

Parshas Bamidbar and Shavuos

Part 1

This week's Parsha is Bamidbar, which comes right before the holiday of Shavuos. Chassidus explains that Shabbos is both a culmination of the week past and an introduction to the week to come. Therefore, Parshas Bamidbar and Shavuos must have some connection.

The Parsha begins with the counting of the Jews, as Rashi explains here and elsewhere. Hashem continuously counts the Jews out of love for them (i.e., one counts something one loves), such as now, which is the third time since the redemption from Egypt. Because Hashem holds the Jews in such high esteem, they are counted.

The holiday of Shavuos (which means "weeks," "vows," or "sevens") is the holiday we celebrate that culminates the commandment to complete a counting of 7 complete weeks from the beginning of Pesach. There is a biblical command to count these 49 days. Since they begin after the first day of Pesach, the counting is often attributed to the spiritual journey the Jews needed to complete after leaving Egypt to be eligible and pure enough to receive the Torah. The timing, from a historical perspective, works out well, but the commandment to count precedes this, meaning that even if we never went

down to Egypt, we would still have the command to count, and theoretically culminate in the holiday of Shavuos. The fact is that after leaving Egypt and around 49 days later, the Jews received the Torah, which means that on Shavuos, we mark the day as Z'man Matan Toraseinu. However, according to the Gemara (Pesachim 88), there is a dispute regarding which day, after the 49 days, the Torah was given. The various dayos of the Gemara explain as such due to the three preparatory days, Shabbos and other factors that influence whether Matan Torah happened on or around the 50th day after the first of Pesach. The point being to elucidate that, unlike any of the other three regalim or biblically commanded holidays, there is no specific Mitzvah of the day. Unlike Sukkos or Pesach, which have the Sukka or Lulav, or the commandment to refrain from eating Chometz and the active Mitzvah to eat Matzah, there is no specific Mitzvah of the day.

Shavuos is called Atzeres, which means to stop, and there are Mepharshim who ask what the source of this is. Atzeres is also specifically referred to as the last day of Sukkos. The purpose of that day is explained that Hashem doesn't want to set us off after the month of the High Holidays and Sukkos, so Hashem attached a final day to celebrate this, its called "Stop" because "Kasha Alay Fridascha" that Hashem misses us. What we do on that day is profound; we observe

the holiday of Simchas Torah, where we celebrate the completion and beginning of the cycle of reading the Parshios. This is a final send-off, before “Yakov Holach Lidarko” and the Jews go out to their lives for the remainder of the year. As we’ve mentioned before, the Yomim Tovim serve as beacons, keeping us connected to Hashem beyond the regular Shabbos. Then, we finally come to Shavuos, also known as Atzeres. I heard a Shiur by R’ Avrohom Schneerson, where this topic was discussed. He brought the following sources for the name Atzeres as it relates to Shavuos. The first reason is that, since there isn’t a specific Mitzvah of the day, except to refrain from work, it is therefore called a Stop. The other reason is that the holiday, like Shemini Atzeres of Sukkos, is a holiday to keep us close from having completed the biblical command to count the days from Pesach for seven complete weeks, and Hashem doesn’t want to send us off, so the holiday is also called Atzeres. This then makes sense why Shavuos is also Z’man Matan Toraseinu, because it’s a holiday where Hashem commanded to us, out of His love for us. What is the method by which we are shown love and show love to Hashem? By learning and living with the Torah, as we know, Oirasa V’Kudsha Brich Hu Kula Chad (The Torah and Hashem are all one). Therefore by learning and living with Torah, this is the ultimate expression of showing love to Hashem, and more so, the gift of the Torah in a revealed manner is the ultimate gift Hashem gave to us for

us to live and learn with, while we pass our time in the physical realm for the time our soul is here in a body.

So, Shavuos, called Atzeres, is a holiday of Hashem and our mutual love, and this was similarly expressed in Parshas Bamidbar, when Hashem counted us. On this note, may we recharge our spiritual batteries this Shavuos and reinvigorate our love for Hashem by locking in and committing to living with and learning Torah.

Part 2

The fantastic thing about the Torah is that it’s accurate and consistent from start to finish. Later in the parsha, the Torah states that the Leviim are counted and appointed to serve in the Mishkan, and subsequently in the temple, as they replaced the firstborns who would have had this responsibility. But as Rashi explains, since the firstborns were involved in the sin of the golden calf, they were replaced. The first exposure to this is actually with Esav and Yakov. At the time of their transaction (when Esav traded lentil soup for his firstborn right), the Torah says Esav was “Mevazeh” the Bechoros; he completely denigrated and

devalued it¹. Rashi there says that Esav knew that, as the firstborn, he or his offspring would have to serve in the temple, and since they didn't care to keep the laws, he would be liable to death. So, he figured to sell the firstborn to Yakov, who would keep the laws. Now, in the Parsha, 3:39 the posuk says "all the counted ones of the Leviim which Moshe and Aaron counted by the word of Hashem..." the name of Aaron has dots on top of it. Rashi explains that this is to tell us that Aaron was not counted among the Leviim. This is based on a Gemara in Bechoros and other Midrashim that wherever the Torah has dots on a word that outnumber the undotted letters, there is a subtextual explanation, which Rashi elucidates in his commentary, i.e., that Aron was not counted. This makes perfect sense further, as explained in Bechoros 4a, because Aron was the firstborn in Moshe's family. Which would confuse whether his priestly hood was given to him because of his firstborn right, or because Hashem said he would be the high priest. Or, that he would have lost his priestly status because of his being a firstborn. By not being counted among the Leviim, we can say that Aaron was predestined to be the high priest regardless of his familial status, and that there was no influence on his being chosen as the high priest. Since he was also from the tribe of Levi, they replaced

the firstborn's role. Because of their abstention from the golden calf, there isn't necessarily an influence on Aaron from the tribe of Levi.

The torah is true, and all its edicts are true, which is why, even from seemingly disparate events and explanations, there is consistency.

May we discover the connections in the layers of the Torah, and may they positively impact our lives, which will undoubtedly influence the world around us, and bring us one step closer to Mashiach.

Good Shabbos, Good Yom Tov!

¹ In the Midrash Mishlei 26:4 there are profound explanations, and there is a further connection where he explains Esav's hate for Yakov.