

Torah Tidbits – July 21, 2014

This week Moses does a quick review of the journey so far. Seemingly every camping spot is mentioned, for the list of places is quite lengthy. Yet there are a few spots not mentioned.

A couple of weeks ago, a little before Balaam showed up to try and curse the people, a sequence of places is mentioned in single verse. In transliteration "Mimatanah nachali'el uminachali'el bamot." In literal translation: From Matanah to Nachaliel and from Nachaliel to Bamot; when the place names themselves are also translated: From a gift, my inheritance - God, and from my inheritance - God, the heights. One interpretation of this verse as completely translated - When a person works to make the gift of Torah a personal inheritance from God, then that person can reach spiritual heights.

Why might Moses have left these stages off the list? I have a couple of thoughts. First, (judging Moses as having made a good decision), Moses could have been thinking, "If I remind the children how great their parents could have been, since we all know that they were not that great, won't I be causing them at the very least to disrespect them?" Second, Moses might not have wanted them to focus as much on the learning as they should on the doing, specifically making sure to conquer the land. Third, Moses might have decided that in spite of being able to go into the land, they did not measure up to their parents, and they would not have been redeemed from Egypt. Finally, Moses might have based his words on the context surrounding them.

The verse in question is embedded in a small digression about the Princes actually getting their hands dirty and digging wells. When the leaders are concerned with the survival of their people, then the people as a whole are given a spiritual boost so that it is easier to attain spiritual heights. When the leaders have a different concern chiefly in mind, even when that concern is essential and positive (such as hoping that the land received by lottery would be congenial to the tribe's future survival), then the people have to provide all the force for take-off velocity, and it is more likely that far fewer of them will do so. Rather than have everyone think that they weren't good enough, Moses skipped those encampments, hoping that mentioning the various places where the people making the journey experienced a bump in the road would be enough impetus to get the new generation to act appropriately.

Perhaps when we next tell our personal journey, we can think about the stages of the journey we are skipping and why we are skipping them, and thank Moses for pointing out to us why it might be important.