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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **BAMIDBAR - SHAVUOS** - 5772

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### **Reishit Bikkurim**

#### **A Guide to Shavuot Observance**

Prepared for the RIETS Shavuot Yarchei Kallah  
Expanded and Updated Edition for Shavuot 5772

#### **According to the Piskei Halakha of**

#### **Rav Hershel Schachter, Shlit"z**

Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

Erev Shabbat Eating a Meal on Erev Shabbat: 1. One should refrain from eating a large meal on Erev Shabbat in order to eat the Shabbat meal with an appetite.1

2. Magen Avraham cites the opinion of the Shelah that one should not have a meat meal on Erev Shabbat.2

#### Shabbat Candle Lighting:

1. The Mitzvah to light Shabbat and Yom Tov candles should ideally take place in one's home. In a hotel, this refers to one's private guest room. However, hotels prohibit lighting candles in guest rooms because this poses a fire hazard.3 Therefore, the obligation is best fulfilled by turning on an electric light in one's room, provided that it is incandescent (not neon or fluorescent, etc.), as many Poskim maintain that a Bracha can be recited on a light bulb that contains a filament.4

2. If this option is not feasible, one should light candles in a place where people will derive benefit from them, such as the dining room, especially if it will enhance the Yom Tov meal. It does not appear proper to light candles in a place where no one will benefit from the candles' light, and a Bracha may not be made in this scenario.5 Shabbat Davening:

1. Av HaRachamim is recited prior to Mussaf when Erev Shavuot coincides with Shabbat.6 This Tefilla is especially relevant during the days of Sefirat HaOmer when countless lives were lost at the hands of the crusaders.7 Seuda Shlishit:

1. Seuda Shlishit should be eaten earlier than usual when Shabbat precedes Yom Tov to ensure that the Yom Tov meal is eaten with an appetite.8 Therefore, Seuda Shlishit should ideally begin no later than half an hour prior to Mincha Ketana (approximately 4:30 PM).9

#### Shavuot Candle Lighting:

1. When Yom Tov begins on Motzaei Shabbat, as it does this year, Yom Tov candles must be lit after Tzeit HaKochavim (nightfall).10

2. Prior to lighting the candles (if one has not already Davened Ma'ariv and recited VaTodeainu), one should say the words, "Baruch HaMavdil Bein Kodesh L'Kodesh."11

3. There are two opinions as to whether the Bracha on Yom Tov candles should be recited before or after the candles are lit. The generally accepted practice is to recite the Bracha before lighting the candles, as is the practice on Erev Shabbat.12

4. The Bracha of Shehechyanu: There is no requirement to recite the Bracha of Shehechyanu in conjunction with Kiddush. However, the Talmud (Eruvin 40b) states that the significance of the Bracha is enhanced when it is recited in conjunction with Kiddush, and common practice is to act accordingly. R. Akiva Eiger (O.C. 263:5) quotes the opinion of R. Yaakov Emden that women should not recite Shehechyanu when lighting Yom Tov candles, but should instead wait until Kiddush to satisfy the requirement to recite the Bracha.13

#### Yahrtzeit Candles:

1. Some Poskim question whether one is permitted to light a Yahrtzeit candle on the second day of Yom Tov in honor of Yizkor. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (98:1) cites Poskim on both sides of the issue and concludes that one should not light such a candle on Yom Tov. He views it as a "Ner Shel Batala," a candle whose light does not provide benefit on Yom Tov, and so may not be lit. Therefore, one should ideally light a Yahrtzeit candle on Erev Yom Tov (see footnote).14 This year, following this view entails lighting the candle prior to Shabbat.

Yaknehaz: 1. When Yom Tov falls on Motzaei Shabbat, Havdala is combined with Kiddush.15 Besamim (spices) are not included in the Havdala.16 The Bracha of "Borei Meorei HaAish" may be made upon the unfrosted17 incandescent light bulbs18 that add significant light to the dining room.19

#### The Shavuot Meal:

1. There is a long-standing custom to eat dairy on Shavuot.20 Mishna Berura (O.C. 494:16, Sha'ar HaTzion 15) notes that one should wait six hours before eating meat if one ate hard cheese.21 R. Soloveitchik ruled that American cheese is certainly not included in the custom.22

#### Staying Up All Night:

1. Many question whether a person who remains awake the entire night is obligated to wash his or her hands in the morning. The common practice is to wash one's hands without a Bracha. However, if one uses the bathroom prior to washing, one may recite the Bracha.23

2. A similar question exists regarding the Birchot HaTorah. Common practice is to fulfill the obligation by answering Amen to the Brachot of one who did sleep. One should not recite Amen after the phrase "Laasok B'Divrei Torah" but after the entire paragraph of "Vihaarev Na" is completed.24

3. It is likewise unclear whether one who remains awake all night may recite the Brachot of Elokai Nishama and HaMa'avir Sheina Me'einai.

Here, as well, common practice is to find someone who did sleep the previous night and answer Amen to that individual's Brachot.<sup>25</sup> Amen following HaMa'avir Sheina should not be said until after the Bracha that concludes the Yehi Ratzon prayer.

4. Those who Daven Vatikim should not recite a Bracha on the Tallit before the Halachic time known as Mi She'yakir. R. Moshe Feinstein states that this time is approximately 35-40 minutes before sunrise (5:27 AM).<sup>26</sup> Because of this concern, the B'nei Yissoschar recommends waiting to don the Tallit until the completion of Korbanot (before Baruch She'amar) in order to ensure that one does not don his Tallit or make the Bracha too early. Shavuot Davening:

1. Those who did not stay up all night should be careful to Daven at a Minyan that recites Keriat Shema at the proper time. R. Soloveitchik and many other Poskim maintain that it is better to Daven without a Minyan before Sof Zman Keriat Shema (the end of the period during which one may recite Keriat Shema) rather than Daven with a Minyan after this time has elapsed. This option is preferred because it allows the recitation of Keriat Shema together with the Birchot Keriat Shema.<sup>27</sup>

2. Many have the custom to follow the Ba'al HaTanya's practice to recite Ushnei Seeirim Lichaper (as opposed to "Visair Lichaper") in the Mussaf Amida, in order to make mention of the Korban Chatas (sin offering) that was offered with the Shte Halechem (ritual loaves of bread) of Shavuot.<sup>28</sup>

3. Megillat Rut is read on the second day of Yom Tov. The custom of Yeshiva is read the Megilla from a Klaf (parchment). Poskim differ as to whether the Brachot Al Mikra Megilla and Shehechyanu are recited.<sup>29</sup>

The Second Day of Yom Tov: 1. One is not permitted to prepare for the second day of Yom Tov on the first day of Yom Tov.<sup>30</sup> As such, in a hotel setting, it is proper to wait until nightfall (Tzait HaKochavim) to begin Davening on the second night of Yom Tov. This allows the caterer sufficient time to prepare the Yom Tov meal following the conclusion of the first day.<sup>31</sup>

2. The Rabbinic restriction against taking medication does not apply on the second day of Yom Tov.<sup>32</sup>

General Shabbat and Yom Tov Halakhot

Elevator Use on Shabbat and Yom Tov: 1. A non-Jewish elevator operator will be present throughout the Yarchei Kallah. The elevator will stop at every floor, so there is no need for guests to give instructions to the operator. Use of the elevator should be limited to guests who are unable to use the stairs.<sup>33</sup>

Carrying: 1. Shabbat: One may only carry inside the hotel and within the Eruv. 2. Yom Tov: It is permitted to carry beyond the Eruv on Yom Tov. However, one may only carry outside the Eruv when necessary. Rishonim and subsequent Poskim debate what defines a sufficient necessity to permit carrying outside of an Eruv.<sup>34</sup> Carrying a Tallit or Machzor for use in Shul is a permissible need, even if this could have been done prior to Yom Tov.<sup>35</sup>

Showering on Yom Tov:

1. One may not take a shower or bathe in warm or hot water on Yom Tov. However, one may adjust the temperature such that the water is not uncomfortably cold.<sup>36</sup> A child who is generally bathed daily in warm water may be bathed in warm water on Yom Tov, as well.<sup>37</sup> One should not use a towel to dry his or her hair. Rather, hair should be allowed to air-dry.<sup>38</sup>

Lighting a Fire on Yom Tov:

1. Though one is permitted to cook on Yom Tov, it is prohibited to light a new fire.<sup>39</sup> Taz (O.C. 502:1) maintains that this prohibition is biblical, but the accepted opinion is that lighting a new fire only constitutes a rabbinic prohibition.<sup>40</sup> As such, one is allowed to ask a non-Jew to turn on or off a light on Yom Tov in certain circumstances.<sup>41</sup>

2. Even those who assume that smoking is generally permitted<sup>42</sup> maintain that one is not permitted to smoke on Yom Tov.<sup>43</sup>

Muktza on Yom Tov:

1. The generally accepted Ashkenazi practice is to treat one's leftover chicken bones as Muktza on Yom Tov,<sup>44</sup> because they are viewed as Nolad (a newly created item from the perspective of Halakha<sup>45</sup>). This is true despite the fact that the bones may still be fit for animal consumption. 2. Nolad also applies to peels, pits, and shells that remain after a fruit or nut is eaten on Yom Tov.<sup>46</sup>

Use of Hotel Lawn Furniture:

1. The Melacha known as "Choresh" (plowing) includes digging a furrow in earth located outside (Shabbat 73b). When a lawn surface is soft, one must avoid dragging furniture if it will cause a furrow to be created.<sup>47</sup> However, one may sit on a lawn chair, even if this will depress the legs of the chair into the earth.<sup>48</sup>

Footnotes

1 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 249:2) states this explicitly in regard to Erev Shabbat. Rema (529:1) rules that this Halakha applies to Erev Yom Tov, as well, for there is also an obligation to honor Yom Tov (see below). See Mishna Berura (249:10) for an additional reason to prohibit large meals.

2 O.C. 249:6

3 R. Schachter cautions that one who lights a candle in a guest room without permission violates the prohibition of theft, as hotel administration does not authorize guests to use rooms in this manner. See R. Asher Weiss, Kovetz Darkei Hora'ah (4:94).

4 It is important to note that this Mitzva can be fulfilled by turning on a closet or bathroom light (Bracha must be recited outside of the bathroom).

For a summary of Poskim who discuss whether one fulfills the Mitzva by lighting electric lights, see Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (chap. 43, note 22).

5 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 263:9).

6 This is based on the simple understanding of Rema (O.C. 284:7) and Mishna Berura (ibid.). Though some have the custom to omit Av Harachamim on this Shabbat, the custom recorded here is also found in Luach Ezrat Torah and Luach Eretz Yisrael.

7 Nimukei Orach Chaim (284:3) points to the fact that many Jews were murdered between Rosh Chodesh Sivan and Shavuot and on Erev Shavuot in particular.

8 See above, note 1.

9 Biur Halakha (529, s.v. MiMincha). Time is for Ryebrook, NY (5772). If one is unable to eat Seuda Shlishit earlier, one should refrain from eating more than will allow him to eat the Yom Tov meal with an appetite, see Mishna Berura (529:8 with Sha'ar HaTziun).

10 When Yom Tov does not begin on Motzaei Shabbat, Poskim disagree whether one should light candles before Yom Tov begins or only after the onset of the Chag. Many Poskim, including R. Soloveitchik, maintain that one should light Yom Tov candles before the start of Yom Tov, just as Shabbat candles are lit prior to Shabbat (Divrei HaRav pg. 173). Be'er Hetiv (503:4) cites Poskim who offer additional justification of this practice. See also Shut Pri Yitzchak (1:6) and Drisha (introduction to Yoreh Deah). This was also the custom in the home of R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichot Shlomo Pesach, pg. 240). R. Auerbach also notes that there is no reason to be concerned that lighting before Yom Tov begins is a violation of the requirement to pass seven complete weeks before Shavuot begins (ibid., pg. 373).

11 Mateh Efraim (599:10) cited in Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (Note to 44:3).

12 Magen Avraham (O.C. 263:12) quotes the Drisha's son who records that his mother's practice was to recite the Bracha before lighting the candles. While Magen Avraham argues that one should recite the Bracha after lighting, the accepted practice is not in accordance with his opinion. See Mishnah Berura (263:27).

13 R. Yaakov Emden's position is recorded in his Shut Sheilat Ya'avetz (1:107) and has been accepted by many Poskim. Mishna Berura (263:23) rules that one should not protest against those whose custom is to recite Shehechyanu at the time of candle lighting. Achronim present justifications for this practice; see Aruch HaShulchan (263:12) and Moadim U'Zmanim (7:117).

14 Many other Poskim accept the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch's ruling; see also Da'at Torah (O.C. 515:5). Shut Ketav Sofer (O.C. 65) permits one to light a Yahrzeit candle on Yom Tov, though he believes that it should be lit inside the Shul. In his discussion of the issue, Biur Halakha (514 s.v. Ner) writes that if one neglected to light a Yahrzeit candle on Erev Yom Tov, it is best to light it in Shul or at least in the place where one eats in order to benefit from the additional light. Some later Poskim have questioned whether Biur Halakha's logic still applies, as it is unlikely that a candle will significantly increase the light in the room in a contemporary setting. Biur Halakha concludes that one may perhaps be lenient in a pressing

situation to light the candle because the aforementioned Ketav Sofer argues that a Yahrzeit candle is considered a permissible Ner Shel Mitzvah, and not a Ner Shel Batala, as it provides honor to one's parents. It should be noted that most Poskim assume that it is only a custom to light a Yahrzeit candle and not a Halachic requirement; see Shut Yechave Da'at (5:60). See also Mishna Berura (261:16) quoting Maharshah who permits one to instruct a non-Jew to light a Yahrzeit candle during Bein Hashmashot of Erev Shabbat, due to the unique importance that many associate with this custom.

15 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 473:1).

16 Mishna Berura (O.C. 491:3) quotes an explanation given by the Rishonim: the festive Yom Tov meal takes the place of spices in reinvigorating the spirit that remains anguished after losing the Neshama Yeteira when Shabbat concludes.

17 R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Meorai HaAish, 5:1). This is based upon the requirement to see the actual flame of the Havdala candle, as codified in Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 298:15).

18 Many Poskim view the filament of an incandescent light bulb as actual fire, and so Borei Meorei HaAish may be said. For example, see Nefesh HaRav (pg. 196) where R. Schachter records that R. Soloveitchik witnessed R. Chaim Ozer Grodzinski recite the Bracha on an incandescent light bulb.

19 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 298:4) rules that one must benefit from the light source in order to recite the Bracha of Borei Meorei HaAish. For this reason, R. Schachter notes that it is improper to recite Havdala on any Motzaei Shabbat in a room that is already well-lit due to electric lights. This is the source of the common practice to extinguish all lights other than the Havdala candle in order to recite the Bracha of Borei Meorei HaAish. Indeed, this was the practice of Chofetz Chaim, as reported by R. Elchanan Wasserman (Ohr Elchanan 1:286).

20 This custom is recorded by Rema (O.C. 494:2). Various reasons are offered for this custom; see Rema and Mishna Berura (ibid.).

21 The custom to wait after eating hard cheese is recorded by Rema (Y.D. 89:2). For this purpose, hard cheese includes types that are aged and somewhat sharp. While Shach (89:17) quotes the Maharshah who forcefully rejects this stringency, most Poskim do not accept his opinion; see, for example, Biur HaGra (89:11). Shach (89:15), Taz (89:4), Yad Yehuda (89:30) and other Poskim discuss how to define "hard cheese" for purposes of this Halakha.

22 As reported by R. Schachter in Mesorah Journal (vol. 20, pg. 92). For an updated list of contemporary cheeses that may pose a problem, see May 2012 edition of Daf HaKashrus, published by the Orthodox Union Kashrus Division ([http://www.oukasher.org/index.php/learn/daf\\_ha-kashrus](http://www.oukasher.org/index.php/learn/daf_ha-kashrus)).

23 Rema (O.C. 4:13) requires one to wash without a Bracha. Mishna Berura (4:30) notes that later Poskim debate whether to accept Rema's ruling or to wash with a Bracha. However, Poskim agree that one can recite a Bracha in this scenario if he or she uses the bathroom first. This appears to be common practice.

24 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 47:12) and Mishna Berura (ibid.). Mishna Berura also cites the ruling of R. Akiva Eiger that one who slept in bed the previous day (prior to staying up the entire night) may recite Birchot HaTorah in the morning according to all opinions. Some Poskim question whether one should accept R. Akiva Eiger's ruling, and it is therefore better to hear the Brachot from one who slept and is certainly obligated; see Shut Tshuvot V'Hanhagot (3:149, citing the Brisker Rav).

25 Sha'arei Tshuva (O.C. 46:7) and Mishna Berura (O.C. 46:24).

26 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 18:3) and Shut Igrot Moshe (O.C. 4:6). Sunrise time is for Ryebrook, NY (5772). Shemona Esrei is scheduled to begin at sunrise, as per Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 89:1).

27 Nefesh HaRav (pg. 114). For more on this subject, see Shut Pri Yitzchak (1:1) and Shut Binyan Olam (O.C. 4).

28 See Siddur Ba'al HaTanya where this practice is recorded. For an alternative perspective, see Shut Igrot Moshe (Y.D. 3:129:7).

29 See Rema (490:9), Levush (490:5), Ma'aseh Rav of the Vilna Gaon (175), Mishna Berura (490:19) and Hilchot Chag B'Chag (Shavuot chap. 8, note 79).

30 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 503:1).

31 Many wait to Daven Ma'ariv until nightfall on the first night in order to ensure that seven complete weeks elapse between Pesach and Shavuot; see Magen Avraham (O.C. 494:1) and Taz (ibid.). Pri Migadim (O.C. 494:1) notes that this concern does not apply on the second night. However, it is still proper to wait on the second night to allow the caterer enough time to prepare the meal. The custom of German Jewish communities is to always Daven Maariv after nightfall following the first day of Yom Tov. By doing so, those making preparations at home will not rush to do Melachot before nightfall (Maharil, Minhagim: Seder Tefillot of Pesach, 6).

32 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 496:2) with Mishna Berura (ibid.). As far as taking medication on the first day of Yom Tov, see Magen Avraham (O.C. 532:2), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (98:13) and Shut Tzitz Eliezer (8:15).

33 Use of electronic systems that do not heat a filament during use, such as an elevator, generally constitute a rabbinic prohibition of Makeh B'Patish; see Mesorah Journal (vol. 20, pg. 61). Therefore, in cases of great need, one may instruct a non-Jew to operate an elevator on his behalf. Amira L'Akum, instructing a non-Jew to perform a Shabbat or Yom Tov Melacha, is also a rabbinic prohibition. This constitutes a Shvus D'Shvus, a confluence of two rabbinic prohibitions, which is permissible in special situations; see Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 307:5) and Mishna Berura (307:20). According to Rashai (Avoda Zara 15a, s.v. Keivan) the prohibition of Amira L'Akum is predicated upon the verse, "V'Daber Davar" (Yeshaya 58), which defines permissible speech on Shabbat. Therefore, even when a great need exists, it is best to arrange for the operator to stop the elevator at every floor, rather than instructing him verbally when entering the elevator.

34 See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 518:1) and Biur Halacha (ibid., s.v. Mitoch). 35 See Shulchan Aruch and Rema (O.C. 495:1, 504:2) and Magen Avraham (O.C. 498:3). Ra'avad (cited in Shita Mikubetzet, Ketuvot 7a) is stringent when an item could have been carried before Yom Tov, but this opinion is not cited in Shulchan Aruch.

36 Mishna Berura (326:7, 511:18, 19) and Sha'ar HaTziun. Even lukewarm water is included in this prohibition; see Beit Meir (Y.D. 197:3), Shut Noda B'Yehuda (O.C. Tinyana 25) and Tehilla L'Dovid (326:3). The permissible temperature described is below lukewarm.

37 Mishna Berura (511:18)

38 Mishna Berura (326:25)

39 Gemara Beitza (33a-33b), Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 4:1) and Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 502:1).

40 See Biur Halakha (502:1 s.v. Ain), Pri Chadash (O.C. 502:1) and Meorei Aish (chap. 1) at length.

41 See above, note 33. One should consult with a Halachic authority if such a need arises.

42 Many Poskim maintain that it is always prohibited to smoke; see for example, Shut Tzitz Eliezer (15:39) and Shut Rivivot Ephraim (8:586). See also [http://www.rabbits.org/pdfs/Prohibition\\_Smoking.pdf](http://www.rabbits.org/pdfs/Prohibition_Smoking.pdf).

43 The permission of fire use on Yom Tov is limited to those purposes considered Shaveh L'chol Nefesh (use generally enjoyed by all people). For that reason, the Talmud (Beitza 22b) prohibits the burning of incense on Yom Tov. P'nei Yehoshua (Shabbat 39b) and Biur Halakha (511:4) permit one to smoke on Yom Tov, arguing that smoking is considered Shaveh L'chol Nefesh, because the conventional thinking in earlier generations was that smoking was beneficial to one's health. Today, we are aware of the dangers of smoking. Smoking cannot be considered an act of enjoyment but of self-injury; see Shut Minchat Shlomo (2:58:6). Additionally, even contemporaries of the P'nei Yehoshua disagreed with arguments advanced by the P'nei Yehoshua; see Chayei Adam (95:13).

44 Mishna Berura (495:17). It is permitted to move the bones if their presence on the table is repulsive (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 518:5) or if the table will be used later on Yom Tov. When possible, they should be moved without direct contact; see Rema (O.C. 509:7) and Biur Halakha (638:2 s.v. U'Byom Tov). In a hotel setting, it is best to allow the non-Jewish waiters to handle such items, as this is permitted as a Shvus D'Shvus in a situation of Ochel Nefesh (see above, note 33).

45 When flesh is attached to the bones, they are defined by Halakha as human food. When the flesh is removed, the bones are defined as animal food. An item that undergoes such a change in Halachic status is known as Nolad and is considered Muktzah on Yom Tov. Mishna Berura (501:30) notes that the bones may still be moved even if just a little flesh remains.

46 Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 501:7). Some pits and shells (ie. peaches, pistachios, etc.) may not even be considered animal food.

47 See Shulchan Aruch and Mishna Berura (O.C. 337:1).

48 See Beitza (23b). Creating a cavity is permitted when the earth is simply pressed down, rather than dug. For this reason, a stroller may also be used on soft ground, for its wheels do not dig but instead press the earth beneath them; see Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchata (28:48) and Ketzot HaShulchan (chap. 149, note 52).

Yeshiva University • A To-Go Series • Sivvan 5772

**Voluntary and Involuntary Acceptance of the Torah**  
**Rabbi Mordechai Willig**

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS Rabbi, Young Israel of Riverdale

Shavuot is described by Chazal as the time of the giving of our Torah, z'man matan Toraseinu. Why isn't it called z'man kabbolas Toraseinu, the time of our acceptance of the Torah, paralleling z'man cheirusu and z'man simchaseinu, the time of our freedom and the time of our joy, of the other holidays?<sup>68</sup> Numerous answers have been offered to this question. See Beis HaLevi, Parashas Yisro, s.v. l'havin.

Perhaps it is because our acceptance was incomplete: The verse states "And they stood under the mountain," R. Avdimi b. Chama b. Chasa said: This teaches that Hashem hung the mountain over them like a barrel and said to them "If you accept the Torah, good, but if not, this will be your burial ground." R. Acha b. Ya'akov said: from here we have a strong protest against the Torah. Rava said: nevertheless, they accepted it again during the days of Achashverosh. Shabbos 88a

Therefore, we focus on that fact that Hashem gave us the Torah, rather than on our questionable acceptance.

Why were we punished for our sins during the period between Sinai and Purim? After all, we accepted the Torah under protest. The Meshech Chochma, Shemos 19:17, offers a remarkable answer. The Gemara states: Why was the first Beis Hamikdash destroyed? Because of three things that existed: idol worship, incest and murder. Yoma 9b

These three sins are punishable even for non-Jews. The fact that our acceptance at Sinai was under protest in no way mitigates our culpability, since these sins preceded Sinai. They are among the seven Noachide laws for which all human beings are subject to punishment, even without any acceptance.

The Meshech Chochma supports his idea with a statement of the Rambam: A Noachide who converted through circumcision and immersion and afterwards wants to turn away from Hashem and be a non-Jewish law abiding citizen as he was previously, we don't allow him. Rather, he must either be a full-fledged Jew or be put to death. If he was a minor when the rabbinic court converted him, he may protest when he becomes an adult and will be a non-Jewish law abiding resident. If he doesn't protest upon becoming an adult, he no longer has the right to protest and is considered a convert. Therefore, if a Jew has relations with a minor that was converted by the rabbinical court, the money of her kesubah, or the penalties for rape or seduction, will remain in the hands of the rabbinical court until she becomes an adult and does not protest her conversion out of concern that she will take the money and protest upon becoming an adult and it turns out that she is using funds that she is only entitled to according to Jewish law. Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 10:3

According to the Rambam, even after one who was converted as a minor protests, he remains a ger toshav (non-Jewish law abiding citizen). The same applies to Am Yisrael who accepted the Torah under protest. They were punished for the three cardinal sins, which are incumbent on a ger toshav as well.

The language of the Rambam raises five powerful questions:

1) Why, indeed, is a minor who protests his conversion considered a ger toshav? Shouldn't he be considered a non-Jew who has not accepted the seven Noachide mitzvos?

2) Elsewhere, in the laws of conversion (Isurei Biah 13:7), the Rambam records the law of a minor convert, but omits his ability to protest upon maturity, as does the Rif (Yevamos 47b). Why is the ability to protest omitted in the laws of conversion where it apparently belongs?

3) The Rambam opens this set of laws by stating that an adult ger who wishes to renege is killed. The Brisker Rav (at the very end of Chidushei Maran Riz HaLevi on the Rambam) asks: If he is guilty of death because he committed a capital offense, it is obvious that he is killed. Why must the Rambam state the obvious?

4) If a woman protests about her conversion as a minor, it emerges that she consumed as a non-Jew money to which she was entitled only by Jewish law. Why, after protesting, is she still entitled to the money according to Jewish law? Assuming that her protest renders the

conversion invalid retroactively, as the Hagahos Oshri (K'subos 1:23) rules, she should not be entitled to the money by Jewish law. This led some to suggest that according to the Rambam, the conversion of the minor is nullified only after he protests, but not retroactively.<sup>69</sup> See R. Nachum Pertzovitz's essay in Ohel Avraham, Kesubos pg.543. This suggestion is unprecedented and counterintuitive.

5) The Rambam never states that a minor convert who later protests is not Jewish. Why? To answer these questions, we return to the Meshech Chochma, who explained that Am Yisrael was not punished for violating the mitzvos that they accepted at Sinai under protest.

Nonetheless, it is unthinkable to consider all of Am Yisrael as gentiles in the period between Sinai and Purim. Their protest served only to relieve them of punishment for failure to observe the laws accepted at Sinai during that period.

Similarly, a minor convert who protests is relieved of punishment for his sins. We punish only those who accepted the mitzvos willingly, namely adult converts or born Jews who are bound by the national acceptance of the Jewish people.

Therefore, the Rambam cites the ability of the minor convert to protest only in Hilchos Melachim which deals with punishment. The death penalty for an adult convert for a capital offense, while obvious, is an appropriate introduction. Only he is killed, as opposed to a minor convert who protests.

Even after he protests, the minor convert remains Jewish, and the Rambam never stated otherwise. Moreover, in the laws of conversion he omits the ability to protest entirely, as does the Rif, indicating that the conversion of a minor is valid in all circumstances, even if he later protests.

Finally, the Rambam implies that the minor female convert who protests is entitled to the money in Jewish law, since she is in fact Jewish. However, since she might conduct herself as a non-Jew, it is not appropriate that she receive the money, and it is withheld until she matures and can no longer protest.

The male convert who protests is treated like a ger toshav. Since, in reality, he is Jewish, we must preserve his life and property and treat him with the same respect and kindness as we relate to a ger toshav (Rambam, Hilchos Melachim 10:12).

All of the five aforementioned questions are now resolved.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> The Bach, Yoreh De'ah 268, interprets "he may protest" that we do not punish him, but denies that he is Jewish. For an analysis of the underlying dispute between the Rambam and the other Rishonim, whether the minor's conversion can be nullified by his protest, see Beis Yitzchak 24 pp. 100-103.

As we have seen, the Meshech Chochma compares the lack of punishment of Bnai Yisrael for sins beyond the seven Noachide laws and the lack of punishment of a minor convert who protests.

Nevertheless, one can distinguish between punishment at the hands of man in Beis Din and punishment at the hands of heaven.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>71</sup> R. Asher Arieli of Yeshivas Mir in a conversation on Chanukah 5764.

Precedent for one who is halachically Jewish, but never accepted mitzvos, not being punished in Beis Din can be found elsewhere. The Rambam states regarding the eishes yefas to'ar (beautiful woman who is captured during war): . The operating principle is that the entire law is because of the coercion. However, if she wants to convert willingly in a rabbinical court according to Jewish law, she is permitted to marry him immediately and permitted to marry his father or brother. This is what the Rabbis stated in Yevamos: [the verse states] "And she should cry for her father and mother for a month," when does this apply? When she has not accepted [mitzvos] upon herself. However, if she accepted [mitzvos] upon herself, she can immerse and she is permissible immediately. It is possible that this applies to all captives of war because out of fear, they will want to convert. It says "And you shall send her on her way" that

she can do what she wishes and we do not force her to observe the Torah. Because one who converts willingly we compel her to observe the Torah. If she violates Shabbos she is stoned, and if she eats pig she receives lashes like a non-observant Jew. This [captive woman] as well, if she states that she is interested in conversion without compulsion, we do not send her on her way, because even if we think that her conversion was out of fear, she is a full-fledged Jew, because we already mentioned that "the law is that they are all considered converts." Ramban, Devarim 21:12

We do not compel the beautiful woman who did not accept the mitzvos willingly to observe Torah and mitzvos. Only if she converts willingly do we force her and punish her if she sins. Otherwise she is not punished by Beis Din, even though she is Jewish. This is a valid precedent for the minor convert who protests according to the Ramban.

At present, we are all bound by the totally voluntary acceptance of Torah by our Jewish ancestors.<sup>72</sup> See Meshech Chochma Devarim 33:4. Nevertheless, in order to appreciate and celebrate Shavuot properly, we should accept it once again personally. For us, now, it is assuredly a time of acceptance of our holy Torah.

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YU Shavuot to Go 5771

### Yearning for Salvation

Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

The theme of emunah, faith, lies at the heart of Anochi Hashem Elokecha, the first of the Ten Commandments. This commandment, which is an imperative for every Jew to believe in Hashem's existence, has a lesser known aspect especially relevant for our times. According to the medieval work SeMaK (Sefer Mitzvos Katan, authored by Rabbeinu Yitzchak of Kurvil), this commandment requires us to cultivate tziptiya liYeshu'a, yearning for salvation:

Just as we must believe that He took us out of Egypt, as it says, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt" ... Since this is one of the Ten Commandments, it must mean that just as I wish you to believe that I took you out, I wish you to believe that I am Hashem your G-d and that I will gather you and save you in the future. As indeed, He will in His mercy save us again, as it says, "He will return and gather you from all the nations." Sefer Mitzvos Katan, §1

The element of yearning for Hashem's ultimate salvation is a recurring theme in our liturgy. Each day in *shemoneh esrei* just before concluding the blessing of *קרן מצמיה* we say *ישועה קרן מצמיה* - because for Your salvation we yearn all day.<sup>2</sup>

Of the Rambam's thirteen fundamentals of faith, the twelfth, which deals with the belief in the coming of Moshiach, emphasizes not only belief in Moshiach's coming, but also "longing" for this to happen each and every day: *שיבא יום בכל לך אחכה זה כל עם שיתמהמה פי על ואף* - even though he delays, nonetheless I long for him each day, that he should come.<sup>3</sup> This notion is echoed in the poem of *Yigdal*, recited at the outset of our prayers, which encapsulates the thirteen principles: *לקץ הימין ישרה* - לקץ הימין ישרה - He will send our Moshiach at the end of days to redeem those who long for His ultimate salvation. Similarly, this affirmation appears in the *shacharis kedusha* for Shabbos: *כי עלינו ותמלך* - כי עלינו ותמלך - reign over us because we long for You. Anticipating the Redemption: Dogma or Virtue?

Let us explore the Talmudic discussion about this longing; what it suggests, and its significance. *R. Shmuel b. Nachmani said, R. Yochanan said, "a blight on those who calculate ends, for they say, 'since the end arrived and Moshiach did not come, he will no longer come.' Rather, long for him, as it says, 'if he tarries, long for him.' Perhaps you will say that we long for him, but He does not long for us? The verse says, 'Hashem therefore will long to be gracious with you, and He will rise to show you mercy.' Now that we long, and He longs,*

*who is to stop [the redemption from occurring at once]? The midas haDin (strict attribute of justice) stops [the redemption]. Now that the attribute of justice stops the redemption, why long for it? To receive reward, as it says, 'praiseworthy are those who long for him'.*" Sanhedrin 97b

Even without delving into the full depth of this enigmatic passage, we glean several important ideas:

1. While one should not engage in specific calculations regarding the time of Moshiach's arrival, one should actively await his coming.
2. It is not only we who wait; Hashem, Himself, does the same.
3. The delay in Moshiach's coming is caused by *midas haDin*, making the process of anticipation something of a struggle in futility; yet, precisely for this we are assured special reward. In contrast, the Ramban writes: *Anyone who does not believe in him, or who does not long for his coming, denies not only the prophets, but denies the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu. For the Torah testifies about Moshiach, as it says, "Hashem will return your captivity and have mercy upon you; he will return and gather you ... even if your scattered ones are at horizon's edge ... Hashem will bring you." These explicit words of the Torah include everything spoken by the prophets.* Ramban, Hilkhos Melachim 11:1

The plain sense of the Rambam's words suggests that not only is belief in Moshiach's coming a critical tenet of Jewish faith, but that the process of anticipating his arrival is equally critical. One who does not actively await Moshiach's arrival is considered to have denied the Torah. How can this be reconciled with the passage in Sanhedrin which implies that the process of anticipation is inherently irrational, and serves only as a means of earning extra reward?

Two Tiers of Yearning Sefer *Siach Yom*, a commentary on *Shemoneh Esrei*,<sup>4</sup> suggests that there are two distinct aspects of longing for Moshiach. The first is referred to as *tziptiya beRu'ach*, a spiritual vision of longing. This means that one is not merely required to believe in the coming of Moshiach, but one is equally obliged to recognize the deficiency of a world which has yet to be perfected by G-d's salvation. The Rambam's attribution of a rational element to the process of longing for Moshiach refers only to this *tziptiya liYeshu'a*. It is quite possible for one to wholeheartedly subscribe to the Messianic doctrine, yet mistakenly believe that fulfillment is found in achieving personal goals, not in the larger picture of *tikun olam*. Such an individual is deemed *eino mechakeh leBi'aso* - he does not truly await the arrival of the Moshiach because he does not perceive the vacuum that exists in a world lacking Hashem's salvation.

The gemara in Sanhedrin, on the other hand, is discussing a higher order of yearning. Not only should a Jew be cognizant, in a general sense, of the void that exists in an unredeemed world; he should reinforce such sentiments on a daily basis with an eye to becoming consumed by awareness of the real possibility that the Moshiach could come at any moment. This kind of anticipation is exemplified by such saintly figures as Rav Levi Yitzchak of Barditchev whose son's wedding invitation stated that the wedding would take place, G-d willing, in Yerushalayim, but in the event that Moshiach would not yet have arrived, then an alternate site would be designated in Barditchev. This level of yearning, while perhaps not indispensable as an article of faith, is something for which every Jew should strive and for which one accrues special merit. This is why, when we petition G-d in the *Shemoneh Esrei* to bring the salvation, "*es tzemach David meheira satzmiach*," we append to this request the affirmation of "*ki liYeshu'ascha kivinu kol hayom*" - because for Your salvation we yearn all day. We ask that Hashem bring redemption in merit of the fact that we passionately yearn for it. This form of yearning, which flows from the heart rather than the intellect, is not dimmed or squelched by the *midas hadin* which inexorably delays Moshiach's coming.

*Tikva* and *Tzipiya* The Talmud (Shabbos 31a) teaches that one early question asked of each departed soul by the heavenly tribunal is “*tzipisa liYeshu'a*” - have you yearned for salvation? The Chofetz Chaim explained the distinction between the terms *tikva* and *tzipiya*, both of which mean “hope,” along the lines of the two levels of yearning described above. *Tikva* refers to a sense of hope which is consistent with an inner vision, while *tzipiya* which derives from the word *tzofeh*, an onlooker, suggests the image of someone who, as a result of his intense yearning, rushes outside constantly to see if the dream has been realized. It is this second level which the gemara describes as *tzipiya liYeshu'a*, longing for salvation. And it is this notion that is apparently alluded to in “*ki liYeshu'ascha kivinu kol hayom.*” (The additional words “*kol hayom*” are meant to transform the first level of *tikva* into one of *tzipiya*.) Indeed, *nusach Sefard* Siddurim contain two additional words here, as if to accentuate the point: *uMetzapim liYeshu'a.5*

Existential Perils in Israel While we cannot expect to understand the reasons for the existential challenges that we face in Eretz Yisrael on a daily basis, and the heavy toll that it has fraught over the years, there can be no doubt that it all serves, in some mysterious and inexplicable way, to help bring about the ultimate redemption. The ongoing crisis in Israel should serve as an impetus for us to intensify our quest for salvation and sharpen our inner vision. We must constantly remind ourselves that if Eretz Yisrael is not whole then we are not whole, and that without peace in Israel we too cannot experience true fulfillment in our personal lives. Rav Shlomo Wolbe (1914-2005), the great musar personality, once noted regarding the sequence of blessings in *bircas haMazon* that after thanking Hashem for our food in the first *bracha*, we speak about the land of Israel in the next *bracha*, and then, in the third *bracha*, proceed to request mercy for Yerushalayim. The message is clear: so long as Eretz Yisrael is in spiritual exile, so long as the *Beis Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim is yet to be rebuilt, our own fulfillment is also lacking. But beyond reinforcing an inner vision of hope, we must also strive to embrace the dimension of *tzipiya liYeshu'a*, generating an ever-present awareness that salvation can come literally at any time. In one sense, nurturing this kind of anticipation is difficult in the face of the many heartbreaking events we have witnessed in recent years, and in the context of a political situation that holds little promise for solution. But on the other hand, ironic though it may seem, it is precisely the darkness and despair that can give rise to passionate hope. It is always darkest before dawn, but dawn inevitably shines forth.

Rising From the Ashes: The Symbol of the *Menorah Shel Aish* The son of the Chofetz Chaim quotes a beautiful thought in the name of his father to illustrate this point. Of all the Mishkan's utensils, there was one – the *menora* - which Moshe had particular difficulty visualizing. Hashem repeatedly showed Moshe the manner in which the *menora* was to be made, but to no avail. Finally, Hashem said: “Hurl the gold into the fire and then you will see the *menora* emerge from it. “What was it about the *menora* in particular” asked the Chofetz Chaim, “that gave Moshe such difficulty?” He answered as follows. As is known, each of the vessels in the Mishkan contained some symbolic representation. (The *aron* symbolized divine wisdom, the *shulchan* corresponded to the material sustenance of the Jewish people, etc.) The *menora*, explained the Chofetz Chaim, is the *ner tamid* of our people – the symbol of the eternity of the Jewish people. According to the Zohar, the light of the *menora* in the Mishkan was meant to correspond to a heavenly light which illuminated the continued survival of the Jewish people. Why did Moshe despair with respect to the *menora*? Because he saw through divine inspiration the millions of *korbanos* throughout the millennia – all the terrible tragedies that would befall us and the deep sense of despair that would exist. So Moshe asked incredulously: “How can I construct a *menora* whose purpose is to light up the nation when all I see is darkness?” Hashem's response was “Moshe, throw the gold into the fire and see what emerges.” The symbolic message is that while man

can only see things superficially, in reality it is precisely those periods that seem bleakest – when destruction surrounds us, when we seem to be consumed by the blazing fire of our enemies – that the *menora* will emerge and shine forth. Just as the founding of *medinat Yisroel* came about miraculously out of the ashes of the Holocaust, there is no doubt that all the trials and suffering that we have witnessed in Eretz Yisrael are meant somehow, in the divine scheme, to pave the way for a glorious future. We must intensify our efforts to support *acheinu bnei yisrael* in Eretz Yisrael during these trying times, while at the same time look beyond the immediacy of the moment and perceive with *tzipiya* the seeds of *geulah* which are already implanted.

## Shema Koleinu 2008 Moshe Shulman

The גמרא states that we learn an extraordinary lesson from the following Biblical phrase: “הַסִּכֵּת וּשְׁמַע ה' הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה הוּא הַיּוֹם הַנְּהִיית לְעַם אֲרֶצְיָשָׁרָל - Keep silence, and hear, O Israel; this day thou art become a people.” The גמרא extrapolates from this פסוק that one who learns תורה should feel as if he receives it from ה' each day.

This message is indeed extraordinary and inspiring, but it also presents a problem. If we must feel excited about receiving the תורה every day, why do we differentiate between *שבועות* and all other days? Indeed, the uniqueness of *שבועות* sends a message that seems to contradict the גמרא!

I believe that the aforementioned question can best be answered in the context of another question.

The גמרא quotes a מסכת פסחים דף סג: in גמרא ר' אליעזר מחלקת between a יום dedicated to ר' יהושע and a יום dedicated to yourself, both of which are mentioned in the תורה. ר' אליעזר says that you either must serve ה' throughout יום טוב, or you can dedicate it to yourself. On the other hand, ר' יהושע is of the opinion that you should dedicate half of the day to ה' and half of the day to yourself.

This would be a fairly innocuous מחלקת if the גמרא did not add in a qualifier. On *שבועות*, the גמרא declares, even ר' אליעזר would agree that you need to dedicate it at least partially to yourself, because the תורה was given on *שבועות*. Many commentaries ask about the connection between the fact that the תורה was given on *שבועות* and the need to dedicate יום טוב to yourself. Shouldn't the opposite be true? On the anniversary of the giving of the תורה, shouldn't we immerse ourselves in serving ה' and not be as focused on our own needs and desires?

Furthermore, ר' אליעזר בביצה דף טו: in תוס' says that even ר' אליעזר thought that if one would normally eat at a certain time, he should eat at that time. In fact, he even encouraged his students to eat high-quality food when they ate their meal. This תוס' was not talking about *שבועות*, so we can assume that ר' אליעזר held that on *שבועות* one should learn less than usual! This is certainly counter-intuitive!

I believe that there are two approaches that will answer all of our questions. The first approach is that *שבועות* exists to drive us to feel as if we accepted the תורה every day. This effect can be best achieved if one rejoices and has more physical and emotional stimuli than usual. It is for this reason that even ר' אליעזר agrees that you must dedicate at least part of your *שבועות* to yourself; this will inspire you to learn more over the rest of the year.

A second approach is similar, but is more nuanced. Perhaps we must feel excited about learning תורה each day, and we must take this to such an extreme that it feels as if it is being given to us every day. However, this applies only regarding learning תורה. On the other hand, on *שבועות* we not only recognize תורה by our excitement to learn, but we engross ourselves in a complete celebration of the giving of the תורה. We recognize that this event has completely transformed our lives, history, and group consciousness. Thus we can explain why everyone

agrees that we must dedicate at least part of his שְׂבוּעוֹת to physical pleasures such as eating and that we should not learn continuously, without stopping, on שְׂבוּעוֹת. If we would not observe the idea of dedicating שְׂבוּעוֹת to ourselves, then שְׂבוּעוֹת would be no different than any other day, when we feel that the תּוֹרָה was given to us. Instead we must celebrate to show ourselves that מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה has really changed our lives completely.

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Shema Koleinu 5772 Weekly Torah Publication of the Yeshiva University High School for Boys

### **Kavod for Torah and its Teachers**

#### **Rabbi Michael Taubes**

This Parsha focuses primarily on the census of Bnai Yisrael taken by Moshe Rabbeinu in the desert, a little more than a year after Yetzias Mitzrayim. Among those counted, although not together with the rest of the nation, were the members of Aharon's family. That part of the census is introduced by a statement that what follows is a list of the offspring of both Aharon and Moshe (Bamidbar 3:1). The Gemara in Sanhedrin (19b) is puzzled by the reference here to Moshe, because his children are in fact not mentioned in the subsequent Pesukim. Why does the Torah speak in the introductory Posuk (ibid.) about the offspring of Aharon and Moshe and then identify only the children of Aharon? The Gemara (ibid.) explains that actually, Aharon's children were in fact Moshe's children as well, because although Moshe didn't father them biologically, he taught them Torah, and as such can be mentioned as their parent along with Aharon. From this, the Gemara (ibid.) concludes that anyone who teaches Torah to a child is considered, in certain respects, as if he produced that child. A similar conclusion is reached by the Gemara later in Sanhedrin (99b) based on another source.

The Mishna in Kerisos (28a) speaks of the Kavod, the honor, which one must extend to one who teaches Torah, and actually says that this obligation to honor one's teacher takes precedence over the obligation to honor one's biological parent. The Mishna in Bava Metzia (33a) likewise documents this idea, giving some practical examples where this rule becomes relevant, and explaining that one's teacher deserves greater Kavod because one's parent brings him into this world, one's teacher, by transmitting Torah to him, provides him with the ability to gain entry into Olam HaBo. The Rambam therefore rules (Hilchos Talmud Torah – Perek 5: Hala cha 1) that just as there is a Mitzvah to honor and fear one's parent, there is also such a Mitzvah regarding one's teacher, and that the obligation to the teacher takes precedence. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah – Siman 242: Se'if 1) rules this way as well.

The Gemara in Bava Metzia (ibid.) discusses what kind of teacher must be given this high level of Kavod; The Rambam (ibid. - Halacha 9) and the Shulchan Aruch (ibid. - se'if 30) writes that this obligation applies only to one's "Rebbe Muvhaak", that is, the teacher from whom one has acquired most of his knowledge. The Ramo (ibid. - se'if 34) adds that this implies only to a teacher who teaches one Torah for free, but if one's parent hired the teacher, the Kavod due to the parent takes precedence. Moreover, if the Parent also teaches the child Torah, the Mishna in Bava Metzia (ibid) notes that the Kavod due to the parent is greater than that due to the teacher. The Rambam (ibid. - Halacha Aleph) rules accordingly, although elsewhere (Hilchos Gezailah V'Aveidah – Perek 12: Halacha 2), he indicates that this may be only if the parent is on the same level as the teacher, a position accepted in one place by the Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat – Siman 264: Se'if 2). The aforementioned Ramo (Yoreh Deah – ibid.), the Taz (ibid. Se'if Katan 19), and others elaborate on this point. Nevertheless, regardless of whether one's obligation to honor one's teacher is greater than his obligation to honor his parent or not, it is clear from these Poskim that

one must have great Kavod for anyone who teaches him Torah since, as mentioned above, this person is like a parent to him.

The question is, may the Rebbe himself be "Mochel" –or forgo- this Kavod to which he is entitled? The Gemara in Kiddushin (32a-32b) says that although a parent may be Mochel his Kavod – the Rambam (Hilchos Mamerim – Perek 6: Halacha 8) in fact says that a parent should do so to a certain extent – there is a dispute as to whether or not a Rebbe may do so. The dispute revolves around a fundamental distinction between a parent and a teacher in terms of the source of the Kavod that is due to him. A parent is respected for being the parent; the honor is for him as a person and he may thus forgo it. One authority holds, however, that the honor due to a Rebbe is for the Torah he represents and teaches; it is therefore not within his rights to allow the Kavod due to Torah to be ignored. In short, the Kavod is not his personally, but the Torah's, and because it's not "his" Torah, he can't be Mochel his Kavod due to it. Those who disagree feel that it is in fact "his" Torah, having mastered it, and thus he can be Mochel the Kavod. The Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah – ibid. Halacha 11) and the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah – ibid. Se'if 32) accept the latter opinion. Rav Ovadyah Yosef (Sha'ailos U'Teshuvos Yabiya Omer: Chelek 6 – Chelek Yoreh Deah: Siman 21) cites Poskim who say that this applies only to people who have mastered the Torah to the point of being Gedolei HaDor, while other Talmidei Chachomim cannot be Mochel the Kavod due to the Torah. He himself rules, however, that it indeed applies to all Talmidei Chachomim, and he supports his view with numerous sources. The Rivash (Sha'ailos U'Teshuvos HaRivash – Siman 220) quotes from the Ra'avad that although a Rav can be Mochel the Kavod, he cannot allow himself to be shamed, mocked or disgraced, just as a parent who may be Mochel his Kavod cannot allow his child to talk to him in a disrespectful or disparaging fashion. Whether or not this ruling is accepted may be a dispute between the Mechaber and the Ramo (Choshen Mishpat – Siman 263: Se'if 3; Siman 272: Se'if 3); the Mechaber says that at least for the sake of a Mitzvah, a Rav may act in an undignified manner, while the Ramo says it is improper even then. The Ramo (Yoreh Deah - ibid.) thus feels that it is necessary to stress that even if a Rav has been Mochel his Kavod, it remains forbidden to disgrace him. The Mechaber (Yoreh Deah – ibid.) himself, like the Rambam (ibid.), notes that even if a Rav has been Mochel his Kavod, it is proper for his students to display some minimal amount of respect anyway.

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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Jerusalem Post :: Monday, May 21, 2012**

**THE BOOK OF RUTH :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

Among the customs that accompany the holiday of Shavuot, the public reading of the book of Ruth is personally one of my favorites. The beauty and simplicity of language, the conciseness and majesty of its narrative and the great moral lessons that are embedded in its four short chapters have always fascinated me. There is much that we and our current society can learn and apply from the ideas and events described in the book of Ruth.

Firstly and perhaps most importantly is the value that Judaism places upon compassion and help to the widow, the orphan, the stranger – the disadvantaged in our society. The great future of the Jewish people, even of all Western civilization, is founded on acts of compassion – Ruth to

Naomi, Naomi to Ruth, and Boaz to Ruth. There are no great intellectual or theological discussions related to us in the book of Ruth. It is deceptively simple in its shining message that we are to be nice to each other.

We are here to help others and such help oftentimes comes not in grandiose social welfare programs or numerous organizations but rather in small personal acts of kindness and sensitivity towards others. The Davidic dynasty is created by giving a tired, poor and strange woman a rather meager lunch and some comforting words.

The book of Ruth purposely details for us the “menu” that Boaz offered Ruth for her midday meal in order to emphasize to us that true human kindness rests in the small things in life and the everyday accommodations to others that sustain us in an otherwise difficult world. The attitude towards the stranger amongst us is also one of the highlights of the book of Ruth. Human beings are very territorial and xenophobic. We look askance at strangers, at those who are not like us physically and temperamentally. In our schools the “different” child is rarely if ever accommodated. Bullying and violence are condoned if not even sometimes encouraged.

The Jewish people over the ages have been victimized simply for being different. No amount of Nobel prizes won can erase the fact that we are different and the refusal of most of human society to tolerate differences within the human race inevitability leads to outrage and atrocities.

The gleaners and the harvesters and their supervisors all looked askance at Ruth – the different one – as she bent down to take the fallen grain. They identified her to Boaz and to themselves as, that “Moabite” person. It was not only meant as a term of description but rather as one of derision as well. The different person always bears the stigma of being different.

The Torah warned us thirty six times to be careful to treat the stranger, the convert, the different one, fairly and with justice and compassion. We are taught that “the world is constructed and built upon compassion towards others.” The book of Ruth perhaps more than any other book in the canon of the Bible illustrates this value in a most emphatic fashion. The book of Ruth also drives home to us the unseen but omnipresent hand of God, so to speak, in the seemingly ordinary affairs of humans. Though we are all accorded almost unlimited free will in our choices, decisions and behavior, we are yet operating within boundaries of events that are subject to the Will of the Divine.

Boaz is free to choose how he will treat Ruth, kindly or otherwise, but as Rambam explains, this freedom in no way impinges on God’s ultimate master plan for the Jewish people and the Davidic dynasty. “Many are the thoughts of humans but it is God’s plan that will ultimately prevail.” We should always operate as agents of our own freedom of will and choice while at the same time being mindful that it is God’s plan that will certainly prevail.

King David need not have arrived through Boaz and Ruth. The Lord has many paths to effectuate His will. Yet because of the compassionate behavior of Boaz and Ruth, the Lord made them the eternal parents of Jewish monarchy. This is a confirmation of the statement of the rabbis of the Talmud: “Good and meritorious events occur to us through the acts of good and meritorious people while other types of events occur to us through the behavior of sinners.” These lessons from the book of Ruth should be guideposts for us all year long - not limited to the holiday of Shavuot itself.  
Shabat shalom

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From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein  
<info@jewishdestiny.com>  
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha :: BAMIDBAR :: Monday, May 21, 2012**

The book of Bamidbar is perhaps one of the saddest, so to speak, of all of the Holy Scriptures. Whereas the book of Shemot, which records for us the sin of the Golden Calf also gives us pause, it concludes with the final construction of the Mishkan and God’s Presence, so to speak, resting within the encampment of Israel. But the book of Bamidbar, which begins on a high note of numerical accomplishment and the seemingly imminent entry of the Jewish people into the Land of Israel, ends on a very sour note. It records the destruction of the entire generation including its leadership without their entrance into the Promised Land.

The narrative of the book of Bamidbar tells us of rebellion and constant carping, military defeats and victories, false blessings, human prejudices and personal bias. But the Torah warned us in its very first chapters that “this is the book of human beings.” And all of the weaknesses exhibited by Israel in the desert of Sinai, as recorded for us in the book of Bamidbar, are definitely part of the usual human story and nature. Over the decades that I have taught this book of Bamidbar to students and congregants of mine, invariably many of them have then asked me incredulously: “How could the Jewish people have behaved in such a manner?” I cannot speak for that generation of Jews as described in the book of Bamidbar but I wonder to myself “How can so many Jews in our generation relate to the existence of the State of Israel in our time so cavalierly?”

How do we tolerate the cruelties that our one-size-fits-all school systems inflict on the ‘different’ child? How do we subject our daughters to the indignities of the current matchmaking process? How, indeed!?” And my answer to myself always is that for the great many of us, human nature trumps common sense, logic and true Torah values. I imagine that this may have been true of the generation of the book of Bamidbar as well. One of the wonders of the book of Bamidbar is that the count of the Jewish people at the end of the forty years of living in the desert was almost exactly the same as it was at the beginning of their sojourn there when they left Egyptian bondage. Though the following is certainly not being proposed by me as an answer or explanation to this unusual fact, I have always thought that this is a subtle reminder to us that that no matter how great the experiences, no matter how magnificent the miracles, no matter how great the leaders, human nature with all of its strengths and weaknesses basically remains the same.

It is not only that the numbers don’t change much, the people and the generations didn’t and don’t change much either. Human nature remains pretty constant. But our task is to recognize that and channel our human nature into productive and holy actions and behavior – to bend to a nobility of will and loyalty. Only by recognizing the propensity of our nature will we be able to accomplish this necessary and noble goal.  
Shabat shalom.  
Chag Sameach

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From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>  
To weekly@ohr.edu  
Subject Torah Weekly

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bamidbar  
For the week ending 26 May 2012 / 4 Sivan 5772  
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com  
Insights**

**A Piano Lesson**

**“...every man at his camp and every man at his banner...” (1:52)**

As a small boy, I remember the first time I saw a concert pianist in action. I was fascinated how his hands could caress the most sublime sounds from a few dozen ivory sticks. Being a persuasive sort, I managed to talk my parents into buying a piano so that I could perform the same

trick. When the piano arrived, I positioned myself carefully on the piano stool. (Had I been wearing tails, I would, no doubt, have given them a nonchalant flick as I seated myself.) I opened the lid, rubbed my hands to warm them, and held them poised over the center of the keyboard just like I had seen the maestro do.

My hands plunged into the unfortunate keys with a loud and highly unmusical 'splang'. This was followed by several more 'splangs', a few 'splongs' rounded off with a 'grong-grang-grong' and a long 'frannnggggggggg' down to the nether depths of the keyboard. This was not the magic that I had hoped for. My mother arranged for me to have lessons.

"Now," said Mr. Szfotzo, my new piano teacher, "...the first thing we need to learn is order..."

"But I want to be a child prodigy," I protested.

Realizing the sort of a pupil with whom he had been blessed, Mr. Szfotzo rolled his eyes heavenward. After a few seconds of contemplation, he began to speak.

"To achieve anything, a person must have order. Music is all about order. One note has to follow the other in the correct order. One movement must follow the next in the correct order. In order to get anywhere in music – sorry no pun intended — (he grinned), you must order your day so that every day you will be able to sit down and practice your scales, the basic order of music. You can't just pick up your hands and expect them to produce Rachmaninoff!"

Of this last fact, I was already painfully aware.

"Order, Order, Order."

"...every man at his camp and every man at his banner..."

The whole Torah is based on order. A split-second divides Shabbat from the weekdays. A hairsbreadth between kosher and treif; one drop of water divides a kosher mikveh from one that is unfit; a separation divides the camp of the Kohanim from that of the Levi'im. A Levi must not do the service of a kohen and vice versa, nor may a Levi do the service of his fellow.

With "every man at his camp and every man at his banner," the Jewish People are able to give a flawless performance of our Sonata of life – the Holy Torah.

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From Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>  
To Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com>  
Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

### **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Bamidbar**

***And they established their genealogy, according to their families, according to their fathers' household. (1:18)***

The census was executed according to tribe, thereby requiring each individual to establish his genealogical descent from a given tribe. This was done either by document, witnesses, or by the word of the individual. Chazal relate that when Hashem gave the Torah to Klal Yisrael, the nations of the world suddenly disputed His decision. Why were the Jews receiving the Torah and not they? Hashem replied, "Bring Me your sefer Yuchsin, book of family pedigree, to determine from which nations you descend, so that it can be determined if you are worthy of receiving the Torah. The Jewish people have presented their pedigree, and it is impeccable." Chazal's words have allowed for the various commentators to each present his individual exegesis of the concept of pedigree.

Horav Yisrael Yaakov Fisher, zl, offers a practical explanation. Kabbolas HaTorah, the receiving of the Torah, was not a one time commitment. It was an acceptance for each and every ensuing generation until the end of time. Otherwise, it is not a kabbalah, acceptance. The question is: How do we guarantee such commitment? How do we ensure the dedication to the Torah of each and every generation of Jews following Har Sinai? This is done through compliance with the instruction received from Moshe Rabbeinu in his farewell address to Klal Yisrael: "And make them known to your children and your children's children - the day that you stood before Hashem, your G-d, at Chorev" (Devarim 4:9,10). Imparting the Revelation and its

significance to the next generation is the primary method for keeping Kabbolas HaTorah alive and well in the hearts and minds of each generation of Jewish children. They will, in turn, transmit their knowledge and emotions to their children. As Ramban writes, "T

his process affirms the veracity of the Torah, for a father will neither testify falsely to his children, nor will he bequeath them something foolish in which he does not believe."

There is one catch, however: This process works only as long as children respect and value their parents. A child who does not extol and hold his parents in high esteem will not accept his parents' affirmation of support for the Torah. Thus, he will not transmit the lessons he has heard from his parents to his children. In order to believe in an event which has taken place in the distant past, one must have faith in his mentor. Faith is the product of esteem. Without respect, one cannot have faith. It is as simple as that.

Chazal convey this idea via a simple aphorism: "If the rishonim, previous generations, are (viewed by you) as angels, then we are like human beings. If, however, the previous generations are not more than human beings, then we are like donkeys." There is a degradation of generations. In order to maintain a status quo, we must glorify our predecessors. If we will not sing their praises, who will? Certainly our children will not take up the cause of faith in the past. On the contrary, they will say, "It was appropriate in the past. We do not live this way today. We are in a modern, progressive society. It is about time that we removed the shackles of the past and move on." Every generation produces its intellectuals who think they are wiser than the previous generation. If there is no respect, there can be no Torah transmission.

This is Klal Yisrael's uniqueness. We have a sefer Yuchsin, book of genealogical descent. We are proud of our ancestors, and, as such, we extol them by singing their praises to our children. Only the Jewish people can say this. We establish our genealogy Ibais avosam, according to their "father's" household. This is a reference to the Patriarchs. Indeed, we are acutely aware that, with each ensuing generation, we are distancing ourselves further from this source of inspiration and pride. We savor everything that we hear or study about them. The greater they appear in our eyes, the greater we become.

***You shall appoint the Leviim over the Mishkan of the Testimony. (1:50)***

The Baal HaTurim notes an intriguing Mesorah concerning the word hafkeid, appoint. There is one other hafkeid in Tanach: Hafkeid alav rasha, "Appoint a wicked man over him" (Tehillim 109:6). What relationship is there between the two hafkeids? Appointing the Leviim to a position of distinction, and signifying one as wicked, are hardly parallel. The explanation of the Baal HaTurim seems to intensify the ambiguity concerning the correlation of the two pesukim. He says that this supports a statement made by Chazal, "One does not become a pakid (hafkeid), overseer, rise to a position of importance and responsibility below, until after he has been designated as a rasha, wicked, by Heaven." In other words, it is almost tit for tat. The one who ascends to greatness on this world's stage has already been "demoted" in the Heavenly sphere. Does this make sense? How are we to reconcile this Chazal and the Mesorah which the Baal HaTurim suggests is supported by Chazal?

Horav Menachem Tzvi Taksin, zl, offers the following homiletic rendering of Chazal and applies it to explain the Baal HaTurim. In the Talmud Yoma 22b, Chazal state: Kama lo chali v'lo margish gavra d'Morei sayei. "How spared from sickness and worry is the person whose help is his Master in Heaven!" Shaul b'achas v'lo alsa lo; David b'shetayim v'alsa lo, "Shaul erred in one sin, and it was reckoned against him; whereas David erred in two sins, and it was not reckoned against him." Rashi explains that Chazal are teaching us that one who has Hashem's support can be confident that no misfortune will befall him. This means that the punishment he receives from Hashem will be mitigated and not necessarily commensurate with his sins. As proof, Chazal illustrate the difference between the manner in which Hashem treated Shaul, who had erred once concerning the incident with Agag, King of Amalek, whom he allowed to live; and David, who had erred twice: first, concerning Uriah HaChitti, and second, when he took a census of the Jewish People, thereby causing a plague. Shaul was penalized with death, causing an end to his monarchy and precluding the chance for a dynasty. David was not punished for either of his infractions. David received favorable treatment, whereas Shaul did not. Apparently, David had Hashem's support, while Shaul did not. This is the case, despite the fact that Chazal, in the Talmud Moed Katan 16b, imply that Shaul was on a higher spiritual plane than David. How are we to understand the implications of Chazal's statement? Are we to think that Hashem plays favorites? Clearly, there is no such thing as favoritism with Hashem.

In his Yaaros Devash, Horav Yehonasan Eibshutz, zl, explains that Shaul was a good person by nature. This means that he was born with a "good" DNA; he was an

individual who was good to everyone, who viewed everything through the prism of "good" and positive. Even those who were disrespectful of Shaul never saw a negative reaction. He was nice to every person, regardless of his nature. While this may be a wonderful - even laudable - way to live, it precludes the individual from being a successful leader. A king is not allowed to let people insult him. A leader must rule with discipline. "Mr. Nice Guy" does not make an effective leader. There comes a time when he must make demands, must put his foot down.

In contrast, David was born with a nature that was far from affable. It is not that he had a mean streak; it is just that his personality was a challenge that he needed to overcome. David Hamelech rose to the challenge, worked on himself and refined his character. He learned how to deal with all types of people under various circumstances. He transformed himself from Heaven's original "designation" of him. It was for this incredible refinement of character that Hashem chose him to be the King of Yisrael and the founder of the Davidic dynasty.

Rav Taksin suggests that the Baal HaTurim is alluding to this. One does not become an overseer in this world until after he has been designated as wicked Above. This means that one who was originally born with character traits that are less than desirable, with a nature that was destined for evil - but, by his own free will and tenacity has succeeded in overriding these innate qualities - manifests leadership capabilities for which he deserves to become an overseer over his community. It is not what a person was - it is what, by his own grit and resolution, he has become.

This was the nature of Shevet Levi, about whom Moshe Rabbeinu said, "The one who said of his father and mother I have not favored him" (Devarim 33:9). When they were asked to carry out Hashem's decree against those who sinned with the Golden Calf, they listened and acted immediately - regardless if it meant carrying out punishment against close relatives. They subdued their natural tendencies and did what had to be done. Those who were originally known for their exceptional compassion transformed themselves in order to execute Hashem's decree.

The Peninei Rabbeinu Yechezkel relates that Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, was meticulous in this area. Every endeavor, every moment in his life, was governed by Torah and Halachah. If Halachah demanded strict justice, he acted in this manner. If Halachah called for extreme compassion, Rav Chaim was compassionate. One could never form an opinion of Rav Chaim's nature, since every aspect of his life was in consonance with what the Torah was asking of him at that moment. His entire essence was suffused with Torah. He was its mortal embodiment.

The Ksav Sofer, zl, suggests a practical explanation of this Mesorah. It is well-known that the greater one is in his spiritual achievement, his yetzer hora, evil-inclination, likewise grows commensurately. There must be a balance in order to earn reward. Thus, the challenge must be raised. One who has been designated for spiritual leadership must be aware that, with his appointment to distinction, there was created in Heaven a spiritual entity or power given to Satan to challenge him. Thus, with spiritual ascension on this world, a rasha, wicked challenge, must be created in Heaven.

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, was known for his short aphorisms which always hit the bull's eye of truth. He viewed leadership over the community, with its responsibilities, as a thankless experience which isolates one from his true purpose on this world: serving Hashem. He, therefore, would say that when one is appointed to a leadership position, it is an indication that Heaven is upset with him. Otherwise, why would he warrant such "punishment"?

#### ***You shall appoint the Leviim over the Mishkan of the Testimony. (1:50)***

Upon perusal of the pesukim, it is evident that the Torah instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to appoint the Leviim for their mission concerning the Mishkan of Testimony even before he was told to count them. Whereas the rest of the nation was immediately entered into the census, Shevet Levi was presented with their unique function and then counted. The Shach explains this from a practical standpoint. Shevet Levi's census was quite small in contrast to the other Shevatim, Tribes. At first blush, this could cause them chalishas ha'daas, a somewhat downcast feeling. After all, why should Shevet Levi be the smallest in number? I must add that it is not just a concept of numbers. Every child that is brought into Klal Yisrael is unique. Every parent wants to play a role in increasing the quantitative effect of the Jewish People. Every Jew is a world. Why should Shevet Levi have less? Thus, the Torah precludes their census by first calling attention to their lofty position. When they realize

and their sublime calling, it assuaged their negative feelings which were evoked by having a diminished portion in Klal Yisrael's total census.

After all is said and done, does their increased role in the Mishkan ameliorate their decrease of progeny? Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita, explains that indeed Shevet Levi had a comparatively diminished family size for a very good reason - one for which they could all be proud. Klal Yisrael's miraculous growth in Egypt was due to a special Heavenly blessing of kein yirbeh v'kein yifrotz - "So it would increase

and so it would burst forth." (Shemos 1:12). The evil Pharaoh was concerned that his Jewish citizens would one day rise up and rebel against his rulership. He felt that by subjugating them to hard and degrading labor he would minimize their growth. Pen yirbeh u'pen yifrotz, "Lest they multiply; lest they burst forth." Hashem responded, Kein yirbeh v'kein yifrotz; "The more you afflict them - the more they will grow and increase." Thus, Klal Yisrael multiplied, increasing their numbers by leaps and bounds in a manner that spelled miraculous. There was, however, one drawback: their growth was commensurate with their labor and affliction. Shevet Levi remained in Goshen, seeing to it that the bais hamedrash was kept spiritually verdant. Whereas Klal Yisrael's physical growth was supernatural, Shevet Levi had to settle for the "natural." As an aside, this provides us with an inspiring lesson. Life is ultimately balanced. The "haves" and "have nots" will, in the final diagnosis, all balance out. It might even take a few generations, but at the end, they are all equal.

Returning to the reason that Shevet Levi were not immediately counted like the other Shevatim, Rav Kanievsky explains that this was due to their distinction. Shevet Levi was different. They were in a league all their own, due to their function as guardians of the Mishkan. The concept of minyan, census, is that everyone is included together as a single unit. Since Shevet Levi was different, they were not counted together with the rest of Klal Yisrael. They were their own distinct minyan. Thus, the Torah defers the count to single out Shevet Levi as the appointees to oversee the Mishkan.

#### ***Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem. (3:4)***

Vayamas is singular, meaning, "and he died." Concerning the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the Torah should have written vayamusu, "and they died." K'motzei Shalal Rav cites the Zohar Hakadosh that teaches that Nadav and Avihu died a purely physical death. Their spiritual selves did not perish, but lived on. The Zohar supports this hypothesis with an anomaly in the text concerning Pinchas. The Torah states (Shemos 6:25) that Elazar HaKohen took a wife from the daughters of Putiel. Pinchas was born to him. This is followed up with the words, eilah roshei avos, "These were the heads/leaders of the fathers of the Leviim." The word eilah, these, is plural and written with regard to a single person - Pinchas. Why does the Torah use a word which implies a plurality if, in fact, it is speaking about one individual? The Zohar infers that Nadav and Avihu's neshamos were nisgalgel, transmigrated, into Pinchas. Therefore, Pinchas - the single person - is actually the embodiment of two people - Nadav and Avihu.

The Zohar continues that, for this reason, in delineating Pinchas' pedigree, the Torah writes, "Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen." Why is it necessary to mention Pinchas' grandfather, Aharon? Indeed, when the Torah mentions Elazar HaKohen, it does not find it necessary to call attention to his father Aharon. Why is it different concerning Pinchas? Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai explains that Nadav and Avihu, although two separate people, were, in fact, together nisgalgel into Pinchas. By detailing Pinchas' ancestry back to Aharon, the Torah is implying that Pinchas had a very distinct relationship with his grandfather. In fact, he was his spiritual father!

Rabbi Elazar ben Shimon asked his father why two people were nisgalgel into one person. It is not as if there was a shortage of people into whom the neshamos could be placed. Rabbi Shimon explained that Nadav and Avihu represented two halves of a human body, since neither of them had married; they were designated as plag gufa, "half a body." Together, they equaled one body, which allowed for both of their neshamos together to be transmigrated into Pinchas.

In summation, Pinchas receives the plurality, since he was the recipient of two neshamos, while the deaths of Nadav and Avihu are written in the singular, since together they were one.

I feel we would be remiss to allow the Zohar Hakadosh's chidush, novel idea, to go by without reflecting upon its implications. Pinchas serves as the paradigm of the true religious zealot, the kanai l'shem Shomayim, one who acts to protect the glory and sanctity of Heaven. Nothing stands in his way when he sees Hashem's Name being dragged in the gutter, utterly humiliated and degraded by those whose purported goal in life is to undermine the sanctity of Judaism. Where did he get this sense of sincere religious outrage? What were the origins of Pinchas' moral indignation with those who defile Judaism? He was one person amongst an entire nation who had the courage, resolution and fortitude to stand up to the Nasi, Prince, of the Tribe of Shimon and slay him and his paramour during their blatant act of moral desecration. Everyone else stood numb, dumbfounded, as they watched Pinchas act definitively, without fear of reprisal or public condemnation.

We now have a clue to Pinchas' origins, his drive and passion, as the recipient of not one - but two - holy neshamos, of Nadav and Avihu, the individuals whom Moshe Rabbeinu eulogized as the b'krovai ekadash, "Through My close ones I will be sanctified." They were Hashem's "close ones"! This is the first prerequisite for achieving kanaas - being close to Hashem - both in experience and in emotion.

In order to take righteous umbrage on behalf of Hashem's Name, one must feel such a sense of closeness with the Almighty that he is one with Him. This feeling must be controlled or it can lead to disaster - as it did with Nadav and Avihu. Out of an overriding sense of love for Hashem, and a compelling passion to serve Him, they crossed the line by not waiting for the Almighty's command. This created an eish zarah, "strange fire." Without Hashem's express directive, the most committed act of observance becomes strange. A Jew lives by obedience. This means he acts in accordance with Hashem's dictate - and never acts without direction from Above. Prior to Pinchas' act of zealotry, he presented himself before his Rebbe Moshe and asked, "Did the Rebbe not teach that Ha'boel aramis kanain pogim bo, 'One who cohabits with a gentile - zealous ones may strike him down?'" Moshe agreed, instructing Pinchas to avenge Hashem's honor. By asking, Pinchas rectified the one error exhibited by Nadav and Avihu, which on their unprecedented sublime plateau, cost them their mortal lives.

In conclusion: A kana'i has to achieve a spiritual plateau relative to that of Nadav and Avihu, a consummate devotion to Hashem and an unwavering sense of obedience to His word. Nadav and Avihu equals Pinchas, who, due to his act of zealotry, was granted the Covenant of Peace.

***There are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe. (3:1)***

The Torah is about to detail the offspring of both Aharon and Moshe; yet, it enumerates only those of Aharon. Rashi quotes Chazal in the Talmud Sanhedrin 19b that teach "whoever teaches his friend's son Torah, it is considered as if he gave birth to him." The Shlah Hakadosh adds that one should not take the word k'ilu, "as if," verbatim, for it is more than "as if." One who teaches Torah to his friend's son has actually given birth to him. Father and mother provide a child's body; the rebbe, Torah teacher, sustains his neshamah, soul. Thus, whoever has chosen the holy calling of chinuch as his life's vocational endeavor, is actually creating and sustaining neshamos.

It goes even deeper than that. One who provides a Torah education for a Jewish child is granting him continued life. The following episode will perhaps shed light on this theory. One day, Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, convened an important meeting with regard to issues confronting the Jewish people. Most of those "invited" to attend were from the Diaspora. Apparently, this was an important meeting. Therefore, his grandchildren insisted that Rav Shach not have his usual "office hours" during which individuals from all over the world came to petition his blessing and sage counsel.

The group was waiting to begin their meeting when a father asked to enter the Rosh Yeshivah's office with his fourteen-year-old yeshivah son. At first, the reply was in the negative. At the behest of Rav Shach, these people had traveled across the world to meet with the gadol hador, the generation's preeminent Torah leader. This was an unusual meeting and quite significant. The Rosh Yeshivah would be tied up all day.

The father would not take "no" for an answer. He asked for only a minute of Rav Shach's time, to obtain a blessing for his son that he grow and be successful in Torah learning. The men granted him his request, stipulating that he would have only a minute. The father and son entered the office and departed from there almost two hours later! One can only begin to imagine the group's agitation when they came out. "You promised us it would be but for a moment, yet you remained for almost two hours!" they clamored.

"You are correct," the father replied. "My intention was to spend a moment, but Rav Shach thought otherwise. He insisted that we stay!"

"What happened?" they asked. "When I presented my son to the Rosh Yeshivah, he asked my son if he enjoys learning Torah. My son answered that he does not look forward to studying Torah, because it makes no sense to him. Apparently, the rebbe teaches the subject, and those students who care to learn - do, while the others are allowed to stare at the ceiling.

"Rav Shach immediately picked up two Gemaros - one for himself and one for my son, and they began to learn together. Slowly, carefully, meticulously, Rav Shach explained the Gemorah's dialogue to my son. One could see the subject matter becoming clear in his mind. Suddenly, my son began to cry. 'Why are you crying?'" Rav Shach asked my son.

"Rebbe, I am crying from joy. For the first time in my life, I understand the Gemorah. It is no longer a closed book to me. Now, I finally sense a ta'am, flavor, to my learning."

The father and son apologized and left. When the group entered Rav Shach's office, he immediately explained his actions, "I could not allow the boy to leave here without addressing his problem. To sense a ta'am in learning is pikuach nefesh, a matter of life and death! For a Jewish child to have a dispassionate attitude towards Torah study is egregious. Such a child is a choleh mesukan, critically ill. To save a critically ill child takes precedence over everything!"

***Adon Ha'niflaos - Master of Wonders.***

When we see or read about wonders in the world, it is important that we take it in perspective. It is a wonder only in the sense that we humans are not used to it. It is outside of the realm of nature to which we humans have become accustomed. To Hashem Yisborach, it is all the same: natural/supernatural are all under his dominion. He is the Master, Hu levado, He alone controls everything which takes place in the world. As Master, He is so far removed from our ability to understand that we could go on and on describing His niflaos, wonders, and still not ever scratch the surface.

Furthermore, a peleh, wonder, is something which, according to the course of nature, should have destroyed everything in its path - yet did not, because Hashem did not want it to. As Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, observes, whether it was the scud missiles that just "happened" to be intercepted by Patriot antimissile missiles or it is every catastrophe that occurs - but does not destroy. Every bullet has its mark. This is part of the Adon Ha'niflaos.

l'zechar nishmas Chaim Tzvi ben Aharon Halevi z"l Dr. Harry Feld nifter 28 Iyar 5760 - by Dr. Donnie and Debbie Norowitz and family

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

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subject: Parsha - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Lord Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org**

**Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

**The Ever-Repeated Story**

Bemidbar takes up the story as we left it toward the end of Shemot. The people had journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai. There they received the Torah. There they made the Golden Calf. There they were forgiven after Moses' passionate plea, and there they made the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, inaugurated on the first of Nisan, almost a year after the exodus. Now, one month later, on the first day of the second month, they are ready to move on to the second part of the journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

Yet there is a curious delay in the narrative. Ten chapters pass until the Israelites actually begin to travel (Num. 10: 33). First there is a census. Then there is an account of the arrangement of the tribes around the Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting. There is a long account of the Levites, their families and respective roles. Then there are laws about the purity of the camp, restitution, the sotah, the woman suspected of adultery, and the nazirite. A lengthy series of passages describe the final preparations for the journey. Only then do they set out. Why this long series of seeming digressions?

It is easy to think of the Torah as simply telling events as they occurred, interspersed with various commandments. On this view the Torah is history plus law. This is what happened, these are the rules we must obey, and there is a connection between them, sometimes clear (as in the case of laws accompanied by reminder that "you were slaves in Egypt"), sometimes less so.

But the Torah is not mere history as a sequence of events. The Torah is about the truths that emerge through time. That is one of the great differences between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. Ancient Greece sought truth by contemplating nature and reason. The first gave rise to science, the second to philosophy. Ancient Israel found truth in history, in events and what God told us to learn from them. Science is about nature, Judaism is about human nature, and there is a great difference between them. Nature knows nothing about freewill. Scientists often deny that it exists at all. But humanity is constituted by its freedom. We are what we choose to be. No planet chooses to be hospitable to life. No fish chooses to be a hero. No peacock chooses to be vain. Humans do choose. And in that fact is born the drama to which the whole Torah is a commentary: how can freedom coexist with order? The drama is set on

the stage of history, and it plays itself out through five acts, each with multiple scenes.

The basic shape of the narrative is roughly the same in all five cases. First God creates order. Then humanity creates chaos. Terrible consequences follow. Then God begins again, deeply grieved but never losing His faith in the one life-form on which He set His image and to which He gave the singular gift that made humanity godlike, namely freedom itself.

Act 1 is told in Genesis 1-11. God creates an ordered universe and fashions humanity from the dust of the earth into which He breathes His own breath. But humans sin: first Adam and Eve, then Cain, then the generation of the Flood. The earth is filled with violence. God brings a flood and begins again, making a covenant with Noah. Humanity sin again by making the Tower of Babel (the first act of imperialism, as I argued in an earlier study). So God begins again, seeking a role model who will show the world what it is to live in faithful response to the word of God. He finds it in Abraham and Sarah.

Act 2 is told in Genesis 12-50. The new order is based on family and fidelity, love and trust. But this too begins to unravel. There is tension between Esau and Jacob, between Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel, and between their children. Ten of Jacob's children sell the eleventh, Joseph, into slavery. This is an offence against freedom, and catastrophe follows – not a Flood but a famine, as a result of which Jacob's family goes into exile in Egypt where the whole people become enslaved. God is about to begin again, not with a family this time but with a nation, which is what Abraham's children have now become.

Act 3 is the subject of the book of Shemot. God rescues the Israelites from Egypt as He once rescued Noah from the Flood. As with Noah (and Abraham), God makes a covenant, this time at Sinai, and it is far more extensive than its precursors. It is a blueprint for social order, for an entire society based on law and justice. Yet again, however, humans create chaos, by making a Golden Calf a mere forty days after the great revelation. God threatens catastrophe, destroying the whole nation and beginning again with Moses, as He had done with Noah and Abraham (Ex. 32: 10). Only Moses' passionate plea prevents this from happening. God then institutes a new order.

Act 4 begins with an account of this order, which is unprecedentedly long, extending from Exodus 35, through the whole of the book of Vayikra and the first ten chapters of Bemidbar. The nature of this new order is that God becomes not merely the director of history and the giver of laws. He becomes a permanent Presence in the midst of the camp. Hence the building of the Mishkan, which takes up the last third of Shemot, and the laws of purity and holiness, as well as those of love and justice, that constitute virtually the whole of Vayikra. Purity and holiness are demanded by the fact that God has become suddenly close. In the Tabernacle, the Divine Presence has a home on earth, and whoever comes close to God must be holy and pure. Now the Israelites are ready to begin the next stage of the journey, but only after a long introduction.

That long introduction, at the beginning of Bemidbar, is all about creating a sense of order within the camp. Hence the census, and the detailed disposition of the tribes, and the lengthy account of the Levites, the tribe that mediated between the people and the Divine Presence. Hence also, in next week's parsha, the three laws – restitution, the sotah and the nazir – directed at the three forces that always endanger social order: theft, adultery and alcohol. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites, this is what order looks like. Each person has his or her place within the family, the tribe and the nation. Everyone has been counted and each person counts. Preserve and protect this order, for without it you cannot enter the land, fight its battles and create a just society. Tragically, as Bemidbar unfolds, we see that the Israelites turn out to be their own worst enemy. They complain about the food. Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses. Then comes the catastrophe, the episode

of the spies, in which the people, demoralized, show that they are not yet ready for freedom. Again, as in the case of the Golden Calf, there is chaos in the camp. Again God threatens to destroy the nation and begin again with Moses (Num. 14: 12). Again only Moses' powerful plea saves the day. God decides once more to begin again, this time with the next generation and a new leader. The book of Devarim is Moses' prelude to Act 5, which takes place in the days of his successor Joshua.

The Jewish story is a strange one. Time and again the Jewish people has split apart, in the days of the First Temple when the kingdom divided into two, in the late Second Temple period when it was riven into rival groups and sects, and in the modern age, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it fragmented into religious and secular in Eastern Europe, orthodox and others in the West. Those divisions have still not healed.

And so the Jewish people keeps repeating the story told five times in the Torah. God creates order. Humans create chaos. Bad things happen, then God and Israel begin again. Will the story never end? One way or another it is no coincidence that Bemidbar usually precedes Shavuot, anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. God never tires of reminding us that the central human challenge in every age is whether freedom can coexist with order. It can, when humans freely choose to follow God's laws, given in one way to humanity after the Flood and in another to Israel after the exodus.

The alternative, ancient and modern, is the rule of power, in which, as Thucydides said, the strong do as they will and the weak suffer as they must. That is not freedom as the Torah understands it, nor is it a recipe for love and justice. Each year as we prepare for Shavuot by reading parshat Bemidbar, we hear God's call: here in the Torah and its mitzvot is the way to create a freedom that honours order, and a social order that honours human freedom. There is no other way.

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**Guarding the Ultimate Treasure**

**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

**The TorahWeb Foundation**

A Torah observant Jew is often referred to as a shomer Torah u'mitzvos. The requirement to be shomer mitzvos is repeated several times throughout the Torah. What is the significance of being shomer - literally guarding - the mitzvos and why does this define the essence of a Torah way of life?

We are taught in Parshas Bamidbar about the mitzvah of shmiras Hamikdash, i.e. the guarding the Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash that was performed by the Kohanim and Leviim. According to many meforshim in Maseches Tamid, this "guarding" was not to actually protect the Beis Hamikdash, but rather was to indicate the significance of what we are "watching over." Similarly, shmiras hamitzvos is not merely performing mitzvos, but rather a declaration of the supreme importance of mitzvos in our lives.

What does shmiras hamitzvos entail above and beyond the fulfillment of mitzvos? Chazal articulate several times the dual obligation of "lishmor v'laasos - to watch over and to perform" the mitzvos, wherein lishmor refers to learning, and laasos addresses actual fulfillment. Learning Torah is the ultimate expression of shmira. If one truly views the mitzvos as the will of Hashem, one will spend all his time and effort to understand them. As such, the constant dedication to talmud Torah is the greatest acknowledgement of the significance of the mitzvos and thus the ultimate expression of shmiras hamitzvos.

Chazal relate that when one who learns Torah enters the next world, he is greeted with the words, "ashrei sheba l'kan v'talmudo b'yado - happy is the one who comes here with learning in his hand." This seems to be a strange way to describe one who learns; what is meant by the one whose

learning is "in his hand"? The most precious of one's assets are not left for someone else to watch, but rather kept in one's own possession. Rashi comments that when Yaakov sent multiple gifts to Esav he also sent him previous jewels. Although not mentioned explicitly in the Torah, these jewels are alluded to by the pasuk that describes gifts sent from "the hand of" Yaakov, since what was in Yaakov's own hand must have been the most important. Perhaps this is the "learning in one's hand" that Chazal are referring to. It is not mere learning that warrants the special welcome in the world to come, but rather it is the acknowledgement of the significance of Torah and mitzvos that is demonstrated by a lifetime of talmud Torah that accompanies a person to the next world and merits such a welcome.

As we approach the yom tov of Shavuos we rededicate ourselves to shmiras haTorah v'hamitzvos. It is though the vehicle of talmud Torah that we demonstrate the significance of Torah in our lives. May we merit on this Shavuos not only to receive the Torah, but also to hold it in our hands as befits the precious gift Hashem has bestowed upon us. Copyright © 2012 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

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From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org & genesis@torah.org  
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Subject Rabbi Frand on Parsha

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Bamidbar**

At the beginning of the parsha, Moshe is commanded: "Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' house, by number of the names, every male according to their head count (l'gulgalosam)" [Bamidbar 1:2]. The expression l'gulgalosam is a rather peculiar expression. I would like to share with you a Maharam M'Pano from the Sefer – Asarah Ma'amoros. Maharam M'Pano writes that Moshe Rabbeinu looked at every single Jew and saw with Ruach haKodesh [Divine Inspiration] how many times each individual would have to return to this world as a "gilgul" (via the process of transmigration of souls).

Usually, I do not like to delve into such matters because I really do not know what I am talking about and the rule of thumb normally is "we do not delve into hidden matters" (ayn lanu eisek b'Nistaros). But this fascinating comment of the Maharam M'Pano is a very important idea worth being aware of.

According to this mystic ideal of "Gilgul Neshamos", most people in this world have souls that are not visiting this world for the first time. Their souls have been here before in other bodies in previous ages. After they passed on from their previous visits to this world, the souls went to the "World of Souls" and the Almighty for some reason decided that they have to come back a second or third or whatever number of times it may be. Why do souls need to return? It is because each of us has a mission (tachlis) that we have to fulfill in this world. If we come down to this world and do not fulfill our purpose or we damage our souls, then the Master of the World will send the soul back into another body so that we may try to rectify the matter the next time around -- or the time after that -- until we get it "right". This idea is hinted at by the use of the word "l'gulgalosam" -- from the root "gilgul". Moshe looked at every individual and saw prophetically how many "gilgul"-iterations the soul would have to endure before it finally fulfilled its mission in this world.

Why do I find it important to talk about this mystical idea involving the soul and the secrets of "Gilgul Neshamos"? The answer is that this concept sometimes can help us understand the incomprehensible.

Unfortunately, there are many occasions in life when we do not understand "how such a thing can happen." We do not understand why such a tragedy should befall such and such a person. We do not understand why people should die young or as children, Heaven forbid. Why is this happening? There seems to be no rhyme or reason for it.

Sometimes such events can be easier to understand if we believe in this concept of "Gilgul". That which happens before our eyes is part of a much bigger picture. The Maharam of Pano cites an example. The Talmud states in a portion that many of us study on Tisha B'Av [Gittin 58a]: There was an incident involving the son and daughter of Rav Yishmael ben Elisha, who were taken into captivity (around the time of the Destruction of the Second Temple) and sold to two different masters. The two Gentile masters met and were each raving about the exceptional beauty of their respective slaves. They decided to breed the two slaves together, have them produce beautiful offspring and the two masters would divide up the profits. They put the two young Jews -- brother and sister -- in a room together at night, a room that was pitch black and they told them what they were to do with each other.

Neither had any idea with whom he or she was sharing the room. The Talmud relates that each of them retired to opposite corners of the room, and sat on the ground weeping. The son thought to himself "I am a Kohen the son of High Priests of Israel. How can I have relations with a slave girl?" Likewise his sister said to herself: "I am the daughter of a priest, descended from the High Priests of Israel. Should I become married to a slave?" They each cried the entire night. When the dawn came they recognized each other. They embraced and cried at what had befallen them. They died crying upon one another. The Talmud concludes the narration by saying that the prophet Yirmiyahu referred this when he said "My eye, my eye, sheds tears..." [Eicha 1:16] How did such a tragedy occur to the children of Rabbi Yishmael? How did it wind up that they were sold as slaves and put into such a situation? The Maharam M'Pano says an unbelievable thing: They were "Gilgulim" of Amnon and Tamar. Dovid HaMelech fathered two children -- Amnon and Tamar who were not halachic siblings. Amnon lusted for Tamar. He arranged a situation where he would be alone with Tamar and he forcibly took her. [Shmuel II Chapter 13] Maharam M'Pano states that as a result of that sin, the two of them had to come back and be placed in a similar situation where they would withstand the temptation and sanctify G-d's Name, rather than participate in the desecration of G-d's Name that took place in the story in the Book of Shmuel.

We read about the situation described in Tractate Gittin and ask how such a thing could happen to the children of Rabbi Yishmael. The answer, says the Maharam M'Pano, is "sod haGilgul" -- the secret of the transmigration of souls. We only see half the picture. With the understanding that sometimes we come back to this world to rectify something which went wrong in a previous "cycle," things make a little more sense.

The Chofetz Chaim once gave a parable to explain the expression "tzodku yachdav" in the pasuke "The laws of Hashem are True, together they are just" (tzodku yachdav) [Tehillim 19:10]: There was once a person who came down to this world and was fantastically wealthy. As is many times the case, wealthy people can be terribly arrogant with people not of their means. This person was indeed arrogant and abusive to people of less stature. He offended many poor people in this world. He came up to Heaven and was chastised for never asking for forgiveness from all these poor people he offended. It was therefore decreed that he would have to revisit the world to make amends. The soul pleaded to the Almighty -- "Please Hashem send me down the next time as a poor person, as a pauper." The Attribute of Justice responded: "No, that would not be a true test. Send him down again as a wealthy man!" But again the soul pleaded with the Almighty to be sent down the second time as a destitute and broken person. The Almighty in His Compassion granted the soul his wish and it came down as a pauper, a smelly nobody. He lived a miserable existence, but he rectified the sin of his soul and cleansed it.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that this is the interpretation of the pasuk "The laws of Hashem are True, together they are just." We would look at this fellow and ask "Why is he unable to make a living? Why is he so

down-trodden? What did he do to deserve it?" We cannot understand it. But ultimately it is "Tzadku Yachdav". If we take into account the entire picture, his earlier existence and sins in that situation, the fact that he was here once before and had abused his privilege of wealth...then the matter becomes clear and sensible. It only makes sense when the two things are taken together.

That is why it is important for us to know this Maharam M'Pano. There are so many things in life that are inexplicable. We cannot begin to understand them. Maybe the answer is that this is a Gilgul. It is a Gilgul that had to come down at a certain time in a certain condition for a certain amount of time. This time, the neshama might be able to do what it was supposed to do originally and then return to the World of the Souls and wait for the Resurrection of the Dead.

The Ramban refers to this secret many times in his commentary to Chumash. Again, we do not understand these things. We should avoid delving into the world of the mystical, but we should at least be aware of the general concept. Gilgul is the great equalizer that can perhaps help give us insight and understanding into matters that appear totally beyond our comprehension.

### **A Thought For Going Into Shavuot**

Everyone is aware that the High Holiday period between Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur is a period of judgment (Din). However, not everyone is aware that the Ari z"l and the Shaloh HaKodesh write that there is judgment on Shavuot as well. The judgment of Shavuot affects each and every one of us. On Shavuot there is Heavenly Judgment that determines the degree of success each of us will have in pursuing our Torah studies during the coming year. Just as the amount of material sustenance each of us will receive for the next 12 months is determined on Rosh HaShannah, the Day of Judgment, so too the amount of spiritual sustenance each of us will receive from our Torah study during the next twelve months is determined on the Day of the Giving of the Torah.

We know how to prepare for Rosh HaShannah. We know we are to pray, we know we are to do mitzvos. These things determine the nature of the Judgment we receive during the season of the Days of Awe. What are we supposed to do on Shavuot in order that the Almighty will say "if this is how he acts then he deserves to be given a year of success in his learning endeavors?"

The Sefarim say that a person's judgment in this matter is dependent on his desire (cheshek) to learn. The more he wants it, the more he shows the Ribono shel Olam somehow that this is important to him and he wants success in his learning endeavors, the more he will receive it. It is this "cheshek to learn" that determines the extent to which the Almighty will allot him success in learning.

This is what we have to demonstrate over the next few days leading up to Shavuot – our desire to learn! One develops a 'cheshek' if one comes to an appreciation of what Torah is and of how important Torah is to his life. Somehow, in these next few days, we must spend time thinking of the role Torah plays in our lives, the importance that it has. In this way, we can sincerely express to the Ribono shel Olam our desire to grow in learning.

There are different ways to demonstrate 'cheshek'. I recently heard the story of a fellow from Manchester England who was a mohel. He went to the Ukraine to perform circumcisions for Jewish Russian babies who had no other access to ritual circumcision. The mohel was met by a Rav from Monsey who was visiting the Ukraine. The Rav asked him to describe his most memorable experience from the Ukraine.

The mohel related that he once went to perform a milah in some off-the-beaten-track little town in the Ukraine. At one time – many years ago – the Ukraine was a vibrant center of Jewish life and Jewish living. It was a country of Chassidim and men of action. Today, there is very little Jewish life and in this town there was next to nothing. The mohel found out that the Bris was supposed to be in the shul. He located the

synagogue and walked into the building, where he saw a number of people gathered. He asked them: What time are you davening here? When is the minyan?

They looked at him curiously and asked "Daven? We do not daven. No one here knows how to daven." The mohel asked "If you do not know how to daven, what are all these people doing in shul?" The person he asked explained. "There are two different things. There is davening and there is coming to shul. We do not know how to daven, but still a Jew must come to shul!"

So morning and evening, these Jews who did not know which way was up in a Siddur, came to shul because that is what Jews are supposed to do. They sit there, they schmooze, they do not daven but they come to shul! They might not achieve "Level B" – davening, but at least they have achieved "Level A" – coming to shul.

I wonder how the Almighty looks at this. People do not know how to daven. They know they are supposed to daven and they feel bad that they are unable to daven, but at least they demonstrate to the Ribono Shel Olam their desire to come to shul. It would seem that such behavior gives much "pleasure" (nachas Ruach) to the Ribono shel Olam.

This is an example of how one demonstrates "cheshek" – the desire to become closer to the Master of the Universe. We have to likewise demonstrate our desire for learning Torah and for having success in our learning. We need to feel and demonstrate that "this is our life and the length of our days".

Therefore, I tried this morning to have special intent in the blessing before Krias Shma of "Ahavah Rabbah". We beseech "instill in our hearts to understand and elucidate, to listen, learn, teach, safeguard, perform and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love. Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah. Attach our hearts to Your commandments". Our kavannah in this blessing demonstrates to the Almighty what is important to us.

We are real good at asking "Bestow upon us Hashem our G-d this year all its kinds of crops for the best..." Everybody knows how to sincerely ask for material sustenance. We are real good at asking G-d to heal those of us who are ill and to strengthen those of us who are weak...when we need these blessings. We are good at putting in requests for all of our personal needs of a financial, social, and material nature. We need to focus on improving our Kavanah in blessings that invoke Divine Aid in spiritual matters as well.

The Chazon Ish says the blessing of "Ata Chonen L'Adam Da'as" [you bestow upon man understanding] is the blessing where a person should pray for Divine aid in his Torah learning. In this blessing, in the blessing Ahava Rabbah in the morning, and in the blessing Ahavas Olam in the evening (a facsimile of Ahava Rabbah) – these are the places where our focus and sincerity will be able to demonstrate how seriously we are asking for Divine Assistance in being able to learn and attach ourselves to G-d's Torah.

"For this is our life and the length of our days" should not merely be lip service. It is the reason for our very existence, the reason for our lives. Let us hope we will all merit Help of Heaven in our learning. May we have an elevation this Shavuot and this coming year, may we merit an increase in our level of Torah, Fear of G-d, and performance of mitzvos. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Subject [Rav Kook List]

**Rav Kook List**

**Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

**Shavuot: The King's Torah Scroll**

While the Torah commands every Jew to write a Torah scroll, there is one individual who is obligated to write an additional Torah scroll. Surprisingly, it is neither the high priest, nor the head of Sanhedrin. It is the king who is commanded to write a second Torah scroll during his reign and keep it with him at all times (Deut. 17:18-19, Sanhedrin 2:4).

What is the significance of these two Torah scrolls, that of the individual and that of the king?

#### Personal Torah and Communal Torah

The people of Israel accepted the Torah at Sinai on two levels. Each individual consented to follow the Torah's laws as a member of the Jewish people. And the Jewish people as a nation also accepted the Torah, so that its moral instructions are binding on its national institutions - the judiciary, the government, the army, and so on.

Observing the Torah on the national level is, however, far more complex than the individual's observance of the Torah. The Torah and its mitzvot were given to refine and elevate humanity. The process of uplifting an entire nation, with its political exigencies and security needs, is far more complicated than the process of elevating the individual.

As individuals, we approach issues of interpersonal morality informed by an innate sense of justice. Mankind, however, has yet to attain a consensus on the ethical issues connected to affairs of state. Furthermore, the propensity for moral lapse - and the severity of such lapses - is far greater on the national level. As a result, all notions of good and evil, propriety and injustice, are frequently lost amidst the raging turmoil of political issues and national concerns.

The greatness of the messianic king lies in his potential to fulfill the Torah's ethical ideals also in the political realm. We read about the foundation of the messianic dynasty in the book of Ruth, which concludes with the lineage of David, king of Israel. Why is it customary to read the book of Ruth on the holiday of Shavuot?

Because the account of the origins of the Davidic dynasty reminds us of the second level of Torah law that we accepted at Sinai, that of the nation as a whole.

Rav Kook cautioned regarding the moral and spiritual dangers inherent in political life:

We must not allow the tendency toward factionalism, which threatens most strongly at the inception of a political movement, to deter us from seeking justice and truth, from loving all of humanity, both the collective and the individual, from love for the Jewish people, and from the holy obligations that are unique to Israel. We are commanded not only to be holy individuals, but also, and especially, to be 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah, pp. 173-174.)  
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