

Parshas Matos-Masei

This week's double Parsha marks the end of Chumash Bamidbar. The first Parsha-Matos was Moshe speaking to heads of the tribes on how to annul vows that arise.

Interestingly, the first posuk of the Parsha is posuk beis, whereas the last posuk of Parshas Pinchas (last week's parsha) is posuk aleph of the new Perek. Rashi on posuk Aleph explains that the topics discussed previously were about Hashem and the Jews (as stated by Rabbi Yishmael) and that there needs to be a distinct separation. Comes Rashi on posuk beis (of our parsha) and explains that Moshe was speaking to the heads of the tribes to accord them honor by teaching them first, then to the rest of the Jews. Rashi explains that the nullification of vows can happen with an expert, or where there is a lack of experts, in front of three peers (kind of like what we do at a minimum on Erev Rosh Hashana- although Chabad's tradition is to annul vows in front of 10 people- although there is a distinct difference in Halacha between Hataras Nedarim and Haforas Nedarim).

Rashi explains further that we must not think these passages were said to the princes alone; instead, these laws were taught to all Jews. The distinct explanations by Rashi highlight a separation between how we approach Bein Adam L'Makom to Bein Adam L'Chaveiro. Last week was Bein Adam L'Makom in that we were taught about the laws of the holiday sacrifices, but those require a specific type of expertise that will automatically require procedures in place to ensure that a sacrifice is adequately performed. Whereas, with a law Bein Adam L'Chaveiro, which means anyone can be involved, a procedural system had to be

introduced. The laws were first taught to the princes and then taught to everyone else. L'havdil, in our modern time, because of the speed at which information is disseminated, there is no chance for the experts to mobilize a thoughtful plan without the external pressures of people (non-experts) weighing in on the matter. This causes the experts to respond quickly and strongly consider background noise, which isn't the best for finding an adequate and thoughtful solution.

Furthermore, the introduced policies are reductive and simplistic to apply to as many people generally, without nuance. Hashem and Moshe are much more intelligent than this. Procedurally, it makes complete sense for Moshe to teach the princes first (which, according to Rashi and an opinion there, happened in all cases of the initial teaching of the Torah). This way, the princes can mobilize and have a plan to teach the rest of the Jews the laws as it is meant to be understood, and with nuance rather than blanket rules that don't necessarily apply. The princes were given, theoretically, a chance to mobilize the information before it got disseminated and taught to the Jews. Why Rashi then explains the law that even a non-expert can be a part of the nullification of vows, to show that there is a procedure that the Torah taught us, and we cannot get hung up on Torah's inapplicability (i.e., that laws can only be performed by experts) instead, the Torah is applied to us, even the non-experts.

Now it makes sense why the Torah explicitly told us here that the princes were taught first (versus any other place where it was the same). Because these laws follow the previous parsha that was between Man and Hashem, where there is automatic expertise (i.e., a Kohen has to make the sacrifice in the Temple etc.), whereas moving right into

a human-to-human experience, the hierarchy and procedure of the Torah were made clear, and perhaps now we understand why Rashi explained what he did.

From the topic of vows, we are prepared to be armed against the enemy-Midian. The famous Mamer- Heichaltzu- about arming in preparation for war is a discussion on Ahvas Yisroel. Just as a battalion fights for its brothers, so must one love their brother as in an army so we can conquer the common enemy (the pejorative Midianites-or enemy against spirituality). This follows the topic of vows because people may make 'promises' to one another, but we must not get let down by 'empty promises' and look past that in our fellow brothers to be a united front against a common enemy. We see this today; there was approval by the Swedish government to allow a protestor to burn a Torah and bible. I don't think it must be more apparent that we must unite against such evil. We are all affected by this.

The next Parsha is Masei, all the travels listed by the Torah that the Jews took on their journey to Israel. The first Rashi on the Parsha explains how the 42 destinations were less because of their time spent leaving Egypt- and that the true travels due to their prolonged time in the desert were only 20 trips (according to R'Moshe Hadarshan). In contrast, R'Tanchuma explains that listing all the trips was to recount what happened in those places (as a king who took his sick son to a faraway place does on the return trip home). This makes the trips and the lessons of the trips more impactful and perhaps meaningful. We Jews are all about recounting our history because we learn from it and get to a point where we are closer and closer to Mashiach. We are there now. Good Shabbos