

Parsha Bamidbar

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1. Only with Proper Preparation Can one Appreciate and Internalize Spirituality

The Torah tells us that in the Shmitta year (the Seventh year) the land must remain fallow and one is not permitted to engage in agricultural pursuits because it is, "***Shabbos L'Hashem (A Sabbath for Hashem)***". The Sforno explains that "***Shabbos L'Hashem***" means that the Shmitta year should be a time of dedicating oneself to introspection, meditation, and the study of Torah. The Shmitta year is devoted completely to spiritual endeavors.

The Torah tells us that during the first day of Chol HaMoad Succos of the eighth year (the year after Shmitta), the King of Israel must gather the entire Klal Yisroel for *Hakhail* at the Temple mount and read to them *Mishna Torah* (The Book of Devorim). The Torah states explicitly that the value of the reading of the Torah is, "**So that they (the Jewish people) should listen and learn to fear Hashem.**" Clearly the purpose of *Hakhail* is to instill the fear of G-d in the hearts of the entire Jewish people.

The question is - why does Hakhail occur **after** the Shmitta year rather than **before** the Shmitta year? In order to understand the question let us consider the order of events that repeated themselves after every six-year period. After six years of working and cultivating the land in Israel the Jewish people were required to cease all agricultural pursuits and devote themselves to a year of introspection and study. After a year of being immersed in spirituality the Jewish people experienced the Rosh Hashanah, Days of Penitence, and Yom Kippur. At this point in time, on the second day of the Festival of Succos the King of Israel read the Book of Devorim for the Jewish people so that they "...should listen and learn to fear Hashem."

One would think that the experience of Hakhail itself (listening to the King reading the Torah in the Sanctuary) would be sufficient to cause the people to fear Hashem and subsequently spend a year devoted and dedicated to introspection and the study of Torah. However, it is clear that this is not the case. But rather after the full year of spiritual immersion followed by the Rosh Hashanah Days of Penitence, and Yom Kippur – only then did the Jewish people ascend the Temple Mount to listen and learn how to fear Hashem. One could argue that the reading of the Book of Devorim should be done before the Shmitta year in order to prepare the Jewish people for the spiritual experience of the Seventh Year.

The Torah is telling us that regardless of the Torah sage's ability to transmit and teach the Word of Hashem, one needs a spiritual orientation to have the capacity and sensitivity in order to receive, absorb, and internalize what is being taught. The Jewish people needed to experience the Shmitta year, a year of Torah study and introspection, followed with Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Judgment), Days of Penitence, and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) to have the capacity to internalize and absorb the experience of *Hakhail*. Only then can they "**listen and learn to fear Hashem.**" From the *Hakhail* we understand that there must be a degree of preparation for one to be affected by spiritual experiences.

The Torah tells us that Man is made from earth (*Adam- from "adamah" meaning "earth"*). Just like a field, regardless of the quality of the soil and seed, must be cultivated and prepared in order for the seed to take root and germinate properly, so too does man need to be cultivated. Chazal tell us, "**I (Hashem) created the Yeitzer HaRah (The Evil Inclination) and I created the Torah as its antidote.**" Meaning, the study of Torah itself is equivalent of the "plow" which cultivates the person in order for him to internalize its values and concepts. Therefore the sequence of events of the Shmitta, followed by *Hakhail* is only in order to give us the capacity to fully absorb and

internalize the words of the reading of the King.

If for example, one enters into the prayer service without any degree of preparation how can one fully have a sense of Hashem when praying? However if one first studies Torah and then engages in *Tefillah* (Prayer), he will have a greater sense of service to Hashem because it was predicated with the Torah.

2. Complaining is the Answer

The Torah tells us that for the forty-year period that the Jewish people were wandering in the desert, Hashem provided them with all of their needs. Every day the *Mann* (*Manna*) would fall from heaven to feed the Klal Yisroel and on Friday they would receive a double portion (the *Manna* did not fall on Shabbos). The Torah tells us that as much or as little a person gathered he always had a sufficient amount for himself and his family regardless of the size of the family.

Chazal tell us that the effort needed to gather the *Mann* and the level of preparation that was required to make it edible was determined by the spiritual level of the individual who gathered the *Mann*. The *Tzaddik* received his portion of the *Mann* on his doorstep, so that he should not be inconvenienced, and it did not require any preparation to make it edible. The *Beinonee* (*The Middle level Jew*) would need to go further from his house to gather the *Mann* and would need to prepare it to a small degree. The *Rasha* (who was at a relatively lower level) needed to go far into the field to gather the *Mann* and it required a full degree of preparation. The Torah is telling us that Hashem provides our total sustenance; however, the level of effort and initiative that each individual needs to exercise in order to receive what is meant to be his is determined by his spiritual level. For example, the *tzaddik* who devotes his life to serve Hashem and the study of Torah, his needs come to him with little effort so as not to distract the *tzaddik* from his spiritual involvement.

The Gemara in *Tractate Shabbos* tells that on Rosh Hashanah one's yearly stipend is determined. Every person receives his sustenance based only on this allocation determined by Hashem. A modicum of this reality was demonstrated in the desert through the *Mann* as we discussed above.

The Gemara tells us that the *Mann* in the desert assumed the flavor and the value of almost any imaginable food. If one ate the *Mann* and intended to eat meat it would taste like meat (there is an opinion in the Gemara that states that the *Mann* even assumed the same consistency as the desired foods). The *Mann* not only tasted like the food that was desired it also provided all the nourishment of that particular food. However there were a number of foods that the *Mann* would not assume their taste such as garlic, onions, melons, and gourds. The reason for this was because eating such foods impacted negatively on the milk of nursing women – affecting the child. Therefore, Hashem did not allow that the *Mann* to assume the taste of these food items.

The Torah tells us that when the Jews complained to Moshe in the desert, they complained that back in Egypt they had garlic, onions, melons, and gourds; however here in the desert they are being denied such foods. They fondly remembered the cuisine they ate in Egypt without regard of the fact that they were slaves living under the worst conditions. In response to the Jews' ongoing complaints, the Midrash explains the opening words of the portion – “Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Sinai desert” to mean – “In the desert of Sinai – did I (Hashem) treat you (the Jewish people) as if it were a desert?” Hashem provided the Jews with sustenance. He protected them from the elements and their enemies. Hashem also caused there to be no disease, sickness, or fatigue in the desert. He performed endless miracles to accommodate the Jewish people. Nevertheless they complained.

If a person is involved in a relationship and continuously complains about what he does not have (when he has everything), it is an indication that he is not interested in the relationship. If the person had interest in the relationship he would only see his partner in a positive light.

When the Jews complained in the desert about what the little they did not have, Hashem responded

by telling them that He did not treat them as if they were in a desert. If in fact the Jews continued to complain it is an indication that they do not have an interest in having a relationship with Hashem.

Very often when we have difficulties in our lives and we believe that they are unjust, rather than seeing that the problem may lie within ourselves we complain. There is also a situation that we only see what we do not have because we do not appreciate what we do have. If one would value and recognize our relationship with Hashem, he would not focus on what he does not have, but rather on all the good that he does have. The Jews in the desert only saw what they did not have (the garlic and the onions) because they did not value what they did have – their relationship with Hashem.

3. Purity is a Prerequisite for Spirituality

The Torah tells us that Hashem Commanded Moshe to take a census of the Klal Yisroel in the desert saying, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt, saying ‘Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families...’”** The Torah states further, **“They gathered together the entire assembly on the first day of the second month, and they established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers’ household, by number of the names...”** Rashi explains that **“they established their genealogy”** means that each Jew brought his documents of pedigree which established his paternal connection with a particular tribe. The question is – why is it important for the Torah to tell us that each person established his pedigree? It seems understood that whoever claimed to be from a particular tribe was actually a valid member of that tribe?

The Midrash tells us that after the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the nations of the world asked Hashem, **“Why did You give the Torah to the Jews and not to us?”** Hashem responded to them, **“Can you prove your legitimacy – that you are the sons of your fathers? My children can prove their legitimacy.”** When the nations of the world understood the purity of the Jewish people they praised them for maintaining their exceptional level of purity.

The Torah tells us that the Jews at a later time engaged in the worship of the Baal Paor and the intermingling with the Daughters of Moav. After this incident the nations of the world believed that the Jews had lost their status of purity and approached Hashem with this claim – **“The Jews are now as impure as we are. Therefore we are no less worthy to receive the Torah”** Hashem responded that all those who engaged in the incident with Baal Paor were killed and the Jewish people remain pure and the rightful recipients of the Torah. Because the Jews maintained their purity and were able to prove their pedigree they had relevance to the Torah. However the nations of the world who could not prove their legitimacy had no relevance to the Torah. What does the purity of pedigree have to do with being qualified to receive the Torah?

The Torah itself is the marriage contract between Hashem and the Jewish people. As part of the contract, the Jewish people were obligated to accept and uphold the laws of the Torah. Therefore the relationship between the Klal Yisroel and Hashem is established through the terms and conditions of the Torah. The Jew needs to maintain a spiritual posture in order to have relevance to Hashem which comes about through the Torah. The Zohar states, **“Hashem, the Torah, and the Jewish people are all one.”** Meaning that the Jewish people are bound to Hashem through the observance of the Torah. This means that the Jew must be spiritual and not to be subject to or influenced by outside influences. We are able to affect the physical world but it should not influence or affect us. We imbue the world with spirituality.

Hashem says that if one cannot prove his pedigree this must mean that he and his family succumbed to temptation thus not adhering to the laws of the Torah. If one has been overcome by his inclination to the point that his pedigree is in question then he has no relevance to spirituality. Thus he has no relevance to Torah and G-d. Despite the fact that the Jewish people were slaves in Egypt for 210 years they maintained their legitimacy and were not acculturated with the Egyptian

moral and value system.

The Gemara in *Tractate Makkos* states that all human beings are compelled by their inclination to engage in forbidden relations and stealing. Despite the fact that the average person is consumed with the desire to engage in these forbidden activities, the Jewish people maintained their purity and were able to control their inclination. This is the spiritual posture that the Jewish people were able to maintain and is a testament that the Jews are spiritual and thus have relevance to Hashem and the Torah. The fact that the Jews brought their documents to prove their pedigree is an indication that we are the *Am Hashem* – The spiritual people of Hashem.

4. What is the Value of Total Dedication to Spiritual Pursuits?

The Torah tells us that Hashem commanded Moshe to take a census of the Jewish people except for the tribe of Levi. The Torah says, “**But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take a census of them among the Children of Israel.**” Rashi cites the Chazal explaining that Hashem had foreseen that there would be a decree against the Jewish people who were counted in the desert as a result of the Jewish spies (*Meraglim*) who reported falsely about the land of Israel. All the Jews above the age of twenty who were part of the census were destined to perish in the desert over a forty-year period because of the incident of the *Meraglim*. Hashem therefore decreed to Moshe that the tribe of Levi should not be included in this census because, “They are Mine; they did not participate in the *Chet Ha’Agail* (*Sin of the Golden Calf*) and therefore I do not want them to be included in the census of the rest of the Jewish people.”

Seemingly the Torah is telling us that if the tribe of Levi were to be included in the census along with the rest of the Klal Yisroel that they too would have perished in the desert as a result of the decree stemming from the incident of the *Meraglim* (*the spies*). However, since the *Leviim* belong to Hashem they should not be included with the rest of Klal Yisroel.

The Torah tells us that the tribe of Levi did not have a portion in the Land of Israel as the rest of the tribes of the Jewish people because “their portion is Hashem.” The *Leviim* were the officiants of Hashem and had certain responsibilities in the Mishkan (the Temple). The Rambam states at the end of the Laws of Shmitta and Yovel that every Jew has the ability to be classified as a member of the tribe of Levi. How is it possible that any Jew can join the tribe of Levi? The Rambam explains that if a Jew devotes his life to the pursuit Torah study then he is viewed by Hashem as a Levite. Hashem provides for the *Leviim* because they are dedicated to His service. So too will Hashem provide for the person who is dedicated the service of Hashem even though he was not born a Levi. We see from the Rambam that the one can be counted as “belonging to Hashem (as the *Leviim*)” by devoting himself to the study of Torah.

Apparently performing mitzvos alone is not enough to be classified as “belonging to Hashem.” In addition to performing mitzvos one must devote himself to the study of Torah. Chazal tell us in *Pirkei Avos* (The ethics of Our Fathers) “Make you Torah study primary and your work secondary.” This is not to say that the only way one that can achieve the status of “belonging to Hashem” is by only studying Torah. This principle is not based on quantitative involvement but rather on perspective. It is teaching us that if our primary focus is Torah and all we do is to accommodate Torah (as a means), then we will have the special status of the Levi and Hashem will provide for us as He does for the *Leviim*. A person may have to work for eighteen hours a day and study Torah for only two hours; however, if his work is only a means to an end (which is Torah) then he has made the “Torah primary.”

We read in *Pirkei Avos* that that there were ten generations from Adam to Noach and ten generations from Noach to Avraham. The Mishna tells us that Avraham was worthy of receiving all the merit of his ten generations. How is this possible? One would think that we receive reward based on what we personally accomplish. Rabbeinu Yona in his commentary explains that the world needs a certain degree of perfection and the way it is perfected is through performing mitzvos. Avraham was the only individual in existence to introduce Hashem into the world. The other members of humanity did not participate to any degree in the spiritual perfection of the

world because they were pagans. Therefore Avraham through his espousing monotheism and his personal service of Hashem, he perfected existence and therefore merited all the reward of the ten generations.

Unfortunately, in our times the vast majority of the Jewish people are not committed to the observance mitzvos and the study of Torah. Nevertheless the world needs to be perfected through the performance of mitzvos and the study of Torah. Therefore any Jew whose life is focused on Torah and mitzvos in a qualitative manner has incalculable merit because he brings about the perfection of the world at a time when so many others are not. The tribe of Levi “belongs to Hashem” because they bring about the perfection of the world and as we discussed earlier the one who engages in Torah study can also be classified as “belonging to Hashem.”

The Rambam says in Hilchos Talmid Torah that there were three crowns given to the Jewish people – one of which is the Crown of Torah. He says that the Crown of Torah can be found lying in the corner- available to any Jew who wishes to partake of it. Every Jew has the opportunity to have the Crown of Torah and to perfect the world.

5. The Power of the Jewish People Lies in Truth

The Torah tells us that the Klal Yisroel traveled in the desert in a specific formation. The center camp was the *Machne (Camp) Shechina (Divine Presence)* was the location of the Mishkan (the Temple). The Camp of the Shechina (Machne Shechina) was surrounded by the Camp of Levi. The Camp of Levi was in turn surrounded by four other camps each comprised of three tribes. The Torah tells us that the tribe of Yehudah was at the head of all of the camps and would be the first to travel when the Klal Yisroel traveled through the desert. Included in the camp of Yehudah were the tribes of Yisasschar and Zevulun.

The Torah tells us that when there was a famine in Canaan, Yaakov’s Children were sent to Egypt to purchase food. Yaakov’s children were told by the Viceroy of Egypt that if they do not bring back their youngest brother to Egypt with them they should not return. Yaakov would not permit Binyamin to return for fear that something may happen to him. Yehudah assumed full responsibility for Binyamin by accepting a spiritual ban upon himself if Binyamin should not be returned. Yehudah was willing to forfeit his share in the World to Come to guarantee the return of Binyamin. The Gemara tells us that if one accepts upon himself a spiritual ban which rests on circumstances beyond his control, that person will be subject to the ban regardless of the outcome of the events. Therefore, even though Yehudah was successful in protecting Binyamin, he was nevertheless subject to his spiritual ban from the World to Come.

The Gemara tells us that Yehudah’s *Nishama (Soul)* was not permitted to enter into the Heavenly Yeshivah in Heaven because of this spiritual ban. Moshe prayed that Yehudah be admitted into the Heavenly Yeshiva and Hashem accepted Moshe’s prayer; however, he was not able to engage in the Torah discussion. Moshe once again prayed that Yehudah should be able to engage in Torah discussion and was successful in his prayers. Moshe prayed further that the Halachic ruling (the Legal Rulings) should be according to Yehudah in the Heavenly Yeshiva and this was accepted.

The tribe of Yehudah represents Kingship and royalty. Dovid HaMelech (King David), a descendent of Yehudah, was the King of Israel was not only a King in the physical sense but also reigned in the spiritual sense. The Gemara in *Tractate Sanhedrin* tells us that Dovid HaMelech was even greater in Torah then the head of the Sanhedrin (The High Court). Every legal ruling given by Dovid was accurate because of his own special dimension. This is a manifestation of the spirituality of Yehudah. This is the reason why Moshe prayed to Hashem that the Halacha should be according to Yehudah. From this we see that Yehudah is synonymous with Kingship which itself is synonymous with Torah.

The tribe of Yehudah was at the head of all of the camps and would be the first to travel when the Jewish people moved through the desert. As we discussed, Yehudah represents Torah and by

association, the other two tribes of Zevulun and Yisasschar also represent Torah. We can see this clearly from Yaakov's blessing to Zevulun and Yisasschar. The fact that Yehudah, Zevulun, and Yisasschar lead the Jewish people through the desert is an indication that the power of the Jewish people emanates from their Torah.

The Gemara tells us in *Tractate Avodah Zarah* that Torah is unadulterated Truth (*Emmes*) and Truth is synonymous with *Din* (*Judgment*). Within the context of Truth and Judgment, there is no place for *Rachamim* (*Mercy*) – either something is Kosher or not Kosher. There is no compromise or deviation in Torah and Truth. The Gemara in *Tractate Berachos* tells us, **“The Signet of Hashem is Truth.”** The nature of Truth is that it must be completely pure and unadulterated. The Maharal states that Truth must be completely unadulterated and even if it is 99.999% true – it is not Truth. This is indicated by the word *Emmes* (which means Truth). The spelling of the word *Emmes* is spelled *aleph mem tuf*. If even the smallest letter “*aleph*”(which indicates an iota) is removed from the word *Emmes*, what remains is “*mem tuf*” which spells “*mes*” (death). We find that if the Kohen Gadol (the High Priest) entered into the Holy of Holies (location of the Divine Presence) and experienced a moment of distraction he would be killed- because he was in the location of *Din* (Location of the Divine Presence).

Chazal explain that the camps of the Jews in the desert were configured in the same manner as the children of Yaakov were arranged when they carried their father from Egypt to be buried in Canaan. Yaakov instructed Yehudah, Zevulun, and Yisasschar to lead the way in carrying his remains out of Egypt. As we know from various verses Yaakov represents Truth (“Teetain Emmes L’Yaakov – Give Truth to Yaakov”). Rabbenu Bachya explains that Yaakov reflected every aspect of Hashem in this world. Yaakov was the being of Truth and therefore he was most intimate with the Shechina.

We see that Truth is at the center of the Jewish people. It was in the center when we left Egypt as demonstrated by the *Machne* (*Camp*) *Shechina* (*Divine Presence*) being situated as the center camp. Yaakov, who represents truth, was carried out of Egypt surrounded by his children (the origin of the tribes). The strength of the Jewish people emanates from Truth because Torah is Truth. Since Yehudah, Zevulun, and Yisasschar represent Torah and Truth they are the appropriate tribes to lead the Jews through the desert. Just as the Yehudah (representing Torah) led us through the desert so too should we have Torah guiding our lives. We need to follow the Torah because the Torah is synonymous with Truth and Truth is the signet of Hashem. The nations of the world may have weapons and physical strength, but the Jews have the power of the Torah and Truth.

6. How does Torah Study Impact on One's Essence?

The Torah states, **“These are the offspring of Aaron and Moshe on the day Hashem spoke to Moshe at Sinai: These are the names of the sons of Aaron...”** Event though the verse begins by saying “These are the offspring of Aaron **and** Moshe” it only enumerates and identifies the offspring of Aaron. Rashi cites the Gemara in *Tractate Sanhedrin*, which says that because Moshe taught Torah to the sons of Aaron they are counted as his children. As it is stated in the Talmud, **“If a person teaches Torah to his friend's child it is as if he fathered that child.”** Teaching Torah in this context means that the majority of the one's Torah knowledge comes from his teacher and the teacher has mentored that student.

The Rambam states in *Hilchos Talmid Torah* that there are three crowns given to the Jewish people: the Crown of Torah, the Crown of *Kahuna* (priesthood), and the Crown of *Malchus* (kingship). The *Crown of Kahuna* was given to Aaron and his sons. The Crown of Kingship was given to Dovid and his decedents. However, the greatest of the three is the Crown of Torah- and it is “lying in the corner for all to partake of.” Meaning, the Crown of Torah is available to any Jew who desires it as it says in the verse, “The Torah is the Heritage of the Congregation of Yaakov (every Jew).”

The question is- if a commoner wears a crown does it make him a king? Or if a person is not a

descendent of Aaron and wears the vestments of the Kohain does it make that person a Kohain? - Surely not. Evidently, the Crown of Kahuna and the Crown of Kingship are identifiers for the essence of the person. One must be the descendent of Aaron to be a Kohain or the descendent of Dovid to be a King. The same is true with the Crown of Torah. If a crown is only an identifier of the essence of the person then when one studies Torah he is only a repository of information. How does the crown have any relevance to this person? The answer is – that when one studies Torah properly and dedicates his life to its studies and values, he not only contains Torah knowledge but rather he becomes an embodiment of Torah. Thus the crown identifies the essence of the being.

Chazal are teaching us that an ordinary Jew has the ability to change his essence and acquire the Crown of Torah. If a Jew studies Torah with dedication and commitment from a rebbe who is rooted in Torah then it is possible for that person to transform himself and change his essence. Just like a child is the product and a descendent of his father and mother so too is the student the product of his rebbe. This is because the rebbe mentors the student and teaches him Torah in a way that transforms his essence. The student's development and metamorphosis is caused by the teachings of the rebbe, therefore he is the equivalent of the student's father. This is the meaning of the passage in the Talmud- **"If a person teaches Torah to his friend's child it is as if he fathered that child."**

The question is why is this principle so important for us to know that the Torah needs reveal that Aaron's children were considered Moshe's children? The answer is that just as a child can only come into existence through a father, identically the Torah can only affect and develop a person through the mentoring of a teacher. It is only through this transmission that Torah can impact the individual and transform his essence. Therefore the verse in Pirkei Avos, "Make for yourself a rebbe and acquire a friend" is more than just "good advice". It is a fundamental aspect of Judaism and the transmission of Torah from generation to generation.