

Yisro - Rabbi Lerner - February 4, 2007

Preparation for Receiving the Torah

19:1-2: *In the third month from the Exodus of Bnei Yisrael from Mitzrayim, on this day, they arrived at Midbar Sinai. They journeyed from Refidim and arrived at Midbar Sinai and camped in the desert; and they camp there facing the mountain.* In the first pasuk the Torah tells us that they went from Refidim and came to midbar Sinai - why repeat in the second pasuk? We also know the battle against Amalek was in Refidim, and one of the goals of Amalek's battle was to block the giving of the Torah; so we already knew where they traveled from. Why repeat that they came from Refidim to midbar Sinai? **Rashi**: We know they traveled from Refidim to Sinai - the reason it is repeated is to create a connection - just as when they came to Sinai with great religious fervor to get the Torah, so too was the leaving of Refidim with teshuvah. Refidim means "Raf Yadayim" - a weakening of the hands - this was the prelude to the attack of Amalek, when the Jews first complained about not having water, and they then additionally complained, asking whether God was with them or not. This was a place where they doubted the existence of God in their midst (not the existence of God, but they questioned whether He was still with them). This very doubt was captured in the name, the weakening of the hands, as opposed to Moshe's strengthening of the hands to fight Amalek. The Torah here repeats it to tell us that even though they fell in religious stature at Refidim, they did teshuvah and corrected themselves there in Refidim before journeying on. That is why in this pasuk it repeats the phrase "they camped," but while the first mention was in the plural (Vayachanu), the second was in singular (Vayichan), to tell us that the physical encampments were many, but the spiritual one was unified as one to enable contact with God and to receive the Torah. They did a quick repentance at Refidim.

Maharal: Even though they fell spiritually there, after the battle when they left, they left with an act of teshuvah. **Oznayim LaTorah**: The Jews always had an enormous capacity to transform themselves throughout their history. Avraham was the Ivri who stood against the world. The next few generations fought against themselves, and certainly worsened in Egypt, with one against the other, and a splintering of the Jewish people throughout the period of Egyptian slavery. This changed at some point after they left Egypt - there was fighting and complaining after immediately leaving Egypt until they reached Har Sinai, where they came to hear God. This idea of coming to Har Sinai touched them, and all of their crookedness ultimately straightened out. The very thought of going to Har Sinai put an end to the divisiveness of the people. Their destiny to change the whole world helped them put away their differences and become a unified nation. That is what this teshuvah was all about. This might have been the only time in Jewish history that they were unified like this - soon after with the sin of Egel they again split up into factions.

19:3: *Moshe ascended to God, and Hashem called to him from the mountain, saying 'So shall you say to the House of Yaacov and related to Bnei Yisrael.'* **Rashi**: Moshe went up on the second day after arriving at Har Sinai - they arrived on Rosh Chodesh Sivan; every ascension to Sinai by Moshe was early in the morning. It says *Vayahkeim Moshe Baboker* - Moshe got up in the morning - this was then the case for each ascension. **Maharal**: Since they arrived on the first of Sivan at some point later in the day, and Moshe has to ascend early on a morning, he had go up on the second day. The reason he goes up only in the early morning was because of the concept of Zerevus Lamitzvos - being zealous to do Mitzvos and serve God - we serve Him with great enthusiasm at the earliest possible moment. When Moshe is going up to have contact with God, he does it at the earliest moment, to have a day that is connected to God from the earliest

moment - this is the ideal that Moshe wanted to set, so he waited until the next day to set this tone. However, the gemorrah tells us that nothing happened until the second day for a different reason - it wasn't Moshe's decision, it was God's decision. God didn't call him because of the weakness of traveling - God waited for Moshe to have time off to gather his strength and to settle the nation. But **Rashi** says it was to point to the highest standards of service to Hashem, to be zealous for Mitzvos - Rashi uncharacteristically disagrees with the Gemorrah.

19:4: *You have seen what I did to Egypt, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to me.* **Maharal:** Rashi says that this phrase of being carried on the wings of eagle was the day they left Egypt, when they came out after gathering in Ramses from all of the far ends of Goshen. They first had to first converge in one place to leave together. God made a miracle that they were all able to come from all over the land of Goshen to convene in Ramses. Earlier in 12:37 Rashi had said that they traveled from Ramses to Succos that it was 120 mil (mil = 2000 amos) - they got there in no time at all - we learn it from the phrase of being carried on the wings of eagles. So there was another part to this phrase - the gathering all together from all corners of the land of Egypt, and then the travel to the distant Succos. There actually are three parts to this phrase - they travel quickly to Ramses, they travel quickly to Succos, and they are protected from injury, as Rashi says - it is a metaphor - an eagle carries its babies on its wings, as opposed to all other birds that carry their babies in their claws below them to protect them from a stronger bird that attacks from above - but the high flying eagle fears no one from above, only arrows from humans below. It is a metaphor of saving babies, of the ultimate mother and protector of children - that is how God hovers over us and protects us. So the road was made shorter, and God protected us with the angels who were watching over us - as when the Egyptians drew near, the angels protected us by moving the columns of clouds and fire between the two nations.

19:13: *A hand shall not touch it, for he shall surely be stoned or thrown down; whether animal or person he shall not live; upon an extended blast of the shofar, they may ascend the mountain.* **Rashi:** it is the shofar of a ram; it was the shofar of the same ram that was offered in place of Yitzchak at the akeida. **Ramban:** What is Rashi talking about? The ram was an Olah that was completely consumed in place of Yitzchak - there was nothing left of the animal. All of it, even the horns, were burned. So what ram's horns was used? **Maharal:** How could Ramban ask this question? Didn't he read the **Pirkei DeRebbi Eliezer** that this ram was created at the last moment of twilight on the sixth day of creation - from that ram not a single part of that body went to waste - the indestructible sinews were used for David's harp; the skin was used as the clothing for Eliyahu; the left horn was blown by God at Har Sinai; the right horn was the stronger horn that will be blown at the time of Moshiach. This all means that because Avraham brought a ram as a substitute from his son, God made this other ram to be used for all of these great things throughout history - the portrait of Yitzchak on the altar is emblazoned on every ram throughout history - they stand in place of this great sacrifice. Any horn from any ram would have this image depicted on it. A second opinion is that it was not any ram - these were supernatural things that were created - God created things in the twilight that would have great powers because of the great zechus of the akeidah - great powers were instilled in different items throughout history (such as the horn, the harp, etc.).

20:1: *God spoke all these statements, saying.* **Rashi:** God said the 10 commandments in one proclamation. It is impossible for a person to do it; it was incomprehensible to humans, and then afterwards He repeated it for us to understand. Why do it this way? **Maharal:** It was done that way, even though they understood none of it, to tell us that the entire Torah is one single

thing, totally unified; even though it had to be broken up to be understood, it is indivisible and unified, like God - the essence of God is unity, and the Torah is a reflection of God. Before anything else, God had to communicate this message - the Torah is all one. This is the basis of a particular halachah - if when the Torah is being read there is a single letter that is defective, the entire Torah is pasul and must be replaced - the Torah reflects God's perfection and must be replaced. But another explanation is that if there is a mistake in one letter, the whole thing is mistaken - since it represents God, it is totally unified, must be flawless, and this is the important message that God sends out from the word go. The 613 mitzvos are not a smorgasbord of commandments for us to pick and choose for our observance - that fragments the Torah. The whole Torah is equally important and taking away a part of it injures the whole thing. God gave us the mitzvos individually for us to understand, but it adds up to an inseparable whole that cannot be separated and fragmented.