

## סחוימה בוי

*Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 18, we will count day 46, which is 6 weeks and 4 days of the omer.*

### **JERUSALEM :: Rabbi Berel Wein Jerusalem Post :: May 16 2007**

This week marked the fortieth anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem during the Six Day War. While it was a festive day in almost all of Jerusalem, it was less marked in other communities in Israel and in the Diaspora. Post-Zionism and the Leftist media have taken away all of the joy, enthusiasm and wonder of living in a Jewish state and certainly the excitement and historic meaning of living in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

The city whose name alone inspired Jews over the ages to keep the dream alive, the city that represented the glorious past and even more glorious future of Israel has in the eyes of many now become only a place on the map; the equivalent of Cairo or Bangkok at most. It is now a city of property to be negotiated over, a piece of some non-existent fatuous fantasy peace plan, with foes who mock our ineptitude and naïveté?.

It is to me no exaggeration to say that as Jerusalem goes so does the fate of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel. The concept of Jerusalem of Gold has given way to the harsh realities of unbearable traffic jams, crowded neighborhoods and an uneasy relationship with our Arab citizens. Though these Arabs loudly proclaim their dislike of “occupation” apparently few if any are willing to give up their Israeli right to live in the city and join their brothers in the paradise of the Palestinian Authority across the cursed security barrier. All in all, therefore, one can feel a bit discouraged about Jerusalem and its present status if one concentrates on only the present and its realities and problems.

But Jerusalem always was more than the present and realities. It is the city “that binds all together.” It is above time and space. It is King David and Isaiah and of Rav Shmuel Salant and Rav Aryeh Levin. It is the Temple Mount and the City of David, of Mount of Olives and Ammunition Hill. It is a place of mystery and history, of inspiration and destiny. It cannot be measured in ordinary terms because it floats above the ordinary nature of its realities.

It represents the whole of the Jewish story, what has already occurred to us as a people and what is yet to occur. It cannot be captured in marches, flags, parades, salutes, though these are undoubtedly necessary means to strengthen our will. It is a dream, an ideal, a vision of what will yet be. And therefore it is so difficult to reconcile with its present realities. The greatness of Torah and Jewish observances was its uncanny ability to take lofty, almost ephemeral ideas and translate them into practical human behavior. For example, the concept of charity and goodness to others, certainly an abstraction, is defined and translated in the Shulchan Aruch into detailed instructions of behavior and action.

Jerusalem however has no such guidebook and set of instructions. The people themselves have to create the Jerusalem of Gold in their hearts and minds and souls. Thus Jerusalem itself becomes a testing place and sounding board for our own spiritual abilities and maturity. If we only see the physical Jerusalem that surrounds us and not the eternal Holy City that it truly is then we have failed the test of our own spiritual nature.

In Jewish thought there is a concept of Yerushalayim shel maalah - the perfect holy Jerusalem that exists so to speak in heaven hovering over our Yerushalayim shel maatah – the earthly Jerusalem of this mundane world. It was the concept of the heavenly Jerusalem that kept Jews alive and hopeful in the long dark night of our exile and our separation from the Land of Israel.

The heavenly Jerusalem had no traffic jams, no quarreling political factions, no real estate arnona taxes to pay and spotless streets. Our earthly Jerusalem does not quite fit that template. But the task of Jews here as

always and everywhere is to raise the earthly Jerusalem so that it at least resembles the heavenly Jerusalem.

It may be an unrealizable goal in its entirety but it should remain a goal nevertheless. As long as the heavenly Jerusalem is present before us and influences our lives, decisions and aspirations then the earthly Jerusalem is not merely a geographical place. To have this attitude of purpose and vision allows one to walk the streets of Jerusalem today and have Hillel and Rabi Akiva as one’s companions on that walk. In such company, the stones of Jerusalem are transformed into the Jerusalem of Gold. Shabat shalom.

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### **Weekly Parsha :: PARSHAS BAMIDBAR :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

The Chumash of Bamidbar is devoted to the narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel during their forty-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai. However, the Torah’s narrative of any event or historical happening is never restricted to dry facts alone. In its nuanced phrasing the Torah comes to reveal to us the human factors and the psychological and spiritual import of these events.

The Torah is not intended to be a history book and to view it as such will only raise problems of text and misunderstanding of message. It is rather the book of humankind, of its achievements and foibles, its grandeur and pettiness, its great capacity to do good and to be evil. Thus the entire narrative here in Bamidbar has to be seen in this light. The Torah is going to tell us the story of people and not just of events.

Therefore the book of Bamidbar is full of character sketches and descriptions of people who by their actions changed the course of Jewish history, not only in the desert of Sinai but for all times as well. Those who complained about the manna, the overriding ambition of Korach, the selfishness and timidity of the ten spies who were sent by Moshe and the contradistinction in attitude with their colleagues, Yehoshua and Calev, the love of the Land of Israel exhibited by the five daughters of Zlafachad, all of these - the analyses of people and their attitudes and motivations - are on display here in this book of Bamidbar. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that the book of Bamidbar ranks with the Chumash Bereshith in describing and teaching us about human beings and their individual but somehow common natures.

I think that this insight into the Chumash Bamidbar explains the often discussed issue of why this Chumash should begin with names of people and of the count of the tribes and the general population of Israel. The Torah, so to speak, is preparing us for the analysis of people and human characteristics that make up the bulk of this book. People have names, are part of a larger society and are distinct individuals. Not to recognize this basic fact of human existence will prevent anyone from having any meaningful understanding of the narrative of Chumash Bamidbar.

The commentators to Chumash point out that some of the tragedies of Chumash Bamidbar were indirectly caused by Moshe’s overoptimistic assessment of human beings and their behavior. The great men named in this week’s parsha – the beginning of the book of Bamidbar – are in the main no longer there at the end of the book. Positions of power take their toll on their holders.

The names therefore are recorded for us as an example of the pitfalls of power and office. By expecting people to be people and not saints and angels, great errors of judgment and policy can be avoided or at least mitigated. The desert was a harsh learning place for the Jewish people. If its lessons were truly absorbed and translated into Jewish individual and public life, then the experience will have proven to be of eternal value. Shabat shalom.

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## OVERVIEW

The Book of Bamidbar - "In the desert" - begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty - old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The levi'im are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the Mishkan and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the Mishkan in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the levi'im, whereby the levi'im take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the Mishkan if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed levi'im from one month old and up. Only levi'im between 30 and 50 will work in the Mishkan. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided in three main families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the kohanim - the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat carried the menorah, the table, the altar and the holy ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the levi'im prepare them for travel.

## INSIGHTS

### The Hand of G-d

**"The Levi'im shall encamp around the Tabernacle of the Testimony so that there shall be no wrath upon the Children of Yisrael." (1:53)**

The computer and the Jumbo jet have made us impatient people.

A little more than a hundred years ago, man's principal activity was finding and preparing food and cleaning his clothes. Technology has marginalized these activities and freed up acres of time. We should all be leading leisured lives, shouldn't we?

It seems that the more time we have, the more rushed we feel.

One of the most striking things about meeting a great Torah sage is that he always seems to have time for you. He makes you feel that the only thing on his mind is your particular peckel (pack of woes). He may have hundreds of people's problems to deal with, and yet he always makes you feel that, at that particular moment, nothing is more important than you.

One of the things that makes a person great is the willingness to sacrifice, whether that means his comfort, his money - or his time.

In the secular world they say that time is money; Judaism says that money is time. In the end, the only thing you have to spend is time; a selfless person is prepared to spend that priceless resource on others without impatience or resentment. Someone who feels or claims that he has no time for himself and resents his public responsibilities is, in essence, denying hashgacha, Divine Providence, for if G-d has put me in the position in which I find myself, it must mean that this is where I am supposed to be.

The book of Bamidbar is a Divine tale of Providence. Except for specific mitzvot, the events of Bamidbar depict G-d's constant and intimate involvement with His People.

"The Levi'im shall encamp around the Tabernacle of the Testimony so that there shall be no wrath upon the Children of Yisrael."

Why does the encamping of the Levi'im prevent G-d's anger? Rashi explains that G-d's anger will flare only if the Levi'im do not perform their appointed tasks and leave their service to non-Levi'im.

Even the appointment of a foreman to his job is decreed from on High. If G-d has chosen me for the task I find at hand, I have no right to demur or neglect my employment.

The Shechina, Divine Providence, manifests itself in two ways: in the heart and in the world. To the extent that I recognize G-d in my heart - that I believe in Him without reservation - then I will see that trust manifested externally in the daily events of my life as Divine Providence.

I will see the Hand of G-d.

Written and compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## Penimim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Bamidbar

### PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai in the tent of meeting. (1:1)

The wilderness is a large area. One would expect the Torah to specify the place in the wilderness that Hashem's dialogue with Moshe Rabbeinu occurred. Chazal derive from here that the word midbar, wilderness, imparts to us a lesson concerning the attitude one must manifest when studying Torah. A midbar is a makom hefker, ownerless property. It is also desolate, indicating humility and lowliness. One must make himself as hefker, give himself up, so to speak, for the Torah. He relinquishes his ownership of himself, declaring himself null and void, so that he is able to dedicate himself totally to the pursuit of Torah study.

There is a limit to how far one can go being hefker. As Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa would say, "I value and appreciate one who declares himself hefker for Torah. I am very wary, however, of he who is mafkir others." This means that the demands we make on ourselves must not be the standard which we apply to others. One should be eager to give someone the shirt off his own back. He should never, however, give away the shirt off someone else's back. Do chesed, perform acts of kindness, with your time, your energy, your money. Do not do it with other people's time, energy and money. Volunteer yourself. Do not volunteer others.

Moshe was the symbol of kabbolas haTorah, accepting the Torah. His humility was exemplary. He made himself hefker to all. He was there for everyone whenever he was needed. Har Sinai was selected to be the mountain upon which the Torah was given because it was the lowest of all mountains. This was its distinction. It achieved eminence because of its diminutive size.

The Noam Elimelech cautions us not to get carried away with being hefker and acting humble. Unrestricted humility, unregulated passiveness, and uncontrolled self-abnegation can lead to depression and hopelessness, which will cause the Shechinah to depart from him. This is why the Torah "counters" the word midbar with Ohel Moed, Tent of Meeting. Moed is the Hebrew term used to describe the Moadim, Festivals, which symbolize festivity and joy. The Shechinah only resides in a place which is the seat of simchah, joy. A person should make himself as a midbar, but he should concurrently see to it that he brings himself into the Ohel Moed - tent of happiness.

The Baal Shem Tov says that everything that can be achieved through fasting and self-denial can be achieved more quickly by performing mitzvos with simchah. The Shomer Emunim writes that the yetzer hora, evil inclination, directs all of its forces to weaken a person's simchah, because it leads to negligence of mitzvos and greater vulnerability to sin. Indeed, the Arizal said that his enormous spirituality and monumental achievements were the result of his performing mitzvos with simchah.

This does not mean that one should laugh in the face of disaster. The antonym for simchah is atzvus, depression, not sadness. The Baal HaTanya explains atzvus as an absence of feeling. One who is depressed is beyond sadness. He has no feeling whatsoever. Sadness is the state of feeling sad. One who is sad about a situation can be motivated to do something about it. Thus, this awareness and sensitivity can be the source of simchah. We see people who are seemingly sad who say they cannot express their emotions; they cannot cry. This is not sadness. This is depression.

The Baal Shem Tov once visited a town in which the people complained that their chazzan, cantor, behaved strangely. It seems that on Yom Kippur, he would chant the Al Cheit, Confession of sins, in a merry melody, rather than in a more appropriately somber tune. When questioned by the Baal Shem Tov, the cantor explained, "Rebbe, if I was the janitor in the king's palace, would I not be happy that I was sweeping away the dirt and beautifying the king's palace? Likewise, the neshamah, soul, within me is G-dly. When I confess my sins I feel that I am cleansing myself and making a better, more appropriate place for my neshamah. Is that not a reason to rejoice?" Needless to say, the Baal Shem Tov praised the chazzan for his attitude.

David HaMelech is the symbol of simchah, reiterating his feelings of gladness and joy throughout Sefer Tehillim. Yet, according to the Midrash, David HaMelech did not have a single good day throughout his entire life! It was his faith and trust in the Almighty that gave him the ability to triumph over adversity with the feeling in his heart that Hashem is taking care of everything. I will just have to wait and see how it all works out. Since Hashem is in control, the outcome will ultimately be good.

Rabbi Abraham Twerski tells the story of a recovering addict that explained why she had succeeded in her recovery program. She explained that she is a devout football fan who never misses watching her team play. She is either there or finds some way to see it. One weekend she had to be away, so she asked her friend to tape the game for her. Upon returning, the friend handed her the tape and said, "By the way, your team won."

Later that day, she watched the game in horror as she saw her team behind by twenty points at halftime. Under all circumstances, at this point, she would normally have been a nervous wreck, looking for different ways to assuage her nerves. This time, however, she was perfectly calm, because she knew the outcome of the game; her team had won.

That was the reason for her success in the addict recovery program. She had made a conscious decision to give her life over to the will of G-d. Knowing fully well that the Almighty will do what is best, she knew that she was ultimately going to win. Even though there would be a number of situations in which she would feel lost and confused, she trusted in G-d.

This is the story of life. We believe; we are faithful; and we trust in the Almighty. Thus, even when things seem not to be going in our favor, we do not lose hope. That is simchas ha'chaim. Is it easy? No. Is it necessary? There is no other way.

#### **Take a census of the entire assembly of the Bnei Yisrael. (1:2)**

Rashi writes that because of Hashem's love for the Jewish People, He counted them frequently. He counted them when they left Egypt; after the sin of the Golden Calf, to see how many remained after the sinners died; and now, when He rested His Presence. The Mishkan was erected on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and they were counted on Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Horav Yosef Leib Bloch, zl, wonders why a human emotion which motivates a person to count something which he cares about should play a role with regard to the Almighty. Man counts that which is precious to him, because he is fond of it and, thus, wants constantly to be aware of its existence. Hashem, however, is aware of everything. There is no secret before Him. Why does He "need" to count? Certainly, it is not because He needs to be made aware of its existence.

Apparently, one can count something merely because he is fond of it - not because he wants to know its amount. Nonetheless, he is still counting it because he wants to concretize the number in his mind. When one cares, he counts because it increases his awareness of the subject. This concept does not apply in any way to the Almighty. Doubt never enters into the equation, because the word "doubt" does not exist regarding Hashem. Why, then, did Hashem instruct that the Jewish People be counted?

Horav Nossan Ordman, zl, cites the Midrash which states: "Come and see how beloved Klal Yisrael is to Hashem. Hashem counted them a number of times, individually, as tribes and collectively, as a nation. This was done l'hodia, to make known, how much they are loved by Him. One always counts and recounts that which is precious to him, receiving great pleasure from every count." This teaches us that Hashem counts the Jewish People simply out of love. Once again, the question arises: How do we attribute a physical emotion to the Almighty? Hashem knows the number of Jews there are. Reiterating this number will certainly not increase His feelings towards us.

Rav Ordman understands this Midrash from a different perspective. He suggests that the word l'hodia, to make known, means to make known to Klal Yisrael. Hashem does not need this knowledge. We do! When we realize how much we mean to Hashem, how much He loves us, how precious we are to Him, we will be ennobled to act better, to be more observant, to develop a closer relationship with Hashem. It is all for us. Is it any different in the human sector? When children feel that their parents love them, they act differently. When students feel that their teachers care about them, they respond concomitantly.

#### **For the sons of Yosef, for the sons of Efraim, for the sons of Menashe. (1:32,33)**

The Baal HaTurim notes the use of the words, l'bnei Yosef, for the sons of Yosef; livnei Efraim, for the sons of Efraim. Usually, when the Torah mentions Yosef's two sons who achieved tribe status, it would write, l'bnei Yosef, l'Eraim; for the sons of Yosef, for Efraim. Why does the Torah add l'bnei Efraim, for the sons of Efraim, as if to exclude Yosef entirely? He explains that Yosef did not participate together with his brothers in carrying Yaakov Avinu's coffin, because he was a melech, king, and it was not kavod malchus, respect for the monarchy. Therefore, he is not counted among the Degalim, tribal banners. The banners are attributed solely to his two sons, Efraim and Menashe.

It seems implied by the words of the Baal HaTurim that Yosef's exclusion in the Degalim was some form of punishment for not carrying Yaakov's coffin. This is enigmatic. It is not as if Yosef refused to participate. He surely would have participated had he not been a melech. It was an oneis, an accident, and he should not be blamed. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm explains that while it is true that Yosef is not to be faulted for not carrying his father's coffin, regardless of the reason, he did not carry it. Therefore, he was not personally included in the Degalim. An accident may relieve one of culpability; it may ameliorate the circumstances for one's non-participation in an endeavor, but, after all is said and done - he was not there! An accident does not fill the void; it excuses it.

We derive an important lesson from here. There are times when we are asked to participate in a certain endeavor or project for which we have a way of excusing ourselves. While our excuse may suffice to explain and even justify our non-attendance, we cannot demand at a later date to be included among those who served, who were involved, who participated. We cannot have our proverbial cake and eat it. Accidents do happen, and circumstances do arise when one cannot be at a given place, but we cannot expect to be included among those who made something happen, if, in fact, we "legitimately" had not been involved.

#### **And these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe. And these are the names of the sons of Aharon. (3:1,2)**

Rashi notes that the Torah begins by stating, "These are the generations of Aharon and Moshe," and goes on to list only the children of Aharon. This is because Moshe was their rebbe, Torah teacher. We are to infer from here that whoever teaches another person's children Torah is considered as if he gave birth to him. The lesson, aside from its simple message, also implies a rebbe's obligation to his student. If he is like a parent, then he must maintain a parental obligation to his student. In other words: it goes both ways. The student is not the rebbe's son unless the rebbe acts like a father.

There is a distinct difference between the nature of Torah studies and that of secular knowledge. The instructor of science -- or any other area of secular knowledge -- discharges his responsibility as long as he successfully imparts the lesson to the students. He is not obliged to take an interest in his student's personal life. As long as his students excel academically, he is considered to be an excellent teacher.

In Torah education this will not suffice. While scholastic achievement is important, it remains only one aspect of a rebbe's responsibility and ultimate success. He is required to take a parental interest in his student, demonstrating an interest similar to what he would manifest for his own child. Torah is more than a utilitarian endeavor; it provides a goal for one's life. If a student has been provided with the tools for living, but has not been taught how to actively assimilate these tools into life, then the teacher has not successfully carried out his mission. Teaching someone how to start a car, but not how to drive it, does not help much. Knowing how to drive on a straight road, without the ability and know-how to maneuver in traffic, will also not serve the student very well. Just as a parent is concerned about his child's ability to adjust to life in the world, so, too, should a rebbe take great pains to see to it that his student will be able to function successfully in confronting life's challenges.

Now that we have some idea of the awesome responsibility placed on our rebbeim, we must ask ourselves: Are we demanding too much from them? Are their classes too large, too demanding? Are they being compensated commensurately, or are they forced to augment their salaries with other sources of income? We must remember that all these diversions deplete

their energy and deter them from their primary focus of addressing the totality of their student's life. Let me take the liberty of adding one more item to the list. It is probably not my place, and perhaps this is not the forum, but given the popularity of this publication, I want to bring a need to the attention of my readers: life insurance. Yes, tragically it happens. A young rebbe is stricken, a family is left bereft of a father and breadwinner. Because of his previous financial situation, he just did not have the money to purchase insurance. So, a tragedy occurs, and as rachamanim bnei rachamanim, compassionate sons of compassionate fathers, we provide for the family. What about preventive medicine? What about seeing to it that rebbeim are provided with the means to protect themselves al kol tzarah shelo tavo? After all, they are raising our children as if they were their own a little hakoras hatov, appreciation, would be in order.

Returning to Rashi's statement, we wonder whether every rebbe is considered to be as a parent, or are there specific criteria concerning the manner and approach of his teaching? Perhaps the words of the Maharal m'Prague can enlighten us. He asks: Was not Moshe Rabbeinu the Rabbon Shel Kol Yisrael? If everyone was his student, why are Aharon's sons emphasized more than anyone else? He explains that while Moshe taught all of Klal Yisrael, he spent extra hours studying with Aharon's sons. When a rebbe goes beyond the call of duty, when he does not look at the clock waiting for the bell to ring, then he is koneh, acquires, the students. They become his, because he has shown that he cares - about the student - nothing else, just the student.

The Chasam Sofer notes that Aharon's sons are mentioned because Moshe taught them, but what about Moshe's own sons, his flesh and blood? Are they any less significant than Aharon's sons? His answer is frightening and should serve as a wake-up call for those of us whose priorities are not in order. He says that Aharon's sons are considered Moshe's spiritual children, because he taught them and devoted his time to them. Moshe's sons were his flesh and blood, but, because of the constraints of leadership, he did not supervise his sons as much as he would have liked. The sons that one watches over and with which he spends time are his sons. The others are his physical offspring, but, in the spiritual sense, there is a failure in their father-son relationship! The Chasam Sofer goes on to suggest that when the opportunity to be mevakesh Hashem, seek Hashem's word, arose and one only had to turn to the Ohel Moed, Moshe's sons did not go of their own volition, and Moshe was not there to motivate them. Therefore, they did not achieve the spiritual distinction that Aharon's sons developed.

The Chasam Sofer emphasizes that educating one's children demands that one dedicate time and effort. "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people" (Shemos 19:14). Rashi notes that Moshe, the quintessential Jewish leader, ignored his personal affairs completely; he went directly to the people. On that day, Moshe's students became his spiritual children, while his physical offspring did not. Children cannot be raised on "five minutes here" and "five minutes there." Perhaps we can add that when children see how much time and effort their parents put into their education, it tells them how much their parents value their education. This sends a powerful and compelling message to a child - one that will hopefully engender a positive reciprocity.

In closing, Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the Mishnah Berurah, who cites the Tur, who discusses two berachos, blessings: Hashuveinu Avinu, Return us our Father; and Selach lanu Avinu, Forgive us, our Father. They both include the word Avinu, our Father, because a father is obligated to his son, and a father has compassion for his son. We, therefore, ask Hashem to do what a mortal father would do. Rav Zilberstein asks: If a father does not find the time to learn with his son; if his son's educational development does not fit into his scheme of things, how can he ask Hashem to do the same for him? This is a question that should make us think. After all, how can we ask Hashem to do for us what we will not do for our own children?

**Va'yomru kol ha'am Amen, v'hallel l'Hashem.**

**And the entire assemblage said: Amen and praise to Hashem.**

In the Talmud Pesachim 117A, Chazal tell us that the word Hallelukah is the highest term for the praise of Hashem found in Sefer Tehillim, which lists ten expressions of praise. They explain that Hallelukah combines both

Hashem's Name and praise, all in one word. What is the meaning of hallel, praise, that elevates it above the other forms of expressions of praise? Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains Hallel as the piel conjugation of the verb hallel, which means to shine a light on something. In the piel form, hallel means to reflect the light away. Thus, the piel form is actually the converse of the kal, simple, conjugation. We find a similar instance with the word dashon, which means to put down ashes, and dashein (piel) which is translated as to remove the ashes. In this sense, the words hallel, mehullal, or ahallelekeh, when praising Hashem, means that we are "reflecting back to Hashem" all the blessings that He has bestowed upon us. In other words, our praise is the acknowledgement that He is the Source of all of our blessings. Is there a greater form of praise than such recognition of Hashem?

l'zechar nishmas Chaim Tzvi ben Aharon HaLevi z"l Dr. Hrry Feld niftar 28 Iyar 5760 by Dr. Donnie and Debbie Norowitz and family

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### **"RavFrاند" List - Parshas Bamidbar**

#### **The Power Of Group Identification: Both Positive and Negative**

Parshas Bamidbar begins with a census of the Tribes of Israel. At the end of the census, the Torah informs us that the total number of population who went out to the army was 603,550 [Bamidbar 1:46]. Then, the next pasuk [verse] says, "The Levites according to their fathers' tribe were not counted among them." [pasuk 47] It is most strange then, that immediately following this statement the Torah again states: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take their census among the Children of Israel.'" [Bamidbar 1:48-49]

What is this second exhortation not to count the Levites teaching us? We already know that they were not counted from the immediately preceding narration! Why then does the pasuk reiterate that they were not to be counted?

Rashi informs us why the Levites are singled out for special treatment here. Rashi states that this census had an ominous future. Anyone included in the census at the start of Parshas Bamidbar (from 20 years and above) would be included in the forthcoming decree in Parshas Shlach that the entire generation would die in the wilderness. Foreseeing this, the Almighty did not want the Tribe of Levi to be included in this census:

"They are Mine because they did not err in connection with the (Golden) Calf."

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: What does being counted have to do with anything—if they did not sin with the Golden Calf, they were not deserving of death regardless of whether they would be counted or not?

We see from here, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says, that if there is a decree on a community, there may be individuals who should not otherwise be punished with the same punishment, who in fact will be held responsible and suffer that same fate by virtue of their being part of the community, despite the fact that they are not individually guilty.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz then address one of the most difficult questions that has perplexed our generation and the generation that preceded ours—why did all the people, May the Almighty spare us, who died in the holocaust have to die and suffer, despite the fact that many among them were G-d fearing and righteous individuals? There is no real answer to this question. But Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz suggests a partial answer that they were in fact not guilty, but for some reason, there was a decree of death on the European Jewish community—and when there is such a decree on a community, innocent people are sometimes caught up in the decree.

Therefore, had the Levites been included in the counting of Klal Yisrael, and there was subsequently a decree on those enumerated as part of Klal Yisrael to be eradicated, the Levites would have had to suffer that same fate. To protect them, so to speak, the Almighty said: "Don't count the Levites." For this reason it is repeated. The Torah is stressing to us that being part of a community is a double-edged sword.

On the other hand, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says: If this works against us, it certainly works in our favor as well. Miraculously, and for some inexplicable reason, there is only one Yeshiva of the Yeshivas that existed before World War II that made it out of Europe, almost totally intact—the Mirer Yeshiva. In this life, we will never know why it was that the

Almighty ordained that this should happen. But the point of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz was that anyone who included themselves in that community was spared by virtue of their having been part of that community. When one speaks to students of the Mirer Yeshiva who went through that ordeal, they emphasize that their teachers always told them they have to stay together. There was a question on one Simchas Torah whether they should be allowed to return home. They were directed by the Yeshiva administration "We have to stick together because the only way we are going to make it out of here is if we are going to remain together." They all went through Europe and through Siberia and Japan and Shanghai together.

There was a merit for that community to be saved and anyone who was a part of that community was spared, regardless of whether or not on an individual level they were any better than people who, G-d spare us, were killed in the holocaust. Their individual merit is academic, they benefited from the "psak din" [Divine decree] on the Mir Yeshiva that they should be spared.

Being part of a Tzibur [community] can save a person, even though he is unworthy. On the other hand, being part of a Tzibur can sometimes doom a person even though he may not be guilty. The lesson here is the power of being part of a Tzibur.

### **Current Events—Rabbi Frand's Personal Thoughts on the Silver Anniversary**

[Editor's Note: This next section departs from our normal practice of presenting Rabbi Frand's parsha material based on shiurim recorded approximately 6 years ago. The comments below were delivered very recently -- May 10, 2007 -- at the conclusion of Rabbi Frand's regular Thursday night shiur. We thank Morris Smith and the entire staff of the Torah Conferencing Network for providing us with the technical ability to transcribe and transmit this "time sensitive material" to the Project Genesis audience in a timely fashion. We join with Rabbi Frand's students, fans, and friends everywhere in wishing him a Mazal Tov on the Silver Anniversary of his weekly Thursday night shiur and cite in this connection the pasuk "One who loves silver, will not be satisfied with silver." [Koheles 5:9] May he and the dissemination of his shiurim and lectures go from "strength to strength." - DT]

My friends, if you will indulge me for a few moments, I would like to share some very personal sentiments. I have thought long and hard about whether I should bring this up, but in the end I decided I should, even though I am doing it with some discomfort.

Tonight marks 25 years almost to the day that I am delivering the Thursday night shiur. I began delivering this class on Parshas Bamidbar in a third floor classroom of the Agudah building 28 Iyar 5742 (May 20, 1982). There were 12 people present that evening. As the crowd grew larger, we moved to a larger room downstairs. Later, we had to move again to the Beis Medrash next door. Finally, we moved to the present Beis Keneses sanctuary.

My hesitation to bring this up is that it may appear that I am tooting my own horn or pounding my chest in pride. The truth of the matter is, I can sincerely say that my primary motive for sharing this is that I have a tremendous gratitude that I have been able to do this for the last 25 years. I think some expressions of thanks are in order.

First of all, I would like to thank the members of the Baltimore community who have attended my shiur for the last 25 years. Anyone who has ever given a shiur or lecture knows that if you don't have a crowd— especially an enthusiastic crowd—it is just not the same. I have been blessed for all these years with a very enthusiastic crowd.

I want to publicly thank Kehillas Agudas Yisrael of Baltimore who has been my host in all these venues throughout this time. I particularly want to thank the Moreh D'Asra, Rav Moshe Heinemann for giving me this opportunity. We take it for granted here, but it is not an every city occurrence that a Rabbi lets some other Rabbi enter his pulpit every single week as though it is his own pulpit. This stems from Rav Heinemann's sterling character (midos) and his attitude of "expanding the scope of Torah and glorifying it." He has a "live and let live attitude" and shows no trace of jealousy. I hope the word gets back to him that I have a tremendous sense of hakaras hatov [gratitude] for his being the gracious

host that he is. I consider it a personal honor when Rabbi Heinemann attends my Teshuva lecture during the time of the Yomim Noraim.

I also want to thank, as a recent addition, the Torah Conferencing Network which makes this shiur available live throughout the United States and even internationally. My thanks go to Mr. Morris Smith and the entire staff of the Torah Conferencing Network for all that they have done for the TCN effort. I want to thank Mr. Avrohom Klugman who comes here every Thursday night and sets up. He is the unsung hero behind our telecast.

I want to thank my colleagues in Yeshivas Ner Israel. I do not necessarily have the prolific knowledge that it appears I have. I receive a lot of help. When I don't understand something or I need a source, I can go to my colleagues in the Yeshiva or for that matter to my network of friends who always share their sources very generously with me. I particularly want to thank my dear and long time friend, Rabbi Shragi Neuberger who almost without fail calls me Wednesday afternoon and asks "Nu, do you have a topic already?" Sometimes it is already 5:30 or 6:00 pm and I have to admit that I don't have a topic and am at a loss for what to talk about. He takes the time to graciously provide me with source material.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank the Ribono shel Olam who has given me the tremendous zechus [merit] to do this. During the High Holidays, we say in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer, "Inscribe us in the Book of Merits". What does this mean? Either a person has the merit or he doesn't have the merit. We would think that "Merits" are not like "Life" or "Prosperity" or "Health" that one turns to the Almighty to request. One needs to earn merits on his own!

I once heard an explanation that we are asking the Ribon shel Olam to give us the OPPORTUNITY to do zechusim [meritorious deeds]. Many people just do not have the opportunity to do zechusim. That is why I thank the Ribono shel Olam that He has given me the zechus to spread the teachings of Torah over these many years.

How does one thank the Ribono shel Olam? Again, I thought long and hard about this. I looked into this question halachically and discussed it with others. The way one thanks the Ribono shel Olam is by reciting the She'hechyanu blessing. I am not one for melodrama or grandstanding, but I have consulted with many people on this matter and I would like to make a She'hechyanu this evening and I would like to recite it with Shem U'Malchus [mentioning G-d's Name and Kingship to give it the status of a bona fide bracha].

To that end, I went today and purchased a horned melon imported from New Zealand. I am also wearing a new suit. Even though (based on the ruling of my Rosh Yeshiva), I do not generally make a She'hechyanu on a new suit, but taking the combination of the new fruit, the new suit, and the special occasion, I am going to make a She'hechyanu. For good measure, I brought with me a bottle of schnaps. Even though I do not promote drinking and am not a drinker myself, I have very small shot glasses and I invite everyone after Ma'ariv to come and have a l'chayim with me.

"Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com  
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

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### **Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky (TorahWeb Foundation) You Can Be a Kohein and a King**

"V'atem tihyu Li mamlachos kohanim - and you should be for me a kingdom of kohanim." As a prerequisite to receiving the Torah, the Jewish people are commanded to become a kingdom of kohanim. This obligation is difficult to comprehend, since only a select group of individuals were chosen to be kohanim. Before the cheit haeigal this group was comprised of the first born, and afterwards the leviim, and specifically the descendants of Aharon, took their place. How, then, could the entire Jewish people be called upon to be kohanim?

A similar problem exists with the word "mamlachos - kingdom". This term refers to royalty, yet the realm of royalty is reserved for the tribe of Yehuda and specifically the descendants of Dovid Hamelech. How can the entire Jewish people be called upon to be kings when most of us are excluded from this role?

Upon further examination, we see that the kohein and the melech have dual roles. While our immediate association with being a kohein is serving in the Beis Hamikdash, each kohein served in the Beis Hamikdash for only a few days a year. The system of mishmaros which divided the kohanim into different groups and enabled each kohein to have a chance to serve in the Beis Hamikdash also limited each individual kohein to a small amount of time per year to actually offer korbanos. What else was the kohein expected to do during the year? When the Torah describes the talmidei chachamim who sat on the highest court, the beis din hagadol, it refers to them as kohanim, leviim v'shoftim. Even a yisroel can be part of the beis din hagadol, yet many of the greatest Torah leaders were kohanim and leviim. Furthermore, the navi Malachi describes in detail the kohein as the model teacher of Torah. Free from the responsibilities associated with owning land, the kohanim were expected to devote themselves to becoming the talmidei chachamim and teachers of the entire Jewish people.

Just as a kohein had a dual leadership role, so too did the melech. While the melech was the political and military leader, this was only one dimension of his leadership. The melech was also commanded to carry the sefer Torah with him constantly, thereby showing that the ultimate authority is Hashem and His word. Additionally, not only did the melech personally study the Torah, but he was charged with teaching the entire Jewish people its message. Every seven years during hakheil when the Jewish people as a whole learned Torah together in the Beis Hamikdash, it was the melech who was given the privilege to read from the Torah publicly.

The Rambam (Hil. Talmud Torah) elaborates on the three crowns that were presented to the Jewish people, i.e. the crowns of kehuna, malchus, and Torah. In contrast to the crowns of kehuna and malchus that were bestowed upon particular families, the crown of Torah was given to anyone who wants to acquire it through hard work and dedication to its study. However, the crown of Torah is not entirely distinct from the other two crowns. The crown of kehuna is made up not only of offering korbanos, but also of teaching Torah. Similarly, both the military and political leadership of the Jewish people as well as the communal teaching of Torah are included in the crown of malchus. Each and every Jew can become a partial kohein and melech, since the dimension of Torah study and teaching that is such an integral part of kehuna and malchus doesn't depend on genealogy.

As we approach zman mattan Toraseinu it is incumbent upon all of us to rededicate ourselves to our role of being a mamleches kohanim. Whether we are kohanim and melachim, i.e. formal teachers of Torah, or have followed any other calling in life, we are each required to respond to the call of mamleches kohanim. Let us each become, each in our own way, a proud member of the mamleches kohanim. By reaffirming our commitment to the Torah ideals of kehuna and malchus, may we merit to see the kohanim and the malchus beis Dovid teaching us the Torah in the Beis Hamikdash, bimeheira biyameinu.

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### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

#### **Jerusalem Day: The City of One Gate**

Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neria, a disciple of Rav Kook and noted author and educator, posed the following question two days after the liberation of the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967:

*Why is it that now we merited conquering the Old City, while in the 1948 War of Independence we did not?*

#### **A City 'Joined Together'**

The book of Psalms describes Jerusalem as a "city that was joined together" [122:3]. What is this 'joining' quality of Jerusalem? The Jerusalem Talmud [Baba Kama 7:7] explains that Jerusalem "joins each Jew to the other." Jerusalem is meant to be a focal point of unity and cohesion for the Jewish people.

The Sages in Zevachim 114b used a peculiar phrase when teaching that the Passover offering may only be brought in the city of Jerusalem. For this offering, the Talmud explains, it is necessary that "all of Israel enter

through one gate." This unusual expression of unity - 'entering through one gate' - rings with an amazing prophetic resonance.

During the War of Independence in 1948, the Palmach forces broke through Zion Gate, while the Etzel forces were ready to break through Damascus Gate. At that time, Rabbi Neria explained, we were divided and disunited. Had we succeeded then in conquering the city, there would have been arguments about who had captured the city and to whom does she belong. Jerusalem would have become a cause for conflict and dissension.

But Jerusalem was given to the entire Jewish people. As the Talmud [Yoma 12a] says, the city was not portioned out to one particular tribe. For this reason, it was only in 1967, when we approached the Old City united, with one army entering through one gate, that we merited regaining the city. The IDF, an army representing the national unity government of Israel - and the Jewish people all over the world - entered Jerusalem's Lions Gate and liberated the city.

Interestingly, we find a similar idea when the Jewish people first conquered Jerusalem. Jerusalem, the holiest city, the eternal home for the Holy Temple, was not conquered during Joshua's conquest of the Eretz Yisrael. Nor was it secured during the period of the Judges, a period lasting 400 years. Nor did King Saul capture it. Only when the Jewish people were united under the eternal dynasty of King David was Jerusalem delivered. The Biblical commentator Radak [Rabbi David Kimchi, 1160-1235] noted that the verse emphasizes this idea by stating, immediately following David's coronation in Hebron by all of the elders of Israel, "Then David and all of Israel went to Jerusalem" [I Chronicles 11:4].

#### **Second Reason for the Delay**

In a footnote, Rabbi Neria added a second, political explanation for delaying the liberation of the Old City until 1967. According to the UN partition plan, Jerusalem was supposed to be an international city under UN auspices. Had Jerusalem been captured in 1948, the newly formed state would have been forced to bow to pressure from the UN. (During the 19 years the Old City was under Jordanian occupation, for some reason no such pressure was placed on Jordan.)

In 1967, the situation was much different. The State of Israel was much stronger and less susceptible to international pressure. The UN was a weaker institution, and it was difficult to suddenly initiate diplomatic effort for the internationalization of Jerusalem after the issue had lain dormant for 19 years.

[adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah pp. 480-482]

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: RavKookList@gmail.com

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### **h a a r e t z**

#### **Portion of the Week / Between embracing and strangling**

##### **By Benjamin Lau**

The Talmud calls the Book of Numbers, which we begin reading this Sabbath, "Humash Hapekudim" (Torah of the Counting): It starts with the census conducted in the second year after the Exodus from Egypt and ends with the census conducted in the 40th year - before the entry into Canaan.

The Natziv - Rabbi Naphtali Tzvi Judah Berlin of Volozhin -explains the Talmud's title: "The book's essence is the transformation and changed behavior of God's nation from the beginning of its journey in the wilderness until the moment before the entry into Canaan. In the wilderness, they act ... in a completely supranatural way; in the Promised Land, they adopt a natural way of life governed by Divine Providence. That is the major change that begins while they are still in the wilderness - in the 40th year after the Exodus." The first part of Numbers describes a dependent nation that relies totally on God's mercy, eating the manna that descends every morning from the heavens. Wrapped in clouds of honor, it navigates its way in tandem with a pillar of cloud and fire. The Israelites complain like little spoiled children about every hardship, every problem and discomfort along the way. The latter part of Numbers describes an independent nation that can stand on its own two feet, fights a war to defend itself and capture territory, and prepares for a natural way of life in its homeland.

Numbers depicts the transition from childhood to maturity. It begins with a census and ends with one: "Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from 20 years old and upward" (Numbers 26:2). The Torah uses the root PKD over 80 times in the first two weekly readings of Numbers. It is undoubtedly the key word in these two readings. One meaning of the root is "to count" - the nation is counted (a census is taken) frequently. Rashi, who never overlooks unique verbal occurrences, writes about this point in the beginning of his commentary on the book: "Because he loves them so much, God counts them constantly." According to Rashi, God counts the Israelites so often out of love: I need to see you and count you every moment because I am worried, because I care.

Love, however, is not the only reason for a census, which can sometimes be driven by a patronizing attitude and a desire to dominate. During basic training, inductees are counted in the morning, at the entrance to the mess hall, in the evening, when there is an alert, as they are just walking along: "Call out your 'iron' numbers now!" (There are also the memories of my father and his generation; they remembered the endless hours of accursed census-taking under the eye of armed troops during the Holocaust.)

One sign that you are a seasoned soldier is your exemption from having to appear at roll call. What does it really mean, however, when I am not counted anymore? Am I still important to anyone? Does anyone care about me? How do veteran soldiers feel when they are no longer called up to military service because they "no longer count"? A patronizing attitude and love are logically connected. Commanders who worry about and love their soldiers count them, strangling them with overabundant love. Husbands far from their families constantly phone home, "counting" their wives in an attempt to dominate them continuously. We all recognize a certain degree of violence in this pressure, which encourages the pressured party to attempt an escape. The distance between embracing and strangling someone is hard to measure.

### **A patronizing beginning**

The structure of Numbers suggests a similar narrative. An entire nation wandering through the desert is dependent on the compassion of the Creator-Ruler who counts them incessantly. Initially, the situation looks good: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals" (Jeremiah 2:2). Knesset Yisrael (the Jewish people) is attracted by an eternal covenant with God. The Creator accompanies His allies, never taking His eyes off them for a moment. Unlike in "The Truman Show," they are aware of this surveillance and feel pressured. They continually seek to escape this connection with God: They complain, are lustful, disobey and weep. According to midrashic literature, the beginning was patronizing. A feeling of being pressured accompanied the "wedding covenant" between Knesset Yisrael and God: "We thus understand that God held the mountain threateningly above them like a wash tub, telling them, 'If you accept the Torah, fine; if not, this will be your burial place'" (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shabbat, page 88a).

The coercion and constant census-taking turned the Jewish people and God into a problematic married couple. The attempts to break free from the pressure led to increased pressure, which only encouraged the attempts to escape - a vicious circle. In this Sabbath's haftarah, Hosea reveals the possibility of another kind of relationship, by which God attempts to teach us how to emerge from the vicious circle. He asks Knesset Yisrael to come to a rendezvous so that they can talk; He wants to renew those elements that cemented their relationship when they were very much in love and to pave the way for a rehabilitation of their marriage, but on a different basis. The domination that was driven by love, but that strangled the other partner, will be replaced by discourse focused on loyalty and non-coercion: Knesset Yisrael will obey God willingly, not through pressure. Loyalty will replace obedience: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord" (2:19-20).

In the first conjugal model of census-taking, neither partner assumes responsibility. In the model Hosea proposes there is no census-taking because the couple is always together. The key word in the new relationship is responsibility: Each partner is loyal, taking responsibility

for the home and marriage. The new focus is love: "And it shall be at that day, saith the Lord, that thou shalt call me Ishi [my man]; and shalt call me no more Ba'ali [my husband/owner]" (Hos. 2:16).

Next week we celebrate Shavuot, the festival marking our receipt of the Torah. In hundreds of places throughout Israel, Jews will study all night, reconstructing that wedding night and hoping to renew and restore the connection

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### **Does Torah Have a Culture?**

#### **Why the Desert Was the Most Suitable Space for Torah**

**By Yosef Y. Jacobson (Algemeiner.com)**

A man comes home from an exhausting day at work, plops down on the couch in front of the television, and tells his wife, "Get me a beer before it starts." The wife sighs and gets him a beer. Fifteen minutes later, he says, "Get me another beer before it starts." She looks upset, but fetches another beer and slams it down next to him.

He finishes that beer and a few minutes later says, "Quick, get me another beer, it's going to start any minute." The wife is furious. She yells at him "Is that all you're going to do tonight? Drink beer and sit in front of that TV? You're nothing but a lazy, drunken, fat slob, and furthermore ..."

The man sighs and says, "It's started..."

#### **The Desert**

This week's Torah portion, named "Bamidbar," which means "in the desert," is always read on the Sabbath preceding the holiday of Shavuot, when we celebrate the giving of the Torah at Sinai, more than 3,300 years ago, in 1313 BCE (1).

#### **Why?**

One reason is because the Torah was given "bamidbar," in a desert. But that only carries the question over: Of all places, why indeed was Torah given in a desert? Our sages describe Sinai as the marriage between G-d and His people (2). Whoever heard of getting married in a barren desert?

The question should be further broadened. Why was it really necessary for the Jewish people to wander 40 years before entering the Promised Land? Was 210 years in Egypt, including more than 80 years of hard labor, not enough suffering? Why liberate them from Egypt only to put them through another 40 oppressive years (3)?

Today I wish to focus on three reasons for the relationship between Torah and the desert.

#### **Absolute Sublimity**

1) Had the Torah been given in a civilized city or community, people might have defined it as a product of a particular culture, milieu and environment. Sophisticated academics would explain to us the particular "genre" of Torah, as if it were an outdated, modern or post-modern piece of literature, an epic or lyric, a work of history, law, tragedy or philosophy. They would enlighten us as to whether Torah belonged to the time of the Athenians, the Hellenistic age, the Greco-Roman period, the Byzantine age or another period of civilization. Torah would be labeled, classified and qualified. It would be put into perspective.

But Torah cannot be put into a particular cultural or artistic perspective. Torah is not culture, literature, art, history or fiction. Torah embodies the eternal truths about existence, life and destiny that speak in every language, in every age, to every soul. The Torah cannot be reduced to a particular time frame or reference point. It benefits all the arts but never competes with them. Professor Abraham Joshua Heschel put it thus (4):

"Why does the Bible surpass everything created by man? Why is there no work worthy of comparison with it? Why is there no substitute for the Bible, no parallel to the history it has engendered? Why must all who seek the living G-d turn to its pages?"

"Set the Bible beside any of the truly great books produced by the genius of man and see how they are diminished in stature. The Bible shows no concern with literary form, with verbal beauty, yet its absolute sublimity rings through all its pages. Its lines are so monumental and at the same

time so simple that whomever tries to compete with them produces either a commentary or a caricature. It is a work we do not know how to assess. Other books you can estimate, you can measure, compare; the Bible you can only extol. Its insights surpass our standards. There is nothing greater. In three thousand years it has not aged a day. It is a book that cannot die. Oblivion shuns its pages."

"Absolute sublimity." Such a work must be given, taught and transmitted in a desert. A desert is not associated with any particular culture or form of living. A desert is barren, raw, plain. A desert is not sophisticated; it is real (5).

Ownerless

2) Had the Torah been given in a particular city or community, its inhabitants would have claimed copyrights on it. Had the Torah been given in Boro Park, Williamsburg or Monsey, these communities would claim "ownership" on Torah. "We know how to interpret Torah, how to assess it, how to appreciate it. It belongs to us." The same would hold true if the Torah was given in Benai Brak, Lakewood or the Upper West Side.

The desert, on the other hand, is ownerless. Nobody wants the desert (besides the Arabs, once the Jews settle it). It belongs to nobody. Torah, too, is ownerless. It belongs to every Jewish soul on earth. Nobody holds any "rights" to the Torah. It is the living, vibrant conversation of G-d with every living creature (6).

Life in the Fast Lane

3) Had the Torah been given in a civilized and splendid terrain, we might have believed that its objective was to guide and inspire beautiful lives, splendid hearts and glowing souls.

But that is not Torah.

Torah does not tell us that life is easy and that faith is bliss. On the contrary, we were placed in a personal and global wilderness, and life is a battle. And it is precisely this battle that G-d intended us to face, day in and day out. Do not be disturbed or demoralized, the Torah teaches, by your challenges, your demons, your inconsistencies and your weaknesses. Do not be shaken when you do not live up to your highest aspirations, and often do not actualize or maintain your inspiration. Do not be discouraged, because the Torah was given precisely to pave a road in the barren desert of the human psyche and in the jungle of history.

Had the Torah been given in a beautiful city, then all we would have is a guide on how to live in beauty, in ecstasy, in an oasis of light. But Torah came to teach us how to transform a desert into paradise.

That is how the spiritual masters explained the reason for the Torah being given on a mountain. Why a mountain, and not flat land?

A mountain is essentially elevated earth. That is the profound message of Torah: With earth, gravel, dirt and mud, you must battle. That is intrinsic to the human condition and the reality of our world. Yet you must remember that your mission is to elevate the earth, to introduce holiness and G-dliness into a mundane and soiled world (7).

G-d did not desire holy people doing holy things; he wanted unholy people doing holy things (8). He desired that earthly human beings become mountains of moral dignity and divine grace.

Footnotes:

1) Rambam Hilchos Tefilah 13:2. Tur and Schulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 428:4.

2) Mishnah Taanis 26b. Midrashim and commentaries on the Song of Songs. Cf. Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah chapter 10.

3) The Bible records that the wandering 40 years was a punishment for the sin of the spies who persuaded the people to reject their mission of entering the land of Israel. But certainly, G-d could have punished them in different ways. Why did He choose this particular consequence?

4) G-d In Search Of Man pp. 240-242.

5) A similar idea is expressed in Midrash Rabah Bamidbar 19:26 and Midrash Tanchumah Chukas 21.

6) Yalkut Shemoni to Yesro Remez 275.

7) Sefer Hamaamarim 5655 p. 188.

8) See Tanya chapters 27; 36.

Posted on June 10, 2005

**Hama'ayan - Parshas Bamidbar (torah.org)**

**Children Guarantee**

**Bemidbar 2 Sivan 5767, May 19, 2007**

**Sponsored by the Katz family on the yearzeits of Avigdor Moshe ben Avraham Abba Hakohen Katz a"h and the other kedoshim of Oyber Visheve, Hungary**  
**Today's Learning: Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 16, Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Pesachim 41**

Parashat Bemidbar, which is devoted in part to the genealogy of the Jewish People, is nearly always read on the Shabbat preceding Shavuot. A number of midrashim observe that this is not coincidental. One midrash states, for example, that the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael because of their genealogy.

R' Shmuel Guenzler z"l (rabbi of Oyber Visheve, Hungary; died 1911) explains in light of another midrash which states: When Yisrael stood at Har Sinai, Hashem asked them, "Who will guarantee your observance of Torah?" Bnei Yisrael answered, "Our forefathers," but Hashem responded that those were not adequate guarantors. "Our children," Bnei Yisrael then said, and Hashem responded, "Your children are certainly good guarantors." This, the midrash concludes, is the meaning of the verse (Tehilim 8:3), "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have established oz / strength." ["Oz" refers to the Torah, as is written (Tehilim 29:11), "Hashem will give oz to His nation."] And, this, writes R' Guenzler, is the meaning of the midrash that the Torah was given because of our genealogy, i.e., our children.

However, this itself requires explanation. How do our children serve as guarantors of our mitzvah observance? R' Guenzler explains further:

Yet another midrash teaches that Hashem sent His Torah into this world only on the condition that He could reside near it, so-to-speak. This is why the Mishkan and, later, the Bet Hamikdash, were built. But what about when there is no Bet Hamikdash? The Gemara (Shabbat 119b) teaches that the world exists in the merit of the Torah study of young children. They are the "mishkan." Why is the Torah study of young children so precious? After all, a seasoned adult scholar studies on a far deeper and more meaningful level! Nevertheless, the Torah uttered by the mouths of children - mouths not yet sullied by sins such as lashon hara (because the sins of children do not "count") - is very dear to Hashem. (Meishiv Nefesh)

*"Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by number of the names, every male according to their head count."* (Bemidbar 1:2)

R' Amram Zvi Gruenwald z"l (dayan / rabbinical court judge in Oyber Visheve; later rabbi in the Fernwald Displaced Persons camp) observes: At the end of last week's parashah we read (Vayikra 27:33-34), "He shall not distinguish between good and bad and he should not substitute for it . . . These are the commandments that Hashem commanded Moshe to Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai." Verse 33 teaches that when one sets aside Ma'aser Beheimah / a tithe from his animals, he must give each tenth animal regardless of its quality. Then, verse 34, by placing "These are the commandments . . ." right after the just-mentioned halachah, teaches us to have the same attitude toward all mitzvot. This alludes to the Mishnah (Avot ch.2), "Be as careful with a seemingly light mitzvah as with a seemingly strict mitzvah, for you do not know the reward associated with each mitzvah." Finally, our verse, by being placed next to the preceding two verses, teaches us to practice a similar attitude towards all people. (Zichron Amram Zvi)

*"And with you shall be one ish / man from each tribe; ish / a man who is a leader of his father's household."* (Bemidbar 1:4)

The word "ish" commonly denotes a person of spiritual stature. Why? R' Chaim Yehuda Meir Hager z"l (the Vishever Rebbe in Tel Aviv; died 1968) explains: The Mishnah (end of Masechet Uktzin) teaches, "Hashem is destined to reward each tzaddik with 310 worlds." Our Sages also teach that: "One hour of Torah and good deeds in this world is worth more than an entire lifetime of Olam Haba." The gematria of ish equals 311, one more than the number of worlds in the tzaddik's reward. This signifies the

Torah and good deeds -- more valuable than Olam Haba -- that the man of stature performs.

(Zecher Chaim)

*"These were the kru'ai / ones summoned by the assembly, the leaders of their fathers' tribes, they are the heads of Israel's thousands." (Bemidbar 1:16)*

The word kru'ai, which should be spelled "kuf-raish-vav-aleph-yud," is in fact spelled with an extra yud instead of the vav, as if it said kree'ai. Why?

R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (rabbi and rosh yeshiva of Oyber Visheve and other Hungarian towns; died 1928) explains:

The greatest Jewish leaders have also been the most humble. The most obvious example is Moshe Rabbeinu, about whom we read (Bemidbar 12:3), "Now the man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth." Likewise, King David was very humble and said about himself (Tehilim 22:7), "I am a worm and not a man."

At the beginning of the Book of Vaykira, the word "Vayikra" ("He called [to Moshe]") is written with a small letter aleph, as if the word really was "Vayikar" ("He happened [upon Moshe]"). Hashem allowed Moshe to write the Torah this way in deference to Moshe's humility. Similarly, here, writes R' Gruenwald, writing that the leaders of the tribes were "kree'ai" rather than "kru'ai" implies a certain degree of happenstance, in deference to their humility.

(Keren L'David)

*"Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered an alien fire before Hashem in the Wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children." (Bemidbar 3:4)*

This verse mentions two of the reasons that our Sages give for why Nadav and Avihu died: (1) they introduced an "alien" fire onto the altar in the Mishkan, and (2) they never married.

R' Mendel Hager z"l (rabbi, rosh yeshiva, and chassidic rebbe of Oyber Visheve; died 1941) explains that these are really two sides of one coin. Why did Nadav and Avihu never marry? Because they thought that earthly matters such as marriage have no place in the lives of people dedicated to holiness, such as themselves. Of course, they were wrong, as that is not the Torah's attitude. Indeed, their error may be seen in the halachah that even though G-d sends a fire from heaven to burn on the altar, man is obligated to light a fire there as well. The Torah in fact expects earthly matters to be elevated to spirituality, not to be shunned entirely.

Given Nadav and Avihu's attitude, however, it was inconsistent for them to introduce an earthly fire onto the altar. That is why they were punished. (She'airit Menachem)

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### The Alter on the Parsha –

**Shmuessin of Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, The Alter of Slabodka –**

**adapted from Sefer Ohr HaTzafun**

**Edited & Compiled by Rabbi Eliezer Grunberg Chaver Kollel Ner David**

**PARSHAS Bamidbar 5767 - ממדי חסד ה'**

**(ביום הכותי כל בכור בארץ מצרים הקדשתי לי כל בכור בישראל" (במדבר ג':י"ג'))**

**"On the day that I smote the firstborn of Egypt, I made all the firstborn of Israel holy to Me." (Bamidbar 3:13)**

When Hashem killed the firstborn Egyptians, the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael were also fearful for their lives. In remuneration for this pain, Hashem raised the status of the Jewish firstborn and imbued them with a special holiness, as the posuk says, "On the day that I smote the firstborn of Egypt, I made all the firstborn of Israel holy to Me."

The fear that the firstborn experienced was truly minimal. Hashem had explicitly promised that the Jewish people would be spared from this plague, making clear to all the distinction between Egypt and Israel (ע' שמות י"א:א'). Hashem had commanded the Jews to place the blood of the Korban Pesach on their doorposts as a sign, so that the plague would pass over their houses. Moreover, the Jews had already seen Hashem's amazing miracles and His continuous protection of the Jewish people. There was no

reason for them to fear; on the contrary, seeing Hashem's clear separation between them and the Egyptians should have generated great joy. Furthermore, Makas Bechoros was the catalyst for the actual redemption from Egypt; Pharaoh, fearing for his own life, awoke in the middle of the night and hastily chased the Jews out of Mitzrayim.

Yet the feeling of fear was not totally absent from their hearts, and the Jewish firstborn suffered a slight degree of anguish and distress. Hashem acknowledged this pain and, in His ultimate kindness, bestowed upon them a unique holiness in exchange. Although all of Klal Yisrael, during the first nine plagues, felt essentially the same fear, the firstborn experienced these feelings during the last plague, when the rest of Klal Yisrael did not. It was in merit of this additional, though minute, anguish that they obtained this extraordinary level of holiness.

The love that Hashem has for us and the good that He wishes to bestow upon us is beyond our imagination. Any pain or distress that we experience is extremely significant in the eyes of Hashem. Recognizing the extent of Hashem's love and the kindness that we receive from Him can, in turn, arouse our love for Hashem and our desire to serve Him. Our role is to follow in the ways of Hashem; we must develop deep concern for the pain and suffering of our fellow human beings, no matter how minute.

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**Bamidbar - Torah Study Shavuot Night**

**Rabbi Asher Meir**

Perhaps the most prominent custom of the Shavuot holiday is to stay up at night studying Torah. This custom is mentioned in the Zohar, which explains the importance of this custom by an interesting analogy (Zohar on Emor III:97-98).

The Zohar likens the period of counting Omer to the process of a woman going through her monthly period of purification. At the beginning of this period, there is a need for separation due to the actual cause of ritual impurity. Afterwards, there is a period of seven clean days. Then the woman is able to immerse, and afterwards she is permitted to be with her husband. The Zohar understands these as spiritual steps: the seven clean days are a kind of psychological and spiritual preparation to return to a state of full togetherness; even when this readiness is achieved, there is still a need for the act of purification. Purity is not just the lack of impurity; it can be achieved only through active participation.

This is parallel to the process involved in the redemption from Egypt. In Egypt the Jews were at first actually involved in an Egyptian lifestyle which was an active source of spiritual defilement. Then they brought an end to this alien influence when they brought the Pesach sacrifice. (See Rashi on Shemot 12:6.) Afterwards they began the seven week period of psychological and spiritual preparation for receiving the Torah, reaching the stage where they were willing to proclaim, "We will do and we will listen!" (Shemot 24:7.) Finally they purified themselves in the three days of separation.

According to the Zohar, we go through this same process each year, though on a smaller scale. At Pesach we receive a certain spiritual enlightenment from on high which can move us towards holiness; afterwards we begin to count the Omer, each day corresponding to a further rung on our climb towards perfection. If we have carried out the count properly, counting each night to devote each full day to another step upwards, then on Shavuot we are fully ready to receive the Torah.

Torah study on Shavuot night corresponds to immersion in a mikveh. One way of understanding this is to suggest that the stages of ascent we go through during the Omer period are primarily connected to our personal qualities and interpersonal behavior, not specifically to Torah. This makes sense on several levels. First of all, immediately following the Exodus we had not yet received the Torah. Second of all, it would constitute a repair which exactly corresponds to the flaw behind the mournful character of these days: the students of Rabbi Akiva who failed to treat each other with respect. (Yevamot 62b.) Also, it is specifically during these days that we study Pirkei Avot, which focuses particularly on our character traits. Finally the days and weeks are numbered according to those spiritual

qualities known as "midot", corresponding to our personal characteristics which we also call midot.

However, as we well recognize from today's pop spirituality, "personal growth" can also be a kind of idolatry. Before we receive the Torah, we need to demonstrate that our personal growth is not an end in itself but rather a means to make us worthy of hearing and carrying out HaShem's will, by accepting the Torah. We show this by not counting Omer on the final night but rather by immersing ourselves in Torah study.

It is interesting to note that the Zohar does not state that all should spend the entire night in study. It states that this was the special level of the earliest pious ones, the chasidim rishonim. This observation reinforces the general recommendation based on the revealed Torah, that a person shouldn't stay up all night if this will prevent interfere with performing mitzvot properly - for example, if tiredness prevents proper concentration during prayer or the Torah or Megillah reading.

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## YatedUSA Parshas Bamidbar 5 Sivan 5767

### Halacha Discussion

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

#### Candle-Lighting on Shavuos

Question: On erev Shavuos, when should ladies light the Yom Tov candles ?

Discussion: There are two basic customs regarding the time of candle-lighting on Yom Tov. Since it is permissible to light candles on Yom Tov proper, there are two options. Some women<sup>1</sup> light at the same time that they light every erev Shabbos, approximately 18 minutes before sunset. Although they could delay the lighting till later, it is meritorious to usher in the Yom Tov by lighting candles as is done on every erev Shabbos. Others<sup>2</sup> light candles on Yom Tov after the men come home from shul and before the meal begins. Since the purpose of candle lighting is primarily to enhance and honor the meal, they light as close to the meal as possible. Each one of these customs has valid halachic sources and reasons, and women should continue the practice of their mothers.

Some<sup>3</sup> suggest that on the Yom Tov of Shavuos it is advisable for women to light candles on Yom Tov itself and not before sunset. This is because the Torah commands that Shavuos commence on the fiftieth day of the counting of the Omer. The fiftieth day does not begin until nightfall. Since many women have the custom of reciting the blessing of shehecheyanu along with their candle-lighting, and the recitation of shehecheyanu represents the unconditional acceptance of the Yom Tov,<sup>4</sup> if they were to light before sunset it would be considered as if Shavuos had begun for them before nightfall of the fiftieth day.<sup>5</sup> It would be preferable, therefore, to light candles after nightfall. But other poskim do not consider this to be an issue and permit candle-lighting before sunset.<sup>6</sup> The custom follows their opinion.

A lady lighting candles after sunset should recite the blessing first and then light the candles.<sup>7</sup> A lady lighting candles before sunset has the choice to light first and then recite the blessing as she does every Shabbos, or to recite the blessing first and then light the candles. Both customs have legitimate sources and reasons.<sup>8</sup>

When Shavuos (or any Yom Tov) falls on Friday night, and women light candles for both Shabbos and Yom Tov, the blessing must be said for both occasions. If a woman forgot that it is also Shabbos and lit candles for Yom Tov only, she must light another candle and recite the blessing over Shabbos and Yom Tov<sup>9</sup>. If she forgot that it is Yom Tov and lit candles for Shabbos only, she should ask her husband or another person to light candles for Yom Tov and that person should make the blessing<sup>10</sup>.

Question: We mentioned previously that many women recite shehecheyanu when they light Yom Tov candles. Why do some women omit this blessing?

Discussion: The validity of the custom to recite shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time, a prevalent long-standing custom,<sup>11</sup> has been extensively debated by the poskim.<sup>12</sup> The preferred time to recite shehecheyanu is right after the recitation of Kiddush, while the cup of wine is still being

held aloft. Since ladies listen and answer amen to the shehecheyanu which is recited after Kiddush, there is no halachic reason for them to recite this very blessing when they light candles. There are other halachic objections as well.<sup>13</sup> Still, since many women are inspired by the important mitzvah of candle-lighting and feel the need to express their joy at that time, the custom evolved of reciting shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time. Most poskim feel that while we do not encourage this practice, we need not object to it and the ladies who recite their own shehecheyanu at candle-lighting time may continue to do so.<sup>14</sup>

Question: Some women do not blow out the flame of the match, lighter, etc. after lighting candles on erev Shabbos; instead, they allow the flame to extinguish on its own. They do this in order to avoid transgressing a Shabbos Labor — "Extinguishing" — once they have accepted Shabbos with the kindling of the candles. Should all women observe this custom?

Discussion: No, they need not do so. It is permitted to extinguish the flame after lighting candles as long as one does so before reciting the blessing of l'hadlik ner shel Shabbos. Although Shulchan Aruch does note the custom of "some" women who are careful not to put out the flame after lighting candles,<sup>15</sup> this custom no longer applies today when all women (who follow the Ashkenazi custom<sup>16</sup>) recite the blessing over the candles after kindling them. Since Shabbos does not begin until after the blessing is recited, there is ample time to blow out the flame before reciting the blessing.<sup>17</sup>

Question: Does the same halachah apply to Yom Tov?

Discussion: On Yom Tov when many women follow the custom of reciting the blessing before lighting candles,<sup>18</sup> care should be taken not to put out the flame after lighting them. This is because once Yom Tov has begun, it is forbidden to extinguish a fire. The match, therefore, should be carefully put aside and allowed to extinguish on its own or she may hand it over to another person to extinguish it.<sup>19</sup> [A woman who is afraid to allow a match to extinguish on its own should light her candles first, blow out the match, and then recite the blessing, as she does on a regular erev Shabbos.<sup>20</sup> Of course, she may do this only if she lit candles before sunset. If she is lighting after Yom Tov has begun, she may not put out the flame.]

Question: On Yom Tov, may one use a match to transfer a flame from one place to another?

Discussion: The general rule is that on Yom Tov it is prohibited to create a new fire,<sup>21</sup> but it is permitted to transfer an existing fire from one place to the next. The application of this principle is as follows:

- It is forbidden to strike a match to create a new fire.<sup>22</sup>
- It is permitted to place a match on a red-hot electric coil in order to ignite the match. This is considered transferring an existing fire from place to place, for a red-hot coil is halachically equivalent to fire.<sup>23</sup>
- It is forbidden to place a match near or on a hot electric coil in order to ignite the match. This is considered creating a new fire,<sup>24</sup> since the hot coil is merely a heat source and not actually "fire," as a red-hot coil would be.

It is questionable whether or not it is permitted to ignite a match by placing it near a red-hot coil (or by touching it to a hot light bulb). Some poskim permit it, since an existing fire (the red-hot coil or the "fire" in the bulb) is merely being transferred; nothing new is being created.<sup>25</sup> Others, however, hold that transferring a fire is permitted only when the fire itself is being transferred, but not when one is transferring the heat which emanates from that fire.<sup>26</sup>

(Footnotes)

1 Match Efrayim (625:33); Be'er Heitev 503:4 quoting the Shelah.

2 Minchas Shmuel (30). See Mishnas Ya'avetz (34) for a full explanation of the two customs.

3 See Piskei Teshuvos 494:2, based on Luach Eretz Yisrael.

4 Consequently, some poskim maintain that women should not make a precondition that they are not accepting the Yom Tov at candle-lighting (which otherwise may be done when needed) if shehecheyanu will be recited at the time; see Kaf ha-Chayim 514:112, Tzitz Eliezer 10:19, for a complete discussion.

5 See Lehoros Nasan 7:31 who explains that even if women are exempt from the counting of the Omer, they are still commanded to accept the day of Shavuot on the fiftieth day of the counting.

6 Halichos Shelomo, Moadim 2:12-2.

7 Mateh Efrayim 625:33 and Elef l'Mateh 50.

8 Mishnah Berurah 263:27.

9 Responsa Maharam Brisk 2:44. See also Kinyan Torah 6:11.

10 Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 44:5. 11 Mateh Efrayim 581:4; 619:4.

12 See Sh'eilas Ya'avetz 107, Kaf ha-Chayim 263:40 and Moadim u'Zemanim 7:117 quoting the Brisker Rav.

13 See she'ilas Ya'avetz 107.

14 Sha'arei Teshuvah 263:5; Mishnah Berurah 263:23; Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:12; Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 585:2; Halichos Shelomo, Moadim 2:9-22.

15 O.C. 263:10.

16 Most Sefaradim, however, recite the blessing before kindling; Yechaveh Da'as 2:33.

17 Aruch ha-Shulchan 263:14; Yechaveh Da'as 2:33, quoting Mateh Yehudah 263:2. [Note that Mishnah Berurah does not disagree with this; indeed, he repeatedly rules that Shabbos begins after the blessing is recited; see 263:21 and 27. See also Da'as Torah 263:5 (s.v. v'yesh).] Chayei Adam and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, too, do not mention the custom of allowing the flame to extinguish by itself. See also addendum to Shulchan Shlomo, vol. 1, pg. 19.

18 As ruled by Mishnah Berurah 263:27.

19 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasah 43, note 179).

20 Based on the ruling of the Magen Avraham (263:12) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (75:4), who rule that women should light on erev Yom Tov exactly as they do on erev Shabbos: first light the candles and then recite the blessing.

21 Because of the prohibition of molid — creating a new entity. For this reason it is forbidden to turn on an electric light or appliance on Yom Tov.

22 Mishnah Berurah 502:4. Under extenuating circumstances, it is permitted to ask a non-Jew to do so; Shevet ha-Levi 8:121.

23 Chazon Ish (quoted in Imrei Yosher, Nashim 70 and in Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 2, pg. 104); Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:75.

24 Mishnah Berurah 502:4. See Az Nidberu 7:61.

25 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos k'Hilchasah 13:3 and note 13); Yabia Omer 2:27.

26 Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Orchos Rabbeinu, vol. 2, pg. 104); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Hilchos ha-Mo'adim 8, note 10); Tzitz Eliezer 7:27-5.

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## R. Joshua Flug (YUTorah)

### The Minhag of Eating Dairy Products on Shavuot

There is longstanding minhag to eat dairy products on Shavuot in lieu of the traditional meat meals that are eaten on other festivals. This article will explore the various reasons for this tradition and the halachic underpinnings of each reason. It will also cover the practical differences between each reason.

#### The Availability of Meat After Matan Torah

Perhaps the most famous reason for eating dairy products is the reason given by Mishna Berurah 494:12. Mishna Berurah suggests that at the time of Matan Torah, the receiving of the Torah, the Jewish people became obligated in all of the mitzvot of the Torah. As such, in order to eat meat, they would have had to follow the complex procedure involved in producing kosher meat. Because this procedure required time in order to properly prepare the meat, the only food items available immediately after Matan Torah were dairy products. The tradition of eating dairy products on Shavuot serves to commemorate the Matan Torah experience when the Jewish people were only able to eat dairy products.

R. Shalom B. Felman, Shalmei Todah, no. 2, notes that there is dispute recorded in the Gemara, Shabbat 87a, as to whether Matan Torah occurred on Shabbat. The reason given by Mishna Berurah follows the opinion that Matan Torah did not occur on Shabbat. The commandment to keep Shabbat preceded Matan Torah (see Shabbat 87b). Regardless of whether or not it was difficult to prepare kosher meat after Matan Torah, the Jewish people would not have been able to prepare meat on Shabbat. Therefore, according to the opinion that Matan Torah occurred on Shabbat, and the commandment to keep Shabbat was already in effect, the lack of ability to eat meat would be attributed to Shabbat and not to Matan Torah. One must then find a different reason for eating dairy products on Shavuot.

#### A Remembrance of the Shte HaLechem

Rama, Orach Chaim 494:2 suggests that the minhag of eating dairy products on Shavuot serves as a remembrance of the shte halechem (two bread) offering that was brought on Shavuot during the times of the Beit HaMikdash. Rama suggests that the minhag of eating dairy products does not replace the traditional meat meal eaten on Yom Tov. Rather, one starts the meal eating dairy products, and mid-way through the meal, one removes the dairy products, and replaces them with meat products. Upon replacing the dairy products with the meat products, one is required to remove the bread eaten during the dairy portion of the meal, and replace it with bread that was not used with a dairy meal (See Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 89:4). By using two separate sets of bread, one commemorates the shte halechem offering.

This reason presumes that there is an actual requirement to remove the bread that was eaten with the dairy products and replace it with bread suitable to eat with meat. However, R. Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:38, notes that the prohibition to eat a meat meal with bread that was eaten with dairy products only applies to the smaller pieces of bread that might have come into contact with dairy products. The loaf of bread on the table may be used during the meat meal. If so, there is no need for two separate sets of bread. Nevertheless, R. Feinstein admits that although there is no obligation to remove the bread eaten with the dairy meal, it is certainly praiseworthy. Perhaps R. Feinstein understands that if one removes the bread eaten with the dairy meal as a matter of added stringency, this also constitutes a commemoration of the shte halechem offering.

#### The First Opportunity to Eat Dairy Products

R. Moshe Shternbuch, Moadim U'Zemanim 8:319, presents a novel approach toward the minhag to eat dairy products on Shavuot. The Gemara, Bechorot 6b, questions why consuming milk products does not constitute a violation of ever min hachai, eating from a live animal. The Gemara states that the permissibility of milk is derived from the verse (Shemot 3:8) that refers to the land of Israel as erez zavav chalav udevash, a land flowing with milk and honey. If milk was actually prohibited, the Torah would not have praised Israel with such an accolade.

R. Shternbuch suggests that the permissibility derived from this verse did not go into effect until Matan Torah. Prior to Matan Torah, consuming milk products constituted a violation of ever min hachai, which is prohibited even for non-Jews. Therefore, after Matan Torah the Jewish people had their first opportunity to consume milk products. Since milk products were novel to the Jewish people, they likely ate mostly milk products in the ensuing days. To commemorate this unique event, the minhag developed that dairy products are eaten on Shavuot.

R. Shternbuch admits that there is a problem with this interpretation. Shita Mekubetzet, ad loc., questions the Gemara's choice of the source that milk is permitted. He suggests that one can derive that milk is permitted from Avraham Avinu. The verse (Bereishit 18:8) states that Avraham offered milk to his three visitors. If milk was actually prohibited, Avraham would not have offered it to them. Shita Mekubetzet explains that one cannot derive from Avraham that milk is permitted. When Avraham offered milk to his guests he did not know that they were angels. He thought they were non-Jews, and therefore offered them milk. Therefore, there is no proof from this event that milk is permitted to Jewish people. The Gemara must then prove the permissibility of milk from a different source; from erez zavav chalav udevash.

It is clear from Shita Mekubetzet's interpretation that there was never a question if milk is permitted for non-Jews. The only question is whether it is permitted to Jews. Therefore, it is illogical to assume that the Jewish people would have refrained from partaking of milk products prior to Matan Torah.

#### We Are Not Like the Angels

The event involving Avraham and the angels serves as an alternative source for the minhag of eating dairy products on Shavuot. The verse states that Avraham not only gave milk to the angels, he gave them meat as well. The Midrash, Midrash Tehillim ch.8, relates that when the Jewish people

were receiving the Torah, the angels complained that the Torah should not be given to mortal human beings who cannot possibly keep the Torah. The Almighty responded "was it not you who descended upon Avraham and ate milk and meat together?"

R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik of Brisk, Beit HaLevi, Parshat Yitro, explains that the angels didn't eat actual basar b'chalav (meat and milk cooked together). Rather, they weren't meticulous in the various laws of eating meat subsequent to eating dairy products. Therefore, on Shavuot, the minhag developed to eat dairy products followed by meat. By doing so with the proper meticulousness, we show that we are not like the angels, and we are indeed worthy of receiving the Torah.

#### Conclusion

Four approaches were presented to explain the basis for eating dairy products on Shavuot. Rama's approach, as well as Beit HaLevi's approach assume that the minhag entails eating dairy products followed by meat products. Mishna Berurah's approach as well as R. Shternbuch's approach do not necessarily assume that one should eat meat subsequent to the dairy products.

The discrepancy is reflected in various family traditions. Some family traditions call for eating dairy products exclusively. Other family traditions insist on eating meat after eating dairy products. The different traditions are due to both varied interpretations of the minhag as well as the various positions on simchat Yom Tov (as discussed in last week's issue).

R. Joshua Flug is the Rosh Kollel of the Boca Raton Community Kollel, YUTorah

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#### TALMUDIGEST :: Yevamot 16 - 22

For the week ending 19 May 2007 / 2 Sivan 5767

from Ohr Somayach | [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

#### HOW TO BE HOLY Yevamot 20a

What makes a person holy?

Holiness is achieved, says the Sage Rava, by sanctifying yourself through abstaining even from what is permitted to you.

Rava offered this definition in regard to the term "kedusha prohibitions" used by some Sages to describe the distant relatives that are forbidden as marriage partners by rabbinic law. "Kedusha" means holiness and it is applied to the laws which the Sages instituted as a "fence around the Torah" to ensure that Jews would not marry relatives forbidden by Torah law.

The nazir who abstains from wine that is permitted for drinking is referred to in the Torah as a kadosh - a holy one. In similar fashion, points out Maharsha, the laws that compel Jews to refrain from marrying relatives permitted by the Torah are laws of holiness.

Although Rava specifically addressed the issue of forbidden marriages, his formula for holiness has been applied by the great ethicists to every area of life. Only when one is prepared to sacrifice even what is permitted to him in order to discipline and elevate himself can he be considered holy.

#### WHAT THE SAGES SAY

"The penalty for cheating the public by selling to them through crooked weights and measures is greater than that for illicit sexual relations because one can repent for the latter but not for the former. (Since he is not aware whom he cheated he finds it impossible to make amends. - Rashi)"

Rabbi Levi - Yevamot 21a

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#### The Weekly Daf :: Yevamot 20 - 26

For the week ending 19 May 2007 / 2 Sivan 5767

from Ohr Somayach | [www.ohr.edu](http://www.ohr.edu)

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

#### Taking Things Literally

A purely literal reading of the Torah can sometimes be misleading. The classic example in regard to a mitzvah is the Torah command for the brother of a man who died childless to perform yibum by marrying the widow. "The first-born to whom she shall give birth," says the Torah

(Devarim 25:6), "shall take the name of the deceased brother." Literally understood, this would require the couple involved in yibum to name their first-born son after his deceased uncle.

This however, is not the case. Our Sages had a tradition going back to Sinai that just as the term "name" used by Yaakov in regard to the tribal status of Yosef's children (Bereishet 48:6) obviously refers to inheritance rather than to the given name, so too does the term "name" in the case of yibum refer to inheritance. The passage should then be understood in this way: The oldest of the surviving brothers has the prime responsibility for performing yibum, and if he — or any of the other brothers in the event that he refuses — marries the widow, he inherits her husband's share in his father's estate.

Reflecting upon this radically non-literal interpretation, the Sage Rava commented that this is an exception to the general rule of Biblical interpretation that requires us to apply the literal interpretation of a passage in addition to any other interpretations that it communicates. This is the one instance, he notes, where the literal interpretation is completely abandoned.

It is this statement of Rava that led some commentaries to an interesting conclusion regarding another mitzvah. "You shall not place a stumbling block in the path of a blind man," the Torah commands us (Vayikra 19:14), and our Sages interpret this as a ban on giving bad advice or assisting someone in violating Torah law. This interpretation of the Oral Law was not accepted by the Kuttim who adhered to the Written Law only. They understood this literally as a ban on placing a stone in the path of a blind man (Rashi, Mesechta Chullin 3a). What about us — do we include this literal interpretation in the Torah ban along with the other aforementioned ones, or do we consider it to be completely abandoned?

Two sides of the case are presented in the discussion of this matter, both in the Minchat Chinuch (Mitzvah 232) and the Ohr Somayach in his Meshech Chochma commentary on the Torah. (Yevamot 24a)

#### Perversion of Conversion

If someone converts to Judaism out of a fear of lions, the Sages differ as to whether that conversion is valid. Although Rabbi Nechemia disqualifies any conversion not purely motivated by a desire to be Jewish, the halacha follows the opposing view which rules that even such a conversion is valid. Who are these mysterious converts out of fear of lions?

Rashi refers us to the Kuttim, who King Sancherib of Assyria brought from their native land to Eretz Yisrael to replace the ten tribes he exiled to their land. After settling in the cities of Samaria and continuing their idolatrous ways, they were attacked by lions sent by Heaven. When they complained to the king, he sent them one of the exiled kohanim to teach them the ways of Hashem, and they converted to Judaism (Melachim II 17:24-28).

Tosefot rejects this explanation, because the conversion of the Kuttim was not only improperly motivated but also a sham. "They feared Hashem," we read in a passage in that same chapter (ibid. 17:3), "and worshipped their gods." The converts to which our gemara refers, Tosefot concludes, were those who out of fear of lions made a genuine conversion.

There is a dispute in Mesechta Chullin (3b) as to whether the Kuttim were genuine converts. Tosefot's understanding is that there is a consensus, based on the above passage, that their initial conversion was a sham since they continued worshipping their idols. The opinion that they were genuine converts is based on a tradition that after becoming familiar with Judaism, they made a genuine conversion and abandoned idol worship. This explains why we find the Kuttim mentioned in mishnayot as Jews. But even according to this view, there were problems with these converts, beginning with their degeneration into rejecting the Oral Law and culminating with the discovery that they were secretly worshipping idols which led to their being totally discredited as Jews. The gemara in Mesechta Chullin (6a) reports that when Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi, two of the leading Sages in the post-Mishnaic era, learned of this duplicity "they did not leave their place of judgment until they declared the Kuttim to be considered non-Jews." (Yevamot 24b)

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Please address all comments and requests to  
HAMELAKET@hotmail.com