

TIME AND SPACE

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we begin the Sefer [Book] of Bamidbar. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe Bamidbar [in the wilderness of] Sinai, in the Ohel Moed [Tent of Meeting the Mishkan], on the first day of the second month of the second year of the exodus from Egypt. [1:1]"

The Ohr HaChaim points out an interesting inconsistency in the posuk [verse]. The posuk mentions both the location and the time that this took place. By location, the posuk moves from the general to the detailed, first telling of the wider, general wilderness of Sinai and then pinpointing the actual detailed location of the Ohel Moed. However, when discussing the point in time of this encounter, the posuk moves from the detailed to the general. First the day, then the month and then the year.

He explains that the posuk was written in this way in order to teach us a very profound lesson. One of Hashem's names is Makome, meaning place. We've explained before that each of Hashem's names describe a different aspect of Hashem as He relates to us. Why is Hashem referred to as Makome? Hashem isn't 'found' in any place. Place is 'found' by Hashem. Hashem created the concept of place and actively maintains the existence of any place as we know it. Therefore, every place is secondary to Him.

As such, the most general place that one can describe is Hashem's presence, manifested by the Ohel Moed, the Mishkan. Any other place that is mentioned is by definition detailed and specific as compared to that. The posuk is therefore moving from detailed to general both by place and by time. By place, it first mentions the relatively detailed place within the creation, Midbar Sinai, followed by the general Ohel Moed. By time, it also moves from the detailed day on to the more general month and year.

With Hashem being the Makome, the ultimate 'place,' why was it necessary to tell us that the place he spoke to us was in the Midbar, the wilderness?

We have so many modern conveniences to make our lives easier, yet our lives just get busier and more complicated. When the 'walk-man' came out (it feels like it was a few hundred years ago!) one of my friends made an interesting observation. He said that with the constant onslaught of information being thrown at us, the only time a person has some time to think is when he goes out for a walk. Comes the walk-man and that little island of solitude has also been invaded. A few short years later, that walk-man seems quaint compared to what we're hit with nowadays. Cell phones ringing, beepers beeping, Internet connections in elevators keeping you abreast of the stock

market's latest gyration. There is virtually no time to think.

For the past number of summers I've been running a boys sleep away camp. When we first started there was a phone in the office but not in the house where my family and I were staying. The inconvenience of needing to run to the office when I needed to make a call was more than compensated by the pleasure of not being held hostage by the almighty ring. Such a setup allows for time to think, time to connect to others and time to connect to oneself.

The Torah was given in the wilderness. Without all the man-made stimuli, a person can finally experience the incredible world that surrounds us. The fingerprints of the Creator become so evident when they aren't smudged by metal and concrete. A person can finally be receptive to the calls of G-d that come from around him and from inside of him.

The Midbar was the place where the Torah was given and a person must carve out a virtual Midbar in his everyday life in order to reconnect to that Torah.

The Mishna [Avos 6:2] teaches: Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Every single day a Heavenly voice emanates from Mount Horeb proclaiming, "Woe to the people because of their insult to the Torah."

It is possible to 'hear' this voice reverberating throughout the creation. It seems that Rabi Yehoshua ben Levi did. But in order to hear it, one must tone down all of the other noise.

The Baal Shem Tov teaches that even if we don't hear the voice, our neshama [soul] does. Whenever we have thoughts of making a greater commitment or trying to be truer to our ideals, it is our neshama, having heard this voice, that is prompting us.

Every heavenly proclamation, every exposure to holiness affects a person. It makes one more open to connecting to one's essence.

One of the boys that recently joined the yeshiva complained to me that the spiritual attempts he's making aren't doing anything for him. His prayers feel empty and even a trip to the Kotel [Western Wall] doesn't move him at all.

He's had a history of having been spoken down to, both at home and at school, as a result of his not living up to the standards that were expected of him. His method of cutting the barrages short was to simply agree with whatever was being shouted at him. "You're no good!" "You're right, I'm no good." He decided early on that arguing wouldn't accomplish anything besides prolonging his agony.

I explained to him that there's a tremendous difference between him not feeling anything and it not accomplishing anything. The diatribes that were directed at him caused layers and layers of protective armor to build up around him. Those seem to block him from feeling anything even when he now tries to re-involve himself in Judaism. However, even though he might not feel the holiness that he's now exposing himself to, each exposure is actually peeling away, layer by layer, the armor

that he's built up. It is accomplishing tremendously and it is just a matter of time until, once the armor will be totally pierced, that he will feel it.

The heavenly voice reverberates around the world and around our souls--may the clutter of our lives and contradictory voices not drown it out.

Good Shabbos,

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