



PARSHAS BEMIDBAR/SHAVUOS – YESHAYA NOSSON HEPNER

The Jewish calendar has been designed so that particular Sedros fall at certain times of the year. The Sedra of Nitzavim - and/or Vayelech - invariably coincides with the Shabbos before Rosh Hashono, and the Sedra of Bemidbar invariably coincides with the Shabbos before Shavuos. The Gemoro (Megillah 31b) explains the reason behind this. Both of the respective preceding Parshios, namely Ki Sovo and Bechukosai, list the terrible curses with which Hashem may punish Bnei Yisroel. We are warned that if we stray from the path of the Torah, horrendous retribution may be inflicted upon us (see Devorim 28:15-69 and Vayikro 26:14-41).

The Gemoro explains that Chazal wanted to “leave behind” the curses together with the outgoing year, starting the new year on a positive note. In addition, a Sedra is interposed between the curses and Rosh Hashono, so that the new year is truly distanced from these depressing *pesukim*. The Gemoro then asks that this is understandable regarding Rosh Hashono, but how can this logic be applied to Shavuos? Is Shavuos also the start of a new year?! The Gemoro answers that Shavuos marks the ‘Rosh Hashono’ for fruit trees; and therefore it is equally unfitting to end the agricultural year on a negative note. To avoid this, Chazal deliberately placed the Sedra of Nitzavim before Rosh Hashono, and the Sedra of Bemidbar before Shavuos. These two Sedros fulfil the role of ‘buffer zones’ before the two types of Rosh Hashono.

The Midrash Rabbo (Bemidbar 1:7) explains that Parshas Bemidbar teaches us an important lesson in our attitude towards learning Torah. The opening *posuk* of the Sedra reads: “And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai”. The Midrash comments that a person can only be successful in learning Torah if he regards himself as a desert.

This esoteric statement is explained by the Eitz Yosef. To learn Torah successfully, a person must subdue his physical requirements in order to make spiritual progress. Just as an arid desert has little to offer by way of luxuries and worldly comforts, so too a person’s Torah learning should be unhampered by material distractions. Furthermore, a person must approach Torah with humility, thereby enabling him to learn from others, as well as to impart Torah knowledge to others. This important lesson must be fully absorbed before we can be ready to accept the Torah on Shavuos.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt”l adds that many Jews may feel unable to learn Torah for a variety of reasons. Some may believe that they are not intellectual, some are too pre-occupied, while others may think that their Torah learning is of poor quality. In Parshas Bemidbar, the Torah tells us how Hashem counted Bnei Yisroel yet again, despite having previously carried out earlier censuses. Rashi explains that this is a display of Hashem’s tremendous love towards Bnei Yisroel, in that He counts us repeatedly, as a person might count his precious jewels.

In addition to placing a buffer between Parshas Bechukosai and Shavuos, the message in Parshas Bemidbar comes across clearly: Every Jew is infinitely beloved to Hashem. As such, every Jew’s Torah learning, utterly irrespective of its quality or depth, brings tremendous joy to Him. Let nobody think that their Torah learning is inferior in the eyes of Hashem - after all, does He not view each of us as His precious jewels?

As we approach a re-enactment of Matan Torah, Parshas Bemidbar reminds us of this concept. May we all merit to receive the Torah this year with renewed enthusiasm!