

always is the שבת before the טוב of יום שבועות. Just as an aside, not the main part of this talk, my quiz question for everyone I've come into contact with for the last two weeks is, if the שבת before פסח is שבת הגדול and the שבת before יום כיפור is שבת שובה, what is the name of the שבת before שבועות? And everyone looks at me with a glazed look and I answered them שבת דרכי ארץ because קדמה לתורה. It's in the חידושי הרי"ם.

But that is not the thrust of this week's talk. This week, we are focusing on the פרשה of במדבר, which always comes out right before the טוב of יום שבועות. Many of the מפרשים, from ראשונים to אחרונים, as prominently as תוספות in מגילה, up to and including R' Moshe Feinstein, discuss the question: why is it specifically פרשת במדבר that comes before שבועות? We know that פרשת במדבר includes one of the counts, the census of בני ישראל. The second pasuk of the פרשה says: "שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל" - "Count up בני ישראל." All the מפרשים ask: why does it use the לשון of שאו? It could have said מנו, or used another term that simply means "count." But שאו also means "to lift up." This teaches us that each and every Yid is equal in value. Each one is counted once. The person who has the least amount of knowledge, an הארץ, is counted equally with the greatest חכם. This gives us an incentive to aspire to greatness. It also tells us that we can reach greatness, we should never think it's beyond us. Every one of us is an equal member of כלל ישראל. Therefore, R' Moshe says in דרש משה that the reason we read פרשת במדבר before שבועות is to remind us that we can lift ourselves up. The way to elevate ourselves is by receiving the תורה and to study it.

What's fascinating is at the beginning of the פרשה is this census, this counting of each and every member of כלל ישראל. And at the very end of what we read on פרשת במדבר, not the end of the פרשה itself, but the end of the הפטרה, which comes from הושע in תרי עשר, there is a powerful conclusion. The last two פסוקים in the הפטרה of פרשת במדבר, which all boys who are 13 years and older will instantly recognize, are as follows: וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי בְצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים - I'll betroth you to me forever; וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי לְעוֹלָם - I will betroth you with righteousness, with justice, with kindness, and with mercy. וְאַרְשִׁיתִי לִי בְאֱמוּנָה - I will betroth you with faith, with אמונה, with בטחון; וְיָדַעְתָּ אֹתִי - and then you will know Hashem. These פסוקים, which we say every single day when we put on our תפילין - and if we're looking forward to our מצוה בר מצוה when we're not yet 13, we start learning it ahead of time - reflects the tremendous excitement, the enthusiasm, and the happiness we feel in drawing closer to Hashem, just like a חתן and כלה who are in the stage of אירוסין. And that's why the מפרשים say the pasuk uses אֲרֻשָּׁתִי and not נִישׁוּאִין? Because this is the period of anticipation. They're looking forward with enthusiasm to that happy day when they'll become a בית נאמן בישראל. A חתן and כלה join together in the most profound way to serve Hashem through the building of a משפחה.

That's what הר סיני was. That's what we're looking forward to. And it's so appropriate that this is the שבת of במדבר, right before שבועות - to infuse us with that same excitement and enthusiasm. To inspire and energize us with the drive we should have, each and every year, and every day, as we face the תורה הקדושה that Hashem is giving to us. We have the זכות to learn it, and through it, to come closer to Hashem. וְיָדַעְתָּ תורה - this knowledge of Hashem, this ידיעת השם, is the ultimate goal of all of תורה.

This was my father's ע"ה bar mitzvah parsha, and this was his הפטרה. It's something which is so well known to us, which he had the זכות to have for his bar mitzvah parsha. My father was an inspiration to us all. His memory should be a ברכה, and he should be a מליץ יושר for all of כלל ישראל.

