



SPECIAL SHAVUOS EDITION 5759 · PARSHAS BAMIDBAR · PARSHAS NASSO · VOL. 6 NO. 31

# "I have heard that song before"

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

*"What a beautiful melody!" Taking a solitary stroll through a forest in order to get away from the pressing affairs of state in his palace, the king was captivated by the strains of the melody coming from some distant, invisible, shepherd's flute. He hummed the tune to himself on his way back to the palace, but by the time he got back into the business of ruling his country he had completely forgotten it.*

**H**aunted by the memory of the beautiful melody, the king was unable to resume his usual routine. Watching his ruler's growing aggravation, one of his advisors suggested a plan for enabling him to hear the melody once again. A royal proclamation would be issued throughout the land, offering a generous reward to the shepherd who could play the desired tune for his majesty.

Shepherds by the dozens lined up in front of the palace, each awaiting his turn to play his favorite melody for the king in the hope that this was the one his majesty had heard and the reward would be his. One after the other they departed the royal chambers in disappointment, as the king positively declared that the tune he played was not the one that he heard while walking in the forest. One frustrated shepherd got up the nerve to challenge his sovereign:

"Is your majesty capable of playing on this flute the melody he heard?"

When the king replied in the negative, the shepherd closed in with what he thought was a victorious thrust.

"Then how can your majesty be so certain that the melody just played is not the one he heard?"

"My dear fellow," parried the king, "I may not have such a fine ear for music as to be able to play that melody, but when I hear it once again you may be sure that I will recognize it!"

Both Pesach and Shavuot celebrate great moments in the history of the Jewish nation. The "Season of our Freedom" offers us an opportunity to relive the great Divine revelation enjoyed by our ancestors on the eve of their liberation from Egyptian bondage, when the Almighty Himself slew the firstborn of their masters and did a "pass-over" on the Jewish homes. This was a powerful experience of intimacy with Hashem. There was, however, one problem with it. Jews had not really prepared themselves with spiritual growth for this Divine revelation. It was handed to them on a silver platter by the Creator, who had fulfilled His promise of liberation.

# SHAVUOT ASK the RABBI

## The Mitzvah System

Gregory Cissell, from Milwaukee, WI  
<4t74cissellg@vms.csd.mu.edu>  
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
I am taking a class at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, so that I can better understand Judaism. My question for you is this: Why is the mitzvah system (by mitzvah system, I mean the 613 commandments that Jews are obligated to observe) considered so important? It has not been my experience that these commandments carry the same significance in other religions as in Judaism. Thank you.

Dear Gregory Cissell,  
G-d gave the 613 commandments to our nation at Sinai. They are so important because they are "the King's decrees."

Let me explain with a parable. Imagine that the president calls you to his office and gives you 10 million dollars and a strange gadget. He tells you to take the gadget home, put it by the open window, and turn it on every day between four and five in the afternoon, and that it's a matter of national security. He tells you that the 10 million is yours so long as you continue to do

your task faithfully every day. You would certainly do it, even though you didn't understand why,

because you know that the president has access to special information and technology that you don't have. You would feel sure that somehow this gadget has some function that, even though you don't understand it, is crucial for national security.

So too, even though we don't understand the ultimate reason for all the commandments, but since G-d Himself told us to do them and told us that they are so important, we certainly believe Him. He took us out of slavery in Egypt and gave us the Land of Israel in order for us to do the commandments; as the Torah says regarding the laws of keeping kosher, that we should observe them, "Because I am the Lord your G-d, who raised you up out of the land of Egypt to be your G-d." (Leviticus 11:45)

We are not to "pick and choose," but rather to do *all* the commandments, as G-d said: "You shall observe *all* My statutes and *all* My laws and do them, so that the Land to which I am bringing you to settle upon will not vomit you out." (Leviticus 20:22)

We see from this verse that our national security in the Land of Israel depends on fulfill-

ing these laws. Not only that, but they are also our ticket to life in the Next World, as the verse says, "You shall keep My statutes and My laws, which a person will do them and live eternal life through them." (Leviticus 18:5)

## Right Shouldering

Harold Crandus from Illinois  
<hcrandus@aol.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
When the Torah is removed from the Ark and carried through the synagogue, over which shoulder should it be carried and why?

Dear Harold Crandus,

The Torah scroll is held with the right hand against the chest and right shoulder. This shows honor and love of the Torah, as expressed in the verse in Song of Songs: "His right hand embraces me." Carrying it in the right hand is also reminiscent of the verse "From His Right Hand, He gave a Law of fire to them."

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch 134:2, Mishneh Berura 14

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# SHAVUOT ASK the RABBI

## All Nighter

Sam from Chicago wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
This is my first time experiencing Shavuot in a yeshiva environment. I'm told that everybody stays up all night studying Torah, which sounds fun but at the same time I'm a little wary of doing so. In school I once had a paper due the next day which I stayed up the entire night writing; in the morning my brain felt like fried tofu and I could hardly function. How important is it to stay up all night on Shavuot and why; or perhaps it's more important to get a good night's sleep?

Dear Sam,

Many, especially in the Yeshiva world, have the custom to stay awake and study Torah the entire night of Shavuot.

Shavuot celebrates the day when G-d gave us the Torah on Mount Sinai. By studying all night, we show our love and enthusiasm for this precious gift.

Another explanation is that the Jews at Mount Sinai slept late on that historic Shavuot morning! G-d had to "wake them up" to teach them the Torah (sound familiar?). We rectify this by staying up all night, to ensure that we won't sleep late on this day.

Staying up all night is not a halacha or a Jewish law, but rather a custom for those who feel they are physically up to it. If you won't function properly the next day, you should not stay up the whole night.

## Chosen Last

Frederick Barry from Canada wrote:

Dear Rabbi,  
According to the Midrash, G-d went to all of the other nations before the Jews and offered them the Torah and they refused. If so, then why are we called the chosen nation? It seems like all of the others were chosen first, only they refused.

Dear Frederick Barry,

G-d already chose Jacob and his offspring long before the giving of the Torah. G-d told Jacob: "The Land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you shall I give it, and to your offspring after you." (Genesis 12)

The Land was to be given to the Chosen People, as G-d said to Abraham, "I have given you and your seed after you the Land of your dwelling, the whole Land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, and I will be their G-d." Thus, we see that Jacob and his seed were chosen already as "G-d's people."

King David referred to this when he wrote: "For G-d chose Jacob, Israel as His treasure (Psalms 135:4)

Furthermore, G-d knew the other nations would decline; He only offered it to them so that they couldn't later claim that they never had a fair chance.

## Clean Torah

Michael D. Moroney Jr.

from Grafton, MA

<miach@ibm.net> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

If a person is ritually impure or dirty and they handle a copy of the Torah, does this defile the Torah permanently and if so is there any way to rectify this desecration? I am anxious to hear your thoughts on this.

Dear Michael D. Moroney Jr.,

A person who is ritually impure may touch a Torah scroll. A person who has dirty hands should not. In either case the Torah scroll does not become defiled or impure. This law, according to the Rambam, has its source in the Talmudic statement that "words of Torah cannot become impure."

## Two Trop Tune

Matthew Schutz from Three Bridges, NJ

<matt613@worldnet.att.net>

wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I notice in Parshat Yitro two different trop [cantillation or "tune" markings associated with each word] were given — one for Shabbat and one for Shavuot. Why is this?

Dear Matthew Schutz,

There are two kinds of trop by means of which the Ten Commandments are read. They are called *ta'am elyon* and *ta'am tachton* (lit. the "uppermost meaning" and the "undermost meaning"). The difference between the two is "musical" but not only musical.

*Ta'am tachton* is the regular trop of this passage as part of the Scriptures. The special trop — *ta'am elyon* — breaks up the sentences in a different way, joining all Ten Commandments into one long sentence, and is used only in the public Torah reading, resembling the revelation at Sinai. As you noted, most communities use it only on Shavuot, the Festival celebrating G-d giving us the Torah.

## Shavuot YIDDLE RIDDLE

Since the Torah was given with Hebrew letters, here's a Shavuot riddle:

Dovid Solomon

<dsolomon@actcom.co.il> wrote:

I have a Yiddle Riddle to suggest: What three characteristics do the Hebrew letters "mem" and "noon" have in common? One characteristic is shared by three other Hebrew letters (easy), one is shared by one other Hebrew letter (harder), and one is peculiar to these two (now that's hard!).

## ANSWER:

- They have two forms: middle and final. This characteristic is shared by the letters "tsadi, peh and kaf."
- Their names begin and end with the same letter. This characteristic is shared by the letter "vav." (The letter "hey" is normally spelled "hey alef.")
- They both require use of the nostrils to be pronounced. If you have a stuffed nose, every "man" is "bad." (see Radak in Michlol, Lyck edition, pg. 70a)

# WEEKLY Daf

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

## Succah 41-47

Insights, explanations and comments for the seven pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle.

### THE EXPENSIVE ESROG

The first day of Succos found four great sages on a boat at sea. Only Rabbi Gamliel had an esrog, which he had purchased for the vast sum of one thousand zuz. After he fulfilled the mitzvah of taking the four species, he gave it as a present to Rabbi Yehoshua, who fulfilled the mitzvah and then presented it to Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaria, who did the same in regard to Rabbi Akiva.

The main point of this story is that even on the first day of Succos when the four species must be one's property in order to fulfill the mitzvah, it is considered *his* if the original owner gives it to him as a gift on the condition that he return it, and he indeed fulfills that condition. This was the manner in which all of these sages fulfilled the mitzvah, each in his time, although there was a single owner at the beginning and at the end.

But why did the *gemara* have to tell us how much the esrog cost? The answer, we are told, is to let us know how much Jews value the *mitzvos*.

This *gemara* is cited by Tosefos (*Bava Kama* 9b) in his discussion of how much is a Jew obligated to spend in order to acquire the means for fulfilling a mitzvah. (In regard to avoiding transgressing a prohibition we have already seen in *Yoma* 92a that the command to love Hashem "with all your might" means that you must be prepared to sacrifice *all* your possessions in order not to commit a sin.) The *gemara* there says that a Jew is not expected to spend a third of his resources to buy an esrog, and Tosefos notes that another *gemara* (*Kesuvos* 50a) warns against giving away more than a fifth of his resources to charity. As additional proof that one is not required to give away all or even a major part of his resources for a mitzvah, Tosefos observes that Rabbi Gamliel's action of spending so much money on an esrog is highlighted as an expression of an exceptional love of *mitzvos*, and not as the expected norm.

How much should one spend to fulfill a mitzvah? In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 656:1 Rema writes: "One who is lacking an esrog or the object needed for any mitzvah which must be done right now is not required to spend a large fortune for it." He, too, sets the limit at a fifth like the aforementioned Tosefos, because our Sages were afraid that someone who gives away too much of the resources he lives on may himself become poor and dependent on others. *Mishna Berura* (656:8) cites the halachic opinion that while a fifth is the maximum to be spent, a tenth is the minimum, but raises the possibility that in the case of a mitzvah like esrog which cannot wait until he finds a cheaper one tomorrow, there may even be an obligation to spend up to a fifth.

• *Succah* 41b

### BONDS AND RESTRICTIONS

"Bind the buxom animals to the Festival," says King David (*Tehillim* 118:27) "until the corners of the altar." This understanding of a passage we say in our Hallel prayer on Festivals forms the basis of a remarkable statement in the *gemara*:

"Whoever makes an *issur* to the Festival with food and drink is equated by this passage with one who builds an altar and offers sacrifices upon it."

What is this "*issur*" and what is its relevance to us?

Rashi defines *issur* as a "bond." One explanation is that this bond refers to the proper celebration of the Festival with food and drink. Rashi's second explanation is the best known one, for it serves as a basis for our reference to the day after the Festival as "*Isru Chag*." According to this approach, a Jew should try to bind himself to the Festival by extending its celebration one more day with a greater indulgence in food and drink than is his norm.

Other commentaries find difficulty with Rashi's first approach because of the lack of any clear connection between the word "*issur*" and celebrating the Festival with food and drink. They offer alternative approaches based on understanding "*issur*" in its literal sense of restriction.

Maharsha sees the *gemara*'s statement as a praise of the Jew who restricts himself in his celebration of the Festival, and avoids overeating and intoxication, for such overindulgence is no longer motivated by a desire to serve Hashem. That extra food and drink that he denies himself on a Festival in order to better utilize it for the service of Hashem is considered as an animal sacrifice offered upon an altar.

*Iyun Yaakov* refers us to an earlier *gemara* (*Succah* 27b) in which Rabbi Elazar praises those who do not leave their home on the Festivals because the Torah indicated that a man should spend the holiday with his family. If we translate the word "*avosim*" literally to mean ropes, rather than buxom animals, we understand the passage as advocating tying oneself with ropes to his home and restricting himself to his family circle.

Even though this last commentary does not offer a comparison to the altar and sacrifices, he probably intended to use the same approach as Maharsha; that is, to view a restriction on travel during the Festival as a sacrifice, thus celebrating the holiday as Hashem wished, and therefore equivalent to the animal sacrifices offered upon an altar.

• *Succah* 45b

# Let Freedom Reign

by Rabbi Pinchas Kantrowitz

**T**o know how to free oneself is nothing," wrote Nobel Prize Author Andre Gide, "the arduous thing is to know what to do with one's freedom."

Modern American and European history can largely be seen as the quest for freedom. The Russian, French, and American Revolutions threw off century-old political, economic, and social shackles.

Yet this freedom has been a paradox. In "Escape From Freedom," eminent Psychologist Erich Fromm notes that modern man "has not gained freedom in the positive sense" and that what is thought of as freedom has in fact isolated man. Fromm grappled with the puzzling phenomenon of what he saw as modern man's "flight from freedom."

What is Freedom?

"And the Tablets are the handiwork of G-d, and the handwriting is the handwriting of G-d *charus* (engraved) on the Tablets." Do not read "*charus*" (engraved) but "*cheirus*" (freedom), for you have no free man except the one engaged in the study of Torah. (*Pirkei Avos* 6:2)

I have often pondered the meaning of this cryptic teaching. The study of Torah makes one free? The one and only path to freedom? I understand that the Torah makes life more meaningful, more spiritual, more enjoyable, more truthful...but more free?

The Maharal explains that the concept of slavery can refer only to the physical body. The body, interfacing with the physical world, is enslaved by the laws of the universe. The spiritual world, on the

other hand, is not enslaved by these laws, since it is a world of "form" and not one of "matter."

The ultimate expression of this form is the Torah, which is the blueprint of the universe and gives form to all matter in the physical domain.

The verse cited above in *Pirkei Avos* expresses this metaphysical reality with its word choice: The handwriting was "engraved" — as opposed to "written" — upon the Tablets. Writing can be erased; engraving cannot be erased without destroying the medium engraved upon.

The Ten Commandments could not merely be *written*, they had to be *engraved*; the inscription had to be indelibly impressed upon the Tablets. The "form" of Torah expressed itself inexorably upon the physical matter; so much so, that the Sages teach that the engraving went completely through the stone Tablets, with the round letters hanging miraculously in "thin air."

"*Charus-engraved*" is not incidental; it is imperative. It hints to "*cheirus*-freedom," spiritual form directing and defining physical matter. This is ultimate "freedom" from the physical.

According to *Pirkei Avos*, Torah study is not merely one avenue to freedom; rather, it is the *only* avenue to freedom. Even an absolute monarch of a vast domain with abundant wealth and prodigious power is not free, as he always faces the threat of the insurrection of his subjects. Only one involved in the spiritual, the eternal, is capable of transcending the physical world absolutely, and dominating absolutely the physical universe.

Torah study is obviously more than casual perusal; to achieve the freedom of the Torah, it must be "engraved on the tablets of our heart;" it must be lived.

By elevating the physical and infusing it with the "form" of Torah and mitzvahs, the Torah scholar transcends the limitations of the material world; he frees himself from the deterioration and decay of the physical by converting finite physical matter into infinite spiritual form. He is truly free.

"Let freedom reign" in the Jewish heart! Only then is there a chance for the Jewish people to be "a light unto the nations," and for the nations of the world to recognize that since true freedom is possible, they no longer need to "escape from freedom!"

When one is not properly prepared through his own efforts, it is impossible for him to internalize such an experience and truly incorporate it into his consciousness. This is why the liberated slaves had to wait seven weeks until they reached the "Season of the Giving of Our Torah." During these weeks, they would grow spiritually day by day, and thus properly prepare themselves for the next great revelation at Sinai which they would be capable of internalizing and incorporating.

But why is it necessary to first be exposed to a "silver platter" revelation which cannot be internalized, if it will not last?

The parable of the king supplies the answer. If someone has never before heard the sweet melody of Divine revelation, he is incapable of searching for its replay. Only after the Heavens had virtually unfolded before our ancestors on the first Pesach Eve were they capable of envisioning what spiritual horizons they could reach. Then they could begin a seven-week process of growth through effort, confident that when they would hear the sweet melody of the Divine voice speaking to them at Sinai, they could say, like the king, that they had heard this song before.

This concept, prevalent in the writings of Chassidic masters such as "Bnei Yissaschar," is applied as well to solving another dilemma:

While yet in his mother's womb, our Sages teach us, a Jew is taught the entire Torah by an angel. When he is

about to enter the world, the baby is gently struck by that angel and caused to forget all that he learned. If it is the will of Hashem that we gain Torah knowledge through our own efforts, what purpose is there in prenatal education doomed to be forgotten?

Torah knowledge is not like any of the human sciences and philosophies. It is Divine in nature and cannot be acquired through ordinary human effort. Only if a Jew has once heard the melody of Torah before birth is he capable of recognizing it when he eventually learns it through his own efforts.

We connect these two epic seasons of revelation — Pesach and Shavuot — with the counting of the days and weeks of the Omer. These days and weeks help us relive the days and weeks of the move our ancestors made from a transient "silver platter" revelation to a lasting earned one. So when we finally reach the last station in this growth, we too are capable of making it a permanent part of our consciousness.

"Return us to Your Torah," a Jew prays three times a day. How can you return to where you have never been? The answer is that we have all heard the melody of Torah before. Our souls heard it at Sinai, and we learned it in our mother's womb. That is why a Jew prays only for Divine assistance in achieving what that king sought — an opportunity to hear that melody again — so that we can gaze with wonder and joy at the *déjà vu* experience and proudly proclaim: "I have heard that song before!"

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions  
concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

### Georgia on My Mind:

*Shalom aleichem!* I am a yeshiva student in Tbilisi, Georgia. I have been your subscriber since 1997 and like very much your issues. I have been inspired with the idea to relay your issues to other people here as well. But since not everyone of them masters English so good I think it would be useful to translate them into their native languages. So, may I get permission from you to do that and put out translated issues of Ohrnet at our yeshiva? Thank you again for so good work you do.

- *Shalva Davitashvili, Tbilisi <shabby@mmc.net.ge>*

### Ohrnet responds:

Yes, please translate our material into other languages and distribute it. We ask that you please credit us by name, location, e-mail and website. That is: Ohr Somayach, 22 Shimon Hatzadik St., POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, info@ohr.org.il, www.ohrnet.org

### On Impact:

Keep up the excellent work — you are having an amazing impact on world Jewry. In the *zechus* of your good work may we merit the speedy arrival of *mashiach*.

- *Binyomin Freilich <ejs@mweb.co.za>*

### The French Connection:

Another success for your site. We are going to use Parsha Q&A between "Sefer Torah aliot" in order to maintain attention to Torah reading. Many thanks for your work and please keep Parsha Q&A as it is today, because I am responsible for relaying it to my community. I translate your questions in French (Rashi's language).

- *Raphael Benshimhon, Paris, France <rbe@quotient.net>*

### Your Staff Comforts Me:

I must tell you that I enjoy and appreciate your weekly e-mails, and just the fact that you are open anytime to any type of question. When I was in school my classmates didn't know what to do with me sometimes, because I couldn't just listen — I had to question. And I thrived on learning. Now that I've graduated from seminary, I don't have the availability of the wonderful staff around anymore and I miss it terribly. I've found for myself just what I need in your "Ask the Rabbi" service! Thank you and *tizku l'mitzvos!*

- *Name@Withheld*

### Ohrnet responds:

We're grateful for the opportunity to educate and inspire. But your former teachers have addresses and phone numbers, don't they? Call them, and go visit them.

## The Longest Marriage in the World

"Take a census (lit. 'lift up the head') of the sons of Kehas ... according to their fathers' households" (4:1)

**O**nce upon a time, there was a princess who married a king. The king loved the princess very much. He wrote into their marriage agreement that he would give her a king's ransom in jewels and palaces.

Shortly after the wedding, the king was called away on urgent business. Before he left, he told his young bride that he might be away for a long time, but she could trust that he would eventually return to her. A month went by. Then two. A year passed. There was no sign of the king. Two years went by. After five years, the people grew restless and decided to elect a new monarch. They told the princess to forget the king, that he would never return. But she said she knew that he would come back.

When it became known that a new king had ascended the throne, eligible suitors started to arrive at the door of the princess, attempting to woo her. She turned down flat every offer. She could never think of marrying another. Eventually, everyone forgot the king, except the princess.

Many, many years later, the king suddenly returned. He was amazed and overjoyed that the princess was still waiting for him. He asked the princess "How were you able to stay faithful to me for so long?" She answered,

"Whenever I used to get a little sad and depressed, I would take out my marriage contract from the cupboard and read all the things that you promised me. I knew it wasn't an illusion, because it was written in black and white."

G-d is the King. The Jewish People are the bride. The Torah is our marriage contract.

Over three thousand years ago we went under the *chupa* wedding canopy with the Master of the World. This year, on Friday the 21st of May, we celebrate our 3,311th wedding anniversary. We don't see the King, but despite His "absence," the Jewish People still faithfully await His "return."

What keeps us going? The inviolable pact He made with us at Sinai. Ever since the nations gave up on the King, they have tried to woo the Jewish People away from waiting. However, as a nation, we have never succumbed to their blandishments.

With every year, the wait grows more difficult; further from that wedding day some three thousand years ago. But we are still here, and we know that His return is imminent.

In the weekly Parsha of *Bamidbar*, the Torah speaks about Kehas the son of Levi. Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kehas and Merari. Their families were charged with various aspects of setting up and transporting the *Mishkan*.

There are some interesting anomalies in the way the Torah speaks of

these three families. In the census of Kehas it says "*Lift up the head of the sons of Kehas ... to their families, to the house of their fathers.*" However, when the Torah mentions the family of Gershon, it adds the words "*them as well.*" When speaking about the third son, Merari, however, it doesn't mention to "*lift his head*" at all.

What does all this signify?

The three sons of Levi represent three eras in the history of the Jewish People. Kehas hints to the time that the Jewish People will live in their land, concentrated and gathered together in one congregation. The name Kehas comes from the word *kehilla*, congregation. During this epoch, the greatness of the Jewish People will flow directly from their illustrious ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Thus their "*head is lifted up ... to the house of their fathers.*" Their greatness will come from the connection to the *Avos* (Patriarchs).

Then comes the era of the Diaspora. The name Gershon comes from the word meaning exile. The Jewish People will wander from place to place, never finding a permanent rest. Nevertheless it will still be possible to say: "*Lift up the head of the sons of Gershon, them as well, to the house of their fathers.*" Like the sons of Kehas, their honor and their distinction will come from their connection to their fathers, *as well*.

The last phase of Jewish History is embodied by Merari. This will be the bitterest chapter, when millions will be lost either physically or spiritually. The

*continued on page 8*

## Parsha Overview - Bamidbar

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

*continued from page 7*

name Merari comes from the word meaning bitter (like the *maror*, bitter herbs we eat at the Seder).

When a marriage breaks down, the first thing to go is the celebration of the anniversary. When paralysis in Torah observance sets in, the first casualty is Shavuos. Pesach has been immortalized by Maxwell House. *Bris mila* circumcision is for life. Friday night chicken soup dies hard. Everyone wants to wave a *lulav* and *esrog*. But Shavuos? What do you do on Shavuos?

On Shavuos, we celebrate our anniversary. In this bitterest of epochs, the lonely bride who waits for the return of the King is symbolized by the tribe of Merari. Of Merari, the Torah does not say “*lift up his head*,” for these last generations do not derive their honor from their connection to “the house of their fathers.”

The generations who will survive a holocaust both of body and soul will need no connection to their ancestors to establish their worth. Their merit and their greatness will be self-evident.

They are like the princess who waits for the King.

## ... And Counting

*“Hashem spoke to Moshe...saying: Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (1:1,2)*

Why did G-d want Moshe to count the Jewish People? Didn’t He already know how many they were? Imagine you come back from doing the shopping, and your spouse takes out a pack of granulated sugar and starts to count the number of sugar grains in the pack. You would probably reach for the phone and call the doctor. However, when the bank statement drops through the letterbox, we examine every penny to make sure there are no mistakes.

We only count things that are important to us.

G-d wanted Moshe to count the Jewish People to show us how important we are to Him. For every Jewish soul is an essential part of the creation.

### PARSHAS NASSO

## All in the Family

*“Any man whose wife shall go astray...” (5:12)*

A hundred years ago in a brilliant Jewish mind, an exciting idea was born. It went something like this: Man is separated from his neighbor by a huge division, an unbridgeable gulf called individual property. If I own something, it means you can’t have it. In a sense, my owning something “steals” it from you. Property is theft. If we could make a society in which everyone owned everything, then no one would be jealous of anyone else. What we need to do is to redeem Capital from the hands of the ruling elite and return it to the people.

The Communist ideal spawned several social engineering experiments. The most notable of these was the collective farm. All property was owned by the collective. Everyone ate in a communal dining room. Every member of the collective was to give what he could and take only what he needed.

Probably the most famous and successful application of the commune concept was the kibbutz movement in Israel. However, there were other countries where the idea also took root. In China, every commune had an economic and administrative unit that controlled the labor force and all means of production. This unit provided central management of industry, commerce, education, agriculture, and military affairs. Living communally, workers performed both industrial and agricultural tasks and supported a military unit. There were communal nurseries, bathing facilities, barbershops, and the like. Wages and perquisites were controlled by the state. All products were marketed through state agencies.

It must have seemed at the time like a Utopian dream.

What happened to the dream? The last vestiges of the collective farm have either become Capitalist enterprises or are moribund. Why did such a noble sounding idea fail?

One inevitable aspect of collective living was a re-evaluation of the role of the family. Rather than sleeping under the same roof as their parents, children now slept in dormitories. One wonders who would answer a small child who might wake in the middle of the night and cry “Mommy, I want a glass of water!” How successful a mother-substitute could a dormitory supervisor be?

There’s something very strange about this week’s Parsha.

Right in the middle of the description of the organization of the *machane*, the Jewish encampment, there is a seemingly illogical interruption in which the Torah presents, along with other *mitzvos*, the mitzvah of the *sota*. The *sota* is a wife whose behavior has provoked her husband to suspect her fidelity. The Torah prescribes a miraculous process by which, if proven innocent, will restore her completely to her husband’s trust. What does the *sota* have to do with the Jewish encampment?

The *machane* was the paradigm of the future social structure of the Jewish People. Not only did it mandate the placement of each individual tribe, but the *machane* represented Jewish Society as it was to be lived throughout the generations. The Torah puts the mitzvah of *sota* in the middle of the description of the *machane* to teach us that the harmony of society at large is predicated on the united and happy family.

The family is the basic building block of society. When you tamper with its delicate balance, when you try and engineer it to conform to man-made concepts of utopian life, inevitably those experiments will be short-lived and will eventually flounder.

Sources:

- *The Longest Marriage In The World* - Midrash, Chasam Sofer in Iturei Torah
- ... And Counting - Divrei Chaim
- All In The Family - Ramban, Rabbi Moshe Eiseman, as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer

## Parsha Overview - Nasso

The Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the sons of Gershon, Kehas, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor's property after having sworn in court to the contrary, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object, and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for inscribing Hashem's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A *nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to Hashem for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The *Mishkan* is completed and dedicated on the first day of *Nisan* in the second year after the Exodus. The Prince of each Tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the *Mishkan*, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

## Haftara Bamidbar

### "Machar Chodesh" - Samuel I 20:18 - 20:42

The obvious reason for reading this *haftara* when the Shabbat is a day before Rosh Chodesh is the first verse mentioning the morrow as a Rosh Chodesh. The episode took place after Saul decided to kill the young David — already his son in law — to avoid the fall of his declining reign and assure it to his worthy son Jonathan. However, Jonathan the crown prince was a good comrade of David; he wished to save him from death even at the expense of losing his future throne. The *haftara* narrates the secret pact of friendship between the two and how Jonathan warned David to flee for his life by an agreed sign they had between them.

## Early Generations

Historians and Bible critiques try to prove from this episode that the people of antiquity had the same nature as we do, with the same moral flaws and selfish inclinations, as seemingly King Saul tried wrongly to kill his fellow for the sake of maintaining his kingdom. We as believing Jews have a different outlook upon the early generations, who were much closer to G-d and had the privilege of Divine revelations through prophecy. Consequently we believe they were aloof and above the moral flaws we know today.

The deeds of Saul are easily explained that at that time the nation needed a monarchy for its survival; to this effect the Torah commands the king to maintain his kingdom, and for this permits him to kill people who seem a potential danger to his reign. Quite the contrary, King Saul was only complying with the command of the Torah when he pursued David. The proof for this is that although Jonathan met with David after sending back the lad, he did not relate the warning to flee with his own lips but relied upon the agreed

sign. He did not wish to transgress the Jewish law prohibiting this, and the exchange of words between them at that meeting was only to affirm their pact of friendship.

## Haftara Nasso

### Judges 13:2 - 13:25

The main features of this week's Parsha are the laws of the *nazir*. This is why the portion dealing with Samson born a *nazir* was chosen for the *haftara*. The passage begins with a prophetic revelation to the wife of Manoach, in which an angel tells her she will bear a child who will be a *nazir* all his life. The angel also tells her to observe the laws of *nazir* herself until the baby is born. In addition, the angel says that this son will bring forth salvation to the Jewish people who were at the time oppressed by the Philistines. The mother of Samson relates this to her husband, who prays for the angel to reveal himself again to instruct them as to the child, and G-d answers his prayer. After the revelation of the angel he departs in a flame.

## Proper Education

The angel instructs the future mother of Samson to observe the laws of the nazerite vow, as her child is to be a *nazir* "from the womb" (13:5). This seems merely an excessive stringency as she was not a nazerite herself. However, we can learn from this episode that education for virtue and righteousness begins before the child is born, as he is influenced from the earliest stages of his existence as a scion of his parent. Exactly like an embryo is poisoned by a mother who smokes, he is influenced by her way of life and the moral traits she favors. Parents cannot lead a life without restrictions if they wish their child to be a pious, observant Jew; they cannot expect him to lead a life that differs from their own.

# PARSHA Q&A

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an *os* and a *degel*?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed ‘*techum Shabbos*’ — the prohibition against traveling more than 2000 *amos* on Shabbos?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon’s sons called “sons of Aharon and Moshe?”
9. Who was Nadav’s oldest son?
10. Which two people from Megillas Esther does Rashi mention in this week’s Parsha?
11. Why did the *levi'im* receive *ma'aser rishon*?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the

## Parshas Bamidbar

- age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *levi'im*?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of *levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number of *levi'im* was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The firstborn males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five *shekalim*. Why five *shekalim*?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?

### Answers to this Week's Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to Hashem.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe’s flag was the color of that tribe’s stone in the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*.
4. 2:2 - An *os* is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - Hashem commanded them to camp no more than 2000 *amos* from the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Mo'ed* on Shabbos.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Mo'ed* departed and the *kohanim* sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it's as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigsan and Seresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the *levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, they received tithes as “payment.”
12. 3:15, 40 - The *levi'im*, and the firstborn of *B'nei Yisrael*.

13. 3:15 - Levi's daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 - Hashem
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous
17. 3:39 - Each *levi* served to redeem a first born of the Jewish People. Since 300 *levi'im* were themselves first born, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel's first-born, who was sold by his brothers for five *shekalim* (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The *kohanim*.

### I Did Not Know That!

When Yaakov blessed his sons at the end of his life, he hinted that the tribes of Reuven, Yehuda, Yosef and Dan would lead the four flag-camps. Anyone whom Yaakov addressed in the second person — “you” — became the head of a flag-camp. Reuven: “You are my firstborn”; Yehuda: “You, will your brothers acknowledge”; Yosef: “From the G-d of your father”; Dan: “For your salvation I long.”

• Ba'al Haturim 2:2

# PARSHA Q&A

Parshas Nasso

1. What is the significance of the number 8,580 in this week's *Parsha*?
2. Besides transporting the *Mishkan*, what other service performed by the *levi'im* is mentioned in this *Parsha*?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *teme'im* (ritually impure) out of the camp?
4. Name the three camps in the desert.
5. Who was sent out of each of the camps?
6. A person stole from another and swore that he was innocent. If he later confesses his guilt, what are his obligations?
7. Who determines which *kohen* receives the gifts that must be given to the *kohanim*?
8. What does the Torah promise a person who gives *matnos kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnos kehuna* followed by the verses about the *sotah*?
10. Why is the *sotah* given water from the holy basin?
11. What does the *kohen* do to the hair of a *sotah*?
12. When a *sotah* who is guilty of adultery drinks the water, she dies in a very specific fashion. What happens to the adulterer?
13. Before the name of Hashem is erased, the *sotah* has the option either to admit guilt or to drink the water. Does she have a third option?
14. What are *chartzanim*? What are *zagim*?
15. What sin does a *nazir* commit against himself?
16. Where was the cut hair of a *nazir* placed?
17. A *kohen* should bless the people "with a full heart." What word in the *Parsha* conveys this idea of "a full heart?"
18. What is the meaning of the blessing, "May Hashem bless you and guard you?"
19. What is the meaning of the blessing, "May Hashem lift up His countenance upon you?"
20. The tribe of Yissachar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

## Answers to this Week's Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *levi'im* between ages thirty and fifty.
2. 4:47 - Singing and playing cymbals and harps to accompany the sacrifices.
3. 5:2 - The day the *Mishkan* was erected.
4. 5:2 - The Camp of the *Shechina* was in the center, surrounded by the Camp of *Levi* which was surrounded by the Camp of *Yisrael*.
5. 5:2 - A *metzora* was sent out of all three camps. A *zav* was permitted in the Camp of *Yisrael* but excluded from the two inner camps. A person who was *tamei* from contact with the dead had to leave only the Camp of the *Shechina*.
6. . 5:6-8 - He pays the principle plus a fifth to the victim, and brings a *korban asham*.
7. 5:10 - The giver.
8. 5:10 - Great wealth.
9. 5:12 - To teach that someone who withholds the gifts due the *kohanim* is deserving of eventually bringing his wife to the *kohanim* to be tried as a *sota*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sota* strayed from the example set by these women.
11. 5:18 - He uncovers it.
12. 5:22 - He dies a similar death.
13. 5:27 - Yes, she can refuse both: She can refuse to admit guilt and also refuse to drink the water. (After the Name of Hashem is erased, she loses this option.)
14. 6:4 - *Chartzanim* are seeds. *Zagim* are peels.
15. 6:11 - He abstains from enjoying wine.
16. 6:18 - It was placed on the fire under the pot in which the *nazir's shlamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "Amor."
18. 6:24 - "May Hashem bless you" that your property may increase, "and guard you" from robbery.
19. 6:26 - "May He suppress His anger."
20. 7:18 - The Tribe of Yissachar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea that the *nesi'im* should offer gifts.

## I Did Not Know That!

"And he instructs the woman to drink the bitter, cursing water..." (5:24).

Verses from the Torah are written with ink on parchment, and the parchment is then erased into the water. The dissolved ink is what gives the water its bitter flavor.

• Ramban 5:18 quoting Sifri; Abarbanel

# LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## GAGOT TZERIFIN AND AYIN SUKAR TWO PLACES, TWO GRAINS, TWO HOLIDAYS

**O**n the second day of Pesach the *Omer* offering was brought upon the altar of the *Beit Hamikdash* from barley flour. On Shavuot, seven weeks later, the Two Loaves made from wheat flour were offered in the *Beit Hamikdash*.

The *mishna* (*Menachot 64b*) tells us that although the grain used in both of these offerings should come from as close to Jerusalem as possible, where this was impossible it could come from distant places in *Eretz Yisrael* as well. This actually happened during the Hasmonean civil war, which found Aristobolus entrenched within the walls of Jerusalem, while his brother Hyrkonius laid siege without. The latter's forces had destroyed all the produce in the vicinity of Jerusalem, so a call was issued if anyone knew where barley for the *Omer* could be acquired. A mute Jew came along and put one hand on a roof and another on a shack. Mordechai, of Purim fame, asked the people if there was a place called Gagot (Rooves), Tzerifin (Shacks) or Tzerifin Gagot. A search was made, a place named Gagot Tzerifin was found, and barley was secured for the *Omer*. When the time came to find wheat



for the Two Loaves on Shavuot, the same scenario ensued. This time the mute placed one hand on his eye and the other in the hole in the doorpost into which the bolt is placed.

Mordechai asked if there is a place called Ayin (Eye), Sukar (Hole) or Sukar Ayin. Ayin Sukar was located, and wheat was brought for the Two Loaves.

There is no other historical record of these two remote spots that had their moment of glory in Jewish history. But the contrast between the grains used for the *Omer* and the Two Loaves mentioned in this story communicates an important message. Barley is traditionally regarded in the Talmud as animal food, while wheat is the staple of humans. The *Omer* brought on the Festival of Freedom, Pesach, comes from barley because we achieved only physical freedom with our Exodus from Egypt, and that is only animal-like liberation. Only on Shavuot when we received the Torah did we achieve the Divine guidance that endowed us with true human intelligence and responsibility. We therefore bring our Two Loaves from the grain that is the food of humans — wheat.

## The Other Side of the Story לפי הצד השני של הסיפור

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

On Shavuos, we eat milky foods to remind us that the Torah's teachings are as sweet as milk and honey. One such teaching is that we must judge others, including our spouses, favorably. Think about that the next time you ask...

## Milk, Honey?

A young man in Jerusalem was home watching his baby one evening when the baby woke up. "No problem," he thought, "a little milk and the baby will fall right back asleep."

But there was no milk. "How frustrating," he thought, staring into the empty fridge. "Is my wife so unorganized? Can't she keep an extra bag of milk on hand? (In Israel, milk comes in bags.) Now, I'll have to hold the baby for an hour until she comes home. The baby will be perfectly happy, but I won't."

Suddenly, in a flash of genius, he decided to borrow milk from his upstairs neighbor. "Sorry," said his neighbor, "we're out of milk. As a matter of fact, we even borrowed a bag from you this afternoon, but we used it!"

"So!" he thought, walking down-

stairs. "My wife had done just what I would have wanted; she lent the milk to the neighbors who needed it for supper. We don't really need it anyway, because I'll just hold the baby until my wife comes home to nurse him. But I'll try one more neighbor."

He continued past his apartment to the downstairs neighbor. "Sorry," said his neighbor, "we're out of milk. As a matter of fact, we borrowed a bag from your wife this afternoon, but we used it..."

Moral: A lack-dose of lactose is not what matters most.

• Heard from Rabbi Dovid Kaplan