

SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR - SHAVUOT · 5 SIVAN 5775 · MAY 23, 2015 · VOL. 22 NO. 32

PARSHA INSIGHTS

NOT ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL

“According to the number of their names” (1:2)

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

“...according to the number of their names.”

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

A number is anonymous, even faceless and lacking in identity. A name, on the other hand, is the essence of separateness and individual identity.

The Torah was given to the Jewish People “according to the number of their names.” It was given both individually and collectively.

The Jewish People are an indivisible unit, and each individual makes up the sum of the whole, of the “*klal*”. On the other hand, each individual is more than just a brick in this “wall of sound”. Each Jew is dear to G-d, precious and special.

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

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

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.

NEDARIM 2 - 8

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

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

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

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

• *Nedarim 8a*

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

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

• *Nedarim 8a*

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*Wishes all of Israel a Chag Somayach
A Happy & Meaningful Shavuot*

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*.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

Bamidbar

During the forty years that the Jewish People spent in the desert before entering the Land of Israel, the encampment of the twelve tribes followed a fixed order. The tribes were divided into four sets of three tribes each, and they surrounded the Mishkan which represented the central heart of the nation. Each group of three had its own distinct banner; there was not an individual banner for each of the tribes. The most honored position was to the east, led by the tribe of Yehuda and accompanied by the tribes of Yissachar and Zevulun. Next in importance was the south, led by the tribe of Reuven and accompanied by Shimon and Gad. Next was the west, led by the tribe of Ephraim and accompanied by Menashe and Binyamin. Finally, the north, led by the tribe of Dan and accompanied by the tribes of Asher and Naftali.

The configuration of the tribes requires explanation. Since Leah had six children, we would have thought that they should have comprised two of the encampments. Another should have gone to the children of Rachel and another to the children of the maidservants. However, since the tribe of Levi, which was dedicated to the service in the Mishkan, did not have a particular spot, it was replaced by Gad who was the oldest of the sons of Leah's maidservant. Since Yehuda represented royalty, he was given the pre-eminent position, with his younger full-brothers under him. His brother Shimon could not serve under him as he was older. It was also fitting that Yissaschar accompany Yehuda, as the members of that tribe were noted for their wisdom, especially in terms of astronomical calculations which would be useful to rulers. Rachel's children comprised the entirety of one encampment (Ephraim and Menashe representing Yosef)

and the three remaining sons of the maidservants, led by Dan, comprised the entirety of the final camp. Dan led the last camp based on his strength, as indicated by the verse in reference to him, "Dan will be a serpent on the highway, a viper by the path..." (Ber. 49:17)

Even though the census of each tribe was enumerated at the beginning of the Torah portion, the sum total of each group of three is listed again when the groups are delineated in chapter two. This repetition has significance for possible future military confrontations. When the nation moved on to a new site in the desert they were led by the banner of Yehuda, which had the largest number of military-aged males. Next in line were the banners of Reuven and Ephraim, which had the least number of fighters. Bringing up the rear was Dan with the second-largest number of fighters. This arrangement was based on sound military tactics. Generally, an opposing army either attacks head-on or goes around and attacks from the rear, assuming that those in the rear would offer the weakest opposition. This is of course what Amalek had done when it attacked the weakened stragglers. The two strongest groups, headed by Yehuda and Dan, protected the two most likely points of attack.

This also explains why the order of the listing of the tribes changes from chapter one to chapter two. In the first listing, Reuven and his accompanying tribes come first, as he was the firstborn, followed by Yehuda, Ephraim and Dan. However, when the Torah describes the movement of the nation, the military preparations become most important. Yehuda, based on his strength and numerical superiority, comes first. Dan is still mentioned last, not because he represents the less-important maidservants, but because he serves to protect the nation from an attack from the rear.

TORAH WILDERNESS

From: Aharon

Dear Rabbi,
Why wasn't the Torah given in the Land of Israel? Since the Land was given by G-d to the Jews to be a holy nation in their own Holy Land, wouldn't it seem to make more sense for them to receive the holy Torah in such a holy place as Israel or Jerusalem?

Dear Aharon,

This is a challenging question, and there are several possible answers.

It is true that Israel is the Holy Land and that the quality of Torah and mitzvah observance there is considered higher than anywhere else in the world. The Talmud (Bava Batra 158b) states that even the air of the Land of Israel is conducive to spiritual growth.

However, for this reason G-d gave the Torah to the Jews before entering the Land in order to prepare them for the elevating experience of entering it, and to ensure that the Land would not be defiled by non-observance upon their arrival. Thus, one reason for giving the Torah in the wilderness was in order to ready the People for the special quality of the Land.

Another reason was to indicate that even though the ultimate place for Torah learning and observance is the Land of Israel, nevertheless, it is not dependent on the Jewish People being in the Land, and even in exile they connect to G-d

through the Torah. In fact, this implies that the importance of the Torah precedes that of the Land. While it's best for the Jewish People to be committed to Torah in the Land, it's better to be committed to Torah outside of Israel than to be in Israel with no Torah.

Additional reasons mentioned in the sources as to why G-d did not give the Torah in Israel but rather in the wilderness: To teach that just as the wilderness is ownerless and freely accessible to all, so too the Torah is free and open to all (Tanchuma); just as the wilderness is materially sparse and simple, so too the Torah is found among people who refrain from luxuries and are humble (Bamidbar Rabba 1); just as the wilderness is traversed by all, so should a Torah scholar be willing to be plied for his wisdom by all (Eruvin 54a).

Another interesting idea is that if the Torah had been given in Israel, the Jewish People might come to think that the teachings of the Torah are just for them, or non-Jews might think that they have no connection to it. So G-d gave the Torah outside of Israel to indicate that also non-Jews may be inspired by the truths of the Torah. Eventually, it was the Jewish People who received the Land of Israel, from which they are to be a light among the nations, and from Zion shall go forth the Torah. But the fact that the Torah was originally given outside of Israel enables its universal message to be heard by all.

LOVE OF THE LAND

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

HAR HABAYIT — TREELESS MOUNTAIN

The mountain in Jerusalem on which the Beit Hamikdash stood was bare of trees. This condition was mandated by the Torah when it ordered (Devarim 16:21): "You shall not plant an idolatrous *asheira* tree or any tree near the altar of the L-rd your G-d which you shall erect."

And not only trees were forbidden at this holy site but also any permanent wooden structure. The only



exception was the wooden platform which was built there once in seven years for the king to stand upon and read from the Torah to the entire nation gathered there in fulfillment of the mitzvah of *hakheil* (Devarim 31:12-13).

The reason for this exception was that this platform was only a temporary structure, which was dismantled after serving its purpose.

SHEMONEH ESREI: THE THIRTEENTH BLESSING

“For the righteous, and for the devout, for the elders of Your people the House of Israel, and for the remnant of their scribes.”

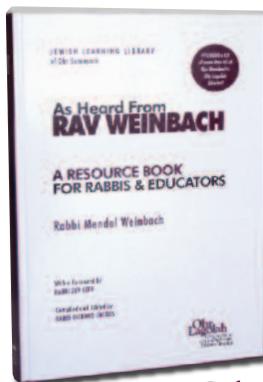
This blessing for the righteous comes immediately after we pray for the downfall of the wicked in accordance with the verse, “All the horns (the pride) of the wicked will be cut off, upraised will be the horns of the righteous”. (Tehillim 75:10; Tur)

Which righteous and devout ones do we pray for here? The Torah states, “There is no man so righteous on earth who always does good and never sins.” (Kohelet 7:20) In comparison to the truly wicked, even someone guilty of sin can be deemed righteous. According to this we can understand why the Men of the Great Assembly put these two blessings together. The bad deeds of the wicked make the righteous “look better”, and, so too, the good deeds of the righteous make the wicked “look worse”. Thus, when goodness is increased, the wicked automatically fall lower.

“*For the righteous*”: This refers to those who guard the commands of the Torah. By virtue of the good deeds of Torah one is deemed righteous and will assuredly have a place in the World-to-Come, as it is written, “And all of Your people are righteous.” (Isaiah 60:21) By mentioning “all” it must include those that have sinned. “*And for the devout*

ones”: This refers to those who immerse themselves in good deeds, such as giving charity and helping those in need. “*And for the elders among Your people*”: It is explained in the Talmud that one that has acquired Torah wisdom is called an elder. Thus, the elders are Torah scholars. According to the Avudarham “the righteous” are those that have never sinned, and “devout ones” refer to those that have repented wholeheartedly. Thus, David Hamelech proclaimed, “Guard my soul for I am a devout one (Tehillim 86:2), i.e. I have repented. Some explain that “the elders of the nation” are the leaders of the generation who are involved in helping the community for the sake of Heaven. This would explain the added phrase “of the nation”, meaning that they are *responsible* for the nation.

“*And for the remnant of their scholars*”: This refers to the teachers of Jewish children, of whom it is said, “Those who teach righteousness to the multitude will shine like the stars forever.” (Daniel 12:3) Teachers of Torah to Jewish youth are compared to stars that shine in the night. People who instill the proper foundation of love and fear of G-d in young children will continue to gain merit from the deeds of their students long after they stop teaching — in the dark the “stars will continue to shine”.



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TEDDY WITT

Age: 23

Albuquerque, New Mexico

University of Texas, B.A. in Finance

The last thing that Teddy Witt wanted to do when he came to Israel in the summer of 2013 was to study Judaism and become religious. He had barely tolerated the once-a-week “Hebrew school” education he had received until bar mitzvah. But, it was a requirement of his Birthright trip, so he reluctantly went. He was surprised at not being bored to death.

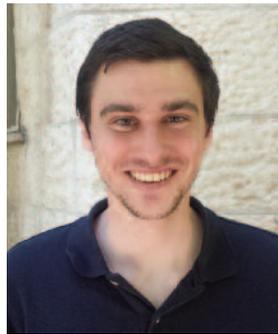
In his Albuquerque high school Teddy had pursued his interest in middle and long distance running. He was on his high school’s cross country team, which finished third in the National Competition in his sophomore year and fifth in his senior year when he was on the varsity squad. An interest in Judaism was not even a close fifth. In college at the University of Texas he avoided the Hillel House and the other Jewish organizations, but when a female student approached Teddy in his junior year and asked him if he was Jewish, he answered; “Yes” — and the process began. She asked if he would be interested in going to Israel on an all-expenses-paid Birthright trip. He didn’t have any other exciting summer plans, so he said he would go.

He stayed on past the Birthright trip to do a short internship and then returned to campus in the fall. Rabbi Yaakov Kirschbaum, an alumnus of the Center Program at Ohr Somayach, was one of the two outreach rabbis on the campus. Rabbi Kirschbaum asked Teddy if he would be interested in meeting and they started learning together *b’chevruta*. Rabbi Kirschbaum suggested the Ohr Somayach JLE

Program to Teddy for a summer activity after his senior year. While here, Teddy decided to attend Rabbi Mandel’s *gemara* class. “It was a bit over my head, but I loved it and wanted more. I decided to delay my return to the States by a month and learn with Rabbi Mandel.” In the fall of 2014 he attended an Ohr Somayach-Mentors Lakewood Shabbaton and met with Rabbis Mandel and Greenblatt and Aharon Wolfson and his family. That experience inspired him to think about learning more seriously. Teddy applied to law schools for the fall of 2015 and decided to return to Ohr Somayach in December 2014 as a full-time student in the Center Program, where he is today.

“I came here to become independent in learning texts and it’s going absolutely amazingly well! I came to the yeshiva with basically no skills — only the ability to recognize the Hebrew letters and now I can pick up any *gemara* and read the words and work out the arguments. I’ve made unbelievable progress thanks to the *rebbeim* and the other students. The students push and help each other to excel. I’ve never worked harder in my life.”

Teddy has been accepted by the Columbia Law School and is on the waiting list at Harvard. He plans to start law school in the fall, but he’s thinking about delaying admission for a year and staying on at Ohr Somayach. He still runs every day while in yeshiva. “It clears my head before night *seder*, gives me more energy and keeps me going.” Teddy is in the race for the long run.



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Rav Bulman *zt”l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

MEGILLAT RUTH Q&A

Questions:

1. Who wrote the Book of Ruth?
2. During which historical period did the events of the Megillah of Ruth occur?
3. Who was Naomi's husband?
4. After she returned from Moav, by what name did Naomi ask to be called?
5. How was Boaz related to Naomi?
6. Into what did Boaz tell Ruth to dip her bread?
7. Why is Elimelech's brother referred to as *Ploni Almoni* and not by his real name?
8. With what object did Boaz redeem Elimelech's property?
9. The people and the elders blessed Ruth that she should be like whom?
10. What was Ruth's relationship to King David?

Answers:

1. The Prophet Samuel (*Bava Batra 14b*).
2. During the era of the *Shoftim*, the Judges. Boaz was the *Shofet* (Judge and leader) at the time (1:1).
3. Elimelech. (1:2).
4. Mara (1:20).
5. He was her husband's brother's son. (2:1, Rashi).
6. Vinegar (2:14).
7. Since he didn't want to redeem his brother's property and thereby discharge his family duty (Rashi 4:1).
8. With a shoe (according to the Targum, a glove) (4:8).
9. Like Rachel and Leah (4:11).
10. She was his great-grandmother: Ruth, Oved, Yishai, David (4:22).

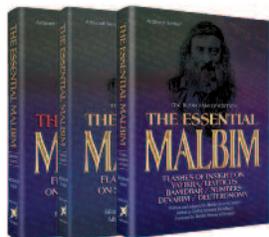
SEVEN REASONS WHY WE READ THE MEGILLAH OF RUTH ON SHAVUOT

1. The events occurred during the harvest season. Shavuot is the "Harvest Festival".
2. Ruth was a convert to Judaism. Conversion is an individual "*Kabbalat haTorah*", receiving the Torah.
3. Ruth the Moabite was permitted to marry Boaz, based on how the Oral Law explains the verse, "A Moabite may not marry into the Congregation of G-d" (Dev. 23:4). This hints at the unity between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.
4. King David was born on Shavuot. The Megillah of Ruth concludes with David's lineage from Ruth.
5. To teach the greatness of "*gemillut chassadim*", acts of loving-kindness.
6. To teach that the Torah is "acquired" only through affliction and poverty.
7. The name "Ruth" has the numerical value of 606. At Mount Sinai the Jewish People accepted 606 *mitzvot* in addition to the 7 Noachide Laws.

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A HEAVENLY GIFT

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

*“You have ascended on high; you captured what had been held captive.
You have taken gifts for Man; that even among rebels G-d may dwell”. (Tehillim 68:19)*

“**A**scended on high”: This verse was said regarding Moshe’s ascent on Mt. Sinai, which was considered an entry into the Heavens. “*Captured what had been held captive*”: This refers to the Torah which Moshe brought down from Heaven. “*Taken gifts for Man*”: The Torah is G-d’s gift to the Jewish People, who are called “Man”. “*Gifts for Man*”: Alternatively, the term “gifts” refers to the *mitzvot*, for in essence the Torah is a book of commands; hence the word Torah means “instruction”. Though we are duty bound to both do and guard the *mitzvot*, in so doing we gain immeasurable merit. Thus, by fulfilling the Torah we receive the greatest gift of all, the reward of the World-to-Come. In relation to the above, our Sages taught, “G-d wished to bestow great merit upon Israel; therefore He gave them Torah and *mitzvot* in abundance, as it is said: ‘G-d desired for the sake of its (Israel’s) righteousness, that the Torah be made abundant and glorious.’” “*Among rebels G-d may dwell*”: Man, who was given free-will, can sometimes rebel against G-d. Nevertheless, he was still given the Torah, the vehicle through which G-d dwells amongst Israel.

A Deeper Look

Upon analysis, the above verse presents us with some apparent difficulties: 1) Why is the Torah described as being “captive in Heaven”? 2) We also must understand the end of the verse which implies that G-d chooses to dwell amongst “rebels” rather than the angels. How can this be so?

We are taught a well-known episode relating to the giving of the Torah. When Moshe ascended to the Heavenly heights, the ministering angels said to G-d, “The coveted and treasured Torah that was stored by You... from before the world was created, You want to give it to flesh and blood?! What (worth) is man that you should remember him... You should rather bestow Your glory, (i.e. Torah) upon the Heavens.” G-d said to Moshe, “Give them an answer.” “The Torah that You are giving me, what is written in it?” You shall not have other gods; you shall not take the name of G-d in vain; you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal. Moshe concludes by

asking if the angels have an “evil inclination” that incites them to transgress the word of G-d. Upon hearing Moshe’s words the angels immediately conceded to G-d, and even befriended Moshe.

What made the angels change their mind?

A parable: Two kings were once discussing who had greater control over his kingdom. The first invited his friend to visit the capital city and palace. This was a most impressive site; the city was beautiful and everyone walked about with a feeling of awe. In the palace nothing moved without the king’s approval. The second king suggested visiting one of the small towns on the outskirts of the kingdom instead of the capital city. The other, although puzzled, agreed. The king decided to pass through the city unannounced. No one knew who was traveling in the carriage. They observed how the citizens of the town behaved during the day, remaining out through the night. The next day the first king rose up from his seat and proclaimed, “By my life, any kingdom that is free of crime and corruption even where the king is never found is surely greater than mine!”

Moshe showed the angels that with all of their perfection, they lacked the one thing that would ultimately give the greatest honor and glory to G-d. In Heaven G-d’s presence is revealed in such an intense manner that there is no free will. Thus, the angel’s fulfillment of Torah would be forced rather than an expression of choice. In this sense the Torah would be “trapped” if it remained in Heaven.

On earth, G-d’s presence is concealed, giving man free choice; he can obey or rebel against G-d’s commands. To make things even more difficult, he has been given an evil inclination that dwells within him, making it very difficult to choose right over wrong. Thus, when man overcomes all of this and chooses to do the will of his Creator it is an expression of the inner essence of man’s will. This expression of choice gives G-d the greatest joy and honor possible. We are thus taught that G-d takes great “pride” in the Jewish People, receiving much delight from the righteous.

Raising Children in an Insane World

Oh Somayach recently did a seven city lecture tour which I took part in, and the general subject was “surviving in an insane world”. My specific topic was titled “Raising Children in an Insane World” and I would like to present a part of that talk here. I will not elaborate as I did in the talks about *why* we see that world as insane — it’s fairly obvious that it is so and we’ve all probably said so at one time or another. Let it suffice to mention the example of an unmarried non-Jewish young lady who was overheard saying to a friend, “When I go out with a guy I ask myself if this is the man I want my children to spend every other weekend with”. Can the world become more insane than this?

There is an interesting phenomenon in the Torah which we have seen numerous times but may never have taken notice of. The difference between “seeing” and “taking notice” is best demonstrated by the following: You have all been up the stairs of your shul, office building or home numerous times, yet if I’d ask you how many stairs there are you’d be hard pressed to answer. That’s because you’ve seen them but haven’t really taken notice of them. Of course, there is always that one individual who *does* know, but then again he’s probably the clear exception. What we may not have noticed in the Torah is that while Avraham Avinu spoke with many people — Sarah, Lot, Pharaoh, Avimelech — the Torah rarely records a conversation between Avraham and Yitzchak his son. The idea that there is no conversation recorded between Avraham and his long-awaited son who he certainly spared no effort in educating properly is so conspicuous in its absence that the Torah must be teaching us something extraordinary. The explanation I once heard is as follows: There is no question that Avraham spoke to Yitzchak plenty, and we find in a Midrash that they learned together in a Yeshiva. But the Torah in its silence wants to emphasize that “*chinuch*” — a proper Jewish education — is not primarily achieved by speak-

ing. It is achieved through demonstration. Parents must demonstrate with concrete actions their dedication to Torah and Torah ideals. They must show clearly that they have a goal and life-focus of growth and serving G-d. That’s the message that will leave the strongest impression on their children.

It is well known that Harav Yaakov Kaminetsky, *zatzal*, was asked how he taught his children to make *berachot*. Rav Yaakov replied, “We never *taught* them to make *berachot*. I made *berachot*, my wife made *berachot*, and our children saw what we did, so they too made *berachot*.” That’s it in a nutshell. A father who tells his son to look in his siddur and daven, but at the same time shmoozes with the person next to him in shul about business or sports, will have taught his son an “important lesson”. The son will have learned that when he’s a daddy he’ll be able to shmooze while telling his son to daven, just as his father did. A mother who tells her children, “If you don’t have something nice to say don’t say it”, but is then overheard talking on the phone and turning the air blue with *lashon hara* (gossip), will fail miserably in instilling proper speech as a value in her children.

Harav Moshe Feinstein, *zatzal*, was once asked if parents should tend towards leniency in the home or towards strictness. Rav Moshe said that the first rule in parenting is that there is no one rule, but experience shows that leniency usually brings about better results. The easiest word for parents to say is “no”. They must communicate to their children that they really *would* like to say “yes”, and in fact they *should* usually say “yes”. A home where “no” is heard more often than “yes” is one in which parenting policies need some reviewing.

Of course, all efforts must be accompanied by *tefilla* that one succeeds. Constant prayer from the heart will certainly pierce its way to G-d and be answered, with all parents enjoying the true “Jewish happiness” they hope for.

SHAVUOT

NOT IN THE HEAVENS

After forty nine days of preparation and counting, we celebrate the holiday of Shavuot on the fiftieth day. We refer to this day in our prayers as “*zman matan Torateinu*”, the day of the giving of our Torah. This title leads the commentators to ask several questions. Firstly, how can we refer to Shavuot as the day we received the Torah when in fact the Gemara tells us we received the Torah on the fifty-first day from the Exodus? Furthermore, what is the meaning behind the word *Torateinu*, “our Torah” — is it not G-d’s Torah?

Rabbi Zeira, and some say it was Rabbi Chanina bar Papa said, “Come and see! The way of G-d is not like the way of flesh and blood. The way of flesh and blood is that when a man sells something to his friend (without getting much in return), the seller is sad and the buyer is happy. But G-d is not so. He gave them (the Jewish People) the Torah and He was happy...” (Berachot 5a)

The Vilna Gaon points out that the Gemara’s comparison of G-d to a seller appears to be faulty. When a seller makes a sale he loses possession of the merchandise he sold, yet when G-d gave us the Torah it always remained His. How then can we understand this Gemara?

Chazal teach us that along with the Torah, G-d gave the authority to define truth and falsehood to those who learn it. When one exerts himself in the study of the Torah, and properly uses the laws of derivation that we received at Sinai, then he can have the power to “originate” halacha. These *halachot* thus become G-d’s own will. The Beit Halevi finds a hint to this idea in one of the blessings that we make on the Torah that states “*asher natan lanu Torat emet*”, *Who gave us the Torah of truth*. The Beit Halevi explains that G-d sanctioned man to be the one to uncover the truth within the Torah.

This idea is best illustrated by the Gemara (Temura 16a) in which we are told that with Moshe Rabbenu’s passing was the loss of the rulings for 3,000 *halachot*. When the nation demanded from Yehoshua to retrieve these forgotten *halachot* from G-d, he refused, stating that the law is not determined in the Heavens. Yehoshua was explaining to the people that

once the Torah was given at Sinai, halacha can only be derived after intense study and resolution by the scholars. In fact, the Gemara continues to describe G-d’s approval with Yehoshua’s decision. When the people became angry with Yehoshua and held him responsible for the loss of these 3,000 rulings, G-d explained that He cannot give Yehoshua the rulings, for the law is no longer in the Heavens for these matters.

The Vilna Gaon uses this principle to explain the comparison between G-d and the seller. The capacity to determine halacha lies solely on Earth in the hands of the scholars. It is in this respect that G-d gave up His Torah to the people, just as the seller gave up ownership over his merchandise.

We can now return to our original questions. G-d intended to give the Torah on the fiftieth day, as the Torah writes: *G-d said to Moshe, go to the nation and purify them today and tomorrow, and they should wash their clothes. And they should be prepared for the third day, for on the third day G-d will descend to Mount Sinai in full view of the entire nation* (Shemot 19:10-11). The Gemara (Shabbat 87a) explains that Moshe added a third day for the people to prepare themselves for the giving of the Torah, thus changing the day of the giving of the Torah from the fiftieth to the fifty-first day. Indeed, when the fiftieth day arrived, G-d deferred the momentous giving of the Torah by an extra day, obeying Moshe’s words. The Beit Halevi explains that it was on this day that G-d gave the Jewish People the consent to create halacha. It is this very ability that we celebrate every year on Shavuot, the ability to derive and create the law to such an extent that G-d defers His will, so to speak, to conform to man’s. Accordingly, that is why we celebrate Shavuot on the fiftieth day and identify the event as “*matan Torah*”, the giving of the Torah, instead of “*kabbalat haTorah*”, the receiving of the Torah, for indeed the Torah was not received until the next day. It is also in this respect that we refer to the day as *zman matan Torateinu*, the day of the giving of *our* Torah — our ability to dictate halacha that was indeed given on this day.

Abarbanel

ON SHAVUOT

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

The Time and Place for Giving the Torah

The Torah portion that we call “Yitro” describes the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, the culmination of the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt. Abarbanel poses two simple but important questions: Why didn’t G-d give the Torah much sooner in history, to Adam or Noah or at least to one of the Patriarchs? Secondly, why did G-d choose to give the Torah at that particular location? Why not give it when the people were in Egypt, or in the Land of Israel, perhaps on the very spot where the Temple would be built?

In regard to the first question Abarbanel offers three perspectives. First of all, the Torah had to be given to a large congregation of people that constituted an entire nation. Even though Adam and Noah observed the universally applicable Noachide laws, and the Patriarchs observed the commandments of the Torah prophetically even before they were given, they did so only as individuals with a personal intellectual and prophetic connection to the will of G-d. Additionally, according to Kabbalistic thought, the 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60 present at Sinai constituted all the different character types in the totality of Mankind. In effect then, the Torah, although it was only directly given to one distinct nation, was in a sense transmitted to all of Mankind.

Secondly, the monumental task of receiving and transmitting the vast scope of the Torah and ensuring that it would be accepted by the nation could only be achieved through Moshe. Although the Jewish nation produced hundreds of prophets, Moshe stood alone, unique in the history of Mankind. That uniqueness can be characterized as follows: 1) Maturity at an early age and physical strength undiminished by age. 2) Total control over his physical desires. 3) The wisdom to understand almost completely the nature of G-d’s total creation. 4) A spiritual make-up that allowed him to receive prophecy at any moment, unlike any other prophet. 5) Since he had led the nation out of Egypt and fought battles and performed miracles on their behalf, it was fitting that only he be the one to transmit the Torah. 6) He combined all the positive characteristics of the Jewish People into one individual: royalty, priesthood, scholarship, material and spiritual accomplishment. 7) Most importantly, the nature of his prophecy was unlike any other. He received his

prophecies when fully conscious. They were never shrouded in metaphors, images visions or dreams. His prophecies came in the most directly manner. This is what is meant by the fact that he spoke with G-d ‘face to face.’

Thirdly, in order to emphasize the fundamental difference between Torah Judaism and all other religious beliefs and philosophies, the giving of the Torah had to be a clearly miraculous Divine intervention. It was the culmination of the Exodus, from the plagues to the splitting of the sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army, to the miraculous manna from Heaven, to the victory over Amalek, and finally to the thunder, lightning, smoke and fire that surrounded the mountain itself.

In regard to the second question, the Torah was given specifically at Mt. Sinai for the following reasons: 1) Because it required Divine intervention, the Torah had to be given in a desert setting where the nation could only be sustained miraculously. It also had to be given soon after the Exodus so that those miracles would be fresh in their minds. 2) Mt. Sinai itself possessed a unique measure of spiritual sanctity. It was there that Moshe first encountered G-d in the burning bush. 3) They could not receive the Torah in Israel since they would be overwhelmed by the physical necessities of conquering and developing the Land. At the same time, they could not receive it in Egypt as they were still affected by the spiritual contamination of the immoral and idolatrous Egyptian society. They required a cleansing experience of three months of travel which brought them to Mt. Sinai. 4) Finally, the Torah had to be given in a desolate wilderness that was not claimed by any other nation. This symbolizes the availability of the Torah to all peoples. If the Torah had been given in Israel, the nations of the world could claim that since the Torah was given only in the territory of the Jewish People, they had no connection to it, were not bound by the dictates intended to apply to all of Mankind, and were not welcome to accept it in totality voluntarily. Additionally, disputes could arise among the Jews themselves, each tribe claiming that the Torah was given in its portion of the Land.

Therefore the Torah had to be given publicly and dramatically in a place owned by no one and thus owned by everyone, to a prophet and a nation uniquely prepared to receive the message which would enlighten all of Mankind.