

# SIYYUM ON SEFER BAMIDBAR

*by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom*

## TRIBAL INTEGRITY AND FAMILY INTEGRITY

The very last presentation in Sefer Bamidbar is a dialogue between Mosheh and the chieftains of Menasheh regarding the land which will soon be inherited by the five daughters of Tz'lofchad, a (dead) member of the tribe.

If we look back to chapter 27, we find that the daughters of Tz'lofchad approached Mosheh with a concern regarding the maintenance of their father's memory in Eretz Yisra'el:

"Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against Hashem in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." (Bamidbar 27:3-4)

Following the assumption that, as daughters, they would not inherit their father's lot in the Land, his name would be lost among the tribe of Menasheh.

Indeed, God affirms the implication of their approach to Mosheh and responds:

"The daughters of Tz'lofchad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them." (ibid. v. 7)

Now, some time later (after the presentation of the war with Midian, the negotiations with the Reubenites and Gadites along with many Halakhot), the chieftains of Menasheh register a concern with Mosheh in response to the Divine solution on behalf of Tz'lofchad's family:

"...and my lord was commanded by Hashem to give the inheritance of our brother Tz'lofchad to his daughters. But if they are married into another tribe of the B'nei Yisra'el, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken away from the allotted portion of our inheritance. And when the Yovel of the B'nei Yisra'el comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they have married; and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestral tribe." (Bamidbar 36:2-4)

To this challenge, Mosheh responds immediately (without consulting with God - unlike his response

to the daughters of Tz'lofchad):

Then Mosheh commanded the B'nei Yisra'el according to the word of Hashem, saying, "The descendants of the tribe of Joseph are right in what they are saying. This is what Hashem commands concerning the daughters of Tz'lofchad, 'Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married'..."

From a straight reading of these verses, it is clear that Mosheh had already been commanded regarding the matrimonial limitation to be imposed on the daughters of Tz'lofchad (and he did not turn to God for more instruction at this point) - but he delayed presenting them until the chieftains approached him. (Alternatively, we could posit that the entire Halakhic schema was presented as one to Mosheh and, from him, to the tribe - but that it was, for some reason, related in the Torah's narrative as separate - and separated - incidents. In any case, the question is the same, to wit:)

Why are these two presentations isolated from each other?

## II

### B'NEI GAD AND B'NEI RE'UVEN

Another question of "placement" may be asked regarding the other significant "land-allotment challenge" at the end of Bamidbar. Chapter 32 is devoted to the "doubled condition" made with the members of the tribes of Gad and Re'uvan (and, later on, a few Menashe-ite families. Two interesting side points, beyond the scope of this shiur, relate to the role of this tribe to the end of Bamidbar. First of all, why did they jump on the Gad-Re'uvan "bandwagon" in the middle of the negotiations with Mosheh? Second, note that they are the tribe of Tz'lofchad; thus, they are involved in all of the "land-allotment" issues at the end of Bamidbar...something worth investigating).

B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvan had a lot of cattle and found the East Bank of the Jordan to be plentiful for their needs - and they approached Mosheh, asking him to be allowed to remain there, without crossing over the Jordan river. Mosheh ultimately "struck a bargain" with them: If they would agree to be at the vanguard of the fighting force in Eretz Yisra'el, leaving their families and cattle behind while they fought, they would be allowed to inherit on the East Bank. Besides the fascinating Halakhic discussions revolving around the "doubled condition" (see Mishnah Kiddushin 3:4, the discussion in the Bavli ad loc. and in Rambam, Ishut Ch. 6), there is simply a question about chronology/sequence here. The land which these two (plus) tribes chose to inherit was the land formerly occupied by Sichon and Og. We read about the successful wars against these two mighty kings at the end of Parashat Hukat - back in Chapter 22. Why didn't B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvan approach Mosheh then? Or, alternatively, why is their approach and subsequent negotiations recorded here?

We will try to answer each of these "placement" questions with a common approach - one which will also serve as a (hopefully) fitting Siyyum to our study of Sefer Bamidbar. First - a much more basic question about the Sefer.

### III

#### LEKHTTEIKH AHARAI BAMIDBAR - ?

Throughout Sefer Bamidbar, we are given one basic picture of the B'nei Yisra'el (both the generation of the Exodus and their children, the generation of the conquest). It is not a pretty picture, as we read of one sin after the other, one complaint after the other. There is very little - it seems - to recommend this nation, based on the narratives in Bamidbar. The only positive remarks about them come - perhaps surprisingly, perhaps not - from the arch enemy, the prophet Bil'am.

Several of the events about which we read - notably the incident with the scouts ("spies") the Korach rebellion and the incident at Shittim (Ba'al P'or) - lead to explicit Divine threats to destroy the people (or so it seems to Mosheh - see Bamidbar 16:21-22 and Rabbenu Hannanel ad loc.). Even though each of these threats was averted, the "mega-question" must be asked:

How did the B'nei Yisra'el survive the desert? How were we not consumed by our own sins?

In order to address this question, we must first review the basic events of Sefer Bamidbar and note the division of the Sefer:

A: Chapters 1-10:

Establishment of the Relationship between the tribes and the Mishkan and readiness to march into Eretz Yisra'el.

1-4: Census

1-2: General Census

3-4: Levite Census

5-6: Assorted Laws relating to Sanctity of the Camp

7: Dedication of the Mishkan

8-10: Preparation for leaving Sinai

8: Sanctification of the Levi'im

9 (1-14): Celebration of Pesach, Institution of Pesach Sheni

9 (15-23): Description of the 'Anan

10 (1-10): The Trumpets of Assembly

10 (11-28): Beginnings of Travel

10 (29-34): Invitation to Hovav

10 (35-36): Misplaced Parashah (see Rav Soloveitchik's shiur)

B. Chapters 11-25: "The Troubles"

11-12: Challenges of Leadership

11:1-3: Mit'onenim ("complainers")

11:4-35: Mit'avim ("lusts")

12: Mosheh, Miriam and Aharon (Lashon haRa')

13-14: Scouts ("Spies")

13 - 14:39: M'raglim (Scouts)

14:40 - 45: Ma'pilim (those who tried to enter the Land prematurely)

[15: Various Laws]

16-17: Korach

[18: Laws of Gifts given to Levi'im and Kohanim]

[19: Laws of The Red Heifer]

20 - 21:10: Dissolution of Leadership

20:1: Death of Miriam

20:2-13: "Mei M'rivah" - the decree against Mosheh and Aharon

[20:14-21: Edom]

20:22-29: Death of Aharon

[21:1-3: K'na'ani War]

21:4-10: Complaints, the Snakes and the Copper Serpent

[21:11 - 22:1: War with Sichon and Og]

[22:2-24:25: Bil'am]

25: Ba'al P'or

25:1-6: The Sin and the Plague

25:7-15: Pinchas

25:16-18: God's command to avenge the seduction

[As can be seen, this section is overwhelmingly represented by stories of challenge, rebellion and

sin. Those sections which do not fit this category have been bracketed; the reasons for their inclusion in this part of Bamidbar are generally local and deserve a separate treatment.]

C: Chapters 26-36:

Establishment of the Relationship between the tribes and their places in Eretz Yisra'el.

(Note the similarities between this section and section A. The interested reader is directed to Aviah Hakohen's shiur on this topic, which can be found in Megadim 9:27-40)

26: Census

27:1-11: Daughters of Tz'lofchad and Laws of Inheritance

27:12-23: Appointment of Yehoshua' as Mosheh's successor

[28-30: Various Laws

28-29: "T'midin uMusafin" (regular and holiday offerings)

30: "N'darim" (vows)]

31: War with Midian

32: Negotiations with B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven

33:1-49: Travelogue

33:50-35:34: Laws relating to Conquest

33:50-56: Destruction of Pagan Worship-sites

34:1-15: Borders of the Land

34:16-29: Naming of Tribal Representatives for Division of Land

35:1-8: Levite Cities

35:9-34: Cities of Refuge

36: Interaction with Chieftains of Menasheh

Now that we have seen the basic division of the Sefer - we may also find some information which will help us answer our "larger" question.

#### IV

#### METHODOLOGY NOTE: CHIASMUS AND BOOKENDS

As we discussed at length in an earlier shiur, it is possible to discern a chiastic literary structure ("ABCBA") in many sections of Tanakh. Without going into the many details of how this may be found

in Bamidbar (the reader is again referred to the article by Hakohen, cited above), there is one piece of the chiasmus which will help us understand an underlying theme in Sefer Bamidbar.

If we accept the notion that the first and third sections ("Before" and "After" the Troubles) are chiastically related, it follows that the events at the end of the first section should be mirrored at the beginning of the third section.

One more bit of methodology before proceeding:

One of the basic assumptions of this shiur is that the Torah utilizes linguistic associations, made by either repeating a phrase several times in one narrative or by using a relatively rare word or phrase in two places, serving as a link. The Torah informs us much more about the relationship between the two linguistically-related narratives (or legal sections) than just the words - each can inform about the other, and the comparison can lead to significant contrasts.

One clear example of this was dealt with in this year's shiur on Parashat Balak. The Torah clearly creates an association between the Bil'am/donkey trip and the Avraham/donkey trip ("The Akedah"). By setting up this comparison, the Torah is able to subtly demonstrate the wide gulf that separates Avraham from Bil'am (see Avot 5:19).

This type of association has a source in the world of Halakhic exegesis: "Gezerah Shavah". When two areas of law employ a common phrase which is either (seemingly) superfluous or is a relatively rare use of those words, associations may be made which allow us to apply the known legal parameters, obligations and restrictions of one area to the other. For instance, the Torah uses the verb L\*K\*cH (lit. "take") when describing betrothal: "If a man shall Yikach (take) a woman..." (Devarim 24:1). The Torah uses a similar verb in describing Avraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah (B'resheet 23:13). The Rabbis were able to use this association to infer that money is a valid form of Kiddushin (betrothal). In other words, what we know about one instance (Avraham) of Lekichah(money), we can apply to the second (marriage) ambiguously presented source.

In much the same way, if we can identify two narratives which employ rare phrases or words (for example), this may indicate that the two are meant to be linked and viewed as a unit - or each against the backdrop of the other.

## **V** REVERSING THE DIRECTION OF LEGAL TRANSMISSION

We are accustomed to a "top-down" (or "Top-down") from of legal transmission - God speaks to Mosheh, instructing him to transmit the information to the B'nei Yisra'el.

There are two instances where this direction is reversed - and they are both found in Sefer Bamidbar.

In Chapter 9 (near the end of the first section):

Now there were certain people who were unclean through touching a corpse, so that they could not keep the Pesach on that day. They came before Mosheh and Aharon on that day, and said to him, "Although we are unclean through touching a corpse, Lamah Nigara' (why must we be kept) from presenting Hashem's offering at its appointed time among the B'nei Yisra'el?" Mosheh spoke to them, "Wait, so that I may hear what Hashem will command concerning you." (Bamidbar 9:6-8)

In this case, Mosheh had reminded the people that they should bring the Pesach offering (it was one year since the Exodus). Several people approached him with their problem - on the one hand, they were impure and unable to participate in the offering; yet, they did not want to be left out of the national celebration. Instead of God initiating the instruction, the initiative came from these people who despaired of being left out of the congregation.

God's response affirmed their position, and the laws of the "Second Pesach" (Pesach Sheni) were given.

Near the beginning of the third section of Bamidbar, we find a curiously similar interaction. Mosheh is about to distribute the Land, via the lottery, to the tribes.

Enter the daughters of Tz'lofchad:

"Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against Hashem in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away (Lamah yigara') from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." (Bamidbar 27:3-4)

Again, the initiative came from individuals who were concerned that as a result of the normative legislation, some level of inclusion will be threatened (in the first case, their inclusion among the people; in this one, the integrity of their father's house within the tribe).

Again, God's response affirms their basic position - daughters inherit their father's estate if there are no sons.

Note also the use of the rare root G\*R\*A' in both of these stories. It means "to be left out" and underscores the concerns of both groups. Note that the only other contexts where it appears in legalistic literature (besides Bamidbar 36 - see below) is in a husband's obligations to his wife (Sh'mot 21:10) and in the prohibitions against diminishing any of the Mitzvot (D'varim 4:2, 13:1). The integrity of the family, as well as God's word, must be maintained and not diminished.

These "bookends" may help us understand the nature of Sefer Bamidbar and answer our earlier question - since they frame the middle section of the Sefer. First - one introductory note.

## VI

## REDEMPTION DEMANDS UNITY

When Mosheh was a young man in Egypt, he went out to see how his brothers were faring. When he saw the harsh treatment one was receiving at the hand of an Egyptian taskmaster, Mosheh slew the Egyptian. The next day, Mosheh went out and found two of his brothers fighting. He was discouraged and tried to keep them from hurting (or even threatening) each other. The Midrash is sensitive to Mosheh's concerns and casts them in a prescient light:

"Mosheh was afraid and said: 'How did this matter become known?'" He said to them: "You are guilty of Lashon haRa' (gossip - for how did these two Hebrews find out that he had saved the life of another Hebrew by killing the Egyptian?) - how will you be redeemed?" (Midrash Tanhuma Sh'mot #10).

Mosheh was distressed because at the beginning of his mission to lead the B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt, he noted their fractiousness - fighting and gossiping. This concerned him because he felt that such a people would never be successfully redeemed. In other words, regardless of whatever other merit is necessary to earn God's salvation, if the people do not get along with each other, there is no hope.

On the other hand, the Midrash tells us, no matter how low the B'nei Yisra'el sink in their ritual behavior, as long as they stand united, nothing can defeat them:

Rebbi says: Great is peace, such that even if Yisra'el are worshipping foreign gods but they are at peace with each other, God declares (as if to say) "I cannot defeat them", as it says: Ephraim is joined to idols - let him alone. (Hoshea 4:17). However, if their hearts are divided [against each other], what does the verse say? Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. (Hoshea 10:2). (Midrash B'resheet 38:6).

Note also the famous statement in the Yerushalmi:

R. Aba bar Kahana said: The generation of David were all righteous, but, since they were guilty of infighting, they would go out to war and be defeated...however, the generation of Ah'av were idolaters, but, since were not guilty of infighting, they would go out to war and prevail. (JT Peah 1:1)

## VII

### THE "SINS OF THE DESERT"

Guided by the great desire of inclusion in national and tribal celebrations and holdings, as expressed by the impure men and by the daughters of Tz'lofchad, we can now re-examine the many sins that make up the bulk of the middle of Bamidbar and understand the success of B'nei Yisra'el to "come out of it alive".

As terrible as some of these sins were, culminating in the vile idolatry of P'or, we never find the B'nei



Yisra'el turning against each other. Indeed, the reaction to the "bad news" of the scouts was "let us appoint a captain and return to Egypt". As awful and self-defeating as that plan was, it reflected an awareness of common destiny - instead of scattering or settling in, the people's desire to remain together (which could have been accomplished, according to this hysterical outburst, even in Egypt) was manifest and constant.

We even look at the most direct attack to Mosheh's leadership - the Korach rebellion. What was his rallying cry? Kol ha'Edah kulam K'doshim - ("The whole congregation is holy" - see our shiur on this topic) - a misguided and misleading populism, no doubt, but one which served to unite the people, rather than turn them against each other.

We can now respond to the "large" question. B'nei Yisra'el were successful in surviving a sinful period in the desert because their sins did not turn them against each other and they seemingly avoided Sin'at Hin'am (groundless hatred) and the like.

We can now turn to our more detailed questions, focused on the end of the Sefer.

## VIII

### THE REQUEST OF B'NEI GAD AND B'NEI RE'UVEN

We can now understand the terrible threat posed by [Mosheh's initial understanding of] the request made by B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven. Since the saving grace of the people throughout the desert was their unity and sense of common destiny and mutual responsibility, the "abandonment" of the B'nei Yisra'el by these two tribes was a dire threat indeed. (See Yehoshua Ch. 22 for the denouement of the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven agreement; note how seriously the leaders of the B'nei Yisra'el respond to their separation.)

On this level, the most reasonable place for their request would have been at the end of Parashat Hukat, immediately after the defeat of Sichon and Og. It would have been appropriately placed there if these two tribes had not demonstrated their willingness and desire to maintain a common destiny with the rest of the B'nei Yisra'el by forming the vanguard of the conquest. It would have belonged to the "Troubles" section of Bamidbar.

That is not how events unfolded. Just like the impure men and the daughters of Tz'lofchad, the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven initiated a request for inclusion (note that they presented the "compromise" plan to Mosheh, not the reverse. This is similar to the inverted order of legal instruction as seen in the two "bookend" cases).

As such, this Parashah belongs "away from the troubles" - in the third section of Bamidbar. Instead of viewing their request as another "sin of the desert", we understand it as an opportunity to demonstrate even greater inclusion and national responsibility.

[There is another reason why the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven delayed their request until now - it

was only after the success against Midian that they felt that the beginning of the conquest was underway - note the common Halutz in both the Midian war and the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven compromise].

[One interesting note about the negotiations between Mosheh and the two tribes. As S'forno points out at Bamidbar 32:28 and 33, Mosheh wanted the two tribes to delay their "conquest" of the East Bank until after the conquest in the promised Land. They insisted on taking the Land now, and Mosheh conceded this point, in order to avoid further dispute with them.

What was the reason for this dispute? We could answer based on the notion of Kibbush Yachid. As the Rambam (MT T'rumat 1:3) points out, any land outside of the "commanded borders" which is conquered, even if done by the King and with the support of the people and the Sanhedrin, is considered Kibbush Yachid (individual conquest) if it was done before the complete conquest of the Land within the commanded borders. Land which is the result of Kibbush Yachid is only quasi-sanctified with the sanctity of Eretz Yisra'el.

Therefore, if the two tribes took the Land now, it would forever remain Hutz la'Aretz - outside of the borders of Eretz Yisra'el. On the other hand, if they waited to "take" it until after the complete conquest, it would be an expansion of Eretz Yisra'el and would have the full holiness of the Land.

Mosheh had every reason to want these two tribes to wait for their conquest; Mosheh knew he was to be buried in this area (see Bamidbar 27:12-13). If their conquest waited, he would end up buried in Eretz Yisra'el - but only if they waited. Nevertheless, in order to avoid further dispute, Mosheh ceded on this point and allowed them to take the Land in advance of their conquest of the West Bank. A tremendous bit of "Mussar" about how far we should be willing to go to avoid "Mah'loket"!!

## IX

### MENASHEH'S CHIEFTAINS REVISITED

We can now answer our first question with ease: Why did Mosheh wait to transmit the final bit of information regarding the daughters of Tz'lofchad and their matrimonial limitations?

This Parashah is, indeed, a perfect conclusion to the book of Bamidbar. Although Mosheh had already been given the instructions regarding these details, it took the approach of the chieftains with their concern for tribal integrity (note, again, the use of the rare root G\*R\*A' - see above) to merit the transmission of this law. There were conflicting concerns here: The integrity of the family within the tribe (the claim of the daughters) as against the integrity of the tribe within the nation (the claim of the chieftains). The response could only come when, just like the impure men, the daughters of Tz'lofchad and the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven before them, the chieftains of Menasheh were willing to approach Mosheh to demonstrate their concern for the integrity of the group.

## X

## POSTSCRIPT

This sense of common destiny - what Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l refers to as B'rit Yi'ud, is the secret to Jewish survival - and what allowed us to successfully enter and conquer Eretz Yisra'el. As we enter the nine days of mourning for our Beit haMikdash, let us remember that, in the words of Rav Kook zt"l: Just as the Temple was destroyed due to Sin'at Hinam (groundless hatred), it will only be rebuilt through Ahavat Hinam (groundless love).

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