בס"ד

Parashat Beha'alotekha   Part II
Numbers Chapter 10

1. Trumpets

Before the Israelites begin to travel G-d instructs Moses to make two silver trumpets (*h□asoserot*, Num. 10:1-10) since one of their functions was to regulate the breaking of camp in a systematic fashion. When the cloud gave the divine signal to travel, trumpet blasts were sounded for specifics and orderliness.

In the heading, Moses is instructed to make two trumpets to be used for summoning the assembly and moving the camps (v. 2). These are administrative functions similar to such trumpet usages throughout the ancient Near East. By varying the use of the instruments, sounding them jointly or singly, blowing *teqi'a* or *teru'a* (different types of blasts) and altering the number of blasts sounded, Moses communicated his intention. One signal summoned the assembly, another the chieftains, others signaled the various tribal divisions to break camp, etc. (vv. 3-6). Although the text specifies indicators for the eastern and southern divisions only, the phrase תְּרוּעָה יִתְקְעוּ לְמַסְעֵיהֶם (v. 6) implies "and so on for each division in their travels." Verse 7 harks back to verses 2 and 3 in that it speaks about summoning the assembly and emphasizes the distinction made earlier between employing *teqi'a* and *teru'a* blasts. It thus appears to be a bookend and begins to close the discussion.

Verse 8 informs that the trumpets are the priests' responsibility and that "they shall be for you for an everlasting statute throughout your generations." This is the type of statement that normally would close the passage. But there is a problem: the trumpet functions itemized in the preceding verses are specific to the nation's temporary situation of traveling through the wilderness. Signals to gather the chieftains or to break camp would be inapplicable upon the nation's settlement and dispersal in the land. Thus, we cannot justify "for an everlasting statute throughout your generations" in relation to the preceding functions. Of course other, more local administrative functions could be found for trumpets in the future, but this appears to be a strained explanation. We will return to this question later in this section.

At this point there is an unusual feature in the passage. The last two verses (9 and 10) prescribe totally different types of functions for the trumpets than the previously mentioned ones. The penultimate verse states that in time of battle, upon sounding the trumpets, Israel shall be "remembered" before G-d and be rescued (v. 9). The final verse teaches that on days of festivals and commemorative occasions, sounding the trumpets shall accompany the sacrifices being offered and they shall be a "remembrance" for Israel before G-d (v. 10).

Ibn Ezra is surely on target with his explanations that "the *teru'a* reminds the people to cry out to G-d" and "when Israel hears the blasts they will know that the sacrifice is being offered and they shall properly set their hearts to G-d." It is a fundamental principle of the Torah, in contrast to the beliefs in pagan societies, that there is no magical act that may be performed, such as blowing trumpets, that automatically compels or persuades G-d to intervene in a favorable manner. Rather, G-d provides a tangible means to inspire national prayer both in war and at the sanctuary.

We now know more about the use of trumpets in the ancient Near East. As J. Milgrom states: "Trumpets used as instruments of prayer appear to be unique to Israel" (JPS Commentary on Numbers, p. 75). The reason for this may be related to the pagan beliefs that the power of a god was generally limited to a particular sphere and that there inhered within

tangible items a specific potency connected with the relevant god or supernatural force. Thus, as regards the trumpets, since they were vehicles that were employed for administrative matters and summoning to battle, they would not also have served as instruments of prayer, especially as regards the rejoicing during festivals in the sanctuary. Our verses imply a singular, all-inclusive religious spirit that suffuses all spheres of life, a concept connected to the monotheistic revolution. The use of trumpets for covenantal purposes in the final two verses is thus more fully appreciated.*

Back to the problem of "for an everlasting statute throughout your generations." The functions of the last two verses were expected to continue indefinitely. Some commentators assume that "for an everlasting statute throughout your generations" refers to the verses that follow, although this normally is considered a most unusual construction. One is tempted to consider the possibility that this might be a case of "there is no early or late in the Torah" and what is now verse 8 originally closed the paragraph. The intention in moving it back two verses may have been to highlight the significant distinction between the types of functions that preceded verse 8 and those that followed it, signaling that an important addition was forthcoming. In light of this, one may also wonder whether the assignment of the responsibility for blowing the trumpets to the priests (v. 8a) applies to all the trumpet functions or only to the more "religious" functions of the last two verses.

2. Breaking Camp and Speaking to Hobab

Finally, on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year from the Exodus the cloud lifted and the nation traveled in its proper formation (Num. 10:11-28). The significance of that day is perhaps connected to its being the fiftieth day from the setting up of the Tabernacle. Similar to the symbolism associated with Shabuoth and the Jubilee, it would mark the beginning of the eighth cycle of seven. This would symbolize the transformation of the symbol of perfection, in the past associated with the number seven, to a higher level, that of covenantal relationship with G-d, associated with the number eight.** Another possibility is that this date was selected so that the nation would arrive at Kadesh, the point from which they would enter the land, on the first day of

the third month, the one-year anniversary of the day they had arrived at Sinai (Exod. 19:1). As Moses stated at the beginning of Deuteronomy, when there were no disruptions it was an eleven-day journey from Horeb (Sinai) to Kadesh-barnea, the border of the promised land (Deut. 1:2).

As traveling began, Moses focused on the value of a master guide. Hence, after depicting the breaking of camp, the text narrates Moses' invitation to *H□obab ben Re'uel HaMidiani h□oten Moshe* to accompany Israel to the promised land and receive from the good that G-d was going to accord the nation (Num. 10:29-32). Many consider *H□obab ben Re'uel* to be another name for Moses' father-in-law Jethro, since *h□oten* is generally understood to mean father-in-law.

However, in Exodus 2, *Re'uel* was described as the father of Moses' wife while the name Jethro was not mentioned in that context. A number of reconciliations have been suggested. Some translate "father" and "daughters" in Exodus 2 as grandfather and granddaughters, although it is strange to speak of the grandfather giving his granddaughter in marriage when she has a father. Some consider *Re'uel* to be Jethro and *H□obab* to be Moses' brother-in-law, interpreting the *h□-t-n* root to signify a marriage relationship, including brother-in-law. Of course, even if the *h□-t-n* root applies only to a father-in-law, in the clause of *H□obab ben Re'uel HaMidiani h□oten Moshe* it is possible to apply the words *h□oten Moshe* to *Re'uel*.

Some translate *H□obab ben Re'uel* in our context to mean that *H□obab* (who is Jethro) is a member of the Midianite clan of *Re'uel* (*ben*, which usually means "son," would take the meaning of "a member of," a well-attested usage). It may even be that he could be called by the clan's name without the word *ben,* a common practice in many cultures and languages.

When Hobab refused Moses' offer, the latter increased his efforts to persuade him. He entreated him, "please do not forsake us," and explained how valuable he would be (or already had been) with יָדַעְתָּ חֲנֹתֵנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהָיִיתָ לָּנוּ לְעֵינָיִם. Grammatically, these words may refer to the past, to Jethro's insight and contribution to Israel's judiciary structure (Exod. 18), if that is who Moses is talking to. However, it fits the context more smoothly to interpret these words of

Moses as referring to the future, "since you know how we encamp in the wilderness, and you will be for us as eyes" (Num. 10:31). The Midianites lived close by and knew the territory well; Hobab could be helpful as a guide. In any event, Moses realized that promising a reward was not enough of an incentive; it was important that Hobab be informed how much he was appreciated.

The Torah does not provide Hobab's response, an omission that requires explanation. But his descendants, the Kenites, are described as living in the land of Israel within the southern portion of Judah's territory – וּבְנֵי קֵינִי חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה (Judg. 1:16; see 1 Sam. 15:6). Many commentators have therefore concluded that Hobab accepted Moses' offer and Moses arranged that he be given an appropriate place to dwell in the land of Israel. The book of Judges records a significant event that resulted from the presence of Hobab's descendant's in the land of Israel. "Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, descendants of Hobab, father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent…near Kedesh" (Judg. 4:11, NJPS). It was Heber's righteous wife Jael who killed Sisera and finalized the miraculous victory of the Israelites described in Judges 4–5.

Our Hobab passage describes a second-year interaction. In the first-year account of Jethro's visit and counsel concerning the judiciary, the passage concludes with the statement that Moses sent Jethro off and "he departed to his land" (Exod. 18:27). Did he leave and return? The Torah does not specifically address this point. Although "he departed to his land" closes a pericope that narrates a first-year episode, it could very well be that it is completing the record concerning Jethro with the conclusion to his story that may have occurred at a later time. In this respect it would be similar to the conclusion of the passage that deals with Terah. After stating that Terah took Abram, Sarai and Lot and traveled to Haran, it concludes, "and Terah died in Haran" (Gen. 11:32), even though he did not die until many years later; the passage is merely concluding his story.

But if that final verse in the Jethro pericope is concluding the story of Jethro, does it not indicate that there was nothing further noteworthy to report about him? Would it lend support to the theory that Hobab

was not Jethro, but his son? Or might it indicate that Jethro did not accede to Moses' request?

3. Traveling

Attached to the foregoing is the statement that during a three-day journey at the beginning of their travels the ark of the covenant traveled before the nation to scout for it a resting place (Num. 10:33-34). Moses' request from his in-law that he serve as a guide and the statement that "the ark" was scouting a resting place for the nation indicate that the locale at which the cloud signaled the nation to encamp might have been a significant distance from the starting point. Apparently, there were alternate routes to choose from to arrive at the next designated station and an intermediate stop or more may have been required. Thus, in 10:12 we are told that as Israel left the wilderness of Sinai the cloud settled in the wilderness of Paran, while the nation's arrival at Paran is first mentioned in 12:16, after several intermediate stops. The wilderness of Paran is a relatively large region. There always is the issue of the potential dangers while negotiating the intervening terrain.

The point is thus made that divine guidance is premised upon the existence of human endeavor and interacts with it. In this statement of the most idealistic relationship between G-d and Israel, one that depicts His active and ongoing leadership, we once again note the Torah's distinctive outlook and its rejection of otherworldly religious philosophies. The model relationship between G-d and His people is construed as His expecting them to actively participate in securing their needs. He shows the way and His followers must do their best to follow His lead. He then would provide for them. They are never exempt from their natural, human responsibility. Were they to neglect it, anything could happen.

Carrying the ark at the head of the march appears inconsistent with the earlier statements in Numbers that the Levites, bearers of the Tabernacle, were to travel in the midst of the divisions (2:17; 10:21). True, the earlier verses do not explicitly mention the carrying of the ark in the midst of the camp, but it appears included in the citations of the "Tent of Meeting" and "Tabernacle" in those contexts. The Sifre states that the ark that traveled in front of the nation, and which on occasion was taken out to battle before the army, is not the one made for the

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Tabernacle in which the tablets resided, but another ark in which the broken tablets were placed. There is no indication of this in the text, and many classical commentators understood this passage to be referring to the one ark. They view this first instance of traveling to be an exception to the mandated procedure, to encourage the people on their first march. When necessary, exceptions could be made. The ark taken out to battle is another issue.

4. The Song of the Ark

The overall section concludes with a two-verse unit (Num. 10:35-36) that, according to the sages, is to be set apart on both sides from the rest of the text. Such separation is achieved in the Torah scroll either by blank spaces before and after the segment or by placement of signs on both sides, which often take the form of inverted נ ("*nun*s"). Each of these verses constitutes a formulaic, poetic prayer recited by Moses, the first on the occasion of the ark setting out and the second upon its coming to a halt. The first anticipates a military confrontation and requests G-d's intervention to scatter His enemies. The second – שׁוּבָה ה' רִבְבוֹת אַלְפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – speaks of the myriads of Israel and has been rendered in many different ways, including the following:

- JPS: "Return, O Lord, unto the tens of thousands of the families of Israel." Although the word "unto" does not appear in the Hebrew, biblical poetry expresses itself in compact form. The word אַלְפֵי (often meaning "thousands," translated above as "myriads") is here translated in the sense of "clan" or "family."
- NJPS: "Return, O Lord, You who are Israel's myriads of thousands." The phrase "You who are" is not explicit in the Hebrew, but again it is a compact statement. The verse expresses the view of Hashem as the true army of Israel.
- Schocken Bible (E. Fox): "Return, O Hashem, (you of) the myriad divisions of Israel." This acknowledges Hashem as the power within the Israel army.
- *Da'at Miqrah* (J. Z. Moskowitz): "Hashem, bring back [from the battle] the myriads of Israel." We will discuss this translation shortly.
- Ibn Ezra, Rashi (citing Menahem): "Hashem, give rest to the myriads of Israel," as in Isaiah 30:15, where the mode of His salvation is

described as בְּשׁוּבָה וָנַחַת תִּוָּשֵׁעוּן "in ease and rest shall you be saved" (Koren).

Psalm 68, a victory celebration song, opens (v. 2) with an instantly recognizable parallel of our passage's first verse, with almost all the key words appearing in both contexts.

Num. 10:35: קוּמָה ה' וְיָפֻצוּ אֹיְבֶיךָ וְיָנֻסוּ מְשַׂנְאֶיךָ מִפָּנֶיךָ

Psalm 68:2: יָקוּם אֱ□קִים יָפוּצוּ אוֹיְבָיו וְיָנוּסוּ מְשַׂנְאָיו מִפָּנָיו

Further in the psalm, the description of G-d's chariots with terms of "myriads" and "thousands," רֶכֶב אֱ□קִים רִבֹּתַיִם אַלְפֵי שִׁנְאָן (v. 18) has been taken as support for the NJPS translation. Further yet in that psalm (v. 23), Hashem declares: מִבָּשָׁן אָשִׁיב אָשִׁיב מִמְּצֻלוֹת יָם ("from Bashan I bring back, I bring back from the depths of the sea"), word usage and imagery which appears to support the *Da'at Miqrah* rendition.

That שׁוּבָה could be transitive, meaning הָשִׁיבָה "bring back," although not grammatically standard, is acceptable in a poetic context. This would be similar to שׁוּבָה ה' אֶת שְׁבִיתֵנוּ (Ps. 126:4), which translates as "Restore, Hashem, our previous condition" or "Bring back, Hashem, our captives" (see '*Olam Hatanakh*). In our context the explanation would be that after the ark leads the military to the battlefront, at a certain point it halts. Soldiers go forth to battle and the prayer is recited that Hashem should bring them all back safely.

Some sages considered this two-verse passage as belonging elsewhere in the Bible but placed here for a reason, reflected in its being set apart in the text. Other sages considered it as "a book for itself," thus dividing Numbers into three books and conceiving of the Torah as seven books (Sifre; *b. Shab.* 116a).*** It may not be very understandable that a two-verse passage is a book unto itself except in a very technical sense, as codified in *Mishnah Yadayim* 3:5. There, the Mishnah rules that the eighty-five letters of this passage constitute the minimum necessary for a portion of Torah scroll to have the degree of sanctity to "make the hands impure" (a concept relevant to a rabbinic decree in the sphere of purity and impurity).

But it is very clear that these two verses do comprise an end-point, separating the first section of Numbers, which was brought to a close at that point, from the following section that begins immediately after and

which is of a different nature. As those sages imply, what follows in Numbers is virtually a separate book from what preceded. The first section continues the themes of Leviticus, somewhat as an addendum to it, concluding the Holiness Code, while the later portion resumes the narrative that was "interrupted" in Exodus. Had the Israelites not sinned and thus been able to proceed straightaway to the promised land, the traveling of Numbers 10 would have been close to the conclusion of the Torah. (An echo of this view is found in the *Ba'al Haturim* on Num. 10:35.) The "marked" passage, although not fully organic to the contextual flow, could have served as an appropriate liturgical conclusion.

Endnotes

* The word חֲצוֹצְרוֹת (trumpets) could be written four ways: with two *vavs*, with only the first, with only the second, or with neither. It is important to note that the *gematria* of חֲצוֹצְרוֹת with both *vavs* is 800, which would clearly make the trumpets a covenant signifier. Interestingly, however, in the Masoretic Text of Scripture the *plene* spelling (with two *vavs*, חֲצוֹצְרוֹת) does not appear. In our passage, it is written once with the first *vav* but not with the second (v. 2), once with the second *vav* but not with the first (v. 8) and twice with neither *vav* (vv. 9, 10). In the other twenty-four scriptural attestations of the word, twenty-three are spelled with one *vav*, always in the final syllable, and one is without a *vav*. The feeling fostered by omission of the *plene* spelling is that the covenant connection is available but not quite implemented. Of course, the last two verses of the passage surely reference the covenant. One wonders about the explanation.

** See our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah from the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon*

*** In his unpublished manuscript on Deuteronomy, Rabbi S. D. Sassoon expresses the opinion that the view of the sages that the five books of the Torah actually constitute seven books represents an accurate tradition whose precise application was forgotten by talmudic times. His theory is that Deuteronomy constitutes three volumes in that the pericope of blessings and curses of chapter 28 was originally maintained as a separate unit and read on occasions of covenant reaffirmation. Only subsequent to the destruction of the First Temple and the exile was that portion organically incorporated into Deuteronomy.