

MAN PLANS AND G-D LAUGHS/SHAVUOS REENACTMENT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1077 -- Can A Father Give Son His Position (Rabbi/Chazan) While Still Alive? Good Shabbos

Man Plans and G-d Laughs

Parshas Bamidbar contains one of several instances in the Torah where the Jewish people are enumerated by *shevet* [Tribe]. In addition to this census at the beginning of the Wilderness sojourn, there is another census towards the end of Sefer Bamidbar, at the conclusion of the 40 years of desert "wandering." For this reason, in Rabbinic literature, the Book of Bamidbar is referred to as the "*Chomesh HaPikudim*" [the Chumash dealing with enumerations]. It is for the same reason that in English (which most likely comes from the Latin), Bamidbar is called "Numbers" -- because it begins and ends with counting.

The Jewish people, as a whole, were counted from the ages of twenty to sixty. However, the Tribe of Levi was not included in this tally. The Levites were counted separately, from when they were one month old. The Ramban notes that even though Levi was counted from thirty days and up, rather than from the age of twenty years and up (as were the other tribes), there were only 22,000 Levites. If you would limit the age range of the Levites to the ages of thirty years to fifty years, there were only 8,500 of them! [See Rashi to Bamidbar 4:49]

The Ramban wonders how it was that even with counting the Levites from the age of one month old, their numbers did not reach even half of the size of the next smallest tribe (who was counted from the age of twenty years and above). The Ramban says the explanation cannot be that the Levites had a "dangerous profession," being that it was their job to carry the Aron [Holy Ark] and other *keylim* of the *mishkan* [Tabernacle Vessels]. Granted that a person in that profession who did not have the right intentions when carrying out his sacred duties would be smitten by Heaven, however, at the time of this counting, the Levites were not yet assigned to those potentially dangerous tasks.

The Ramban speculates that this discrepancy in the population of the Tribe of Levi compared to the other Tribes, provides support for the Rabbinic tradition that the Levi was not subjected to the bitter experience of Egyptian bondage. The rest of the Jewish people, who were subjected to "back breaking labor and embittered lives," were compensated by Heaven with the blessing mentioned at

the beginning of the Book of Shemos: "But as much as they (the Egyptians) would afflict it (the Jewish nation), so it would increase and so it would spread out..." [Shemos 1:12]. The miraculous phenomenon of "six births at one time" accounts for the unnatural population boom within the rest of the Jewish people. This miracle was performed for the tribes who were tortured by the Egyptian bondage. Hashem said to the Egyptians, as it were, "You think you can destroy the Jewish people -- let's see how successful you will be in that endeavor." This miracle did not apply to the tribe of Levi who were not enslaved and who increased in number strictly based on natural fertility rates.

We see one of the great truths of life from the Ramban: As the Yiddish expression goes – *A mensch tracht, un G-t lacht* [man thinks and G-d laughs]. If a statistician or a census taker were to estimate who is going to be the most populous tribe -- the tribe that endures terrible enslavement and persecution, or the tribe that lives in peace and does not need to work or suffer -- clearly the tribe that lives in peace will be projected to be by far the most populous tribe three or four generations later. For sure, they would say, *Shevet Levi* will be the most populous! However, it does not work like that. Hashem has His plans. That which we think should happen -- based on natural and logical projections -- is not necessarily going to be what actually occurs.

Rav Chaztkal Levenstein [1895-1974] writes that the biggest proof to this is that the second most populous tribe (after Yehudah) was Dan. Dan had a population of 62,700 people in the census. Dan himself had only one son (Chushim ben Dan), who was deaf. Binyomin had 10 sons. So anyone can do the math: One tribal patriarch had 10 sons and another had a single son who was hearing-impaired. Who is going to be more populous? "The plan of *Hashem* will be established." [Mishlei 19:21] Dan turns out to be the second most populous tribe, and the Tribe of Binyomin turns out to be just somewhere in the middle.

Man plans and G-d laughs. That is what we see from *Shevet Levi*, and that is what we see from *Shevet Dan*.

Shavuos: Reenactment Rather than Mere Commemoration

In a regular year, Parshas Bamidbar is always immediately prior to Shavuos. In fact, the Tur notes that this factor is part of the system by which the decision is made when to read two *parshios* on the same week (such as Acharei Mos and Kedoshim).

When we read the *Aseres HaDibros* [the 10 Sayings, which are commonly called the "Ten Commandments"], there are two sets of *trop* [cantillation notes] that are associated with these Biblical passages. The first is known as *ta'am elyon* [the upper notes] and the second is known as *ta'am tachton* [the lower notes]. When we read the *Aseres HaDibros* publically (i.e., with a minyan), as we do on the Yom Tov of Shavuos, we read them using the *ta'am elyon*. When someone is merely reviewing the Torah portion privately, he reads them with the *ta'am tachton*.

The Chizkuni writes that when we read the *Aseres HaDibros* on Shavuos, we read with *ta'am elyon* (what he calls the *neginos haGedolos* – the "large notes"). One of the distinguishing features of the

ta'am elyon is that it parses the associated *pesukim* into ten distinct "commandments" (something which is not apparent when reading with the *ta'am tachton*). For example, even though the prohibition against idolatry and the mitzvah to observe Shabbos (Commandments #2 and #4, respectively) each consist of multiple *pesukim*, the *sof pasuk* [end of sentence] note is ignored in the *ta'am elyon*, so that multiple *pesukim* are read as if they are one long *pasuk*, emphasizing that each group of *pesukim* is a single "commandment" within the *Aseres HaDibros*. Therefore, it is most appropriate that on Shavuot, which commemorates the giving of the *Aseres HaDibros*, the narration is read with these "upper notes".

The Chizkuni comments that in the month of *Shevat*, when we read Parshas Yisro, we read this same section containing the *Aseres HaDibros* with the *ta'am tachton*, such that the *pesukim* dealing with idolatry and the *pesukim* dealing with Shabbos are each read as four distinct *pesukim*.

This is an interesting custom -- which we in *Chutz L'Aretz*, to the best of my knowledge, do not follow. I am told that in Yerushalayim, where there is widespread practice to follow the *Minhagei haGra* [customs of the Vilna Gaon], they do read with *ta'am tachton* on Yisro, even *b'Tzibur* [publicly].

Regardless of our custom, the Chizkuni is informing us of a fantastic concept: *Krias HaTorah* on Shavuot is a reenactment of *Kabalas HaTorah*. On the original day of Shavuot, the Almighty gave us **Ten** "Commandments". So, when we read the Torah on Shavuot, we need to reenact the original scenario. Therefore, we read the Torah portion in a way that emphasizes that there were **ten dibros**. For this reason, on Shavuot we read "*Lo Sirtzach*" and "*Lo Sin'af*" (Thou shalt not murder and Thou shalt not commit adultery) as two separate *pesukim*; even though when reading those *pesukim* otherwise, we read them together. There is no such thing in the Torah as a two-word *pasuk*! In fact, according to the *ta'am tachton*, *Lo Sirtzach*; *Lo Sin'af*; *Lo Signov*; *Lo Sa'aneh b'Reyacha Ed Sheker* (commandments #6-9) are all read as a single *pasuk* [Shemos 20:13]. But on Shavuot we are not reading *pesukim*; we are reading **Ten** Commandments.

The Chizkuni adds (again, this is not our custom) that on Shavuot, when we read the *Aseres HaDibros*, we read it with the *Targum* [Aramaic translation] as well. This too, is part of the reenactment of the *Har Sinai* experience.

The question is, what was the source of the Chizkuni for these specific customs? I heard a tape of Rav Isaac Bernstein, who quoted something he heard from Rav Shlomo Fisher (a Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivas Itri, Yerushalayim) who apparently was a student of the Brisker Rav. Rav Fisher told the Brisker Rav that he has a Talmudic source for this Chizkuni. In the Gemara [Berachos 5a], Rav Shimon ben Lakish expounds the *pasuk* "...and I shall give you the Tablets of stone (*Luchos*) and the Torah, and the commandments (*Mitzvos*) that I have written (*asher kasavti*), to instruct them (*l'horosam*)" [Shemos 24:12]: *Luchos* – refers to the *Aseres HaDibros*; *Torah* – refers to Scripture; *Mitzvah* – refers to Mishna; "*asher kasavti*" – refers to *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim* [Prophets and Writings]; "*l'horosam*" refers to Talmud. This teaches that all of Torah, *Nevi'im*, *Kesuvim*, Mishna, and Talmud were all given to

Moshe at Sinai.

Rav Shlomo Fisher asks – why is "*Luchos*" (i.e., the *Aseres HaDibros*) listed separately as if it was not part of "*Torah*"? It must be, he says, that we see from this Gemara that there was a separate place for the *Aseres HaDibros*, independent of the rest of Torah. The *Ribono shel Olam* gave Moshe Rabbeinu on Har Sinai something called the *Aseres HaDibros* that must be related as **ten separate utterances**. The rest of the Torah is known as "*Mikra*" [Scripture]; but the *Aseres HaDibros* has its own status.

There is also another indication that the *Aseres HaDibros* is special. The Gemara says [Berachos 45a] that Rav Shimon ben Pazi taught, "How do we know that the one reading the *Targum* cannot raise his voice louder than that of the Torah reader? As it is written, 'Moshe would speak and G-d would respond to him **in a voice**.' [Shemos 19:19]. What is the meaning of the seemingly unnecessary words 'in a voice' at the end of that sentence? They teach that the Almighty would respond 'utilizing the same voice as Moshe.'"

This means that at the time of Revelation, Hashem uttered one Commandment and Moshe offered the *Targum* [interpretation]. Hashem spoke the four *pesukim* prohibiting idolatry as one utterance and that is why we need to read it as one commandment. As Moshe interpreted each utterance, so do we need to say *Targum* for each utterance. This is the Chizkuni's source for the Shavuot customs he quotes, because Shavuot is a reenactment of Revelation.

Rav Bernstein further quotes from a Rav Zev Wolfe Hildenheimer that the latter found a 750-year-old *Shavuot Machzor*, and in that *Machzor*, not only did the Torah reading include the *Aseres HaDibros*, but it also included the *Targum* for the *Aseres HaDibros* along with the reading. This answers one of the great questions of life: Why on earth, on Shavuot, do we recite *Akdamos* prior to the Torah reading? At six o'clock in the morning, when people can hardly keep their eyes open (following being up all night at a *Leil Shavuot Mishmor*), the *Baal Koreh* reads *Akdamos*. 99.9% of the people in shul do not have a clue about the meaning of *Akdamos* (even with an Art Scroll). Where did this come from? There is no comparable public reading the entire rest of the year!

The answer is that this came from the ancient Jewish custom that on Shavuot they read the Revelation narration including the *Aseres Hadibros* just as Hashem gave it to the Jewish people through Moshe, when they translated the entire section! As a preface to the *Targum* they were going to say during the Torah reading itself, they wrote something called *Akdamos Milin* [words of introduction]. This is how it happened on Har Sinai. This is the reason for *Akdamos*.

The question still is, when did it stop, such that we no longer read the *Targum* of the *Aseres HaDibros*, and we only say *Akdamos*? I don't know where or when that happened, but apparently it was sometime between 750 years ago and the modern era. But at least we understand the source.

Shavuot is a reenactment of *Kabbalas haTorah*. This is why the Abudrahm argues with the Rambam. The Rambam says that a person should **not** stand for the *Aseres HaDibros* (because we do not want to give the impression that some parts of Torah are more important than others). The Abudrahm

insists that we **should** stand during the public recitation of the Revelation narrative on Shavuot because "they **stood** beneath the mountain" [Shemos 19:17] and we reenact that scenario with all its details.

We do not merely commemorate the giving of the Torah on Shavuot, we try to make it as real as possible, involving a total reenactment. Just as on Pesach we try to see ourselves as if we are actually leaving Egypt that night; so too, on Shavuot, we try to see ourselves as if we are standing by Har Sinai, receiving the Torah that very day!

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Bamidbar is provided below:

- 013 Yerushalayim in Halacha
- 058 Going Up To Yerushalayim for Yom Tov: Does it Apply Today?
- 101 Teaching Torah to Women
- 147 Sefiras HaOmer, Shavuot & the International Dateline
- 194 Can One Charge for Teaching Torah?
- 240 An Early Start for Shavuot?
- 284 Birchas HaTorah
- 330 Sefer Rus and Its Halachic Implications
- 374 Bathing On Shabbos and Yom Tov
- 418 Shavuot Issues--Late Maariv--Learning All Night
- 462 May A Child Carry A Sefer On Shabbos
- 506 Shavuot: Two Days, She'cheyanu & Other Issues
- 550 Opening Cans on Shabbos & Yom Tov
- 594 Omer Davar B'Sheim Omro - Giving Proper Credit
- 638 Eruv and the Big City
- 682 Carrying on Yom Tov
- 726 Returning Pidyon Haben Money
- 770 Let Them Eat Cheesecake
- 814 Oy, The Eruv is Down, Now What?
- 858 Ms. Cohen for A Pidyon Haben?
- 902 Dancing on Yom Tov
- 946 The Beautiful Poem of Akdomus
- 989 The Mitzva of Talmud Torah - How Much - How Little?
- 1033 Conning Someone Out of A Mitzva

- 1077 Can A Father Give Son His Position (Rabbi/Chazan) While Still Alive?
- 1120 The Zohar vs Talmud Bavli: Whom Do We Pasken Like?
- 1162 Yahrtzeit/Yizkor Candles on Yom Tov – Is There A Problem?
- 1206 What Bracha on Cheesecake? Is It BH or BSD? And other Shavuos Issues
- 1250 Erev Shavuos on Shabbos
- 1294 When Should Women Light Candles for Shavuos?

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