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Parashat Behaalotecha - #283

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## On the Parashah...

### On the Way

[Tal Chermon]

The Book of Bemidbar is the book of transitions - the “on the way” book. As the People of Israel journey to the Promised Land, they encounter many dangers and must undergo many tests. In the first Parshiyot of Bemidbar, the Torah teaches us how they prepare for their journey: Each tribe is arranged in military fashion in its own specified area. In the heart of the encampment stands the Mishkan, where the Divine Presence rests. The question of those who, for one reason or another, are physically or spiritually estranged from the Camp (the physically impure, the thief, the Sotah, the Nazir) is dealt with in Parashat Naso. The Birkat Cohanim is received, the Mishkan is dedicated, and we arrive at Parashat Beha'alotcha.

We begin with man's physical and spiritual work in this world as represented in the spiritual world of the Mishkan: Lighting the Menorah symbolizes enlightenment. The light kindled in the Mishkan brings a blessing to all cultural achievements worldwide. The Lechem Ha-Panim, on the other hand, symbolizes man's economic achievements. “To become wise - go south, for the Menorah stands in the southern area of the Mishkan. To become rich - go north, for the Shulchan Lechem Panim is in the North” (Baba Batra 25b).

Care of the Mishkan and its utensils is entrusted to the Levi'im. This week's Parashah teach us more about their work. It then goes on to the unique sacrifice brought by each Jew - the Korban Pesach.

The Nation is now ready to travel, led by the Pillar of Cloud in the daytime and the

Pillar of Fire at night. Yitro, Moshe's Midianite father-in-law, is invited to become a part of the Jewish People and to embark on the journey together with the whole Nation.

"A book of its own" is how our Sages designate the two short verses separating the above preparations from the onset of the actual journey. "And it came to pass, when the Aron set forth" (Bemidbar10:35-36): This Parashah teaches that the Divine Presence accompanies us "on the way." The Aron contains the Torah through which the Master of the Universe reveals Himself to us, as the Gemara tells, "I gave myself in the written words" (Shabbat 105a). It is as if G-d Himself were in the Torah. The Aron containing the Torah accompanies us everywhere, whether we succeed or fail: "He who dwells in their midst in all their impurity"- "Even when they are impure, the Divine Presence remains in their midst" (Yoma 56b). This short passage is framed on both sides by an upside-down letter "Nun". Nun is the letter of "Nefilah" - of falling and failing, and for that reason was left out of the "Ashrei" (Shabbat 116. Berachot 4b). Nevertheless, the Master of the World does not desert us. He is with us in our exile (Megilla 29a). |This concept deserves a 'book of its own.'

No sooner do we start out on the way than troubles begin. First, "and the People were as if complaining; it displeased Hashem" (Bemidbar.11:1). Then they "desired a desire" (ibid. 4), followed by the Lashon Hara against Moshe, the sins of the spies, Korach, and so on - all internal crises. These are followed by enemies from without - Edom, Sichon, Balak and Bil'am. The way is fraught with danger and time after time we fall.

After the Six Day War, a conference of Muslim academics was held in the El-Azhar University near Cairo on the theological implications of the State of Israel. They agreed unanimously that the State must be wiped out. As to its Jewish population, there were two opinions. One was that they could be permitted to remain if they were faithful to the Palestinian State. The other held that they were incorrigible and must be totally eradicated. One professor wrote an article in which he attempted to prove the intrinsic corruption of the Jewish Nation as reflected in the 'Old Testament' itself, by the sins we committed in the desert.

There is no attempt here to hide our imperfections. However, mistakes are an inherently human characteristic. "There is no one so righteous on earth who does only good and never sins." We stumbled, got up, and resumed our work. "Seven times does a righteous man fall, and he rises" (Kohelet 24:16). Through these failures, we learn to correct and perfect ourselves.

There are things that can only be comprehended through trial and failure. The trial of "Kivrot HaTa'ava" (the graves of desire) teaches us how to relate to materialism. Through the crisis with Miriam and Aharon we come to understand the vast difference between Moshe Rabbenu and all other prophets. Of course, it is

unnecessary to fail purposely, there are sufficient opportunities without that. When we do fail, however, we must use that experience as a springboard for spiritual elevation. “No person can really comprehend the Torah’s teachings unless he has failed first” (Gittin 43a). Failure can actually help us reach perfection.

## Rav Aviner on... Conversion in our Day

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Naso 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

**Question:** In our country, there are 300,000 immigrants who are non-Jews. It isn’t clear who was responsible for this bizarre phenomenon, but it’s a fact that we cannot ignore. 99% of them are uninterested in Mitzvah observance, so perhaps we must enact a mass conversion of whoever is interested in converting, rendering them part of the Jewish People, without Torah and Mitzvot, and make do with that.

**Answer:** Conversion in our generation is like conversion throughout the generations, for the Torah has not changed. Quite the contrary, according to the Torah, we have to be more careful about accepting converts in our generation than in previous generations, since the situation in our country is good, thank G-d. Hence we have to consider the possibility that whoever sets out to convert is not doing so out of love of the Torah of Israel, but for his own benefit. As Rambam said: “The correct way of effecting conversion, is that when a prospective convert approaches us, we investigate whether that candidate is seeking conversion for monetary benefits, power or even out of fear. And we also investigate whether or not that candidate has set his eyes on a Jewish person of the opposite sex... The Rabbinical courts rejected converts throughout the entire time of King David and King Shlomo. During the time of the former, converts were rejected lest they were coming out of fear, and during the latter they were rejected lest they were attracted by the great monarchy and bounty that Israel enjoyed. Whoever applies for conversion out of ulterior motives is not considered a righteous convert” (Hilchot Isurei Bi’ah 13:14-15).

Indeed, in our own times, whoever sets out to convert is suspected of being insincere, making us wonder, “Why are you coming now? Why didn’t you come during the Crusades, during the Chelminski pogroms or during the Holocaust, but only to a fine, wealthy country?!” (see Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 268:2). It may very well be that the candidate is sincere, but he certainly should have to prove it.

There are discussions within Jewish law about whether or not Mitzvot have to be performed with sincere intent (Orach Chaim 60), but with conversion it’s different. It’s not enough to proclaim, “Your people are my people”. Rather, the candidate must say, “Your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d,” as Rut did (Rut 1:16). Otherwise, the candidate is referring to a different Jewish People, one that has no G-d that revealed Himself to them at Sinai and gave them Torah and Mitzvot. He is then not a “righteous convert” [Ger Tzedek], to use Rambam’s term. He’s got the wrong address. He has converted to a different Jewish People. Thus, changing the definition of a convert is tantamount to changing the definition of the Jewish People.

How then did Hillel the Elder accept the candidate who said to him, “Convert me with the intent of making me the High Priest” (Shabbat 31a). How could that be? Surely that candidate was seeking power and privilege! Rather, the Tosafot explain that Hillel knew that that convert was on his way towards being a total convert (Yevamot 109b, s.v., “Ra’a”). It was clear to Hillel that his insincerity would develop into sincerity.

In our day as well, if a court is convinced and certain that the conversion candidate will ultimately be G-d fearing, the Rabbinic court justice can accept him on his own discretion (Beit Yosef 61, Yoreh Deah 268).

Nonetheless, in our day the reality is the opposite. In many cases, when someone sets out to convert, the court is convinced that he is not going to keep Torah and Mitzvot.

Moreover, if people seek to convert under such circumstances, we have to wait and see what is going to happen. As Rambam wrote: “And despite that [suspicion we harbor regarding the attractiveness of King David’s era], many converts still converted during the days of Kings David and Shlomo before laymen’s courts, and the Sanhedrin suspected them. All the same, since they had immersed in the ritual bath they wouldn’t reject them, but they would not accept them until they saw what became of them.” (Hilchot Isurei Biah 13:15)

Likewise, Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Avraham Shapira explained that it does not suffice for the convert to say that he accepts the yoke of Mitzvot. Rather, as long as it is not yet clear to us that he truly intends to keep Torah and Mitzvot fully, he is a “Safek Ger” [a convert of doubtful status] (Menachem Avraham 1, pp. 69-70. And if there is a clear assessment that he has not undertaken the yoke of Mitzvot, then there is no value to his declaration, and his conversion does not take hold (Shut Achiezer 3:26, at the start of paragraph 3. Shut Da’at Cohian 153, d.h. vatimhenu me’od).

Some argue that it says, “Love the convert” (Devarim 10:19). Certainly he must be loved, brought near and accepted graciously. Yet that does not mean that we should lie in the name of the Torah. Imagine someone telling his physician, “Please treat me nicely. Love me. Make no demands of me. Go lightly with me. Let your doctoring be friendly and indulgent.” If a physician conducted himself that way, against what he was taught, he would be expelled from the medical profession.

It is true that the first Sephardic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Ben Tzion Uziel wrote that in a great emergency, one can accept converts even if it is clear that they will not keep Torah and Mitzvot (Piskei Uziel Bi-She’elot Hazman 65), and he was certainly a very illustrious rabbi. Yet his was a solitary view, and all the other halachic authorities rejected it (Achiezer *ibid.*, Da’at Kohen, *ibid.* and 143, Igrot Moshe, Minchat Yitzchak, Shevet Levi, Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Shlomo Auerbach, Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Elyashiv, et al).

Likewise Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Shlomo Dichovsky expressed the novel idea that if the candidate declared that he accepts the Mitzvot, his conversion is in force even if his behavior afterwards contradicts this, because we have to accept the idea that at the very moment he made the declaration, there was a spark within him of intent to keep Torah and Mitzvot. Yet that, as well, is a solitary view, with which the other halachic authorities do not agree.

It is true that sometimes in an emergency we rely on solitary views, but here it’s the opposite. A convert has to be accepted as a Jew according to most opinions, even according to all opinions. Consider the following: Suppose I came to you suggesting that you marry a wonderful girl, but the chance that she was Jewish was only one percent? Would you agree to marry her? Even if there was a one percent chance that she was not Jewish, you would not agree.

Therefore, we don’t do mass conversions, but only individual conversions, based on investigating each candidate about whether or not he/she wishes to join the fold. True, the history books note that there were cases of mass conversions, but it is not certain whether this involved pristine, genuine conversion, or adoption of a few Jewish customs. Moreover, it is not made clear what came of that afterwards. Likewise, there is no support for any of this in our Talmudic or halachic literature. What is clear is that from a scientific perspective, the DNA of Jews from all ethnic groups is almost identical, which points to a low percentage of conversions.

The rule of thumb is this: If a non-Jew converts and does not undertake to keep Mitzvot, his conversion is no conversion (Da’at Kohen 148, Minchat Yitzchak 6:107, et al).

Moreover, even imagining that such a conversion would be considered valid, what benefit would we be bringing to that person who is not going to be keeping Mitzvot? We are no missionaries, and we do not say that the World-to-Come is only for Jews. That non- Jew, prior to his conversion, is one of the righteous gentiles who has a heavenly portion.

Now we are transforming him into a Jewish sinner who has no share in the World-to-Come! (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 157. Minchat Shlomo 35:3).

If so, you ask, what is the solution? There is no solution! It is an unsolvable problem! After all, we have other serious, unsolvable problems in our national lives: the proliferation of our enemies from without and from within; large portions of our people being estranged from the Torah; educational and legal systems that do not conform with Jewish law; most of the Jewish People living in the Exile facing terrible spiritual dangers. And all this without mentioning the unsolvable problem of the Exile, which weighed heavily on us for two thousand years, and even so, it didn't break us, and didn't force us to abandon our religion. Rather, we believed that this suffering would meet its end, and now our hope is being fulfilled.

In just the same way, the problem of large numbers of non-Jews in Israel will be solved. How? We don't know. Perhaps it will happen the way our sages envision it, or perhaps in some other way: "In the future, idolaters will come and convert. Will we accept them? Surely we learned, 'We don't accept converts in the Messianic era,' just as we did not accept them in the times of David or of Shlomo. Rather, they will become self-made converts, i.e., 'they will push their way in, even though they are not accepted' (Rashi on Avoda Zara 22a), and they will put Tefillin on their heads and their arms, Tzitzit on their garments and Mezuzot on their doorposts.

"When those converts see the War of Gog and Magog, they will ask Gog and Magog, 'Why have you come?' and the answer will be, 'To attack G-d and His anointed,' as it says, 'Why are the nations in an uproar? Why do the peoples mutter in vain?' (Tehillim 2:1). Every one of those converts will then pull off his Tefillin and leave, as it says, 'Let us break their bands' (v. 3), and G-d sits and laughs: 'He who sits in heaven laughs.'" (Avoda Zara 3b)

Let us strengthen ourselves in the pathway of Torah. Let us not change or alter our Nation. Your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d.

## **Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law**

### **Har Ha-Bayit - Temple Mount**

Opinion of Charedim

Q: Why haven't Charedi Rabbis, like Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv ztz"l, come out against ascending to Har Ha-Bayit?

A: Because the answer is obvious and known. Someone once asked Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv about ascending to Har Ha-Bayit, and he responded: "Chas Ve-Shalom!" The Gabbai said to the one who asked: "You ask questions like this to Ha-Rav?! The punishment is Karet?!" Ha-Rav Elyashiv added: "And even if it isn't Karet, as it is written (Bemidbar 5:3): 'So that they should not contaminate their camps, among which I dwell'" (Vayishma Moshe Volume 1, pp. 188-189. And immediately after the Temple Mt. was liberated, it is related that the Steipler Gaon prepared a letter to publicize that it is a severe prohibition to enter the Har Ha-Bayit, and his students gathered the signatures of all the great Charedi Poskim, but when the Chief Rabbinate publicized that it is a severe prohibition, he said that there is no need

to put out his letter, since it has already been pronounced. Orchot Rabbenu Volume 1, pp. 324-328).

Meiri and Har Ha-Bayit

Q: I saw a quote in the name of the Meiri regarding the Temple Mt.: "The basic custom is to enter there according to what we heard"?

A: We need to add the word: "Not". Shut Tzitz Eliezer 10:1.

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