

The Gemara (מגילה ל"א:) associates the Torah reading before the holiday of Shavuot with פרשת בחוקותי which contains the ברכות וקללות, blessings and curses. We actually read that section at least one week before Shavuot, making במדבר the פרשה that most frequently precedes Shavuot. What is the connection between Shavuot and פרשת במדבר that Chazal were keen on ensuring?

It is interesting to note that on leap years where the last day of Pesach in Israel is Friday and Shabbat for those in the diaspora, the weekly reading in diaspora communities lags by a week in comparison to the community in Israel. We don't synchronize with our brethren in Israel until פרשיות מטות-מסעי, when we finally double up those Parshiot. There is ample opportunity for the diaspora communities to catch up prior to פרשיות מטות-מסעי. Indeed, we could read מות-קדושים or בהר- אהרי מות-קדושים together as is often done in a non-leap year and catch up almost immediately. Why do we wait so long to catch up?

The Maharit says we wait to catch up because this is a unique situation where those in the diaspora can fulfill something that those in Israel cannot. The Rabbis associated the Blessings and Curses from בחוקותי with the holiday of Shavuot but those in Israel cannot comply because the calendar will not allow them to, as the conclusion of Passover on Friday opens up a regular Shabbat Torah reading and they must read the next Parsha in sequence. As we do not read the same Parsha twice, by reading one Parsha per week those in Israel are forced to read פרשת נשא the week before Shavuot. However we in the diaspora have an opportunity to comply with the Rabbis desire to read בחוקותי a week before Shavuot and therefore read פרשת במדבר the Shabbat that immediately precedes Shavuot. We forego the opportunity to synchronize at the earlier time and instead wait for the 3 week period prior to Tisha B'Av to synchronize then.

Apparently Chazal identified a strong connection between these Parshiot and Shavuot. פרשת במדבר begins with the census taken as the Jews were about to depart the Sinai Desert and begin their march to the Promised Land. At Sinai, the Jews were encamped around the mountain in concentric circles of sanctity that separated the various groups. The community was camped around the mountain, but were enjoined from crossing the line to touch the mountain. The Elders and the children

of Aaron were permitted to come closer to the epi-center than the nation at large, yet they too were limited in how far up the mountain they could go. Joshua, Moses' student, approached even further as he camped on the mountain awaiting the return of his teacher. The most inner circle was occupied by Moses and ultimately Gd as he climbed the mountain and remained with Him for 40 days and nights. (See Ramban's introduction to ספר במדבר where he offers a similar idea.)

This encampment blueprint was not limited to the Sinai desert and the receipt of the Torah. Gd established the principle of קדושת מחנות, the different and increasing levels of sanctity that defined the Jewish Nation as it camped around Mount Sinai and as they traveled in the desert towards their final destination. The 12 tribes were divided into 4 groups all of whom surrounded the Levite Camp which then surrounded Aaron and his children who surrounded Moses and the אוהל מועד which surrounded the שכינה, Divine Countenance, כביכול. This traveling formation reenacted the concept of קדושת מחנות from Mount Sinai, as each group had to remain within its designated area.

The idea of קדושת מחנות continued even after the people inherited and divided the land. The Rabbis tell us (כלים פ"א) that there are 10 different levels of sanctity and how the land of Israel has a higher level of sanctity than all other lands. Jerusalem has a higher level of sanctity than the rest of the land of Israel and the Temple Mount has an even higher level, etc. Each of these designated locations is defined by their level of sanctity, which was modeled upon the encampment of the people in Sinai at the time of קבלת התורה, celebrated on Shavuot.

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