**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Bamidbar/Shavuos– Vol. 11, Issue 35**

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**והחנים עליו מטה יששכר ונשיא לבני יששכר נתנאל בן צוער וצבאו ופקדיו ארבעה וחמשים אלף וארבע מאות מטה זבולן ונשיא לבני זבולן אליאב בן חלן ... ומטה גד ונשיא לבני גד אליסף בן רעואל (במדבר 14, 2:5-7)**

 There was once a complicated and difficult Din Torah in the city of Vilnawhich required Rabbinical arbitration. The two sides requested that the Vilna Gaon preside over the Beis Din that would hear and rule on the dispute, but to their surprise, he refused. When they pressed him for an explanation, he explained that one of the individuals chosen to sit as a judge on the Beis Din was a businessman who wasn’t sufficiently learned to be involved in the resolution of the case. The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 3:4) forbids a judge from sitting on a Beis Din together with somebody who is unfit for the position, such as one who isn’t a Torah scholar. In fact, the Sm”a comments that the rulings of laymen are generally the opposite of those of Torah scholars.

 The Vilna Gaon continued his explanation by offering a beautiful hint to this law. In listing the formations and configurations of the Jewish encampments in the wilderness, the Torah lists four groups of three tribes, each of which encamped in a different direction around the central Mishkan. In each list of three tribes, the verse which mentions the third tribe always begins with the letter “vav,” which serves to connect that tribe to the preceding tribes.

However, there is one exception. The tribe of Zevulun, which represented the businessmen and merchants, is the third tribe listed in the encampment of Yehuda in the east, yet it doesn’t begin with a connecting letter “vav.” The Gaon explained that this is because the second tribe in the list is that of Yissochar, which consisted of Torah scholars. The Torah intentionally omitted the connecting “vav” to hint to the aforementioned law. When it comes to clarifying and ruling on Torah laws, there may be no connection between the competent Torah scholars and the insufficiently-learned businessmen.

**וימת נדב ואביהוא לפני ד' בהקרבם אש זרה לפני ד' במדבר סיני**

 **ובנים לא היו להם ויכהן אלעזר ואיתמר על פני אהרן אביהם (3:4)**

 The Rav of a town in Europe once passed away. Because his son was too young to fill his position, the leaders of the community hired another Rav to take his place. Several years later,the son matured and reached a level at which he was capable of serving in his father’s stead. The new Rav expressed resistance and argued that although a Rav’s son is legally entitled to inherit his father’s position and fill the role if he is fitting, in this case the son had been too young at the time and therefore lost his right of succession.

 The dispute was brought for resolution to Rav Meir Shapiro. He cited the Medrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:26), whichexplains that the Torah emphasizes the fact that Nadav and Avihu died without any children to teach that if they had indeed had offspring, their children would have precedence in taking their places. It was only because they died without children that the verse concludes that Elozar and Isomar were therefore eligible to serve in their father Aharon’s stead.

Rav Shapiro noted that this Medrash is difficult to understand. The Zohar HaKadosh teaches that Nadav and Avihu were under the age of 20 when they died. Even if they had left descendants, those children would clearly be under the age of Bar Mitzvahat the time of their deaths, which would invalidate them from inheriting the position and serving in the Mishkan. If so, how could the Medrash infer that had Nadav and Avihu left behind progeny, they would have preceded their uncles (Elozar and Isomar) in filling a position for which they were ineligible?

Rav Shapiro concluded that we may deduce from here that even in a case when the inheritors are too young at the time of death to fill the role which is rightfully theirs, they never relinquish their claims to the position, which they are entitled to fill upon their maturity. As a result, Rav Shapiro ruled that the son of the first Rav shouldnow inherit his father’s mantle.

**ויהי בימי שפט השפטים (רות 1:1)**

There are two books in Tanach named for women: Esther and Rus. The Sifsei Chochomim explains that each of them merited a book named for her by displaying mesiras nefesh – self-sacrifice. Esther’s mesiras nefesh is understandable and straightforward: She went in to Achashverosh without being called, risking her life in the process, and in so doing, she saved her nation. Purim is a happy time and a popular holiday. Because Megillas Esther depicts Hashem watching and protecting us even while His presence cannot immediately be felt, it is particularly relevant for us while we are in exile.

Rav Yisroel Reisman points out that Rus, on the other hand, is not as popular and well-known. The narrative of her life story and the events of her mesiras nefesh are not as widely studied, but if we step back and ponder the events of her life, we can’t help but stand in awe and marvel. Rus was born into a Moabite royal family but married a foreigner – Machlon – while she was still a young child. She was married to him for 10 years without bearing any children. During this time, their animals continued to die and their possessions continued to be stricken until they were left in dire poverty, at which point her husband died. She decided to return with her mother-in-law as an older single woman who needed a shidduch but had no reason to think that she would be permitted to marry a regular Jew.

Upon arriving in Israel, Rus had to degradingly go to gather forgotten grain in a stranger’s field with other poor men. In the middle of the night, she followed her mother-in-law’s instructions to go to the leader of the generationin his threshing floor. Her closest redeemer refused to marry her and questioned the permissibility of any Jew marrying her. When Rus finally got the elderly Boaz to agree to marry her, he died the next day, and instead of going to Sheva Berachos, she went from her wedding to a funeral. Shortly thereafter, she discovered that she was pregnant and alone without family or money, only for people to cast aspersions on her for causing the death of Boaz, and her child by implication.

While Esther was a very public figure, with all of the Jews proud of their cousin the Queen, Rus was a private individual who suffered tremendously and essentially all alone. The darkness and confusion that she went through symbolizes the pain and confusion of עקבתא דמשיחא– the days prior to Moshiach’s arrival – and is hinted to in the very first verse of the Megillah which cryptically doesn’t even tell us when these events took place or who was in charge at the time. Yet in spite of all of this, Rus remained the paragon of chesed. It is easy to do chesed when everything in life seems to be going our way and we naturally feel a desire to share our good fortune with those less fortunate than us, but to be a גומל חסד– doer of kindness –under the conditions that Rus endured is nothing short of incredible.

Yet Esther was in some sense the more tragic figure. Esther’s Megillah ends with her trapped in the palace married to Achashverosh, never able to return to her husband Mordechai, with her children raised as non-Jews. Although she saved the Jewish nation, there was no light at the end of her personal tunnel. Rus’s life was the diametric opposite. After suffering through so much trauma and upheaval, she lived a very long life that ultimately justified all of her pain and suffering. Rus is mentioned one time in Nevi’im (Prophets), where the verse records (Melochim 1 2:19) that Shlomo made a special chair לאם המלך. Rashi interprets this as a reference to אמא של מלכות– the matriarch of royalty, his Bubbe Rus. After all of the questions, doubts, and uncertainty, Rus lived to see her vindication. She saw her descendants Dovid and Shlomo accepted as legitimate Jews, who ruled in tremendous honor and glory.

The Medrash points out that every verse in Megillas Rus begins with the letter ו, except for eight. The letter ו means “and” and symbolizes connection. All of the events in the Megillah seem to be the natural outgrowth and continuation of one another. Except for eight. The Maharal writes that the number eight symbolizes the concept of למעלה מן הטבע– above the laws of nature. The events recorded in Megillas Rus may seem arbitrary and coincidental, but for all of the seemingly natural chain of events, they were in reality each part of a much larger chain to fulfill Hashem’s master plan to bring מלכות בית דודinto the world, which Rus ultimately recognized as a reward for her emunah and bitachon throughout her years of darkness and uncertainty.

**עד ממחרת השבת השביעת תספרו חמשים יום והקרבתם מנחה חדשה לד' (ויקרא 23:16)**

 Although the Torah does not explicitly link the Yom Tov of Shavuos and the giving of the Torah, the Gemora (Shabbos 86b) makes clear that Shavuos is in fact the day on which Hashem gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai, and for this reason we refer to Shavuos in our prayers as זמן מתן תורתנו – the time of the giving of our Torah. However, it is difficult to understand why we have two Yomim Tovim which both seem to be dedicated to celebrating the gift of the Torah: Shavuos and Simchas Torah. Although it is true that Simchas Torah is observed when we conclude the annual cycle of public Torah readings in the fall, this is quite arbitrary, as our Sages could have just as easily set up a system in which we complete the reading of the Torah on Shavuos, such that Simchas Torah and Shavuos would be celebrated at the same time. Why do we specifically need two distinct festivals which both ostensibly serve the same purpose?

 Rav Simcha Zissel Broide, the head of the Chevron yeshiva, explains that there are two different types of gifts. Some presents possess inherent worth, such as an exotic car or precious jewels, while others are not intrinsically valuable, yet become cherished due to the prominence of the person who gave them. Rav Yissocher Frand cites the example of President Lyndon B. Johnson, who as part of his legislative strategy frequently arranged elaborate bill signings in the White House. A large number of pens were placed in front of him, and he used a different pen for every curve in each of the letters of his name, which he then gifted to the people who had been invited to the ceremony due to their involvement and assistance in passing the bill. Even though each of the pens was not particularly expensive, they became prized due to the fact that they were received from the President after he used them to sign an important piece of legislation into law.

The giving of the Torah represents a confluence of both components of valuable presents, as we received a gift which is inherently the most valuable gift in the world independent of who presented it, and additionally, it was given not by the President of the United States, but by the King of Kings, from Whom any present automatically becomes elevated and cherished.

Rav Simcha Zissel explains that our celebration of the gift of the Torah therefore requires two separate days, one day to focus on the gift itself, and another day to appreciate the Giver.Shavuos is the Yom Tov of the Torah, the time when we commemorate the fact that if not for the Torah, we would be indistinguishable from the myriad other people in the marketplace (Pesachim 68b). A quick glance at the society around us shows us what our lives and our families would look like without the Torah to guide us, a truly terrifying prospect. The Torah, with all of its mitzvos and life lessons, is so valuable that we set aside one day for the purpose of treasuring it and expressing our gratitude for this innately valuable gift.

 However, in addition to celebrating and appreciating the Torah itself, we must also have a second day on which we focus on the greatness of the Giver of this gift, which is Simchas Torah. After we go through the month of Elul, a time of אני לדודי ודודי לי– I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me, we crown Hashem as King on Rosh Hashana and spend the next ten days repenting our errant ways and returning to Him, climaxing on Yom Kippur. After the more universal Yom Tov of Sukkos, on which we offer 70 sacrifices on behalf of all of the 70 nations of the world, Hashem tells us to remain behind with Him for one extra day, Shemini Atzeres. On that day, there is no lulav and esrog, no sukkah, and no other nations of the world, only an intimate bond between Hashem and His chosen nation, and therefore this is the appropriate time to focus on appreciating the King of Kings for the gift that He chose to give us.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. Rashi writes (Bamidbar 2:2) that the tribes encamped 2000 cubits away from the Mishkan so that they would still be permitted to travel there on Shabbos. As the prohibition against traveling outside of the techum is only Rabbinical in nature, why were they required to encamp within 2000 cubits of the Mishkan? (Ayeles HaShachar)
2. Rashi explains (3:1) that the Torah refers to the sons of Aharon as Moshe’s progeny because whoever teaches Torah to others is considered as if he gave birth to them. As Moshe taught the entire Torah to every single Jew, in what way are Aharon’s children considered his offspring more than the rest of the Jewish people? (Sifsei Chochomim, Kli Yakar, HaEmek Davar, Ahavas Eisan Sanhedrin 19b, Ma’adanei Asher 5768)
3. The Gemora in Shabbos (88a) teaches that when the Jewish people were encamped at the foot of Sinai, Hashem lifted the mountain above them like a barrel and threatened them that if they don’t accept the Torah, שם תהא קבורתכם – there will be your burial place. Wouldn’t it be more grammatically correct to say פה – here – you will be buried? (Peninim MiShulchan Gevoha)
4. The Jewish people told Moshe (Shemos 19:8) that everything that Hashem has spoken, נעשה – we will do. How could any individual Jew respond that he will do all of the mitzvos when there are numerous mitzvos which can only be performed by specific subsections of the population and no single person is capable of doing all of the mitzvos himself? (Genuzos HaGra)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) **Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman** suggests that perhaps the Rabbinical decree not to travel more than 2000 cubits beyond the techum on Shabbos had already been enacted by Moshe at this time. He cites Shu”t Rav Akiva Eiger (2:128), who writes that there were Rabbinical decrees and stringencies that were already enacted in the times of Yehoshua and the early prophets. The P’nei Yehoshua writes (Rosh Hashana 29b) that there were also decrees which were already made in the times of Moshe, in which case it is possible that this was one of them. However, he notes that the Mabit writes in Beis Elokim (Shaar HaYesodos 38) that Moshe and Yehoshua did not make any Rabbinical enactments, in which case the only potential answer to this question would be in accordance with the opinion of Rebbi Akiva (Sotah 27b), who maintains that the prohibition to travel outside of the techum is Biblical in nature.

2) The **Sifsei Chochomim** and **Ahavas Eisan** answer that Moshe was commanded by Hashem to teach the whole Torah to the entire nation. Because he had an explicit command to teach them, he couldn’t be considered as giving birth to them for doing so. On the other hand, he specifically singled out Aharon’s sons to teach them the Torah individually, and for this reason, they were considered to be his children. The **Netziv** maintains that the concept that one is considered to have given birth to somebody to whom one teaches Torah applies only to the study of the Oral Law, which is the study that truly makes and creates a person. Moshe didn’t begin to teach the Oral Law to the nation as a whole until much later (Devorim 1:5), so at this time they weren’t yet considered his children. Because he had already begun teaching it privately to Aharon’s sons, he was already considered to have given birth to them.

3) **Rav Aharon Bakst** explains that it wasn’t necessary to threaten that generation to force them to accept the Torah, as they had already declared נעשה ונשמע– we will do, and we will listen. Rather, Hashem was threatening all Jews in future generations, informing them that the Torah must be their lifeblood, and if they choose to abandon it, שם – there, wherever you may be, will be your burial place.

4) The **Vilna Gaon** explains that although it is true that no individual Jew can do all of the mitzvos, when all of the Jews are living together in Israel they can collectively perform all of the mitzvos as a nation. They alluded to this by saying נעשה – we will do – as opposed to אעשה – I will do – as they understood that only through joining themselves together with others could they perform all of the mitzvos. For this reason, the measurements of the Aron in the Mishkan were incomplete units, as it was 2.5 cubits long, 1.5 cubits wide, and 1.5 cubits tall (25:10), to hint to this concept that no individual should see himself as self-sustaining. To paraphrase John Donne, no Jew is an island, and it is only through viewing ourselves as incomplete halves that we can join together with the community to become a complete whole.

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