



TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Bamidbar

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A Taste of Torah

Just Desert

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

One would expect the name of an entire book of the Torah to reflect its content. As we begin the fourth book of the Torah, it's fair to say that its name - "Bamidbar," "In the Desert" - aptly describes the setting for the entire book. If you're happy with that approach, you can stop reading now. But if that leaves you unsatisfied, let's talk. Perhaps what's bothering you is bothering me. Sure, the Jews are in the desert, but why is that important? There are many events that occur, triumphs and failures of the Jewish People, yet the one word that sums it up is their location - the desert.

The Ramban, in his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar, discusses several themes of this Book. One of those ideas is predicated on the fact that the Jewish Nation in the desert encamped in a very specific arrangement, as described in the parsha. The *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) was located at the center, with the four families of the Tribe of Levi surrounding it, each family assigned to a specific side. The other twelve tribes camped around the Levites, three tribes per side, each triad also assigned to one of the four directions. The Ramban explains that this arrangement was actually meant to mimic the Jewish People as they stood at Mt. Sinai at the time of *Matan Torah* (the Giving of the Torah), with certain individuals allowed to ascend to various points upon the mountain, while the bulk of the Nation remained at the foot of the mountain. The *Mishkan*, says the Ramban, was the focal point, as Mt. Sinai was when the Torah was given.

Take a moment to consider this eye-opening approach. During their

entire journey - ultimately a forty-year sojourn - through the desert, the Jewish People lived as if they were still at Sinai, receiving the Torah. In what way did they experience this? Sinai was a unique, one-time experience, when G-d revealed Himself to the entirety of the Jewish Nation and gave them the Torah. Life in the desert, while certainly miraculous, doesn't seem to replicate the events of *Matan Torah*.

Perhaps this Ramban can be understood with a concept discussed by the Akeidas Yitzchak (Rabbi Yitzchak Arama; c. 1420-1494). The Akeidas Yitzchak explains that the wilderness encampment was arranged in numerous layers, with the twelve tribes on the periphery, followed by the Levite families, then the *Mishkan*. Within the *Mishkan* itself there are multiple layers: the Courtyard, followed by the actual Sanctuary, then the *Kodesh Kadashim* (Holy of Holies), and, finally, the *Aron Habris* (Ark of the Covenant). The ultimate center of attention and focus was the *Aron Habris*, which contained within it the *Luchos*, the two tablets that contained the Ten Commandments and which are representative of the Torah itself. Hashem arranged everything this way, says the Akeidas Yitzchak, to stress that the entirety of the Jewish Nation and of Jewish life - every single layer just described - is all pointing toward one central pillar, the Torah itself. This would inspire the Jewish People, concludes the Akeidas Yitzchak, to abandon the pointless pursuit of physical matters and to focus solely on a life built around Torah.

The Medrash (Mechilta Parshas Beshalach) teaches that one reason why

continued on back

Stories for the Soul

Forgotten Rules

Rabbi Yaakov Bruchin (1780-1844) was one of the top students in the famed Volozhin Yeshiva, founded and led by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin. Reb Chaim put much effort into developing his student, recognizing that he would grow to become a leader of the Jewish People.

Reb Yaakov once had to leave the yeshiva for some time. Before he departed, Reb Chaim took him into his private study to speak with him. Some of the other students, curious as to what the head of the yeshiva was telling his prize student, managed to spy on the meeting through a crack.

They observed Reb Chaim take a volume of Talmud from the shelf. He opened it to a particular passage of *Tosafos* (a basic commentary of the Talmud) and asked Reb Yaakov to explain it. Reb Yaakov looked at the words, but was unable to do so.

"You cannot explain it?" wondered Reb Chaim. "But it is a fairly simple *Tosafos*! Perhaps you have become haughty due to your achievements in Torah? Our Sages teach us that one who becomes arrogant will lose his Torah knowledge!"

Reb Yaakov burst into tears, immediately humbled. After some moments, he looked again at the passage of *Tosafos*, and found he was, indeed, able to understand its contents.

Our Sages teach that the Torah was given in the desert because Torah is acquired only by one who makes himself ownerless like the desert. One element of this process is ensuring that one does not allow himself to grow vain or haughty.

Kollel Happenings

KOLLEL 22ND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION: EMERGING STRONGER - A VIRTUAL EVENT

Spend an hour celebrating the unstoppable power of Torah on Tuesday, June 2, 7 pm, just a few days after Shavuot, the time of the Giving of the Torah. Honoring Kerry and Mindy Berman for their steady and unswerving commitment to Torah and the Denver Jewish community. Join the community as we continue to grow and emerge stronger. To place an ad and for more info, visit denverkollel.org, email journal@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855

KOLLEL CLASSES CONTINUE VIA ZOOM MEETING

The Kollel is continuing many of its classes and offering new classes via Zoom Meeting. You can tune in to live classes online or call in on a phone. For a full schedule and the links and phone numbers to access this treasure trove of Torah, visit www.denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

THE BIG PICTURE

Join a multi-part series of your choice via Zoom (online or on the phone) and discover The Big Picture of a section of Torah. Choose from an array of different Torah topics throughout the week. Classes run through 5/28. An initiative of the Denver Community Kollel in partnership with Aish of the Rockies and JOI. Visit denverkollel.org for full details.

Parsha Quizzers

The six items below can be found in Rashi's commentary to this week's parsha. Can you figure out where they are? (Answers on bottom)

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Must be 20 or older to enter | 4) Like a son |
| 2) Birth certificate | 5) Counted from birth |
| 3) Funeral arrangement | 6) Stay out and just listen |

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Menashe ben Yisrael - Part IV

In 1632, Rabbi Menashe published his own work, titled *El Conciliador*. *El Conciliador* sought to resolve areas of the Written Torah that appear to contradict each other. The work, written in Spanish, reflected Rabbi Menashe's

brilliance and erudition in the length and breadth of Torah. It was written not just for Jews, but for Christians, as well, and the work was widely read by the intellectual segment of non-Jewish Europe.

A Taste of Torah

continued from front

Hashem took the Jewish People into the desert instead of directly into *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) is because He was concerned that, upon arriving in *Eretz Yisrael*, they would take possession of their fields and vineyards and wouldn't study Torah. First, said Hashem, let them live in the desert, eating manna and drinking water from the Well of Miriam, and the Torah will be absorbed into their bones.

The Medrash is teaching that worldly distractions - permitted though they may be - will lead a person away from Torah. It is first necessary to establish a real relationship with the Torah, to absorb it into one's bones. Once a person has calibrated himself and established the Torah of Sinai as the center of life, one can engage the physical world and navigate through it.

To return to the question posed at the outset: Why the desert? The answer, in light of the concepts presented above, may be that before the Jewish People could venture into *Eretz Yisrael* - a land

"flowing with milk and honey," a land that could potentially distract them from the Mt. Sinai that was to remain at the core of their lives, they needed to first truly incorporate this new reality into themselves by living in the desert, free of any distractions. The challenges and hurdles they would encounter there, the soaring heights they would reach, along with the agonizing errors they would make, were all part of a process to ensure they were ready, as a People, to enter the Land that is the apple of G-d's eye in a state that would allow them to discover, develop and bring forth the spiritual potency, and not merely the physical riches, of that Land.

The Book of Bamidbar is the tale of the Jewish People as they struggled to reach the level necessary to enter the Land of Israel. As we begin our personal journey through the Book of the Desert, let us glean our own lessons for our lives in making the Torah of Sinai the true center of our lives, as well.

Answers - Parsha Quizzers

1) Must be 20 or older to enter 1:3 s.v. kol	2) Birth certificate 1:18 s.v. veytsyvaldu	3) Funeral arrangement 2:2 s.v. bitosos lives
4) Like a son 3:1 s.v. v'tayleh	5) Counted from birth 3:15 s.v. miben	6) Stay out and just listen 3:16 s.v. al pi