



Trees and Teachers

Following the Splitting of the Sea, the Torah records two places where the Jews encamped. The first, *Marah*, was a place with bitter waters. Hashem instructs Moshe Rabbeinu to cast a piece of bitter wood into the waters and it becomes sweet. The second place, *Elim*, was a beautiful oasis with twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees.

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It is curious that in recounting Am Yisrael's travels in the desert as recorded in *parashat Mas'ei*, the Torah deviates from listing each place, "they travelled and they encamped" to tell us once again about the springs and trees in *Elim*. If the Torah emphasizes this information, there must be true significance here.

One approach is suggested by the Chafetz Chaim zt"l. The Jews complained in *Marah* about the bitter waters, yet just a stop away was a lush wellspring. So often we hyper focus on our present situation without pausing to realize that life is a journey and "just around the corner," goodness and salvation await. The abundance in *Elim* serves as a perpetual reminder for us that we are in Hashem's caring Hand and sometimes we must exercise patience and trust until we see the obvious blessing.

Rashi alludes to a Midrash teaching that Hashem prepared this oasis at the time of *bri'at ha'olam* — the creation of the world. There were twelve springs, one for each tribe and seventy palm trees to provide rest and fruit for each of the seventy elders. The Ramban adds that Hashem arranged this for the glory of the people and the glory of the sages.

Rav Simcha Broide, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron, offers an important lesson to learn from this section. Each elder sat under a different palm tree, similar to Devorah who sat under a palm tree as she taught and judged the people. The elders did not need the tree for shade; they had the Clouds of Glory that

shielded them from the sun. The trees were a symbol of prominence, according honor to each of the elders. Here *Am Yisrael* learned the value of treating elders of Torah with respect and reverence.

As the Jews were preparing to receive the Torah, this was a crucial message. One must show the utmost respect to the values of Torah, and to those who transmit its messages. Particularly in the age of AI, we can't forget that Torah's vibrancy and efficacy is shared through the *Talmidei Chachamim* in each generation. We see how important this lesson is — worth a second mention in *parashat Mas'ei*. ■

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