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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BAMIDBAR – SHAVUOS - 5781

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Fri, May 14

This is a Sefira reminder for Friday evening, May 14

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subject: Rabbi Reisman's Weekly Chumash Shiur

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman - Parshas Bamidbar 5781

1 – Topic – A Thought on the Upcoming Yom Tov of Shavuos.

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar and the Chag of Mattan Torah which is a time of great for Klal Yisrael tempered by great concern for the situation in Eretz Yisrael and the welfare of Acheinu Bnei Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael and all of the children in Eretz Yisrael who are facing a difficult time again after a very difficult year. Hashem Yiracheim.

Let's start by discussing Shavuos. There are really two faces to Shavuos. Shavuos is Zman Mattan Toraseinu which is of course what is most foremost on our mind, but also as the Torah points out the end of Sefiras Ha'omer, not only the counting of the Omer, but in the agricultural cycle the Omer which is brought on Pesach is the beginning of the time that Yidden eat from the new crop. The Shte Halechem on Shavuos is the beginning of the time that Korbanos and Menachos are brought in the Bais Hamikdash from the new crop, and therefore, the Omer or the Pesach – Shavuos period is the Chag Habikkurim, it is the time that new things are brought first in our homes and then in the Bais Hamikdash. So these are the two aspects of Chag Hashavuos.

The Gemara in Maseches Menachos 45b makes the following comment. The Gemara observes that the Korban of Shavuos is brought in Parshas Emor and in Parshas Pinchas. The Gemara says (22 lines from the top) (יכול הן הן כבשים האמורים כאן הן כבשים האמורים בחומש הפקודים). I would think it is the same Korban, the Shavuos Korban that is mentioned in Emor and the one brought in Pinchas is it the same? You have to be careful. (אמרת כשאתה מגיע אצל פרים ואילים אינן הן). If you think when you are Mavir Sedra, you will see it is not the same. Why? In Emor it is one Par and two Ailim. In Pinchas it is two Parim and one Ayil. Says the Gemara (אלא הללו באין בגלל עצמן והללו באין בגלל לחם).

What the Gemara is saying is that there are two parts to Shavuos. (בגלל עצמן). There is the Yom Tov itself, the Chag Hashavuos of Mattan Torah and there is the Yom Tov of Yom Habikkurim the Shte Halechem which is brought together with the two Parim.

So therefore, what the Gemara is saying is the following. We have the Yom Tov of Mattan Torah, of Shavuos which is mentioned in Parshas Emor with the other Yomim Tovim, and then we have the Yom Tov of Yom Habikkurim (וביום הבכורים, בהקריבכם מנחה חדשה). In Pinchas 28:26 it says clearly that we are talking about a Yom Tov to be Makriv a new Mincha and the Posuk in Pinchas says (וביום הבכורים, בהקריבכם מנחה חדשה לירור--בשבעת ימים). Yom Bikkurim is the day you bring a new Mincha to Hashem, (בשבעת ימים) on your Shavuos. So that there are two faces to Chag Hashavuos.

Why do we eat Milchigs, why does Klal Yisrael have this Minhag? We find two reasons. The Rama says because we bring the Shte Halechem, there are two breads offered on Shavuos from the new crop, so therefore, we have two Lechem. A Fleishig bread and Milchig bread (that doesn't mean that the bread is Fleishig or Milchig). It is a bread that is eaten with Fleishig and a bread eaten with Milchig so that it is K'negged the Shtei Ha'Lechem.

The Mishna Brura brings a second reason because at Mattan Torah when Moshe Rabbeinu came down Klal Yisrael had Milchigs, they didn't have Kosher Fleishigs ready for them. One reason based on one aspect of Shavuos and one reason based on the other aspect of Shavuos. So that we have these two parts to the Yom Tov that we are about to begin.

The question is why mix it together, Kabbalas Hatorah. The main moment in the history of the world accepting the Torah at Har Sinai has to be mixed with an agricultural holiday, with the celebration of the bringing of the new crop, making the new crop useable. Why mix Mattan Hatorah with anything?

The answer is there is a message as Rav Pam used to say about Shavuos. The Gemara says that every Yom Tov if you want can be Kulo L'Hashem, it can be a purely spiritual Yom Tov. Except for Shavuos. As it says in Maseches Pesachim 68b (29 lines from the top) (הכל מודים) (בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם). Everyone agrees that on Shavuos you need Lachem. Why Shavuos, why Mattan Torah you have to have things that you enjoy?

Somebody might make a mistake and think that Olam Hazeh is a contradiction to Mattan Torah. That the pleasures of this world are somehow not in line with the serving of the Ribbono Shel Olam. (הכל (מודים) בעצרת דבעינן נמי לכם). No! By Mattan Torah the Torah is given to be observed in the world, not as a contradiction to the world. Therefore, everyone agrees that on Shavuos you have to have a Geshmake meal, something that you enjoy. Therefore, there is a mixing of the Yom Tov of Kabbalas Hatorah with the Yom Tov of a Yid who works B'olam Hazeh, works the land and does the 10 Mitzvos that a person has to do to bring bread. There is more than 10 Mitzvos, but there are at least 10 Mitzvos. There is a Mayla by Hamotzie that you should hold the bread with all 10 fingers K'negged the 10 Mitzvos that have to be performed in order to bring bread to your table. That is why it says that the Beracha of Hamotzie has 10 words in it. This is because when you look at a piece of bread you are looking at 10 Mitzvos. It is not a contradiction to Mattan Torah to have the good Gashmios of Olam Hazeh as long as it is done in the spirit of the Torah.

Along those lines, the Chasam Sofer asks a question regarding Megillas Rus. Boaz we are told was a Nasi, a Shofet, he was the judge of Klal Yisrael. He was a man in his 80's. What is he doing working in the field

and sleeping in the tent in the field. Why isn't he home or in the Beis Medrash and have his workers do their work?

Enfert the Chasam Sofer, because working the land of Eretz Yisrael is a Mitzvah as Yishuv Eretz Yisrael which includes working the land. The Chasam Sofer says that it is a Mitzvah She'e Efsheir Al Yidai Shaliach. This is what the Chasam Sofer says on Megillas Rus. This is taken actually from the Drashos Chasam Sofer. He says it was a Mitzvah and that is why he worked the land. It is not a Stira to Torah. It is with Torah that we serve HKB"H and we have the Geshmak of Olam Hazeh. So we stay up Shavuos night and we learn and with it we have refreshments, we have things that make us feel good in our Avodas Hashem.

2 – Topic – A second thought regarding Chag Hashavuos.

It has been noted that we celebrate Mattan Torah with the first Luchos. The first Luchos were broken. Logic would dictate to observe Mattan Torah when Moshe Rabbeinu went up to receive the second set of Luchos on Rosh Chodesh Elul and we say no. It is one long lesson. From the beginning of the first Luchos until the second Luchos came down on Yom Hakkipurim it is one long 120 day lesson of Mattan Torah. The last words in the Torah are (Devarim 34:12) (לְעִינֵי כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל). Rashi says that it goes on the breaking of the Luchos. When the Torah ends it is Miramez to us Moshe Rabbeinu's great accomplishment that he broke the Luchos.

There is a Kasha on this. That is Moshe Rabbeinu's great accomplishment that he broke the Luchos? Moshe Rabbeinu did so much and that is what you remember him for? For breaking the Luchos? It doesn't seem to make any sense. Remember Moshe Rabbeinu for taking us out of Mitzrayim, for going up and receiving the Torah, for Davening to HKB"H all the time. What is going on?

I once saw in the Sefer Toras Chessed he says an incredible Pshat. He said that Moshe Rabbeinu came down with the Luchos. Klal Yisrael was serving the Eigel. Hashem didn't say break the Luchos. (ג' דברים עשה משה). There are three things that Moshe Rabbeinu did on his own as it says in Maseches Shabbos 87a (8 lines from the top). He broke the Luchos on his own. HKB"H said you are right (והסכים הקב"ה). He didn't have to break the Luchos. The Luchos has a Parsha of Teshuva. He could have brought down the Luchos and have Klal Yisrael do Teshuvah.

Moshe Rabbeinu said no. Moshe Rabbeinu taught Klal Yisrael there are times in life where you can get something but if you wait and are patient, and you prepare properly, you can get something better. When it comes to ice cream, take the ice cream you get now. If it is going to take patience and work to get better ice cream then take the ice cream you got. It is good enough. Good enough is for Gashmios.

When it comes to Kabbalas Hatorah, Moshe Rabbeinu said what? A B'dieved Kabbalas Hatorah. I am going to bring down Luchos that are going to involve doing Teshuva if you want to be Mekabeil the Luchos? No!

Moshe Rabbeinu broke the Luchos and said we are going to start all over again. We are going to get new Luchos and we are going to have a new Kabbalas Hatorah. It is better to wait and do it right then to accept a B'dieved in things that are Ruchnius, things that are spiritual (ישר כחך ששברת). Moshe Rabbeinu taught us that things should be done in the Lechatchila'dika Ofen, in the best way when it comes to the serving of HKB"H. That is a lesson. The lesson in our service of HKB"H to do it in the most Lechatchila'dika way.

3 – Topic – A Thought on Parshas Bamidbar.

Let me not forget Parshas Bamidbar. We are talking about Har Sinai and Mattan Torah and Parshas Bamidbar starts with it. (וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה) (בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי). Why is it mentioning Midbar Sinai? Maybe because HKB"H knew that Parshas Bamidbar will come out around the same time as the Simcha of Kabbalas Hatorah. But what is the lesson of Bamidbar Sinai?

Says the Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7 that it says Bamidbar Sinai that a person who wants to learn Torah he has to make himself Hefker like a Midbar (וידבר ר' אל משה במדבר סיני אלא כל מי שאינו עושה עצמו כמדבר הפקר, אינו יכול) (לקנות את ההכמה והתורה, לךך נאמר: במדבר סיני). He can't be too Makpid on his own things. The lesson here is if you want to have Hatzlacha in serving HKB"H Maisim Atzmo K'midbar, you have to put aside your

own personal needs. You have to put aside the Ani of the person. My needs have to be second most important to the service of HKB"H.

It has been noted that in Parshas Chayei Sarah we learn about the extraordinary work of the extraordinary Shadchan Eliezer. Eliezer goes, Eliezer travels, Eliezer does... People ask, guess how many times it says the name Eliezer in Parshas Chayei Sarah? The answer is zero. It doesn't say his name once. It says Eved Avraham all the time. Vayomer Eved Avraham, Vayeilech Eved Avraham. It never says Eliezer. Do you know why Eliezer had such great Hatzlacha? Because there was no Ani, there was no me. He was Eved Avraham and he did what he had to do.

Klal Yisrael, we have to be Avdai Hashem, we have to serve the Ribbono Shel Olam and with that approach we go to Midbar Sinai, we go to Har Sinai, we go to Kabbalas Hatorah. Put aside the Ani. I know. It is hard to stay up Shavuos by night. It is much more enjoyable to go into a comfortable bed. Ani. No!

Imagine if G-d forbid, if Chas V'chalila all of Klal Yisrael were like you and they all went to sleep Shavuos by night. It would be a reenactment of the disaster that happened the first time. Who are the ones in Klal Yisrael that are going to stay up and go to the Bais Medrash? Other people? You!

You go to the Bais Medrash and you do what you have to do. This time Shavuos is Sunday night. Working people for the most part are off on Sunday (unless they are accountants). Working people are off on Sunday. Take a nap. Prepare. It is Sheloshes Yemai Hag'bala, take three days of naps. But by Mattan Torah you got to be awake. You got to be there. Klal Yisrael needs you! Put aside the Ani and Maisim Atzmo K'midbar. Then you will be able to have a proper Kabbalas Hatorah.

As we march towards Kabbalas Hatorah lets Daven that HKB"H should give Seichel to those in Eretz Yisrael to ignore the Kochi V'osem Yadi for wanting to do everything on their own. They should be careful with the lives of Klal Yisrael, with the Neshamos of Klal Yisrael. HKB"H should help us and we should have a Siyata Dish'maya. Our enemies should kill each other and leave us alone. If only they would fight a little more among themselves that would be wonderful and if only Klal Yisrael would not fight among themselves that would be wonderful. We have to get there. B'ezras Hashem to have a wonderful Chag Hashavuos. Hashem should help that by the time Shavuos comes this Tzarah should have passed and we should be able to successfully serve HKB"H B'simcha Rabbah. I wish everyone a Gutten Shabbos and a Gutten Kabbalas Hatorah. Make it happen!

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust** <info@rabbisacks.org> via gmail.mcsv.net reply-to: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org> date: May 13, 2021, 10:39 AM subject: **Shavuos Inspiration** | Download the new 'Ceremony & Celebration: Family Edition'

Shavuos in a Nutshell SHAVUOT is the second of the three biblical foot festivals (the Shalosh Regalim), falling on the 6th of Sivan (and continuing on 7th of Sivan in the diaspora). Shavuos celebrates the moment when, fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt, the Jewish People stood at Har Sinai for the Giving of the Torah. It also celebrates the wheat harvest in Eretz Yisrael. Shavuos means "weeks", as it falls seven weeks (a "week of weeks") after Pesach, the culmination of the 49-day Omer period which began on the second night of Pesach. Because of this, Shavuos is also known as "Pentecost" which means fifty in Greek (it is the fiftieth day after the completion of the counting of 49 days). Other names for Shavuos found in the Torah are Chag HaKatzir (the Festival of Reaping), and Yom HaBikkurim (Day of the First Fruits) and in the Talmud it is also known as Atzeret (refraining or holding back). This connects Shavuos to Pesach in a similar way that Shemini Atzeret is connected to Succot). We also refer to Shavuos in our prayers as Zeman Matan Torah (the Time of the Giving of the Torah). While there are no rituals associated with Shavuos in the Torah, there are several beautiful and meaningful customs that have developed to help us celebrate Shavuos. These include Tikkun Leil Shavuos (staying up all night to learn Torah), eating dairy foods, decorating the shul with flowers and greenery, and the reading of Megillat Rut.

From the Thought of Rabbi Sacks
TORAH: OUR GREATEST GIFT

Zion in Jerusalem but at Mount Sinai in the desert. The law came before the land. Therefore, though they had lost the land, they still had the law. Though they had lost the country, they still had the covenant. The law of Israel was not like the law of every other nation – the decree of kings or the edict of a legislative assembly. It came from God Himself, the Infinite Eternal. Therefore, it could never be lost or nullified. This was when the full significance of Shavuot began to come clear. The real miracle was not the land but the law that preceded the land. Ezra and Nechemiah understood this after the Babylonian exile, as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai in the midst of the rebellion against Rome. Without them it is highly doubtful whether Jews or Judaism would have survived. For the better part of two thousand years Jews lost their land, and once again – as it was for the exile in Babylon – it was Torah that sustained the people as a people, giving them the assurance that one day they would return. For in truth this always was our greatest gift: the Torah, our constitution of liberty under the sovereignty of God, our marriage contract with Heaven itself, written in letters of black fire on white fire, joining the infinity of God and the finitude of humankind in an unbreakable bond of law and love, the scroll Jews carried wherever they went, and that carried them. This is the Torah: the voice of heaven as it is heard on earth, the word that lights the world. On the face of it, Shavuot is a brief festival with few distinctive practices and, at least as far as the Torah is concerned, no specific historical content. But Shavuot is the festival of Jewish identity. Judaism is supremely a religion of the land – the whole of Torah from Avraham to the death of Moshe is a journey toward it – and Shavuot was the supreme festival of the land. There were agricultural elements on Pesach and Succot also, but Shavuot was the time of the grain harvest and of bringing first fruits to the Temple and declaring: “My father was a wandering Aramean.... And the Lord brought us out of Egypt.... He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” However, from the outset Shavuot was also the festival of the Giving of the Law, seen as the culmination of the seven-week journey that began with Pesach. But every nation had laws, and for much of the biblical era, other issues, political, military and cultural, held centre-stage. The Prophets tirelessly argued that without faithfulness to God and justice and compassion to their fellow humans, Israel would eventually suffer a momentous defeat, but all too few were listening, and the reforms of Kings like Chezekiah and Yoshiyahu proved too little too late. Only with the experience of the Babylonian exile did people come to see that the law of Israel was unlike that of any other nation – not just because of its content but because of who gave it, when and where. It was given not at Mount Zion in Jerusalem but at Mount Sinai in the desert. The law came before the land. Therefore, though they had lost the land, they still had the law. Though they had lost the country, they still had the covenant. The law of Israel was not like the law of every other nation – the decree of kings or the edict of a legislative assembly. It came from God Himself, the Infinite Eternal. Therefore, it could never be lost or nullified. This was when the full significance of Shavuot began to come clear. The real miracle was not the land but the law that preceded the land. Ezra and Nechemiah understood this after the Babylonian exile, as did Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai in the midst of the rebellion against Rome. Without them it is highly doubtful whether Jews or Judaism would have survived. For the better part of two thousand years Jews lost their land, and once again – as it was for the exile in Babylon – it was Torah that sustained the people as a people, giving them the assurance that one day they would return. For in truth this always was our greatest gift: the Torah, our constitution of liberty under the sovereignty of God, our marriage contract with Heaven itself, written in letters of black fire on white fire, joining the infinity of God and the finitude of humankind in an unbreakable bond of law and love, the scroll Jews carried wherever they went, and that carried them. This is the Torah: the voice of heaven as it is heard on earth, the word that lights the world.

Deep Diving into Megillat Rut BACKGROUND The story of Ruth is one of the most beautiful in the Bible. It begins in dislocation and grief.

Famine leads Elimelech, together with his wife Naomi and their two sons, to leave their home in Bet Lechem, to go to Moav to find food. There, the sons marry Moavite women, but all three men die, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law childless widows. Naomi decides to return home, and Ruth, who had married her son Machlon, insists on going with her. There, in Bet Lechem, in a field at harvest time, Ruth meets a relative of Naomi’s, Boaz, who acts kindly toward her. Later at Naomi’s suggestion, Ruth asks him to act the part of a kinsman-redeemer. Boaz does so, and he and Ruth marry and have a child. The book that begins with death ends in new life. It is a story about the power of human kindness to redeem life from tragedy, and its message is that out of suffering, if transformed by love, can come new life and hope. The commentators make two primary connections between Ruth and Shavuot. The first is seasonal. The key events in the book are set during the barley and wheat harvests, the time of the counting of the Omer and Shavuot itself. The second is substantive. Ruth became the paradigm case of a convert to Judaism, and to become a convert you have to enter the covenant of Sinai with its life of the commands: what the Israelites did when they accepted the Torah on the first Shavuot. THE BOOK OF LOYALTY AND LOVE All three megillot read on the pilgrimage festivals are about love: the stages of love as we experience it in our growth from youth to maturity to old age. The Song of Songs, read on Pesach, the festival of spring, is about love in the spring: the passion between two lovers that has nothing in it of yesterday or tomorrow but lives in the overwhelming intensity of today. The book is structured as a series of duets between beloved and lover, their voices loaded with desire. There is nothing in it about courtship, marriage, home-building and having children: the world of adult responsibilities. The lovers long simply to be together, to elope.

Kohelet, read on Succot, the festival of autumn, is about love in the autumn of life, as the heat cools, light fades, the leaves fall, and clouds begin to hide the sun. “Live well, with the woman you love,” says Kohelet (9:9). This is love as companionship, and it is rich in irony. Kohelet is written as the autobiography of Shlomo Hamelech, the King who married seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (I Kings 11:3), and in the end concluded, “And this is what I found: woman is more bitter than death, for she is all traps, with nets laid in her heart; her arms are a prison” (Kohelet 7:26). A thousand wives will not bring you happiness. Faithfulness to one will. Ruth is about the love at the heart of Judaism, the love of summer, when the passion of youth has been tamed and the clouds of age do not yet cover the sky. Ruth is about love as loyalty, faithfulness, committing yourself to another in a bond of responsibility and grace. It is about caring for the other more than you care about yourself. It is about Ruth setting her own aspirations aside to care for her mother-in-law Naomi, bereaved as she is of her husband and two sons. It is what Boaz does for Ruth. The root a-h-v, “love,” which appears eighteen times in the Song of Songs, appears in Ruth only once. By contrast, the words chessed, loving-kindness, and the verb g-a-l, “to redeem,” do not appear at all in the Song of Songs, but figure in Ruth respectively three and twenty-four times. The megillot are framing devices that force us into seeing the festivals themselves in a new light. When we read the Song of Songs on Pesach it transforms our understanding of the Exodus from a political event, the liberation of slaves. Kohelet turns Succot into a philosophical reflection on the succah as a symbol of mortality, the body as a temporary dwelling. It is the sobering story of how Shlomo, wisest of men, sought to deny death by taking refuge in possessions, wives, servants and worldly wisdom, yet at every step he found himself face to face with the brevity and vulnerability of life. Only at the end did he discover that joy is to be found in simple things: life itself, dignified by work and beautified by love. Ruth likewise invites us to reframe Shavuot, seeing the making of the covenant at Sinai not simply as a religious or political act, but as an act of love – a mutual pledge between two parties, committing themselves to one another in a bond of responsibility, dedication and loyalty. The covenant at Sinai was a marriage between God and the Children of Israel. The covenant at Sinai was a bond of love whose closest analogue in Tanach is the relationship between Boaz and Ruth.

One of the most sustained libels in religious history was Christianity's claim that Judaism was a religion not of love but of law; not of compassion but of justice; not of forgiveness but of retribution. The book of Ruth, read on Shavuot, is the refutation. Judaism is a religion of love, three loves: loving God with all our heart, our soul and our might (Devarim 6:5); loving our neighbour as ourselves (Vayikra 19:18); and loving the stranger because we know what it feels like to be a stranger (Devarim 10:19). Judaism is, from beginning to end, the story of a love: God's love for a small, powerless and much afflicted people, and a people's love – tempestuous at times to be sure – for God. That is the story of Ruth: love as faithfulness, loyalty and responsibility, and as a marriage that brings new life into the world. That is the love that was consecrated at Sinai on the first Shavuot of all.

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Leading a Nation of Individuals

Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20)

May 9, 2021

by **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

Leading a Nation of Individuals

The book of Bamidbar begins with a census of the Israelites. That is why it this book is known in English as Numbers. This raises a number of questions: what is the significance of this act of counting? And why here at the beginning of the book? Besides which, there have already been two previous censuses of the people and this is the third within the space of a single year. Surely one would have been sufficient. Additionally, does counting have anything to do with leadership?

The place to begin is to note what appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, Rashi says that the acts of counting in the Torah are gestures of love on the part of God:

Because they (the Children of Israel) are dear to Him, God counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His Presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the Sanctuary), He counted them again. (Rashi to Bamidbar 1:1)

When God initiates a census of the Israelites, it is to show that He loves them.

On the other hand, the Torah is explicit in saying that taking a census of the nation is fraught with risk:

Then God said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to God a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them." (Ex. 30:11-12).

When, centuries later, King David counted the people, there was Divine anger and seventy thousand people died.¹ How can this be, if counting is an expression of love?

The answer lies in the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: *se'u et rosh*, literally, "lift the head." (Num. 1:2) This is a strange, circumlocutory expression. Biblical Hebrew contains many verbs meaning "to count": *limnot*, *lifkod*, *lispov*, *lachshov*. Why does the Torah not use these simple words for the census, choosing instead the roundabout expression, "lift the heads" of the people?

The short answer is this: In any census, count or rollcall there is a tendency to focus on the total - the crowd, the multitude, the mass. Here is a nation of sixty million people, or a company with one hundred thousand employees, or a sports crowd of sixty thousand. Any total tends to value the group or nation as a whole. The larger the total, the stronger the army, the more popular the team, and the more successful the company.

Counting devalues the individual and tends to make him or her replaceable. If one soldier dies in battle, another will take their place. If one person leaves the organisation, someone else can be hired to do their job.

Notoriously, too, crowds have the effect of tending to make the individual lose their independent judgment and follow what others are doing. We call this "herd behaviour," and it sometimes leads to collective madness. In 1841 Charles Mackay published his classic study, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, which tells of the South Sea Bubble that cost thousands of people their money in the 1720s, and the tulip mania in Holland when entire fortunes were spent on single tulip bulbs. The Great Crashes of 1929 and 2008 had the same crowd psychology.

Another great work, Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) showed how crowds exercise a "magnetic influence" that transmutes the behaviour of individuals into a collective "group mind." As he put it, "An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will." People in a crowd become anonymous. Their conscience is silenced. They lose a sense of personal responsibility.

Crowds are peculiarly prone to regressive behaviour, primitive reactions and instinctual behaviour. They are easily led by figures who are demagogues, playing on people's fears and their sense of victimhood. Such leaders, Le Bon noted, are "especially recruited from the ranks of those morbidly nervous excitable half-deranged persons who are bordering on madness,"² a remarkable anticipation of Hitler. It is no accident that Le Bon's work was published in France at a time of rising antisemitism and the Dreyfus trial.

Hence the significance of one remarkable feature of Judaism: its principled insistence – like no other civilisation before – on the dignity and integrity of the individual. We believe that every human being was created in the image and likeness of God. The Sages said that every life is like an entire universe.³ Maimonides wrote that each of us should see ourselves as if our next act could change the fate of the world.⁴ Every dissenting view is carefully recorded in the Mishnah, even if the law is otherwise. Every verse of the Torah is capable, said the Sages, of seventy interpretations. No voice, no view, is silenced. Judaism never allows us to lose our individuality in the mass.

There is a wonderful blessing mentioned in the Talmud to be said on seeing six hundred thousand Israelites together in one place. It is: "Blessed are You, Lord... who discerns secrets."⁵ The Talmud explains that every person is different. We each have different attributes. We all think our own thoughts. Only God can enter the minds of each of us and know what we are thinking, and this is what the blessing refers to. In other words, even in a massive crowd where, to human eyes, faces blur into a mass, God still relates to us as individuals, not as members of a crowd.

That is the meaning of the phrase, "lift the head," used in the context of a census. God tells Moses that there is a danger, when counting a nation, that each individual will feel insignificant. "What am I? What difference can I make? I am only one of millions, a mere wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea-shore, dust on the surface of infinity."

Against that, God tells Moses to lift people's heads by showing that they each count; they matter as individuals. Indeed in Jewish law a *davar she-be-minyan*, something that is counted, sold individually rather than by weight, is never nullified even in a mixture of a thousand or a million others.⁶ In Judaism taking a census must always be done in such a way as to signal that we are valued as individuals. We each have unique gifts. There is a contribution only I can bring. To lift someone's head means to show them favour, to recognise them. It is a gesture of love.

There is, however, all the difference in the world between individuality and individualism. Individuality means that I am a unique and valued member of a team. Individualism means that I am not a team player at all. I am interested in myself alone, not the group. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam gave this a famous name, noting that more people than ever in the United States are going ten-pin bowling, but fewer than ever are joining bowling teams. He called this phenomenon "Bowling alone."⁷ MIT professor Sherry Turkle calls our age of Twitter, Facebook, and electronic rather than face-to-face friendships, "Alone together."⁸ Judaism values individuality, not individualism. As Hillel said, "If I am only for myself, what am I?"⁹

All this has implications for Jewish leadership. We are not in the business of counting numbers. The Jewish people always was small and yet achieved great things. Judaism has a profound mistrust of demagogic leaders who manipulate the emotions of crowds. Moses at the Burning Bush spoke of his inability to be eloquent. "I am not a man of words" (Ex. 4:10). He thought this was a deficiency in a leader. In fact, it was the opposite. Moses did not sway people by his oratory. Rather, he lifted them by his teaching.

A Jewish leader has to respect individuals. They must "lift their heads." If you seek to lead, however small or large the group you lead, you must always communicate the value you place on everyone, including those others exclude: the widow, the orphan and the stranger. You must never attempt to sway a crowd by appealing to the primitive emotions of fear or hate. You must never ride roughshod over the opinions of others.

It is hard to lead a nation of individuals, but this is the most challenging, empowering, inspiring leadership of all.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

Why do you think a census was taken just before the inauguration of the Mishkan?

What is the difference between a great leader who gives inspiring speeches to crowds, and a dangerously dictator who gives stirring oratories to the masses?

Jewish law follows the majority rule – how can it do this while also valuing every individual's opinion? (Hint: how are halachic decisions made and recorded in the Gemara?)

NOTES

1. 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21. 2. Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd*, London, Fisher Unwin 1896, 134. 3 Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:4. 4 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:4. 5 *Brachot* 58a. 6 *Beitsah* 3b. 7. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000. 8. Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, New York, Basic Books, 2011. 10 *Mishnah Avot* 1:14.

from: **Rabbi Yisroel Ciner** <ciner@torah.org>

to: parsha-insights@torah.org

date: May 13, 2021, 8:38 PM

subject: Parsha Insights - Where is Your Furniture?

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya Parshas Bamidbar Where is Your Furniture? This weeks parsha begins the Sefer of Bamidbar. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Midbar (wilderness) of Sinai... saying. (1:1)" The Ramban writes that this sefer primarily deals with the mitzvos that we were commanded to perform in the midbar and the miracles that accompanied us through our travels. The Midrash states that the Torah was given through three mediums: water, fire and the wilderness. Avraham passed through the fire of Uhr Kasdim in his steadfast refusal to deny Hashem's existence. As we left Mitzraim we passed through the waters of Yam Suf. We then traveled into and through the midbar. The Ksav Sofer explains how each of these, teach us the underlying foundations of our connection to the Torah. The Torah is compared to water. Just as water flows from a high place to a low one, so too Torah flows from a haughty person to a humble one. The Torah was given on Har Sinai, the lowest of the mountains, to demonstrate this aspect of the Torah. In order to develop and grow in Torah, one must properly recognize his position vis-a-vis Hashem. He must realize the incredible gift that has been offered to him to connect to the will of his Creator. Only such a humble approach will allow him to properly access the Torah and thereby properly access Hashem. The Torah is compared to fire. Fire illuminates the path of life for a person and allows him to choose the proper direction. Rav Shalom gives a parable of a person who had never yet seen a movie, who

wandered into a theater. Upon seeing the screen and wanting to get a better understanding of what was happening, he shined a flashlight onto the screen. The mesmerizing, moving shapes and figures turned into a blank white screen. The fire of Torah illuminates this world, and gives us the perspective to distinguish between tempting illusions and reality. The Torah was given in the midbar. This relates to the Torah being given to 'the eaters of manna'. Such people had the perspective of the proper priorities of life and that which is unimportant. They had perfect faith that Hashem would provide for their needs as the need would arise. Luxuries were seen as impediments to proper growth. There is a famous story of a wealthy businessman who was passing through Radin and took advantage of the opportunity to visit the Chofetz Chaim. He was astounded by the lack of furniture in the Chofetz Chaim's home. Unable to contain himself, he asked, "Where is your furniture?" The Chofetz Chaim responded by asking him where was his furniture. The man, a bit surprised by the question, explained that he was only passing through. The Chofetz Chaim smiled and explained that in this world, he too, was only passing through. A lesser known story is told that when his wife asked to decorate the house with wallpaper, the Chofetz Chaim suggested that they just take pages from the gemara and paste them on the wall! The time spent obtaining the necessary money to buy the wallpaper comes at the expense of learning. On the level that they were on, sacrificing that time in order to get wallpaper was tantamount to pasting the pages of the gemara on the wall. This, of course, is a level that is far beyond us. With the environment in which we were brought up, with yesterdays luxuries becoming our necessities, we would not be able to function, must less to grow, in such surroundings. Nevertheless, we must try, each on our own level, to minimize our dependence on the luxuries. The Torah, for this reason, was given in the midbar to 'the eaters of manna'. To focus on the purpose of our lives and not get sidetracked by the many distractions. Our parsha also discusses the diglei midbar – the flags of each tribe and the formation in which they camped and traveled. Why was it necessary to have these flags and this formation?

Rav Dessler writes that, in the physical realm, there are three reasons for order and organization. 1) There is order for the sake of order. One gets enjoyment from seeing things arranged in an organized fashion. 2) There is order to enable us to find something when we need it. 3) There is order to bring a unity and an efficiency of action. An intricate piece of machinery will only function optimally if each piece is in its proper place, accomplishing its objective.

In the spiritual realm only the third aspect applies. Neither divided groups nor a confused mixture can accomplish our purpose in this world of 'kiddush shem shamayim' – sanctifying Hashem's name.

Each individual must develop according to who he is, in an environment that is conducive to, and promotes, such growth. All groups are working toward this same goal, and each is gaining and learning from the other. When there is this diversity of experiences and this diversity of situations all leading to the same point, then the greatest kiddush shem shamayim is attained.

This is what we learn from the 'diglei midbar', the formation of encampment in the midbar. As the Ramban writes, Yehuda was royalty, Yissachar- Torah, Zevulun- wealth, Reuven-tshuva, etc. Each, necessary and crucial aspects of serving Hashem. Each tribe had its path to travel on. That was their midah, their attribute, their strong point. At the same time, each midah was necessary for all of the tribes to internalize. Each contributing his area of expertise to elevate the level of

the group. All simultaneously combining their diverse talents into the symphony of kiddush shem shamayim.

Elazar, the son of Aharon, was in charge of transporting the oils, the incense and the flour (4:16). The medrash relates that, although Elazar could have easily delegated the carrying to others, he carried it all himself. How did he manage this feat? The oil for the menorah was in his right hand. The incense was in his left.. The flour for the morning offering hung from his arm and that for the evening offering hung from his belt. The Ramban explains the amounts of some of these. The incense was 365 portions (weighing close to 400 pounds!) and the oil was 183 'lug' (about 15 gallons – quite a bit of lugging!).

If Elazar needed to carry such tremendous amounts why didn't he have someone help him?! The medrash explains that from this we learn that there is no haughtiness before Hashem! Those with the proper view of serving Hashem don't see anything as a burden. Every chance to serve, even if it leaves one with flour hanging from his belt, is seen as a golden opportunity that can't be passed.

When Rav Yerucham came to Kelm he saw the Saba MeKelm carrying out the bowl of water into which the kohanim had washed their hands. When Rav Yerucham tried to take the bowl from his hands he was given a reproachful look. "You are new here... you don't yet know how things here work!" The honor of carrying out the water was not easily earned!

As we draw close to Shavuot, may we use all of our capabilities to prepare for kabalas haTorah – the receiving of the Torah- sharing our strong points with others and drawing inspiration and strength from theirs. Realizing that only through lowering oneself before the Creator does one truly become elevated.

Good shabbos.

Yisroel Ciner

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

A Concise Guide to Mahshava

Shavuot We count the seven weeks of the omer beginning at Passover. At the conclusion of the seven weeks, on the fiftieth day, we celebrate the festival of Shavuot. According to the Sages, this was the day of the revelation at Mount Sinai, when the Jewish people received the Torah, although in the Written Torah no explicit date is mentioned with regard to this event. What do we do on Shavuot? Why does the Torah have so many names for this festival? And why is it not stated explicitly that it is the day on which the Torah was given? Every year, we engage in preparations to receive the Torah, recognizing our obligation to demonstrate that we truly want it. The giving of the Torah was not a one-time event. Each day, and each year, we relive that wonderful experience of connecting to the Giver of the Torah.

What Do We Do on Shavuot? Shavuot night is a time of preparation for receiving the Torah. The giving of the Torah is not just an event that took place thousands of years ago; rather, each year on this day, we receive the Torah anew, and are like a bride entering the wedding canopy with her husband, that is, with God. On Shavuot night, the Jewish people spend their time studying the Torah, which is likened to the jewel worn by a bride: Rabbi Shimon would sit and engage in Torah study on the night when the bride joins her husband [that is, on Shavuot]. As the Sages taught: On the night before a bride is to come under the wedding canopy with her husband, all those friends [that is, Torah scholars] who are close to the bride [that is, the community of Israel] must remain with her all night and

rejoice with her during her preparations. They engage in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings, in interpretations of the verses, and in the concealed wisdom, because these are her enhancements and jewels. She enters and stands at the head of her attendants and is adorned by them. She rejoices with them all that night, and the next day she enters the wedding canopy accompanied by them. They are known as the wedding party. When she enters the wedding canopy, the Holy One, blessed be He, asks about them and blesses them, and crowns them with the crown of the bride. Fortunate is their lot. Those who study Torah on this night receive protection: Sit, honored ones, sit, and we will renew the preparation of the bride on this night. As everyone who joins her on this night will be protected, both above and below, for the entire year, and will end his year in peace. With regard to such people it is written (Psalms 34:8-9): "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them. Consider and see that the

Lord is good." (Zohar 1:8a)

Beyond feeling joy and gratitude at having received the Torah, we must strive to make it a meaningful part of our lives.

Shavuot is the day of judgment with regard to the extent of our connection to Torah: One is obligated to greatly rejoice on this festival because it is the day on which we merited to receive the crown of Torah.... Nevertheless, it is written: "Rejoice with trembling" (Psalms 2:11); this joy is a spiritual joy of thanks and praise to God for giving us the Torah. One's heart is roused and he resolves to become sanctified, to rectify his ways, and to be crowned with the crown of Torah, in order to fulfill: "And you shall ponder it day and night" (Joshua 1:8). For this holy day is the day of judgment. (Rabbi Yeshaya HaLevi Horowitz, Shenei Luhot HaBerit, Masekhet Shavuot, Ner Mitzva)

Names of the Festival: Shavuot Why is this festival named after the seven weeks that were counted starting from Passover, which culminate on this day? These weeks build up the bond of love between us and God. We renounce all else for the sake of our love for Him. The counting of these weeks is similar to the counting of the seven days [free of menstrual blood] before a wedding: The counting of weeks is to teach us that at the giving of the Torah we became joined to God like a bride entering the wedding canopy.... Now she will direct her love to him alone, and therefore she counts seven days especially for this bridegroom.... In the same way, aside from our obligation to observe the mitzvot, we became obligated to direct our love to Him alone. The seven weeks symbolize the period of preparation and the bestowal of our love upon God. This is why the festival is called Shavuot: Since it is not an easy matter for a person to direct his love to God like a woman does toward her husband, God commanded us to count seven weeks [shavuot]. This is why the festival is called Shavuot, that is, the Festival of Weeks, and not the Festival of Days [even though the days are also counted during the omer]. It is to enable us to understand that we must direct our love to God and restrain ourselves [ne'etzar] before Him [to disconnect from all mundane matters in order to concentrate on God]. This is why this festival is called Atzeret by the Sages; this is the purpose of Shavuot. (Netziv, Ha'amek Davar, Numbers 28:26) Names of the Festival: Atzeret The Sages called the festival of Shavuot: Atzeret [literally: restraint or cessation], because there are no specific mitzvot associated with the festival through which our connection to God is expressed. Therefore, it is a unique day, as the illumination that comes from above is not limited to specific types of connections.

There are two types of divine light: that which comes as a result of observing the mitzvot, and that which is tied to a particular time: Why is Shavuot called Atzeret [in the Mishna], and likewise, why is the festival on the eighth day of Sukkot called Atzeret [see Leviticus 23:36]? There are two lights that the Creator shines upon the Jewish people. He shines the first one upon them because they fulfill His mitzvot. The other is not connected to the observance of mitzvot; rather, it comes as a result of the abundance of holiness at specific times. Now we will explain the difference between them: The light that comes as a result of the observance of mitzvot is limited and finite, as the mitzvot themselves are finite [that is, they each have a defined time, place, and procedure]. But the light that comes as a result of abundant holiness has had no limits set upon it. When the divine light is revealed through a certain mitzva, the illumination corresponds to the mitzva and is therefore limited. But illumination that is not linked to a particular mitzva is unlimited: On Sukkot and Passover the light shines due to the mitzvot that are fulfilled on these days, for example, the mitzvot of sukka and lulav on Sukkot and the mitzva of matza on Passover, in addition to the other mitzvot associated with these days. But on Shavuot and Shemini Atzeret, there are no unique mitzvot, and the light on these days has had no limits set upon it. On these days of unlimited illumination, we must direct the light in accordance with our needs. The term Atzeret refers to the restraint and limitation of the light in furtherance of a certain purpose. We must limit the light until the upper and lower worlds receive it, for if the light is unlimited, the lower worlds cannot hold it. Each individual must limit the light to the matter that he is in need of, for example, wisdom, children, life [health], or livelihood. For this reason these two festivals, that is, Shavuot and the eighth day of Sukkot, are called Atzeret. The word Atzeret hints to restraint and limitation, from the term: “And [the plague] was stopped [vate’atzar]” (Numbers 17:13). We must restrain and limit the light. (Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, Kedushat Levi, Numbers, Shavuot) Why Is It Not Written in the Torah That Shavuot Is the Festival of the Giving of the Torah? Is the day on which we received the Torah a joyous one? The gentiles did not want to receive it. In a certain sense it is the day we accepted upon ourselves obligations. Of course, we have accepted the Torah, and we rejoice over having received it. But since it is a day that also contains the necessity of servitude to God, the date is not explicitly mentioned in the verses that deal with the festivals. God gave the times for the festivals, which are the joy of Israel, as they merited receiving goodness. For example, the verse states with regard to Passover that Israel left the house of bondage, and with regard to Sukkot that “I had the children of Israel dwell in booths” (Leviticus 23:43)... But on Shavuot, God gave us the Torah, which is a burden on Israel. Indeed, the nations of the world did not want to receive it. Even though we say: “The time of the giving of our Torah” (Shavuot prayer), that is, we ourselves accepted the Torah, saying: “We will perform and we will heed” (Exodus 24:7), nevertheless, God, who gave us the Torah, held the mountain over the children of Israel to force them to accept the Torah, 26 because it is a burden upon them How could the time of the giving of the Torah be written in the Torah when God gave it with a decree against man? (Maharal, Tiferet Yisrael 27) A fixed date limits the event that is said to have taken place on that date. One should accept the Torah every day and become renewed by it. Therefore, the Torah does not specify a date on which the Torah was given. God did not want to limit the giving of the Torah to a specific day because on every day of the year one should feel as though he has received the Torah from Mount Sinai that very day.... If so, the Torah is given every day to those who study it; therefore, it is not fitting to

specify the day on which it was given. With regard to this, our Sages said (see Rashi, Deuteronomy 26:16) that the words of Torah should be for you as if they were brand new. (Rabbi Shlomo Efrayim Luntschitz, Keli Yakar, Leviticus 23:17)

from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

date: May 13, 2021, 7:00 AM

subject: Talmud Tips - Meron 2021

For the week ending 15 May 2021 / 4 Sivan 5781

Meron 2021

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

These words are written while funerals are still taking place and so many families are joined by the entire Jewish People, who mourn the tragic and unfathomable loss of life at Mount Meron on Lag B’Omer this year. And there are many injured individuals — both physically and emotionally — whom we pray will be healed by the Healer and the healers quickly and completely. But here I would like to share a recent conversation I had with a colleague, in the hope that it will inspire if only one person in a small way to strive for a future that will be as bright for our nation as it was at the time of the Beit Hamikdash.

A few weeks ago, in Talmud Tips for Yoma 16-22, in an article titled “Personal Space,” we addressed the nature of one of the miracles that took place then and there: Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, “When they stood, they were extremely crowded, but when they bowed down they had a lot of room.” There we cited Rashi’s explanation that although it was extremely crowded in the Beit Hamikdash, there was nevertheless a miraculous expansion of one’s personal space for prostration in order to say Vidui — a verbal confession to Hashem of one’s sins. The person would miraculously have full use of a surrounding daled amot (four cubits) in which to prostrate and verbally confess, without a concern that the person nearest him would be within earshot and be able to hear this private admission — a factor which could potentially inhibit a person’s confession due to embarrassment of others hearing his verbalizing his personal transgressions.

It has been reported that many survivors who were present at Mount Meron who felt certain of imminent passing from this world said Shma Yisrael, the traditional act of a Jew taking his final breath. Presumably, they also said or thought whatever type of Vidui was possible under the constraints of time and place of the sudden and swift tragic event.

A few days ago, a reader of this column reminded me of what I wrote only a few short weeks earlier, that Rashi explains the Rav Elazar’s words “They would stand in a crowded manner” (in the Beit Hamikdash) as follows: “The word for “crowded” in the text is tzafufim, which Rashi says is based on the Hebrew root-word tzaf, which means “to float.” He explains that the multitude of people in the Beit Hamikdash were so crowded that the physical human pressure on all sides caused them to be lifted from the ground and to be “floating” in the air without their feet being on the ground. I related there my own experiences, as well as those of my wife and friends who have attended funerals of great rabbis in Jerusalem over the years, which at times included turnouts of people that numbered in the hundreds of thousands. And sometimes, the scene being terrifying, with being lifted from our feet and moved like a wave to a place some distance away. For anyone who has not experienced this feeling of helplessness, it reminded me of driving a car on ice in my youth, when it was futile and meaningless to try and steer or use the brakes, due to a lack of traction and the “feet” of the car not making proper contact with the street. At least once I ended up in a shallow (fortunately!) ditch on the roadside. I am not advocating for

either being or not being in such a crowd — especially when it involves a mitzvah — but one should at least be aware of what might happen and take necessary precautions as possible.

I replied to the reader that I appreciate his appreciation for having learned something from the “Torah Tips” article, and that after the horrific Meron incident I wanted to share an additional insight I had while crying in shock. In the Beit Hamikdash, despite the squeezing pressure experienced by the entire nation standing there (to be more exact, they were floating above ground) — there is no mention that anyone was ever injured in the slightest. I suggested that this great safety was also a display of another miraculous act by Hashem. He protected His nation from harm in “His house.” But that was then and there. May we merit the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash and the renewal of Hashem once again showing us great miracles emanating from His gracious Countenance toward us — maintaining peace throughout the world and safety for all of us in all places and at all times. Amen.

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from: Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>
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to: Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>
date: May 13, 2021, 5:55 AM
subject: [Rav Kook Torah] Shavuot: Seeing Sound
Shavuot: Seeing Sound

וְכָל-הָעָם רָאוּ אֶת-הַקּוֹלֹת וְאֶת-הַלֵּפְידִים וְאֶת קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר.

“And all the people saw the sounds ...” (Exod. 20:15).

The Midrash calls our attention to an amazing aspect of the revelation at Sinai: the Jewish people were able to see what is normally only heard. What does this mean?

Standing near the Source

At their source, sound and sight are united. Only in our limited, physical world, in this alma deperuda (disjointed world), are these phenomena disconnected and detached. It is similar to our perception of lightning and thunder, which become increasingly separated from one another as the observer is more distanced from the source.

If we are bound and limited to the present, if we can only perceive the universe through the viewpoint of the temporal and the material, then we will always be aware of the divide between sight and sound. The prophetic vision at Mount Sinai, however, granted the people a unique perspective, as if they were standing near the source of Creation. From that vantage point, they were able to witness the underlying unity of the universe. They were able to see sounds and hear sights.

God’s revelation at Sinai was registered by all their senses simultaneously, as a single, undivided perception.

(Gold from the Land of Israel (now available in paperback) p. 135.

Adapted from Mo’adei HaRe’iyah, p. 491)

See also: Revealing Our Inner Essence

From: torahweb@torahweb.org
to: weeklydt@torahweb.org
date: May 12, 2021, 3:13 PM
subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Petty Cash or Mega Millions

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Petty Cash or Mega Millions

This year, as in most years, we read Parshas Bamidbar before the yom tov of Shavous. This is found in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 428:4) which teaches “manu v’atzru” - count and celebrate the holiday of Shavous. The Gemara (at the end of Megillah) teaches that we should have a buffer, a separation, between the curses that were read in Parshas

Bechukosai and the holiday of Shavous.

I’d like to suggest another reason. Bamidbar, which literally means “in the desert”, represents the sheer sense of dependency that the Jewish people had on Hashem during their forty-year trek in the desert. Devarim (8:15) describes the midbar as “The great and awesome wilderness- of snake, fiery serpent, and scorpion, and thirst where there was no water - Who brings forth water for you from the rock of flint, Who feeds you manna in the wilderness, which you forefathers knew not.”

The Gemara (Yoma 76a) relates that the students of R’ Shimon bar Yochai asked him, given there were so many miracles associated with the manna, why did Hashem not give them their allocation of manna once a year and it would have stayed fresh the entire year? He answered with a parable: the king who supported his son by giving him an annual stipend was visited by the prince, but once a year. When he changed his allocation and provided for his son on a daily basis, his son would then visit his father every day. Similarly, Hashem allocated manna daily in order to internalize within the millions of recipients their total reliance on Him. This feeling of total reliance is a prerequisite for our accepting His Torah.

The Mechilta (in Parshas Yisro) describes in detail the events that took place on the days preceding the revelation at Sinai. On the fifth of Sivan the nation experienced an inaugural ceremony as a prerequisite for Matan Torah. Moshe wrote and read to the people Sefer Habris -the Torah starting from Bereshis until Sinai. The Jewish people who underwent conversion at Sinai pronounced their acceptance of mitzvos with the declaration of “naasah v’nishma - we will do and we will listen”. Offerings were brought; blood was sprinkled on the people. Moshe then declared, “behold you are inextricably bound to Hashem, tomorrow come and receive the entirety of His Torah.”

How does one become bound to Hashem? The Gemara (Yevomos 64a) teaches in the name R’ Yitzchak, “why were each of the Avos and Imahos barren? Because Hashem desires the prayers of the righteous.” The Maharal, in his commentary on this Gemara, teaches that prayer was the great connector which created the constant bond between the barren matriarchs and patriarchs, and Hashem.

One week after we left Egypt we experienced the miraculous splitting of the Sea. The Medrash (Shemos Raba 21:5) teaches in the name of R’ Yehoshua Ben Levi, to what may it be compared? To a king who was traveling and heard the cries of a princess begging for help from robbers. The king heard and saved her from them. A short time later, the king was interested in having a relationship with her, but she was not interested. The wise king created the situation again that she would be in danger, and once again he responded to her cries. Similarly, when the Jewish nation were severely persecuted by the Egyptians, the Torah tells us (at the end of chapter 2 in Shemos), “the Children of Israel groaned because of the work, and they cried out; their outcry went up to G-d”. Hashem heard their deep-felt pain and suffering. Thereupon, He brought ten miraculous plagues, punitive to the Egyptians and establishing a relationship with the fledgling Jewish nation. When they left Egypt, Hashem desired to again hear their voices in praise and thanksgiving. Unfortunately, this did not come. Hashem therefore orchestrated that Pharaoh and the Egyptians should pursue them so that He would deliver the Jewish nation from the ensuing danger. Miraculously splitting the sea, He evoked from them the song of Thanksgiving, expressed with the same enthusiasm that they had prior demonstrated in Egypt.

Prayer, as the Maharal teaches, creates a bond. During the difficult months of COVID, experiencing the death of many (and especially gedolim) and many seriously sick individuals, we davened with great fervor and emotion. The verse (Shemos 12:30) “for there was not a house where there was no corpse” was acutely felt. Now that we are privileged to have a vaccine, our prayers are not the same. Unfortunately, there is a

mindset of "getting back to normal". What each individual will personally learn from COVID is something that they must grapple with by themselves. However, I'd like to suggest that collectively, one lesson that we can all learn is to attempt to keep the strong connection to Hashem through prayer. When one, G-d forbid, survives a car accident, they recite Birkas haGomel and Nishmas. Think about it: if one was not in a car accident, should they not thank Hashem all the more?!

As we are emerging from COVID and our teffilos are "getting back to normal", perhaps one reason Klal Yisroel has experienced the tragedy in Meron and a war in Israel is to remind us about the need for, and importance of, constantly upgrading of our teffilos.

I'd like to strongly recommend that we daven more slowly. Having those additional minutes will give us the opportunity to focus on the meaning and understanding of our prayers. What a different connection there is if one actually understands what he is asking for in each of the nineteen blessings of the Shemone Esrei. I believe that it is most reasonable to allocate no less than fifteen minutes from the beginning of berachos to Yishtabach, enabling the tzibur to actually appreciate the praises being offered to Hashem, reminding us of the privilege it is to pray before Whom we are praying. The Shulchan Aruch (51:8) teaches that "one should not say the Pesukei D'Zimrah verses rapidly, but at a leisurely pace". The Mishneh Berurah (20) teaches that one should recite the words as if he were counting money. Ask yourself: are you counting small change, so that if you miss a few it is relatively inconsequential, or are you counting hundred-dollar bills? He heard our voices in COVID, may we be privileged to maintain the connection and the fervor.

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Shavuot Edition, 4 Sivan, 5781 | May 15 2021

Rabbi Zecharia Wallerstein

My Daughter, Ruth

As Boaz is told by his servant overseeing the harvesters that Ruth, a young Moabite girl, has entered his field to harvest grain, he approaches her and says, "Hear me well, my daughter. Do not go to glean in another field, and do not leave here, but stay close to my maidens" (Ruth 2:8). The Midrash explains that Boaz told this to Ruth as the other harvesters had conspired to physically evict her from the field. Believing her to be a Moabite, they were vehemently opposed to her collecting from the field along with Jews. But Boaz reassured Ruth that she had nothing to worry about. She would be safe under his auspices as he was looking after her well-being. As Ruth heard the kind-hearted words of Boaz, she bowed to the ground and said, "Why have I found favor in your eyes that you should take special note of me even though I am a foreigner?" (ibid. v.10). Herein lays the number one key ingredient in chinuch: noticing a student and giving him or her recognition. When Ruth felt that Boaz was especially looking after her and caring for her, she said, "You have comforted me...you have spoken to the heart of your maidservant..." (ibid. v.13). How do you console someone who feels left out? When you see a child at risk, how do you open the conversation? I was once asked by a parent, "What did you do to help my daughter? What is the template? You changed her whole life!" I said to her, "Look in Megillas Ruth. The Pasuk says that Ruth was comforted because Boaz spoke to her heart. He realized that she was special." The key to parenting and chinuch is to making children feel cared for and special. "Rebbe loves me! Morah loves me!" But how exactly did Boaz speak to Ruth's heart? What did he say which so powerfully and effectively made her feel special? One word – "Biti," my daughter. Boaz's opening words to Ruth say it all. How different would it be if when a parent wished to call over his or her child, they would say, "My daughter, Miriam, come here right now! My son, Chaim, come here right now!" If the same parent would

open a conversation with the words, "My daughter," or "My son," their feelings would change and their child's response would likely be positively different. But why in fact did Boaz give Ruth so much attention? What did he see in her that no one else did? Boaz realized where she had come from and how much she had given up. She was a female Avraham Avinu. She left her homeland, her birthplace and her father's house. She gave up everything and loyally clung to Naomi as the two of them journeyed to

<https://www.yeshiva.co/ask/58788>

Shavuot

Torah-giving not explicit in Tora on Shavuot+ Why "Atzeret"?

Rabbi Ari Shvat

Nisan 22, 5781

Question

A couple of important and basic question: What are the explanations about why Shavuot is also called by the name "Atzeret" (where is the first time it was called it and by who)? Does it have something to do with the completion of the Sefirat haOmer? Or what makes Shavuot "atzeret"?

Another question: why does the Torah not mention that Ma'amad Har Sinai and the giving of the Torah took place in the holiday of Shavuot, but rather in other terms (completion of the Sefirat haOmer, the harvest of the fruits ...)? How are these other terms connected to Ma'amad Har Sinai ... given that the best known aspect of the holiday is the Giving of the Torah! Please, I'd like to have as many explanations (if there are divergences) / sources as possible!

Answer

Atzeret literally means "the end" from the root: ATzR= "stop". Accordingly, just as Shmini Atzeret is the 8th day and end of Sukkot, already chazal (Mishna, Rosh HaShana 1, 2) in the Oral Law, refer to the end of the Pesach period after 7 weeks (not days, as in Sukkot!), with the 50th day of Atzeret, the beginning of the 8th week. All explanations of this Omer period, deal with the gradual process of spiritual independence and freedom, which sees the Pesach period as climaxing with Shavuot. The Yalkut Shimoni on Pinchas (782) explains that actually Shmini Atzeret should have also been the 8th week (and not 8th day) counting from the 1st day of Sukkot, but God didn't want to trouble us during the rainy season to come twice to Jerusalem.

R. Ovadia Sforno explains that the Shavuot was "supposed to" be called Atzeret already in the Written Torah, for it also means "holy gathering" (= all "stop" their regular actions and "stop" to meet together), for that was what happened at Sinai, but when 3,000 people worshiped the Golden Calf there, and ruined the "holy gathering", that term was not used.

All Torah holidays represent a national, historical and religious event, as well as an annual agricultural event. This isn't felt that much outside of the Land of Israel, where the climate and agricultural seasons may differ greatly from where the holiday was, and today- once again is, meant to be observed, in Israel.

Regarding the date of the Torah giving, there is also an opinion in the Talmud (Shabbat 87b) that the Torah was given on the 7th of Sivan. Similarly, when the Sanhedrin would consecrate Rosh Chodesh through witnessing the new moon, the holiday could come out anywhere between the 5-7 of Sivan (depending if Nissan and/or Iyar were 30 days). Accordingly, the 50th day may not necessarily fall on the day the Torah was given in the original year of the exodus! The Magen Avraham (494, 1) explains that's why the holiday is called in Ya'aleh v'Yavo: "Zman Matan Toratenu"= the time/period (and not "the day!") of the giving of our Torah, for it may not be the exact date, but it is the period of time (Pesach and Shavuot were also worded accordingly).

Cutting hair after lag bomer

Rabbi David Sperling

Iyyar 17, 5772

Question Is it permissible for a woman to cut her hair after Lag Bomer?

Answer Shalom,

During 33 days during the time of counting the Omer, we refrain from haircuts and weddings (and certain other celebrations) as a sign of semi-mourning for the death of Rabbi Akiva's students. The widespread custom is that women refrain from haircuts like men. (There are exceptions, but they do not seem to apply to your question).

There are many customs as to when during the 49 days of the counting of the Omer we observe days of mourning. Some people start this semi-mourning period from the beginning of the Omer until the 33rd day - Lag B'Omer, in which case they may certainly get a hair-cut after Lag B'Omer. In fact, the Ashkenazim who observe these days cut their hair from the day of Lag B'Omer itself (from the morning, not the evening). Sephardim wait until the morning of the 34th day (the day after Lag B'Omer).

Others, however, start their semi-mourning from Rosh Chodesh Iyar and continue it until 3 days before the festival of Shavu'ot. (There is a variation on this custom that counts from the 2nd day of Rosh Chodesh until the day before Shavu'ot). According to this tradition, one would not cut their hair after Lag B'Omer. The Ashkenazim who hold according to this opinion may cut their hair on Lag B'Omer itself (in the daytime) but not the days after - until reaching the days before Shavu'ot.

There are others who refrain from haircuts during the entire Omer period until the day before Shavu'ot, for reasons based on the Kabbalah.

So, in short, the answer to your question depends on your custom. If you have no set practice, then if you are Sephardi, you should adopt the practice of allowing haircuts after Lag B'Omer. If you are Ashkenazi, you may certainly get a haircut on Lag B'Omer day itself (in the daytime), and if you started the semi-mourning from straight after Passover, may get a haircut any day (or night) after Lag B'Omer. If you started the semi-mourning period from Rosh Chodesh you should either get a haircut on Lag B'Omer itself, or wait until just before Shavu'ot.

Blessings.
