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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE HAND OF G-D

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

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

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

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

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

In the secular world they say that time is money; Judaism says that money is time. In the end, the only thing you have to spend is time; a selfless person is prepared to spend that priceless resource on others without impatience or resentment. Someone who feels or claims that he has no time for himself and resents his public responsibilities is, in essence, denying *hashgacha*,

Divine Providence, for if G-d has put me in the position in which I find myself, it must mean that this is where I am supposed to be.

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

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

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

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

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

I will see the Hand of G-d.

OHRNET *Shavuot Special* see page 6

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

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

ISRAEL Forever

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

As we begin this Shabbat to read our weekly portions in *Chumash Bamidbar*, and prepare for Shavuot as the Festival of the Giving of the Torah, we cannot overlook the relationship between the word *bamidbar* — in the wilderness — and the fact that the Torah was given to our people in the wilderness of Sinai.

Many explanations have been offered as to the significance of the Torah being given to us outside of Eretz Yisrael and removed from civilization. One of these focuses on the need to separate Torah from nationalism.

In all their years of exile Jews steadfastly lived Torah

lives despite the lack of a country to call their own. In their geographic wilderness they realized that Torah was their true homeland and fervently prayed for the opportunity to live a full Torah life in the land promised to them by the Giver of the Torah.

How sadly ironic it is that Torah-observant Jews are a minority in the Jewish State of our days. On the other hand it is gratifying to see the exciting growth of Torah-true Jewry in Israel. Perhaps the Divine voice heard at Sinai this week 3319 years ago will reverberate in the hearts of all Jews and secure Israel forever.

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

DO WHAT YOU CAN

Question: I try to give as much charity as I can but am sometimes disheartened by the fact that there are so many people in need and it is beyond my ability to help them all. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: The Chafetz Chayim dealt with such a question by providing a parable:

“A man saw a bridge collapse, hurling twenty people into the river below. All of them were in danger of drowning. Two onlookers jumped into the water to rescue them. Just

then they heard a fellow shouting:

‘Fools, what good is your jumping into the water? Can you save everybody? There are only two of you and twenty people have to be saved. You better give up!’

Of course they laughed at this ‘wise’ man. Isn’t it worth bothering for the rescue of only two lives — or even one? Even if it is hopeless to save everybody is it right to just stand by and give up on those who could be saved?

A person must always remember that he has a duty to do whatever he can in order to help and in order to save.”

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 “ot” and a “degel”?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed “*techum Shabbat*” - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 *amot* on *Shabbat*?
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 the Book of 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 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 was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The first-born 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?

PARSHA Q&A!

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 G-d.
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 “ot” is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 *amot* from the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Mo'ed* on *Shabbat*.
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 - Bigtan and Teresh.
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 first-born 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 - G-d.
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*.

The confrontation between Rabbi Akiva and Yonatan ben Hirkanus
Three halachic rulings from the Prophet Chaggai
Which candidates are not accepted for conversion and why not
What preoccupied different heathens when they destroyed *Beit Hamikdash*
The issue of patrilineal descent in determining Jewishness
The brother born after death of the deceased as a candidate for *yibum*
Brother from one mother but not one father as candidate for *yibum*
Whether *zikhah* – the relationship of the deceased’s brothers to his widow before *yibum* – creates a virtual marital rela-

tionship with halachic implications
If *ma’amar* with a *yevamah* can be effective without her consent just as *yibum* can be
Which women are ineligible for *yibum* but must have *chalitzah* and which are exempt from even that
When the deceased’s brother is a *kohen gadol* who is forbidden to marry a widow
When a positive command clashes with a prohibition
Sources for rabbinical restrictions on marriage partners
A listing of distant relatives one is forbidden to marry by rabbinic law
Who is considered a brother and who a son in regard to *yibum* and other matters
If one is guilty of two sins for relations with one sister

HOW TO BE HOLY

What makes a person holy? Holiness is achieved, says the Sage Rava, by sanctifying yourself through abstaining even from what is permitted to you.

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

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

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

• *Yevamot* 20a

WHAT THE Sages SAY

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

• *Rabbi Levi - Yevamot* 21a

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

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

BIRIYAH – TOMBS OF THE GREAT

Less than a mile north of Tsefat is Biriya where two great figures in Jewish history are buried. One is Benayahu ben Yehoyada, who was one of King David’s most important aides both as a scholar and a warrior, and whose great deeds



and holiness are described in the Talmud and the Zohar. The other is the Talmudic Sage Abba Shaul. In addition to his great scholarship he was proud of his role as a gravedigger, about which he once said “The evil inclination can’t be found in the cemetery.”

DOW JONES WITNESS

From: Lee Vyner

Dear Rabbi,

I heard that someone who gambles is viewed as being engaged in a type of theft that thereby disqualifies him from being accepted as a reliable witness in a Jewish court. If so, what about the stock market? People literally gamble as to the price of a particular commodity or stock, and the person who has a holding of this particular item certainly does not want the price to deteriorate. So is someone who trades on the stock market invalid as a witness?

Dear Lee,

Stocks are a legitimate investment. Buying stocks is essentially no different than buying diamonds, land, or wheat — commodities whose price naturally fluctuates. True, the stock market has an element of risk, but 'lost wages' is not synonymous with 'Las Vegas'.

Gambling, on the other hand, is a game where each person hopes to guess the right number on the dice, land the best hand or pick the right horse. Gamblers are invalid as witnesses in a Jewish court.

The Sages of the Talmud differ as to why gamblers are invalid for testimony:

According to one opinion, someone who wins a bet is like a thief, because he collects prize money that he didn't 'earn' and to which he has no true legal claim. Alternatively, since the person who loses doesn't really pay with a full heart, the money "earned" by the winner is considered theft.

According to another opinion, only a professional gamster, whose sole source of income is from gambling, is invalid as a witness. His integrity is suspect because his form of work contributes nothing to society. Alternatively, one whose income is based on chance, and at the expense of the loss of others, cannot be relied upon to fully appreciate the financial loss his testimony might cause. According to this opinion, someone who gambles only part-time can be a valid witness, provided he's involved in some productive profession.

The following story is told about the Chafetz Chaim: A man once asked the rabbi to bless him that he should win the lottery, but the Chafetz Chaim refused. The man asked, "But you give blessings to people who gamble on stocks, why not when they gamble on lotteries?" The Chafetz Chaim answered that he gives blessings to stock investors because if the stock goes up, no one loses money. But blessing one lottery ticket owner is a 'curse' upon the others.

Sources:

- *Talmud Sanhedrin 24b*
- *Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 34:16*
- *Story thanks to Will Shulman*

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

DOUBLE HEADER FOR THE HOSPITAL

It is not often that a hospital in Israel gets a double dose of publicity but that is what happened to the HaEmek Hospital in Afula last month.

The first item concerned an Israeli citizen whose leg was saved by the orthopedic team of the hospital after he broke it during a business trip to Kenya. When Dr. Nimrod Rosen, head of orthopedics, learned of the accident and the inability of the Nairobi hospital to perform the emergency surgery required to save the leg, he got on the phone and issued instructions on how to prepare the patient for an

emergency flight to Israel. The hospital staff was ready when he arrived and the leg-saving operation was successfully performed.

The other item was a happy one from beginning to end. On March 19th the maternity ward of the Afula hospital was the scene of a record-breaking baby boom. While the average number of births there in a day is 13, on that day 22 babies were born — 15 boys, 5 girls and a set of twins. The nurses on the ward were worn out at the end of such a demanding day but they all had a smile on their face.

The Ultimate Message

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

The Last Frontier

Very soon, only the speed of light will limit our ability to communicate a thought, a picture, a sound or a sentence from one side of the world to the other, and beyond.

The meaning of the word “distance” has changed forever.

Just as the electron has shrunk our world, so has there been a quiet and maybe even more fundamental revolution in the way we look at traveling. We see nothing special in the fact that several hundred people can walk into a large metal room and find themselves on the other side of the world in a matter of hours. In fact, the major drawback in circling the earth in a jet-plane may be an aching back from sitting in a reclining chair that doesn't quite live up to its name. A little more than a hundred years ago, to circumnavigate the globe would have required months of arduous, dangerous and expensive effort, almost beyond our imagining.

We have breached the last frontier. Distance has become no more than a function of time spent in a chair.

In the Fast Line

The electron and the 747 have had their impact on our culture in other ways: Our cultural mindset mandates that speed is of the essence. *Where am I going?* is now less important than *How fast can I get there?* Immediacy has become a yardstick of worth. How fast is your car? Your computer? Our age has sought to devour distance and time, rendering everything in a constant and immediate present. Now this. Now this. (Interestingly the languages of the age - film and television, computer graphics - are languages which have trouble expressing the past and the future. They only have a present tense. Everything happens in a continuous present.)

All of which makes it very difficult for us to understand what it means to receive the Torah.

On the Beach

Why did G-d give the Torah to the Jewish People in the middle of a desert? Why didn't He give it on the other side of *Yam Suf* (the Sea of Reeds)? Once the Egyptian army had been safely dispatched and the Jewish People had finished singing the Song at the Sea, wouldn't that

have been an appropriate time to give the Torah? And even if you'll say that the Jewish People weren't ready for the Torah at that point, that they were too steeped in the fleshpots of Egypt, that they needed time to purify themselves; fine, so why didn't they just camp there on the beach for seven weeks? On the beach, their biggest problem would have been sunburn. Why did they have to *schlep* hundreds of miles through an inhospitable desert to some small mountain in the middle of nowhere?

The Path of the Just

We talk of spirituality as being a path. The spiritual path. For, in truth, travel is no more than a physical paradigm of the spiritual road. The quest for spirituality demands that we travel; if not physically, then certainly in our soul we must notch up the miles. If we refuse this invitation to journey, the groove of our lives becomes a rut. We think we are traveling, but we are just wearing down the same circular path. The spiritual road requires us to forsake the comfortable, the familiar ever-repeating landmarks of our personalities, and set out with an open mind and a humble soul. We must divest ourselves of the fawning icons of our own egos by which we have defined and confined ourselves, and journey. Physical traveling is no more than the concretization of this internal process. The physical journey gives expression to the spiritual progress.

Journey to the Center

In Hebrew, the word for the imperative “Go!” is written with exactly the same two letters as the phrase “to yourself.” When G-d took Avraham out of Ur Kasdim and sent him to the Land of Israel, He used those two identical words, *Lech Lecha*, which can be translated: “Go to yourself.” The spiritual path is always a process of going. Of moving, of progressing. And inevitably, as in any journey, when we conquer the obstacles that lie in our path, we grow in stature. By overcoming the difficulties along the way, we connect with the fundamental purpose of the journey: To travel inward, to reach inside to our true selves. We “go to ourselves.”

Beneath and Beyond

But the spiritual path is not just a journey inside. It is a path to a world beyond. Avraham traveled the length

and breadth of *Eretz Yisrael*. There is an *Eretz Yisrael* of the body and there is an *Eretz Yisrael* of the soul. To experience that higher reality, Avraham had to travel throughout its physical counterpart. Similarly, when the Jews left Egypt, they needed to travel a spiritual road which would lead them not just to a physical place called Har Sinai, but to its spiritual *doppelganger* as well.

But why a desert?

The Jewish People needed to travel through a desert because they needed to become like the desert, devoid of preconceptions, unencumbered by the spiritual baggage of Egypt. Sitting on the beach would never have brought them to that spiritual state.

Sivan, Mercury, and the Ultimate Message

The month of *Sivan* is associated with the planet Mercury. Mercury symbolizes communication. Thus it is that the Torah was given in the month of *Sivan*. Because The Torah is the Ultimate Communication. Every communication, every message must come from one place and arrive at another, from “there” to “here.” The Torah is the Ultimate Message. Thus it can only be received by way of a journey. For a journey is always from “there” to “here.” The seven weeks of journeying in the desert, from Egypt to Sinai, are a paradigm of the Ultimate Communication from There to here.

Space Eaters

Our age seeks to devour distance. To make it into nothing. We live in a world which has no patience. A world which cannot wait. A world which has no time for physical travel and even less with its spiritual counterpart. We live in an era of “instant spirituality,” a contradiction in terms. There is no such thing as instant spirituality. Spirituality is a path. A path contains a myriad of small individual steps. And if we are ever to reach our destination, each one of those steps must be guided by G-d's “Guidebook for the Human Race,” the Holy Torah. It must be followed step by step.

If we want to travel the pathway of the soul, we must know that life is a journey, that we must move. If, however, we want to lie on the beach in a spiritual deckchair, reading a paperback “*Kabbala in Four or Five Easy Lessons*,” we will never make it to our own individual rendezvous at Sinai.

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