Parshas Bamidbar: Exercising Kindness in the Desert

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Exercising kindness in the desert

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This week we begin the fourth book of the Torah which discusses the forty year journey. of the Jewish people in the desert after the exodus. The Torah tells us that all their material and spiritual needs were taken care of during their travels.

They had ample food and water from the daily falling of the Manna and the constant flow of water from the well of Miriam. The clouds of glory protected their environment providing them with a climate controlled 21 degree temperature. Their clothes never wore out. They did not even ever need to eliminate waste from their systems! Can you imagine never needing to change a diaper for forty years!

They were spiritually well taken care of, as Moses led a much esteemed Kollel of learning. Since the Jews had no lack of material needs, they could spend all day long studying Torah and perfecting their relationships with the Almighty and between themselves.

It would seem that they lacked nothing. They were in a perfect world. But is that so? The Torah tells us that the world is built on kindness. The true meaning of this statement is that the purpose of this world is for man to perfect his being by practicing kindness on a daily basis. The Rabbis tell us that one of the reasons why the Almighty chooses for there to be poor people is precisely to enable the rich to have the merit of showing kindness to the poor. The world has no purpose if there is no active kindness happening. R? Yitzchak Kalish of Vorka [18th century Chassidic master] asks: How were the Jews able to exercise kindness when they were in the desert if Hashem took care of their every need? Who was impoverished and in need for others to help?

We say in the Ashrei prayer ?Lehodia Livnai HaAdam Gevurosov? ? that Tzadikkim make known His [G-d?s] strength to people. The Chassidic masters say that it means more than that. It means that a Tzaddik is able to make known people?s own strengths. The role of a Tzaddik is to teach people the unbelievable Gevura [potential strength of character]that they have within themselves. A good teacher is able to draw out all the potential talents from within a child, by telling him that he has so much power that he is not aware of [instead of putting the child down.]

Hillel was a master of this. He represented Chesed. The greatest Chesed you can do for a Jew is to show him how much strength he has and give him greater aspirations of whom he is. The first three letters of Hillel?s name: Heh, Lamed, and Lamed, are the first letters of the above-mentioned verse in reverse order.

The Rabbis tell us that the Manna tasted like anything you wanted. However, many Jews who had been slaves never tasted any really good foods all their lives. The kindness was that those who were not slaves were able to tell them about better tasting foods that they could now think

of. Thus kindness was still able to be performed. On a deeper level, the ultimate kindness is to teach a former slave to stop thinking like a slave, but to actualize the freedom that they really now have.

The portion of Bamidbar almost always falls on the Shabbos before Shavuos ? the day we commemorate the receiving of the Torah at Sinai. On that day, we achieved the fourth and final level of redemption from Egypt ? the freedom to make a difference in the world. We live in a society where our physical quality of life far surpasses any generation. We seem to lack nothing. Yet ironically its subliminal messages slowly tear away at our G-d given freedom of choice, which is our ultimate freedom. Many people today have left the true thinking to the media and others. The greatest kindness we can due for our fellow Jews is to teach them that we are indeed a ?Kingdom of priests and holy people? with a higher calling, purpose, and ability to think independently. This week?s Torah portion should motivate us all to empower others to realize their true greatness and potential as found in the Torah ? the book of instructions for living.