

Rebirth - Bamidbar

[Shiurim Main Menu](#)

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי בְּאַהֲלֵךְ מוֹעֵד בְּאַחַד לַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁנַי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית
לְצִאתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר (במדבר א, א)

Sefer Bamidbar is a very "strange" sefer. Unlike the other four sefarim of the Chumash, Bamidbar seems to have no clear, *definitive* central theme, except that it talks about Am Yisrael - בְּמִדְבָר. But most of sefer Shmot and *all* of Vayikra *also* speak about Am Yisrael בְּמִדְבָר, so what makes this sefer different? Even the *name* of the sefer is not really definitive. We call it sefer Bamidbar, when in fact the word in the first passuk upon which this derivation is based is actually *Bemidbar*, not Bamidbar. This already hints to us that sefer Bamidbar is something of a conundrum. The fact that we call it Bamidbar is a little derogatory actually, because if we would call it sefer Bemidbar Sinai (it's real name), at least that would be a reference to Matan Torah. "Bamidbar" seems to be "unaffiliated" – "in the desert", like wandering around aimlessly in the desert with no affiliation.

Sefer Bamidbar is also uncharacteristic in terms of the number of mitzvot that appear there. Sefer Breishit deals with the reality before the Torah was given and before the Nation of Israel was born, so it is understandable that in the entire sefer Breishit, we only have three mitzvot (פָּרוּ וּרְבוּ, בְּרִית מִלְכָה, גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה). Of the four sefarim after we received the Torah and became a nation, Bamidbar has the *least* number of mitzvot. Here are the stats – Shmot 111, Vayikra 247, Bamidbar 52, Devarim 200.

In the Gemara (שבט קטו, ע"ב), Rebi says that sefer Bamidbar is actually divided into *three* separate sub-sefarim. The first "sub-sefer" is from Bamidbar to the middle of Beha'alotcha, to the passuk (במדבר י, לה) וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵךְ הָאָרֶץ (במדבר י, לה). The passuk וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵךְ הָאָרֶץ itself (enclosed in reversed letters "nun"), is a separate (second) "sub-sefer", and after that passuk, the remainder of sefer Bamidbar, until the end of Mas'ei, is the third "sub-sefer".

Obviously, there is a lot more depth to this subdivision, but purely from a "content" perspective, we see a distinct shift in the content after the passuk וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵךְ הָאָרֶץ. Until that passuk most of the psukim dealt with positive things (with the exception of the parsha of the Sotah). Following וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵךְ הָאָרֶץ, however, there is a small "smattering" of positive content (like hafrashat challah, temidin and musafim, ma'aser and truma), but the *vast majority* of the content is *negative* in the extreme. The first passuk after וַיְהִי בְּנִסְעֵךְ הָאָרֶץ talks about the מְתַאֲנְיִים, and it degenerates from there, to the spies, Korach, Mei Meriva, Balak, Ba'al Pe'or, the journeys (and backtracking) in the desert. It is like a sefer of "dirty

laundry", that makes us uncomfortable and perhaps wish it hadn't appeared in the Torah at all.

In this shiur I would like to explore the hidden essence of sefer Bamidbar and show how it reflects a process of *rebirth*.

We in fact have four processes of "birth" in the Chumash.

The first birth is that of Adam HaRishon in parshat Breishit. We read how HKB"H created Adam HaRishon and Chava בְּצֶלֶם אֱ-לֹהִים-לְקַיִם. Adam, the pinnacle of Creation, sinned and was diminished. Adam's neshama was fragmented and scattered over the entire world and time.

This resulted in the necessity of a *second* birth, Avraham Avinu, the original purpose for which the world was created - אֱלֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ - בְּהַבְרָאָה (בראשית ב, ד) (שמות ז, ז). The Midrash (בראשית רבה יב, ח) says don't read it as אֱ-לֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ but as אֱ-לֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ.

The third birth is when HKB"H sent Moshe and Aharon to lead Am Yisrael out of Egypt, וּמֹשֶׁה בֶן שִׁמְשׁוֹן וְאַהֲרֹן בֶּן שֵׁלֶט וְיִשְׁמַעֲיֵאל בֶּן שִׁשַׁי וְאַהֲרֹן בֶּן אֲמִלֵּךְ וְאַהֲרֹן בֶּן אֲמִלֵּךְ (שמות ז, ז). At Har Sinai Moshe Rabbeinu, who is called מֹשֶׁה (דברים לג, כא), brought down the Torah. Am Yisrael were reborn and the Creation was reset to its state before Adam HaRishon sinned.

Following Matan Torah, however, Am Yisrael sinned with the egel, which necessitated a *fourth* birth, Am Yisrael's wandering for forty years בְּמִדְבָּר before they could enter Eretz Yisrael.

We see the umbilical connection between these four birth processes from the wondrous gematria of 248, which is - בְּצֶלֶם אֱ-לֹהִים-לְקַיִם, אֱ-לֹהֵי תוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ, מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ, מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ and ... בְּמִדְבָּר.

The gematria of בְּמִדְבָּר is also רֶחֶם, meaning womb. Am Yisrael's wanderings in the desert were equivalent to a *rebirth*. According to the Torah the birth process results from something called סְרַחֲוֹן, as it says מֵאִין בָּאֵת, מֵטָפָה (אבות ג, א). What does this mean?

R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Ba'al HaTania (ליקוטי אמרים א, לא) explains it as a sequence of צוּרָה וְלְבִישָׁת צוּרָה. In order for life to perpetuate, you need a continuous cycle of "shedding form" and "assuming form". Take, for example, planting a seed. When you plant a seed in the ground, the outer layers of the seed decay and are "shed" to reveal the inner essence of the seed which then miraculously "assumes a new form", it sprouts roots and grows into the new plant. If not for this process of סְרַחֲוֹן, the seed would remain lifeless, dormant and would eventually die. Only by being exposed

to a "hostile" environment that strips away the tough, outer layers of the seed, its continuation of life ensured.

Rebirth is only necessary when the inner essence has become masked, encased in a tough outer coating that separates it from the truth. When a person (or a nation) sins, they become covered in such tough outer layers, called קלפות which form barriers between them and HKB"H. To reestablish the direct, *uninhibited* connection, these outer layers must be shed by סָרְחוֹן, being allowed to decay, disintegrate and vanish.

[Aside: This is why, according to Meir Panim, the Lechem HaPanim, which comes to atone for Adam and Chava's sin, require a process of סָרְחוֹן to achieve a thickness of one tefach].

After Adam and Chava sinned it required 20 generations (ten from Adam to Noach and another ten from Noach to Avraham). Generations of debauchery and sin, that had to "de-generate" before the inner essence – Avraham Avinu - could be revealed and be reborn.

Avraham set into motion the process of rebirth that culminated in the 12 Tribes of Israel – his great grandchildren, all born of pure stock, without any of the קלפות that remained from Adam HaRishon's sin. Had the brothers themselves not sinned, they would have received the Torah directly and become Am Yisrael – in Eretz Yisrael.

However, since they sinned by selling Yosef (בראשית, ויִּוָסְפוּ עוֹד שָׁנָא אֹתוֹ) (ח, לז), erecting barriers between them and HKB"H, they necessitated a further rebirth – in Egypt. The gematria of 248 is ויִּוָסְפוּ עוֹד.

To remove the tough outer קלפות that resulted from this sin required the 12 Tribes being "planted" in the hostile environment that was Egypt, the world center for debauchery and decay, to shed these קלפות and return to their inner essence. They achieved this at Har Sinai. At Har Sinai Am Yisrael achieved the status of Adam HaRishon before the sin, which was a status higher than angels.

When they sinned with the egel, once again Am Yisrael erected barriers separating them from HKB"H. These required removal in the same way as above, by another rebirth – shedding the outer layers through decay, thus revealing the inner essence. The desert is a hostile, desolate place where nothing grows. Every year, for 38 years, Am Yisrael "planted themselves" in the ground, *literally*. Every year 15,000 of them were buried/planted and decayed in the Midbar, until the entire generation of adult males who left Egypt were gone (except for Yehoshua and Calev). What remained was the inner essence of Am Yisrael, who sprouted and entered Eretz Yisrael with Yehoshua.

According to the Midrash (במדבר רבה יט, יג) Moshe remained behind with the מְתֵי מִדְבָּר in order to lead them into Eretz Yisrael in the time of the Geulah and תְּחִיטָה הַמְּתִים – the final rebirth.

Indeed, what we read about in the latter two thirds of sefer Bamidbar is a repetitive, degenerative series of decaying - from the מְתֵאֱנָנִים, to the spies, to Korach, to Mei Meriva, to Balak, to Ba'al Pe'or and the plague that killed 24,000 (according to the Ari z"l [ליקוטי תורה], the 24,000 students of R' Akiva were gilgulim of these 24,000 and did tikkun for them). It is not pretty, Decay is never pretty, but it is an essential process of rebirth. Without decay there can be no rebirth. It is therefore an essential and integral part of sefer Bamidbar, for without it, Am Yisrael would have perished *in their entirety* in the Midbar!

We have described the process above as a series of "rebirths". Other opinions in Chazal (מדרש אגדה, ויקרא פרק יב; ספר הכוזרי, מאמר ראשון, אות פא-) say that these were different stages in the *same birth*.

The first stage, exile in Egypt, was the conception. Slavery was the pregnancy. Passing through the sea at Yam Suf was the birth process. Wandering in the desert for forty years was adolescence. Entering Eretz Yisrael was reaching maturity.

Similarly, it is possible to examine the history of our nation over the millennia, through the same prism. We reached maturity and entered Eretz Yisrael with Yehoshua. This stage reached fruition with the building of the 1st Beit HaMikdash by Shlomo HaMelech. Am Yisrael had again been reborn and attained the status of Adam HaRishon before the sin (as they did at Har Sinai).

Then again began the cycle of sin, resulting in a new process of rebirth – exile (conception), oppression/expulsion/Holocaust (pregnancy), return to Eretz Yisrael (birth process), the past 78 years of statehood (adolescence). We have not yet reached maturity.

Once again, this time in the middle of an existential war with our enemies, we find ourselves plunged into another round of what I like to call "national psychosis" - a new round of general elections. Unfortunately, as has been made plainly obvious over the last 78 years, politics serves only to divide and widen the rifts in our nation, not heal them.

We are currently in our "national" adolescent stage, unsure of our national identity, our place in the world, our *purpose* in the world. There are *so many* pressing issues that require national resolution. The role and responsibility of Charedim within Am Yisrael as a whole. The infiltration of foreign Western liberal progressivism into our society – specifically in the civil service, academia and the media. The optimum balance between "state" and "religion". Our vision for the

future of this country – a safe haven or a light unto the nations. How to fight (and defeat?) our enemies. How we relate to ownership of our ancestral homeland. Resolving the "schizophrenia" of being part of Am Yisrael but not settling and living in our ancestral homeland, etc. etc.

For decades these pressing issues have been swept under the carpet, or stuffed like a genie in the bottle – with politics. Political agendas have seen to it that these issues continue to fester beneath the surface and remain unresolved. We are now experiencing a very similar situation that Am Yisrael faced in the Midbar, with the same "adolescent" manifestations – politics (Korach), agendas (spies), infiltration of foreign values (erev rav), etc. which prevent these issues from being resolved once and for all. They are continually swept under the carpet and are thus perpetuated. Back then it was for 40 years, now (so far) it has been 78 years. You cannot plug these issues in a bottle with a cork or sweep them under the carpet. HKB"H will not allow them to remain unaddressed, He requires resolution, one way or the other.

Am Yisrael need to find some apolitical, agenda-free way of confronting and addressing these issues, with courage and conviction. We need to bring our nation to maturity and not keep "passing the buck" down the line to future generations.

One thing is for sure - it will not be pretty. Dirty laundry seldom is. Nobody likes a bad smell. However, חֵרֶף is an essential component of rebirth. It is inescapable and history demands that we have the courage to face it head on and *resolve it* – for our children.

Meanwhile the "national psychosis" and accompanying שְׂנֵאת הָעַם is raging destructively - full steam ahead. There has to be a better way and we are collectively responsible to find it. The process will reach maturation, whether we like it or not – HKB"H will make sure it does. We get to decide how painful or painless it will be, by virtue of how we behave and how much responsibility we take upon ourselves.

Am Yisrael needs to find a way to sidestep the political and agenda levels by confronting these issues on a grassroots level, uninfected by government and political agendas, which are a dead end. A huge chunk (perhaps the majority) of this country is *already* being run on a grassroots level and not on a governmental level, by private initiatives, charities, NGO's, NPO's etc. If we had to wait for the government/political level to solve all our problems, there would be no MRI's in hospitals, no departments/research in universities, no national ambulance/hatzala services, insufficient equipment for our soldiers to wage war, etc. etc.

The most important lesson that October 7 taught us is that we cannot rely on the government/civil service level to protect us or ensure the wellbeing of our

nation. Am Yisrael at the grassroots level have to take the initiative and not wait for these bodies to arrive and deal with anything. We need to individually pack our bags and rush to the front and fight on our own, raise funds to provide missing essential equipment, recruit our own forces to house and support those evacuated, wives whose husbands are away from home and have been fighting non-stop for the last 2½ years, helping small businesses to stay afloat, providing psychological and welfare care for those injured physically and mentally, those orphaned and widowed.

If we want to have a board of inquiry into how October 7 came about, we need to primarily indict *ourselves*. How we collectively allowed a small minority of politicians, civil servants with progressive and personal agendas to take control over the lives and destiny of *our entire nation*, rather than take responsibility for it ourselves. How we could possibly trust such a vital task to such an irresponsible and corrupt group of people.

Am Yisrael need to resolve all the burning issues – ourselves at the grassroots level, the way we rallied to fight on October 7. Not to wait for the politicians and civil servants to resolve them. We all need to accept responsibility and band together to establish forums and frameworks for national reconciliation and cooperation that are *apolitical*. To establish apolitical media channels whose only agenda is achieving national reconciliation and consensus.

Am Yisrael need to wake up and realize that national politics/psychosis is nothing more than "Hollywood". It is not real. It is all an illusion that we like to deceive ourselves into believing. It has never and will never resolve the critical issues that face our nation. Only we can do that ourselves. We need to accept that and take responsibility.

Am Yisrael are such an incredible nation. When we rally together with a common cause, we are unstoppable. Instead of us running after the politicians, judges, generals, reporters etc. we need to have them running after us. We need to *regain control over our own nation* and not "outsource" this role to incompetent people with agendas.

It begins on a family level, a neighborhood level, a community level, a town/city/province level and then it envelops the whole country and the entire nation.

How do we want our generation to be remembered by history? Like the generation of the spies, Korach, Zimri? Or like Moshe, Aharon, Miriam and Pinchas? It is our collective mission to make sure this happens, to restore Am Yisrael to a – nation! Not an eclectic potpourri of warring factions.

Nobody says that this will be easy. Being in the Midbar was not easy, it was not all mann/clouds/wells and roses. It was often tough, unpleasant,

uncomfortable and downright dirty and smelly at times. But it was essential, back then and today. We cannot escape history or responsibility. We have to grapple with it and resolve it to the best of our ability.

Shabbat Shalom

Eliezer Meir Saidel

Machon Lechem Hapanim

www.machonlechemhapanim.org

To subscribe to this weekly Parshat Hashavua, send an email with the subject Subscribe to machonlechemhapanim@gmail.com

To unsubscribe, send an email with the subject Unsubscribe to machonlechemhapanim@gmail.com

To view previous shiurim, go to - www.showbreadinstitute.org/Parshat-Hashavua

If you would like to dedicate a shiur in someone's memory or for refuah, etc., please email machonlechemhapanim@gmail.com with the details.