

### **1. BAMIDBAR 11 – MOSHE APPOINTS SEVENTY ELDERS**

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲסַפֶּה לִּי שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָדַעְתָּ כִּי הֵם זִקְנֵי הָעָם וְשִׁטְרֵי וְלִקְחָתָּ אִתָּם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהִתְיַצְּבוּ שָׁם עִמָּךְ. וְיַרְדֹּתִי וְדִבְרֹתֵי עִמָּךְ שָׁם וְאַצְלֹתִי מִן הָרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיךָ וְשָׁמַתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם וְנָשְׂאוּ אִתְּךָ בְּמִשָּׂא הָעָם וְלֹא תִשָּׂא אֹתָהּ לְבַדְּךָ. ... וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל הָעָם אֵת דְּבָרֵי ה' וַיֵּאֲסֹף שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ מִזִּקְנֵי הָעָם וַיַּעֲמֵד אֹתָם סָבִיבַת הָאֹהֶל. וַיֵּרֶד ה' בְּעָנָן וַיְדַבֵּר אֵלָיו וַיֹּאצֵּל מִן הָרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלָיו וַיִּתֵּן עַל שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ הַזִּקְנִים וַיְהִי כְּנוּחַ עֲלֵיהֶם הָרוּחַ וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ וְלֹא יָסְפוּ.

God said to Moses, "Assemble for Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the people's elders and officers, and you shall take them to the Tent of Meeting, and they shall stand there with You. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will increase the spirit that is upon you and bestow it upon them. Then they will bear the burden of the people with you so that you do not need to bear it alone. ... Moses went out and told the people what God had said, and he assembled seventy men of the elders of the people and stood them around the Tent. God descended in a cloud and spoke to him, and He increased some of the spirit that was on him and bestowed it on the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, but they did not continue.

### **2. HOW DOES ONE CHOOSE 70 ELDERS FROM 12 TRIBES?**

When Moses chose "princes" to preside over the nation (Bamidbar), or chose spies to spy out the land (Shelach Lecha), or chose officials to divide up the land (Masei), God explicitly indicated to him which people should fulfill these roles. But for the seventy elders chosen to assist Moses in his spiritual leadership, God did not tell Moshe who to choose, nor how to choose them, but only: אֲסַפֶּה לִּי שִׁבְעִים – "Assemble for Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the people's elders and officers..." So what did Moshe do to be as inclusive as possible, while at the same time keeping the number 70?

### **3. SANHEDRIN 17A – 72 CANDIDATES, 70 WINNERS**

שבשעה שאמר לו הקב"ה למשה אספה לי שבעים איש מזקני ישראל אמר משה כיצד אעשה אברור ששה מכל שבט ושבט נמצאו שנים יתירים אברור חמשה מכל שבט ושבט נמצאו עשרה חסרים אברור ששה משבט זה וחמשה משבט זה הריני מטיל קנאה בין השבטים. מה עשה? בירר ששה ששה והביא שבעים ושנים פיתקין. על שבעים כתב "זקן" ושנים הניח חלק. בללן ונתנן בקלפי. אמר להם בואו וטלו פיתקים. כל מי שעלה בידו "זקן" אמר "כבר קידשך שמים". מי שעלה בידו חלק אמר "המקום לא חפץ בך, אני מה אעשה לך?"

When God said to Moses: "Gather for Me seventy men of the Elders of Israel" (Num. 11:16), Moses said: How shall I do it? If I select 6 from each and every tribe, there will be a total of 72, which will be 2 extra! But if I select 5 from each and every tribe, there will be a total of 60, minus 10. And if I select 6 from this tribe and 5 from that tribe, I will bring about envy between the tribes, as those with fewer representatives will resent the others. What did he do? He selected 6 [from every tribe] and he brought 72 slips. On 70 he wrote: "elder", and he left 2 blank. He mixed them up and placed them in the box. He then said to the 72 chosen candidates: Come and draw your slips. Everyone who picked out a slip that said: Elder, he said to him: Heaven has already sanctified you. And everyone who picked out a blank slip, he said to him: God does not desire you; what can I do?

**BUT ALTHOUGH THIS EXPLAINS HOW MOSHE CHOSE 70 ELDERS, IT PROMPTS ANOTHER QUESTION: WHY WAS IT NECESSARY TO INSIST ON THE NUMBER SEVENTY? WOULD IT NOT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO CHOOSE SEVENTY-TWO ELDERS AND KEEP THINGS EQUAL BETWEEN THE TRIBES? IN EVERY OTHER SITUATION GOD HAD ALWAYS KEPT THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE TRIBES. WHY NOT DO THE SAME WITH THE ELDERS? WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT 70?**

## **6. 12 & 70 -- TWO PRIMARY NUMBERS FOR THE JEWISH NATION**

The Jewish people is divided in two different ways. There is a division into 12 and there is division into 70. The number 12 is the main number; either we count 12 sons of Jacob, or alternatively, anywhere the tribe of Levi is not counted, Menashe and Ephraim are counted as two separate tribes, in order to preserve the number 12.

But the number 70 is also a very important number, although it features less prominently than 12. In Vayigash, when Jacob and his family went down to Egypt, the Torah detailed everyone who went to Egypt. The number was 70. In Pinchas, when the tribes were designated for entry into the Land, the nation was counted according to their families, besides for being counted as 12 tribes. Some of the families match the names of those who were counted in Vayigash, but many of those who went to Egypt do not appear as family names listed in Pinchas. In Vayigash it is mainly Jacob's grandchildren, plus five great-grandchildren; in Pinchas there are 16 great-grandchildren, 3 great-grandchildren and 6 great-great-grandchildren. But despite the differences between these two sources in the Torah, both end up with the same total: 70.

The people of Israel are composed of 12 tribes and 70 families. These two numbers correspond to something else. The number 12 appears in Abraham's family three times. At the end of Vayera, the children of Nahor, Abraham's brother, are enumerated: 8 sons of Milka, and 4 other sons of Re'uma, which totals 12. At the end of Chayei Sarah, Ishmael's sons are listed -- also 12. At the end of Vayishlach, the descendants of Eisav are named. Once again, the total number is 12. Meanwhile, the number 70 is also symbolic, corresponding to the seventy nations of the world, the descendants of Noah.

When the Israelites left Egypt, one of the first places they reached was Elim. The Torah tells us (Ex. 15:27): וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶלְמָה וְשָׁם שְׁתַּיִם עֵשְׂרָה עֵינֹת מַיִם וְשִׁבְעִים תְּמָרִים -- "they came to Elim, where there were 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees." Random? Does not seem likely. In Parashat Mas'ei all the journeys in the wilderness are summarized, without any additional details. Even the giving of the Torah is not described there. But one stop is described in detail (Num. 33:9): וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶלְמָה וּבְאֵילָם שְׁתַּיִם עֵשְׂרָה עֵינֹת -- "they came to Elim, and in Elim there were 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees." Why mention such meaningless trivia? The importance is the symbolism in the numbers. The people of Israel, as opposed to the sons of Nahor, Ishmael and Esau, are not only divided by 12, but also by 70.

Every negative needs a positive to counteract it. Within the Abrahamic family it is the number 12 that needs to be counteracted; corresponding to the nations of the world the number is 70. That number has nothing to do with the 12 tribes. Even so, Moshe wanted to keep the selection of the 70 elders as equitable as possible.

## **7. ELDAD & MEIDAD – THE PROPHETS IN THE CAMP**

וַיִּשְׁאָרוּ שְׁנֵי אַנְשִׁים בְּמַחֲנֵה שֵׁם הָאֶחָד אֶלְדָּד וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִי מֵיָדָד וַתֵּנַח עֲלֵהֶם הָרוּחַ וְהֵמָּה בְּכַתְּבִים וְלֹא יָצְאוּ  
הָאֶהָלָה וַיִּתְּנָבוּ בְּמַחֲנֵה : (כז) וַיֵּרָץ הַנֶּעֱרַר וַיִּגֵּד לְמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶלְדָּד וּמֵיָדָד מִתְּנַבְּאִים בְּמַחֲנֵה : (כח) וַיַּעַן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן  
נוּן מִשְׁרַת מֹשֶׁה מִבְּחָרָיו וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי מֹשֶׁה כְּלָאִם : (כט) וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה הֲמִקְנִי אֶתְּהָ לִּי וַיְמִי יִתֵּן כָּל עִם ה'   
נְבִיאִים כִּי יִתֵּן ה' אֶת רוּחוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם :

26. Now two men remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the second was Meidad, and the spirit rested upon them. They were among those written, but they did not go out to the tent, but prophesied in the camp. 27. The lad ran and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!" 28. Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' servant from his youth, answered and said, Moses, my master, imprison them!" 29. Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? If only all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would bestow His spirit upon them!"

## **8. OHR HACHAIM – EXPLAINING ELDAD & MEIDAD**

**וישאר שני אנשים** וגו'. צריך לדעת א' כוונת מאמר "וישאר" מנין נשארו? ב' למה הוצרך להזכיר שמם? ג' אומרו "ותנח עליהם" וגו' ממה נפשך אם הם מהע' הרי כבר הזכירם הכתוב בכלל הע', דכתיב "ויאצל" וגו' ויתן על ע', כי מאומרו ותנח משמע דבר חדש שלא הוזכר עד עתה? ואם אינם מהע' הלא לא אמר ה' אל משה אלא ע' ד' אומרו והמה בכתובים אין ידוע הכוונה בזה. ה' אומרו "ולא יצאו" הלא מאומרו "וישאר" במחנה" מובן הדבר שלא יצאו? ו' אומרו ויתנבאו לבסוף שהיה לו להסמיך הנמשך להם בפני עצמו והנעשה מהם בפני עצמו על זה הדרך וישאר ב' אנשים וגו' והמה בכתובים ולא יצאו האלה ותנח עליהם הרוח ויתנבאו, למה כתב הדברים שלא כסדר הנכון?

Firstly, what is the meaning of "they remained?" Relative to whom and to what did they remain? Secondly, why did the Torah have to mention the names of these two men [when none of the seventy elders were named though they were chosen and these men were not]? Thirdly, why does the Torah say that the spirit rested on them? If the men were part of the seventy elders selected, what is the Torah adding that we did not know before? If they were not part of the seventy elders the Torah had spoken about, why would they be granted prophecy seeing that God told Moses to select only seventy men? Fourthly, what is the meaning of the words "they were in the writings"? Fifth, why did the Torah say they did not go out? If they have been reported as "remaining," they obviously had not "gone out"? Why did the Torah write at the end of the verse: "they prophesied inside the camp?" The Torah should have written the verse in the following order: "Two men who were amongst those whose names had been suggested as prospective elders did not go out to the Tabernacle; the spirit came to rest on them and they prophesied." Why did the Torah completely jumble up this verse?

ורז"ל נחלקו (ספרי) מנין נשארו, יש אומרים נשארו מהע"ב שברר משה מישראל ו' מכל שבט בשוה והגריל להוציא הב' היתרים על הע' שאמר לו ה' והם הב' שנשארו, ורבי שמעון אמר כי מהע' נשארו שלא רצו ליכנס לאהל מועד לצד ענוה ושפלות ונשארו במחנה ע"כ. לסברת האומר מהע' נשארו יתבאר הכתוב עז"ה וישאר ב' אנשים במחנה לצד חושבם עצמן כשיריים, שם הא' וגו' פירוש ידועים היו במדות ישרות ומוחזקים בעיני ישראל שלסיבה זו נשארו במחנה, שזולת זה יש לעם לרנן אחריהם שמאסו ח"ו בנחת הרוח עליהם ונמצאו מחללים ה' וימאסם עליון לסיבה זו, אלא לצד ששם האחד המיוחד אלדד ושם השני לו מידד לזה לא דנו בהם המעשה להרע, ובוזה לא נמאסו ותנח עליהם הרוח עצמה שנחה על הע' לא מנעתם ההרחקה שהיתה בין אהל מועד ובין המחנה ונחה גם עליהם, ודקדק לומר ותנח, לומר ששם קנתה מקומה הרוח כאומרם ששאר הע' פסקו ואלו לא פסקו נבואה מהם, וקודם שהזכיר הנבואה הזכיר דברים שבהם יצדיקו העם כי דברי נבואה בפייה אמת, ואמר והמה בכתובים פירוש מאותם הע' שנכתבו, וכדי שלא תחשוב שהכתובים הם שנכתבו בפתקי הגורלות, לזה אמר ולא יצאו האוהלה הא למדת שהיו יכולין לצאת, ובוזה נאמנו דבריהם שהיו נבואה והוא אומרו ויתנבאו, וזולת התנאי הנזכר מי יחזיק דבריהם לדברי נביאות, ובוזה נתישבו כל הדקדוקים :

The sages debated the identity and character of these men who were "left behind." According to some they were the 2 left out of the total of 72 whom Moses had invited to take part in the draw for the selection of a total of 70 ... these two had drawn blanks and had therefore not been appointed as elders. Rabbi Shimon says that two of the seventy men selected were so humble that they did not want to enter the Mishkan and preferred to stay behind in the Israelite camp. According to this explanation we can explain the verse as follows: "Two men remained behind in the camp as they considered themselves superfluous."

The Torah gives their names to tell us that they were renowned for their modesty. Had they not been renowned for their modesty the people would have told them off for refusing Moses' invitation to high office which included God granting them Holy Spirit. Their refusal would have been a public desecration of God's name. It was their names that protected them against their conduct being interpreted negatively. As a result of their modesty they were granted prophecy even though they had remained in the camp, as confirmation that their motives in remaining was acceptable.

The Torah chose the expression **וַתֵּן** to indicate that whereas the other seventy elders experienced only a brief elevation to prophetic insights, these two men retained the spirit of prophecy granted to them. Before mentioning the substance of their prophetic insights, the Torah mentions matters which caused the people to judge these men's behavior in a favorable light, namely that their prophecy proved to be true. In order that we should not think that the words **בַּכְּתוּבִים** and **וְהֵמָּה** refer to the slips of paper making up the lottery, the Torah says that **לֹא יָצְאוּ הָאוֹהֵלָה** -- they did not leave their residence to go to the Mishkan, even they had been entitled to do so. When they were nonetheless able to prophesy all of a sudden, this convinced their peers that they were worthy and had not insulted God by declining Moses' invitation.

ולדברי האומר מהע"ב נשארו יתבאר הכתוב על זה הדרך וישארו פירוש הגם שנשארו ב' האנשים שהיו יתרים על העי' במחנה, שם האחד וגו' אף על פי כן ותנח עליהם הרוח גם כן מלבד שנחה על העי' כמו שאמר למעלה ויאצל מן הרוח וגו' ויתן על עי' איש וידוייק על נכון למה הוצרך לומר ותנח עליהם הרוח לצד שלא הזכיר בפסוק ראשון שנתן הרוח אלא על העי' הודיעך ה' שגם נחה על הב', ואמר והמה בכתובים וגו' בא לתת טעם להצדקת נבואתם כמו שפירשתי למעלה ואמר והמה בכתובים פירוש בפתקים שכתב משה ע"ב זקן, ומעתה הרי ראויים הם לנבואה כיוצא בעי' ויכול להיות שיתנבאו, וכדי שלא תבין שהמה בכתובים שבאו האהלה לזה בירר הכתוב ואמר ולא יצאו בפתקין לבא האהלה: ודרך דרש אולי שיודיע הכתוב שהב' שלא יצאו בפתקין נכלמו ונכנסו במחנה מה שלא עשו כן כל ישראל שיצאו כולם לאהל מועד והב' נחבאו במחנה, וירא ה' בושתם וכלימתם ויתנבאו, והוא אומרם והמה בכתובים שהן הפתקין ומטעם זה ולא יצאו מהמחנה, וחננם ה' ומילא תאותם ויתנבאו:

Meanwhile, according to the opinion that Eldad and Meidad were part of the 72 elders, the word **וישארו** means that although two people whose names were Eldad and Meidad were surplus and therefore remained in the camp, the spirit of prophecy came to rest on them nonetheless, despite the fact that they had not been allowed to proceed to the Mishkan. This was in addition to the 70 who had had been given prophecy as described in verse 25. Seeing that these 2 had not been mentioned in the previous verse as being amongst the 70 Moses had assembled, they needed to be mentioned separately. The words **בַּכְּתוּבִים** and **וְהֵמָּה** provides the justification for being given prophecy, as their names had appeared on the original list of 72 names Moses had recorded as possible candidates to become elders. This made them fit to receive prophetic spirit no less than the other 70. And so that we do not think that the words **בַּכְּתוּבִים** and **וְהֵמָּה** meant that they were part of the 70 out of the original 72, the Torah added that they never left their tents to go to the Mishkan to receive a portion of Moses' prophecy.

A homiletical approach to this paragraph is that the two candidates who drew blank pieces of paper in the lottery were initially upset about not having been chosen. As a result of their rejection they had to return to the general camp after having first being part of the assembly at the Mishkan. They were actually so embarrassed that they went into hiding. When God saw how terribly ashamed they were at having been rejected, He granted them prophetic powers. The words **בַּכְּתוּבִים** and **וְהֵמָּה** mean that the reason they would not come out of hiding was

that their names had originally appeared on the list of candidates. God compensated them for their disappointing experience.

וירץ הנער וגו'. צריך לדעת למה נתרעש המגיד להגיד שנתנבאו, ועוד לו שרעש עליהם לתתם בבית כלא וכי כל המתנבא נענש על שניכא וזה מן התימה, ויש לתת טעם לסברת האומר שהיו ב' שנשארו בפתקין, כי לצד שאמר משה לישראל על פי ה' שיתן רוח נבואה על ע' ועכשיו נבאו גם הבי' יש לחוש לא' מבי' דברים, או לא יאמן משה ח"ו במאמרו שאמר לו ה' ע', או המתנבאים נבאו שקר, ולסברת האומר כי היו מהע' הגידו למשה המעשה הבלתי הגון שהוא אמר שילכו לאהל מועד והם עמדו במחנה ונבאו שם, ויש בזה שתיים רעות, א' שלא קיימו דבר משה, והב' שבזה גילו דעתם שלא רצו שתאצל עליהם הרוח מרוחו של משה אלא ממקור הרוח ומתנבאים במחנה :

Why was the boy so upset that he told Moses that Eldad and Meidad prophesied? Even if he had good reason to tell Moses about it, why did he demand that they be locked up? Since when has prophecy been a punishable crime? According to the opinion that these two men were the ones who had been rejected out of the original 72 candidates we can understand why he was upset. Moses had told the Israelites that 70 people would be endowed with prophetic spirit by God. All of a sudden he saw that 72 had become prophets. There could only be two reasons for this. Either Moses had not told the truth, or these 2 were false prophets. And according to the opinion that these 2 were included in the 70, he was informing Moses of a misdemeanor - they had been told to come to the Mishkan and failed to show up, and were now prophesying inside the regular camp. Eldad and Meidad committed two wrongs: 1) they ignored Moses' order; 2) they refused to be recipients of Moses' prophecy and instead wished to receive their prophecy directly from a higher source as a result of which they prophesied within the camp.

ויען יהושע וגו' כלאם. צריך לדעת על מי סמך יהושע להורות לפני רבו, ומה גם להורותו כה וכה תעשה, וזה מהזרות, ורז"ל אמרו (עירובין סג.) כל דמותיב מלה קדם רביה אזיל בלא ולד שנאמר ויען יהושע וגו', ואפשר לתת טעם למעשה יהושע על פי דבריהם ז"ל (ספרי) שאמרו וזה לשונם מה נבואה אמרו משה מת יהושע מכניס עד כאן. לזה כששמע יהושע הדברים בחר לדבר לפני רבו כדי שיגלה דעתו כי מאוסים הדברים אצלו ואומריהם וכי שקר בפייהם, ובזה שלל החשד כי יחפוץ הוא בדברים הנאמרים למעלתו וגילה ההפכיות ברצונו: ואמר אדוני משה כלאם פירוש תן אותם במשמר עד אשר יבא דבר מלך משפט עשות, או כלם מן העולם, וטעם הדבר בין לסברת האומר חוץ מהע' בין לסברת האומר מהע' מהטעמים שכתבנו, ואולי שרמו באומרו אדוני משה, שאינו חפץ היות הוא אדון אלא היות לו אדונו משה לשלול הרצון בנאמר כי ימות משה והוא יכניס, וידויק גם כן מאמר ויען שעשה תשובה לדברים הנאמרים עליו בנבואה ההיא כי לא דברו נכונה וצריכין לינתן בבית כלא, ואף על פי כן ענשו הכתוב, כי סוף סוף השיב דבר בפני רבו :

Joshua reacted and said: "imprison them!" What gave Joshua the right to make a halachic decision in the presence of his teacher? Our sages in Eruvin 63 have said that anyone who makes a halachic pronouncement in the presence of his teacher will die without leaving behind children. The Talmud quotes our verse as its source. Perhaps we can explain what Joshua by referring to Sifri on verse 26 where it says that Eldad and Meidad kept prophesying that Moses would die and Joshua would lead the Israelites into the Holy Land. When Joshua heard these words he resolved to take a stand in the presence of his teacher in order to demonstrate his displeasure with this prophecy. He believed that Eldad and Meidad were not fit to prophesy and were talking nonsense. By taking a stand he showed that he was not interested in assuming the leadership role prophesied by Eldad and Meidad. He may have meant either one of two things with his suggestion that Moses lock these people up. The confinement would be temporary until the matter came to trial, or perhaps he meant that they should be banished from this world. Either possibility is in accord with the two views we have quoted regarding whether Eldad and Meidad belonged to the 70 elders who had been chosen or whether they were the two men who had drawn blanks.

The wording "my lord Moses," suggests that Joshua expressed his desire for Moses to remain his superior, and did not secretly want to replace Moses. The apparently unnecessary word "vayaan" means that he replied to the words (the content) that Eldad and Meidad had prophesied. But Joshua was punished for having spoken out in this manner -- in the final analysis, he had violated the rule of deciding halacha in the presence of one's teacher.