Points to Ponder

Bamidbar 5780

**בְּמִדְבַּ֥ר סִינַ֖י בְּאֹ֣הֶל מוֹעֵ֑ד In Midbar Sinai in Ohel Moed (1:1)** – Why do we highlight that this conversation occurred in both the Midbar and Ohel Moed? Why the double location? Chazal tell us that one needs to make himself as Hefker as a Midbar to be ready to learn Torah. However, **Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshishcha** adds, if one is so open and Hefker s/he can become directionless, hopeless, helpless and depressed. Therefore, the **Noam Elimelech** explained that we needed both identifications – in the Midbar but also entrenched with the idea that we are NOT directionless, we are meeting Hashem and listening to his words as if meeting in Ohel Moed directly and with purpose.

**שְׂא֗וּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ֙ כָּל־עֲדַ֣ת בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל  Count the heads of everyone in Bnei Yisrael (1:2)** – Why does one vote count? **Rav Mordechai Kamentzky Shlita** told the story of Henry Shoemaker who in 1842 as a farmhand in Indiana made the vote that shaped international relations. You see, voters did not directly elect U.S. Senators until 1913. Before then, state legislatures selected each state’s two senators, so voting for a state representative helped determine who would be appointed to the U.S. Senate. The candidates for state legislature in Shoemaker’s district each received 360 votes—a tie. But Madison Marsh contested those results; it seemed the election officers in Smithfield Township, DeKalb County, had rejected the ballot of Henry Shoemaker. However, after the challenge the Indiana House voted to allow Shoemaker’s vote, which in turn elected Madison Marsh to the state legislature. Marsh was a Democrat, who helped select Edward A. Hannegan as the newest Senator from Indiana. Four years later, Hannegan, United States Senator from Indiana, supplied the vote necessary to declare war against Mexico in 1846. Rav Mordechai Kamenetzky notes that we see that a single person with a single vote can make a difference on so many levels – to his home, his family & community and even the entire nation. If it is true in the US, it is certain true in Am Yisrael.

**אִ֣ישׁ עַל־דִּגְל֤וֹ  Each according to his flag (2:2)** – It seems that this idea of having a flag was important to Chazal and it is a sign of love between Hashem and his people. How? And why is it so important? **Rav Avraham Rivlin Shlita** offered 2 distinct perspectives. The first is that the flag of Am Yisrael highlights the fact that Hashem selected Am Yisrael as the chosen people. These flags would be a sign that even if a member of Am Yisrael lost his way, he would be able to look for the flags and rejoin not only the nation but the choice status that every member has. In addition, the flags were also an internal design – each Shevet had a different one because each had a different Tafkid – a different job to do when serving Hashem that they were the primary responsible party. In that manner the flags were a distinction and a guidepost about how the individual person would best link into Hashem.

**וַיָּ֣מָת נָדָ֣ב וַֽאֲבִיה֣וּא Nadav & Avihu died (3:4)** – Why does the Torah state their death in the singular – VaYamas instead of the more correct VaYamusu**? Chasam Sofer** notes all the different horrendous mistakes that Nadav & Avihu made when they sinned. In the midst of them, the fact that they didn’t seek advice from one another seemed small. However, Chasam Sofer shows how each Avaira subscribed to them would have made sense in their minds and would have been ok. **Rav Betzalel Rudinsky** **Shlita** suggests that based on the Chasam Sofer, it appears that the main reason they died was that they did not speak to one another to seek advice. Had they done so, they might have recognized that their thinking was faulty. Thus, since each one acted individually the death is a singular event for each.

**כָּל־זָכָ֛ר מִבֶּן־חֹ֥דֶשׁ וָמַ֖עְלָה תִּפְקְדֵֽם Every male older than a month (3:15**) – So the Leviim are counted from once they were a month old for at that point they were Shomrei Mishmeres HaKodesh. They were counted again at 30 to know who could actually work. Why the double count? **Rav Moshe Feinstein ztl.** explains that there are multiple stages to Chinuch to be learned here. The first is the understanding that to provide for a proper Chinuch you need to start when the kids are young – even at a month old. However at the same time, you are never finished raising your kids and even when they become old enough to work on their own, you need an accounting and a reminder that they are still a part of your family and reflect accordingly. Hence, you can continue to guide and advise.

**פְקֻדַּ֞ת אֶלְעָזָ֣ר | בֶּן־אַֽהֲרֹ֣ן הַכֹּהֵ֗ן שֶׁ֤מֶן הַמָּאוֹר֙ וּקְטֹ֣רֶת הַסַּמִּ֔ים וּמִנְחַ֥ת הַתָּמִ֖יד  The job of Elazar HaKohein is the Ketores and the Minchas HaTamid (4:16)** – Why would Elazar need or even be able to transport the Ketores and Minchas HaTamid? These things are Nifsal B’Yotze – they are ruined once they are removed from the Mikdash. How then were these ever able to be transported? What would be the point? **The Brisker Rav ztl** answered based on Rashi (Shabbos 93) it seems that the Mikdash retained its status even when it was in a transitory state – Machaneh Shechina was on the go. (it is interesting to think that as we are also a Machaneh currently on the go, we can still carry the Shechina with us)..

**וָמֵֽתוּ: And they will die (4:20)** – How could the Torah end Parashas Bamidbar on the note and message of death? What happened to ending on a good note? **Sefer Megadim Chadashim (Moed Katan 28b)** explains that the Torah is not ending on a bad note here. Rather, the Torah is reminding us not to gaze at the Keilim. The Torah can warn us carefully so that bad things do not result! That is the point of the section here and the reminder lest you die.

**Haftara: תִּקְרְאִ֖י אִישִׁ֑י וְלֹֽא־תִקְרְאִי־לִ֥י ע֖וֹד בַּעֲלִֽי: On that day you shall no longer call me Baalee but rather Ishee (Hosea 2:18) – Rav Schachter Shlita** explained that this possuk is a connection to the Parasha as well. When we are in the eirusin status of our relationship with Hashem which we are in so long as the Mikdash is not in its proper built place, we are not to gaze at the Keilim in the Mikdash or risk death for it. Yet, when the Mikdash is in its proper place the Kohanim regularly highlighted and showed the Keilim, and Paroches to show the Olei Regel the love Hashem has for us. For when the relationship with Hashem is compared to one of nissuin, of course the couple may stare at each other. They are living together intimately. But during the period of erusin, we're not even permitted to stare at the aron. The concluding passuk in parshas Bamidbar indicates that when the mishkan was taken apart, it was forbidden for outsiders (other than the kohanim who were needed to pack up the aron) to look at the aron. That was a period of Eirusin. In the haftarah Hoshea prophecies that the day will come when the Jewish people will no longer will refer to Hashem as "ba'ali", but rather as "ishi". Mishne Lamelech notes that this means that our relationship with Hashem will be restored to that of nissuin as opposed to the state of erusin.