YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**Parashat BAmidbar**

**Sicha of HarAV Mosheh Lichtenstein**

**"These are the Generations of Aharon and Moshe"**

Summarized by Aviad Brestel

Translated by David Strauss

*Parashat Bamidbar* opens the book of *Bamidbar* with a sense of euphoria: the people are nourished by the manna, they are not threatened by foreign nations, and they are free to involve themselves in Torah with no interference. Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun has argued that the book of *Bamidbar* is a continuation of the book of *Shemot*, and therefore we can learn from there as well about the relationship between the people of Israel and God:

Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*. And Moshe was not able to enter into the tent of meeting, because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the *Mishkan*. And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the *Mishkan*, the children of Israel went onward, throughout all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not, until the day of its being taken up. For the cloud of the Lord was upon the *Mishkan* by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys. (*Shemot* 40:34-38)

In addition to their outstanding material circumstances and the opportunity for them to study Torah, the people of Israel at this point enjoy an excellent relationship with God. Moreover, they are close to their destination, about to enter the Land of Israel:

And the children of Israel traveled on their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai, and the cloud settled in the wilderness of Paran. And they took their first journey, according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moshe. And the standard of the camp of the children of Yehuda set forward first, according to their hosts; and over his host was Nachshon the son of Aminadav… Thus were the journeys of the children of Israel, according to their hosts. And they set forward. And Moshe said to Chovav, the son of Reuel the Midyanite, Moshe's father-in-law: We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said: “I will give it to you”; come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel. (*Bamidbar* 10:12-14; 28-30)

And yet, there is a certain point in the *parasha* that is jarring and muddies the atmosphere:

And these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe, on the day that the Lord spoke with Moshe at Mount Sinai. And these are the names of the sons of Aharon: Nadav the firstborn, and Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar. These are the names of the sons of Aharon, the priests that were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office. And Nadav and Avihu died before the Lord, when they offered a strange fire before the Lord, in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children; and Elazar and Itamar served as priests in the presence of Aharon their father. (*Bamidbar* 3:1-4)

It is puzzling that Moshe's children are not mentioned at all in the verses about the "generations of Aharon and Moshe."

True, the Ramban explains that in terms of the plain sense of the text, they are indeed mentioned – immediately after the above passage, as part of the tribe of Levi:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aharon the priest, that they may minister to him. (*Bamidbar* 3:5-6)

But the organization of this information is still jarring. Rashi cites the words of *Chazal*, who noted the issue:

"And these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe" – But it mentions only the sons of Aharon!

They are called the “sons of Moshe” because he taught them Torah. This teaches us that whoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellow, Scripture regards it to him as if he had begotten him. (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 3:1, from *Sanhedrin* 19b)

The solution that Rashi offers, based on *Chazal*, is that Aharon's sons are also attributed to Moshe, because he taught them Torah.

This idea is also sharpened in the Rambam's introduction to the *Mishneh Torah*, where he describes how Elazar and Pinchas were among the Sages who passed down the tradition continuing the work of Moshe:

And Elazar and Pinchas and Yehoshua, the three of them received [the tradition] from Moshe.

And yet, we are dealing with a tragedy: unlike Michal, who "had no child until the day of her death" (II *Shmuel* 6:23) and therefore adopted her sister Meirav's sons (*Sanhedrin* 19b), Moshe had children of his own (Gershom and Eliezer) but they did not inherit his position – while his brother Aharon did in fact found a dynasty that continued in his path, a tribe of priests and transmitters of the tradition.

Indeed, *Chazal* understood Moshe’s words, "Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation" (*Bamidbar* 27:16), as a request for his sons to take over from him. As Rashi explains:

"Let the Lord… set" – When Moshe heard that God said to him: "Give the inheritance of Tzelofchad to his daughters," he said to himself: The time has come for me to make my request – that my sons should inherit my position. God replied to him: Not thus has entered My mind; Yehoshua deserves to receive the reward of his ministrations, because he has never departed from the tent. This is what Shlomo said (*Mishlei* 27:18): "He who guards the fig tree shall eat the fruit thereof." (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 27:16)

Things deteriorate even further, for Moshe’s descendants, when we discover that according to *Chazal*, Moshe's grandson was a priest in the service of the statue of Micha:

But was Levi his name? Surely his name was Yonatan, as it is stated: "And Yonatan the son of Gershom, the son of Menashe, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of the Danites" (*Shoftim* 18:30). He said to him: But [even] according to your argument, [it may be objected]: Was he the son of Menashe? Surely he was the son of Moshe, for it is written: "the sons of Moshe: Gershom and Eliezer" (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 23:15). But [you must say that] because he acted [wickedly] as Menashe, the Scriptural text ascribed his descent to Menashe… (*Bava Batra* 109b)

I will offer several approaches to explain the tragedy of Moshe’s children not carrying on his legacy, beginning with a statement in the Gemara:

And why is it not common for Torah scholars to be found among the sons of Torah scholars? Rav Yosef said: So it will not be said that Torah is an inheritance for them. (*Nedarim* 81a)

It is naturally difficult for the children of leaders or rabbis to serve as their parents’ heirs. Frequently, they knuckle under the burden of the "inheritance" and fail. But beyond that, it is important that a person who is not Moshe's son be his successor, to demonstrate that when it comes to Torah study, it is not a person's lineage that determines his success, but rather his diligence. One who does not “depart from the tent” is the one who will succeed Moshe. "A Torah scholar who is a *mamzer* comes before a High Priest who is an ignoramus" (Mishna *Horayot* 3:8).

The well-known description of Moshe, provided when his sister and brother speak ill of him, leads us to another approach:

Now the man Moshe was very humble, more than anyone upon the face of the earth. (*Bamidbar* 12:3)

It is precisely against the background of the fact that his sons do not continue his path and inherit his position that it is emphasized that Moshe nurtured Aharon's sons – out of concern for the people of Israel, and not for himself. In his humility, he realized that Aharon’s sons were worthier than his own.

Another approach is related to the following verse:

Have I conceived all this people? Have I brought them forth, that You should say to me: Carry them in your bosom, as a nursing-father carries the suckling child, to the land which You swore to their fathers? (*Bamidbar* 11:12)

If Moshe is "Rabbeinu," "our teacher," the leader of the people of Israel, then we are all his heirs, and he has no need to establish a family dynasty. This also relates to another piece of information about Moshe:

Moshe had acted rightly in that he had separated from his wife, since the *Shekhina* used to reveal itself to him at all times and there was no definite time fixed for the Divine communication. (Rashi, *Bamidbar* 12:4)

Moshe "separated from his wife" and God agreed to that move. This means that Moshe reached a stage where he was no longer connected to matters of marriage and family; he lived on another plane. We, of course, do not generally educate to such a level; across all the generations, we know of only two such figures – Moshe and Ben Azai. The fact that Moshe found it necessary to separate from his wife is thought provoking, and suggests that perhaps one of the results of Moshe's high rank was that he was removed from the world and could not properly educate his sons. With respect to prophecy, Moshe was above all others; it is possible that in the field of education, he had several failures.

[This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Mosheh Lichtenstein on Shabbat *Parashat Bamidbar* 5778.]