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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

Chanukat ha'Mishkan & Parshat ha'Nesiim

[for "Zot Chanuka" & Parshat Naso]

We were all taught from a young age that the Torah doesn't 'waste' any words. Nevertheless, the repetition of the 'korbanot ha' Nesiim [the offerings of the Princes (of each tribe)] in Parshat Naso certainly leaves the reader with the impression that the Torah can be very 'wordy'.

In the following shiur, as we study chapter 7, we will attempt to explain the thematic significance of that repetition - to show how the Torah's 'wordiness' is not 'wasteful' at all.

INTRODUCTION

Rarely does anyone pay careful attention to the second half of Parshat Naso; and for a very simple reason. In those last eighty some psukim (see 7:12-83), the Torah repeats twelve times the exact same details of the exact same korban brought by each "nasi"! Then, 'to top it off', in the final five psukim (see 7:84-88) the Torah tallies them for us as well.

For that reason, you probably never paid attention to the last pasuk of the Parsha - but if you did, it most certainly should have bothered you!

Let's explain why:

AN ALMOST PERFECT FINALE

At the conclusion of the Torah's tally of all of the offerings brought during those twelve days we find what appears to be a 'perfect' summary pasuk:

"zot chanukat ha'mizbeiach... " - 'this was the dedication offering for the Altar on the day that it was consecrated.'
(see 7:88)

Clearly, 7:88 could (and should) have been the final pasuk of this entire unit. To verify this, simply note how 7:88 provides perfect 'closure' for 7:84, as well as for 7:1 (which began the entire unit)!

[It is highly recommended that you take a look in your Chumash to see this for yourself!]

But to our surprise, after this summary is complete, the Torah 'adds on' an additional pasuk that appears to be totally unrelated. Let's take a look:

"...And when Moshe would come into the OHEL MOED to speak to Him, he would hear God's voice speak to him from above the KAPORET above the ARON between the two keruvim, and then He would speak to him."
(See 7:89, i.e. the end of Parshat Naso)

The information in this pasuk may be important, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the 'korbanot' that were just offered. After all, what connection could there be between 'how God spoke to Moshe from the Ohel Moed' and 'the twelve days of korbanot' that were just offered by the Nsiim?

NOTHING NEW

To complicate matters, not only does this pasuk appear to be 'out of place', it also appears to be totally superfluous - for it doesn't contain any information that we didn't already know beforehand. Let's explain why.

Concerning how God spoke to Moshe from above the KAPORET etc. (see 7:89) - note how this very same detail was already recorded in Parshat Terumah - in God's commandment to Moshe concerning how to build the Mishkan:

"and in the ARON put the EYDUT... And I will meet you there and speak to you from above the KAPORET between the two

KERUVIM that are on the ARON HA'EYDUT..." (see Shmot 25:21-22)

Later on, in the very first pasuk of Sefer Vayikra, we were already informed that God had indeed spoken to Moshe Rabeinu from the Ohel Moed (see Vayikra 1:1).

Therefore, all the information provided by 7:89 is already known, and hence this pasuk seems to be both 'out of place' and superfluous.

To uncover the importance of this 'add on' pasuk, we must return to our study of what transpired on this special day in the Bible - the day when the Mishkan was first dedicated - as the events on that day are described not only here in Sefer Bamidbar, but also in Shmot and Vayikra!

YOM HA'SHMINI

Recall that in addition to Parshat Naso, there are two other units in Chumash that describe the story of the Mishkan's dedication:

- * Toward the conclusion of Parshat Pekudei, the Torah described how the Mishkan was assembled, followed by how the shechina dwelled upon it (see Shmot chapter 40);
- * In Parshat Shmini, the Torah detailed the special korbanot offered by Aharon and the people on that day, that enabled God's glory to appear (see Vayikra 9, especially 9:1-6).

Even though each of story describes a different aspect of what happened on that day, they both focus on how God's "shechina" returned to Am Yisrael on that day (see Shmot 40:34-38 and Vayikra 9:5-6,24).

We will now show how the final pasuk of Parshat Naso may also relate to that same event, and for an important thematic reason!

BACK TO CHET HA'EGEL

Recall that in the aftermath of chet ha'egel [the sin of the Golden Calf /see Shmot 32], God concluded that Bnei Yisrael would not be able survive if His divine Presence - the shechina" - remained in their midst. Therefore, God informed Moshe that He would be taking away His "shechina" from the camp of Bnei Yisrael (see Shmot 33:1-4). As a consequence of this punishment, God instructed Moshe to re-locate his own tent from inside the camp to **OUTSIDE the camp**:

"And Moshe took the tent, and set it up OUTSIDE the camp, FAR AWAY from the camp, and called it the OHEL MOED, then anyone who would seek God would need to go to the tent OUTSIDE the camp (see Shmot 33:7).

From this perspective, the very placement of Moshe's tent OUTSIDE the camp, and the fact that God would now only speak to him at this location served as a constant reminder of Bnei Yisrael's 'down-graded' status.

[Note as well that Moshe's tent outside the camp is now named the OHEL MOED - the tent of meeting (between God and Moshe) - a name that will later be used to describe the Mishkan itself!]

With this background, we can better appreciate the thematic importance of the wording of God's opening commandment for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan (in Sefer Shmot):

"And you shall build for Me a MIKDASH, so that I can dwell in THEIR MIDST..." (see Shmot 25:8)

Building the Mishkan would enable the shechina to return to the camp of Bnei Yisrael.

[In regard to whether this commandment was given before [Ramban] or after [Rashi] chet ha'egel - see TSC shiur on Parshat Terumah. This thematic connection between the Mishkan and the story of chet ha'egel certainly supports Rashi's (and Chazal's) approach.]

Recall as well that even though God had answered Moshe

Rabeinu's plea to forgive their sin (see Shmot 33:12-19) by invoking His thirteen attributes of Mercy (see 34:1-7) - the "shechina" did not immediately return. Rather, in order to re-establish their special covenantal relationship with God, Bnei Yisrael are instructed to first build the Mishkan (see 35:1-6).

Therefore, during that entire interim time period, i.e. the six months between Moshe's descent from Har Sinai on Yom Kippur and the Mishkan's dedication on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, any conversation between God and Moshe took place in the OHEL MOED located OUTSIDE the camp.

[See Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Chizkuni on 33:7!]

Until the Mishkan would be assembled, the existence of Moshe's special OHEL MOED outside the camp served as constant reminder to Bnei Yisrael that were still not worthy for God to dwell in their midst.

Thus, the location of the Mishkan at the center of the camp, and God speaking to Moshe from its innermost sanctuary (see Shmot 25:21-22) would certainly serve as a sign to Bnei Yisrael that God had forgiven their sin, and that they have returned to their pre-"chet ha'egel" status.

THE BIG DAY!

With this background, it becomes clear why the highlight of the day of the Mishkan's dedication would be the return of God's "shechina" to the camp, a sign not only of their divine pardon, but also an indication that they could now continue their journey to Eretz Canaan.

Therefore, the FIRST time that God will speak to Moshe from the Mishkan (in contrast to his OHEL MOED outside the camp) will certainly be a major event in the eyes of the nation - for it will indicate that their construction of the Mishkan has achieved its primary goal!

From this perspective, the final pasuk of Parshat Naso becomes the most important pasuk of the entire Parsha! It is no longer a misplaced 'add on'; rather it should be understood as the highlight of the entire chapter - for it describes how God spoke to Moshe from the KAPORET in the OHEL MOED (see 7:89) - the key event that everyone was waiting for!

Note how this interpretation completes our parallel to the other two descriptions of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan in Shmot and Vayikra:

* In Sefer Shmot, the Torah described the return of the shechina (i.e. the KAVOD and ANAN /see 40:34) at the conclusion of MOSHE RABEINU's assembly of the Mishkan.

There, the Torah focuses on the leadership of Moshe Rabeinu, and how God answered his prayer (see 34:8-9!)
["b'zchut" Moshe]

* In Sefer Vayikra, the Torah describes how the "shechina" word return by the offering of special korbanot (see 9:5-6 & 9:24).

There, the Torah focuses on the function of Aharon, and the kohanim, who serve as the liaison between God and His people.
["b'zchut" Aharon]

* Now, In Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah describes how the shechina returned due to the leadership of the Nsiim.
["b'zchut" ha'Nsiim]

But why were these korbanot offered by the Nsiim so instrumental towards the return of God's shechina?

To answer this question, we must return to our analysis of Sefer Bamidbar (as discussed in our introductory shiur).

A SHOW OF UNITY

Recall how the first ten chapters of Sefer Bamidbar describe Bnei Yisrael's preparation for their journey from Har Sinai to Eretz Canaan. During this journey it was the job of the Leviim to transport the Mishkan, while the twelve tribes both encamped and traveled with the Mishkan at their 'center' (see Bamidbar 10:11-24).

On the day of the Mishkan's dedication, the leaders of the

twelve tribes - i.e. the Nsiim - took a joint initiative to donate six transport wagons - that would help the Leviim carry the Mishkan during their journey (see 7:1-9). Together with the presentation of these six wagons, each and every "nasi" also offered a special korban - in honor of the dedication of the Mishkan (see 7:10).

Instead of each leader trying to outdo the other [ever hear of such a thing?], to our surprise - each NASI offered the exact same korban, and they all presented their korbanot to Moshe Rabeinu together on that very first day.

For some reason, God instructed Moshe not to accept them all on the same day; rather Moshe was commanded to set aside a special day for each NASI (see 7:11!). Furthermore, the Torah dedicates the next eighty psukim to detail the precise korban offered by each leader on each consecutive day!

One could suggest that this show of 'unity' was so important, that the Torah found it worthwhile to detail each and every korban, even though they were all identical!

BACK TO DAY ONE!

It would have been significant enough had the Torah only repeated each korban; but to 'top it off', the Torah continues in 7:84-88 by providing us with a tally of all the offerings brought over those twelve days (like we don't know how to multiply!).

But note carefully how that summary unit begins:

"This was the dedication of the MIZBAYACH, on **THE DAY** that it was anointed, by the NSIIM of Israel... (7:84)

The Torah has returned to 'Day One' of the dedication ceremony, reminding us that all of these korbanot were first presented jointly by all the Nsiim - on the very first day (i.e. when the Mishkan was first dedicated):

This could provide us with a reason for this summary. The Torah does not need to teach us multiplication; rather it is emphasizing once again how all of these korbanot were presented to Moshe Rabeinu by ALL of the NSIIM on the very first day - in a show of national unity!

As these psukim describe what transpired on the first day of the Mishkan's dedication - the Torah concludes (in 7:89) by telling us how this joint offering enabled the most significant event on that day to take place. From now on, God would speak to Moshe from the Ohel Moed **within the camp** of Bnei Yisrael! It may have been this show of unity that inspired God to allow His "shechina" to return to dwell in their midst.

The nation, via its leaders, had shown their worthiness to return to their status as God's special nation - chosen to represent Him before the eyes of all mankind.

United in purpose, Bnei Yisrael were now ready to leave Har Sinai with God in their midst, to take the challenge of establishing God's model nation in the Promised Land.

[See also Rashi on Shmot 19:2 "va'yichan" everyone as one person with one heart...], describing how Bnei Yisrael first encamped at Har Sinai.]

It may be that it was because of this collective effort, where everyone acted together towards a common goal, while keeping their own identity; that God found it important to give each Nasi his own special day. By acting with unity, each Nasi was now able to shine as an individual. It may have been that understanding of the important balance between the nation and the individual - that made room for God to 'join along' with His nation, as they prepared for their next stage of Redemption!

That show of unity was only short lived in Sefer Bamidbar, as the nation returned to divisiveness as soon as they left Har Sinai (see chapters 11 thru 25 in Sefer Bamidbar). Nonetheless, that short moment of unity can remain as inspiration for future generations, especially to their leaders, and especially at times of historic potential.

shabbat shalom,
menachem