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DAF KESHER

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Harav Yehudah Pinchas Ben Yitzchak Isaac ז"ל

DVAR TORAH WHERE WAS MOSHE?

The Torah describes, in great detail, Yitro's reunion with Moshe, their conversations, the sacrifices Yitro offered, and the great feast that followed. "Aharon and all of the Elders of Israel came to eat bread with Yitro before G-d" (Shemot 18:12). Even though the main purpose of Yitro's journey was to meet Moshe, Moshe's name is conspicuously missing from the description of the meal. Aharon his brother was at the feast, as were all of the Elders of Israel, Moshe's disciples – but where was Moshe?

Even though a number of commentators simply answer that Moshe wasn't mentioned because the feast was in Moshe's tent; the Mechilta (Yitro Parshah 1), quoted by Rashi (Shemot 18:12), answers differently. Moshe wasn't mentioned as a participant in the feast because he was standing and waiting on everyone else.

The Mechilta follows with an anecdote that took place thirty-three generations later, at a Tannaitic feast. Rabban Gamliel, the Nasi, the leader of the entire Jewish community, and one of the greatest of the Tannaim, made a feast for the rabbis and was standing and waiting on them. The other rabbis were speaking among themselves, and some voiced how inappropriate it was that the Nasi, who was akin to royalty, was serving them. But Rabbi Yehoshua justified Rabban Gamliel's conduct. He reasoned: Avraham Avinu, who was a "נשיא – אלקים – a Prince of G-d" stood over the three nomads and served them (Bereishit 18:8). If it was legitimate for Avraham to serve the nomads, who appeared to be idol worshippers, this was certainly the case for Rabban Gamliel, who served the Tannaim.

Rabbi Tzaddok then said to the rest of the rabbis: "We have found One greater than both Avraham and Rabban Gamliel Who serves people." They asked: "Who are you referring to?" He replied: "It is the Shechinah (Divine Presence), who constantly supplies sustenance for the world's inhabitants, fulfilling all of their needs ... Since this is true not only for the kesherim (proper people) and tzaddikim (righteous people), but even for the evil and idolatrous ones – it is certainly legitimate for Rabban Gamliel to serve the wise men and the Torah scholars."

The Mechilta here presents three perspectives on Rabban Gamliel serving the rabbis at the meal:

1. Those who objected to his behavior worried that by "serving" others Rabban Gamliel appeared to be their "servant." Negating himself to them might demean the position of the Nasi; it was beneath his dignity.
2. But Rabbi Yehoshua found a precedent for Rabban Gamliel's humility – Avraham Avinu's. If Avraham, who was also a Nasi – literally, a lofty one – could serve others out of humility, it was also legitimate for Rabban Gamliel. But Rabbi Tzaddok had an entirely different perspective on Rabban Gamliel at the meal.
3. According to Rabbi Tzaddok, Rabban Gamliel was not just **servicing** others, but **providing** for them, taking care of their needs. Rabban Gamliel was not just exhibiting self-effacing humility, but G-d-like greatness. Avraham serving the nomads; Moshe serving Aharon, Yitro, and the Elders; and Rabban Gamliel serving the rabbis, all, like the Divine Presence, expressed their elevated nature, giving and caring for all.

SOURCE GUIDE: PREPARATION FOR HOLINESS

The rabbis of the Midrash were bothered by two words in the Torah that seemed to be extra, “ויסעו מרפידים – They traveled from Refidim” (Shemot 19:2). In this source guide we discuss why they seem extra, the solution that appears in the Midrash, and, according to the Netziv, the great principle the Midrash teaches us.

A. They Traveled from Refidim

The Mount Sinai narrative begins with the following two verses:

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| <p>1. Shemot 19:1-2 (1) On the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt – on that day they came to the wilderness of Sinai. (2) They traveled from Refidim and they came to the wilderness of Sinai. They encamped in the desert; and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain.</p> | <p>שמות יט:א-ב (א) בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי. (ב) וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבַר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנּוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיַּחֲנֶן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֹגַד הַהָר.</p> |
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The words “They traveled from Refidim” seem unnecessary. We know the Jews were in Refidim:

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| <p>2. Shemot 17:1, 8 (1) The entire congregation of the Children of Israel traveled from the wilderness of Sin on their journey at the word of Hashem; and they encamped in Refidim; and there was no water for the nation to drink ... (8) Amalek came and waged war with Israel in Refidim.</p> | <p>שמות יז:א, ח (א) וַיִּסְעוּ כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּדְבַּר סִין לְמִסְעֵיהֶם עַל פִּי ה' וַיַּחֲנּוּ בְּרִפְדִּים וְאֵין מַיִם לְשִׁתּוֹת הָעָם ... (ח) וַיָּבֹא עֲמֶלֶק וַיִּלָּחֶם עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִפְדִּים.</p> |
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If Israel was encamped in Refidim and then traveled to the wilderness of Sinai, is it not obvious that they traveled from Refidim? And since the Torah already said (in Shemot 19:1, Source 1 above) that they reached the wilderness of Sinai, why does it then repeat (in Shemot 19:2) both that they traveled from Refidim and that they reached Sinai? The Midrash actually builds on an additional difficulty, that these exact two words appear elsewhere in the Torah:

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| <p>3. Mechilta Parshat Bachodesh Parshah 1 “They traveled from Refidim and they came to the wilderness of Sinai” – Does it not already say in the passage about their travels, “They traveled from Refidim ...” (Bamidbar 33:15)? What does it teach here by saying that they came to the Wilderness of Sinai? It connects their departure from Refidim with their arrival in the Wilderness of Sinai. Just as their arrival in the Wilderness of Sinai was in a state of repentance, so their departure from Refidim was in a state of repentance.</p> | <p>מכילתא פרשת בחדש פרשה א “ויסעו מרפידים ויבואו מדבר סיני” – והלא כבר נאמר בפרשת מסעות “ויסעו מרפידים וכו” ומה תלמוד לומר באו מדבר סיני? הקיש נסיעתן מרפידים לביאתם למדבר סיני. מה ביאתם למדבר סיני בתשובה אף נסיעתם מרפידים בתשובה.</p> |
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B. The Netziv: Why Is This Significant?

The Netziv (Harav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, זצ”ל, 1816-1893) asks an obvious question: Why is it significant that their travel was in a state of teshuvah and not just their arrival? He answers with a principle:

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| <p>4. Haamek Davar on Shemot 19:2 “They traveled from Refidim” – All of this seems extra. It is because of this that we learn in the Mechilta: “Just as their arrival in the Wilderness of Sinai was in order to receive the Torah (this seems to be the Netziv’s interpretation of the state of repentance Israel was in at that point), so their departure from Refidim was in order to receive the Torah.” But we still need to understand why it makes a difference that they traveled from Refidim with that in mind? But from here we learn that for all matters of holiness, the more a person</p> | <p>העמק דבר על שמות יט:ב “ויסעו מרפידים וגו’.” כל זה מיותר. ומשום הכי תניא במכילתא: “מה ביאתן למדבר סיני על מנת לקבל תורה כך נסיעתן מרפידים על דעת לקבל תורה.” ועדיין יש להבין מאי נפקא מינה בזה שנסעו מרפידים על מנת כן? אלא, מכאן יש ללמוד דכל דבר שבקדושה מה שהאדם מכין עצמו יותר לזה חל עליו יותר ההכשר לזה.</p> |
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| prepares himself for it, the more it will affect him and give him a predisposition to it. | |
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C. Preparing for Holiness: Three Examples

The Netziv gives three examples of this phenomenon. One is Rabbi Chiya's educational approach:

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| <p>5. Bava Metzia 85b</p> <p>“For I made sure that the Torah would not be forgotten from Israel. What did I do? I went and sowed flax, wove nets, and hunted deer. I fed their meat to orphans and [from their hides] prepared scrolls. I wrote the Five Books of the Torah and went up to a city. There I taught five children Chumash – to each I taught one of the five Chumashim. I taught another six children – to each I taught one of the six orders of the Mishnah. I said to them: ‘By the time I return back, teach each other the Chumash you learned and the Mishnah you learned.’ That is how I made sure Torah would not be forgotten from Israel.” This is what Rebbi (Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi) meant by “How great are the works of Chiya!”</p> | <p>בבא מציעא פה:</p> <p>“... דעבדי לתורה דלא תשתכח מישראל. מאי עבידנא? אזלינא ושדינא כיתנא וגדילנא נישבי וציידנא טבי. ומאכילנא בשרייהו ליתמי ואריכנא מגילתא. וכתבנא חמשה חומשי וסליקנא למתא ומקרינא חמשה ינוקי בחמשה חומשי ומתנינא שיתא ינוקי שיתא סדרי. ואמרנא להו: ‘עד דהדרנא ואתינא אקרו אהדדי ואתנו אהדדי.’ ועבדי לה לתורה דלא תשתכח מישראל.” היינו דאמר רבי, “כמה גדולים מעשי חייא!”</p> |
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The Netziv asks an obvious question: We appreciate the greatness of Rabbi Chiya educating the youth all over the Jewish world; and we understand the educational value of having the students teach each other. But why did he have to plant the flax, weave the nets, catch the deer, make the parchment, and write the Torah scrolls? Surely he could have speeded up the entire process by buying ready-made Torah scrolls.

He answers that Rabbi Chiya understood the value of preparation for kedushah, for holiness. Rabbi Chiya knew that the children's receptivity to the Torah's kedushah would be dependent on how much preparation went into their Torah. So he even planted the flax the nets were made of, caught the deer and prepared the hides for writing the Torah scrolls. Then he wrote the Torah scrolls and taught the children Chumash and Mishnah. He even made sure their Torah would be Torat Chesed – Torah coupled with lovingkindness – through feeding the venison to poor orphans. From the earliest possible point in the process he introduced kedushah into the scrolls, causing them to affect the children more powerfully than ready-made ones.

He shares two more examples of this phenomenon. One of them is Aharon's priestly clothing, the בגדי כהונה. Moshe told the craftsmen full of the “spirit of wisdom” to make them in a way that they would affect Aharon:

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| <p>6. Haamek Davar on Shemot 28:3</p> <p>For after Aharon was commanded to become holy; the Ever-Present One gave him holy clothes to aid him to accomplish this. They knew that for all matters of holiness, they must not only fulfill the law requiring that they be made “lishmah,” for the sake of holiness. They also knew that the more they are prepared for the sake of holiness they will better accomplish their goal [of sanctifying Aharon]. This is as we wrote earlier (Shemot 19:2 and elsewhere). Therefore Moshe was commanded to warn the craftsmen, who themselves were G-d-fearing, that they should make clothing that will be as effective as possible in sanctifying him.</p> | <p>העמק דבר על שמות כח ג:</p> <p>דאחר שנצטוו אהרן להתקדש נתן המקום לו בגדי קודש שיסייעו לו לדבר. וידעו דכל דבר שבקדושה לבד שטעון עשיה לשמה על פי דין. עוד כל מה שמכינים יותר הפעולה לשם קדושה. מועלת יותר לתכליתה כמו שכתבנו לעיל י”ט ב’ ובכמה מקומות. משום הכי נצטוו משה שיזהיר להאומנים שהם בעצמם יראי ה’ לעשות הבגדים באופן שיועילו יותר לקדשו.</p> |
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The Netziv mentions this principle a third time in conjunction with the extra Torah scroll the king of Israel was commanded to have written. Hashem commands that it be written “before the Kohanim of the Tribe of Levi” (Devarim 17:18). The Netziv comments: “It seems that this verse also includes that “gedolei Yisrael,” great ones of Israel, should be involved in the writing of that Sefer Torah, so it should have an intense level of kedushah. It will then have a powerful effect when the king reads it to the entire People of Israel.”

E PLURIBUS UNUM BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

The Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 1:10) relates that as Hashem was about to create the heavens and earth, each of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet hoped to be chosen to be **the** letter with which the world would be created.

When the letter Bet was chosen – בראשית – Alef was disappointed, and Hashem said, “Do not worry. You will be the letter of Matan Torah, the Giving of the Torah – אנכי ה' אלקיך.

What is the lesson implicit in these words of Chazal?

The Rabbis teach that the word בראשית may be read as ב' ראשית – 2 beginnings. The course of history alternates between two tracks, the path of G-d's Will, and the path of the deviation from the Divine Will. The diversity of creation, the apparent randomness of events, the pervasiveness of evil – all tend to obscure the fundamental unity of all existence within G-d.

The world was created by ten מאמרות, sayings. Each saying expands creation but also serves to veil the Creator. The Torah was given in ten commandments; each commandment serves to uncover one of those veils.

The obscurity can be dispelled only by revelation. Torah, as instruction, tells us to take the chaos of the human condition and integrate its diverse and contradictory pieces into a oneness, a wholesomeness of purpose in the service of Hashem. Torah as the revelation of the depths of the intention of the Creator is the key to understanding the inner unity of the apparent chaos of world history.

Out of the plurality of the Bet of בראשית emerges the unity of the Alef of אנכי.

The ultimate goal is to bring us to that glorious day in the future: “ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד” – On that day G-d will be one and His Name one” (Zechariah 14:9).

שבת שלום ומבורך

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We pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.