Points to Ponder

Bamidbar 5783

**בְּמִדְבַּ֥ר סִינַ֖י God spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai (1:1)** - Why the stress on the Midbar? **Rav Yehudah Amital** explains, based on the Maharal that the Torah is telling us that the nation was built in a place of desolation against all odds. Technically, Rav Amital noted, one would expect the nation to grow in a place ripe for growth. But *Am Yisrael* are commanded, on the one hand, to fulfill the most elementary requirements which should be the basis of any proper, moral society.  On the other hand, they are commanded this with no connection to anything that has come before; they start off on a clean page, in the empty wilderness.  On the one hand, *Am Yisrael*, organized and arranged by God's direct command, is in constant conflict with the wilderness, representing absolute chaos; on the other hand, they are in constant conflict with the other nations of the world, who build their societies based on human priorities. Hence the Midbar – while still connected to the Sheva Mitzvos Bnei Noach.

**לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם לְבֵ֣ית אֲבֹתָ֑ם According to their families and the homes of their fathers (1:2)** - The Gemara (Bava Basra 109b) notes that for Yerusha and (Yevamos 54b) Yichus, the family of the father establishes the title of “family”. It is fascinating that in regard to certain issues, we are interested in the lineage and purity of the mother’s line and yet at other times, it is the father’s lineage that makes a difference. How do we understand this? **Rav Schachter** pointed out that there are 2 different titles of significance in family relations – Mishpacha and She’Er Basar. When it comes to the issue of illicit relationships the Torah notes that it is to a Sh’Er Basar, one cannot approach. Hence the title Mamzer falls on the one whose mother engages in inappropriate relationships but she does not make a person “family.” When it comes to family, family is determined on the basis of Beis Av – as is seen in our Possuk. There is no contradiction – just 2 different qualifications.

**וְאִ֥ישׁ עַל־דִּגְל֖וֹ לְצִבְאֹתָֽם Each man on his Degel (1:52)** - The Midrash notes that Moshe was worried about the concept of the Degalim and the damage that might result from the in fighting that would arises as each Shevet jockeyed for best position in the travelling camp. Hashem reminded him that they already had a trial run when they carried Yaakov up to his burial in Eretz Yisrael and that would be the deciding factor here too. But why would an episode of generations past make a difference at the present? **Rav Mordechai Rogov** suggested that Hashem was calming Moshe to realize that the people were already conditioned to be mentschin even in trying times. If the people already understood how to be mentsches when they were in pain (over the loss of Yaakov) they would be mentsches in the present too.

**אִ֣ישׁ עַל־דִּגְל֤וֹ בְאֹתֹת֙ לְבֵ֣ית אֲבֹתָ֔ם יַֽחֲנ֖וּ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל They will camp surrounding the Ohel Moed (2:2) - Rav Boruch Mordechi Ezrachi** once noted that the Parasha surrounded two major themes, counting and camping. Why? He explained  that there is superficiality that governs the generations. Each person often gets lost into the boxes into which s/he fits. This is especially so among the nations where it is not who you are that makes a difference but to whom you are connected. The Torah fights the superficiality and encourages us to remember that we are complete maximums. 2 is not greater than one in number – 2 is really 2 maximums together. But at the same time each maximum is at its maximum in its proper environment and that  is why the camping was stressed.

**אִ֥ישׁ עַל־יָד֖וֹ לְדִגְלֵיהֶֽם: According to their flags (2:17)** -  Why did it take a whole year for HaShem to assign degalim for Bnei Yisrael? Why didn’t they do so immediately after leaving Mitzrayim? **Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky** suggests that the degalim represent the diversity of klal Yisrael. Each shevet has its own unique traits. This has the potential to cause people from different shevatim to grow apart from one another. As such, HaShem waited until there was a Mishkan set up. The Mishkan serves as a hub to unify all of Klal Yisrael.

**כֵּן־חָנ֤וּ לְדִגְלֵיהֶם֙ וְכֵ֣ן נָסָ֔עוּ אִ֥ישׁ לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖יו עַל־בֵּ֥ית אֲבֹתָֽיו They camped by their tribes and they traveled each with his family (2:34) - Rav Yechiel Perr** noted that it is important for us to understand that while the Torah of all of us is the same and the Halacha is the same, the worldview is different. And by being different each group prevents the other from going off the path and becoming too extreme. Ehrlicher Yidden can also look and be different as long as their commitment to Torah and Halacha is the same. That is the diversity that existed in our shevatim and that keeps us strong.

**וְאֵ֛לֶּה תּֽוֹלְדֹ֥ת אַֽהֲרֹ֖ן וּמשֶׁ֑ה And these are the offspring of Moshe and Aharon (3:1-2) - Rashi** cites the Gemara which notes that when a person teaches his friend’s child Torah it is as if he raised him because although Aharon’s biological children are listed, they are listed as the children of both Moshe AND Aharon. **Rav Wolbe** observes that a teacher needs to show devotion to a student as if the student were his own child. In turn, the student needs to relate to the teacher as a parent. Hence, Elisha called Eliyahu Avi, Avi twice since he saw Eliyahu as both his mother and his father.

Haftara

**בֵּינִ֣י וּבֵינֶ֗ךָ וּבֵ֥ין זַרְעִ֛י וּבֵ֥ין זַרְעֲךָ֖ עַד־עוֹלָֽם: Between me and you (Shmuel Alef 20:42 Haftorah Machar Chodesh)** - What is the connection between the date of Erev Rosh Chodesh and the Haftara events? And if the relationship between Dovid and Yehonasan was so strong why did Yehonasan need to relinquish his right to the throne to Dovid? **Rav Soloveitchik** suggested that the lunar cycle represents Jewish history which hit a highlight during the reign of Shlomo but shrunk until the time of Tzidkiyahu. Yet, when we think we are done and out, we are told Machar Chodesh – not to worry because tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh and we will endure. Yehonasan knew that the hope of Jewish destiny was built around Dovid and his reign. For the sake of the people Yehonasan transferred his rights to Dovid. Thus, at Kiddush Levana we declare Dovid Chai V’Kayam which was a symbol that the new moon was spotted (See Rosh Hashana 25a).