

## Vayechi - Rabbi Lerner - February 5, 2012

### The Arrival at Har Sinai

19:1-2: *In the third month of the Bnei Yisrael's leaving Egypt (the month of Sivan) on this very day (Rosh Chodesh) they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai. They traveled from Refidim and arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai and encamped in the Wilderness; and Israel encamped there, opposite the mountain (Vayichan Shom Yisrael Neged Hahar).* **Ramban**: if they already arrived at Sinai in the first pasuk, why then say in the next pasuk that they traveled from Refidim - these pasukim seem out of order? In addition, at the end of the previous parsha, when Amalek attacked, we know they were in Refidim - it was the last stop before Har Sinai, and Amalek deliberately attacked at that point to prevent the Jews from receiving the Torah. So if anything, these pasukim should have been reversed to emphasize from where and what experience the Jews had just left?

**Meshech Chachmah**: there is no comparable situation of these pasukim to any other place in the Torah - whenever the Torah gives dates, it always uses a Vav Hachibur, a connecting Vav, along with the word Vayehi beforehand - it should have said "*Vayehi Bachodesh Hashlishi*" - there is always a connecting vav with the word Vayehi. Here it has to start this way because this is like a new beginning to the chumash, comparable to the beginning of the Torah, both beginning with a bais. Why is that? In 24:1, the perek starts with a command from Hashem for Moshe, Aharon and his Sons, with the pasuk beginning with an unusual formulation that uses "Ve'El Moshe Amar" rather than the usual "Vayedaber Hashem El Moshe". **Rashi** says that is because this pasuk was said before the Torah was given - it means that Hashem had said this to Moshe before the Torah was given. This section at the end of Mishpatim really happened earlier, occurring on the fourth of Sivan. The Meshech Chachmah agrees that this is out of order. In 24:4, it says that Moshe wrote down all of the words of Hashem - what words did he write down? In 24:7 it says that *he took this Sefer Habris and read it to all of the people and they responded Na'ase Venishmah*. What was he reading? **Rashi**: quotes the Mechilta, that this was the complete history and record of events from the beginning of the Torah to this point in time, the giving of the Torah at Sinai; he also included the mitzvos given at Marah. So, on the fourth of Sivan, a significant portion of the Torah was written down and read to the Jewish people. The Torah is actually being written in two phases - the first part now, and the second part, starting from the giving of the Ten Commandments to the end of the Chumash, is written later at the end of Zos Habrachah. That is why this is a new beginning, comparable to Bereishis, the beginning of the Torah. The first 2000 years were like Tohu Vavohu before the Torah was given; now there is a new phase in history when the Torah is given - this is indicated in the Torah by the way this first pasuk 19:1 is written, with no connecting vav, to indicate a new beginning. These first two pasukim are likewise out of order to highlight this important idea that there were two points where the Torah was written - it was done in two parts, with the second part beginning here. The Torah had to be written with these two pasukim reversed to emphasize this idea, that of a new beginning.

**Ramban**: When the Jews reached the wilderness of Sinai, it was a day of tremendous celebration for them - like a Yom Tov. From the day they left Egypt, they were waiting eagerly for this day. This is why we count Sefiras Ha'Omer - it is a countdown to the day of our receiving the Torah, because we were so eager to receive it. The whole goal of the Exodus was not just the freedom from slavery - it was to arrive at Har Sinai to receive the Torah; Moshe had

told them that it was not just physical freedom - it was spiritual freedom, and they waited anxiously for that day. It was a day of happiness and Yom Tov. They knew that at Sinai they would get the Torah, as Moshe had told them in Egypt. Moshe had also told this to Pharaoh numerous times. Because of that, the Torah begins this chapter emphasizing this burst of excitement, which is so dominant that these two pasukim in the Torah were written out of order. It was their entire focus the whole time they were traveling, and it had to be highlighted for that reason - it was the greatest thing of all. After emphasizing this in the first pasuk, the Torah then continues with the narrative. We see this further illustrated by saying they came to Midbar Sinai and when they saw the mountain, they immediately made camp - they didn't wait to scout out the best place to set up camp; they didn't care about physical amenities - as soon as they saw the mountain, they immediately camped in the desert. This was the place they would be given the Torah. It is called Har Chorev - Chorev means desolate. They didn't care that there was no physical amenities there; they only cared about the Ruchniyos and negated the Gashmiyus; they didn't care about physical pleasures and comforts. As a part of arriving here, they also sent out the Erav Rav from the camp to purify the camp in order to receive the Torah; they had to have only the Jewish people here together. This is suggested at the end of pasuk 19:2 where it adds *Vayichan Shom Yisrael Neged Hahar* - the rest of the people settled elsewhere near the mountain, separate from the Jewish camp.

Another explanation: a well-known **Rashi**: the repeated words of *Vayichan Sham Yisrael* is in the singular to emphasize that they camped as one person, with one heart - it switches from the plural to the singular because of the transition of the nation into one completely unified people with one goal; all of the other travels never compared to this moment in time - we never reached this height of unity again as we did when we arrived to receive the Torah.

**Kli Yakar**: There is a connection between leaving Refidim and camping next to the mountain. In 17:7 it says that *they called Refidim Ma'ase Umerivah* - a place of tremendous strife and quarreling; here they fought, argued and questioned God. That is why the pasukim here in our perek emphasize leaving the strife and contention of Refidim and reaching this point of unity here at Sinai. That is what the Torah is all about - it is the key to bringing about unity. The original Torah was not supposed to be a source of machlokes - prior to the end of the historical period of the Zugos during the second Commonwealth, there was no disagreement about any single matter of Jewish law - no issues about holidays or mitzvos; the mesorah was intact up to then - our oneness reflected God's oneness and His Torah; Torah is not supposed to be filled with disagreements with different camps and factions. It was supposed to be one Torah for one unified Torah. The split began with a disagreement about doing Semichah on the head of the Korban Pesach - then after that point there was an explosion of machlokes, as we see with Bais Hillel and Bais Shamai who disagreed on so many topics. But it wasn't supposed to be this way. So we left the place of arguments and conflict of Refidim, and the mountain of Sinai turned us into one. This pasuk is mentioned again to emphasize this point. This is why the Torah was given in the third month, whose symbol in the constellations is that of the twins - they are supposed to be twins who love each other, unified together. So we are like twins loving each other, like the two luchos given together.

19:5: *If you only listen to Hashem's voice and his Mitzvos, you will be God's Am Segulah, for Mine is the entire world.* **Rashi**: Segulah is like a precious treasure. Hashem feels close to us - we are His treasure from amongst all of the nations of the world.

**Ramban**: we will be in God's hand, like a precious gem - it is so precious God will hold tightly onto it so it won't get lost. That which is so precious, the King will not entrust even to His

most loyal subjects. This tells us of God's Hashgachah - the rest of the nations are ruled through intermediaries; God rules us directly with no intermediaries, no intervening angels or other higher powers. God has a one-on-one relationship with us. We are the only nation that God does not delegate other powers to supervise. We don't need to go through angels to approach Him - our tefillos go straight to Him, not through angels. It is like God is marrying us - there are no intermediaries between husband and wife - it is a real love relationship.

**Meshech Chachmah**: The Torah adds the phrase *because God has the whole world* at the end of the pasuk. It means that it goes without saying that God is angry at the rest of the nations because of their contaminated lifestyle and beliefs - God doesn't want to deal with these disgusting nations; - God doesn't want to recognize them because they don't recognize Him. Therefore He delegated their supervision to others. But even at the end of time, when all nations will recognize God, and Hashem will have no reason to avoid any nation, we will still be the special nation of God. Even when all others will give up idolatry and perversion, we will still retain that special status. When it says "because the whole world is God's," it means that when the whole world is His, when all the world will recognize God as the ruler of the universe, He will still remember our goodness - the other nations will not be equivalent to us; we were the ones who made the sacrifices throughout time. We will be God's Segulah even when the whole world is His, at the end of days, when all of the nations have fallen into place. God never lacks Hakoras Hatov for the good that people do.