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מרומי תורה

פרשת נשא - ט' סיון תשפ"ד

Should *Parshas Bamidbar* Have Been Shorter?

Ben Freund

The classic *d'var Torah* on *Parshas Naso* questions the repetition in the *parsha* that makes *Naso* the longest *parsha* in the *Torah*. However, this is not the shortening I want to focus on in this *d'var Torah*. Instead, I want to highlight a point brought out by the Birkat Asher[1] about how the *parsha* could have been shorter in a different way.[2]

If we look at the end of *Parshas Bamidbar*, we see that the seventh *aliyah* focuses on listing the responsibilities of the *Levi'im*.[3] It starts off with the families of Kehas, listing all their duties. Then, *Parshas Bamidbar* abruptly ends. Enter *Parshas Naso*, and we continue the list of responsibilities with the families of Gershon and Merari, and we finish the *perek* with a census of all three groups of families.[4]

The Birkat Asher's question is simple: Why split the *perek* into two different *parshiyos*, when it's all referring to the same topic? The responsibilities of the families of Kehas could have been included in *Parshas Naso* (which is already long anyway), along with the discussion about the responsibilities of the families of Gershon and Merari and the census. Why split them up?

He brings down an answer from the sefer, Vavim La'amudim,[5] which brings a question on the Sefer HaChinuch. When a *parsha* doesn't contain a *mitzvah*, the Sefer HaChinuch's normal formulation is something like, "פרשת פלונית אין בה מצוה" ("This *parsha* has no *mitzvah* in it.").[6] However, by *Parshas Bamidbar*, he changes his language slightly: "סדר ראשון אין בו מצוה לחשבוננו" ("The first *seder* has no *mitzvah* in it according to our count."). Setting aside the change in language from "פרשת" to "סדר", why does he include the language of "לחשבוננו", "according to our count"? This language doesn't appear by any other *parsha*,[7] so why include it here?

The Minchas Chinuch also notices this inconsistency and explains as follows.[8] The Sefer HaChinuch's count of the *mitzvos* is based on the count of the Rambam. However, there are many other *meforshim* who count *mitzvos*. Therefore, explains the Minchas Chinuch, while there is no *mitzvah* in *Parshas Bamidbar* according to the count of the Rambam, there is a *mitzvah* according to a different count, namely, the count of the

The *Mitzvos* of G-d or the Holiness of Aharon?[1]

Elisheva Cohen

A few of the more famous *pesukim* in this week's *parsha* are those of *birkat kohanim*.[2] Not only are they *leined* this week, but we also say them during *davening* every day during the *chazzan*'s repetition,[3] during *davening* every *Yom Tov* during *mussaf*,[4] and some with children have the *minhag* to bless their children with these *pesukim* every Friday night.[5]

However, instead of focusing on the *pesukim* themselves, I'd like to focus on the *bracha* that the *Kohanim* say before they bless the people:

"ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרון וצונו לברך את עמו ישראל באהבה"

"Blessed are You, Eternal our G-d, Ruler of the universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless Your people Israel with love." [6]

This formulation is puzzling. When we look at most *brachos*, the formulation is, "...אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו...", "…Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us…".[7] However, here, the formulation seems to be more focused on Aharon than on G-d. Why don't we stick to the same formulation? Is the *bracha* here meant to imply that the holiness of Aharon is necessary to bless the people with these *brachos*?

The question is only strengthened when one looks at the text around *birkas kohanim*. During *davening*, before we say the *brachos*, we say a short prelude:

"אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו ברכנו בברכה המשלשת בתורה הכתובה על ידי משה עבדך האמורה מפי אהרן ובניו כהנים עם קדושך כאמור"

"Our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, bless us with the three-verse blessing in the *Torah* that was written by the hand of Moses, Your servant, that was said by Aaron and his sons, the *Kohanim*, Your holy people – as it said." [8]

Notice how this prelude asks G-d to bless us, noting Moshe and Aharon as the intermediaries, but not as the source of sanctity. Additionally, when the *Torah* details the *birkas kohanim*, Hashem makes it very clear that He is blessing the people and not

Ba'al Halachos Gedolos ("Bahag"). The Bahag counts a negative commandment of "הגונב את הקסוה", "one who steals a service vessel".[9] The *Gemara* in *Sanhedrin* learns out this negative commandment from the last *pasuk* in *Parshas Bamidbar*.[10] So, according to our count, the count of the Rambam and the Sefer HaChinuch, there are no *mitzvos* in *Parshas Bamidbar*. However, according to the count of the Bahag, there is a *mitzvah*.

This, explains the Vavim La'amudim, is why the *parshiyos* are split like they are. We wanted to ensure that both *Parshas Bamidbar* and *Parshas Naso* had a *mitzvah* in them, since both are considerably long *parshiyos*.[11] Therefore, we keep reading about the division of responsibilities of the *Levi'im* in *Parshas Bamidbar* until we hit a *mitzvah*, and then we immediately switch to *Parshas Naso*.

We see from here how much Chazal valued not going too long without involving oneself in *Torah* pursuits.[12] *Parshas Bamidbar* could have gone by without anyone ascribing any *mitzvos* to it. This is, in fact, how the Rambam viewed it. However, Chazal were concerned about going too long without mentioning a *mitzvah*. Therefore, they made sure to include a *mitzvah* in *Parshas Bamidbar* as well.

Now that *Shavuos* is over, it may feel like there's not much to look forward to in the Jewish calendar. The next closest "holiday" in our calendar is the Three Weeks, bookended by *Shiva Asar B'Tammuz* and *Tisha B'Av*. Nonetheless, we must focus on the lesson Chazal teach us from where they end *Parshas Bamidbar* and start *Parshas Naso*. We must carry our inspiration from *Shavuos* over throughout the upcoming months, making sure we learn *Torah*, *daven*, and do *mitzvos* every day. And, in the merit of all of this, may we be merit the building of the third *Bais HaMikdash* speedily in our days.

Trivia Questions

1) Who was רות's sister? Who was their father? Who was their great grandfather?

2) What event in מגילת רות happened on פסח?

[1] ברכת אשר על התורה is a, "21st-century *Torah* commentary by the editor of the *Shmirat Shabbat KeHilkhatah*, with a focus on elucidating Rashi's commentary" (Sefaria).
[2] This whole question and answer is elucidated in ברכת אשר על התורה במדבר ד:כב ד"ה שאלה אחרת לגמרי.
[3] במדבר ד:א–כ.
[4] במדבר ד:כא–מט.
[5] The ברכת אשר על התורה quotes this as follows: "תשובה נוספת מביא הרב פרופסור יעקב אליהו אפרתי בספרו 'ווים לעמודים' (עמ' טז. ראה גם שמעתין 115–116 עמ' 20)".
[6] See, for example, פרשת נח, where he says, "פרשת אלה תולדת נח אין בה מצוה".
[7] As the ספר ווים לעמודים points out: "שאין דרכו של בעל החינוך לכתוב כן בפרשיות אחרות שאין בהן מצוה".
[8] מנחת חינוך שסא:ב.
[9] סנהדרין ט:ו.
[10] סנהדרין דף פא עמוד ב. As Sefaria explains, "And where is it intimated that one who steals a service vessel is liable to be killed by zealots? The *Gemara* answers that it is intimated in the verse: 'But they shall not come to see the sacred items as they are being covered [*kevala*], lest they die' (Numbers 4:20). The *Gemara* interprets the term *kevala* as one who ingests, i.e., who takes (see Job 20:15), and the verse thereby teaches that one who steals a service vessel is liable to be killed."
[11] As the ספר ווים לעמודים explains: "שכאשר קבעו רבותינו שבבל לסיים את קריאת התורה מדי שנה בשנה וחילקו את התורה לפרשיות אלו הנהוגות עד היום בכל תפוצות ישראל בדקו וראו שהנה בפרשה ארוכה זו אין בה אפילו מצוה אחת".
[12] This is the same reason given for why we *lain* on Mondays, Thursdays, and by *Mincha* on *Shabbosos*, as the *Gemara* says: "כיון שהלכו שלשת ימים בלא תורה נלאו עמדו נביאים שביניהם ותיקנו להם שיהו קורין בבא קמא דף פב עמוד א בשבת ומפסיקין באחד בשבת וקורין בשני ומפסיקין שלישי ורביעי וקורין בחמישי ומפסיקין ערב שבת כדי שלא ילינו שלשה ימים בלא תורה".

someone else.[9] So, why are we deviating from our standard formulation? Why focus on Aharon's sanctity at all, if the *bracha* is coming directly from G-d?

The answer to this question lies in the other strange part of the formulation, namely, that the *bracha* of *birkas kohanim* ends with, "באהבה", "with love". Love is essential to *birkas kohanim*, so much so that the *Zohar* says, "a priest who does not love the people or is not loved by the people should not raise his hands to bless them".[10] And who better to represent love than Aharon, someone who Chazal say was a lover of mankind.[11]

Of course, Hashem could bless the Jews without Aharon and without the *Kohanim*. Nonetheless, Hashem made Aharon into a paradigm of love, and he wanted this blessing that we use so frequently to flow through that love. That's why we change the formulation of this blessing. We want it to be, "בקדושתו של אהרון", "with the sanctity that Hashem gave Aharon", which itself is imbued, "באהבה", "with love".

We say *brachos* so many times throughout our lives, but how often do we focus on how we say them? Now that *Shavuos* has passed and we have focused on how Hashem gave us the *Torah* with love, let us take the opportunity to thank Him and praise Him with that same love, and, with that love, may we merit the rebuilding of the third *Bais HaMikdash*, speedily in our days.

Trivia Answers From Last Week

1) The מנורה had three arms on each side and the base rested on three legs. See רש"י פרשת תרומה כה, לא.

2) The 12 are:

- חושים בן דן
- אהליאב בן אחיסמך
- בן האשה ישראלית
- שלומית בת דברי
- אחיעזר בן עמישדי
- עמיאל בן גמלי
- בקי בן יגלי

[1] The ideas for this דבר תורה are taken from a sheet on Sefaria titled, "*Priestly Blessing / Birkat Cohanim (handout)*" by Jonathan Samuel. It can be found here: sefaria.org/sheets/179580.16?lang=bi.
[2] במדבר ו:כב–כז.
[3] סדור אהבת שלום, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*, pg. 116.
[4] סדור אהבת שלום, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*, pgs. 692-700.
[5] סדור אהבת שלום, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*, pg. 354.
[6] Translation from Sefaria.
[7] See, for example, the *bracha* on lighting *Shabbos* candles: "ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להדליק נר של שבת". Additionally, translation quoted above is taken from סדור אהבת שלום, *The Artscroll Siddur*, pg. 297.
[8] Translation from the סדור אהבת שלום, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*, pg. 695.
[9] See במדבר ו:כז, where the פסוק says, "ואני אברכם", "and I will bless them".
[10] זוהר נשא דף קמז עמוד ב. Translation from the sheet quoted in footnote 1. The actual text reads, "כל כהן דהוא לא רחים לעמא או עמא לא רחמין ליה לא יפרוס ידוי לברכא לעמא דכתיב (משלי כב:ט) טוב עין הוא יבורך יבורך אל תקרי יבורך אלא יברך".
[11] פרקי אבות א:יב.

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