

חמודי שי על התורה והמועדים

Chamudei Shai on the Torah and Holidays

by Dr. Joseph Geliebter

Topics Covered

Parashas Bamidbar

I

- ▶ **The parallels between Har Sinai and the Mishkan**
- ▶ **A point of departure for a great mission**
- ▶ **The counting of the Jewish people versus the counting of the Leviim**
- ▶ **The army of Israel versus the army of Hashem**
- ▶ **The Leviim as a spiritual protective wall**

II

- ▶ **The significance of reading Parashas Bamidbar before Shavuos**
- ▶ **The concept of the "Midbar" and its necessity for receiving the Torah**
- ▶ **Parashas Bamidbar — The Jewish People at their spiritual peak**

Parashas Bamidbar

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I

The parallels between Har Sinai and the Mishkan

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי בְּאֶהֱל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיָּה לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם מִצְרַיִם לְאָמֹר:

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Ohel Moed, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Mitzrayim, saying." (Bamidbar 1:1)

Regarding the Torah's statement "in the Wilderness of Sinai," one may ask: why did the Torah specify the place where this was said? The Ibn Ezra writes that it comes "to inform us that Moshe did not ascend Har Sinai again after the Divine glory rested in the Ohel Moed." After the construction of the Mishkan, with the Shechinah dwelling there and the cloud of Hashem's glory resting upon it, Moshe no longer returned to Har Sinai.

There are halachic parallels between Har Sinai at the time the Shechinah rested there and the Mishkan. Regarding Har Sinai during Matan Torah, the verse states: "You shall set boundaries around the mountain." At the time of Matan Torah, it was forbidden for us to approach

► **The “flight from Sinai” was the beginning of the calamities**

► **Reading Parashas Bamidbar before Shavuos to recall and reconnect to the atmosphere of Har Sinai**

Har Sinai. Similarly, regarding the Mishkan there is a comparable prohibition: “And the stranger who approaches shall die.” One of the roles of the Leviim was to stand around the Mishkan, as stated in our parashah, serving as a “*mishmeres*,” a human protective barrier safeguarding both the Mishkan and the Jewish people, ensuring that no one approached the Mishkan unlawfully.

A point of departure for a great mission

Our parashah states: “On the first day of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Mitzrayim.” We must understand why the Torah specifies both the exact time and place, that this occurred on the first day of the second month, in the second year, and specifically in the Wilderness of Sinai. Although the Chizkuni does not address this question directly on this verse, shortly afterward, on the verse, “Take a census of the entire congregation of the Jewish people,” he writes: “Because within twenty days they would journey forth to travel to Eretz Yisrael.”

The arrangements of encampment and travel with banners arranged in

formation like an army on the march, are explained throughout our parashah and Parashas Behaaloscha. Accordingly, the Torah records the exact date and location as a fixed point of reference for a carefully planned operation, as is done with any military campaign, so that the Jewish people would prepare themselves at that time to depart from the Wilderness of Sinai within twenty days and proceed directly into Eretz Yisrael.

This was an enormous undertaking by any measure, especially according to the words of Rashi, who explains that Moshe Rabbeinu himself was originally meant to enter Eretz Yisrael together with them but due to our sins we did not merit this.

At that time, we existed in the category of the “army of Hashem.” This is the meaning of the encampments in the wilderness, corresponding to the verse: “For Hashem your G-d walks in the midst

of your camp": the encampment of the army of Hashem, with the Mishkan of Hashem at its center, literally "walking in the midst of your camp." All the tribes were counted in the category of: "All who go forth to the army." Hashem was preparing His nation, His armies, to march with the Aron and conquer Eretz Yisrael.

The counting of the Jewish people versus the counting of the Leviim

The time at which the Leviim were counted differed from that of the rest of the nation. Regarding the census of the Leviim, the Torah states: "Their counted number included every male from one month old and upward" (Bamidbar 3:22). This contrasts with the rest of Klal Yisrael, who were counted only from the age of twenty, which, for the Israelites, that age constitutes: *כָּל־יֵצֵא צָבָא* "All who go forth to the army." The Leviim, however, were counted already from the young age of one month.

Rashi explains that the Leviim were counted from the age at which they emerged from the halachic status of possible *נפל* - "stillborn". In other words,

the Leviim are considered counted already from the womb, but they must first emerge from the status of *נפל ספק* into the status of a viable existence.

The Rashbam adds another angle. The Leviim came to redeem the firstborn, who themselves become obligated in *pidyon ha'ben* from one month onward, once they emerge from the status of possible stillbirth. Therefore, the Leviim, who replace the firstborn, are counted from one month of age corresponding to the firstborns of whom they redeem.

The army of Israel versus the army of Hashem

The beginning of a Levi's service differs from that of the "men of the army" of the Bnei Yisrael. The service of the Leviim begins at the age of thirty, ten years later than the Bnei Yisrael, who are considered "those who go forth to the army" from the age of twenty. This teaches us a profound lesson regarding *avodas Hashem* and what it means to belong literally to the army of Hashem and serve before Him: To reach the necessary level of holiness, one must prepare from nearly the time of birth until the age of thirty, ten additional years

beyond the preparation required for the "army of Yisrael." From this we may learn about the demands of holy service: *avodah* that requires holiness calls for greater preparation than other forms of labor within our national mission as Am Yisrael.

The Leviim as a spiritual protective wall

The Leviim protected the Mishkan, which itself served as protection for all of Klal Yisrael. The holy Mishkan, at whose heart stood the Aron of Hashem, was in essence situated within the heart of all Klal Yisrael.

The broken *luchos* contained within the Aron that accompanies us into battle possess the power to defeat our enemies. The broken *luchos* remind us to return in *teshuvah*, as we have explained elsewhere, and it is this that grants us the merit to overcome our enemies. "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we invoke the Name of Hashem our G-d" (Tehillim 20). Through faith in Hashem, we shall prevail, and with Hashem's help we are destined to emerge from this difficult exile through faith and the *teshuvah* that flows from it. Amen.

II

The significance of reading Parashas Bamidbar before Shavuos

As the yom tov of Shavuos, the anniversary of Matan Torah approaches, the Jewish people observe the longstanding custom of reading Parashas Bamidbar on the Shabbos preceding the yom tov. This custom is recorded in the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 428:4).

The primary reason for this practice is that Parashas Bamidbar serves as a buffer between the *tochachah* (the rebuke) contained in Parashas Bechukosai and the joy of Shavuos. The severe curses and admonitions at the end of Sefer Vayikra could cast a somber mood over the approaching yom tov. Therefore, we read Bamidbar beforehand, so that the congregation enters Shavuos with joy and anticipation rather than fear or heaviness (*Magen Avraham* 428:4; *Mishnah Berurah* 428:17).

The Midbar and its necessity for receiving the Torah

Although this is the primary explanation, many also see a connection between Bamidbar and Shavuos itself. The Torah

was given in the midbar (desert), which is a place devoid of ownership, commerce, and distraction. More profoundly, the midbar symbolizes humility, and receptivity to the word of Hashem (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 1:7). The midbar teaches that Torah can only truly be acquired by one who clears himself of worldly distractions and temptations, desire for honor, and indulgence. Like a desert, he must be devoid of that which diverts the mind and heart from the Torah of Hashem.

Parashas Bamidbar — the Jewish people at their spiritual peak

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִי לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר: (במדבר א, א)

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Ohel Moed, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Mitzrayim, saying.” (*Bamidbar* 1:1)

Upon deeper reflection, the opening chapters of Sefer Bamidbar present a remarkable and inspiring picture. Bnei Yisrael are still encamped at the foot of Har Sinai after nearly eleven months of Torah study under the direct guidance of Moshe

Rabbeinu. This period represents an unparalleled spiritual elevation, an ascent without parallel, in which the entire nation is united in the words of Torah given by Hashem.

“Fleeing Har Sinai” was the beginning of the calamities

וַיִּסְעוּ מִהָר ה' דָּרָךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְאָרוֹן בְּרִית ה' נִסַּע לִפְנֵיהֶם דָּרָךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לְתוֹר לָקֵחַם מִנוֹחָה: (במדבר י, לג)

“And they journeyed from the mountain of Hashem a distance of three days, and the *aron* of the covenant of Hashem traveled before them for a distance of three days to seek out a resting place for them.” (*Bamidbar* 10:33)

Only later, in Parashas Behaaloscha, did Bnei Yisrael begin traveling away from Har Sinai (*Bamidbar* 10:33), with the Aron containing the *luchos* accompanying them on their journey. In the section beginning with “*Vayehi Binsoa Ha'aron*,” the Torah uniquely encloses these verses within inverted letter nuns, something unique.

According to one opinion in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 116a), these verses constitute a separate sefer of the Torah. Another opinion explains that the verses were relocated here in order to separate between two

calamities. What calamities are we referring to?

The *pesukim* immediately following "*Vayehi Binsoa*" describe tragedy and decline, beginning with the passage of: *וַיְהִי הַיָּעַם כְּמִתְאַנְּנִים* - "And the people were like complainers." However, the Gemara's description of the first calamity is surprising: "And they journeyed from the mountain of Hashem." Rabbi Chama bar Rabbi Chanina said: They turned away from following Hashem."

The Ramban (to Bamidbar 10:35) explains: "The meaning of this Midrash is [based on] what Chazal found in the Aggadah - that they traveled away from Har Sinai joyfully, like a child fleeing from school. They said, 'Maybe He will

increase our obligations and give us more mitzvos.' This is the meaning of 'And they journeyed from the mountain of Hashem.'"

They traveled like a child fleeing from school, and this was considered a calamity, and even a turning aside from Hashem, because they no longer wished to learn additional mitzvos and become obligated in them. The Ramban explains that this journey, which was supposed to have been a swift and direct march into Eretz Yisrael, was ultimately delayed because of this behavior. Later, the sin of the *meraglim* sealed their fate and prolonged the journey for nearly forty years.

**Reading Parashas
Bamidbar before
Shavuos to recall and**

**reconnect to the
atmosphere of Har
Sinai**

Yet before this juncture, at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, all those who stood at Har Sinai were at the peak of spiritual achievement, particularly at that time, only a month after the Mishkan had been erected, with the potential to inherit Eretz Yisrael together with Moshe Rabbeinu and swiftly actualize their destiny and the eternal destiny of Knesses Yisrael.

Thus, reading Parashas Bamidbar before Shavuos is not merely a way of separating the yom tov from the negativity of the *tochachah* and its curses. It is also a powerful reminder of the spiritual readiness the Jewish people at Sinai, which was then at

Maharal Tzintz ב-י-ל-א ואמן

PEARLS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE GAON FROM PLOTZK

Parashas Bamidbar — Erev Shavuos

As is well known, in the vast majority of years, Parashas Bamidbar is read on the Shabbos preceding the yom tov of Shavuos. Rabbeinu, the Maharal Tzintz, would deliver a special *drasha* (sermon) on this Shabbos, which he entitled: "The *drasha* of the Shabbos before Shavuos."

Rabbeinu opens and expounds upon the famous words of the Gemara:

"In the future, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will bring a Sefer Torah and place it in His lap and say: 'Whoever occupied himself with it shall come and receive his reward'... The nations will gather [as well], and they too will seek 'reward,' but Hakadosh Baruch Hu will reject them. Then they will say before Hakadosh Baruch Hu: 'Master of the Universe! The Jews, who accepted the Torah, where did they fulfill

it?' ...Hakadosh Baruch Hu will say to them: 'The heavens and the earth shall testify regarding them that they fulfilled the entire Torah.' The nations will reply before Him: 'Master of the Universe! The heavens and the earth are partial in their testimony, as it says, "Were it not for My covenant day and night, I would not have established the laws of heaven and earth..."'

"...What is the meaning of the verse: 'And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day'? This teaches that Hakadosh Baruch Hu made a condition with Creation and said: 'If the Jewish people accept My Torah, all is well; but if not, I shall return you to chaos and void,' etc.

"...What is the meaning of the verse, 'From Heaven You caused judgment to be heard; the earth feared and became tranquil'? If it feared, why was it tranquil? And if it was tranquil, why did it fear? Rather, at first it feared, lest the Jewish people not accept the Torah and the world return to chaos and void. In the end, when they accepted it with 'Naaseh V'Nishma' ('We will do and we will hear') the earth became tranquil."

From this we learn, in brief, that the heavens and earth are "disqualified from testimony" regarding whether the Jewish people fulfilled the Torah throughout the generations, because the very existence of heaven and earth depends upon the Jewish people's fulfillment of Torah. This emerges from three sources: a. the verse "Were it not for My covenant day and night..." b. "And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day." c. "The earth feared and became tranquil." From all these passages it is evident that the continued existence of the world depends upon the acceptance of the Torah.

Rabbeinu then raised the classic question of the earlier commentators. The verse "the sixth day" implies that the existence of the world depended upon the sixth of Sivan, yet we rule in accordance with the opinion of R' Yossi that the Torah was given on the seventh of Sivan. This difficulty divides into two questions. On the one hand, if the world's existence was conditioned upon the acceptance of the Torah on the sixth of Sivan, how did the world continue existing until the seventh of Sivan without the Torah? On the other hand, if the sixth of Sivan had already been designated at Creation as the date of Matan Torah, why did Hakadosh Baruch Hu postpone it until the seventh of Sivan? Rabbeinu answered both questions through two remarkable parables.

Rabbeinu answered the first question as follows: Reuven owed Shimon an enormous sum of money and established a date for repayment. When the due date arrived, Shimon hurried early in the morning to collect the debt from Reuven, but Reuven did not immediately repay him. Shimon could not forcibly extract payment from Reuven, for the day was still long. The day passed and Reuven still had not repaid the debt. At that point Shimon could already begin collection proceedings and forcibly collect what he was owed, except that *beis din* (rabbinical court) does not operate at night. Therefore, Shimon waited until the following morning. The next morning, Reuven immediately hurried to repay the debt, and Shimon no longer had any claim against him.

Rabbeinu explained that this is precisely what occurred at Matan Torah. On the sixth of Sivan, Hakadosh Baruch Hu demanded from the entire world "to pay the debt," namely, that the Jewish people accept the Torah. And if they would not accept it, then... The entire world trembled before the Creator's demand, yet throughout that entire day nothing happened. And during the following night as well, "there is no *beis din* at night." Then, on the following morning, the Torah was immediately given, and there was no longer any claim against the world. This event is alluded to in the third source cited by the Gemara: "From Heaven You caused judgment to be heard; the earth feared and became tranquil." On the sixth of Sivan, Hakadosh Baruch Hu summoned the world to judgment concerning the condition upon which its existence depended, and the earth trembled in fear lest the condition not be fulfilled and, Heaven forbid... Then, on the seventh of Sivan, once the Torah was given, the earth became tranquil and calm. At first it feared, and in the end it became tranquil!

But why, in fact, was the Torah not given on its original date, the sixth of Sivan? Rabbeinu related: A wealthy nobleman lived in a magnificent palace together with his entire household, yet he sent his only son to live in a distant house that appeared small and unimpressive. In truth, however, everything had been designed in such a way that thin cables extended from the small house to the palace, and they supported the entire palace. The nobleman constantly invested large sums of money in maintaining the small house that upheld everything else. One day, members of the household asked the nobleman: "Why do you invest in the small and lowly house rather than in the great palace itself?" Instead of answering, the nobleman struck the small house with a single blow... Immediately, the entire palace shook violently and nearly collapsed. At once, everyone understood how essential it was to maintain the small house.

So too at the time of Matan Torah, the *Malachei Hashares* (Ministering Angels) argued against giving the Torah to the earthly world. They said before Hakadosh Baruch Hu, "Hashem, our Master, how mighty is Your Name throughout the earth, You Who placed Your glory upon the heavens!" "Leave the Torah in the great palace, in Heaven!"

But Hakadosh Baruch Hu wished to demonstrate to the angels that the continued existence of all Creation, including the angels themselves, depends solely upon the practical fulfillment of Torah by the Jewish people, and that the souls of the Jewish people originate from a place even higher than that of the angels. Therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu delayed Matan Torah by one day, and immediately the entire universe, upper worlds and lower worlds alike, trembled with fear and dread lest the Torah not be given to the Jewish people and, Heaven forbid, everything be destroyed. Through this one-day delay in Matan Torah, the angels came to understand and accept that the Torah must indeed be given on earth. Once they understood the compelling greatness of the Jewish people – that the world absolutely requires the Jewish people to fulfill the Torah – they desired and even rejoiced in the giving of the Torah to ישראל.

עליונים ששו ותחתונים עליו

“The upper worlds rejoiced and the lower worlds exulted, upon the receiving of the Torah written at Sinai.”

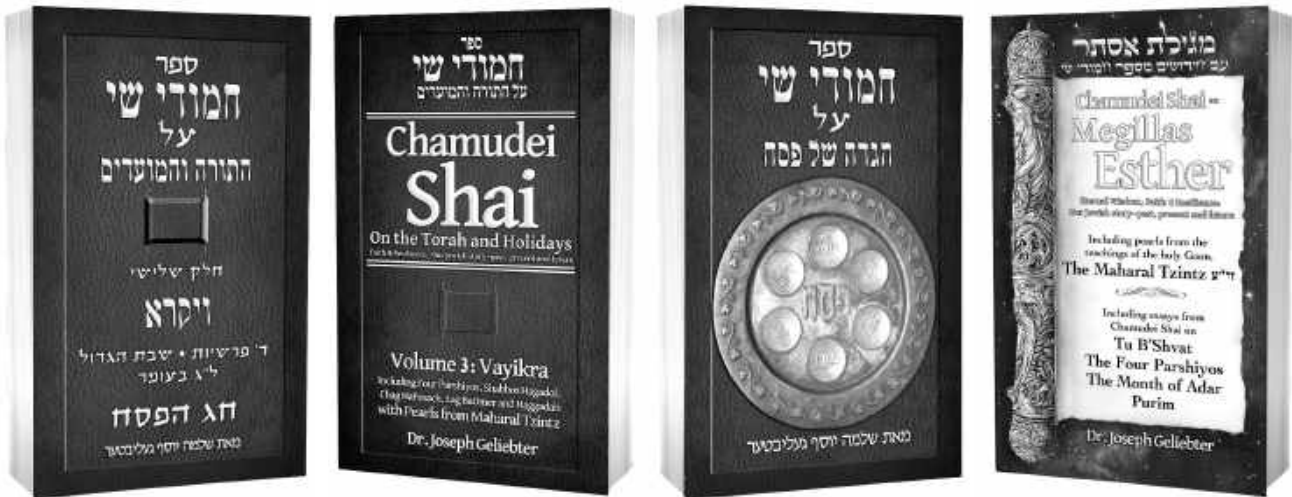
תאר פלה מאד נתעלה.

בקבלת יום זה עשרת הדברים:

“The splendor of the bride was greatly elevated through the receiving, on this day, of the Aseres HaDibros.”

Rabbeinu concluded the *drasha* with these words:

“May the Merciful One grant us the merit to be among the guardians of His testimonies and His Torah! Amen.”



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