

SHAVUOTH CONNECTION

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

The first two and one half Parshios of Bamidbar (Numbers) are all about organization. As explained in previous issues, the historic and chronological setting of Sefer Bamidbar was post-Sinai-Golden Calf and pre-Miraglim (Spies). It means that the Jews were poised to enter the land of Israel within a few short months. It means that the generation of the desert would not have perished in the desert. It means that Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam would have led the Jews across the Jordan River. It means that the battle against the Seven Nations occupying Canaan at that time would have been fought and won in a single day, or not fought at all! In essence, it means that at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar the Jews were readying themselves to enter the land and usher in the Messianic era. Therefore, the detailed description of the tribal organization and census presented in the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar is a description of what should have been the triumphant entrance of the Jews into the promised land of their forefathers.

In so far as the yearly schedule for the reading of the Parshios is concerned, the beginning of Bamidbar is always read before Shavuoth. Why the juxtaposition between the beginning of Bamidbar and Shavuoth?

On Shavuoth we read the story of Russ, the great-grandmother of Dovid Hamelech (king). We do so because tradition has it that King David was born and died on Shavuoth; therefore, in honor of King David we read the story of his ancestral origins - the story of Russ and Boaz. What is the connection between Russ, Boaz, Dovid and Sefer Bamidbar?

First the juxtaposition of Sefer Bamidbar with Shavuoth.

The seminal moment in the history of the Jewish people was Mattan Torah (the giving of the Torah). That event defined who we were and who we were intended to be. As G-d said, "You are to be My Kingdom of Priests and Holy Nation." The designation of priesthood, holiness, and nationality was to convey responsibility and obligation on the Jews to serve G-d by being teachers and role models for the other nations. In order to be teachers and role models for the other nations G-d had to give us extensive and detailed instructions as to how He wanted us to behave. The Torah, consisting of the Oral Law and the Written Law, were the extensive and detailed instructions that G-d gave the Jews at Mattan Torah.

The relationship between the Jews and the other nations is very specific. It is a relationship of leader and follower, teacher and student. However, the goal of that relationship is to teach through word

and example that there is a G-d Who created the universe and Who expects all of humanity to behave in accordance with His instructions.

The relationship between the Jewish nation and the other nations is not of a king and subject. We were not intended by G-d to be the "kings of the world." We were not intended to "dominate" the world or conquer its inhabitants. G-d's plan was and is for the Jews to live on a relatively miniscule stretch of real estate at the edge of the Mediterranean and create a perfect society reflecting the ideals and values of His intentions. From within that "perfect society" would go forth "Torah from Tzion and the word of G-d from Yerushalayim."

As mentioned earlier, Sefer Bamidbar began as the Jews were poised to enter into Israel and introduce the Messianic era. The miracles of the Exodus, the spectacle of Revelation, the ignoble failure of the Golden Calf, the majestic constancy of the Mishkan, and the time spent camped around Mt. Sinai engaged in a national process of introspection and Teshuvah (repentance) had readied the nation to assume their Divinely ordained obligations and responsibilities. The Jews were ready to become the teachers of the world. They were ready to become "A light unto the nations."

The national census, the designation and job descriptions of the Kohanim and the Leviyim, and the positioning of each Tribe for both travel as well as encampment were intended to accomplish four things.

- a) Show each person and family unit that he was counted and essential in the eyes of G-d and of the nation.
- b) Present the Kohanim and Leviyim as teachers and role models to the rest of the Jewish people as how a Jew should live.
- c) Show the balance and integration of talent and purpose for each of the Tribes in relation to each other and to the whole of the nation.
- d) Present the entire package to the Seven Nations inhabiting the Promised Land and give them the choice.

1. Join as support staff to accomplish the mission of the Jews. This would demand that they recognize and accept the rightful claim of the Jews to the land and its intended purpose as the training ground for a perfect human society.
2. Leave the land and find somewhere else to settle.
3. Remain on the land, fight the Jewish claim of inheritance, and be utterly destroyed in the process.

The juxtaposition of Shavuoth to the start of Sefer Bamidbar is now clear. Mattan Torah defined our mission and Sefer Bamidbar should have been the moment when we began to realize our complete destiny as the world's teachers. Even though the sin of the Miraglim forced that destiny into a circuitous journey through many centuries of trial and persecution, the yearly calendar of Yomim

Tovim (holidays) and the schedule of the reading of the Parshios reminds us each year that Shavuoth is far more than blintzes and cheese cake. Shavuoth is intended to celebrate the anniversary of the designation and acceptance of our destiny to live a life according to the detailed instructions of G-d's Torah and thereby create the perfect human society for rest of the nations and ourselves.

Dovid Hamelech was Melech Hamoshiach (The Anointed King). He was the one whom G-d had designated from the beginning of creation to begin the final process of redemption. (The story of Adam and Dovid's seventy years.) Dovid was the quintessential king. He was warrior and poet, singer and administrator. He was passionate and devoted, troubled and elated. He understood his purpose as a Jew and as a king. He led men into victorious battle and hob-knobbed with the other kings of his time. Dovid's desire was to serve his G-d and his people. "Only one thing do I ask... Let me dwell in the house of G-d all the days of my life..." Born on Shavuoth and died on Shavuoth, Dovid's life was a living example of a person committed to being an Eved Hashem (servant of G-d). As such, King David's gifted seventy years of life were used to study G-d's Torah and mold the nation and society that would be "a light onto the nations,"

The Melech Hamoshiach is a product of two equally important factors: a) The personal initiative and devotion of the man himself; and b) The readiness and worthiness of the Jewish people. It is important to note that the reigns of Dovid and Shlomo (Solomon) were the culmination of those two factors. In spite of the seemingly tumultuous history of the Shoftim (Judges) the 350 years culminated in the being of Dovid and the building of the Bais Hamikdash by Shlomo. It was the fulfillment of the mandate, "And you should be for Me a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." It was the fulfillment of Shavuoth! (It also means that both the king and the people were ready and deserving to attempt the Messianic age!)

Where did Dovid come from? What are the circumstances that wove their way into the tapestry of redemption?

The story of Russ and Boaz is the tale of two individuals who embraced their personal destinies as G-d's servants. Their sense of obligation was so strong that nothing could stand in the way of living life according to G-d's Torah. Russ, as the former princess of Moav, chose a life of poverty rather than riches and power. Boaz, the Shofet (Judge) of his generation, willingly embraced a woman who was only appropriate for him because of the Mitzvah "to redeem his brother's name."

From a social point of view Russ was the most inappropriate wife for Boaz; however, because of her personal commitment to Torah and her extraordinary sense of humility, as well as Boaz's absolute commitment to the word of G-d and his personal humility, their shiduch set in motion the birth of redemption.

The beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, the Yom Tov of Shavuoth, the birth and death of Dovid Hamelech, and the story of Russ and Boaz are all linked to the Jewish mission of being the world's role models and teachers. One need not set out to "teach the world". All one needs to do is follow G-d's

commandments. If we do so individually and collectively the rest of the world will know about it and come to learn from us.

The Pasuk in Divarim says, "And the nations of the world will see that the name of G-d is upon you." The Talmud in explains that the thing they will see is the Tefilin Shel Rosh (phylacteries). The Tefilin in and of themselves are certainly worthy of note and do reflect the name of G-d with its knotted Daled (Hebrew alphabet) and Yud and the embossed Shin; however, the Talmud's intention is far more than that. The prayer that we recite before donning our Tefilin focuses us on the binding of our hearts and minds in service to G-d. That is what the other nations will "see." More so than the Tefilin themselves will be the obvious personal commitment of a nation who serve their G-d according to the detailed dictates of G-d's Torah. We will not have to advertise. We will not have to stand at street corners. All we need to do is follow the dictates of the Torah.

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The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
