



## The Amazing Connection between Parshas Bamidbar and Chag HaShvuos

### Parshas Bamidbar Separates Chag HaShvuos from the Curses in Parshas Bechukosai

This coming Shabbas Kodesh, we will read Parshas Bamidbar. It is also Erev Chag HaShvuos, the occasion of the giving of the Torah—“Zman Matan Toraseinu.” Therefore, it is fitting that we present upon this royal table the amazing connection that exists between Parshas Bamidbar and Chag HaShvuos. It states in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 428, 4): **“ולעולם קורין פרשת—במדבר סיני קודם עצרת”** **“we always read Parshas Bamidbar prior to Atzeres.”**

The source for this practice is found in the Gemara (Megillah 31b). Chazal teach us that Ezra instituted that Yisrael read the “tochachah”—the rebuke—in Parshas Bechukosai prior to Shavuos and the “tochachah” in Parshas Ki Savo prior to Rosh HaShanah. They provide the following rationale: **“כדי שתכלה השנה—so that the year should end along with its curses.”**

This prompts the following question: **“בשלמא שבמשה תורה איכא—כדי שתכלה שנה וקללותיה”**—this makes perfect sense with regards to the “tochachah” in sefer Devarim, which is read before Rosh HaShanah; **“אלא שבתורת כהנים אטו עצרת ראש השנה היא”**—but how does this rationale apply to the “tochachah” in sefer Vayikra? Is Shavuos the beginning of a new year? The Gemara replies: **“אין—yes, indeed, Atzeres (Shavuos) is also a type of New Year . . . with respect to the fruits of the tree.”**

Tosafos (ibid.) explain why Parshas Bechukosai is not read on the Shabbas immediately preceding Shavuos, and similarly why Parshas Ki Savo is not read on the Shabbas immediately preceding Rosh HaShanah. Instead, Parshas Bamidbar always intervenes prior to Shavuos and Parshas Nitzavim intervenes prior to Rosh HaShanah. Tosafos explain: **“לפי שאנו רוצים להפסיק**

**ולקרות שבת אחת קודם ראש השנה, בפרשה שלא תהא מדברת בקללות כלל, שלא להסמיך הקללות לראש השנה, ומטעם זה אנו קורין במדבר סיני קודם עצרת, כדי שלא להסמיך הקללות לראש השנה, ומטעם זה אנו קורין במדבר סיני קודם עצרת, כדי שלא להסמיך הקללות שבבחוקותי לעצרת”**—**we want to interrupt by reading a parsha that doesn’t discuss curses one Shabbas prior to Rosh HaShanah, so as not to associate the curses with the new year; for this same reason, we read Parshas Bamidbar prior to Shavuos--so as not to associate the curses in Parshas Bechukosai with Shavuos.**

Now, we have a basic principle that nothing is coincidental; every single detail instituted by our blessed sages possesses some deeper significance. Therefore, it behooves us to explore why our sages instituted that Parshas Bamidbar be read in conjunction with the festival of Shavuos—creating an interruption between the rebuke in Parshas Bechukosai and Chag HaShvuos, “Zman Matan Toraseinu.”

### Show Me Your Genealogy

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by introducing a passage from the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar 684):

**“בשעה שקיבלו ישראל את התורה נתקנאו אומות העולם בהן, מה ראו להתקרב יותר מן האומות, סתם פיהן הקב”ה, אמר להן הביאו לי ספר יוחסין שלכם, שנאמר (תהלים צו-ז) הבו לה’ משפחות עמים, כשם שבני מביאין (במדבר א-יח) ויתלדו על משפחותם, לכך מנאם בראש הספר הזה אחר המצוות (ויקרא כז-לד), אלה המצוות אשר צוה ה’ את משה אל בני ישראל בהר סיני, ואחר כך, וידבר ה’ במדבר סיני שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל, שלא זכו ליטול את התורה אלא בשביל היוחסין שלהן”**.

**The nations of the world were envious of Yisrael when they received the Torah. They protested: “Why are they more deserving than any of the other nations?”**



step, involving **“water,”** occurred at Krias Yam Suf—the parting of the Red Sea. HKB”H said to Moshe (Shemos 14, 15): **“מה תצעק—אלי דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו”**—**why do you cry out to Me? Speak to Bnei Yisrael and let them proceed!** In response, the tribe of Yehudah led the way by jumping into the perilous waters, and they were followed by the rest of Yisrael. They demonstrated their willingness and readiness to sacrifice their lives and drown in the sea in order to fulfill Hashem’s command.

Even this step in the development of the Jewish trait of “mesirus nefesh” was limited; it was only momentary. It began and ended as Yisrael jumped into the sea. This brings us to the third stage in the development of our “mesirus nefesh”—in the **“midbar.”** After the exodus from Egypt, the people of Yisrael did not hesitate to follow Hashem in the desolate wilderness for forty years. The passuk teaches us (Shemos 12, 39): **“ולא יכלו להתמהמה וגם צדה לא עשו להם—for they could not delay, and also they had not made provisions for themselves.** HKB”H praises them for their “mesirus nefesh” in the midbar through the prophet (Yirmiyah 2, 2): **“כה אמר ה' זכרתי לך חסד—נעורייך אהבת כלולותיך, לכתך אחרי במדבר בארץ לא זרועה”**—**thus said Hashem: I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the midbar, into an unsown land.**

This then is the the meaning of the sages enigmatic words in the Midrash: **“מכאן שנו חכמים בג' דברים ניתנה התורה, באש ובמים ובמדבר”**. These three instances of “mesirus nefesh” in Jewish history: with **fire**, with **water** and in the **midbar**—paved the way for the covenant that HKB”H forged with Yisrael at Har Sinai, resulting in Him giving them the Torah. This three-stranded cord of “mesirus nefesh” is the foundation of the eternal bond between HKB”H, the Torah and Yisrael that exists in every generation, exemplifying the notion that (Koheles 4, 12): **“והחוט המשולש לא ינתק-- במהרה ינתק-- a three-ply cord is not easily severed.**

### Bring Me Your Genealogical Record of “Mesirus Nefesh”

We can now rejoice at having gained a better understanding of the Midrash: **The nations of the world were envious of Yisrael when they received the Torah. They protested: “Why are they more deserving than any of the other nations?” HKB”H silenced them. He said to them: “Bring Me your genealogical record . . . as My children do.”** Let us explain based on what we have just discussed. The Torah states explicitly: **“זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל”-- this is the Torah**

**concerning a man should he die in a tent.** The sages derive from this passuk: **That the words of Torah are not retained except by one who sacrifices himself on its behalf.** Therefore, Bnei Yisrael, who have a legacy—a “sefer yuchsin”—from their holy ancestors, who sacrificed their lives for the kedushah of Hashem in three stages: **Fire, water and midbar**—are worthy to be given the Torah. Their claim is founded on the established fact that they will continue in the ways of their forefathers to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the Torah.

You, however, the nations of the world, the descendants of Eisav and Yishmael, your “sefer yuchsin” does not contain any acts of bravery demonstrating “mesirus nefesh” to Hashem and His Torah. In fact, the opposite is true! You received a heritage that denies the authority and validity of Hashem and His Torah, which allows you to pursue the nonsensical whims of Olam HaZeh. You have emulated the ways of the wicked Eisav, who sold Yaakov his valuable birthright in exchange for some lentil soup. From Yishmael you inherited the tendency to frolic with avodah-zarah, immorality and murder. So, how do you expect to receive the Torah that demands “mesirus nefesh” in order to retain it?

We can suggest a very nice allusion to this interpretation from the words HKB”H addresses to Yisrael as a preface to Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 5): **“ועתה אם שמוע תשמעו בקולי ושמרתם את בריתי והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים כי לי כל הארץ, ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת קדוש”**—**and now, if you hearken well to Me and you will keep My covenant, you will be a “segulah” to Me from among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine. You will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.** The Shem MiShmuel writes (Nitzavim 5676) in the name of the great Rabbi David of Leluv, zy”a: **“דאפילו-- אתה מהפכה לכל צד תישאר בתמונתה”**—**“you will be a ‘segulah’ to Me” like the symbol of the vowel “segol”; no matter which way you turn it, it retains the same shape.**

Based on our current discussion, we can suggest the following: HKB”H was hinting to Yisrael that the prerequisite for receiving the Torah is: **“והייתם לי סגולה מכל העמים”**-- that they resemble the symbol of the “segol,” which is composed of three dots. They should never forget their “sefer yuchsin”—their predecessors who were willing to sacrifice their lives for Hashem in the three situations of **fire, water and midbar.** The other nations do not possess such a “sefer yuchsin,” demonstrating their “mesirus nefesh” to Hashem. In this merit: **“You will be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation.”**

## Chag HaShavuos Is the Day of Judgment of Matan Torah

Continuing onward with this line of thought, we will proceed to explain the profound wisdom of Ezra HaSofer. On the one hand, he arranged the Torah-readings so that Parshas Bechukosai would be read prior to Chag HaShavuos: **כדי** “שנתכלה שנה וקללותיה”—**so that the year should end along with its curses.** On the other hand, he interposed the reading of Parshas Bamidbar between the curses of Parshas Bechukosai and Chag HaShavuos. As mentioned above, on Shavuos the fruits of the tree are judged. We are taught this fact in the Mishnah (R.H. 16a):

“בארבעה פרקים העולם נידון, בפסח על התבואה, בעצרת על פירות האילן, בראש השנה כל באי עולם עוברין לפניו ככני מרון... ובחג נידונין על המים... מפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו שתי הלחם בעצרת, מפני שעצרת זמן פירות האילן הוא, אמר הקב“ה הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת, כדי שיתברכו לכם פירות האילן.”

**The world is judged at four junctures during the year: On Pesach for the grain, on Atzeres for the fruits of the tree, on Rosh HaShanah all who come to the world pass before Him like “bnei maron” . . . and on the Festival they are judged for the water.** The Gemara expounds (ibid.): **And why did the Torah instruct us to bring the offering of “the two loaves” on Atzeres, because Atzeres is the time of judgment for the fruits of the tree. HKB”H said: “Bring before Me the two loaves on Atzeres so that the fruits of the tree will be blessed for you.”**

Now, the Shela hakadosh (Masechet Shavuos) presents a fascinating yet alarming idea in the name of the divine kabbalist, the author of Tolaat Yaakov. He explains that Shavuos is the day of judgment related to Matan Torah. On Shavuos, the neshamos of Yisrael are judged. They are referred to as **“פירות האילן”**—**“the fruits of the tree”**—because they emerged from HKB”H’s tree of neshamos. On this day, they are held accountable: Did they engage in Torah-study and observe the mitzvos of the Torah as necessary? Let us examine the sacred words of the Shela:

“חייב אדם לשמוח בזה החג ביותר, כי הוא יום שזכינו בו לכתר תורה, ובפסחים פרק אלו דברים (דף סח:): הכל מודים בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם... מכל מקום (תהלים ב-יא) גילו ברעדה כתיב, והשמחה אשר שמח תהיה שמחה רוחנית, והודות והלל להשם יתברך שנתן לנו התורה, מתעורר מאוד בלבו להתקדש ולתקן מעשיו, ולהיות מוכתר בכתר תורה לקיים והגית בו יומם ולילה, כי היום הקדוש הזה הוא יומא דדינא.

זזה לשון תולעת יעקב דף ג”ח, ודע כי כמו שבראש השנה רצה הקב“ה להשגיח ולדרוש מעשה בני אדם, כי הוא יום הבריאה הראשונה וחידוש העולם... כן רצה ביום מתן תורה שהוא מורה על חידוש העולם, להשגיח ולדרוש על מעשה העולם ולדונו על פירות האילן... וכבר ביארנו כי הפירות ההם, הם הנשמות הפורחות מאילנו של הקב“ה, והעולם נידון ביום זה על התורה שניתנה בו שבטלו עצמם ממנה, והוא אמרם על פירות האילן, בלא השלימם בתורה ובמצוות כראוי.”

**A person is obligated to rejoice more than usual on this festival, because it is the day that we were privileged to receive the crown of the Torah. In Maseches Pesachim, chapter Eilu Devarim, it states: “All authorities concede that on Atzeres, we also require ‘lachim’ (‘for you’: earthly celebration and gratification, e.g. food and drink)” . . . In any event, the rejoicing should be spiritual, involving thanking and praising Hashem, Who gave us the Torah. A person should be uplifted and inspired to correct his ways and to be awarded the crown of the Torah—to fulfill the directive: “Study it day and night.” For, this holy day is a day of judgment.**

Here are the words of the Tolaat Yaakov: Know that just as HKB”H wanted to supervise and evaluate man’s deeds on Rosh HaShanah, because it is the beginning of creation and the renewal of the world . . . so, too, on the day of Matan Torah, which is related to the renewal of the world, did He want to supervise and evaluate the merits of the world and to judge it with regards to the fruits of the tree . . . we have already explained that those fruit are the neshamos that bloomed from HKB”H’s tree. The world is judged on this day with regards to the Torah that was given on it, which they neglected to study properly. This is what is meant when it says that the world is judged with regards to **“the fruits of the tree”**—their failure to fulfill the Torah and the mitzvos properly.

Rabbi Baruch of Mezhibuzh, zy”a, used to say that he feared Chag HaShavuos more than Rosh HaShanah. Because on Rosh HaShanah, the judgment is primarily related to **“gashmiyus”**—material and physical things: **“A loaf of bread more versus a loaf of bread less.”** The judgment on Shavuos, however, deals with **“ruchniyus”**—spirituality: Did we engage in Torah-study and observe its mitzvos as we should have?

This explains very nicely HKB”H’s command: **“Bring before Me the two loaves on Atzeres so that the fruits of the tree will be blessed for you.”** How does bringing **“the two loaves”** ensure that the **“fruits of the tree”**—**“פירות האילן”**—the neshamos of Yisrael, will be blessed on the day of judgment

related to Matan Torah? It appears that we can answer this question based on the teaching in the Zohar hakadosh (Part 1, 260a) that the two loaves represent Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh: "אורייתא דאקרי לחם דכתיב (משלי ט-ה) לכו לחמו בלחמי, ואנו מקרבין ביומא דחמשיין דאתייהיב ביה אורייתא, שתי הלחם תורה. —the Torah is called bread, as it is written: "Come, partake of My bread." And we offer on the fiftieth day, on which the Torah was given, the two loaves— Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh.

Accordingly, we can suggest that this is why HKB"H commanded us to bring the two loaves on Chag HaShavuot and to wave them (Vayikra 23, 20): "תנופה לפני ה'—a waving before Hashem. Because this ritual represents a korban of atonement, together with complete teshuvah, to make amends for not having engaged in the study of Torah she'b'chsav and Torah she'b'al peh adequately. By performing this ritual, we accept upon ourselves to occupy ourselves with the two symbolic loaves by waving them before Hashem. This is the implication of HKB"H's command: "Bring before Me the two loaves on Atzeres so that the fruits of the tree will be blessed for you." For, in the merit of this acceptance, we will merit a plentiful abundance of Torah-related insights.

### The Curses Result from Not Laboring in the Study of Torah

If we scrutinize the pesukim in Parshas Bechukosai, we reveal a crucial but daunting principle. All of the curses and "tochachos" mentioned in the Torah stem solely from not laboring in Torah-study. This sin and oversight is the cause of all the major aveiros. We learn this from that which is written at the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai (Vayikra 26, 3): "אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם, ונתתי גשמיכם בעתם, ונתנה הארץ —if you follow My statutes and observe My mitzvos and you will perform them, I will provide your rains in their proper time. The earth shall give forth its produce and the tree of the field shall give forth its fruit. Rashi comments: "If you follow My statutes": One might think that this refers to fulfillment of the mitzvos. When it says "and observe My mitzvos," see that the observance of the mitzvos has been stated. So, how do I interpret "if you will follow My statutes"? That you should labor in Torah-study. "And observe My mitzvos": You should labor in the Torah in order to observe and fulfill what you learn, as it says (Devarim 5, 1), "and you shall study them, and you shall observe them to perform them."

It appears that Rashi intended to interpret the passuk based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): "הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל, בני בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תכלין, ואם — Thus has HKB"H said to Yisrael, "My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand." This then is the meaning of the passuk: "אם בחוקותי תלכו". It is as Rashi explains: **You should labor in Torah-study;** and with the power of Torah, you are assured: "ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם"—that your rigorous Torah-study will negate the yetzer hara that tries to prevent you from fulfilling Hashem's mitzvos.

Now, just as Yisrael are privileged to receive all of the Berachos in the merit of: "אם בחוקותי תלכו"—laboring in the study of Torah; by the same token, the curses enumerated in Parshas Bechukosai represent the severe punishment for not laboring in the study of Torah. This is evident from that which is written at the beginning of the "tochachah" (Vayikra 26, 14): "ואם לא תשמעו לי ולא תעשו את כל המצוות האלה, ואם בחוקותי תמאסו ואם —but if you will not listen to Me and will not perform all of these mitzvos; and if you will consider My statutes revolting, and if your being rejects My ordinances, so as not to perform all of My mitzvos, to annul My covenant."

Here Rashi comments: **But if you will not listen to Me, to be laboring in Torah, to know the exposition of the sages; one might think that this refers to the fulfillment of the mitzvos. When it says: "And you will not perform, etc.," see now that fulfillment of mitzvos is addressed. So, how do I interpret: "but if you will not listen to Me"? To be laboring in Torah. . . "And will not perform": Once you will not study, you will not perform. Thus, you will have committed two aveiros.**

Rashi goes on to explain that by not laboring in Torah-study, they will ultimately transgress seven major aveiros: "And if you will consider My statutes revolting"—he abhors others who perform them. "Your being rejects My ordinances"—he hates the Torah scholars. "Not to perform"—he prevents others from performing. "All My mitzvos"—he renounces them, claiming that I did not command them. "To annul My covenant"—he renounces that which is essential. Thus, there are seven aveiros. The first leads to the second, and so forth until the seventh. They are the following: He did not study, and he did not

**perform; he abhors others who perform; he hates the Torah scholars; he prevents others; he renounces the mitzvos; he renounces that which is essential.**

Hence, it is patently clear that if a person does not labor in the study of Torah, he will ultimately succumb to all of the major aveiros—to the point that he will deny G-d's very existence. The process is easy to comprehend. As we have learned, the only way to overcome the influence of the yetzer hara is to engage in Torah-study. So, without this powerful weapon to combat the yetzer hara, this person will inevitably commit all of the major aveiros.

### **Parshas Bamidbar Constitutes an Amazing Tikun It Abolishes the Curses and Elicits the Berachos**

At this point, it is with great pleasure that we can explain the profound wisdom inherent in Ezra HaSofer's institution. On the one hand, he arranged for Parshas Bechukosai to be read prior to Chag HaShavuos: **“כדי שתכלה שנה וקללותיה”**—so that the year should end along with its curses. As we have learned, on this festival, we are judged regarding “the fruits of the tree”—namely Torah-study. Did we exert ourselves adequately in Torah-study, so that we would be able to fulfill all of the mitzvos; or, chas v'shalom, did we neglect to do so, which caused us to transgress many major aveiros? With this in mind, Ezra instituted that Parshas Bechukosai be read prior to Chag HaShavuos—the day of judgment with regards to the study of Torah; so that as a result of this reading, **the year should end along with its curses.**

On the other hand, he instituted that Parshas Bamidbar be read just before Chag HaShavuos to create an interruption between the curses in Parshas Bechukosai and Chag HaShavuos. According to what we have learned, the valuable lesson learned from Parshas Bamidbar is the importance of laboring in Torah-

study with “mesirus nefesh.” It is for this reason that the parsha opens with the words: **“וידבר ה' אל משה במדבר סיני”**. Expounding on this passuk, the Midrash explains that the Torah was given with fire, with water and in the midbar. This teaches us that it is imperative to study Torah with “mesirus nefesh” like: (a) Avraham Avinu, who was willing to sacrifice his life in the fiery furnace, (b) Yisrael who threw caution to the wind by jumping into the sea and (c) Yisrael who followed Hashem into the desolate wilderness after the exodus from Egypt.

Furthermore, it is precisely for this reason that the very next passuk states: **“שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל למשפחותם לבית אבותם—take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael, according to their families, according to their fathers' houses.”** Expounding on this passuk, our blessed sages teach us that HKB”H stifled the nations of the world by saying to them: **“הביאו לי ספר יוחסין שלכם כשם שבני מביאים”**—show Me your “sefer yuchsin”; My children have an unrivaled “sefer yuchsin.” It is in the merit of the trait of “mesirus nefesh” that they inherited from their forefathers that they are entitled to receive the Torah.

For this reason, Parshas Bamidbar represents an iron curtain separating the curses of Parshas Bechukosai from Chag HaShavuos. As explained, the curses come solely due to Yisrael's failure to labor in the study of Torah. Parshas Bamidbar, however, teaches us to follow in the footsteps of our holy ancestors, who sacrificed their lives in fire, in water and in the midbar. If we heed this vital lesson, we are guaranteed that the year will end along with its curses, and we will be exonerated on the judgment day of Matan Torah. In addition, HKB”H will bestow upon us an abundance of new Torah insights along with all of the Berachos associated with Torah-study, as it is written (Mishlei 3, 16): **“אורך ימים בימינה בשמאלה עושר וכבוד”**-- **length of days is at its right; at its left, wealth and honor.**



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