatim) their numbers only equaled 22,000. Rashi (Berashis 29:34) explains that being near the Aron caused them to be diminished in number. The difficulty with that explanation is that only the family of Kehas came into contact with the Aron. Why did every other family become affected?