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Matan Torah: Singular Event, Two Narratives

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS • Morah D'asra, Congregation Beth Abraham, Bergenfield, NJ

Parshas Hageirus / The Conversion Narrative Tucked away after the lengthy legal discourses of Parshas Mishpatim and prior to the launching of the even lengthier detailed description of the Mishkan requirements, Hashem recorded an understated eleven-verse narrative. Woven around the story of the writing and reading of the first sefer Torah, this portion describes Moshe building twelve pillars, one for each tribe, and sprinkling the Jews with blood of their sacrifices. The events climax with a penetrating and puzzling vision that reassures us that Hashem was watching over us even as we were suffering terribly, even during His apparent hiddenness from us.

4 Moshe wrote all of the words of Hashem, and he woke in the morning and built an altar under the mountain and twelve pillars corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5 And he sent the youth of the people of Israel and they brought burnt offerings and offered peace offerings to Hashem using bulls. 6 Moshe took half of the blood and placed it in basins, and the other half, he sprinkled on the altar. 7 He took the Book of the Covenant and he read it to the nation and they said "Everything that Hashem said, we will do and we will follow." 8 Moshe took the blood and sprinkled it on the nation and said "Behold this is the blood of the covenant that Hashem created with you on these matters." 9 Moshe went up with Aharon, Nadav, Avihu and seventy of the elders of Israel. 10 They saw the God of Israel and under His feet was like a work of paved sapphire and the very essence of Heaven in its purity. Shemot 24

Though this story is understudied as a biblical narrative, the rabbis of later years teased out from these verses all the necessary elements of conversion. That means to say that they saw here a description of the "conversion" of

the Sinai generation. Indeed later scholars would entertain whether the laws of conversion were consistently applied to that generation.

When this process took place is debated by Rashi and Ramban. Whereas Ramban understands that the text follows in chronological order and that this covenant took place on the day after Matan Torah, Rashi sees it as a flashback to the preparatory days leading up to revelation. This is part of Rashi and Ramban's deliberations on the interpretation and application of the Talmudic principle *ain mukdam ume'uchar baTorah*, passages in the Torah are not necessarily written in chronological order.

Simply put, the rabbis of the Talmud stated that chronology need not be the driving organizer of the Torah narratives. While Rashi applies this principle broadly throughout Torah, the Ramban understands that it refers to a specific parsha in Bamidbar where the recorded dating clearly indicates that the chronological order of the texts was ignored. Beyond that episode, argues Ramban, almost all the narratives of the Torah text follow in their natural sequence.

Thus Ramban explains that this parsha occurred just after the content of the entire Parshas Mishpatim was taught. It precedes Moshe's return to the top of Sinai for the next forty days but it represents a more informed covenant than the one that took place the day before:

Behold, Moshe wrote in the Book on that day all that he was commanded, statutes, laws and commandments, and he awoke the next morning to create a covenant on all of it. He built an altar and offered sacrifices and placed half the blood on the altar of Hashem and half in basins. He took the Book that he wrote the day before and read it to them and they accepted to enter the covenant with him. They said: everything that Hashem said, we will do and we will follow you, whatever you command us from Hashem. He then sprinkled the other half of the blood upon them because this covenant required two equal parts. After he completed his actions, he was required to fulfill the word of Hashem who told him to go up with Aharon etc. This is what is stated "Moshe went up with Aharon, Nadav, Avihu etc." He also performed what was commanded, "And he approached Hashem himself," and this is reflected in the verse, "Moshe went into the cloud etc." Behold, this covenant took place the day after the giving of the Torah and that is when Moshe went up the mountain and stayed there for forty days. Ramban, Shemot 24:1

Here, Ramban is arguing with his much more succinct predecessor, Rashi, who says: This portion took place before the giving of the Ten Commandments. On the fourth of Sivan, he was told to go up [the mountain]. Rashi, Shemot 24:1

Rashi's View: Two Narratives

Accordingly, Ramban views that our commitment to the life that Hashem wants us to lead coalesced over a multi-step process. That process included the teachings of Mara, the initial verbal commitments to becoming a "mamleches kohanim" (a nation of priests), the Sinai revelation per se, and finally, completing a conversion process complete with sacrifices and accepting the "stone handiwork" of Hashem.

Yet Rashi's view begs interpretation. In Rashi's view, the Torah divided the story of Matan Torah into two storylines. How intriguing it is to have two parshiyos focus separately on the selfsame episode, each one choosing details so different from each other that they convey vastly different impressions and overtones.

The Matan Torah of Parshas Yisro welcomes the Shechinah with supernatural thunder and lightning and shofar sounds that increase in volume. The trembling mountain marks Hashem's presence as it sends up furnace like smoke. The people are prepared through abstinence and are severely cautioned to keep their distance. They are overwhelmed and left shaking, somewhat traumatized and ready to run:

15 He said to the nation: Be prepared for the next three days, don't approach a woman. 16 It was on the third day in the morning and there was thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain; the sound of a shofar was very strong and the nation in the camp trembled. 17 Moshe took

the nation out of the camp towards Hashem and they stood at the base of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was full of smoke because Hashem descended upon it and the smoke rose like smoke from a furnace and the mountain trembled greatly. 19 The sound of the shofar was growing stronger. Moshe would speak and Hashem would respond with a voice. 20 Hashem descended upon Mount Sinai to the peak of the mountain and Hashem called Moshe to the peak of the mountain and Moshe ascended. Shemot 19

Not so the Matan Torah of Parshas Mishpatim. Here, the people stand — presumably quietly — to be crowned by the light sprinkling of blood that marks the new covenant. They have been engaged through Moshe's Torah instruction and have responded with absolute commitment. They have their korbonos sprinkled on them. The depiction of a fiery quaking mountain lifted off its core surrounded by bolts of light, sound, and visible thunder is absent.

Why two different stories instead of one complete account? Why are so many details suppressed, seemingly in an effort to paint such distinct pictures?

Perhaps the event that would model the experience of Torah study for all time has to include both the impulsive excitement associated with the high drama that Sinai was, as well as the very measured care and concern that characterizes sacrificial service. There are times that our study must be charged by an exciting program and fuelled with a flamboyant teacher and charismatic colleagues. However, as any matter worthy of our energies, it will more often require the careful and even painstaking efforts to successfully pave our path in the labyrinth of Torah. For most of us, we will have to slowly amass knowledge even as we attempt to deepen our understanding of all of Hashem's wisdom.

Certainly, we, who have come to appreciate the results of laborious and thorough research in so many areas of life, can well understand the humbling message of Parshas Mishpatim. It is the unassuming ongoing and scheduled Torah study that connects students and teachers, and fathers and sons. Quietly imbibing wisdom, slowly and steadily, molds hearts, souls and minds and plants anchors to our commitment.

Thus, we return to the story of Sinai after learning in great detail about courts and torts, and the concern for the poor and disadvantaged and having been exposed to the breathtaking scope of Torah.

The experience of study modeled in Parshas Mishpatim, the one closer to our ongoing efforts to be kove'a itim la'Torah (set aside time for Torah study) does not end with a shocked people on the run, rather it culminates with a people riveted on their vision of Hashem as a consuming fire that is visible to all.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, May 21, 2015 at 5:07 PM

Shavuot: The Torah's Mystery Man

Excerpted from Rabbi Norman Lamm's Festivals of Faith: Reflections on the Jewish Holidays

The Book of Ruth read on Shavuot is a beautiful and inspiring story, instructive to us in many ways. The story itself is fairly simple, and most of us are, or should be, well acquainted with it. The cast of characters is well-known: Boaz, Ruth and Naomi as the major characters, and Orpah, Elimelech, Mahlon and Kilyon as the minor characters.

But there is one personage who makes a brief appearance in this Book (chapter 4) whom we may designate as the "Mystery Man"! The Bible doesn't even give him a name. He is an anonymous and therefore mysterious character. You recall that Boaz was determined to marry this young widow of his cousin, this Moabite girl Ruth who had embraced Judaism. Now since Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi owned the land left to them by their respective husbands, marriage would mean that these estates would be transferred to the new husbands. Let us remember that in those days real estate had more than commercial value—it meant the family inheritance, and

sentiment was supported by law in making every attempt to keep property within the family or as close to it as possible. Now while Boaz was a first cousin, there was a closer relative—the brother of Elimelech, the father of her late husband. Before Boaz could marry her and take possession of the family property, he needed the closer relative's consent (this relative is called the go'el or redeemer, for he redeems the family's possessions). Boaz therefore met this man and offered him priority in purchasing the lands of father and sons. He seemed willing to do this, regardless of price. But when Boaz told him that he would also have to marry Ruth if he should redeem the land, the go'el hesitated, then refused. I can't do it, he said. Boaz was then next in line for the right of redemption, and that he did, and, of course, he married Ruth. From this union, four generations later, came one of the greatest Jews in our long history, King David.

Who is this relative who missed the historic opportunity to enter history? What is his name? We do not know. The Bible does not tell us. It does tell us rather pointedly that it does not want to mention his name. When the book describes Boaz's calling to the man to offer him the chance of redemption, we read that Boaz said, "Come here such a one and sit down" (Ruth 4:1). Piloni Almoni—"such a one." Lawyers might translate that as "John Doe." Colloquially we might translate those words as "so-and-so," or the entire phrase in slang English would read, "and he said, hey you, come here and sit down." Translate it however you will, the Torah makes it clear that it has no wish to reveal this man's name. Evidently he doesn't deserve it. He isn't worthy of having his name mentioned as part of Torah.

We may rightly wonder at the harsh condemnation of this person by the Torah. Why did he deserve this enforced anonymity? He was, after all, willing to redeem the land of his dead brother and nephew. But he balked at taking Ruth into the bargain as a package deal and marrying her out of a sense of duty. Well, who wouldn't do just that? Are those grounds for condemnation?

As a matter of fact, our Rabbis tried to pry behind this veil of secrecy and they found his true name. It was, they tell us, Tov, which means "good" (Ruth Rabbah 6:3; Tanhuma, Behar, 8). He was a good chap. He showed a generally good nature. There was nothing vicious about him. And yet the Torah keeps him as a mystery man, it punishes him by making him a nameless character. He remains only a faint and anonymous shadow in the gallery of sacred history. His name was never made part of eternal Torah. He was deprived of his immortality. He is known only as Piloni Almoni, "the other fellow, "so-and-so," "the nameless one." A goodly sort of fellow, yet severely punished. Why is that so?

Our Sages have only one explanation for that harsh decree. By playing on the word Almoni of the title Piloni Almoni, they derive the word illem—mute or dumb. He remains without a name she-illem hayah be-divrei Torah because he was mute or dumb, speechless in Torah (Ruth Rabbah 7:7). He was not a Torah-Jew. Some good qualities, yes, but not a ben Torah. When it came to Torah, he lost his tongue. He could express himself in every way but a Torah way. Had he been a Torah kind of Jew, he would not have sufficed by just being a nice chap and buying another parcel of land. He would have realized that it is sinful to despise and underrate another human being merely because she is a poor, forlorn, friendless stranger. Had he been imbued with Torah he would have reacted with love and charity to the widow and the orphan and the stranger, the non-Jew. The Rabbis suggest that his reluctance to marry Ruth was for religious reasons: that the Torah forbids marriage with a Moabite, and Ruth was a Moabite. Had he ever bothered to study Torah in detail, as a Jew ought to, he would have known the elementary principle of Mo'avi ve-lo Mo'aviyyah (Yevamot 76b)—only male Moabites could never marry into the Jewish nation; female Moabites are acceptable spouses. Once this Moabite girl had decided to embrace Judaism from her own free will and with full genuineness and sincerity, she was as thoroughly Jewish as any other Jewish woman, and a Jewish man could marry her as he could the daughter of the Chief Rabbi of Israel. But this man was illem be-divrei Torah, he was unfeeling in a Torah way, he was out of joint with the spirit of

Torah, he was ignorant of its laws and teachings; he had no contact with it. And a man of this sort has no name, insofar as Torah is concerned. He must remain Peloni Almoni—the nameless one. Such a person is unworthy of having his name immortalized in the Book of Eternal Life. His name has no place in Torah.

What we mean by a “name” and what the Torah meant by it, is something infinitely more than the meaningless appellative given to a person by his parents. It refers, rather, to a spiritual identity; it is the symbol of a spiritual personality in contact with the Divine, hence with the source of all life for all eternity. A name of this kind is not given; it is earned. A name of this sort is not merely registered by some bored clerk in the city records. It is emblazoned in the sacred letters of eternity on the firmament of time. One who is, therefore, Almoni, strange to Torah, can never be worthy of such a name. He must remain a Peloni Almoni.

It is told of the famous conqueror, Alexander the Great, that he was inspecting his troops one day and espied one particularly sloppy soldier. He said to him, “soldier, what is your name?” The soldier answered, “Sir, it is Alexander.” The great leader was stunned for a moment, then said to him, “well, either change your name or change your behavior.” That is what we mean by a name in Torah. It is the behavior, the personality, the soul, and not the empty title that counts.

As far as we Jews are concerned as a people, we can be identified primarily through Torah. Without it we are a nameless mass. Our history, like that of other peoples, has in it elements of military ventures, politics, economics. But more than any other people, it is a history of scholarship, of Torah. It was a non-Jew—Mohammed, the founder of Islam—who called us “The People of the Book”—not just books, but “The Book.” It was a non-Jew—the famed economist Thorsten Veblen—who called Jews “eternal wayfarers in the intellectual no-man’s land.” It was a non-Jew—the Protestant philosopher Paul Tillich—who said that, for Christians, Jews serve the spiritual purpose of preventing the relapse of Christianity into paganism. It was a non-Jew—the King of Italy—who in 1904 told Theodor Herzl that “sometimes I have Jewish callers who wince perceptibly at the mere mention of the word Jew. That is the sort I do not like. Then I really begin talking about Jews. I am only fond of people who have no desire to appear other than they are.” The King of Italy was referring to nameless Jews, those who reject the name “Jew,” those who are “mute in the words of Torah.” For the Jew who is not

illem be-divrei Torah knows that the function and destiny of our people is to be a “holy nation and kingdom of priests” (Ex. 19:6). As a people we have the choice: remain with Torah and be identified with the House of David, be benei melakhim, princes of the spirit— or become nameless and faceless blurs in the panorama of history; the people of Boaz, or a collection of Peloni Almonis.

And what holds true for our people as a whole holds true for us as individuals as well. The Kabbalah and Hasidism have maintained that the name of every Jew is merummaz ba-Torah, hinted at in the Torah. Here too they meant “name” as a source of spiritual identification, as an indication of a living, vibrating, pulsating, soulful personality, a religious “somebody.” When you are anchored in Torah, then you are anchored in eternity. Then you are not an indistinguishable part of an anonymous mass, but a sacred, individual person.

We who are here gathered for Yizkor, for remembering those dearly beloved who have passed on to another world, we should be asking ourselves that terrific question: will we be remembered? How will we be remembered? Or better: will we deserve to be remembered? And are we worthy enough to have our names immortalized in and through Torah? Are or are we not illemim bedivrei Torah?

Oh, how we try to achieve that “name,” that disguise for immortality! We spend a lifetime trying to “make a name for ourselves” with our peers, in our professions and societies. We leave money in our wills not so much out of charitable feelings as much as that we want our names to be engraved in

bronze and hewn in stone. And how we forget that peers die, professions change, societies vanish, bronze disintegrates and stone crumbles. Names of that sort are certainly not indestructible monuments. Listen to one poet who bemoans the loss of his name:

Alone I walked on the ocean sand/A pearly shell was in my hand; I stooped and wrote upon the sand/My name, the year, the day. As onward from the spot I passed/One lingering look behind I cast, A wave came rolling high and fast/And washed my lines away. The waves of time wash names of this kind away, indeed. Try as we will, if we remain each of us an illem be-divrei Torah, unrooted in Judaism, then we remain as well Peloni Almoni. Is it not better for us to immortalize our names in and through eternal Torah, so that God Himself will not know us other than as Peloni Almoni?

There is a custom which we do not practice but which Hasidic congregations do, which throws this entire matter into bold relief. The custom stems from the famous Shelah ha-Kadosh, Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, who recommends that in order she-lo yishkah shemo le-Yom ha-Din, that our names not be forgotten on Judgment Day, we should recite a verse from the Bible related to the name at the end of the daily Shemoneh Esreh (Siddur ha-Shelah s.v. pesukim li-shemot anashim). There is a Biblical verse for every name. Thus my own is Nahum. And the verse I recite is from Isaiah, Nahamu nahamu ammi yomar Elokeikhem—console, console My people, says your God (Is. 40:1). My, what that makes of an ordinary name! Even as a child I was terrifically impressed with it—a job, a mission, a destiny: console your fellow man, your fellow Jews!

Let any man do that and no matter what his parents called him, God knows his name—it is not Peloni Almoni; it is an eternal verse which will be read and taken to the hearts of men until the end of days.

On this Yizkor Day, think back to those whom you will shortly memorialize: does he or she have a name in Torah—or must you unfortunately refer to Peloni Almoni a shadow of a memory about to vanish? How will we be remembered— not by children, not by friends, not by other men at all . . . but at Yom ha-Din, on the day of judgment, by God Himself? Will we distinguish ourselves with humility, so that our names will become merged with the glorious verse of Micah (6:8): Ve-hatznea lekhet im Elokekha, walk humbly with thy God? Or will we prove ourselves men and women of sincere consideration and kindness and love for others so that our names will be one with ve-ahavta le-re’akha kamokha, love of neighbor (Lev. 19:18)? Or will we devote our finest efforts to the betterment of our people and effecting rapprochement between Jews and their Torah, so that our names will be beni bekhori Yisrael, Israel is my firstborn (Ex. 4:22)? Will we delve to the limits of our mental capacity into the study of Torah, so that our names will be an etz hayyim hi la-mahazikin bah, a tree of eternal life to those that hold it (Prov. 3:18)? Or will we do none of these things, just be tov, good-natured men and women. with no special distinction in Torah, no real anchorage in Jewishness, and find that our lives have been spent in nothingness and that even God has no name for us, that we will be just plain Peloni Almoni?

On this Shavuot day, when we recall the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the “Mystery Man” of the Book of Ruth calls to us from the dim obscurity in which he has been shrouded: Do not do what I did. Do not be illem be-divrei Torah, mute and speechless when it comes to Torah. Do not end your lives in a puff of anonymity. Grasp the Tree of Life which is Torah. Live it. Practice it. Overcome all hardships and express it in every aspect of your life. Do not abandon it lest God will abandon you. Jump at this opportunity for immortality. In short: make a name for yourself—through Torah, and with God.

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Mazal Tov to Carolyn & Steve Baruch and all the extended family on the birth of a son to Ari & Sarah Baruch.

The Blogs :: Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz

Curious Jews

May 18, 2015

For most people, the act of studying stops abruptly at the end of formal schooling, whether after elementary school, high school or college. They continue to learn once their schooling is over, have lots of experiences, and hopefully, learn something from them. People who live in a good-sized city may have all kinds of lectures to choose from, and perhaps they go and listen, and even go again, if the subject interests them. However, few adults actually sit down and study in a continuous, disciplined way, because they find no compelling need or motivation to do so.

Curiosity is a characteristic of youth. All other primates abandon curiosity relatively early, in order to deal with the problems of daily living – finding food, rearing offspring – but the prolonged childhood of humans gives them the opportunity to spend more time cultivating their curiosity.

Many educational systems do not understand this. They try to make every subject “relevant,” and this is a big mistake. Teachers, and sometimes parents, think that relevance enhances the desire and the inclination to learn, when in truth, it actually destroys curiosity; and curiosity is what matters most. Our interest in irrelevant things – in things that have no immediate, and maybe even no remote, relevance to our existence – is part of our uniqueness as human beings.

In the preface to his book on popular physics, Leopold Infeld describes the earliest experiments with electricity. You can even perform them yourself. Take a piece of glass and rub it with silk, and you get electricity. Or, take a piece of amber and rub it with flannel. You also get electricity this way, but it is of a different kind: one is positive, the other is negative.

Now, what would most people do if they had such objects? They would probably use the piece of glass as a paperweight, put the amber on a shelf as an ornament, polish their shoes with the flannel and use the silk to wipe their noses.

So how did we go from static electricity to computers? What is common to the Greek philosopher Thales (the first to describe creating static electricity by rubbing glass with silk 2500 years ago,) and to Steve Jobs who tinkered in his parents’ garage? They were both curious men who had time on their hands and objects with which to play. They played in order to satisfy their curiosity. They tried this and that, and eventually discovered something interesting.

Making everything relevant and utilitarian can be helpful, but it can also kill the basic notion of curiosity. Surely there are certain realms of knowledge where it is fine to ask “What is the good of this or that?” or to see whether we can find a practical answer to a practical problem. But sometimes, we just want to find out about what that object is, and “relevance” simply kills curiosity. One might even say that it is the lack of continuous curiosity that slows human advancement.

Observant Jews are obligated to be involved in studying Torah for its own sake. This is a rather unusual religious activity. Most religions have expectations about belief and about doing the right things, but they do not obligate one to study. Jews, however, study Torah as an independent activity that is not directly connected with belief or action. In fact, the most studied books in Jewish life, like the Talmud, have very little practical use.

So why are people studying laws about things that happened in remote times – and were rare even then – or things that the Talmud says never happened and never will? We devote time to this because what we are doing is going after knowledge for itself, not as something that is to be used. Not everyone has the same level of active curiosity, but study is encouraged and done as an

obligation. The number of classes and lectures available in an observant Jewish community cannot be compared to anything that happens in any other place.

Why does God want us to study? Theologically, it is a way to commune with Him. The ability to study for the sake of study is what I call one of the very true human traits that makes man, in a certain way, higher than the angels. Angels do not seem to have any curiosity; they know everything, and animals learn only what they need to survive. So the only beings who are curious about anything are people.

This notion has always been powerful within Jewish life, and it has pushed some people to very high intellectual levels. When Isidor Rabi – who won the Nobel Prize for physics in 1944 – was asked to what he attributed his prize and his great achievements, he said to his parents. When he came home from school, they never asked him what he had learned. Rather, they wanted to know, “Did you ask a good question today?”

The Jewish approach to learning seems to have been ingrained very early and very deeply. Hecataeus, a Greek geographer active during the reign of Alexander the Great, wrote about remote countries that were beginning to be known at the time. He remarked that he had heard of an interesting people who lived to the south of Syria: all of them were philosophers, that is, people who asked idle questions and were interested in wisdom for wisdom’s sake. This is a very nice statement about our people.

On the upcoming holiday of Shavuot, we celebrate receiving the Torah. We do not dance and sing with it, as we do on Simchat Torah. Rather, alone or together, we sit and we learn – whatever text or topic we choose – just to learn and to connect with God.

Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz is the founder of Shefa and The Israel Institute for Talmudic Publications. In 2012 he completed his monumental, 45 volume translation of the Talmud into modern Hebrew. The Steinsaltz Talmud has been translated into 29 volumes in French and 5 volumes in Russian.

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Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Shavuot

Fifty days pass quickly, especially if one counts them individually. It seems that it was just yesterday that we were preparing ourselves to sit down at the Pesach seder table and here it is Shavuot at the end of the week. Though the holiday has a number of other names associated with it – the Festival of Bikurim/First Fruits, the festival of the granting of the Torah – the proper name assigned to it is Shavuot – the Festival of Weeks.

The emphasis that the name gives us is that of the passage and counting of time. In its description of the festival itself, the Torah repeats, a number of times, this passage of weeks from the holiday of Pesach to the celebration of the holiday of Shavuot. It is apparent that this passage of time is deemed to be an important part of the significance of the holiday itself.

In the Talmud, as well as in the Bible itself, the holiday of Shavot is referred to as being atzeret - an adjunct and bookend, so to speak, to Pesach. Somehow it completes the process of redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian bondage. It illustrates for us the purpose of that redemption and the true goal that freedom points us to in our personal and national lives.

It is as though the revelation at Sinai and the granting of the Torah is the strategic goal of the entire story of the Jewish people in Egypt while the actual Exodus from Egypt is the necessary tactic to allow this strategic goal to be attained. Only by connecting Shavuot to Pesach with this seven-week counting does this message become clear and cogent to us.

The connection of Shavuot to the bounty and blessings of agricultural produce is also emphasized in the Torah and is the backdrop to the drama of

the book of Ruth, which by custom is read publicly in the synagogue on Shavuot. Humans cannot live by bread alone but they cannot live without bread either. Therefore, we are reminded on Shavuot of the daily miracle of nature that provides food and sustenance for us all.

In our blessed current circumstances of plenty we often think that our food is from the supermarket and that we are somehow entitled to enjoy the quantities and varieties of food available to us. We always look for the hand of God, so to speak, in unusual and unforeseen circumstances. However, in the regular every day mundane activities that we are engaged in, we find it more difficult to sense the Divine Presence.

The agricultural nature of the holiday of Shavuot comes to remind us of the constant presence of God in our lives every time we sit down to eat the food produced by our earth. There was a time in the world when not only Jews said blessings of thanksgiving before and after their meals. The modern world has swept that antiquated custom aside today. However in Jewish life it remains a vital part of our daily activity and a necessary reminder as to the blessings that God has bestowed upon the agricultural toils of man. Freedom without food is a calamity. Shavuot reminds us of this obvious but often neglected truth.

Finally, Shavuot comes to reinforce our belief in the primacy of Torah study and observance in our life, both individually and as a nation. Rav Saadyah Gaon's famous statement that "Our nation is a nation only by virtue of our Torah" has been proven true by the millennia of Jewish history and its events. Those who forsook any connection Torah, they and/or their descendants eventually fell away from the Jewish people.

It is the Torah and the revelation at Sinai that binds all of Israel together – Ashkenazi and Sephardy, Yemenite and Lithuanian, black and white and in all shades in between, politically liberal and conservative and old and young. It is the Torah that crosses all lines and groupings within Israel.

This is the idea that the Torah itself expresses that at Sinai we were all "of one heart and one being." Shavuot is the holiday of Jewish unity, of the acceptance of our individual differences within the framework of the goal of becoming a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. There was a seven-week process that led from the slavery of Egypt to the glory of Sinai. We are also in the midst of a process of rebuilding the Jewish people, strengthening the Jewish state, and revitalizing the actual Land of Israel. This process takes time and will not be accomplished in only seven weeks. But the example of the seven-week wait for Shavuot should stand us in good stead.

Shabbat shalom
Chag sameach

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
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**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel
Bamidbar**

The main message that is contained in this week's Torah reading, as well as in much of the content of the chumash of Bamidbar, is that one does not only count numbers but that numbers really count in Jewish life. The Torah emphasizes for us the fact that without Jews there is no Judaism. Judaism is not an idea or a philosophy. It is meant to be a living organism and that requires human participation and numbers.

We often think that individuals are not that important in the grand scheme of things. The Torah however teaches us otherwise and that is why it continually counts the people of Israel. The Talmud teaches us an halachic and philosophic principle here. Something that is counted acquires a status that does not allow it to be nullified by greater numbers or amounts.

Being counted gives one status. Sometimes that status is extremely negative, as it is with the numbers given to incarcerated prisoners in jails. Sometimes it is pretty much neutral as the numbers given to us on our social security cards and personal identification papers. And sometimes being counted and numbered can be a positive experience, such as being the tenth man to constitute a minyan (prayer quorum.)

But all of us are aware that we are somehow being counted somewhere, somehow. And, that this fact should be taken into account when we make decisions about our speech, behavior and outlook on life. We count and we are to be counted. The Torah reading of Bamidbar comes to reinforce that truism within our psyches and personalities.

On the High Holy Days we recite the famous liturgical poem regarding the shepherd having his flock pass before him individually, to be marked for holy purpose. The poem is naturally based on the imagery of the Mishnah as it appears in tractate Rosh Hashanah. Each of the billions of people who populate our world is an individual and is so counted by the great shepherd of us all.

No matter how fervently we wish to melt into the mass of humanity, each of us is singled out for particular tasks, challenges and inexplicable events. Part of the uniqueness of the Jewish people is that we have always been relatively small in number. The Torah itself informed us that we would be of limited numbers and that God did not choose us to fulfill our mission in human civilization because we would be many. Our limited numbers contribute to our sense of uniqueness and mission.

To be a Jew is to be special, but only those who truly cherish and appreciate their Jewishness, their traditions and value system can achieve that inner sense of uniqueness, self-confidence and self-worth. And those who unfortunately opted out of Jewish life, who assimilated, intermarried, and never built families etc., eventually counted themselves out of participating in the great drama of the Jewish story. So we should not wonder why the Torah counts us so often and so carefully. It teaches us a great deal about ourselves and our future.

Shabat shalom
Chag sameach

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bamidbar
For the week ending 23 May 2015 / 5 Sivan 5775
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights

Not Another Brick In The Wall

"According the number of their names" (1:2)

There's nothing quite like the sound of a full symphony orchestra. Music has this wonderful quality that you can listen to it in different ways. You can listen to the overall effect and you can also listen to each individual part of the arrangement, enjoying the melody of each individual musical strain. Then you can take that strain and see how it melds together with all the other strains to build the overall sound picture.

"...according the number of their names."

Ostensibly, the idea of "number" and the concept of a "name" are antithetical.

A number is anonymous, even faceless and lacking in identity. A name, on the other hand, is the essence of separateness and individual identity. The Torah was given to the Jewish People "according to the number of their names." It was given both individually and collectively.

The Jewish People are an indivisible unit, and each individual makes up the sum of the whole, of the "klal". On the other hand, each individual is more

than just a brick in this "wall of sound". Each Jew is dear to G-d, precious and special.

The spiritual Masters teach, "Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said, 'From where is it evident that if the Jewish People were lacking even one person the Divine Presence would not have been revealed to them?' From the verse, "For on the third day G-d came down in the eyes of all the people to Mount Sinai." If even one person had not been there, if even one violin had been absent, the symphony of Mount Sinai would never have been heard.

Based on Rabbi Shimshon Pincus; Midrash Devarim Rabba 7:5

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column

Bamidbar and Shavuot: "Two Very Different Texts"

Note: This week marks the beginning of the seventh year of the Parsha series, which began with Parshat Bamidbar, May 2009. A book collecting the best of the nearly 300 Parsha columns is being prepared for publication later this year.

The Ten Commandments and the Book of Ruth are two very different biblical texts, yet they both will be read on the upcoming festival of Shavuot. In Israel, where Shavuot is celebrated for just one day, they are even read on the very same day. Outside of Israel, we read the Ten Commandments in synagogue on the first day of our two-day festival, and we postpone the story of Ruth for the second day. Nevertheless, both texts are essential to our holiday experience.

These two texts are as important to the intellectual appreciation and religious experience of Shavuot as blintzes and cheesecake are to the culinary celebration of this beautiful holiday. Yet they are strikingly different from each other. We are puzzled to find them sharing the center stage of this holiday.

After all, it is "The time of the giving of the Torah"! What connects the Book of Ruth, a simple pastoral tale, to the central theme of this festival? Would not some other biblical passage serve as a more apt companion to the Ten Commandments? Why commemorate the momentous occasion of God's Revelation on Mount Sinai with this charming, but surely not momentous story?

To answer this question let us ponder the plot of the Book of Ruth. It is often included in anthologies of the world's greatest short stories where it is erroneously classified as a tale illustrating that good deeds lead to happy endings. But a careful reading of the book, which I encourage all of you to undertake in preparation for Shavuot, reveals that this story is by no means merely an idyllic morality tale.

The characters of the Book of Ruth suffer almost every conceivable human tragedy: famine, betrayal, exile, sudden death, bereavement, widowhood, loneliness, poverty and shame. The book begins with the depiction of a demoralized nation of Israel, devastated by famine. One noble family deserts its brethren and betrays its homeland. The family soon experiences the pangs of exile. Its sons marry women of an alien culture, further betraying their heritage. Death strikes swiftly, leaving three widows, and one bereaved mother. Two of the women return home in shame and loneliness, with a life of poverty in store for them.

Both women, mother-in-law Naomi and daughter-in-law Ruth, return home with hope. Naomi's is the hope of desperation. She has no choice but to hope. But Ruth's is the hope of courage and commitment: "Wherever you

go, I will go; wherever you dwell, I will dwell; your people shall be my people and your God my God" (Book of Ruth 1:16).

This makes for a stirring and inspirational narrative. But the question remains: What does this drama have to do with zman matan Torateinu, the "time of the giving of the Torah?" Does this tale match up to the majesty and power of the Ten Commandments? What connection is there between God's Universal Laws, His do's and don'ts for the human race, and this sad tale? How does this story, in which God barely plays a role, find its way into the liturgy of a day which celebrates the most foundational religious experience? God Himself utters the Ten Commandments, but His name appears only incidentally in the Book of Ruth!

For me, the answer is apparent. Two texts are chosen for Shavuot. One tells of the laws, standards, and requirements of a just and successful society. The Ten Commandments incorporate, as our Rabbis have demonstrated, the Torah's highest values: compassion, generosity, loyalty, and responsibility for each other. The Book of Ruth proffers but one example of a society which defies those values with disastrous consequences, but achieves inspiring results when it abides by them.

The Rabbis (Yalkut Ruth, 594) tell us that the Book of Ruth is read on Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah, to teach us that one must be prepared for suffering and poverty in one's search to master Torah. Mastery of Torah does not come easy, and a life led according to the Torah's precepts calls for significant sacrifice. But eventually, the difficulties entailed by a total commitment to the Torah's demands prove to be the very sources of a life of happiness and fulfillment.

The tragic circumstances of the Book of Ruth gradually recede. The loneliness is overcome by a caring community, the shame is lifted by understanding and forgiveness, the poverty is ended by charity, and the widowhood is overcome by love. Even the bereavement is eventually softened by rebirth.

Rabbi Zeira in the Midrash (Ruth Rabbah 2:15) wonders: "This scroll teaches us nothing about ritual purity or impurity, nor does it inform us about what is forbidden and what is permissible. Why then was it given a place in the Biblical canon?" To which he answers, "It is in order to teach us about the benefits which ensue from a life lived with compassion and loving-kindness."

The Ten Commandments describe the ultimate encounter of Man with God. Our sages teach us that the Book of Ruth was written by the Prophet Samuel. In it he tells us a story which is but an illustration of the lesson that our father Abraham taught us by his example centuries before Samuel: "Loving-kindness, exemplified by simple hospitality, pre-empted even the direct experience of the Almighty's Presence!"

The Ten Commandments declare God's expectations of His people. The tale of Ruth and Naomi epitomizes His people's history. Our people have known all of the tragedies described in the story, and more. But as we have persisted through those tragedies we have come to glimpse what a truly benevolent society can resemble. We have experienced, albeit thus far never yet completely, the blessings of redemption.

Those blessings result from our adherence to the values of the Ten Commandments, one of the texts we read on Shavuot. One example of those blessings is described in the other text we read on Shavuot, the exquisitely uplifting Book of Ruth, which culminates in the birth of King David, the symbol and progenitor of the Messiah, with whom will come the final redemption.

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Law as Love

One of the most amusing scenes in Anglo-Jewish history occurred on 14 October 1663. A mere seven years had passed since Oliver Cromwell had found no legal bar to Jews living in England (hence the so-called “return” of 1656). A small synagogue was opened in Creechurch Lane in the City of London, forerunner of Bevis Marks (1701), the oldest still-extant place of Jewish worship in Britain.

The famous diarist Samuel Pepys decided to pay a visit to this new curiosity, to see how Jews conducted themselves at prayer. What he saw amazed and scandalised him. As chance or Providence had it, the day of his visit turned out to be Simchat Torah. This is how he described what he saw:

And anon their Laws that they take out of the press [i.e. the Ark] are carried by several men, four or five several burthens in all, and they do relieve one another; and whether it is that every one desires to have the carrying of it, I cannot tell, thus they carried it round about the room while such a service is singing ... But, Lord! to see the disorder, laughing, sporting, and no attention, but confusion in all their service, more like brutes than people knowing the true God, would make a man forswear ever seeing them more and indeed I never did see so much, or could have imagined there had been any religion in the whole world so absurdly performed as this.[1]
This was not the kind of behaviour he was used to in a house of worship.

There is something unique about the relationship of Jews to the Torah, the way we stand in its presence as if it were a king, dance with it as if it were a bride, listen to it telling our story and study it, as we say in our prayers, as “our life and the length of our days.” There are few more poignant lines of prayer than the one contained in a poem said at Neilah, at the end of Yom Kippur: Ein shiyur rak ha-Torah ha-zot: “Nothing remains,” after the destruction of the Temple and the loss of the land, “but this Torah.” A book, a scroll, was all that stood between Jews and despair.

What non-Jews (and sometimes Jews) fail to appreciate is how, in Judaism, Torah represents law as love, and love as law. Torah is not just “revealed legislation” as Moses Mendelssohn described it in the eighteenth century.[2] It represents God’s faith in our ancestors that He entrusted them with the creation of a society that would become a home for His presence and an example to the world.

One of the keys as to how this worked is contained in the parsha of Bemidbar, always read before Shavuot, the commemoration of the giving of the Torah. This reminds us how central is the idea of wilderness – the desert, no man’s land – is to Judaism. It is midbar, wilderness, that gives our parsha and the book as a whole its name. It was in the desert that the Israelites made a covenant with God and received the Torah, their constitution as a nation under the sovereignty of God. It is the desert that provides the setting for four of the five books of the Torah, and it was there that the Israelites experienced their most intimate contact with God, who sent them water from a rock, manna from heaven and surrounded them with clouds of glory.

What story is being told here? The Torah is telling us three things fundamental to Jewish identity. First is the unique phenomenon that in Judaism the law preceded the land. For every other nation in history the reverse was the case. First came the land, then human settlements, first in small groups, then in villages, towns and cities. Then came forms of order and governance and a legal system: first the land, then the law.

The fact that in Judaism the Torah was given *bemidbar*, in the desert, before they had even entered the land, meant that uniquely Jews and Judaism were able to survive, their identity intact, even in exile. Because the law came before the land, even when Jews lost the land they still had the law. This meant that even in exile, Jews were still a nation. God remained their sovereign. The covenant was still in place. Even without a geography, they had an ongoing history. Even before they entered the land, Jews had been given the ability to survive outside the land.

Second, there is a tantalising connection between *midbar*, ‘wilderness,’ and *davar*, ‘word.’ Where other nations found the gods in nature – the rain, the earth, fertility and the seasons of the agricultural year – Jews discovered God

in transcendence, beyond nature, a God who could not be seen but rather heard. In the desert, there is no nature. Instead there is emptiness and silence, a silence in which one can hear the unearthly voice of the One-beyond-the-world. As Edmond Jabès put it: “The word cannot dwell except in the silence of other words. To speak is, accordingly, to lean on a metaphor of the desert.”[3]

The historian Eric Voegelin saw this as fundamental to the completely new form of spirituality born in the experience of the Israelites :

When we undertake the exodus and wander into the world, in order to found a new society elsewhere, we discover the world as the Desert. The flight leads nowhere, until we stop in order to find our bearings beyond the world.

When the world has become Desert, man is at last in the solitude in which he can hear thunderingly the voice of the spirit that with its urgent whispering has already driven and rescued him from Sheol [the domain of death]. In the Desert God spoke to the leader and his tribes; in the desert, by listening to the voice, by accepting its offer, and by submitting to its command, they had at last reached life and became the people chosen by God.[4]

In the silence of the desert Israel became the people for whom the primary religious experience was not seeing but listening and hearing; Shema Yisrael. The God of Israel revealed Himself in speech. Judaism is a religion of holy words, in which the most sacred object is a book, a scroll, a text. Third, and most remarkable, is the interpretation the prophets gave to those formative years in which the Israelites, having left Egypt and not yet entered the land, were alone with God. Hosea, predicting a second exodus, says in God’s name:

... I will lead her into the wilderness [says God about the Israelites] and speak tenderly to her ...

There she will respond as in the days of her youth,

As in the day she came out of Egypt.

Jeremiah says in God’s name: “‘I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown.’ Shir ha-Shirim, The Song of Songs, contains the line, “Who is this coming up from the wilderness leaning on her beloved?” (8: 5).

Common to each of these texts is the idea of the desert as a honeymoon in which God and the people, imagined as bridegroom and bride, were alone together, consummating their union in love. To be sure, in the Torah itself we see the Israelites as a recalcitrant, obstinate people complaining and rebelling against the God. Yet the prophets in retrospect saw things differently. The wilderness was a kind of *yichud*, an alone-togetherness, in which the people and God bonded in love.

Most instructive in this context is the work of anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep who focused attention on the importance of rites of passage.[5]

Societies develop rituals to mark the transition from one state to the next – from childhood to adulthood, for example, or from being single to being married – and they involve three stages. The first is separation, a symbolic break with the past. The last is incorporation, re-entering society with a new identity. Between the two comes the crucial stage of transition when, having cast off one identity but not yet donned another, you are remade, reborn, refashioned.

Van Gennep used the term *liminal*, from the Latin word for “threshold,” to describe this transitional state when you are in a kind of no-man’s-land between the old and the new. That is what the wilderness signifies for Israel: liminal space between slavery and freedom, past and future, exile and return, Egypt and the Promised Land. The desert was the space that made transition and transformation possible. There, in no-man’s-land, the Israelites, alone with God and with one another, could cast off one identity and assume another. There they could be reborn, no longer slaves to Pharaoh, instead servants of God, summoned to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Seeing the wilderness as the space-between helps us to see the connection between the Israelites in the days of Moses and the ancestor whose name

they bore. For it was Jacob among the patriarchs who had his most intense experiences of God in liminal space, between the place he was leaving and the one he was travelling to, alone and at night.

It was there, fleeing from his brother Esau but not yet arrived at the house of Laban, that he saw a vision of a ladder stretching from earth to heaven with angels ascending and descending, and there on his return that he fought with a stranger from night until dawn and was given the name Israel. These episodes can now be seen to be prefigurations of what would later happen to his descendants (maaseh avot siman le-banim, "the acts of the fathers are a sign of what would later happen to the children").[6]

The desert thus became the birthplace of a wholly new relationship between God and humankind, a relationship built on covenant, speech and love as concretized in the Torah. Distant from the great centres of civilization, a people found themselves alone with God and there consummated a bond that neither exile nor tragedy could break. That is the moral truth at the beating heart of our faith: that it is not power or politics that link us to God, but love. Joy in the celebration of that love led King David to "leap and dance" when the ark was brought into Jerusalem, earning the disapproval of King Saul's daughter Michal (2 Sam. 6: 16), and many centuries later led the Anglo-Jews of Creechchurch Lane to dance on Simchat Torah to the disapproval of Samuel Pepys. When love defeats dignity, faith is alive and well.

[1] The Diary of Samuel Pepys, 14 October 1663.

[2] In his book Jerusalem, 1783.

[3] Edmond Jabès, Du Desert au Libre, Paris, Pierre Belford, 1980, 101.

[4] Eric Voegelin, Israel and Revelation, Louisiana State University Press, 1956, 153.

[5] Gennep, Arnold Van. The Rites of Passage. [Chicago]: University of Chicago, 1960.

[6] See Ramban, Commentary to Gen. 12: 6.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Bamidbar & Shavuot

Yissachor-Zevulun: The Hyphenated Tribe

In the second chapter of Bamidbar the Torah describes the order of the "Flags" and the sequence in which the Tribes of Israel travelled in the Wilderness. There were four camps, each led by a particular tribe. Each tribe had their unique flag. The Torah describes the order of the flags.

The first camp, which was on the eastern side of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], was led by the Tribe of Yehudah and included the Tribes of Yehudah, Yissocher and Zevulun. The pasukim elaborate on the names of the Princes and the population of each particular tribe.

The flag of the Tribe of Reuven led the southern camp, which included the tribes of Shimmon and Gad. The flag of the Tribe of Ephraim led the western camp, which included the tribes of Menashe and Binyamin. The flag of the Tribe of Dan led the northern camp, which included the tribes of Asher and Naftali.

The Baal HaTurim points out an anomaly in the description of the four camps. By three of the four camps, the Torah describes the tribal components in the following fashion: "The flag of the camp of (Tribe A) ... AND those encamping next to him (Tribe B)... AND (Tribe C)... In only one case is the

conjunctive "AND" not used prior to naming one of the supplementary tribes in each camp. The only time that there is not an AND is by the Tribe of Zevulun, who traveled along with Yehudah and Yissocher in the eastern camp.

Most of us do not even notice such an anomaly. However, only by Zevulun it does not say "u'Mateh Zevulun" as it says by all the other tribes, but rather simply "Mateh Zevulun" [Bamidbar 2:7]. Why?

The Baal HaTurim explains (quoting the Medrash Tanchuma) that the reason is why is because the Tribe of Zevulun (who were merchants) supported the Tribe of Yissocher (who were Torah scholars). Scripture did not want to give the impression that they were subordinate to Yissachor and described their encampment in an independent fashion without the conjunctive "AND" (vov). Zevulun was not secondary to Yissocher. Zevulun was co-equal to Yissocher and they share equal reward for their respective efforts in building the Jewish people.

The pasuk "It is a Tree of Life to those who grasp it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." [Mishlei 3:18] alludes to this concept. In a sense, the arrangement between these two tribes actually merge them into a joint "corporation" as it were – "The Tribe of Yissachor-Zevulun" where all components of this super-Tribe receive equal reward. It is for this reason that the Tribe of Zevulun is not preceded by the word "And": It is not a different tribe, but rather a hyphenated tribe which has merged with Yissocher. They are co-equals because of the parnassah [sustenance] that Zevulun provided to the Tribe of Yissocher.

Why Wasn't Zevulun A Lawyer or Computer Programmer?

Each camp and each tribe had their own flag. On each flag was that tribe's symbol. For example, Yehudah's flag contained a lion (based on Bereshis 49:9) representing Kingship and Yissocher's flag contained the moon and stars (based on Divrei HaYamim I 12:32) because the scholars of that tribe possessed astronomical knowledge necessary to determine the New Moon. Dan's possessed a snake (based on Bereshis 49:17). Zevulun's flag possessed a boat (based on Bereshis 49:13) because his territorial allotment in the Land of Israel was on the coast.

The Tribe of Zevulun, as we mentioned before, were merchants. They were in the import export business. However, it was not like people today in the import export business who sit behind a desk and conduct their transactions by phone or computer. Zevulun did it the hard way. He went out on the boats. He sailed the seas, where he bought merchandise and then sold it in various ports. That is how he earned his living.

We must ask the question: Zevulun is such a wonderful person. He supports his brother Yissocher. Why did he need to make his livelihood in such a difficult and dangerous fashion? It was not only in ancient times that going on a ship represent a risk to one's life (such that seafarers are one of four categories of people mentioned in the Talmud as needing to recite the "HaGomel" blessing upon their safe return). Even today, fishermen have a hard time obtaining life insurance. The boats go down in storms; people are thrown overboard, and so forth. It is a dangerous profession. Zevulun is a Tzaddik. He supported his brother Yissocher. Why was he not a lawyer? He could have sat behind a desk and billed by the hour. Let him be a computer programmer. Why did he need to be in the merchant marine? What kind of "Jewish profession" is being a sailor? Why did such a righteous tribe have such a tenuous existence?

Rav Dovid Feinstein once said a beautiful insight. The Gemara [Niddah 14a] says that all sailors are pious. This is a variation of the old rule "there are no atheists in foxholes". When a person is out on a boat, he does not know if he is going to survive. Even if he does survive, he realizes how difficult and tenuous earning his living is. As a result, he becomes aware of G-d and he becomes more pious. The person knows how dangerous it is and how scary it is. He knows that in a matter of minutes, he can lose everything. In such a situation, one becomes more G-d fearing; he gets religion.

This explains why the Tribe of Zevulun supported his brother. Such a person knows Who really provides 'parnassah'. When one sits behind a desk and

gets the same paycheck every single week, it is much easier to think, "This is the way it is supposed to be". A person might begin to believe in himself: It is because I am such a brilliant lawyer that I have such a good income. It is because I am such a clever accountant. It is because I am such a creative and innovative programmer. "That is why I make a good living." When someone approaches such a person and asks for a check for someone else, his response is "I should give you a check of my hard earned money that I worked and sweated for with my ingenuity and my talent? You want me to give away my money? I worked hard for this money!"

However, when a person is a sailor who works on the high seas and knows how scary it can be, he knows that only the Master of the World provides "parnassah". He is much more amenable to have a brother like Yissocher and to support him fully. "After all, I do not earn the money. I am just a conduit, a bank for someone to hold the money of the Ribono shel Olam. If the Ribono shel Olam wants me to do this with His money, I will do it!" Since the Tribe of Zevulun was the one that supported the Tribe of Yissocher, it was for that very reason that he needed to make a living through being a merchant marine – the type of profession where one gains an appreciation for who really provides the "parnassah".

Lucky Strike? No Way

I would like to share an insight on the Book of Rus, from a sefer entitled Ikvei Erev by Rav Azriel Langa, a student in the Mir Yeshiva in Europe. Rav Langa escaped through Shanghai with the rest of the Mir Yeshiva, came to America, and was an eighth grade Rebbe in Yeshivas Torah VoDaath. Unfortunately, Rav Langa never had any children. He left behind a number of manuscripts, which friends of the family recently published. Mr. Moshe Smith was instrumental in publishing this work and sent me a copy of the Sefer, from which I would like to share one insight.

It says in Megillas Rus, "...and her fate made her happen upon a parcel of land, belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech" [Rus 2:3]. Rus and Naomi came back from Moav. They literally had nothing to eat. Rus starts picking the gleanings left for the poor (Leket, Shikcha, Peah) in the field of Boaz.

The pasuk uses a very unusual expression to describe what happened. "Vayiker mikreh chelkas haSadeh L'Boaz". "Vayiker mikreh" basically means "And it so happens (that she started picking in the field of Boaz)". We know the end of the story. We know that Boaz saw her. He was kind to her. She told Naomi about it. Eventually Rus and Boaz married and they were the ancestors of Dovid King of Israel, from whom the righteous Moshiach will eventually descend.

This is not "Vayiker mikreh". This was not happenstance. This was all pre-ordained. The Master of the World wanted Rus to be the Mother of Royalty. Therefore, out of all the fields that Rus could have chosen, the Ribono shel Olam directed her to the field of Boaz. So why then does the pasuk use the expression "Vayiker mikreh chelkas haSader L'Boaz" as if this was a lucky chance – a shot in the dark? This was not "mikreh" [happenstance]. This was "Hashgacha" [Divine Providence] of the highest order! The Almighty is orchestrating the advent of Moshiach!

The answer is that this is a lesson. The lesson is that what appears to us as happenstance ("Mikreh") just LOOKS like that. It LOOKS like a stroke of luck. However, it is not luck at all! It is all preordained and pre-planned. Rabbi Langa writes from personal experience, "If a prophet would have predicted in Europe in 1930 that there would be a Holocaust in Europe and the entire student body of the Mir Yeshiva would manage to escape just in time, who would have believed him? Could anyone have predicted the amazing sequence of events and opportunities that enabled the salvation of the Yeshiva students?

(After the Soviets captured Eastern Poland including Vilna early in World War II, they planned to transfer Vilna to Lithuania. However, there was a window of opportunity prior to that transfer when travel was possible between Poland and Vilna. The Mir Yeshiva and many others rushed from various parts of Poland to Vilna. After the Soviets transferred Vilna to

Lithuania, travel between Vilna and Poland ceased. Anyone who was in Vilna was now in Lithuania and was at least temporarily out of harm's way.) An amazing combination of permits and visas then enabled the escape of the Mir Yeshiva, which planted the seeds of Torah communities in America and Eretz Yisrael. Rav Shach, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz, Rav Nochum Parchovitz, Rav Dovid Kronglass – all great future Torah leaders who were saved along with the Mir Yeshiva. Why? They were saved, in part, through an amazing sequence of events that included the timing of both the opening of the gates between Poland and Lithuania and the transfer of Vilna to Lithuania. If someone had predicted at the time that this political event would be a vital link in the chain that led to the salvation of Torah for Klal Yisrael, we might have dismissed him as delusional.

Events might look like ordinary. They may look like "luck," however; they are Hashgacha Pratis [personal Divine Providence]. The reason the pasuk in Rus uses these words is to tell us that regarding the history of Klal Yisrael – for good or for bad – nothing is "just a matter of luck".

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter

"Anochi"

The gemara (Shabbos 105a) points out several places in the Torah where we find roshei teivos (an acronym). Rav Yochanan says that one such place is the opening word of the aseres hadibros - "anochi", which is an acronym for "ana nafshi kesovis yehovis - I have given you my soul by writing down, and giving you, the Torah". Our tradition has it that the Torah is not merely a collection of mitzvos, but by means of a moshol (parable) is a description of Hashem's essence. Maamad Har Sinai consisted of a gilui shechinah not only in the sense that there was a heavenly light shining at the time (see Moreh Nevuchim vol. 1 chapter 64), but also because Hakadosh Baruch Hu "revealed Himself" to us (gilui shechinah) by giving us the laws of His Torah, a description of Elokus - His soul.

Rashi (Parshas Mishpatim, 21:13) quotes the midrash interpreting the phrase (Shmuel 1, 24:13), "hamashal hakadmoni" as referring to the Torah. The entire Torah is a moshol of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, who is "The Ancient One", since He was around before the world was brought into existence. This is the rationale behind the principle of faith, articulated by the Rambam, that the laws of the Torah are immutable. The navi Malachi (3:7) tells us that although everything that was created is always changing, the essence of Hashem never changes. Therefore it follows that since the Torah is a description of the essence of Hashem, the mitzvos of the Torah can also never change. This is also the reason why the opening pesukim in krias shema tell us that the way to develop a love for Hashem is to learn His Torah. When we get to understand His soul better, we can develop a greater love for Him; to the extent that one gets to know Him, he can come to love Him.

Every morning when we recite the special berachos before learning Torah we ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu that by learning His Torah we should all get to know "His name", since the entire Torah is a description of Him, which is the same as "His name". The reason why the chachmei hamasorah included this concept into the text of birchas haTorah is because the entire institution of birchas haTorah is derived (Berachos 21a) from the passuk (Devarim 32:3), "when I mention the name of Hashem, everyone give praise to our elokim", and the chachomim knew that "the name of Hashem" is a reference to the entire Torah[1] [see introduction to sefer Ginat Egoz.]

[1] For further discussion of this idea by Rav Schachter, see the following divrei Torah: Torah and Nevuah, Ego and Humility in Torah Study, Interacting Directly With Hashem, and In the Pursuit of Happiness Copyright © 2015 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

How should we celebrate receiving the Torah?

May 21, 2015 Thursday 3 Sivan 5775

Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, is unique among Jewish holidays in that there is no special mitzva that must be fulfilled. On Passover, we refrain from hametz and eat matza; on Succot, we sit in a succa and hold the four species; on Rosh Hashana, we blow the shofar. On Shavuot, there is a festive and serene ambiance, a refreshing atmosphere that blends nicely with the story of Megilat Ruth, the greenery decorating the synagogue, and the delicious dairy foods. But all these are traditions, not commandments. What is really the story of Shavuot? It is the story of Ma'amad Har Sinai, the most historic and significant event to ever happen to the Jewish nation, at which the nation received the Torah and declared before G-d the famous declaration of "Na'aseh ve'nishma" – We will do and we will hear. The uniqueness of Shavuot in comparison to all the other festivals is expressed in the Talmud in typical halachic fashion. The Talmud in Masechet Psachim (daf 68) tells of the disagreement among the sages on how Jewish holidays should be celebrated: Should the festival be split so that one part is dedicated to eating and drinking while the other is dedicated to studying Torah and praying; or should the focus be on one – either studying Torah or eating and drinking, not combining both? As the debate continued, the Talmud mentions one important detail: This dispute was debated in relation to all Jewish holidays except Shavuot, about which all agreed that it should be celebrated by eating and drinking. The reason given was that it marked the Torah being given to Am Yisrael.

Is eating a big meal the most appropriate way to mark receiving the Torah? Most of us could probably come up with different, more suitable and spiritual ideas. But the Talmud sees this from a different perspective. Rashi, the well-known Talmud commentator, explains why Shavuot should be celebrated with food and drink in order to "show that this day when Israel received the Torah is comfortable and acceptable to us."

Meaning, what is important to mark on Shavuot is not awareness of the obligation to fulfill mitzvot, not the burden, but awareness of the pleasure in fulfilling commandments, the fact that it is "comfortable and acceptable" to us.

Indeed, this point is emphasized every morning during Shacharit prayers in the blessing recited between the Shma and Shmona Esreh when we say the following: "True and firm, established and enduring and right, believed and beloved, precious, desired and sweet, yet awesome and mighty, well-ordered and accepted through tradition, good and beautiful is this thing and binding upon us for all eternity." This "thing" is, of course, the Torah.

This sentence is a bit intense, but it can be divided into two categories of descriptions.

The first category deals with the rational approach to the Torah: true, firm, established, enduring, right and believed.

The second category deals with the emotional approach to the Torah: beloved, precious, desired, sweet, awesome, mighty, well-ordered, accepted, good and beautiful.

Many times, we tend to focus on the first category, the rational one, that which investigates the reason for one mitzva and the logic behind another; that which tries to make reality fit the Torah or make Torah fit reality.

But the second category, the emotional one, is neglected. When we focus on the question of whether or not a deed is permissible or forbidden, if a food is

kosher or not, we forget to listen to our Jewish heart and ask ourselves: Is this beloved? Is it precious? Is it desired and sweet? To what extent is it awesome? The entire Torah, start to finish, is directed at man's heart and soul. Through fulfilling mitzvot, the Torah awakens man's conscience, his sensitivities toward others and toward his environment, and particularly toward his own existence as man.

When our sages sat and thought about how to celebrate receiving the Torah, they reached an agreed-upon conclusion: The way to truly celebrate is through food and drink, a celebration that does not focus only on our spiritual side, but also on our physical being.

This is a way of celebrating that looks at man as a whole, as a totality of body and soul, feelings and desires, understandings and longings. We celebrate being part of the Jewish nation, and of "receiving the Torah" each year anew.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Shavuot: Like an Apple Tree

The Midrash compares the Jewish people at Mount Sinai to an apple tree. In what way?

"Like an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons" (Song 2:3). Why is Israel compared to an apple tree? An apple tree sends forth its fruit before its leaves. So too, Israel promised 'Na'aseh' ('We will do') before 'Nishma' ('we will understand')." (Shabbat 88a)

The Song of Songs - the poetic love-story of a shepherdess and her beloved - is traditionally understood as a parable for the relationship between the Jewish people (the shepherdess) and God. This Midrash, however, interprets the story in a different fashion, as a parable for the special connection of the Torah and the people of Israel. According to this interpretation, the shepherdess is the Torah, which yearns for the holiness found in the souls of Jewish people.

Still, the comparison to an apple tree is not clear. Why it is important that the people first said at Sinai, 'Na'aseh,' 'We will do? How does this relate to the fact that certain species of apple trees produce fruit-buds before the leaves?

Two Revelations - Oral and Written

A careful reading of the Torah's description of Matan Torah reveals that Moses presented the Torah to the people not once but twice:

"Moses came and told the people all of God's words and all the statutes. All the people answered in one voice, saying: 'All the words that God spoke - we will do.'" (Ex. 24:3)

"Moses wrote all of God's words ... He took the book of the covenant and read it to the people. And they said, 'All that God spoke, we will do and we will understand.'" (Ex. 24:4-7)

In other words, Moses transmitted the Torah both orally and in writing. Why was this necessary? And why did the people respond "we will do" the first time, while at the second revelation they added, "and we will understand"?

The Challenge of Sinai

Matan Torah presented a major challenge. On the one hand, the Torah was to be presented in a way that the entire people would gain a personal connection to its Divine message. At the same time, it was critical to avoid the dangers of distorted interpretations due to the superficial study of

unlearned masses. To address this concern, two Torahs were transmitted at Sinai: the Oral Torah and the Written Torah.

The primary goal of Torah is that we should know how God expects us to act in the world. This is the purpose of the extensive literature of the Oral Law, the Mishnah and Talmud, which analyzes in detail our moral and spiritual obligations in life's varied (and often complex) situations.

Additionally, there is a second aspect of Torah: knowing the Torah for its own sake. This is the function of the Written Torah. The Sages wrote that even one who does not understand the words he reads fulfills the mitzvah of Torah study (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 2:4). This, however, is only true for the Written Torah. Studying the Oral Torah has no value if it is not understood correctly. On the contrary, misunderstanding the Oral Law can lead to erroneous actions.

To acquire a clear grasp of the Torah's teachings on a practical level requires a breadth and depth of Torah scholarship. An entire people cannot be expected to attain such a level of Torah knowledge. For this reason, the practical side of Torah was transmitted orally. This way, only those willing to toil in its study and learn from great scholars can acquire its knowledge. If this part of Torah were written down and revealed to all, even the unlearned would feel qualified to decide practical issues. An oral transmission ensures that those rendering decisions will be dedicated scholars who study Torah thoroughly and diligently.

One might argue that perhaps the entire Torah should be transmitted orally. But were this the case, Torah knowledge would be limited to a select few. The Written Law enables all to approach the Torah on whatever level they are capable of understanding.

In summary: it was important that the Jewish people accept both forms of Torah at Sinai, both written and oral. This ensured that the entire people would be connected to Torah while relying on qualified scholars to render legal decisions.

Na'aseh and then Nishma

It is natural for people to seek to understand as much as possible and act according to their understanding. We would expect that the Jewish people would demand to receive the entire Torah in a written form, so that they would have access to all aspects of Torah.

The spiritual greatness of the Jewish people at Mount Sinai was their recognition of the advantage of not writing down the Oral Law, so that their actions would be determined by true scholars and thus best fulfill God's Will. This is the significance of their promise, 'Na'aseh': we will act according to the teachings and instructions of the sages. Since this acceptance was equally relevant to all, regardless of intellectual capabilities and education, the verse emphasizes that "All the people answered in one voice."

Having accepted upon themselves to properly keep the Torah according to the dictates of the sages, Moses then presented the people with the Written Torah. We would have expected that the people would have demonstrated their love for the Written Law - since this was a Torah they could access directly - by immediately stating, 'Nishma!' - "we will understand." But once again, the Jewish people demonstrated their desire to first fulfill the practical side of Torah. They announced: "We will do," and only afterwards, "we will understand."

The Fruit and the Leaves

Now we may understand better the comparison to an apple tree. Fruit requires sunlight to grow and ripen. Too much exposure to the sun, however, may cause the fruit to dry up and shrivel. This is where the leaves come in - to protect the fruit so they will receive the right amount of sunlight.

The ultimate goal is, of course, the fruit. With Torah, the goal is the proper action, which is achieved through the Oral Torah. The Written Law, on the other hand, is like the leaves. Just as the leaves protect the fruit, so too, the more accessible Written Torah prepares each soul to receive the light of the Oral Torah. In order that the people will accept the Torah and understand the

importance of keeping its mitzvot, the entire people needed to be exposed to the Written Torah. Through this direct connection to Torah, they were ready to accept the instruction of the Oral Torah as taught by the great Torah scholars of each generation.

The apple tree produces fruit-buds before the leaves, since at first the fruit requires direct sunlight. So too, the people first accepted the Oral Law, the detailed Torah given to the sages to interpret, like the sunlight that ripens the fruit.

However, without a direct connection to Torah, the people would eventually come to reject it. Therefore Moses subsequently presented the Written Law, to protect the Oral Law for future generations. The order at Sinai - first the Oral Law and then the Written Law, first 'Na'aseh' and then 'Nishma' - thus parallels the development of the apple tree - first the fruit-buds, and then the leaves.

(Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 160-165)

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Serving Dairy Bread on Shavuos

What about small amounts, and does the prohibition apply only to bread?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: The Whey to Celebrate Shavuos!

"May I add dairy ingredients to bread that I intend to serve with a milchig meal on Shavuos?"

Question #2: English Danish

"Is one permitted to make pastry with butter, when it will not be noticeable that the product is dairy?"

Question #3: Sour Cream Kugel

"As my daughter was preparing a kugel for seudah shlishis, she added sour cream to the dough. The kugel is too large to consume at one meal, even for our large family. Once it is removed from its oven tray, there will be no indication that it is dairy. May we eat it?"

Answer:

Each of the above questions is a shaylah that I have been actually asked, and each involves our understanding the prohibition created by Chazal against making dairy or meaty bread. In a previous article (available on RabbiKaganoff.com under the title Making Dairy Bread), we learned that it is prohibited to use milk as an ingredient in dough, and that if one added milk to dough, the bread produced is prohibited from being eaten at all, even with a dairy meal, because of concern that one might mistakenly eat the dairy bread together with meat. The Gemara rules the same regarding baking bread that contains meat ingredients or baking on a hearth that was greased with beef fat - it is prohibited to eat this bread, even as a corned beef sandwich (Pesachim 30a, 36a; Bava Metzia 91a; Zevachim 95b). If one greased a hearth with beef fat, one must kasher it properly before one uses it to bake bread.

Is one ever permitted to make dairy bread?

The Gemara (Pesachim 36a) permits an exception - one may bake dairy dough if it is ke'ein tora, "like a bull's eye," which means either a small amount of dairy bread that one would eat quickly, or dough that will be baked with a heker, meaning that it will have an unusual shape. In the previous article, I discussed many of the issues germane to baking milchig bread that possesses an unusual shape.

How much is a small amount?

In the previous article, I noted that Chazal did not prohibit producing small quantities of milchig or fleishig bread. What was not discussed was: how much milchig or fleishig bread is considered a "small quantity" that one may produce? One early authority, the Hagahos Shaarei Dura, rules that one may bake rolls that have absorbed meat for Shabbos meals, since they will certainly be eaten in the course of Shabbos.

Although both the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama quote this ruling of the Hagahos Shaarei Dura, a careful reading of their comments shows that these two authorities dispute exactly how much one may make. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 97:1) writes that a small amount is the amount that one would eat at one time, which implies that it is permitted to make only what one would eat at one sitting and not leave any leftovers (Pri Megadim, Sifsei Daas 97:1; Ben Ish Chai, II Shlach 17; Darchei Teshuvah 97:17; Badei HaShulchan, Tziyunim #49). Thus, when preparing dairy or meat bread, one may make only as much as one is certain that his family and guests will completely devour at the time the bread is served.

Take it a day at a time

On the other hand, the Rama rules that one may make milchig bread for Shavuot or fleishig bread for Shabbos, since this is called a "small amount." When preparing bread for Shavuot or Shabbos, one is preparing more than what will be eaten at one sitting, but what will be eaten for a whole day. In another venue, the Rama states explicitly that it is permitted to make dairy or meat bread for a day at a time (Toras Chatas, 60:2). For this reason, the Aruch HaShulchan concludes that one may knead dough that is no more than what one's family and guests will eat within 24 hours.

Some authorities expressly prohibit baking dairy bread for both days of Shavuot in advance of the Yom Tov (Darchei Teshuvah 97:33). They reason that baking for two days at a time is no longer considered a "small amount." We should note that although several authorities mention explicitly that the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama dispute whether one may make bread for only one sitting or for one entire day, other authorities imply that the Shulchan Aruch accepts the Rama's more lenient understanding of a small amount (see Chavos Da'as, Biurim #4; Aruch HaShulchan 97:4).

All opinions agree that one must be careful not to produce so much that one expects there to be leftovers, unless one makes a heker in the bread (Bach; Darchei Teshuvah 97:34).

The whey to celebrate Shavuot!

At this point, we can address the first question asked above: "May I add dairy ingredients to bread that I intend to serve with a milchig meal on Shavuot?"

The answer is that, according to the Rama, one may prepare milchig bread in honor of the day, but only as much as will definitely be eaten in one day's time. According to the way most authorities understand the Shulchan Aruch, a Sefardi should not prepare more than will definitely be eaten in one meal.

Dairy bread during "the Nine Days"

During the Nine Days, am I permitted to make dairy bread, since we are not eating meat anyway?"

I have not found any halachic authority who states that the custom not to eat meat during the Nine Days permits us to make dairy bread during these days. Perhaps the reason why no one mentions such a heter is because there are numerous situations in which one may eat meat. For example, if someone is ill and needs to eat meat, at a seudas mitzvah, or on Shabbos. We still need to be concerned that one may mistakenly eat the dairy bread on any one of these occasions.

However, the two general heterim mentioned above, either of preparing a small amount of bread or of making bread with an unusual shape, both apply. Therefore, if the questioner is a Sefardi who follows the Shulchan Aruch, he may make (without a heker) as much dairy bread as his family and guests would eat at one meal, without any leftovers. If the questioner is an

Ashkenazi, he may make as much dairy bread as his family and guests would eat in a 24-hour day, without having any leftovers.

What about pastry?

At this point, we can address the two remaining questions I quoted above: "Is one permitted to make pastry with butter, when it will not be noticeable that the product is dairy?"

"As my daughter was preparing a kugel for seudah shlishis, she added sour cream to the dough. The kugel is too large to consume at one meal, even for our large family. Once it is removed from its oven tray, there will be no indication that it is dairy. May we eat it?"

The halachic authorities discuss whether the prohibition against bread containing dairy or meat applies also to items such as spices and pastry. The consensus is that one may add dairy ingredients to pastry that is ordinarily not eaten with meat, but is usually eaten either as dessert or together with coffee. However, one may not add dairy ingredients to foods, such as crackers or zwieback, that sometimes accompany meat (Shu't Maharit 2:18; Chachmas Adam 50:3). Others are lenient even regarding crackers and zwieback, contending that Chazal prohibited only bread (She'eilas Yaavetz #62; see Pri Chodosh, Yoreh Deah 97:1). According to both of these opinions, one may produce dairy cakes, cookies or doughnuts, even if they do not obviously look dairy.

There is a minority, late opinion that disagrees with the above and contends that one may not make dairy products that one may mistakenly eat for dessert after a meat meal (Yad Yehudah, Peirush HaKatzar 97:3). Following this approach, all dairy cakes, cookies or doughnuts must either be obviously dairy or be marked in a unique way that calls attention to their dairy status.

Distinguished bourekas

Based on this latter approach, common custom in Eretz Yisrael today is to make cheese bourekas in a triangular shape and pareve bourekas in square shapes. One could argue that since bourekas occasionally accompany meat, they should be prohibited from being dairy, even according to the opinions of the Shu't Maharit and the Chachmas Adam, quoted above, unless the dairy products would be distinguished as such. Since many authorities consider the Chachmas Adam to be the final authority in kashrus and other Yoreh Deah topics, this forms the basis for the current custom in Eretz Yisrael.

What if it happened by mistake?

What is the law if someone is in the process of making dough, and some milk spills into the dough? Is there a basis to be lenient, since the person was not trying to violate Chazal's rules?

Crying over spilled milk

The answer is that the prohibition against eating dairy bread is not a penalty that Chazal imposed on someone who violated their ruling. It is a takkanah that they instituted to guarantee that no one err and mistakenly violate the laws of eating meat and milk together. Thus, the prohibition is in effect, whether or not the milk (or meat) was added intentionally or in error. If an unintentional spill would result in a major loss, the Chachmas Adam (50:5) permits giving many families one loaf of bread each for immediate consumption (see also Aruch HaShulchan, Yoreh Deah 97:8; Yad Yehudah, Peirush HaKatzar 97:4). This is permitted, because each person receives an amount that he will finish in one day.

Commercial bakery

There are authorities who permit a commercial bakery to manufacture a large quantity of dairy bread, as long as it is careful to sell to each individual or household only a small amount that he would be permitted to make for himself (Shu't Kesav Sofer, Yoreh Deah #61). This logic would permit a kashrus agency to certify a company that makes dairy bread (under permitted

conditions), even though there is a large batter being made into small loaves. However, an earlier authority, the Maharit, rejects this heter, being concerned that the baker may forget to tell customers that the bread is dairy (Shu't Maharit 2:18).

Non-Jewish bakery

Does the prohibition apply only to a Jewish bakery, or even to a non-Jewish bakery? Chazal have the ability to prohibit only Jews from specific activities, but there is no mitzvah binding on a gentile to obey a ruling of Chazal. Thus, the question is as follows: If a gentile-owned bakery produces commercial quantities of dairy bread, may a Jew purchase small amounts of this bread — that is, enough for one meal or for one day? The Yad Yehudah (Peirush HaKatzar 97:7) discusses this issue, and prohibits it, only because of the problem of chalav akum, milk that was not supervised by an observant Jew. (I have written several articles on this topic in the past, which can be accessed on RabbiKaganoff.com under the heading chalav. Alternatively, I can send them to you via e-mail.) According to those who permit contemporary produced milk (also called sometimes chalav stam or chalav companies), it would appear that one would be permitted to buy a small quantity of dairy bread — enough that one would consume either at one meal or in the course of one day, without any leftovers.

Conclusion:

The Gemara teaches that the rabbinic laws are dearer to Hashem than are the Torah laws. In this context, we understand the importance of this prohibition created by Chazal to protect the Jewish people from eating dairy and meat together. We should always hope and pray that the food we eat complies with all the halachos that the Torah commands us to observe.

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For the week ending 23 May 2015 / 5 Sivan 5775

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav, “From where do we learn that one may make an oath to fulfill a mitzvah? From the verse, ‘I took an oath and I will keep it, to guard the judgments of Your righteousness’ (Tehillim 119:106).” Nedarim 8a

The apparent meaning of this teaching is that one may make an oath to fulfill a mitzvah, and the oath that he makes is binding. However, the gemara asks, “But isn’t he already under oath to fulfill all of the mitzvot from the time of the giving of the Torah at Sinai?” At that time the entire Jewish People promised, “We will do and we will hear” (the Torah and commandments). How can a person make himself more under oath and obligated than he already is?

The answer offered in the sugya is that the person may make an oath in order to be more inspired and invigorated to fulfill the mitzvah properly. The Maharsha explains that this oath is in fact not binding, but is permitted nevertheless (and is not considered “taking Gd’s Name in vain” — see Rabbenu Asher). The Rishonim discuss and express differences as to whether this oath is binding, and if so, to what extent — see Rabbenu Nissim, Tosefot, Ramban and others.

The Maharsha also explains why the gemara asks about the “redundancy” of the oath specifically on the teaching of Rav Gidel in the name of Rav, but did not pose this question directly on the verse that is the basis for the Sages’ teaching. From the verse, says the Maharsha, I might think that the oath mentioned is the one made by the entire Jewish People to keep all mitzvot when they received the Torah at Sinai, and King David is “reaffirming” in the verse that he will fulfill the oath made at Sinai. Only after Rav Gidel in the name of Rav explains the verse to be teaching about making a new oath to fulfill a mitzvah, the gemara can challenge this teaching, “But he already made this oath at Sinai!”

Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav, “One who says ‘I will get up early and learn a certain chapter or a certain tractate’ has made a great vow to the G-d of the Jewish People.” Nedarim 8a

Although this promise that the person makes does not contain the Name of G-d, it nevertheless has the status and strength of an oath, since the person is making a statement of commitment to do a mitzvah. Just as when a person who states that he will give charity is considered to have made a binding commitment, likewise a person who declares intent to learn Torah (beyond the minimum) is bound by his statement as “a great vow to the G-d of the Jewish People.” Although he did not mention the Name of G-d we do not suspect that he intends to learn Torah for his own personal honor and self-aggrandizement to be called “Rabbi.” Rather, it is assumed that his aim is to learn Torah “for the sake of Heaven”. (Maharsha)

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Halacha Hotline of the Five Towns and Far Rockaway

Enhance Your Shabbos Table with the Halacha Hotline: Parshas Bamidbar/Shavuos

Halachos Relevant for One Who Remains Awake the Entire Night of Shavuos

REMINDER: Please make sure to have a 3-day candle or to leave a flame on your stovetop for the duration of Yom Tov.

Over the centuries, a minhag (custom) has developed for people to remain awake the entire night of Shavuos to study Torah. The source for this minhag is in the Zohar.[1] The Arizal writes in his Shulchan Aruch[2] that one who remains awake the entire night of Shavuos and studies Torah the entire night is assured that he will complete his year and no evil will befall him.

Remaining awake the entire night, however, presents challenges in halacha with regard to the recitation of several b'rachos in the morning.[3] Those b'rachos are: 1) Al netilas yadayim; 2) Asher Yatzar;[4] 3) Elokai, neshamah...;[5] 4) Hama'avir Sheinah (...Hagomeil chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael);[6] and 5) Birchos HaTorah.[7] We will discuss each individually, noting the relevant issues and the possible solutions.

1) Al Netilas Yadayim: Upon waking in the morning from a regular nighttime sleep,[8] one must wash one's hands in the prescribed manner - each hand three times, alternating hands.[9] This procedure is called netilas yadayim shacharis (morning hand-washing) or negel vasser ([finger]-nail washing).[10] Three reasons are offered in the Poskim (halachic authorities) for the recitation of this b'rachah in the morning:[11]

a) When one is sleeping, one is likely to touch a part of one's body that is generally kept covered. When one does so, one is obligated to wash one's hands before davening (praying), reciting b'rachos, or studying Torah; b) A person who awakens from sleep is likened to one who is newly created to serve one's Creator. Accordingly, when one wakes up from sleep, one is obligated to wash one's hands as a Kohen is obligated to wash his hands before performing service in the Bais Hamikdash (Temple); c) When one sleeps, a ruach ra'ah[12] descends on one's body, and can be removed only through the prescribed manner of washing.[13] When washing one's hands in the morning, one recites the b'rachah of Al netilas yadayim. [14] Technically, when one remains awake the entire night, none of the three reasons for washing hands in the morning would apply: Since one was awake, one would not unintentionally touch a covered part of one's body; one was not "newly created"; and, seemingly, a ruach ra'ah would not have descended upon one's body. Accordingly, the question arises: If one remains awake the entire night, should one recite the b'rachah of Al netilas yadayim in the morning? At first glance, it would seem that one should not be allowed to recite the b'rachah. There is, however, an additional factor: Many b'rachos

were instituted in accordance with the minhag ha'olam (the custom of the world);[15] i.e., they were instituted for humankind in general, and are recited even by someone to whom it is not relevant. For example, in one of the birchos hashachar, pokeich ivrim, we recognize that Hashem "opens" the eyes of the blind. The b'rachah refers to the person who was unable to see ("was blind") while sleeping and is again given the ability to see upon awaking. Seemingly, this b'rachah should not be recited by one who is actually blind, since Hashem did not "open" that person's eyes. Nevertheless, a blind person does recite that blessing since it was instituted in accordance with minhag ha'olam. Perhaps the b'rachah of Al netilas yadayim as well was instituted in accordance with minhag ha'olam that people sleep at night, and one who remains awake all night may also recite the b'rachah.

The matter is questionable, and, therefore, one who remains awake the entire night should not recite the b'rachah of Al netilas yadayim in the morning.[16] However, most Poskim agree that if one were to relieve oneself in the morning, one may then recite Al netilas yadayim when washing one's hands.[17] See also the "resolution" at the end of the article. Alternatively, if one sleeps at least one-half hour at night, one may recite the b'rachah in the morning.

A similar question arises with regard to several other b'rachos:

2) Asher Yatzar: In this b'rachah we recognize Hashem's supervision over our body and its various functions, most specifically with regard to the removal of waste from the body. The b'rachah is recited after each time one performs one's bodily needs. In addition, it was instituted to be said upon awaking in the morning, since when one awakens from sleep, one is likened to one who was newly created and received a functioning body. Upon awaking from nighttime sleep, most people must attend to their bodily needs anyway, and the b'rachah is recited either after relieving oneself or at the beginning of the morning blessings.[18] Since the b'rachah was instituted due to one's likeness upon awaking to a newly created person, the Rema[19] rules that even one who has no need to relieve oneself recites the b'rachah. The Mishnah Berurah,[20] however, writes that since there are some Poskim who disagree, one should not recite the b'rachah until after one relieves oneself.

3) "Elokai, neshamah...": Chazal[21] write that when one sleeps, one's soul returns to Hashem to give an accounting of all the deeds one performed during the waking hours. Although we often have not acted perfectly during the day, and do not deserve to have our souls returned to us, Hashem, in His kindness, returns our soul to us anyway and allows us to live another day. We recite the b'rachah of "Elokai, neshamah..." to recognize Hashem's kindness in this matter.

4) Hama'avir Sheinah (...Hagomeil chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael): In this b'rachah we begin by recognizing Hashem's kindness in removing the bonds of sleep from our eyes in the morning.

5) Birchos HaTorah: Every morning we recite Birchos HaTorah to allow us to study Torah during the day and ensuing evening. The b'rachos recited the previous day do not satisfy the requirement for the subsequent day because there was an interruption in the possibility of effectiveness of the b'rachos - the time during which one slept and was unable to study Torah.

The question arises: May one who remained awake all night recite the b'rachos of Asher Yatzar, "Elokai, neshamah...", Hama'avir Sheinah (...Hagomeil chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael), and Birchos HaTorah? On the one hand, perhaps these blessings were instituted only for those who actually experienced the situations the b'rachos address (see note),[22] and one who remained awake all night would not be permitted to recite these b'rachos. On the other hand, perhaps these b'rachos were instituted in accordance with the minhag ha'olam that people sleep at night, and one who remained awake all night would be permitted, and indeed required, to recite these b'rachos. The matter is questionable, and, therefore, one who remained awake the entire night should not recite all the aforementioned b'rachos in the morning.[23] However, all Poskim agree that if one were to relieve oneself in the morning, one may recite the b'rachah of Asher Yatzar. Also, if one sleeps at least one-

half hour at night, one may recite all the b'rachos of Asher Yatzar, "Elokai, neshamah..." and Hama'avir Sheinah (...Hagomeil chasadim tovim l'amo Yisrael) in the morning; and if one sleeps at least one-half hour at night on a bed or a sofa,[24] one may recite Birchos HaTorah in the morning.[25] See also "The Resolution" below.

The Resolution

As can be seen from the above discussion, there are quite a number of b'rachos in the morning that may not be recited by one who remains awake the entire night. This issue is not germane to Shavuos night; it is relevant anytime one remains awake the entire night. On Shavuos night, however, the issue is relevant not only to individuals, but to entire congregations. To resolve the issue, the custom is that at the beginning of Shacharis, one who slept at night (at least one-half hour in bed or on a sofa) recites out loud all the b'rachos that are problematic. (In fact, the custom has developed that he recites all the morning blessings, even those that may be said by those who remained awake all night.)[26] He has in mind to exempt all the members of the congregation with his recitation of the b'rachos, and they must listen to every word of his b'rachos and have in mind to be exempted with his recitation. By doing so, all of the issues are resolved.

[1] Mishnah Berurah 494:1. See also Sh'nei Luchos HaBris, Mesechta Shavuos, Amud Hatorah, who records a fascinating account of the first time the Bais Yosef (Rav Yosef Karo) and his colleagues remained awake studying Torah the entire night of Shavuos. [2] Cited in M.B. ibid. [3] This issue is not germane to Shavuos night; it is relevant anytime one remains awake the entire night. On Shavuos night, however, the issue is relevant not only to individuals, but to entire congregations. [4] The b'rachah one recites after performing one's bodily needs. [5] The b'rachah we recite to thank Hashem for returning to us our soul upon waking; see below in the article. [6] That is, the last of the 15 Birchos Hashachar (Morning Blessings). [7] Blessings of the Torah, which we recite to allow us to study Torah during the day and ensuing evening. [8] For elaboration, see article of Parshas Vayishlach, emailed Dec 4, 2014. [9] Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 4:1-2. [10] For an understanding of the name negel vasser, see Taamei Haminhagim #5. [11] See M.B. 4:1,8. [12] Literally: evil spirit. It is a type of metaphysical defilement of the body. [13] Technically speaking, upon awaking the ruach ra'ah leaves the entire body except for the hands. Washing removes the ruach ra'ah from one's hands. [14] Some recite the b'rachah before Shacharis. For elaboration, see article of Parshas Vayishlach, emailed Dec 4, 2014. [15] See Bi'ur Halacha 52:1 s.v. Kol hab'rachos. [16] See Mishnah Berurah 4:30. Refraining from reciting a b'rachah in this case is due to the application of the concept of safeik b'rachos l'hakeil - we refrain from reciting b'rachos in cases of doubt. [17] The logic behind this ruling is beyond the scope of the article (see Bi'ur Halacha 4:13 s.v. V'yitlam b'lo b'rachah). In order to be able to recite the b'rachah, one either has to move one's bowels or urinate and touch an unclean part of one's body. Some Poskim recommend, if possible, that one not rely on this ruling; rather, one who remained awake all night should have someone who slept at night exempt him with the b'rachah (see "the resolution" at the end of article). [18] For elaboration, see article of Parshas Vayishlach, emailed Dec 4, 2014. [19] Orach Chaim 4:1. [20] 4:4. [21] Our Sages, may their memories be blessed. [22] I.e., they were "newly created," returned their soul to Hashem, experienced the bonds of sleep, or experienced an interruption in the effectiveness of the Birchos HaTorah. [23] See M.B. 4:3, 4:30, 46:24 and 47:28. See also note 16. [24] For elaboration, see article of Parshas Vayishlach, emailed Dec 4, 2014. [25] There is much discussion in the Poskim whether one who slept during the day then remained awake the entire night may recite Birchos Hatorah in the morning. There is also much discussion in the Poskim whether one can have in mind to dispense one's obligation of Birchos Hatorah through intent during the b'rachah of Ahavas Olam in Ma'ariv (the Evening Prayer) or during the b'rachah of Ahavah Rabbah/Ahavas Olam in Shacharis (the Morning Prayer). In the end, the issue remains questionable and one must seek a resolution to satisfy (at least) the majority of the Poskim. See "The Resolution" at the end of the article. [26] See Magen Avraham 46:14.

DISCLAIMER: Not all details and aspects of the question and answer can be fully expressed in this limited format. Accordingly, one should not rely on the information herein for their specific case as a small change in the circumstances can change the halachic outcome.