

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR · 24 IYAR 5771 · MAY 28, 2011 · VOL. 18 NO. 34

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY

*"In the desert..." (1:1)*

I think one of the most chilling photographs at Yad Vashem is of a well-to-do Dutch family being escorted to a train to take them to their final destination. It's clear they have no idea where they are going. They take with them everything they can, including the family dog. Quiet desperation is written on their faces.

I often wonder how I would have reacted in their place. What if I had been born a decade earlier and without the few miles of the English Channel?

How would I have stood up to that horrific sixteen-hour journey in a cattle train surrounded by the screaming of small children and the stench of an overflowing pail to accommodate the sanitary needs of over fifty people? How would I have reacted to seeing my family standing waiting for 'a shower'? I wonder.

How was it that seemingly ordinary people were able to show such extraordinary courage and bravery in the face of events which make a nightmare pale?

The Midrash tells us that the Torah was given in Fire, in Water and in the Desert.

What does this mean?

It was through Abraham that we received the Torah

in Fire. Abraham went through the fiery furnace of Ur Kasdim rather than deny G-d. He is the father of the Jewish People, our progenitor. We carry his spiritual genes.

At the Reed Sea, the Jewish People as a nation passed an ordeal by water. The Egyptians army was poised to drive them into the sea. At G-d's command the entire nation jumped into the water, and the sea parted.

And if you'll say that this was merely a moment of bravado, then look at a third event that sealed the capacity of the Jewish People for self-sacrifice. They followed Moshe into the unsown vastness of the wilderness, without food, without water, with nothing more than the promise of miracle food from Above. Their only companions were snakes and scorpions.

It was these three ordeals - in fire, in water and in the desert - that anchored in the spiritual genes of the Jewish People the capacity for self-sacrifice. To this day, it is this legacy which has empowered ordinary people to behave extra-ordinarily, to reach up and proclaim, in the face of Hell, their faith in Heaven.

• Source: Rabbi Meir Shapiro from Lublin in *Mayana shel Torah*

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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, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the *levi'im*, whereby

the *levi'im* take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided into 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

### THE LEVITES OF TODAY

A major subject of this week's Torah portion is the selection of the Levites as the “Legion of G-d” with a special status and special responsibilities.

Rambam (Laws of Shmitah and Yovel 13:13) points out that the Levite is a concept rather than just a member of a special tribe. Just as the Levites were not involved in agriculture, war, or any worldly matters because they were reserved for serving G-d, so too will anyone who chooses

such a role be provided with all his needs.

How fitting is this as a description of those who dedicate their years and sometimes even their lives to the study of Torah in *yeshivot* and *kollelim*. Just as the Levites did more for the entire nation than they received from it, these modern members of the “Legion of G-d” are the ones who secure Israel forever.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

### MAMREI – THE FAITHFUL ALLY

Together with his brothers Eshkol and Avneir, Mamrei the Emorite was a faithful ally of the Patriarch Avraham. It was in the plains of Mamrei that Avraham established his home shortly after arriving in Eretz Yisrael and where he built an altar to G-d in gratitude for the Heavenly gift of all of the



land. Mamrei was also the one who encouraged Avraham to go through with his circumcision in public fashion without fear from his enemies. In recognition of this, G-d chose the Plains of Mamrei as the site for appearing to Avraham following his circumcision.

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## 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 firstborn, 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*.

- How the invalid slaughtering of the *Korban Todah* affects the breads that accompany it
- What is done with the *nesachim* designated to accompany a sacrifice which turns out to be invalid
- When does bread not accompany the product of a *Korban Todah*
- Which funds must one use for purchasing the animal and bread for fulfillment of a vow to offer a *Korban Todah*
- Which sacrifices can come from outside Eretz Israel
- What were the best sources for flour for the Omer offering and the two loaves on Shavuot
- Improper sources for the flour
- The source for the Omer offering to be from barley
- Best source for the oil used in the *Beit Hamikdash*
- The bounty of olive oil in the portion of the Tribe of Asher

### THREE SCENARIOS FOR A SWITCH

When does an animal designated for a particular sacrifice become eligible for a different sacrifice? If a Jew designated an animal to be a *Korban Pesach* and it was not used for that purpose, then it must be sacrificed as a *Korban Shelamim*.

Three different Torah sources are cited for this rule, and the question arises as to why so many sources are needed.

The answer is that there are three different possibilities for such an animal to be invalid for a *Korban Pesach* despite

being designated for that purpose.

One is that when the time came for offering the *Korban Pesach* (14 Nissan), the animal was more than a year old, an age that disqualifies it for such a sacrifice. Another case is that the animal was not around on that date but was theoretically available for the *Pesach Sheini* sacrifice a month later. A third possibility is that the animal was lost and another was designated in its place. If it turned up before midday of the fourteenth, which is too early for offering the *Korban Pesach*, it can be offered as a *Korban Shelamim*.

• *Menachot 83b*

### What the SAGES Say

“When the *mishna* rules that any wood in which a worm is found is disqualified for use on the altar, this applies only to wood which is damp. When the wood is dry the worm can simply be scraped from it.”

• *The Sage Shmuel - Menachot 85b*

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## GOOD LOOKS GO; GOODNESS GROWS

**From: Jason**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Until now I've been in a series of casual relationships without any commitment. Recently, I've started to think that since I'm getting older, it may be time to start thinking about getting into a more serious relationship in order to get married. I am just having a really hard time dealing with the idea that you could be with the same person for the rest of your life. And also, how could you possibly not be attracted to other people while you're married? What do you think?*

Dear Jason,

It sounds from your question that the types of relationships you've had are based on physical attraction and mutual convenience.

It's no wonder, then, why they've been casual and why you have trouble seeing how a relationship could last and be fulfilling for the rest of your life.

As far as convenience is concerned, today's convenience is tomorrow's burden. So how could you stay with one person for so long? And as far as "looks" are concerned, 1) looks get old and 2) as one gets old, good looks go. So how could you not look around?

Before eyeing the alternative, let's play out your scenario.

Be assured that as her good looks grow old, or as she grows old and her good looks go, the same thing is happening to you. For the very same reasons, you're becoming less attractive to her. So you're not the only one looking for "greener grass". Just as you're looking at others, so is she. And what's more, you two aren't the only ones. Just as the two of you are eyeing others, so others are eyeing you – and "yours". In fact, in a society whose relationships

are based on your model, everybody is tired of every body they "have", while desiring everybody else. That's sick. Breakdown!

Furthermore, even if while looking around, theoretically, you would change pasture to the other side of the fence, leave one relationship that started with attraction to another which currently seems more attractive, then what? Eventually, what happened to the older would happen to this newer. Namely, it would get old, and the same person you looked toward with such interest, you'd now look away from toward another. So what was this newer relationship worth in the first place? And where will such relationships take you? Out of the meadow and into the swamp!

So what's the alternative?

Take the advice of our Sages who said: Love which is based on external factors, when the externals go, so does the love. Love which is not based on external factors, even if the externals go, the love remains.

Healthy, long-lasting and fulfilling relationships must be based less on good looks and more on good character. Good looks go; goodness grows. This means that while physical attraction diminishes over time for the reasons mentioned above, good people generally become even better people over time. They mature well, their good disposition inclines them to refine themselves, and they actually become more pleasant and attractive as time passes. Love for such a person for such reasons will not wane but only grow with time. And in a society where it's every person's responsibility to be such a person, good, wholesome, productive, stable and lasting relationships thrive.

This doesn't mean that if you merit finding and building such a relationship that you would never be challenged by looking over the fence, but recalling how distasteful and even harmful that deceptively "greener grass" is should keep you in home pasture.

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## SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

### Question:

I have a telephone number that is apparently very similar to someone who is a “late-night bird”. On a couple of occasions I have rushed out of bed to answer the telephone in expectation of an emergency call from a family member only to hear a lame “Sorry, wrong number” from the other end. What should be my reaction to such infuriating disturbances?

### Answer:

A friend of mine with a macabre sense of humor had a similar problem and would answer such late-night calls by saying “Good evening, you have reached the insomnia ward of the Bad Samaritan Hospital. Do you need help in falling asleep?”

In a more serious vein, you must view such disturbances

as Heaven-sent challenges to your tolerance and temper. Please remember that the party calling had no intention to reach you and it is an understandable human error to press the wrong button. Perhaps the right thing to do when it emerges that you were not the intended receiver of the call is to gently suggest to the caller that he or she exercise greater care in placing a call, especially late at night. If the disturbance becomes a regular affair it might be a good idea to ask the caller what number he or she is trying to reach, and then to call that number and ask that party to either stress to his callers the need for greater caution or to encourage them to make their calls at a more civilized hour.

Bottom line: Don't get excited, because it will be much harder to fall asleep and you may end up needing the services of my funny friend's insomniac ward.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### AN APPETITE FOR LIFE

Many memories of the late great leader of Torah Jewry, Harav Eliezer Shach, of blessed memory, are often recalled. Among them are touching stories about the wisdom and sensitivity he displayed in helping individuals along with his historic feats of teaching Torah and leading a generation.

One such story concerned an American young woman whose severe diet brought her to a dangerous state of anorexia. With a total lack of appetite she was literally withering away, much to the consternation of her family. When medical and psychological aid failed to solve the problem, her father turned in desperation to the Rosh Hayeshiva of the Ponevez Yeshiva.

Sensing that the young lady had probably embarked on her destructive diet in order to achieve a figure which might improve her matrimonial opportunities, Rav Shach turned to her with a request that she eat the piece of cake he placed before her and added a promise that if she resumed eating she would be blessed with a good match. After convincing her to thus break her self-imposed fast, he urged her to write him each day what she had added to her eating, once again reassuring her that she would find a good *shiduch*. The strategy worked. She recovered her appetite and her health and soon met a fine Torah scholar with whom she established “a faithful home in Israel” thanks to the brilliance of mind and heart of this Torah giant.

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