

א ב י ס כ ל ת ו ר ה !

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כ"ח אייר תשפ"ו · במדבר

The Power of Silence

By Miri Rosenblum '26

This week, we read פרשת במדבר, the פרשה directly before שבועות. Because of this, there must be a significant connection between the two. Why would במדבר, the פרשה centered on the census of בני ישראל and their preparation to enter ארץ ישראל, serve as the precursor for the holiday of שבועות?

Elie Wiesel was once asked, "Is there such a thing as silence in Judaism?" He replied: "Judaism is full of silences ... but we don't talk about them." Judaism is an intensely verbal religion, a faith sanctified by language. Through words, Hashem created the universe: "וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר" "And G-d said, Let there be light and there was light" (בראשית א:ג). Words create, communicate, and shape relationships. Much of Judaism centers on the power that words hold, and their ambiguous ability to either elevate something or destroy it. Simultaneously, silence in תנ"ך frequently carries a negative connotation. Following the deaths of נדב and אביהוא, the תורה says, "וַיִּדַם אֶהֱרֹן" "And אהרן was silent" (ויקרא יג). Similarly, in תהלים it says, "לֹא הַמֵּתִים יְהַלְלוּ-יְהוָה וְלֹא" "The dead do not praise You, nor do those who go down to the silence [of the grave]" (תהלים קט"ז:ז). However, תהלים also teaches that

תהלים) "לְךָ יְהוָה תְהִלָּה" "to You, silence is praise" (ס"ה:ב).

When one stands in awe before Hashem, it can become inadequate. In those moments, silence becomes a form of connection. חז"ל valued silence greatly. They described it as a fence to wisdom (משנה אבות ג:ג). And taught, if words are worth one coin, silence is worth two (מגילה י"ח). Even the work of the כהנים in the בית המקדש was performed in silence. Some of Judaism's deepest prayers are also silent. The עמידה, where one stands in direct communion with Hashem, is called the silent prayer. The silence that matters most in Judaism is, therefore, not emptiness, but attentiveness. Listening is one of Judaism's highest values. The Hebrew word "שמע" means not only to hear, but to listen, understand, internalize, and respond. At בני ישראל, הר סיני we responded to Hashem by saying, "נעשה ונשמע" "we shall do and listen" (שמות כ"ד:ז). The "נשמע" was essential. Judaism is not only a religion of speaking and acting, but also of listening. This, perhaps, is the core connection between במדבר and שבועות. Before בני ישראל could receive the תורה, they had to enter the wilderness, a place of silence. In the desolation of the desert, away from distraction and noise, they learned how to listen to Hashem. במדבר is not only about counting the nation; it is about preparing them spiritually for

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revelation. Before the תורה can be received, there must first be silence - the kind that enables us to hear the voice of Hashem.

איש על דגלו

By Theo Fraenkel '28

All the מצוות commanded in this week's פרשה, פרשה במדבר were commanded בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה "on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt" (במדבר א:א). These commandments include the commandment for בני ישראל to camp by tribe and flag, "אִישׁ עַל־דָּגְלוֹ, בְּאֹתוֹת לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם יִחַנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנְּגֻד סָבִיב לְאֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד" (במדבר ב:ב). "Each man at his own banner, with the insignia of their fathers' houses shall Bnei Yisroel encamp, at a distance around the Tent of Meeting they shall encamp" (במדבר ב:ב). Presumably before this commandment, בני ישראל camped wherever they wanted among each other, so why does Hashem introduce this commandment now, as בני ישראל have already been in the desert for a year?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky explains that the introduction of camping by שבטים, and the flags for each tribe introduced separation into בני ישראל. Each flag represents a positive attribute or quality that was unique to that tribe. These

differences would create a sense of differentiation among the tribes that would cause them to fight amongst each other. However, Hashem was able to introduce the flags at this point as the shvatim were to be camping "סָבִיב בַּמִּדְבָּר" "around the Tent of Meeting" (במדבר ב:ב). Now that the משכן had been completed, the בני ישראל rests among the camp and the שבטים wouldn't fight as they have the common purpose of serving Hashem.

This provides us with a model for how we should deal with disagreements or differences within בני ישראל. We can have our differences, but as long as we remain centered around the goal of serving Hashem, disagreements can remain constructive. "כָּל מַחְלֶקֶת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוּפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם" "Every dispute that is for the sake of Heaven, will in the end endure" (אבות ה:ז).



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