

Yisro - Rabbi Lerner - January 16, 2011

Perek 19: Preparation for Revelation

19:1: *In the third month of their having left Egypt, on this day they arrived in the wilderness of Sinai.* **Rashi:** it was Rosh Chodesh Sivan.

19:2: The Torah tells us in this pasuk that they traveled from Refidim, the place where they had expressed doubts about God being in their midst and their subsequent punishment with the attack by Amalek. In Beshalach 17:1-7 they quarrel with Moshe and Hashem about water - it is called Ma'ase U'Merivah, where they questioned whether God was in their midst or not, and where were then attacked. Refidim is a contraction of two words - *Raf Yadayim* - meaning a weakening of the hands - they showed a weakening of the hands, a lack of faith in Hashem. **Ramban:** these pesukim are out of order; 19:2 should have come first, with the pasuk describing their travel from Refidim ; the Torah should then mention that they then camped in front of the mountain which is pasuk 19:1 - the Torah should first mention leaving one place, then arriving at the new place. It also probably should have eliminated the first pasuk entirely and just combined both into one pasuk: they traveled from Refidim, came to Har Sinai on the third month of their leaving Mitzrayim. Why do it in this way? It is linked to why we count Sefiras Ha'Omer - the Chinuch says that we count to show our enthusiasm for getting the Torah - we were counting each day until we arrived there; the real objective of leaving Egypt was to accept the Torah and become God's people. Likewise, the Torah creates this weird construction of the pesukim because they are coming to that place which is a tremendous source of simchah for them; they are wildly rejoicing about arriving at Sinai - God wanted them to have this yearning for Sinai since leaving Egypt - they knew all along that they would be coming to Sinai to worship God; it was therefore appropriate to list the pesukim this way - this was the target date and place. It purposely put the comment about leaving Refidim afterwards because this arrival at Sinai with great enthusiasm was the tikun for what went on at Refidim - that was a terrible event because of their sinning by showing a lack of faith in Hashem; now they are repairing that sin - they are doing tikun for what they did.

Rav Nissan Alpert: they named the place Refidim because of the Raf Yadayim. How does the tikun come about? They had expressed doubts as to whether God was amongst them and were then attacked by Amalek - to overcome the enemy they had to focus on Moshe's holding his hands up to Hashem, with his hands supported by Aharon and Chur - the hands of Moshe was the posture of Tefilla - that was what Moshe was signaling to them: that prayer to Hashem will always help them prevail - if they pray to Hashem and have faith in Him, they will succeed - the way the battle unfolded was the beginning of the tikun for the lack of faith they showed. In the last pasuk of the perek about Amalek (17:16) the word Yad comes up again - it is the hand of God on His throne - if we strengthen our hands with emunah in Hashem, God will strengthen His hand against Amalek.

19:3: **Ramban:** along with great simchah on the part of Bnei Yisrael, there was great happiness on the part of Hashem as well. The cloud of the shechinah is hovering above the mountain before they arrive - Hashem called out to Moshe at that time from the mountain, as soon as they arrived - God was waiting for us with great enthusiasm; the cloud already covered the mountain for a full 6 days before they were to get the Torah. Hashem showed His eagerness in meeting with us - it was a tremendous romance between God and His people. God reciprocates our enthusiasm with love and excitement.

Rabbeinu Bachya: while there is some controversy whether the Torah was given to us on the sixth or seventh day of Sivan, according to all opinions it was given on shabbos - we see this from the fourth commandment of the Aseres Hadibros - God says remember **this day** as shabbos. What does it mean when it says Yismach Moshe Bematnas Chelkoh? That Moshe was happy receiving the Torah on shabbos.

Chafetz Chayim: when we learned that God held the mountain over us - Kafar Har Kegigis - why does it say the word *shom*, that **there** will be your burial; it should say **here** will be your cemetery - what does it mean over there? The idea was that without Torah, the whole world couldn't exist; the world survives because of our acceptance of the Torah, which is studied day and night; God only created the world for the sake of the Torah. After the initial failures of mankind with the generation of the flood and the generation of the dispersion, God chose Avraham and his descendants who would appreciate the Torah and teach it to the rest of the world. The vision of the future is for the world to be fixed by our actions. If we had declined to accept the Torah, it doesn't mean that we would be buried here - instead, the whole world will be destroyed. Had we said no, then the whole world would have become a cemetery for all mankind.

Suggestion by **Rabbi Lerner**: Why was the Torah given specifically on shabbos? Shabbos represents the ultimate day of creation; it represents the completion of the world; it was the last thing God created. Shabbos is a real force - it takes all of the physical and superimposes a crown of the spiritual above it; the function of the six weekdays is to lead up to shabbos - that is why we call them yom rishon, yom sheni, etc without specific names. Without the Torah there is nothing; without shabbos there would have been no creation; the weekdays are the stepping stone towards shabbos; without shabbos there would be no world - it represents the completion, the purpose of the world.

17:5: *If you listen to Hashem, we will be a Segulah to Hashem.* It could mean a treasure amongst all of the people. **Ramban**: it means more than a treasure - a precious item is not entrusted to anyone else's watch; the king holds on to what is treasured by Him. God owns the whole world, but He is willing to delegate the running of most of the world to his emissaries; each nation has a guardian angel, except for us - God does not want another to watch over us; He takes personal responsibility for us; He watches over us, He loves us; we are special to Him with a personal relationship - this is the idea of Hashgachah Peratis.

Sforno: Even though all nations are precious to Hashem - every person is created in the image of God, and there is no other creature in the world as precious to God as a human; and the righteous ones amongst the nations are even more precious to Hashem. Yet, we are select amongst all of the nations because of 19:6 - we are a nation of Kohanim - we are teachers of all mankind, we take them out of the darkness into the light; we are the ones to teach all of the nations, so that all people should call out in the name of Hashem and serve Him. We are always the Kohanim of Hashem - the Torah emanates out to the whole world from Zion - Ki Mitzion Teytzey Torah. Hashem needs us to be the teachers of morality and ethics and spirituality - we have to convey this to all of them, and that is why we are so precious to Hashem. It is not just special rights that we have - there are obligations we have as well. We are treasured because of our special role in the world.

17:9: Why does Hashem stage the revelation in the first place? So they should trust in Moshe forever. **Ebn Ezra**: why does Hashem talk to Moshe in front of all of the people? Because they had doubts in prophecy, doubts in their belief in Moshe; there were some Jews who believed, many did not; some were scoffers and sinners, and did not believe that God

would speak to a lowly human being. So Hashem had to have everyone hear Him speak to Moshe. **Ramban**: this is a ridiculous assertion, that at this late stage in Jewish history people would not believe in the concept of prophecy; what this is really about is teaching Bnei Yisrael that Moshe is a super-prophet - as the **Ramban** says, Moshe is unique, with no others achieving his great status - it is heresy to equate him with any other prophet. Bnai Yisrael learned this at Har Sinai - God wanted all of the nation to hear when Hashem spoke to Moshe; the Revelation was to make the prophecy of Moshe greater than all others. **Sforno**: they believed in prophecy, but not the idea that a prophet can be awake, alert and conscious and receive prophecy in that way, as Moshe did; no other prophet can be conscious because of the great fear they would have when communicating with Hashem; only Moshe could do that; the people did not believe it until they witnessed God coming face to face with Moshe - they were all awake and surviving while hearing God at this moment - it taught them how Moshe always communicated with God; Hashem let us be like Moshe for this one moment in time to teach us that Moshe was like this all of the time. This is why Moshe could no longer return to a normal life; he could no longer live with his wife because he communicated with God while awake, while remaining totally physical, talking and hearing. Moshe has broken the barrier between the body and the soul; he has been elevated to a great level and could not return to behave as someone with normal body needs and actions - he could spend 40 days on the mountain without eating, and could no longer return to normal physical activities such as relations with his wife. We had to separate from our spouses for three days before the Torah was given, to receive the Torah in purity, but also to show what Moshe was always like.

Abarbanel: Why was there a need for the Revelation? Three different things had to come into play for the Torah to be given: 1) We needed Moshe who was superb in his character traits, his compassion; from birth he was special, born circumcised; even growing up in the evil palace he could not stand injustice; he always intervenes when he saw injustice. He is not into gashmius - he leaves the palace because he is into moral development. 2) The second important party to this was Bnai Yisrael - the Torah could not be given to an individual - it had to be given to a nation; we had to be elevated spiritually. 3) The Torah is so great, it must be given in a spectacular fashion, with great miracles and splendor.