Points to Ponder

Bamidbar 5779

**בְּמִדְבַּ֥ר סִינַ֖י  In the Sinai desert (1:1)** - The **Midrash** notes that the Torah was given in Midbar Sinai with fire and water to teach us that just like these three things are free to all, Torah too, is free to all. The midrash then adds that one must make himself free as the desert in order to receive the Torah. It sounds as if there IS an exchange rate for Torah -- that one needs to become like the desert in order to receive it? **Sfas Emes** explains that anyone can LEARN Torah for free but in order to ACQUIRE it and make it part of his existence, one must unburden himself from extraneous matters. **Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht ztl** explained that while one fulfills the REQUIREMENT of Torah study by having set times for Torah study. However, when it comes to ACQUIRING it and wearing the crown of Torah, one needs to line it and make it a part of his being without boundaries of time. **Rav Yitzchak Yosef Shlita** added that this is why the desert -- as opposed to mountains and valleys -- is used as the imagery. A mountain and a valley both have limits to their identities. Deserts seem vast and endless. The same is true for the Torah.

**מִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם לְבֵ֣ית אֲבֹתָ֑ם  Each family, each Shevet a number of names (1:2)** - Why does the Torah have to be so lengthy, to repeat the same formula for each shevet over and over again? And why does it have to give the sum total at the end? **Rashi** writes at the beginning of Parshas Shemos that Klal Yisrael is compared to the stars, about which the possuk says, "Hamotzi b'mispar tze'va'am, l'chulam b'shem yikra - He brings forth their hosts by number; He calls each of them by name" (Yeshaya 40, 25.) There are billions of stars in the universe, but Hashem calls each one by its own name because each one has a specific purpose. The same is true with Klal Yisrael. Every Jew has a special name because each one has a unique role to play in this world. **Rav Elyakim Koenigsberg Shlita** added that the sum total, the mispar, of all the Bnei Yisrael demonstrates that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts because when all the individuals of Klal Yisrael join together, they can accomplish so much more as a community.

**אֶלְיָסָ֖ף בֶּן־דְּעוּאֵֽל: For Gad Eliyasaf Ben Deu’el (1:14**) - Later he is referred to as Elyasaf ben Reuel. Why the change of name? The **Sefer Tal Oros** learns a valuable lesson here: If a person works hard to get people to know Hashem (Deu Keil), he will also merit to be a Reiya to Hasem (Reiyo Keil).

**אֵ֣לֶּה הַפְּקֻדִ֡ים These are the people who were counted by Moshe, Aharon and the Nesiim (1:44)** - The **Ramban** asks why the need to know the entire count was necessary. We understand why there was a need for each member of Klal Yisrael to know his “place” but why the count and the total? **Rav Soloveitchik ztl.** noted that there are two types of counting -- to know a sum and also to make sure everyone is accounted for. While in the first, we need the total, in the latter each person makes a difference. Here, Rav Soloveitchik notes, Moshe was taking on the role of Rabban Shel Yisrael and as a result he needed to teach each and every member. In order to do so, he needs to know each one by name (a point made by Ramban) and to pray for each one’s success as well. Perhaps this is why the census is introduced with the word שאו. We are making it clear that the Kahal is made up of each and every individual and we all count.

**וְהַֽלְוִיִּ֖ם לְמַטֵּ֣ה אֲבֹתָ֑ם The Leviim were not included in the numbers (1:47**) - The **Sefer Taam V’Daas** points out that in the previous census, the numbers totaled 603,550 and this time again, the exact number came through -- 603,550. The only difference was that Shevet Levi was not included. In other words, the birth rate of Klal Yisrael was enough to cover the gap of removing Shevet Levi from the census. **Rav Shimshon Dovid Pinkus ztl** comments that this teaches us an important lesson - when we separate a group in Klal Yisrael to serve Hashem, it does not come as a cost to the Yotzai Tzava (the size of the army). Hashem fills in the gap in the quantity and quality of the soldiers.

**וַיָּ֣מָת נָדָ֣ב וַֽאֲבִיה֣וּא  Nadav and Avihu died (3:4)** - Why does the Torah use the singular וימת instead of the more correct וימותו? **Chasam Sofer** noted that the Midrash lists a number of possible sins that Nadav and Avihu did for which they lost their lives. One listed is that they did not ask one another for advice. However, this is odd as there is no Avaira in not taking advice from a peer. Chasam Sofer concludes that this is not the sin, but rather a fact -- had they spoken out their logic to the other issues with one another, they would have discovered the mistakes in their actions and would not have come to sin. **Rav Betzalel Rudinsky Shlita** suggests that the same can be said here: each one died as an individual for had they spoken with one another, they would not have died.

**וְשָׁמְר֣וּ אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתּ֗וֹ They may serve him." (3:6**)- The **Rambam** (Kelei Ha-Mikdash 3:1) notes that serving as a Levi is not a choice but rather an obligation. **Rav Amital ztl.** explained that this coercion has a function and purpose: the inculcation of the concept of discipline and coercion in Divine service.  Through this command to the Levites, who symbolize the entire nation, the rest of the nation observes and learns the importance of this concept. Obedience out of coercion and out of love - were the guiding principles of two radical phenomena which we witnessed during this century.  On one hand - the Communist regime, which ruled by pure coercion, authoritarianism and suppression of the people and which eventually collapsed, and on the other hand - the Western concept of total freedom, which is also on its way to bankruptcy. Am Yisrael and Jewish philosophy create a balance between these two paths.

**Haftara:  תִּקְרְאִ֖י אִישִׁ֑י וְלֹֽא־תִקְרְאִי־לִ֥י ע֖וֹד בַּעֲלִֽי: On that day you shall call me Ishee and no longer Baali (Hoshea 2:18) - Rav Schachter Shlita** would regularly remind us that there is a deep connection between the Haftara and the leining based on this Possuk. What is the difference between Ishi and Baali? The Gemara, Kesuvos 71b, explains that Ishi means fully married and Baali means betrothed and still living in her father’s house.  **Rav Yerucham Perlow** explains that while we were in the desert, our relationship was like an arusa (someone who is betrothed but still living in her father’s home). When we have the status of arusa, we don’t have the right to look at the Aron as is clear in the Parasha. When the Beis Hamikdash was built, we attained the status of nesuah (fully married) and we were entitled to look at the Aron. The **Mishneh Lamelech** suggests that we might have thought that after two rounds of exile, we could never restore our status of nesuah. The pasuk is teaching us that when the Third Beis Hamikdash is rebuilt, we will have the status of nesuah and as such, we will once again have the ability to look at the Aron.