

Parshas Bamidbar

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1. Revealing What is Not Obvious

The Torah states, “**Hashem spoke with Moshe in the Desert of Sinai, in the Tent of the Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from the land of Egypt...**” The Torah identifies the location in a general and broad manner namely, “**Desert of Sinai,**” and then identifies the specific location within that vast area, i.e. “**the Tent of the Meeting.**” On the other hand, regarding the time frame, it first states in the most specific way the moment and then continues to identify the time in the most broad terms – “**the first day of the second month**” and then “**the second year** after their exodus.”

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out that the Torah usually expresses itself in a consistent pattern. For example if a verse first presents a general concept and then is more specific, the information that is communicated in the latter half of the verse is presented in a similar manner. However, in this instance it seems that the Torah is not consistent in its presentation of information. How do we understand this?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the verse is in fact consistent with the pattern of presenting first the particular and then the general. Despite the fact that one may think that the “Desert of Sinai” is a larger location vis-à-vis the “Tent of the Meeting,” he explains that this is not the case. In fact, the desert of Sinai is the specific and the Tent of the Meeting is the broader and more encompassing.

He cites the Midrash that tells us that 600,000 Jews were able to fit between the two staves that protruded from the Holy Ark (*Aron*) (which was located within the Tent of the Meeting). Meaning the concept of limitation has no relevance in the location of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence). Thus as vast as the Desert of Sinai may be in a physical sense, it does not compare to the Tent of the Meeting that contains the *Shechina*. The Desert of Sinai is a finite location and the Tent of the Meeting has unlimited capacity. Thus, the verse is going from the limited to the broader and more general.

The Gemara in Tractate Shabbos tells us that the reason the Basis HaMikdash (Temple) is referred to as *even ha'shesiya* – the sustaining stone, is because all existence was sustained through the Basis HaMikdash. Despite the fact that in a physical context the world is vast and the mount upon which the Basis HaMikdash stood is finite, because it was the location of the *Shechina* all sustaining energies/forces emanate from that location.

The verse in Proverbs states that G'd said to the Jewish people, “I (G'd) have given you a *lekach tov* (a good commodity) do not abandon it (the Torah).” The Chofetz Chaim zt'l explains this with an allegory. If a poor man had a few coins in his pocket he would consider himself well off however, compared to a wealthy person this amount of money would be meaningless. The poor man, relative to his financial condition, possesses a “*lekach tov* – valuable commodity” but to the wealthy person it is something of no value. The minister of the king (who has at his disposal greater wealth), does not consider the situation of the wealthy person as special. Whatever the minister may consider special and valuable, the king (the master of the land and subjects) considers it inconsequential. Whatever the mere mortal considers special within the context of physical existence, is considered meaningless by the spiritual angel. Whatever the greatest angel considers

special and of enormous value, G'd, the Omnipotent Being, considers it meaningless. Thus, if G'd, the Infinite One and Creator of all existence, tells the Jewish people that He is giving them something that He values as a "*lekach tov* - special commodity," then this is the most valuable entity in the most absolute sense. This is the Torah.

One may mistakenly regard the Torah as being only five books of antiquated material – yet it is the most precious commodity in existence. One may view the location of the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) as an ordinary rock – yet it sustains all existence. One may regard the Tent of the Meeting as a finite location (with great limitation) - yet 600,000 Jews could easily fit between the two staves of the Ark. Intrinsic value is not determined by its physicality and material make up, but rather, it is determined by its relevance to spirituality.

G'd, who is the One who endows all with understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, is telling the Jewish people that He has given them something that is so special that He studies it Himself. It is the ultimate in profundity and intellectualism.

In his introduction to Tractate Berachos, The Nodah B'Yehudah explains in his work *Tzlach* that although there are many aggadic passages in the Talmud that are beyond our grasp, we nevertheless study them – regardless of our lack of understanding of their significance. Why must we study these passages if we have no understanding of their significance? He explains that it is analogous to an old man and a child who become shipwrecked on a desert island. The old man chooses to teach the child reading, writing, mathematics, and the understanding of business. He explains to the child that although he may not be discovered for many years, there may be a time in the future that he will be rescued and return to society. If the child possesses all the skills and abilities that are necessary to function in society, he would be able to integrate immediately as a fully functioning person. Eventually the old man passes away and the child is rescued as an adult. Because of what he was taught, he can easily integrate into society and succeed. Similarly, the Nodah B'Yehudah explains that because we live within a physical context there are many spiritual concepts, which are beyond our comprehension and grasp. The world itself is analogous to the desert island. However eventually we will pass on to the World to Come – a world of spirituality. Only then will we appreciate the value of the aggadic passages that we had studied in this physical and limited life.

Therefore, what may seem as unimportant and irrelevant at this moment will in fact be needed to integrate ourselves into the spiritual world that will follow.

2. Understanding the Relationship Between Yissachar and Zevulun

The Torah tells us that the Jewish people traveled in the desert as four camps, each comprised of three tribes. The camps were positioned in a specific formation and situated in the east, west, north or south. They would travel and camp in this formation. The camp of Yehudah was comprised of the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun. They were the first to travel when the Jews were given the order.

When the Torah tells of the various camps comprised of Tribes it always states: “this tribe **and** that tribe”; however when the Torah mentions the Tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun it omits the “and” (in Hebrew it is the letter “vav”). It states “*Yissachar Zevulun.*” This is not the case when the composition of the other camps are mentioned the *vav* (and) is inserted between the names of the Tribes.

Baal HaTurim explains that the reason the Torah does not present the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun separated with the letter *vav* (and), as it uses with the other tribes, is because the tribe of Zevulun was responsible for the full material support of the tribe of Yissachar, who were fully dedicated to Torah study. The Midrash tells us that the tribe of Zevulun, who were the benefactors of Yissachar, “placed sustenance in the mouth of Yissachar.” The Midrash should have said “Zevulun supported Yissachar.” Why does the Midrash depict the material support as “putting the sustenance in the mouth of Yissachar”?

The verse in Prophets refers to the tribe of Yissachar as “those who know time – *Yodei eetim.*” Meaning their cogency of thought was so exceptional that they were able to perform all the mathematical calculations that were needed to determine the calendar. The Gemara in Tractate *Megillah* tells us that when Achashverosh (the king of Persia) sought advice concerning the fate of his wife Vashti after she had defied his order, he consulted with the tribe of Yissachar because they had such exceptional clarity. The Midrash *Tanchuma* in the Portion of *Vayechi* explains that the reason for their clarity was that they were not responsible to any degree for their own material needs and thus were not distracted at all from their Torah study. Zevulun provided them with every conceivable need.

Zevulun not only provided for Yissachar’s material needs but they also appreciated the value of Yissachar being fully immersed in Torah without having a moment’s distraction. Because Zevulun had this depth of appreciation, they went to every length to ensure that Yissachar was provided for sufficiently so as not to be distracted. This is the meaning of the Midrash cited by Baal HaTurim which states, “Zevulun placed the food in the mouth of Yissachar.” Meaning, all Yissachar had to do was to consume the material that was provided for him. The Torah does not use the letter *vav* (and) to separate between the Tribe of Yissachar and the Tribe of Zevulun in order to indicate that they are the equivalent of one tribe with each individual being responsible for the other’s existence – both material and spiritual. This was the ultimate partnership. Baal HaTurim concludes that it is as if the verse was, “Yissachar, the Tribe of Zevulun” – one providing for the other as one.”

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that if one offers wine to a Talmud Chacham (Torah Sage) it is considered the equivalent of bringing a libation offering on the Altar. Additionally, if one gives a gift of food to the Talmud Chacham, it is considered as if he brought Bekurim (new fruits) to the Temple. Why should the gift of wine and food assume such great significance? It is only the one who truly reveres the Torah Sage and thus expresses his reverence through the gift of wine and food that it is considered that he brought libations and Bekurim. The gift is only an expression and demonstration of that reverence. It is because by acknowledging and valuing the Talmud Chacham, one is in effect demonstrating his reverence for the Torah itself.

King Solomon states in Mishlei (Proverbs) regarding the Torah, “It is a Tree of Life for the one

who takes hold of it.” It is only when one recognizes the value of Torah that he would attach himself to it. Zevulun felt privileged that he was able to provide the material means for Yissachar so that he would excel and dedicate himself to Torah study. He did not see it as giving tzedakah (charity) to his brother. Rather, he viewed himself as being the beneficiary of the support.

In the Amidah (silent prayer) of the Shabbos morning service we say, “Moshe rejoiced in the gift of his portion - that You called him a faithful servant.” Moshe rejoiced in the gift of Torah only because he was the “faithful servant.” A servant/subject only exists for the sake of the master. The faithful servant prides himself in doing the will of the master. The glory of the master is the glory of the servant. Similarly, Zevulun rejoiced in providing for Yissachar only because he revered and valued the Torah to such a degree. It is because of this that Zevulun shares the same reward (of Torah) as Yissachar – they are considered one tribe.

3. Appreciating the Far-Reaching Ramifications of our Behavior

The Torah tells us that G’d commanded Moshe to take a census of the Jewish people. Sforno explains, “Because the Jewish People were meant to enter into the Land immediately, Moshe needed to take a census of them. If it were not for the sin of the spies, they would have entered immediately. However, because they failed (due to a lack of faith) they were denied the right to enter into the Land. It was only the future generation that was permitted to enter after forty years. Initially, the Jewish people were to enter the Land without resistance from the Canaanite nations. They would have fled from the Land, thus allowing the Jewish people to settle there...However because of the sin of the spies, the Canaanite nations remained in the Land for an additional 40 years – during which they continued to sin in the Land.” Because of their extreme spiritual failing, it was deemed that the Jewish people would annihilate the Canaanite nations upon entering the Land.

It is interesting to note that the reason there is a Negative Commandment to not allow any of the Canaanite nations to live is only because the Jewish people were delayed in entering the Land. During the forty-year period that the Jewish people were denied entry into the land, the Canaanites reached a point of extreme spiritual corruption and impurity. It is because of this that they had to be annihilated. One could argue that the Jewish people were indirectly responsible for the Canaanites sinning in the Land (for an additional forty years) and ultimately needing to be destroyed.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) states, there is “*Din v’cheshbon* – judgment and computation.” One would think that computation and analysis should precede judgment because it is only after one’s record is evaluated could judgment be rendered. Nevertheless Chazal state the order as first “Din” and then “Cheshbon.” How do we understand this?

The Vilna Gaon z’tl explains that it is understood that judgment is predicated on a prior computation and evaluation of one’s record. However, the “cheshbon” that is mentioned in the Mishna is another level of computation. It is to evaluate and determine what mitzvah could have

been accomplished at the particular moment the sin was committed.

There is a Torah concept known as “*kol Yisroel areivim zeh la zeh* - every Jew is responsible for his fellow.” When one Jew performs a mitzvah, he affects his fellow and the entire Jewish people positively. However, when he sins he diminishes his fellow and the entire Jewish people spiritually. We find a semblance of this regarding the fate of the Canaanites. It was because of the sin of the spies that the Canaanite nations were allowed to remain an additional forty years in the Land to continue their abominable behavior - thus they needed to be annihilated. Had the Jewish people entered immediately into the Land, the Canaanites would have fled the Land and continued their abominable behavior elsewhere (not needing to be destroyed).

When one sins he must not only be concerned about the negative consequence of his action vis-à-vis the Jewish people and the world at large, but he also must be concerned about the mitzvah that he did not perform at the time that he had sinned. When the Chofetz Chaim z’tl computes the number of positive and negative Commandments that one could violate over time when speaking Lashon HaRah (Negative Speech), he includes the mitzvah of the study of Torah, which is the equivalent of all mitzvos combined (*Talmud Torah Keneged Kulam*). Thus, when one speaks Lashon HaRah, not only is he saying what is not permitted, the time utilized for this negative speech could have been invested in the study of Torah. This is based on the principle of “*Cheshbon*” mentioned in the Mishna – the computation that follows the transgression.

4. The Lesson Learned from King David’s Census

The Torah states, “**From twenty years of age and up - everyone who goes out to the legion in Israel – you shall count them (*tifkidu osum*) according to their legions...**” Ramban explains the expression “*tifkidu osum*” (*you shall count them*) to mean, “Remembering - as it states in the verse, “Hashem Remembered Sarah (*pakaad es Sarah*)” When the Torah uses the word “*tifkod*” it means to “remember.” It indicates that Hashem values the individual as He values a precious gift. Thus, when the Torah states, “...**you shall count them (*tifkidu osum*)...**” it means that the Jewish people should be counted in a way that they will be preserved/protected (and not a simple counting of individuals). The census was to be taken through the counting of the Machtzis HaShekel (the half-silver coin), which was given by every male from the age of twenty and above. The Machtzis HaShekel was used to purchase communal offerings.”

Ramban continues, “King David wanted to take a census of the Jewish people to know the extent of his reign. He did so by having his general Yoav conduct the census. It is difficult to understand why King David did not heed the warning of the Torah, which tells us that counting/quantifying the Jewish people brings about plague? Perhaps one could say that King David simply made a mistake (which is difficult to say), even if one considers that Yoav, who was given the order to take the census, should have used Shekalim.” Ramban concludes that in fact Yoav did conduct the census through the Shekalim. However, plague was still the result of this seemingly proper counting.

Ramban explains that the wrath of Hashem came upon the Jewish people because they were

counted unnecessarily. The objective of the counting was purely for the sake of King David knowing the extent of his reign so that he could rejoice in ruling over so many subjects. King David would have been permitted to take a census if it were purposeful – such as preparation for war, by knowing the extent of his army. Since the census was unnecessary, plague came upon the people. Contrastingly, Moshe was commanded by G'd to take census of the Jewish people in order to set the formation of the camps in the desert.

According to Ramban's explanation, King David's failing was to conduct a census that was not necessary; It was only for the sake of feeling proud knowing how many people were in his kingdom. However, King David did not conduct the census because of vanity and personal benefit. He did so only for the sake of G'd. He rejoiced that he had the good fortune to merit being king over G'd's chosen people – the kingly, priestly people. This counting was considered unnecessary. A census is only permitted to be taken when it pertains to a physical/material consideration of the Jewish people (such as dividing the Land). Seemingly, if one conducted a census of the Jewish people in a context that was not necessary, even if it was through the Machtzis HaShekel, it would precipitate tragedy. What must be understood is even if the counting was done in a context that was not permitted, why should it result in tragedy if the Machtzis HaShekel was used to purchase communal offerings, which bring about atonement? The offerings should have averted plague.

When the Jewish people must be counted - such as to determine the extent of the army in preparation for war (or dividing the Land), the focus of the counting is not to quantify the essence of the Jew; but rather, it is to know how many people are available to be conscripted into the army. The essence of the Jew is not to be quantified because the extent of his spirituality is unlimited. However regarding the census that was taken by Yoav (the general of King David) the primary focus was to assess the extent of King David's kingdom. Jews are not valued as individuals unto themselves, but rather, as part of the whole – the Nation of G'd (*Am Hashem*). They are all components in the entity known as the “holy nation.” The census that was taken by King David was unnecessary because his pride should have been that he ruled over “G'd's people” – and not a large number of individuals. By taking a census of the Jewish people, although it was conducted through the Machtzis HaShekel, the offerings could not avert tragedy because the Jew was being identified as something other than what he is – not as a component of “G'd's people.”

The number of Jews is irrelevant regarding our innate value. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos tells us that when ten Jews study Torah together, the Shechina (Divine Presence) is with them. This is derived from the verse, “Elokeem (G'd) stands in the congregation of Keil (G'd).” A “congregation” is a quorum of ten. The Jewish people throughout the ages have always been small in number. Our survival has not been the result of our numbers but rather because the Jewish people are G'd's holy and chosen people. Because the Jewish people's essence is spiritual they are eternal.

5. Putting the Patriarchs in Perspective (*Bechukosai*)

The Torah tells us that if the Jewish people do not adhere to the dictates of the Torah, G'd will bring punishment and curses upon them. The Torah enumerates the various stages of punishment that will come upon them if they do not repent. This is referred to as the *Tochachah* (Admonition) in the Portion of *Bechukosai*. In the midst of the tragic events outlined in the *Tochachah* the

Torah states, **“I (G’d) will remember My covenant with Yaakov and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham will I remember...”** The Torah could have stated, “I will remember My covenant with Yaakov and My covenant with Yitzchak...” Why does it say **“and also”** when it mentions the covenant with Yitzchak...? What is the connotation of “also”?

Seemingly, the value of the covenants that were made with Yitzchak and Avraham did not have the same value as the one made with Yaakov; If they were, then the Torah would have said “and” rather than “also.” In addition, the connotation of “also” can mean that although the covenants made with Yitzchak and Avraham were not the equivalent of the one made with Yaakov, G’d will nevertheless remember them.

Baal HaTurim cites the Midrash, “The Torah only states, “I will remember” regarding the covenants that were made with Avraham and Yaakov. When the term ‘Remember’ is used, it connotes something of the past that must be recalled. However, regarding the covenant of Yitzchak, the Torah does not use the expression ‘remember.’ What is the significance of this? It is because the merit of the Akeidah (the binding of Yitzchak) remains continuously before the eyes of G’d. As it is stated, “The ashes of Yitzchak (from the ram that was sacrificed in the place of Yitzchak) are piled before Him.” Therefore ‘remembering’ has no relevance to the covenant with Yitzchak.”

The Midrash continues, “When the Torah mentions the covenants of the Patriarchs it does not do so in chronological order. Why does the Torah first mention the covenant of Yaakov and proceed in the reverse chronological order? G’d said, “I remember from where you come.” Meaning, Yaakov descends from Yitzchak and Yitzchak descends from Avraham. The reason the term “also” is used regarding the covenants of Yitzchak and Avraham - and not with the covenant of Yaakov - is because the covenant of Yaakov has greater value – thus offering a greater degree of protection for the Jewish people. All of Yaakov’s children were tzaddikim (devoutly righteous); however, Yitzchak’s and Avraham’s children were not all righteous (Esav and Ishmael respectively). The children of Yaakov are referred to as “the Tribes of G’d – *Shivtei Kah*.”

The Midrash continues, “Avraham is referred to as “My servant.” The Torah also refers to Yaakov as “My servant.” However, the appellation of “servant” is not associated with Yitzchak, (even though Chazal refer to him as the unblemished offering). Avraham and Yaakov respectively performed the mitzvos within the Land of Israel and outside of it; however, Yitzchak our Patriarch never left the Land. Thus, he did not have the opportunity to perform mitzvos outside of the Land. Therefore, he is not referred to as “servant (eved).”

It is interesting to note that when Yitzchak and his wife Rivka had prayed for a child, the Torah tells us that Hashem responded to the beseeching of Yitzchak. Why did He not respond to Rivka? Rashi cites Chazal who explain, “The prayer of a tzaddik who is the son of a tzaddik has greater value (and thus not comparable) to the prayer of a tzaddik who is the child of a rasha (evil person).” One would think that the prayers of a tzaddik who is the child of a rasha should be considered as being at an even greater level than that of the son of a tzaddik because despite his environment and upbringing he became a tzaddik. Nevertheless, this is not so.

Yitzchak wanted to leave the Land of Israel at the time of famine but G'd did not allow him to do so. It was not by choice that he did not perform the mitzvos outside of Israel. Nevertheless, the fact remains that he never fulfilled the mitzvos outside of the Land. Thus, not bringing about that level of accomplishment. Consequently, he did not merit the title of "eved (servant)."

Relatively speaking, every Jew has unlimited potential. However, one needs to be presented with particular situations and circumstances in order to develop his potential. If one succeeds through drawing on his own ability, he will be at a more advanced level than the one who did not achieve – despite his great potential. This is determined by the circumstances and challenges that one faces during his lifetime. If one is not presented with circumstances that will enable him to actualize his potential, he will not achieve the more advanced level of spirituality.

Baal HaTurim points out, "We find that whenever the Patriarchs are enumerated, the Torah either commences with Avraham (as we find -Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov) or with Yaakov (as it is stated- Yaakov, Yitzchak, and Avraham); however, the Torah never begins with Yitzchak." One could say that the reason Yitzchak is always listed between Avraham and Yaakov is that chronologically he was the generation between his father and his son. However, Baal HaTurim answers differently. He explains, "The reason Yitzchak is never mentioned at the beginning in any context (as the first of the Patriarchs) is because he blessed Esav by saying – 'You shall dominate your brother (Yaakov).'" Since Yitzchak gave Esav the upper hand over Yaakov, he (Yitzchak) is never identified as the first of the Patriarchs." Why is Yitzchak faulted for identifying Esav as special when G'd withheld the true (evil) identity of Esav from him? If negative consequences come about because of one's action or inaction, although that individual is unaware of those consequences, there is still degree of liability.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia tells us that after the winter season, the lime that was applied to the graves as a marker was washed away by the winter rains. Thus, it needed to be reapplied in the spring. The lime was placed on graves in order to prevent Kohanim (or people who wanted to maintain their spiritual purity) from unknowingly crossing over the graves - thus causing them to become contaminated with the dead. Rashi explains, "The reason the lime was reapplied every year was so that it should not be a pitfall for the tzaddikim who were buried there. If one were to become contaminated as a result of crossing over their graves, the deceased tzaddikim would be culpable for causing those of spiritual purity and Kohanim to violate the Torah law." How is it possible that the tzaddik, who has no control over his circumstance, be held responsible for contaminating those who pass over his grave?

The culpability of the tzaddik is rooted in the fact that the Torah was transgressed because of the contamination that emanated from his remains. He, in essence, contributed to the contamination, albeit passively.

We pray that we should always be placed in a position where our actions will bring about positive consequences and be protected from inadvertently causing negative results.