

Bamidbar

Should anyone wish to examine the elements needed to form a country or nation, one need only use the United States as an example. First and foremost was the need for a place to live. The Pilgrims saw to this when they settled in America. But this was not enough. A nation, even one where freedom is first and foremost, needs certain laws and standards to live by. A constitution is drawn and a government is established to keep order to insure that the constitution is upheld and carried out. After these primary steps are put into motion, the nation is then ready for growth and development. Its character defined, its culture, the identifying mark.

With the Jewish people, this was not the case. The natural order was reversed. First, we were given our constitution, the Torah; even before we had a land, before our feet touched the soil that was to be ours, we already had our system of Laws and Standards concerning every aspect of life. We did not even have a roof over our heads when our culture set us apart from the rest of the nations of the world.

The Jewish people are a strange nation. Strange in every respect. Whether we speak of how we became a nation in another land that was not ours, our very existence for the last thousand years, or how we survived that span of time, having gone through and lived in the terrible *Midbar Ha'amim* and finally found our way back to Eretz Yisrael.

Today, we can well understand the words of the prophet Yirmiyahu concerning *Midbar* and *Geulah*: "Thus saith the L-rd; the people that were left of the sword have found grace in the wilderness, even Israel when I go to cause him to rest."¹

"In the wilderness" must be understood as *Galus*, while "cause him to rest" refers to Israel's returning to the land (Eretz Yisroel). "*Bamidbar Sinai*" reminds us of another prophecy given by Jeremiah.²

"Thus saith the L-rd, I remember for you the affection of your youth, the love of your espousals; how you went after Me in the wilderness (*Midbar*), in the land that was not sown."

This description is most beautiful and filled with romanticism. One can easily see the picture in one's mind—man lost in the hot sandy desert, hungry, and tired. He is searching for something to revive him. Suddenly he eyes an oasis and stills his hunger and quenches his thirst. Hoshea alluded to this when he remarked "like grapes in the desert I found Israel."³

The *Midrash* tells us, when the Israelites wandered in the desert, the Ark, the Torah, went before them and two flames of fire that came from the rods with which the Ark was carried burned all the snakes and scorpions and destroyed Israel's enemies.⁴

The Jewish people survived thousands of years of exile and persecution only because of the strength of the "Ark," the Torah. Only with the *Zechus* of Torah were we fortunate enough to see the miracles of this generation concerning Israel. We are still in *Golus*. But we will merit to see its end, the return of the Bais Hamikdash and the coming of Mashiach Tzidkenu as long as we carry the Torah before us, study it daily, making it an integral part of our daily lives.

FOOTNOTES

1. Jeremiah 31:1
2. Ibid 2:2
3. Hosea 9:10
4. Devorim Rabba 7:9