

BS"D

To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com
From: crshulman@aol.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BAMIDBAR - 5762

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From: Don't Forget[SMTP:sefira@torah.org]
Subject: Day 44 / 6 weeks and 2 days
Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 10, will be day 44, which is 6 weeks and 2 days of the omer.

From: torahweb@zeus.host4u.net Sent: Wednesday, May 08, 2002
Subject: Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger - Together Forever
http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2002/parsha/rneu_bamidbar.html
RABBI YAAKOV NEUBURGER
TOGETHER FOREVER

The prophet Hoshea was told by Hashem to marry a woman of ill repute, begin a family with her, and then to let her go. However, the pain of breaching the relationship, dubious in its very nature, would be too great for him to bear. Thus, Hashem gives Hoshea a glimpse into the depth of Hashem's covenant with us, one that will survive any disappointment, no matter how profound. The Haftarah of Parshas Bamidbar records this prophecy and concludes with the words, "vEairastich li IEolam, viairastich li bEtzede uEvEmishpat uEvEchessed uEvErachamim, vEairastich li bEemunah" ("and I will marry you forever, and I will marry you with righteousness and with justice and with kindness and with mercy, and I will marry you with trust") (Hoshea 2:21-22).

At first blush, I have often considered, we would rearrange these expressions of love. Would we not leave "forever" for a climactic conclusion, presented only after the relationship has been tested, and its substance clarified? Nevertheless, Hashem puts it first, before explaining that this relationship is about kindness, righteousness, mercy, and justice. Furthermore, we would probably believe that every bond starts with trust, as ambiguous as trust may be, rather than building up to it. However, it seems to me that the order of ideas here communicates to us an insight crucial to founding enduring and meaningful personal relationships. Indeed, if a marriage is to be successful, it must be viewed by both parties as "forever". Presumably it is only after the appropriate criteria of each party have been met that marriage is contemplated, and when the marriage is formulated, nothing short of "life long" should be envisioned. Thus, the marriage context is created free of tests and judgements, void of places to run, and replete with sharing and realizing shared blessings. It is in that context that Hashem reminds us of the justice, righteousness, kindness, and mercy that he invests into us. Similarly, it is in an enduring marriage that spouses will generously contribute whatever is required. After all, there is precious little in life that would justify limiting efforts that can impact that which is life-long.

Finally, Hashem reminds us how we benefit, time and time again, from His confidence and trust in us, allowing that to override many faults and debacles. The comfort that we have from that inviolable faith gives joy and meaning in one's most frightening and lonely moments. That this indeed describes the utmost in any relationship, I am sure will resonate well with those who enjoy trusting family bonds built on years of willingness to share all of one's blessings. May we all be blessed to understand this profoundly and personally.

http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2001/parsha/rros_bamidbar.html
[From last year]
RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG
KEDUSHAT AND PIDYON BEKHOR

Parshat Bamidbar marks an important transition in the structure of Kelal Yisrael, in which the Leviim assumed the role hitherto reserved for or at least designated for the bekorot. This change itself raises many issues, as Chazal discuss, calling into question the very purpose of initially infusing the bekorot with such short-lived kedushah.

The pesukim that describe this development further challenge us to understand both the nature of this transition, as well as the prevailing character of kedushat bekorot. Even as the Torah continually stresses, with the word "li", the total commitment and dedication that Hashem will demand from the Leviim (Bamidbar 3:12,41, 45- "ve-hayu li halviim" etc.), the Torah also characterizes not only the initial, but also the continuing status of the replaced bekorot in the same terms! Thus, we note the triple usage of "li" in the pasuk that concludes Hashem's instructions to Moshe on this matter (Bamidbar 3:13)- "ki li kol bekorot be-yom hakoti kol bekorot be-eretz mizrayim hiqdashiti li kol bekorot be-yisrael me-adam ad behemah li yihiyu ani Hashem" (see Bekhorot 5a).

The Torah discusses the mitzvah and status of bekorot differently in various contexts. In parshat Bamidbar, bekorot's special status, which at least partially seemingly persists, is explicitly linked to makat bekorot, even as the transition to the Leviim is formulated. In parshat Bo (Shemot 13:2), also in the context of the commemoration of yetziat Mizrayim, we are informed that the bekorot is to be sanctified- "kadesh li kol bekorot peter kol rehem be-benei yisrael ba-adam u-babehemah li hu". The Neziv (Haamek Davar, ad. loc.) questions how this act of sanctification is manifest upon a child. [Chazal in other contexts argue that kedushah signifies perisah-separation. See Rambam, Hil. Bekhorot 1:1.] In parshat Korah (Bamidbar 18:15), perhaps linked with the mitzvah of bikurim (18:13) (see Sefer ha-Hinukh, no. 40, and Moreh Nevukhim), the Torah underscores the need to redeem the bekorot: "akh padoh tifdeh eit bekorot ha-adam...".

While the connection to makat bekorot dramatizes the distinctive status of bekorot and underscores the need for one manifestation of "ki li hu", that of total dedication to avodat Hashem unambiguously defined, the link to bikurim perhaps implies a more general theme of "ki li hu", according to which the bekorot constitutes an appropriate representative of the broader population of Kelal Yisrael. Moreover, the obligations to sanctify and redeem appear irreconcilable. Indeed, the Rashbam argues that the formulation in parshat Bo reflects only the status of bekorot before the transition, while the pesukim in Korah refer to the contemporary. The Rambam actually omits reference to human bekorot when he codifies the mitzvah of "kadesh li kol bekorot" in Sefer ha-Mizvot (aseh no. 89), although the actual source in Bo includes both animal and human bekorot. However, Seforno projects that the themes of kedushah and pidyon are compatible. The standard pidyon ha-ben ceremony includes the pasuk of "kadesh li" immediately after the pasuk of "u-peduyo mi-ben hodesh tifdeh". In fact, the Rambam in Yad ha-Hazakah does include human bekorot in the mitzvah of "le-hafrish bekorot", codified in Hil. Bekhorot (1:1), even as he projects the mitzvah of pidyon bekorot in Hil. Bikurim (11:1).

An examination of the ceremony of pidyon ha-ben reveals other facets of this mitzvah that require clarification. The great joy that is reflected in the ceremony and accompanying formulae convey that this pidyon is perceived not as an unfortunate derogation of status, or loss of spiritual opportunity, but as an authentic expression of spiritual ambition and an affirmation of kedushat Yisrael. Some formulations conclude the berakah with "mekadesh yisrael le-pidyonam", though this is not our normative practice.

Perhaps the significance of pidyon ha-ben lies precisely in the very fact that the mitzvah of pidyon does not completely negate the initial mitzvah of kedushah or render superfluous (or spiritually insignificant) the prior state of perisah. The fact that the principle of "ki li kol bekorot" persists on the basis of "li yihiyu" despite the transition of the avodah to the Leviim may be responsible for the special joy and singular spiritual

meaning associated with pidyon ha-ben. Notwithstanding the subsequent exclusion of bechorot from the actual avodah, this perspective effectively conveys the ideal that the opportunity to serve in that elite capacity was initially and in some (abstract) respects still remains the potential legacy of every single family of Kelal Yisrael. Furthermore, it accents that shevet Levi continues to serve as the representatives of that original integrated population. Moreover, a joyous pidyon that reflects and affirms initial kedushah even in absence of the actual potential to serve and which anticipates a spiritually rich life of torah and yirat shamayim as conveyed in the accompanying formula ("ve-yikanes zeh ha-ben le-hayyim, le-torah u-leyirat shamayim...she-kesheim she-nikhnas le-pidyon ken yikaness le-torah u-le-hupah, u-le-maasim tovim"), not despite but because of the pidyon, is one that truly reflects a profound theme of kedushat yisrael. It powerfully projects that "ki li kol bechor" and all that it implies, transcends the avodah and can be channeled, manifested and expressed in ways that are also accessible to all members of kelal yisrael. In this way, the otherwise distinct themes of makat bechorot and bikurim, of Hil. Bekhorot (kedushah-avodah) and Hil. Bikurim (reishit-pidyon) converge bearing the singular message of "ki li kol bechor be-yom hakoti kol bechor be-eretz mizrayim hiqdashti li kol bechor be-yisrael me-adam ad beheimah li yihyu Ani Hashem".

From: listmaster[SMTP:listmaster@shemayisrael.com] Subject: PENINIM ON THE TORAH BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

And they established their genealogy according to their families, according to their father's house. (1:18)

Rashi explains that they brought their documents of lineage and witnesses to the status of their birth, in order to trace their ancestry to the particular tribe to which they claimed to belong. Chazal tell us that the other nations also claimed their stake in the Torah and were rebuffed by Hashem due to their lack of yichus, lineage. This is problematic, because surely Bnei Yishmael can trace their lineage back to Avraham Avinu and Bnei Eisav can trace their pedigree to Yitzchak Avinu. Apparently, a deeper meaning supports the idea of presenting their documents of lineage.

The Pupa Rav zl, takes a practical approach towards explaining this Chazal. He posits that zechus avos, the merits of one's ancestors, are credited to the children only when one sees the avos in the children, if their good deeds are reflected in the actions of their progeny. Chazal teach us that the Jewish People were redeemed from the Egyptian exile because they did not change their Hebrew names, their Hebrew language or their traditional manner of dress. They adhered to the legacy which their ancestors had transmitted to them. While they were spiritually deficient in many areas, they still maintained a filial bond with their forebears.

When the other nations came to complain that they had no part in the Torah and Eretz Yisrael, Hashem asked them to produce their documents of lineage. Hashem was telling them that in order to stake a claim, to be part of the Jewish nation, they had to show that they carried on from their ancestors. One cannot expect to invoke the memory of his forebears if, indeed, he does not in any way, shape, or form demonstrate a relationship with them. An individual cannot dress, speak and act like the nations of the world and expect to be part of the Jewish destiny just because he is able to trace his lineage to the Patriarchs. There is more to being Jewish than simply having a Jewish surname.

This is the penetrating meaning of vayisyaldu al mishpechosam l'beis avosam, "and they established their lineage according to their father's house." The word "vayisyaldu" actually means "they gave birth to themselves," as the verb "vayisyaldu" is the hispaal form of the root word "yalod," to give birth. Generally, verbs in the hispaal are reflexive, suggesting a definition which is an obvious impossibility. Therefore, we must say that they made a peulah, action, in themselves, in their nafshius, spiritual/moral dimension, which bound them with the source of their own essence - their ancestors. They strengthened their relationship with their past by continuing to maintain the unique

spiritual persona that distinguished their ancestors.

In his commentary to the mitzvah of Peru Revu, "Be fruitful and multiply," Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains that it is not enough to simply "peru," bear the products of the human fruit, children. It is important that these children achieve independence and ripen into human beings who carry within them the noblest traits of G-dliness and humaneness which are innate in the father and mother. Also, revu, the family should multiply, duplicate itself in the children. The mere physical increase of the human race presupposes something more than just begetting children. Revu is something higher than mere multiplication. The parents are to multiply themselves in their children, replicate and repeat themselves in their children. The children are to be not only replicas of the physical bodily traits, but also, of the spiritual, intellectual and moral characteristics of the parents. Accordingly, the parents have to implant their best spiritual and moral traits in their children, carefully and lovingly nurturing their development. They have to leave their imprint upon their children's persona. This, we suggest, is the meaning of vayisyaldu, the parents are the progenitors of themselves in their children.

These are offspring of Aharon and Moshe These are the sons of Aharon. (3:2,3)

Rashi notes that while the Torah begins by saying, "These are the offspring of Moshe and Aharon," it only mentions Aharon's sons - not Moshe Rabbeinu's. He explains that Aharon's sons are also referred to as Moshe's offspring, since he taught them Torah. We derive from here that whoever teaches his friend's sons Torah, the Torah views it as if he had fathered them. This idea is reiterated throughout Chazal. Indeed, the Noda B'Yehudah writes in his Sefer Ahavas Tzion that one fulfills the mitzvah of Peru u'Revu, "Be fruitful and multiply," from a spiritual perspective when he teaches Torah, causing it to be transmitted to yet other Jews. This idea also applies to one who authors a sefer, or any form of Torah-oriented literature, through which others can, and will be, inspired by his ideas.

The Kli Yakar gives an alternative explanation for the fact that Aharon HaKohen's sons were also considered Moshe's offspring. He explains that it was Moshe's tefillos, prayers, that saved them from the Heavenly decree that imposed death upon their brothers. When Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem wanted to punish him by taking his sons from him. Moshe's entreaty helped - half way, and Elazar and Isamar were spared. Consequently, since they were granted continued life as a result of Moshe's intercession on their behalf, they were considered Moshe's sons. Because Moshe had taught them Torah they were no longer affected by the decree, since the decree was only on Aharon's sons.

Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, expounds upon the idea that through the medium of teaching Torah to a student, one develops a "keshar avahi," fatherly bond/relationship. In a lecture to the students of the high school of the Yeshiva of Eastern Parkway in 1963, Rav Hutner, said the following: "First of all, I would like you to know that the fact that I am speaking to all of you publicly is not by choice. I would much rather speak to each and every one of you - personally and individually. But, because time does not allow for this, I am compelled to speak to you all together.

"Let me explain why I would rather speak to you individually. You all know that Horav Chaim Volozhiner zl, was the father of the Yeshivah movement. When he founded Yeshivas Volozhin, he engendered a new concept in relation to the yeshivah. He tried to do away with the expression of talmidei ha'yeshivah, students of the yeshivah, and change it to bnei ha'yeshivah, sons of the yeshivah. What compelled him to make this change? Why not leave it as it had been before?

"In many instances we find stories in the Talmud where a great Tanna would meet a young boy and, after speaking to him, would be so impressed with the boy's responses that he would say, 'I am sure that one day he will become a great moreh horaah, halachic arbiter, in Yisrael'. I recently had a similar experience which I would like to share with you. I questioned a young Mesivta student, 'You have a rebbe from whom you study Torah. You also have a teacher who teaches you secular studies. Do you have the same relationship with both, or do you

sense a difference? If you do feel a difference, what is it?'

"The boy thought for a few moments and looked up at me and said, 'My relationship between myself and my secular studies teacher is comparable to one who receives food from the cook, while my relationship to my rebbe is like one who nurses from his mother. The food that I receive from the one who nurses me is a part of his/her life. She gives me her life! The cook, on the other hand, gives me something external, not an intrinsic part of her essence.'

"When I heard these words, I declared, 'I am sure that this young boy will be a great Torah leader.' Indeed, it was this underlying logic that motivated Rav Chaim Volozhiner to change the title of the yeshiva student to ben, son, of the yeshiva. The yeshiva is not the place where the food is prepared and doled out. The yeshiva is the place where a student nurses; where he receives a yenikah ruchnis, spiritual imbibing. You may now understand why I feel I should speak to each one of you individually. To nurse is an individual endeavor - it is not a collective activity that is performed for a group. One dishes out food to a group. I come not to teach you; rather, I come to give you an opportunity to absorb, to imbibe, to nurse the Torah that I seek to impart to you."

A tragedy occurred in Yeshivas Knesses Chizkiyahu in Kfar Chasidim that a young bachur, student, passed away suddenly. The Rosh Ha'yeshiva, Horav Refael Mishkovsky, zl, spoke at the graveside about his close, fatherly relationship with his beloved student. He declared, "The Torah demands of a shomer, guardian, when he returns an object to make two shavuos, oaths. One, that he was not negligent in its care and second, that he did not make personal use of the object. One would think that parents who send their son away to yeshiva might expect the same oaths from the Rosh Ha'yeshiva. After all, he is their son's guardian. But, the Rosh Ha'yeshiva declared brokenheartedly, this is not true. I was never a shomer. I was like his father, and a father does not make an oath." What a powerful statement by a rebbe who "felt" that his relationship extended beyond the extrinsic and reserved, to a fatherly bond of love.

Bring near the tribe of Levi and have it stand before Aharon HaKohen. (3:6)

The Midrash cites the pasuk in Tehillim 92, "A righteous man will flourish like a date palm planted in the house of Hashem, in the courtyards of our G-d they will flourish," as reference to Shevet Levi. They were the tzaddikim, righteous, who opposed the rest of the nation during the sin of the Golden Calf. They are considered the shesulim, planted. Even as little children, they are sent to the bais ha'sefer, school, to study Torah. It is peculiar that Chazal single out the tribe of Levi as unique because they attended school at an early age.. After all, all Jewish children were sent to school as soon as they were ready to study Torah. Torah study is the staple of our People, without which we would be nothing. Education distinguished a committed Jew from one who is not. What is the meaning of Chazal's statement?

The Satmar Rebbe, zl, explains that veritably the pasuk's reference is not only to Shevet Levi, but, rather, to all Jewish children who were inspired by the kedushah, holiness, that was inherent in Shevet Levi. He cites the Talmud in Bava Basra 21a which traces the genesis of formalized, structured Jewish education. At first, they had teachers only in Yerushalayim whose function was to teach Torah from the spiritual center of our People. Afterwards, they appointed teachers in every province, until Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla decreed that every city should have a teacher, in order to avail a Torah education to all children. Regarding the original establishment of teachers only in Yerushalayim, the Talmud supports this tradition based upon the pasuk in Yeshaya 2:3, "From Zion will go out Torah and the word of Hashem from Yerushalayim." Tosfos explains that the significance of Yerushalayim was founded in the fact that when the young student was exposed to the incredible sight and unparalleled holiness which was manifest by the Kohanim and Leviim who served in the Bais Hamikdash, he was greatly motivated to apply himself to his studies with greater fervor and diligence.

Implied in Tosfos' statement is that the merit and virtue of the young Jewish children were dependent primarily upon the impression

imbued in them by the Kohanim and Leviim. In other words, they determined the moral/spiritual compass of the young children. We now understand the meaning of the pasuk which Chazal have explained, as a reference to the young Leviim who attended school. Shesulim is a reference to all of our children who are the young "seedlings" in the house of Hashem. Their inspiration is derived from Shevet Levi. In fact, even after Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla established the total network of schools which reached out throughout the length and breadth of the land, the light of kedushah that emanated from Shevet Levi in Yerushalayim impacted the entire country.

From: Kol Torah[SMTP:koltorah@hotmail.com] Sent: Friday, May 03, 2002 2:39 PM

KOL TORAH A Student Publication of the Isaac and Mara Benmergui Torah Academy of Bergen County Parshiot Behar Bechukotai

This week's issue of Kol Torah has been sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Ellman in memory of all the victims of Arab terrorism in Israel.

EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH
BY RABBI HOWARD JACHTER

In August 2001, President Bush presented his position regarding embryonic stem cell research. He adopted a compromise position between the Catholic Church's complete opposition and liberal exponents' unbridled support. Interestingly, the President adopted (for the most part) the approach of Orthodox Jewish Poskim to this issue. The Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America articulated the Halachic position on this topic in a letter they sent to the President in July 2001. In this essay, we will explain the position of Halachic authorities regarding this issue. We will print as a supplement to this article the text of the OU-RCA letter to the President. We should note that the President did not completely follow the Halachic position, which calls for more safeguards than did the President; however, the basic Halachic position has also become the law of the United States.

Chillul Shabbat to Save the Life of a Fetus The Mishna (Yoma 82a) teaches that we may violate Yom Kippur and Shabbat to save the life of a pregnant woman. The Rosh (Yoma 8:13) presents a dispute among the Geonim and Rishonim whether one may violate Shabbat or Yom Kippur in order to save the life of the fetus. Some rule that only saving the life of the mother justifies violating Shabbat or Yom Kippur. The Behag, however, believes that one may violate Shabbat or Yom Kippur even to save the life of the fetus. The Ramban (Torat Haadam, Inyan Hasakana), Rashba (Shabbat 151b), and Ritva (Niddah 44b s.v. Dichtiv) endorse the Behag's ruling.

The Shulchan Aruch does not explicitly address this dispute. However, the Tur (Orach Chaim 617) rules in accordance with the Behag. The Mishna Berura (617:1) and Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 617:1) appear to rule in accordance with the Behag. The Maharsham (cited in Orchof Chaim O.C. 617:1), Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 11:43, and Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata (36:2) explicitly rule in accordance with the Behag.

Chillul Shabbat to Save the Life of a Fetus within Forty Days of Conception The Korban Netanel (Yoma 8:10) cites the Ramban who rules that according to the Behag, one may violate Shabbat or Yom Kippur to save a fetus within forty days of conception. The Shaar Hatziyun (617:1), however, is uncertain whether this is permissible. This uncertainty stems from the Gemara (Yevamot 69b) and Rambam (Hilchot Terumot 8:3) that state that a fetus within forty days of conception is considered "mere water" because of its lack of development.

The Ramban believes that even though, before forty days, the fetus is not considered a live being, it still has the potential to live and thus one must desecrate Shabbat or Yom Kippur to save it. The aforementioned Maharsham, Tzitz Eliezer, and Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchata rule in accordance with the Ramban's understanding of the Behag. They note that the Gemara (Yoma 83a) teaches that Safek Nefashot Lehakel, that one should be lenient in case of even possible danger to life. Hence, the uncertainty of the Shaar Hatziyun remains

unresolved, and we may rule leniently regarding this question. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Nishmat Avraham 4:50-51) rules that one may violate Shabbat or Yom Kippur even in case of only possible mortal danger to a fetus that is less than forty days old.

Abortion within Forty Days of Conception Based on the Gemara's assertion that a fetus within forty days of conception is viewed as "mere water," some Poskim permit an abortion at this point in case of great need. These authorities include Teshuvot Torat Chesed (Even Haezer 42:33) and Teshuvot Seridei Eish (3:127). On the other hand, Rav Isser Yehudah Unterman (Teshuvot Shevet Miyehuda 1:9) and Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Choshen Mishpat 2:69) reject this lenient approach. Rav Moshe argues that since the Ramban sanctions desecration of Shabbat to save a fetus at this stage, we are forbidden to perform an abortion at this point. See Teshuvot Bnei Banim 3:38-39, where Rav Yehuda Henkin offers a compromise position on this question.

Rav Henkin emphasizes that a layman should not decide such a question. Moreover, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, in a personal conversation with me, once compared a Rabbi rendering a Halachic decision in the area of abortion to a physician conducting a liver transplant. Just as an ordinary physician should not perform a liver transplant, so too an ordinary Rabbi should not render a decision regarding an abortion. Only a Rav of eminent stature may render a decision regarding abortion.

Embryos before Implantation - Chillul Shabbat and Disposal of Excess Embryos Rav Shmuel Wosner (Teshuvot Shevet Halevi 5:47) rules that even according to the Ramban's interpretation of the Behag, one may not violate Shabbat in order to save a fertilized egg that has not yet been implanted in a woman. He reasons that the Ramban permits Shabbat desecration even for an entity that is not yet alive, since most fetuses will survive to term. However, no such justification exists for a not yet implanted fertilized egg, since most of them will not be implanted and survive to term. Rav Wosner writes that even if the technology will progress to the point that most eggs will survive to term, he would still be inclined to believe that Shabbat desecration would not be justified.

Rav Zalman Nechemia Goldberg told me that it is permissible to discard fertilized eggs that were created, but will not be utilized, for IVF. The OU-RCA letter states that this is the accepted opinion among contemporary Halachic authorities. It seems that even Rav Moshe Feinstein might concur with this reasoning, as Halacha does not sanction Shabbat desecration for a not yet fertilized egg.

Embryonic Stem Cell Research Accordingly, the OU-RCA letter states that Halacha sanctions using an embryo for research purposes if it was created for the purpose of IVF but will be discarded. However, Poskim do not permit creation of an embryo for research purposes. This does not constitute sufficient reason to sanction harvesting sperm. Halacha permits this only in the attempt to create a child (see Yevamot 76a, Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Even Haezer 1:71, Teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer 15:45, and Nishmat Avraham 3:8). The OU-RCA letter urges that the government establish rigorous supervisory procedures to insure that the procurement of embryonic stem cells is accomplished in an appropriate manner.

The OU-RCA letter: UNION of ORTHODOX JEWISH CONGREGATIONS OF AMERICA Eleven Broadway New York, New York 10004 212-613-8159

RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA 305 Seventh Avenue New York, New York 10001 212-807-7888

July 26, 2001 6 Av, 5761

President George W. Bush The White House Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush: We write to you on behalf of this nation's largest Orthodox Jewish synagogue umbrella organization and Orthodox Jewish rabbinical organization with regard to a serious matter you are currently considering -whether to permit federal funds to support embryonic stem cell research. On the basis of consultations with leading rabbinic authorities in our community as well as with scientists sensitive to traditional Jewish values, we write to express our support for federal funding for embryonic stem cell research to be

conducted under carefully crafted and well-monitored guidelines. As you no doubt appreciate, the decision you face is one with complex moral dimensions. On the one hand scientific research indicates that there is great life-saving potential in embryonic stem cell research, potential that warrants federal support. On the other hand, we must be vigilant against any erosion of the value that American society affords to human life, including potential human life. Our Torah tradition places great value upon human life; we are taught in the opening chapters of Genesis that each human was created in G-d's very image.

The potential to save and heal human lives is an integral part of valuing human life from the traditional Jewish perspective. Moreover, our rabbinic authorities inform us that an isolated fertilized egg does not enjoy the full status of person-hood and its attendant protections. Thus, if embryonic stem cell research can help us preserve and heal humans with greater success, and does not require or encourage the destruction of life in the process, it ought to be pursued. Nevertheless, we must emphasize, that research on embryonic stem cells must be conducted under careful guidelines. Critical elements of these guidelines, from our perspective, relate to where the embryonic stem cells to be researched upon are taken from. We believe it is entirely appropriate to utilize for this research existing embryos, such as those created for IVF purposes that would otherwise be discarded but for this research. We think it another matter to create embryos ab initio for the sole purpose of conducting this form of research. Because of the ethical concerns presented by embryonic stem cell research and the reports of potentially garnering similar benefits from research on adult stem cells, we would urge you to simultaneously increase funding for adult stem cell research. Other elements of an ethically sensitive oversight regime would include a rigorous informed consent process from future IVF procedure participants, a fully funded and empowered oversight body comprised of scientists and bio-ethicists, and periodic reviews by relevant Executive branch agencies and congressional committees. We hope these views are useful to you in your deliberations over this critical issue of public policy. We wish you the paramount blessing for political leaders that the Jewish tradition offers -wisdom.

Sincerely, Harvey Blitz President, UOJCA Nathan Diamant Director of Public Policy, UOJCA Rabbi Herschel Billet President, RCA Rabbi Steven Dworken Executive Vice President, RCA

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From: RABBI JONATHAN SCHWARTZ jschwrtz@ymail.yu.edu
To: internetchaburah@yahoo.com Subject:

[internetchaburah] internet Chaburah-- Parshas BaMidbar/Yom Yirushalayim

Prologue:

The book of Bamidbar seems to be the first whose theme is somewhat unclear. The uniting theme of Berashis spells out the growth of Adam until Mitzrayim and serves as a guide for future generations (Maaseh Avot Siman L'Banim). Shemos describes the birth of one nation, under G-d. VaYikra is Torat Kohanim and more wholly is the book of Kedusha of man, of place and of time. But what unites Bamidbar?

Abarbanel in his commentary, notes that Bamidbar is the book of national conduct. The Torah sets ground rules for camping and counting the nation and details challenges to unity. Even the Mitzvot of

Bamidbar are exclusively applied to those effecting the future generations exclusively.

Ramban offers a slightly different understanding. He sees the book of Bamidbar as being one that completes the topics not completed in the book of Shemos or VaYikra. He even adds that the Mitzvot in this book are exclusively limited to those that are L'shaah. Ramban goes to great detail to explain the Mitzvot of the book as limited to the needs of the nation at the time. Each explanation still returns to a central theme - the need of the nation (See Bamidbar 5:6, 15:18 and Sforno to 15:18 for examples). Clearly whatever approach you adopt, the lesson of BaMidbar abound. Whenever and wherever, united we stand, divided we fall. And where there is no G-d there is no unity.

This week's Chaburah examines one of the most important lessons of unity in community and details the difference of L'Shaah or L"Dorot. It is entitled:

Touching the Wall: Kotel Konnections

Chazal tell us that the Shechina never left the Western wall of the Beis HaMikdash (Shemos Rabba 2:2). The Midrash clarifies that the reason Hashem can never destroy the Western wall because it is the place of the Shechina (Eicha Rabbasi 1:32). The Radvaz (Shut Radvaz II:648) explains that this does not mean that true Kedusha remains only at the Kotel, rather the Makom Kodosh HaKodoshim remains Kadosh even after destruction. The addition is that the Makom Mikdash is most potent in the West. However, one davening on Har HaBayis (when he has no choice to be there) does not face the Kotel during Tefilla. He faces Makom HaKodosh HaKodoshim.

In fact, there has been a long standing tradition in Judaism, stretching back to the times of Yaakov Aveinu, to pour our hearts out at the Kotel (Pirkei D'r'eliezer 35:Rashi <Berashis 28:19>). The Gemara (Berachos 31a) suggests that the sanctity of the place adds to the Hishlahavus of the one who davens there. But can one benefit from the Kotel? May one kiss the wall or take part of the stones home?

The Radvaz (II:691) notes that in his opinion, the wall of the Kotel is, in fact a wall of the actual inner sanctum (Azara) of the Beis HaMikdash. Given his position that the Dome of the Rock is the Makom Kodosh HaKodoshim, it would follow that the Kotel of today is the wall of the Azara and therefore, a Baal Keri and a Nidda (even a girl prior to her wedding) may not approach the Kotel (See Chochmas Adam, Mishpitei HaAretz, 8). According to this position, not only does one not have permission to touch the Kotel, many might not even be able to approach the Kotel. Beis Radvaz (38) and Shut Har Zvi (Yoreh Deah p. 269) try to explain Minhag Yisrael despite the position of the Radvaz.

However, it has been noted that the wall of the Kotel is not really the wall of the Azara. The Avnei Nezer (Yoreh Deah, 450) clearly notes that the Kotel must be the wall of Har HaBayis and not the Azara. Rav Yechiel Michel Tuckechinski (Sefer Eretz Yisrael) notes that in the days of the Kaftor V"ferach, the Kotel was not even able to be seen. Accordingly, he feels that it is clear that the Kotel is not inside the Har HaBayis but outside it. If it had been part of Har HaBayis, it would have never been covered (it would have been on top of the mountain). There are those who are still Machmir not to visit the Kotel for this reason (See HaMiasaf, III:121). The Griz was included among them (See Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim II:113).

A question was put forth to Maharil Diskin as to whether people may put notes into the Kotel wall. The Maharil Diskin (Sefer Mishkenos L"Avir Yaakov) reportedly did not feel that he needed to deal with the question given that the Kotel did not have Kedushat HaMikdash according to him. The Aderet too, felt that one may put his fingers against the wall of the Kotel for it is not Kadosh. However, if it is not Kadosh, why do so many choose to specify the beauty of Davening there?

Rav Yitzchak Yosef (Yalkut Yosef Dinei Har HaBayis) cites a Taz who feels that the Kedusha of the Kotel is that of being the largest Shul (Siman 151). Thus, even if we adopt the prevalent assumption that the Kotel is not the wall of the Azara, it is an especially significant Makom Kadosh. The only Chiddush is that according to the view of the Taz, one might recognize a Kedusha of the Kotel without seeing the area as Meila (see Har Zvi Yoreh Deah, p. 281).

So how far does Kedushat HaKotel extend today? Rav Moshe (Igros Moshe, Y.D. IV:63) felt that although we do not see the area of the wall as Kotel Azara, there is still Meila if one takes part of the stones. This is based upon the idea that the Kedusha of Kotel Har HaBayis was never removed from the original wall. The Tzitz Eliezer (x:1) and Rav Ovadiah (cited in Yalkut Yosef vol. II) agree. Still, the prevailing opinion permits one to place Kvitlach into the wall as the outside and the spaces in the stones were not Mikudash (see Avnei Nezer above). In cases of great need, Rav Ovadiah allows the bushes in the Kotel to be trimmed. All agree that the Kedusha of the Kotel is clear and needs to be respected.

Battala News

Mazal Tov to Rabbi Jacob Goldberg and Jessica Grossman and families upon their recent engagement.

Mazal Tov to the Pearlman and Schwartz families upon Ilana's recent engagement.

Hear Internet Chaburah Live!!! - Tuesday evenings at 8:30 pm at Fifth Avenue Synagogue, 5 East 62nd Street NYC. This week's topic: "Have Some Cheesecake Too: A Shavuot Menu."

From: elaine@jewishdestiny.com Sent: Thursday, May 09, 2002 1:33 AM Subject: RABBI WEIN'S WEEKLY COLUMNS

BAMIDBAR

Weekly Parsha

In 1950, according to the census of the Jewish Federations in North America at that time, the Jewish population of North America was approximately six million people. That meant that there were six million people in North America who identified themselves as Jews. According to the natural increase in population as exhibited in the general census in North America, there should now be at least fifteen million people in North America who identify themselves as Jews. In stark reality, however, there are barely five million people in North America who do so. That means that there are ten million people who have disappeared as potential Jews in the last half-century, and their absence is out of personal choice and not external enmity. That statistic was certainly one of the saddest ones for Jews as the doleful 20th century closed. More than sixty years ago, there were nineteen million Jews in the world. Today, there are approximately thirteen million Jews in the world. A half-century after the Holocaust, we have not replaced the numbers that the Germans and their cohorts killed. This ugly and sad fact only intensifies the tragedy of the Holocaust in the current Jewish world.

In the three count's of the Jewish people in the desert, one of which is the main theme of the Torah reading of Bamidbar, there is also no noticeable increase anywhere or at any time in the numbers of the Jewish people during their forty-year stay in the desert of Sinai. For the missing ten million American Jews in current history there are many reasons that can be marshaled to explain the disaster. Assimilation, an astronomical rate of intermarriage, late marriages, feminist careerism, zero population growth (in fact minus population growth in the Jewish community) and the ravages of modern American society all can be cited as reasons for the shrinkage of the North American Jewish community. But what were the reasons for the static population of the Jewish people in the Sinai desert? None of the reasons cited above - applicable to North America - were valid with regard to the generation of the Exodus from Egypt.

The Torah itself has an attitude towards Jewish numbers and population. G-d told the Jews explicitly: "I have not chosen you because of your great numbers; rather, you are to be the smallest of all nations." There seems to be some sort of Divine brake upon Jewish population explosion after the Exodus from Egypt. We are commanded to be numerous, to enlarge the Jewish people and its spiritual influence in the world. Nevertheless, we are to be aware that our numbers will somehow always be limited and that we will never achieve great numbers relative to other great populations in the world. Pogroms and forced conversions have decreased our numbers over the centuries. We have been decimated by assimilation and intermarriage, by

voluntary spiritual surrender, by terrible living conditions of poverty, poor sanitation and the pressures of being a persecuted minority. Thus, in my opinion, the miracle of the fact that there are still millions of Jews in the world - proud Jews, Jews by choice and faith - is a far more important point of attention than the sad reality of the fact that there are so few Jews, relatively speaking, in the world.

The fact that there are so few Jews in the world places a great responsibility on the Jews who do exist. The world is preserved by the few, the righteous, the moral and the kind. Our father, Avraham, and our mother, Sarah, built the civilized world by education and example, even though they were a lonely couple in their world. The few are the ones that lead and guide the many, for good or for better. The realization of the importance of the individual is one of the cardinal principles of Jewish belief and behavior. In fact, the source of much of Jewish self-pride and positive stubbornness over the ages was the realization that one belongs to the few and therefore one is special and unique - and that basic attitude of Judaism and its reason for its survival is that of being special and unique. So, the numbers of Bamidbar teach us an ancillary lesson, which is as important as the direct count and numbers of Israel itself.

Shabat Shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

From: Jeffrey Gross jgross@torah.org To: weekly-halacha@torah.org

WEEKLY-HALACHA FOR 5762

By RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT Rav of Young Israel in Cleveland Heights

A discussion of Halachic topics. For final rulings, consult your Rav. CROCK-POTS ON SHABBOS

QUESTION: Is it permitted to place food in a crock-pot on Friday afternoon in order for it to be cooked and warm for Shabbos?

DISCUSSION: There are basically two kinds of crock-pots on the market. One(1) is designed as a free-standing pot which is filled with food and then placed on top of the heating element. The heating element does not encircle the pot at all. This type of crock-pot may be used on Shabbos as long as the food in the pot is half-cooked(2) by the time Shabbos arrives(3). The other type of crock-pot(4) consists of a pot holding food which is inserted into another, bigger pot. The outer pot completely surrounds the inner pot (insert) on three sides. The heating element is built into the walls and base of the outer pot. The halachic concern pertaining to this type of crock-pot is the rabbinic prohibition of hatmanah, insulation. The Rabbis forbade the insulation of all foods, even prior to Shabbos, if the insulation will add heat to the food(5). Contemporary poskim debate whether inserting the inner pot into the outer pot is considered "insulating" it, which is forbidden by the Rabbis, or not. There are three areas of dispute which we will attempt to describe briefly: 1. There are Rishonim who hold that it is forbidden to place a pot - even on Friday - in burning coals. It is considered as if the coals are insulating the pot. In their view, the only permissible way for a pot to be left on a fire is to place the pot on a grate, over the fire, not "in it"(6). Other Rishonim argue and hold that as long as the top of the pot is uncovered "and air can get to it," the pot is not considered to be insulated. Although the Rama(7) rules according to this view, it is not clear if he considers it sufficient that the top is uncovered so that "air can get to the pot," or if he would require that the sides be exposed as well. Thus, some poskim(8) understand the Rama to hold that when a pot is surrounded on three sides [as is a crock-pot], even if the top is not covered, it is still considered insulated, since no air can reach the sides of the pot. 2. The second issue to consider concerns the proximity between the outer and the inner pots. There is usually a small air pocket which separates the two pots. It is questionable whether this small space is sufficient to consider the insert as being physically separate from the outer pot and thus not being insulated by it, or if the outer pot is so close to the insert that it is insulating it(9). 3. The third issue to consider is whether the Rabbis prohibited insulation when its purpose is not to warm the food but to cook it. Since a crock-pot is used for cooking, not for warming, it has been suggested that the

rabbinic decree would not apply.

What do contemporary poskim rule? Harav S.Z. Auerbach and Harav Y.S. Elyashiv rule stringently on all of the points listed above and do not allow the use of this type of crock-pot on Shabbos. Harav S. Wosner and Harav C.P. Scheinberg rule leniently and permit this type of crock-pot to be used(10). There are reliable sources who report that Harav M. Feinstein had also ruled leniently concerning this type of crock-pot. Harav Elyashiv, though, suggests a simple solution for those who want to use this type of crock-pot. He suggests placing several stones(11) between the insert and the outer pot. This way, the insert will rest on the stones and not on the floor of the outer pot. Since the stones will raise the insert above the rim of the outer pot, the sides of the insert will be exposed to the air. In this fashion, no violation of hatmanah will occur. Simply putting aluminum foil between the insert and the outer pot does not resolve the problem of hatmanah.

FOOTNOTES: 1 Produced by Westbend, Inc. and others. 2 In time of urgent need, if it is cooked a third of the way through it is also permissible. 3 Note that we are not discussing removing and then returning the pot on Shabbos, nor are we discussing stirring or removing food from this pot on Shabbos. 4 Produced by Hamilton Beach, Rival and others. 5 For the reasons behind this rabbinic decree, see Shabbos 34a and Mishnah Berurah 257:1. 6 Shulchan Aruch 253:1 rules like this opinion. According to the Chazon Ish 37:19, the halachah is like this view. 7 O.C. 253:1. 8 This is clearly the understanding of the Pri Megadim 259:3 in explanation of the view of the Rashba and the Taz. There is some uncertainty as to the view of the Chayei Adam and the Mishnah Berurah on this issue. See Otzros ha-Shabbos, pg. 256 for a lengthy analysis. 9 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyon 257:43. 10 Responsa from all of the quoted contemporary poskim are published in Otzros ha-Shabbos, pg. 514-522. See also Ohr ha-Shabbos, vol. 9, pg. 10, responsum from Harav Y. Roth, who rules leniently. 11 A more practical choice - in lieu of stones - would be to crumple large piece of aluminum foil into balls.

Weekly-Halacha, Copyright 1 2002 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. The author, Rabbi Neustadt, is the principal of Yavne Teachers' College in Cleveland, Ohio. He is also the Magid Shiur of a daily Mishna Berurah class at Congregation Shomre Shabbos. The Weekly-Halacha Series is distributed L'zchus Doniel Meir ben Hinda. Weekly sponsorships are available - please mail to jgross@torah.org. Torah.org depends upon your support. Please visit <http://torah.org/support/> or write to dedications@torah.org or donations@torah.org. Thank you! Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 203 Baltimore, MD 21208 (410) 602-1350

From: Ohr Somayach[SMTP:ohr@ohr.edu] Sent: Wednesday, May 08, 2002 2:52 PM To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Bamidbar

* TORAH WEEKLY * Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion Parshat Bamidbar For the week ending 29 Iyar 5762 / May 10 & 11, 2002

Sponsored by Kof-K Kosher Supervision <http://www.kof-k.org>

FIRE AND WATER

"In the Desert" (1:1)

The Midrash tells us that the Torah is compared to three things: Water, fire and the desert.

Just as water always finds the lowest point, so too the Torah seeks out the humblest person. A person who is conceited may bathe and bask in its waters for a while, but water will not stay in any other place except the lowest.

Fire, on the other hand, is the symbol of pride. Just as fire always seeks to rise, so too a proud person seeks to rise above others. How is it, then, the Torah can be both compared to fire and to water? Aren't these two irreconcilable extremes?

The answer lies in the third comparison j to the desert. To acquire the wisdom of the Torah, we must make ourselves as empty and barren as a desert. Intrinsicly, we are have nothing. We are as empty as the desert, but we have been given the Torah j a crown beyond the most precious diadem.

The whole world seeks to be honored, and yet there is no true honor except for the honor that Torah bestows. A person should have pride in this great gift j but the pride belongs only to the Torah j not to himself.

In Hebrew, the word for a humble person - ANAV comes from the same root as the word ANI f "a poor person". A truly humble person sees himself as a pauper: He himself owns nothing j everything he

has is a gift from the Almighty.

Sources: Shir Ma'on, as heard from Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter
Written and compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office[SMTP:office@etzion.org.il]
Subject: SICHOT62 -29: Parashat Bemidbar
Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm)
Student Summaries of Sichot Delivered by the Roshei Yeshiva

This shiur is dedicated in memory of the victims of Tuesday night's terror attack in Rishon LeTzion. HaMakom yenachem etkhem be-tokh she'ar avelei Tzion veYerushalayim.

PARASHAT BAMIDBAR
SICHA OF HARAV AMITAL SHLIT"A "In His Own
Camp and at his Own Flag" Summarized by Dov
Karoll

The first part of this week's parasha deals with the setup of the camp of Israel in the desert. We read: "And the Israelites camped with every man in his own camp and at his own flag" (Bamidbar 1:52). These two elements, "in his own camp" and "at his own flag," are central to a person's growth.

"Every man in his own camp" refers to the concept of feeling at home. Regardless of how successful a person may be, he always prefers to be in a supportive environment. The discomfort of an unfamiliar place makes it very difficult for a person to succeed there. In this week's haftara, G-d promises: "I will make a covenant on that day with the wild beasts and birds of the sky and animals which crawl upon the ground; and I will rend the bow, sword and war from the earth, and lay them down for all eternity" (Hoshe'a 2:20). In this view of the end of days, the ideal state of society, even the animals are able to exist harmoniously with man. What a person needs is the ability to feel comfortable in his environment, and even at ease with the natural world. If a person feels out of place, he cannot realize his full potential.

There are numerous examples of this principle. One example is a visitor who comes to the Yeshiva. He is always looking for someone whom he knows. He wants someone with whom he can associate. It is important to help this person out, and not to cause him to struggle with the uncomfortable environment. Once, when I was asked to speak at one of the religious kibbutzim, I spoke to them about hakhnasat orchim, welcoming guests. They were all offended, telling me that they allow anyone who comes into their dining hall to partake of their meals. I told them that this attitude also has its disadvantages. If a person comes in and eats without anyone asking who he is and from whence he came, he can go through the whole meal without anyone greeting him. Even with an open-door policy, it is important to make the extra effort to help a person feel comfortable. In the Yeshiva, we have a similar problem, due to that same policy. Anyone who comes to our meals is welcome, but sometimes goes unnoticed.

Another application of this principle is within Israeli society, where there are always people coming on aliya. It is important to help these people feel at home. Everyone who comes here has undergone some difficulty along the way, but the most difficult part of moving is becoming comfortable in your new home. I feel that when G-d commanded Avraham to leave his homeland (Bereishit 12:1), the real challenge was not leaving. Rather, it was rooting himself in the land of his destiny.

Another example of the sensitivity which we need to have for other people's comfort is found in the gemara (Bava Batra 9b): "Rabbi Yitzchak states: He who gives a peruta (a small coin) to a poor person receives six blessings ... and he who appeases the poor person receives eleven blessings." While helping a person financially is essential, raising his spirits and allowing him to feel comfortable is even more praiseworthy.

The second important element in the verse is "every man at his own flag." Each tribe had its own flag, symbolizing the unique nature of that particular tribe. The Midrash Rabba (Bamidbar, parasha 2:3) recounts that when G-d revealed Himself to the Jewish people at

Sinai, 220,000 angels descended with Him. When the Jewish people saw that the angels appeared "degalim degalim," assembled by "flags," they also desired flags, and G-d consented. What does it mean for an angel to have a flag? The flag represents the goals and ideals which one sets for oneself. For an angel, the mission upon which it is sent is precisely what it fulfills. There is no gap between its Divinely-ordained mission and its actions. The Jewish people were striving to reach this level, and also wanted to realize their individual missions.

The continuation of the Midrash (2:4) recounts that the Jews presented a great and holy spectacle when assembled by their flags. The nations asked them in wonderment: "Who is she [Israel] that looks out like the dawn, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and intimidating, like an army with banners?" (Shir Ha-shirim 6:10). They told the Jewish people, "Come with us, and we will appoint you as rulers." The Jewish people respond, "How can this greatness which you offer us compare to the greatness which G-d did for us in the desert with the flags?! Can you offer that to us?!"

The Jewish people, according to this Midrash, appreciate the lesson of the flags. They do not want positions of authority which are not appropriate for them. Rather, they want to be able to fulfill their own goals, as symbolized by the flags of the desert. It is important to realize that positions of authority are meaningless if they are not right for the person. I know many people with very "high level" positions who nevertheless are miserable and depressed with their jobs.

Every person has a mission in life. For some people it is teaching Torah, for some it is adding an element of humor and joy to other people's lives, for others it is saving people's lives, and the list goes on endlessly. However, people usually do not know what that mission is, or how to go about fulfilling it. The Vilna Gaon (Commentary on Mishlei 16:1) relays the following principle: "Every person has his own personal approach, because no two people think exactly the same ... and no two people have the same nature. In the time when there were prophets, people used to go to them to seek out G-d's will. The prophet would tell the person, based upon prophecy, what path he should follow, according to the root of his soul and the nature of his body ... Now a person has his internal 'ruach ha-kodesh,' an internal Divinely-inspired spirit. Happy is the man for whom G-d knows of no sin or trickery [and merits to know this]" Certain Chasidic Rabbeim were said to have been able to determine for people what their mission is, but otherwise we are left to determine this on our own. A person has to do his best to realize his individual goal, and follow his own path. Oftentimes people follow familial or societal pressures in choosing a direction in life instead of going along the path which they themselves wish to follow. It is proper for a person to follow his own path toward his mission, create his own flag, rather than allow himself to be dragged along with these pressures.

To summarize, the verse teaches us two lessons. The first is that in order for a person to thrive he has to be able to feel at home. In order for this to occur, you must make sure to welcome visitors and foreigners to your midst. The second lesson is that every person must strive to realize and bring to fruition his own special contribution, following the path which is appropriate for him.

(Originally delivered at Seuda Shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Bamidbar 5757.)

Yeshivat Har Etzion's Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash is on the world wide web at <http://www.vbm-torah.org> Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash Alon Shevut, Gush Etzion 90433 E-mail: Yhe@etzion.org.il or Office@etzion.org.il

From: National Council of Young Israel Sent: Monday, May 06, 2002 4:51 PM Subject: Parshat Bamidbar

29 Iyar 5762 May 11, 2002 Daf Yomi: Baba Batra 62

(Editorial Note: We share with you the following insights into Eretz Yisrael. During these difficult times, it is important to better appreciate the spiritual essence of her many cities)

Landscapes of the Spirit: THE CITIES OF ERETZ YISRAEL in Jewish Thought

by RABBI ABBA ZVI NAIMAN Published by Targum/Feldheim
Shechem: City of Individuality

Shechem seems an ill-fated city. There, Yaakov's daughter Dinah was violated by the town's namesake, Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery, and, centuries later, the northern kingdom of Israel broke away from the kingdom of Yehudah. The Gemara calls Shechem destined for calamity (see Sanhedrin 102a); murder is common there (see Makkos 9b).

However, Shechem was also Avraham's first stop in Eretz Yisrael (see Bireishis 12:6) and Yaakov's first home when he and his family returned from Lavan's house (see *ibid.* 33:18). Additionally, the Midrash points out that our ancestors purchased three places in the Land of Israel, hoping their ownership would never be contested: Me'aras HaMachpelah in Chevron, acquired by Avraham; Yosef's burial plot in Shechem, obtained by Yaakov; and the Temple Mount in Yerushalayim, bought by King David. Why should Shechem rank among such hallowed cities? How can Yosef's grave compare to the Beis HaMikdash and Me'aras HaMachpelah, two locations essential to the Jewish nation? And why was Shechem Avraham and Yaakov's first destination in Eretz Yisrael?

The Gemara states that Yosef was buried in Shechem because that is where he was sold, so he had to be 'redeposited' there (see Sotah 13b). The town suits him so well that it almost owns him, reclaiming him like lost property. The Midrash explains that, having resisted seduction by his master's wife in Egypt, Yosef belonged in Shechem to counteract Dinah's violation there. Consequently, Yaakov purchased the city as the place for Yosef's service. Let us clarify this idea.

The Shem MiShmuel notes that 'shechem' means 'portion,' for Shechem is where one discovers his role in the world. Avraham and Yaakov entered Eretz Yisrael via Shechem because the beginning of any project requires enthusiasm, and a person is most enthusiastic if his purpose seems special, even unique. Unfortunately, continues the Shem MiShmuel, one can overestimate his capabilities. That was Shechem's mistake in wanting to marry Yaakov's daughter.

This concept strengthens Yosef's connection to Shechem. In Egypt, he apportioned the proper provisions to each individual. More important, in providing for his family, he assessed everyone's needs and talents. He was the person best suited to utilize Shechem, the place that reveals our abilities. Furthermore, individuals can coalesce into a nation only when each understands his function. Yosef thus forged the sons of Yaakov into the people of Israel. The Hebrew word 'Shechem' also means 'shoulder,' for in Shechem every Jew found his niche, which enabled him to 'rub shoulders' - i.e., join forces - with his brethren. Similarly, Shechem borders Har Gerizim, where the Jews accepted responsibility for each other.

In Shechem, Yosef's brothers realized their unique functions within the budding Jewish people. But Yosef had dreamt of their bowing to him, insinuating that he was to control the nation. Thus they rebelled and sold him. But in Egypt, Yosef indeed saved his clan. His brothers' descendants then returned his bones to Shechem.

With Yosef buried there, Shechem could have become the place to discover one's national role. The city's ability to forge individuals into a people certainly ranks with the type of Me'aras HaMachpelah and the Beis Hamikdash. That's why Yaakov purchased Shechem, just as his grandfather Avraham had acquired Chevron and his descendant King David would secure Yerushalayim.

Yet Yaravam, a descendant of Yosef, exploited Shechem to split the nation. The town's mission must therefore wait until the tribes of Yehudah and Yosef reunite, allowing Yosef to help each Jew fulfill his potential as part of the Jewish people.

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