

מאמרי תורה – Torah Talk



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פרשת בהעלותך
ט"ז בסיון תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 8:1-12:16

In this *parasha*, the Bnei Yisrael receive instructions regarding Pesach; they journey forth from Sinai and complain to God on several occasions, provoking God's anger; Miriam and Aaron speak against Moshe.

The text describes the cloud which covered the *mishkan* (Tabernacle) by day and the appearance of fire which covered it by night. It also describes how, when the cloud moved, the Bnei Yisrael picked up and moved their encampment (9:15-23):

טו וביום הקים את־המשכן כסה הענן את־המשכן לאהל העדת ובערב יהיה עליהמשכן כמראה־אש עד־בקר: טז בן יהיה תמיד הענן יכסנו ומראה־אש לילה: יז ולפי העלת הענן מעל האהל ואחרי־כן יסעו בני ישראל ובמקום אשר ישכן־שם הענן שם יחנו בני ישראל: יח עלפי ה' יסעו בני ישראל ועלפי ה' יחנו כלי־מי אשר ישכן הענן עליהמשכן יחנו: יט ובהאריך הענן עליהמשכן ימים רבים ושמו בני־ישראל את־משמרת ה' ולא יסעו: כ ויש אשר יהיה הענן ימים מספר עליהמשכן עלפי ה' יחנו ועלפי ה' יסעו: כא ויש אשר יהיה הענן מערב עד־בקר ונעלה הענן בבקר ונסעו או ילילה ונעלה הענן ונסעו: כב או־ימים או־חדש או־ ימים בהאריך הענן עליהמשכן לשכן עליו יחנו בני־ישראל ולא יסעו ובהעלתו יסעו: כג עלפי ה' יחנו ועלפי ה' יסעו את־משמרת ה' שמו עלפי ה' ביד־משה:

15 And on the day that the *mishkan* was established, the cloud covered the *mishkan*, even the *ohel moed* (tent of the testimony); and at evening there was upon the *mishkan* as it were the appearance of fire, until morning. **16** So it was always: the cloud covered it, and the appearance of fire by night. **17** And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the Tent, then after that the Bnei Yisrael journeyed; and in

the place where the cloud rested, there the Bnei Yisrael encamped. **18** At the commandment of Hashem, the Bnei Yisrael journeyed, and at the commandment of Hashem, they encamped: as long as the cloud rested upon the *mishkan* they remained encamped. **19** And when the cloud tarried upon the *mishkan* many days, then the Bnei Yisrael kept the charge of Hashem, and did not journey. **20** And sometimes the cloud was a few days upon the *mishkan*; according to the commandment of Hashem they remained encamped, and according to the commandment of Hashem they journeyed. **21** And sometimes the cloud was from evening until morning; and when the cloud was taken up in the morning, they journeyed; or if it continued by day and by night, when the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. **22** Whether it was two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the *mishkan*, resting on it, the Bnei Yisrael remained encamped, and did not journey; but when it was taken up, they journeyed. **23** At the commandment of Hashem they encamped, and at the commandment of Hashem they journeyed; they kept the charge of Hashem, at the commandment of Hashem by the hand of Moshe.

Seder Olam Rabbah, a traditional source from the 2nd century CE, tells us that the Bnei Yisrael camped at a place called *Kadesh Barnea* for 38 years, and the travels outlined at the end of *Bemidbar* in *Parashat Masei* occurred during the first year and the last two years of their wanderings in the wilderness. Why, then, are we always told that the Bnei Yisrael wandered for forty years?

This sense of wandering reflects human psychology. Although during the middle years of the wilderness experience, the Bnei Yisrael did not move, they knew that they could wake up any morning (given the passage cited above) and be told that today was the day they would travel. Day by day they did not know their future, and therefore could not settle down, until of course they came to the land of Israel.

Many people have experienced similar feelings. A difficult experience for many is the time between when a physician does a medical test and when the results are shared. I have heard many people say, "Just let me know what is going on, and I can move forward. It's the uncertainty that is killing me."

So it was for the *dor hamidbar* (the generation of the wilderness). Their lives were filled with uncertainty. Perhaps Hashem opted to do this to create a sense of

dependence upon the Divine Providence. Perhaps it was because the Bnei Yisrael in their infancy as a nation were not yet ready to have the sense of being settled down. Perhaps it was that the only true place of settlement could be Israel.

Whatever the reason, the *parasha* itself gives the formula for reassurance each time the nation moved (10:35-36):

לֵה וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעַת הָאָרוֹן, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה: קוּמָה ה', וַיִּפְצוּ אֹיְבֵיךָ, וַיִּגְסוּ מִשְׁנֵאֵיךָ, מִפְּנֵיךָ. לֹא וּבְנַחְתָּהּ, יֹאמֶר: שׁוּבָה ה', רַבְבוֹת אֱלֹפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

35 And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moshe said: 'Rise up, Hashem, and let Your enemies be scattered; and let them that hate You flee from before You.' **36** And when it rested, he said: 'Return, Hashem, to the ten thousands of the families of Israel.'

The first of these verses is sung every time we take out the Torah to read it, and the second is read as we return the Torah to the ark. These verses remind us of our origins as Jews who wandered without a settled place, of our continued existence as Jews who wander, and of God's providence which protects us on a regular basis.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What might it have felt like to be a person your age in the generation of the wilderness?
- How did Bnei Yisrael obtain food, clothing and housing during their time in the wilderness? (Answer: it was supplied by Hashem. Food in the form of *mahn* (manna); clothing, according to the *midrash*, never became worn, and grew with the children; and housing with their tents which traveled with them.)
- How might we see Hashem's providence today?