

Bamidbar 2016

1.

Why was the Torah given in a desert?

Why do we generally lain (read) Bamidbar before Shavuot? The question arises, why wasn't the Torah given in a large Beis Medrash? **Why did Hashem give us the Torah in a desert? A desert where there are sand storms and other uncondusive factors doesn't seem like the optimal setting to give or receive the Torah! Why wasn't the Torah given in a more conducive environment?** The Gemara in Baba Basra (158b) states that the air of Israel smartens a person. (אורא דארץ ישראל מחכים). The air itself possesses a certain amount of kedusha (holiness). This kedusha will positively affect others. Furthermore, many mitzvahs require the land of Israel (מצות תלויות בארץ). Meaning, there are many mitzvot that could only be performed in Israel. This strengthens the original question; why did Hashem give the Jews the Torah prior to entering Israel? Rabbi Shimshon Pinkes (Tiferes Shimshon page 1) explains based on a Mishna. The pasuk in Shir HaShirim (3, 11) states "ביום חתונתו וביום שמחת לבו." / "on his wedding day and on the day his heart was gladdened." The Mishna at the end of mesechas Tanis explains that "on his wedding day", refers to when the Jews received the Torah at Har Sini. The Jews receiving the Torah was like a wedding. Har Sini is the direct connection between the Jews and Hashem. The actual mountain was the chupa (wedding canopy). The Jews were the chason (groom). While the Torah, was the kala (bride). In order that this link between the Jews and Hashem would be complete, there needed to be a yichud (seclusion) room, similar to all Jewish weddings, in which there needs to be seclusion between the chason and the kala. If the Jews would have immediately gone into Israel prior to receiving the Torah then this necessary yichud would have been nonexistent. This would have been a serious problem, because perhaps everyone would have gone to their fields. Many would get distracted and preoccupied with maintaining their fields. The Jews wouldn't have allocated a proper amount of time for learning. This is why, not only was it necessary for the Torah to be given in the desert, but we additionally needed to be in the desert for forty years. **We needed forty years to fully focus on the Torah without any other interruptions and distractions. This forty year period strengthened, enhanced and beautified the relationship between the Jews and the Torah and Hashem.** In the desert, there were also fewer distractions from other mitzvot. We were not obligated to perform the mitzvot that required the land of Israel. This powerful seclusion between the Jews and the Torah would have a positive ripple effect on future generations as well. This bondage would last for many subsequent generations. Furthermore, all of our necessities were taken care of. Our food, laundry and protection were all taken care of.

Let's now discuss those who relocate to learn away from their home environment, even when the area they live in has Yeshivos. The Mishna in Avos (perek daled) states that one should exile himself to a place of Torah and shouldn't say that the Torah will come after him. (רבי נהוראי אומר.) (הוי גולה למקום תורה ואל תאמר שהיא תבוא אחריו.) The Rabbenu Yona explains that one should dwell in a place where there is a lot of Torah and talmidai chachamim. The Tiferes Yisroel explains that when the Mishna said exile, this is literal. One should literally leave their parents, family, friends and all of the stuff that is in their hometown. Even though this is very difficult and it is like detaching a child from his mother when being breastfed, nevertheless this must be done. This is for one's good. Many times people have success when they relocate. This is comparable to

plants. Sometimes plants do not have agricultural success in one location. However if they are uprooted and relocated to a place that has more fertile soil, they will have success. So too, sometimes one will be unsuccessful with their growth in Torah and middos unless they relocate. What are the mechanics of how relocating helps? Many times when one is in his location where they were raised, their old friends whom they used to joke with are there. Their old friends might still have that same negative contagious joking attitude. This will disallow one to mature properly. Furthermore, since he will always be viewed as a kid, therefore this will also most likely stunt one's spiritual growth. Many times he is spoiled in his hometown; this could potentially detract from one's spiritual growth as well. Lastly, it is known that one typically strives to grow more when he is free. Meaning, more people prefer to grow on their own rather than being forced by someone else, such as their parent. This is precisely what Avraham was told in safer Berashis (perek 12) "Go" / "לך לך". Moshe was also told to leave the place where he was born and go to a new land. The Gemara in numerous places (Kesubos 62b, Tosfos in mesechas Shabbos 9b) relates that many would relocate in order to learn better.

Even though based on the aforementioned information, one is strongly recommended to relocate in order to maximize one's spiritual growth. Nevertheless, for some people it is better to stay local for numerous reasons. If someone is fully focused and growing in his hometown location, then it is unnecessary for him to relocate. Relocating really depends on the person, place and time. (הכל לפי הענין.)

2.

The Torah is the midpoint and foundation of the Jewish people

"The tent of Meeting, the camp of the Leviyim, shall journey in the middle of the camps." (2, 17)

"ונסע אהל מועד מחנה הלויים בתוך המחנות."

The Ohel Moade (tent of meeting) was located in the middle of the Jewish camps. Why? The Chafetz Chaim explains that the Torah is placed in the Aron (ark), which is in the Ohel moad. Therefore the Ohel moad has to be in the middle. The middle is equidistant to everybody. A similar concept exists in Shuls, where the bima (the podium or platform in a shul from which the Torah and Prophets are read) is located in the center. Similarly, the eitz chaim (tree of life) was planted in the middle of the gan (garden) as explained by Targum (2, 9). The Torah is also an eitz chaim, as stated in the pasuk in Mishlay (3, 18) "it is a tree of life to those who grasp it." "עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה." Everyone needs to be located around that tree. There is actually a machlokes (argument) about how the Jews would travel when they would relocate. Some say that they would go in a straight line. Others argue and say that they would go in a square like position and the Ohel moad would be in the center. The aforementioned concept is based on the opinion that holds that they would travel in a box like manner. This is also similar to the anatomy of a human body. As we know, our body consists of many different limbs, organs and parts. Some are more crucial than others. **The heart is incredibly important. Our life comes from the heart. The heart pumps/sends blood and gives life to the rest of the body. The heart serves as the midpoint of the body. The heart is vital. We cannot live without a heart. The heart is a necessity. The Torah is located in the center because of its vitality. The Torah is for every single Jew, whether they spend their time fully engrossed in learning Torah, or**

whether they support Torah and spend less time learning. So too, the Torah needs to be in the middle, in order that it can provide spiritual life to everyone. The life of Jews without Torah isn't life as stated by the Rambam (hilchos rosayach perek 7).

What is the Chafetz Chaim alluding to when he stated 'as stated by the Rambam (hilchos rosayach perek 7)'?

They used to have something called עירי מקלט (city of refuge). One who kills someone accidentally would run to this city of refuge in order that the friends or family of the one who was murdered won't try to kill the accidental murderer. The Gemara in Makkos (10a) states the Rabbi of a student who accidentally killed someone goes to the city of refuge with the student because the pasuk in Devarim (4, 42) states "he shall flee to one of those cities and live." His Rabbi is considered his life. (תנא תלמיד שגלה מגלין רבו עמו שנאמר "והי" עבד ליה מידי דתהוי ליה חיותא.) The Gemara also says that if a Rosh Yeshiva accidentally killed someone, his entire Yeshiva goes to the city of refuge with him. The Namoki Yosef explains that the Torah is life as the pasuk states in Devarim (30, 20) "it is your life and the length of your days." / "כי הוא חיך ואורך ימך." Also the pasuk in Mishlay (4, 22) states "it is life for those who find it." / "כי חיים הם למוצאייהם." Even though there are other Rabbis in the city of refuge; nevertheless the Rabbi of the student who accidentally killed someone goes with him to the city of refuge, because certain teachers are irreplaceable as mentioned above. The same applies to the Rosh Yeshiva who accidentally killed someone. Even if there is another Yeshiva in the city of refuge, nevertheless explains the Ritva, the Rosh Yeshiva's Yeshiva goes with him to the city of refuge.

The Rambam (hilchos rosayach perek 7 Halacha 1) paskins (holds) that this is the Halacha. He also says that the life of talmid chachamim without Torah is like death. (חיי בעלי חכמה ומבקשה) (בלא תלמוד תורה כמיתה חשובין).

The Nesiv (Mashiv darav chalek beis siman 76) adds that since the necessary sefarim of a talmid chacham are his life; therefore these sefarim must go with him to the city of refuge as well.

Nowadays the sefarim of talmid chachamim are their Rabbis and life. (ספרים ההכרחיים) (לתלמיד חכם היינו חייו וכו'. ובזמן הזה ספרי תלמידי חכמים המה רבותיו וחיותא דידיה.)

The Tapuchay Zahav (page 713) asks; the city of refuge most likely has Rabbis there. Even though this student is used to learning from a certain Rabbi, is this really a legitimate reason to cause the Rabbi and his entire family to get exiled to the city of refuge? Getting exiled is not a simple task that should be taken lightly. The Chinuch (mitzvah 410) writes that exile is very painful because one separates from their loved ones and place of birth. He has to live in a foreign land with unfamiliar people, this is almost considered like death?! We can derive a massive childish (insight) from the Rabbi having to go to the city of refuge. **A qualitative spiritual diminishment, even if it is only minimal, is a qualitative decrease in one's life.** (כל 'משהו' של מיעוט באיכות הלימוד כמוהו כמיעוט בעצם החיים.)

The Shulchan Aruch (yora daya siman 240 sif 25) states that one who wants to attend a certain Yeshiva where he knows he will have success because of a Rabbi there or another reason, but his father doesn't want him to attend that Yeshiva because they are afraid that that area is physically dangerous, the son does not need to listen to his parent. (תלמיד שרוצה ללכת למקום אחר, שהוא בוטח שיראה) סימן ברכה בתלמודו לפני הרב ששם, ואביו מוחה בו לפי שדואג שבאותה העיר העובדי כוכבים מעלילים, אינו צריך לשמוע (לאביו בזה). (The source of this Halacha is a Terumas Hadeshen siman 40. He explains that a good Rabbi/teacher is irreplaceable (שלא מן כל אדם זיכה ללמוד).)

Meaning, one could in fact listen and fulfill his parents concern and not attend that Yeshiva. However, he doesn't need to listen to his parent. **He can halachically attend whatever Yeshiva**

he wants even against the will of his parent. This is not considered a violation of kivud av v'eim (respecting one's parents). (As a side point; many people incorrectly think that kivud av v'eim necessitates children to do everything that their parents ask for. This is very far from true. For example if a parent instructs a child to jump off a fifty story building without a parachute; this child surely shouldn't listen.)

The Pischay Teshuva (sif katan 22) quotes the Chamude Daniel who says that even if the son is doubtful whether he will have more spiritual success in this new Yeshiva or not, nevertheless it is permissible for him to attend.

This shows how the Torah is our life.