



Parshat Bamidbar: Fire, Water, and Desert

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The Shem Mishmuel cites a Midrash in Bamidbar Rabbah that when Hashem revealed himself on Har Sinai, 22 myriads of angels came down with him and all of them were arranged in specific encampments. When the Jewish people saw these encampments they said, "If only we could be made into encampments like them." Hashem said to them, "I will fulfill your request." And he commanded Moshe to make *degalim* for them. How do we understand this Midrash?

The Netivot Shalom explains that the Torah was given with three elements: desert, fire, and water. Each of these aspects can be used either for positive things or negative ones. Fire symbolizes passion, which can be

channeled either for good or bad. The Ohr Yechezkel notes that within every person there is the trait of self-sufficiency and being happy with what one has. This sometimes prevents a person from desiring more. This is good in the material world, but in spiritual matters it is unhealthy. "*V'gam hanefesh lo timale.*" The soul can never be quenched because it is in the image of Hashem. Just as Hashem is beyond us and there's no way to quantify or qualify Him, our passion and hunger for spiritual matters can never be quelled. When a growth oriented person sees something positive he's inspired to adopt it as his own. So when the Jewish people saw the angels on high they wanted to emulate them.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that just as the *degel* joined people together in a physical sense, it did so in a spiritual sense. Angels are not subject to the vicissitudes of human life and enjoy a continually elevated relationship with Hashem. The Jewish people admired this greatly and asked Hashem if they could also have such a relationship too. Even while they toiled in the normal physical activities of daily life, they wanted to remain close to Him without allowing the physical nature of their lives to impede or cloud that relationship. The encampment of the angels is a model of always clinging to Hashem even in our daily activities. Be mindful of how the way we do *mitzvot* changes the quality of the act, and we will pursue them with passion and fire.

Fullfilling the Will of G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Michael Taubes

In the second chapter of Pirke Avot Rebbe says, "What is the proper path to follow? One that will bring *tiferet*, glory, from Hashem and from other people." He answers that we're not only meant to be concerned how Hashem views our behavior, but how people view us as well. A person may say, "Who cares what other people think, Hashem knows what I'm thinking." But that's not true. If we are respected by other people, it brings greater glory to Hashem. There has to be *tiferet* in both directions.

Further on Rebbe says, "Be as precise in a minor *mitzva* as you are in a stringent *mitzva*." We do not know Hashem's grading system and what may seem an unimportant *mitzva* to you may be important to Hashem. One

should calculate the loss of a *mitzva* against the reward for its performance. Sometimes it may cost time and effort but one must look towards the ultimate future rewards. Rabbi Chanina says the reward for someone who is commanded to do a *mitzva* is greater than one who isn't commanded. One reason is because presumably the one who wasn't commanded enjoys doing it. But sometimes *mitzvot* are inconvenient. The idea is to do *mitzvot* because Hashem commanded. We should calculate its long term benefit in relation to its short term costs.

Pirkei Avot gives us a famous piece of advice with a formula to keep away from sin. "Remember what is above you: an eye that sees, an ear that hears, and all your deeds are

inscribed in a book." Rabban Gamliel, the son of Yehuda Hanasi taught, "*Talmud Torah* is good along with *derech erez* because the effort of doing both prevents sin." Torah is not only an intellectual pursuit. It affects one's personality. However, if one only spends his time learning, he may become frustrated, angry, and bitter and his Torah could be lost. For many people learning full time can work for a certain amount of time, but even then, there should be a certain amount of accountability. People who are involved in community work must remember they are doing it for the sake of Hashem. Sometimes one can get so wrapped up in what one is doing, it takes on a life of its own and we forget what our mission really is.



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Tree of Life: The Path to G-dliness

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The world is a continually unfolding reality and the Torah contains everything in potential. Torah teaches us Hashem's will and gives us the sensitivity to understand how it is expressed in the actual world. There's the inner core, which is the wisdom of the Torah, and the outer expression, which can even be studied from the ordinary conversation of Torah scholars. The word *tzizit* contains within it the word *tziz* which means to peek and blossom. This embodies the way the Torah works. It gives us a future and a vision, like a seed unfolds and is actualized.

We're instructed not just how to learn Torah, but how to relate to it. "*V'hageeta bo*," You should think about Torah and it should be in your subconscious all the time. It should be the source of your strength and your courage. The Torah comes forth from the six days of creation. Every day parallels a one thousand year period in the world's history from the time of Adam. There are things that can only be

revealed in each of the thousand year periods, just as there's only so much you could see in the maturation process of a tree year by year. This is true not only of the Torah but of every soul of Israel. Each soul is unique and comes into the world at its own specific point in time. The power of the soul matches the unfolding process of Torah. This is also true of time. There's continual newness.

The Torah contains all of Hashem's names. A name is how you identify someone and how you distinguish him from someone else. The Torah tells us how to find Hashem through the specific *mitzvot*. In Shir Hashirim, Hashem says to us, "Open up for me my sister." At the moment we learn Torah, our will and Hashem's will become united. Hashem tells us through the Torah how to sanctify Him in the world. When we tell Hashem, "We want to do Your will," we become in a sense like two siblings from one source.

The 600,000 letters of Torah parallel the 600,000 soul roots of Israel. If one letter of the Torah is missing the whole Torah is invalid. So too, every Jew is needed to unveil and develop their part of Torah. As women, there's no *mitzva* to learn Torah as a preoccupation in and of itself, for the sake of knowing Hashem's will. But we can let ourselves be inspired by the vision and holiness of Torah and let it draw us to love and fear Hashem.

Our experiences give us the potential to incorporate the Torah into our lives. *Chochma* comes from heaven, the expression of Hashem's will. But its actualization comes from *aretz*, what we make of it. We take everything we learned, and apply it to our lives by learning to ask in each situation, what does the Torah say? We must really know it, feel bonded with it, and make our own specific and defined contribution through our own inner capacities.