

The gemarra in Masechet Shabbat tells us that "Yerushalayim will be redeemed through Zedakah". **We are expected, in the spirit of the Prophets, to create a just society based on taking responsibility and integrating spiritual and moral values into our day to day lives.** The gemarra in Taanit tells us that "The Holy One said: I will not enter "Yeushalayim shel maalah" until I enter "Yeushalayim shel mata". **There is a reciprocal relationship between the Divine Yerushalayim and the Yerushalayim we create here on earth.** That Yerushalayim is built through our actions. These actions should derive from our spiritual growth, as we transcend levels of spirituality.

Just as Am Yisrael becomes a People in Sefer Bamidbar, so we become as we elevate ourselves and enter the spiritual Yerushalayim that we create here on earth. Midrash Zuta tells us that Yerushalayim has 70 names, as if to imply that there are a myriad of personal and spiritual points of entry to the Holy City. Maybe the Midrash is also inviting us to switch perspective and enter from different points at different times or stages of our lives. Each of us carves their own unique path. Together we build a Yerushalayim shel mata that can be a basis of Yerushalayim shel Maalah.

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ET LIDROSH

בס"ד, גליון 47

Parshat Bemidbar & Yom Yerushalayim Ascending to Yerushalayim Shel Mata' Rabbi Y. Jayson

This week we begin reading the book of *Bemidbar*. Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook zt"l called the book "*Sefer HaDerech*"- the book for the "way" or "journey". **Am Yisrael's process of becoming (as opposed to being) a People is arduous and bumpy. Such, too, is the individual process we experience as we become and strive for spiritual growth.** *Parshat Bemidbar* focuses on the structure of the camp and the census, signifying the importance of each individual to the general *whole*. The camp is built in concentric circles. At the center the ark and the mishkan, carried by the *Leviim*. Surrounding them are the rest of the tribes. In a similar way *Rambam* describes a hierarchy of *kedusha* with regards *Eretz Yisrael*: "*Eretz Yisrael* is sanctified more than any other land. *Yerushalayim* is sanctified more than any other walled city". The focus of *Kedusha* is *Yerushalayim* with the *Kodesh HaKodashim* at its center. We "go up" to *Yerushalayim*. As we enter, we elevate ourselves. We strive to be worthy and to be able to enhance that *kedusha*. To quote Eli Weisel, *Yerushalayim* is "**the city which miraculously transforms man into pilgrim; no one can enter it and go unchanged**".

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Ne'emaney Torah Va'Avodah

Thinking about Thanking

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. During this period, the old generation who had been slaves in Egypt died out, and a new generation grew up. The wilderness was the training ground for developing a confident and free Israelite nation.

Yet, it seems that bad news is news, and good news isn't as memorable. When we think of the Torah's account of the wilderness experience, we remember the Israelites' incessant complaints about food and water; their murmurings against Moses; the rebellion of Korah and his group. In spite of the fact that God provided for their needs in a miraculous way, the Torah seems to underscore the ingratitude and grumblings of the people.

Yes, there certainly were some complaints, and some rebels, and some disgruntled individuals. But all told, the Israelites were amazingly good! During a span of forty difficult years in limbo, there actually were very few incidents of complaining and rebellion. **It would seem that most of the Israelites were grateful and happy for most of the time.** Although the Torah doesn't focus on the vast "silent majority", they certainly were there--and they were the mainstay of the nation.

The long period in the wilderness taught the Israelites to show gratitude to God for His many kindnesses to them. As individuals and as a nation, they could not fulfill themselves without developing a deep sense of appreciation--not just for God, but for Moses; not just for the leaders, but for their fellow Israelites. **The spirit of gratitude shapes the spirit of a nation; it imbues people with humility, with thoughtfulness, with genuine appreciation for the wonders of life.** Perhaps the lessons of the wilderness were best encapsulated in the Dayenu passage in our Passover Haggada: we recount God's mercies on us, and are astounded by the overflow of goodness.

Recently, a class of second-graders in a Jewish Day School was given an assignment by the teacher: write a short prayer that you would want to say to God. Most of the children asked God for things they would like to receive. One child, though, wrote his prayer in three words: Todah, Todah, Todah. For a second grader to have this sense of gratitude and appreciation is remarkable--and it is a lesson not just for his classmates but for adults as well. **We need to focus less on asking for things we would like, and focus more on saying thanks for what we have.**

There is no shortage of problems in the world, and there is no shortage of "bad news". Yet, we need to remember that most people are good most of the time. We need to foster the spirit of goodness, kindness and communal solidarity. We need to thank God for all the good that we enjoy. **A basic ingredient for living a decent, happy and meaningful life is to be able to say sincerely and regularly: Todah, Todah, Todah.**

The Children of Moshe

As we read this week's parsha we are thrown back into *sefer Bereishit*. Chapter three begins "these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe". The phrase 'these are the generations' appears only in Bereishit, once in Megillat Ruth and here. It is no coincidence that the parsha of Bemidbar always precedes Shavuot.

Rashi notices that *Bemidbar* 3:2 cites a genealogical list of Aharon whereas Moshe's children are not listed. He explains that this verse is the source of the adage that **one who teaches his friends children Torah is considered to have given birth to that child.** Aharon was their biological father but Moshe taught them Torah and so is credited with having borne them as well. There are many parallel sources that grant a teacher the accolade of not only being the student's father but also of making him a person and of granting him life. This is because having knowledge of Torah is what differentiates us from the animal kingdom and is our *raison d'etre*.

This concept resonates in the halacha regarding a student who mistakenly killed someone. Rambam (Laws of Rotzeach and Shmirat HaNefesh) states that a student who is exiled to a city of refuge is accompanied by his Rabbi. The role of the Rabbi in this situation is to provide the student with life because a life without learning is not considered life. Similarly if a Rabbi is exiled to a city of refuge then his Yeshiva also accompanies him.

Last weeks' parsha began with *ואם בחקתי תלכו ואת מצותי תשמרו*. The Sifra explains that the first part of this statement does not refer to mitzvot because this would make the second clause redundant. Therefore the first clause teaches us that we must endeavour and work hard at learning Torah. Furthermore this *passuk* ends *ועשיהם אתם* and you will do them. The word *אתם* is written lacking a letter *vav* and so could be understood as 'making yourself'. i.e by busying yourself with Torah you in fact make yourself. This defines you as a person.

As we begin Bemidbar and prepare for Shavuot it is a time to reflect on learning, teaching and the effect we can have upon others.