

**Wembley Synagogue**

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן

**Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Va'etchanan**

וְאֶתְחַנֵּן אֶל ה' - And I implored G-d. (3:23)

According to the *Midrash Rabbah* (11:10) the word "Va'etchanan" which has the numerical value of five hundred and fifteen, teaches us, that Moshe prayed five hundred and fifteen prayers to Hashem to be permitted to enter *Eretz Yisrael*.

Why specifically five hundred and fifteen?

The spies returned with their evil report against *Eretz Yisrael* on the ninth of *Av*. Since the people cried bitterly and refused to go to *Eretz Yisrael*, Hashem decreed that the entire nation between the ages of twenty and sixty would die in the wilderness. Annually, on the ninth of *Av*, graves were dug and the people would sleep in them. In the morning those who were alive would climb out of the graves, and those who had expired would be buried where they were. This went on for all the years of the sojourn in the wilderness.

On the fortieth year graves were dug for the people to sleep in, but surprisingly, they all emerged alive. The people began to wonder, "Perhaps we have miscalculated and yesterday was not really the ninth of *Av*." Therefore, they continued sleeping in graves on the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth. When they noticed a full moon on the fifteenth of *Av*, they were certain that the ninth had already passed, and obviously the punishment was completed (see *Bava Batra* 121a).

Thus, on the fifteenth of *Av* the Jewish people celebrated the fact that no one else would be punished for the spy episode, and Moshe thought that it was an opportune time to pray to Hashem to permit him to enter the land.

The Hebrew calendar, which is based on the lunar system, normally has six months of twenty-nine days and six months of thirty days. From the month of *Elul* (which follows *Av*) till the month of *Adar*, in which Moshe passed away, there are six months. Counting three of them as full months (thirty days) and three as incomplete ones (twenty-nine days), there is a total of one hundred and seventy-seven days. Adding to this, sixteen days from the fifteenth to the thirtieth of the month of *Av*, and seven days of the month of *Adar* until Moshe's passing, there is a total of two hundred days.

A Jew is required to pray three times a day. In each prayer we may include personal requests, except on *Shabbat*, when personal needs may not be mentioned (see Jerusalem Talmud *Shabbat* 15:3, *Orach Chaim* 294:1. However, on *Yom Tov* it is permissible, see *Magen Avraham* 128:70). Since in a two-hundred-day period there are twenty-eight *Shabbatot*, one hundred and seventy-two days remain, in which a person prays three times a day and may include personal requests, which totals five hundred and sixteen prayers. On the night of the fifteenth, after seeing the full moon, they realised their sins were forgiven, and they thus celebrated the following day. Hence, Moshe started praying from the morning of the fifteenth of *Av*, till *Minchah* of the seventh of *Adar*, uttering exactly a total of five hundred and fifteen prayers before his passing. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

וְרָאָה לְפָנַי אֶתֶּם - See: I (Moshe) taught you (laws and statutes like that which Hashem my G-d commanded me to do within the land that you are coming there to inherit) (4:5) When a country is first settled, it usually cannot draft its laws right away. Rather, its lawmakers need to wait and see how the people interact under unique conditions of that particular land. Once they see the problems that affect their civilization they can make laws to improve the situation. However, before the land is settled, no one can anticipate the social problems that will arise and which laws will be needed to remedy these problems.

The Torah is an exception to this rule. It was authored by Hashem He is able to write laws that are applicable to any and every situation. It was thus possible to set forth the Torah's rules for living in the Land of Israel before the Jews actually entered the Land.

This is indicated in the above verse. The verse states that Moshe taught the Jews the Laws of the Torah "within the land that you are coming there". The Jews were just about to be coming there to inherit it". The phrase "within the land" refers to the fact that Moshe taught these laws and statutes as a guide for life for when the Jews would be "within the land". Indeed only the Torah, of Divine origin, is able to guide the people

through each and every circumstance. The Torah continues to maintain its relevance and guide us throughout all of the generations. (Source: Rabbi Shimson Refael Hirsch)

וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד לְנַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם - And you shall carefully guard your souls (4:15)

The Gemara Berachot 32b teaches that this verse as well as verse 9 commands us to take utmost care to safeguard our bodies and maintain our physical well-being. Although the soul is the primary element in the composite being that is man, one must still pay heed to the needs of the body. The Chafetz Chaim offered the example of a Wagoner and his horse. The Wagoner carefully looks after the welfare of his horse, for his horse is the key to his livelihood. Similarly, it is only through the medium of the body that the soul can fulfil its earthly purpose; therefore a person must be careful not to endanger or weaken their body. (Source: The Torah Treasury)

The Gemara Berachot 53b compares Israel to a dove. Just as a dove is protected by wings, so the Jewish people are protected by the fulfilment of mitzvot. HaRav Reuven Melamed Z'TL points out that all that Hashem created was provided with a natural means of protection. Some were given great strength, some great speed and some wings to fly and avoid their enemies. (Source: The Parsha Anthology)

כְּבֹד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ - Honour your father and your mother, as Hashem, your G-d, commanded you, so that your days will be lengthened. (5:16)

Rashi says that the commandment to honour one's parents was first given at Marah. Does it really make a difference where Hashem first commanded the Jewish people in regard to this mitzvah? Perhaps this teaches us that our entire approach to the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim is wrong. There are those who think that we have an obligation to honour our parents out of a sense of gratitude for what they have done for us. They bring us into the world, clothe and feed us, arrange our education and provide for our basic material needs. This is not the Torah's perspective on the mitzvah. One is obligated to honour his parents, regardless of the benefit - or lack thereof - that he has received. We are enjoined in the mitzvah because "it was commanded to us at Marah." What occurred in Marah that was so unique, yet endemic to the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Eim?

In Marah, Hashem began sustaining us - miraculously: water from a stone; quail from Heaven; our clothes did not become ruined, the manna descended from Heaven. In short, everything came to us "special delivery" from Hashem. There was no need for the medium called "parents" They did not have to labour to earn a living to support their children, because everything was served to them on a silver platter from Hashem. They were commanded in the mitzvah of honouring their parents, specifically in Marah - in a place in which their parents did not have even a supporting role in sustaining their children. Hashem's miracles were overtly manifest, so that all would see and benefit from them. Our relationship to our parents has nothing to do with what we receive from them; it has to do with Hashem. He commanded us to honour them. (Source: Peninim on the Torah)

וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה - And these words (which I command you today should be on your hearts and you shall impart them to your children) (6:6)

These verses direct us to absorb the Torah's teachings and to impart them to our children. The Rabbis teach "that which issues forth from the heart penetrates the heart." Sincere words have the greatest impact upon the listener. This is indicated by the above verses. In order to be able to fully "impart them (the Torah's lessons) to our children, we must fulfill the directive that these lessons "should be on your hearts" and absorb them fully. Thus, we are commanded to absorb the Torah's lessons ourselves, and afterwards to convey them to our children. (Source: Alshich - Ma'ayana shel Torah)

## Shabbat Shalom



**Shabbat starts 8.00pm**



**Shabbat ends: 9.53pm**

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is produced by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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