

IN AND AROUND

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Bamidbar

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Today's Learning:

Sotah 1:8-9

Orach Chaim 448:3-5

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 19

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Horiot 5

Ramban writes: After the Book of Vayikra has taught us what to do in the Mishkan (i.e., the laws of the sacrifices), Bemidbar describes the organization of the camps around the Mishkan. This, says Ramban, is reminiscent of the way Bnei Yisrael encircled Har Sinai at the time of Matan Torah / the giving of the Torah.

The parallelism noted by Ramban is not coincidental; the Shulchan Aruch states that Bemidbar is always the parashah which precedes Shavuot. (There are, however, two exceptions to this rule.) The midrash finds a related connection, noting that the arrangement of the camps around the Mishkan was based on the groupings of angels that Bnei Yisrael "saw" at Har Sinai.

It is also interesting to note that Parashat Bemidbar is one of the few parashot (outside of Sefer Bereishit) which teaches no new mitzvot. And, Ramban observes that the vast majority of the commandments in Sefer Bemidbar are of a temporary nature, applying only to the sojourn in the

desert or to the first generation thereafter. Similarly, in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash, there are no unique mitzvot for Shavuot. [In fact, the Mishnah (Mo'ed Kattan 19a) entertains a view that in certain respects, Shavuot no longer has the status of the other Torah-ordained holidays, though the halachah does not follow this view.]

"Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, every man at his camp and every man at his banner, according to his legions." (1:52)

This verse is paraphrased in the zemer / song for Friday night, Kol Mekadesh, where we read:

"Whoever hallows Shabbat as befits it, whoever safeguards the Shabbat properly from desecration, his reward is exceedingly great in accordance with his deed - 'Every man at his camp and every man at his banner'."

How does this verse relate to Shabbat and to the zemer? R' Gavriel Ze'ev Wolf Margolis z"l (1847-1935; rabbi in Grodno, Boston and New York) explains:

We know that Shabbat has two aspects: "zachor" / "remember" (Shmot 20:8) and "shamor" / "safeguard" (Devarim 5:12). The former expression requires us to sanctify the Shabbat, in particular through reciting kiddush, while the latter expression requires us to refrain from certain activities on Shabbat, i.e., not to violate Shabbat.

The Sages say that the reward of one who sanctifies Shabbat is unlimited. They also teach that if Bnei Yisrael would refrain from violating two consecutive Shabbatot, the ultimate redemption would occur immediately. (And at the time of the ultimate redemption, the prophet Michah tells us [7:15], "As in the days when you left the land of Egypt, I will show you wonders.")

The zemer Kol Mekadesh mentions both aspects of Shabbat, both the affirmative aspect - "Whoever hallows Shabbat as befits it" - and the negative aspect - "whoever safeguards the Shabbat properly from desecration." Paralleling these, the zemer mentions two rewards: for sanctifying the Shabbat, "his reward is exceedingly great in accordance with his deed," and for not violating Shabbat, "Every man at his camp and every man at his banner," just as at the time of the redemption from Egypt. (Torat Gavriel)

"Count the sons of Levi . . . every male from one month of age and up shall you count them." (3:15)

Why were the Levi'im counted from such a young age, while other Jews were counted from age 20? R' Isaac Sher z"l (Rosh Yeshiva of Slobodka) explains that this was in recognition of the fact that the Levi'im willingly performed many dangerous tasks in the mishkan. [The work was dangerous because failure to treat the mishkan and its vessels with proper respect could cause the Levi's death at the hands of G-d or man.] Such mesirut nefesh / self sacrifice does not come to a person unless

he is trained in it from his infancy. (Lekket Sichot Mussar)

Pirkei Avot

This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation - and toil in Torah study. If you do this, "You are praiseworthy and all is well with you" (Tehilim 128:2). "You are praiseworthy" - in this world, "and all is well with you" - in the world to come. (Chapter 6, mishnah 4)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (died 1806) explained: The mishnah does not mean that a student of Torah must consciously deprive himself as an end in itself. It merely means that one should love Torah single-mindedly such that he forgets all other pleasures. (Petach Enayim)

R' Simcha Bunim of Przysucha z"l (died 1827) explained this further with a parable: When a merchant travels to the market, he may pass through villages where little food can be obtained. Does this deter him? Does he think for a moment of canceling his trip because he may go hungry, when he knows of the rewards that await him? Of course not!

We are passing through this world on our way to a place where Torah is the most valuable commodity. Knowing that, can we be deterred from studying Torah just because it sometimes requires deprivation? (Quoted in Mi'maayanot Ha'netzach p. 319)

In early 20th century Poland, a young man who chose to dedicate his life to full time Torah study was virtually assured of living in poverty and squalor. When R' Meir Shapiro z"l (best-known as the founder of the Daf Yomi movement; died 1935) set out to change this by constructing the palatial Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin, he was asked whether his plans did not run counter to the above-quoted mishnah. He answered:

We read (Mishlei 22:7): "A debtor is a servant to the creditor." Nevertheless, the Torah commands (Devarim 24:12), "If that man is poor, you shall not sleep with his security." [The Torah assumes that a poor person has nothing but his bedclothes to give as collateral.] How can the mitzvah of returning a debtor's collateral every single night be reconciled with the debtor's being a servant of the creditor?

The answer is that the verse in Mishlei is addressed to the debtor, while the verse in Devarim is addressed to the creditor. The debtor must recognize his indebtedness, while the creditor must act with compassion.

Similarly, concluded R' Shapiro, our mishnah is addressed to the yeshiva student. In order to succeed, he must be prepared to live in the conditions that the mishnah describes. However, the mishnah is not speaking at all to the wealthy people who are capable of supporting a yeshiva. _They_ must live by the dictum (Mishlei 3:18), "[The Torah] is a tree of life for those who grasp it, and its supporters are fortunate." (Ibid. p. 320)

Selected Laws of Shemittah

(From Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel, ch. 4)

[Ed. note: This year is a shemittah year, and, from time-to-time, we are presenting excerpts from the laws of shemittah. As with any halachic issue addressed in Hamaayan, our goal is to increase awareness of the subject, not to provide practical halachic guidance. For such advice, consult a competent rabbi.]

25. The laws of shemittah apply only in Eretz Yisrael, as it is written (Vayikra 25:2), "When you come into the land that I give you . . ." [The laws of shemittah] apply whether the Bet Hamikdash is standing or not standing. [Rambam appears to hold that the mitzvah of shemittah applies _according_to_TorahLaw_ even when the Bet Hamikdash is not standing. Others hold that shemittah is only a rabbinic-decree so long as the majority of Jews live outside of Eretz Yisrael, even when the Bet Hamikdash is standing, as was the case in the Second Temple era. (Kessef Mishneh)]

26. Any place which the returnees from Babylon settled, as far as Akhziv [near the Israeli-Lebanese border], is included in the prohibition on working the land, and any sefichin / wild plants that grow in that area may not be eaten. Any place that was settled by those who left Egypt [but not those who returned from Babylon], i.e., from Akhziv until the River and until Amanah, even though one may not work the land there during the shemittah, sefichin that grow there may be eaten. From the River and Amanah outwards, one may work the land in the seventh year. [Ed. note: Commentaries disagree what river is meant, but generally agree that the reference is to a river in Lebanon. "Amanah" is a mountain in Lebanon.]

27. In Syria, shemittah does not apply according to Torah law, but the Sages decreed that working [the land] there is forbidden just as in Eretz Yisrael. This was done in order to discourage Jews from leaving Eretz Yisrael and settling in Syria. However, the lands of Amon and Moav [both in Jordan], Egypt, and Shinar [Iraq] are not subject to the laws of shemittah even though the laws of ma'aser / tithes do apply there based on a rabbinic decree.

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