

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

Bamidbar

A YIDDISHE KOP

“The sons of Naftali, their offspring according to their families...” (1:42)

In a certain country being caught, gambling was a serious offense. It so happened that one day a certain priest was playing poker with his friends the rabbi and the imam. Suddenly the door flew open and a policeman rushed in. The policeman rushed over to the priest and said, “Gotcha! You were playing poker!” “No I wasn’t”, protested the priest. “Would you swear that you weren’t playing poker?” “Absolutely,” said the priest. “So swear!” And he did.

Next, the inspector turned to the imam: “You were playing poker!” “No I wasn’t” protested the imam. “Would you swear that you weren’t playing poker?” “Absolutely,” said the priest. “So swear!” And he did.

Next the policeman turned to the rabbi, “You were playing poker!” “No I wasn’t” protested the rabbi. “Would you swear that you weren’t playing poker?” “Listen”, said the rabbi. “If this fellow swears that he wasn’t playing poker, and this fellow swears that he wasn’t playing poker, who was I supposed to be playing poker with?”

With this old and not particularly funny joke, we can under-

stand the following anomaly in this week’s Torah portion.

“The sons of Naftali, their offspring according to their families...”

When enumerating all the other tribes, the Torah employs the prefix “For...”. As in: “For the sons of Asher... forty-one thousand, five hundred.” (1:41). Only with the tribe of Naftali does the Torah omit the “For”.

Why?

The present counting of the Tribes of Israel was designed to establish the number of each tribe by itself, for, as Rashi points out, the grand total of all the Jewish People was already established that year, and that number was unchanged. Thus, once the other tribes had been counted and only the tribe of Naftali remained, their number was already known by a simple sum of deduction. Therefore, it was not necessary to use the prefix “For”.

That’s what you call a “Yiddishe Kop”.

• Sources: *Panim Yafot in Mayana shel Torah*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Bamidbar

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.

PARSHA Q&A?

Bamidbar

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 Bamidbar’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*.

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Naso

THRUST UPON HIM?

“...for his father and his mother and his brother he may not contaminate himself” (6:7)

While he still lived in London, Dayan Yechezkel Abramsky, *zatzal*, would give a *shiur* (class) every Friday night to non-religious young people. After the meal he would welcome them into his home and teach them something from the weekly Torah portion.

When it came to the *parsha* of *Ki Teitze* he spent the whole week pondering how to explain the “*yefat toar*” — the halacha that allows a Jewish soldier in battle to have relations with a non-Jewish female captive.

How was he going to explain this controversial concept to his young pupils?

Try as he might, he could think of no suitable approach. Friday night arrived, and still no *shiur* had materialized in his head. He *davened* that G-d should put the right words into his mouth. Suddenly, during the Friday night meal, G-d opened his eyes and it came to him...

Later, with his students seated around the Shabbat table, Dayan Abramsky said: Before we open the *Chumashim*, I want you to know something: From what we are about to read we will see clearly how the whole of the Torah is obligatory upon us.

He explained. “From this week’s Torah portion we learn that the Torah never demands that which is beyond a person’s ability. In a situation where it is impossible to hold back, the Torah permits us to follow our instincts. It must be then,

that everything that the Torah *does* demand of us is certainly within our capabilities. And if the Torah itself understands the limits of human endurance and permits that which is beyond Man’s power to withstand, it must be that everything that it commands is within our power to do.”

We see a similar concept in this week’s portion. A *Nazir*, someone who accepts upon himself a greater level of abstinence than the Torah requires, is not allowed to become spiritually impure through contact with a dead body, even to bury one of his parents or siblings. A *kohen*, however, despite his elevated level, may become spiritually impure to bury his immediate family.

Why the difference?

A *kohen* does not accept upon himself his higher level of holiness — it’s thrust upon him. Thus there is a possibility that when faced with a situation that may be beyond his endurance — like not being able to bury his parents — he may not withstand the test. Understanding this, the Torah permits him to compromise the sanctity of his priesthood.

The sanctity of a *Nazir* is not thrust upon him. It’s something that he willingly submits himself to, and thus the assumption is that he will be able to withstand the test of following his commitment to the end.

• Sources: *Sefer HaChinuch* and a story heard from Rabbi Naftoli Falk

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Naso

The Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, 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, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor’s property, 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 G-d’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 G-d 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 *Nissan* 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.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Naso

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 referred to 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 *matnot kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnot 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 G-d 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 G-d bless you and guard you"?
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d lift up His countenance upon you"?
20. The tribe of Yissaschar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Naso'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 *sotah*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sotah* 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 G-d 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 shelamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "Amor."
18. 6:24 - "May G-d 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 Yissaschar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea that the *nesi'im* should offer gifts.

PREPARING FOR SHAVUOT THROUGH SEFIRAT HA'OMER

The simple explanation for counting the *omer* is a counting toward the long-awaited day of receiving the Torah. Based on this, the commentaries explain that the counting of the *omer* is comparable to a person who is counting to the day when he will reunite with his beloved. So too, we count toward the glorious day of the giving of the Torah. While this idea is certainly true, it does not fully account for how we count the *omer*. According to the above, it would seem ideal to start the count with the number 50, and count down to Shavuot. However, we count starting with the number one, up toward the day of Shavuot. What additional lesson does this method of counting teach us about the mitzvah of *sefirat ha'omer*? (See Sefer Hachinuch 306)

To answer this we first need to address another fundamental question. It is known that names in Judaism always express its essence. By studying the depth behind names, we are able to gain an understanding of the spiritual nature of the person, object, etc. bearing that name. Similarly, the names of the holidays reflect their core (Michtav M'Eliyahu II p. 17). We reach a difficulty with this idea, however, when we examine the name Shavuot. Shavuot literally means weeks, which is referring to the weeks of *sefirat ha'omer* that precede the holiday. How do the weeks of *sefirat ha'omer* that precede Shavuot represent the essence of the holiday? Not only that, but an actual date or month for Shavuot is never provided in the Torah; the Torah only writes that the holiday of Shavuot is at the completion of seven weeks. In fact, in the times when the Sanhedrin determined the new moon, Shavuot could have fallen out on the fifth, sixth, or seventh days of Sivan. The fact that Shavuot is always 50 days from Pesach regardless of which day it falls on in Sivan, shows that Shavuot is essentially rooted in the weeks of *sefirat ha'omer*. How is this so?

The commentaries explain that every year on Shavuot everyone is allotted a portion of Torah that he will merit the upcoming year. Therefore the days of *sefirat ha'omer* are meant to be used as a preparation for each individual's yearly *Matan Torah*. It says in *Pirkei Avot* 6:6 that there are 48 different ways to acquire the Torah. Based on this, Rav Simcha Zissel says that on each day of *sefirat ha'omer* one should prepare himself for Shavuot by working on one of these ways listed. On the last day before Shavuot, the 49th day, he should go over all the 48 steps (*Alei Shor, chelek bet*, II, p. 397). Based on this, it is essentially the preparation before Shavuot that determines the Torah that one will receive on Shavuot.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that the name Shavuot, literally weeks, so beautifully conveys this idea since the holiday of Shavuot is an outcome of the weeks that precede it. For this very reason, the date of the holiday of Shavuot is determined by the 49 days of *sefirat ha'omer*, and not the date, because the 49 days prior, that are used to prepare, are essential to the holiday, and are required in full (see *Shem M'Shmuel, Bamidbar* 5675).

This explanation also helps us understand why we count up during *sefirat ha'omer*, instead of down. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus explains that counting downward implies that the 49 days prior to Shavuot are just an impediment to the day itself. It is almost as though they are unnecessary, and we are trying to get rid of that time. However, that is not the case at all with the days of *sefirat ha'omer*, during which the days themselves are absolutely essential for the holiday. Instead, we count upward so that we appreciate the special ways in which we grow over the time as we prepare ourselves for *Matan Torah*. May we all take advantage of this special time and thereby merit receiving a special portion of Torah on Shavuot.

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Bamidbar

The Purpose of the Census

In this week's portion the Torah details the census that was taken of all males from the age of twenty and up after their departure from Egypt. Abarbanel questions the need for this census since one year earlier the same population was counted through each individual's donation of a half-shekel towards the construction of the Tabernacle (Mishkan). Abarbanel is also puzzled by the fact that the count is exactly the same in both instances, an impossible result since there would have been a significant number of individuals who were nineteen years old at the time of the first census and would only be counted at the second census.

Regarding the first question he answers that at this point the nation would soon be entering the Land of Israel, which would have to be conquered militarily. Just as a king would take a careful census of his available troops before embarking on a military campaign, the Torah specifically states that Moshe counted "From twenty years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the legion in Israel." The command to conduct the census was specifically given to Moshe alone, as he would be functioning like a king at the head of his army. This is indicated by the end of the above-mentioned verse which states, "You shall count them according to their legions."

The Torah then goes on to designate a leader for each of the tribes, since they would have to know how many men would be under their command, as they would have to assume, as the Ramban emphasizes, that they could not rely on miracles, such as one man chasing a thousand of the enemy. Additionally, since there would be a division of the Land amongst the tribes, each leader had to know the population of his tribe in comparison to the others. Since this census was part of an upcoming military campaign which would ultimately result in the division of the Land, the mixed multitude of Egyptians that accompanied the Jews into the desert were excluded from the census since they would have no inheritance in the Land. Even though Abarbanel does not elaborate, perhaps we can assume as well that their questionable loyalty and commitment would preclude them from military service as well.

In answer to the second question, Abarbanel points out that the Torah makes it clear that the Levites were not part of the second census. At this point the Tabernacle had been completed and it was the Levites' role to be involved in all the activities centered in the Tabernacle, including taking it down, transporting it and re-erecting it. Since the Levites would be excused from military service and would not have a specific portion in the Land of Israel, there was no need to count them in the second census. The first census, however, took place before the Levites were specifically designated for service in the Tabernacle, and since they also contributed a half-shekel to the Tabernacle they were counted along with all the other tribes. Thus, even though thousands of just-turned-twenty young men were added to the number of the second census, we have to subtract the approximately 22,000 Levites who were not counted in the second census.

Naso

The Connection between the Nazir and the Sotah

In this *parsha* the Torah discusses the subjects of the *Sotah*, or suspected adulteress and the *Nazir*, the individual who, for a minimum of thirty days, refrains from wine and all grape products, lets his hair grow and does not come into contact with the deceased, even members of his own family. Abarbanel cites the Talmudic statement that the reason the subject of *Nazir* follows the subject of *Sotah* is that "One who sees the disgrace of the suspected adulteress will vow to abstain from wine, since it is wine that can bring one to adultery." Abarbanel states that this reason seems insufficient. Since the *Nazir* has to bring sacrificial offerings either at the end of this period, or if he became ritually impure due to accidental contact with a deceased individual, this whole section should have been included in the book of Vayikra where all the sacrificial offerings are detailed.

Abarbanel answers that indeed now is actually the most appropriate point to discuss the subject of *Nazir*. The previous *parshiot* represent the progression of the spiritual purification of the nation. Starting with the construction of

continued on page eleven

THE CROWNS OF TORAH

From: Stuart

*Dear Rabbi,
Is it possible nowadays to gain understanding in Torah as the Jews did when they received the Torah at Sinai? Or is that something particular to that generation alone?*

Dear Stuart,

It is nearly impossible for most people to attain the level of Torah understanding as those of the generation in which the Torah was given.

Remember that the generation of the Exodus was miraculously elevated from physical and spiritual oppression to liberation. In addition, they subsisted on the most potent “soul food” there ever was — the manna. And they were surrounded by clouds that permeated their daily lives with G-d’s glory. Concurrently, they prepared themselves intensively during the seven weeks between leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah with unparalleled religious passion and fervor.

So as far as G-d’s influence and their own readiness are concerned, those were very special and unique times.

The Midrash explains that when G-d decided to give the Torah, He approached all the nations with the proposition: “Do you want to receive the Torah?” Each nation effectively replied, “It depends. What’s written in it?” When G-d enumerated the obligations of the Torah, each nation in turn declined by replying, “If that’s what’s in it, it’s not for us”. Then G-d approached the Jews: “Would you like to receive the Torah?” The Jews replied, “We shall observe and we shall listen!” — “*Na’aseh v’nishma*”. No questions asked.

The Talmud (Shabbat 88a) asserts that when the Jews unconditionally agreed to accept the Torah, preceding their commitment to observe the commandments before hearing the reasons and explanations for the commandments, G-d exclaimed, “Who revealed this secret to them, which only the ministering angels know?” And in the

merit of this two-phrased, unconditional commitment, 600,000 angels descended from Heaven and conferred two crowns on the head of each Jew — one on account of “we shall observe” and one on account of “we shall hear”.

Of course, these were not literal crowns, but special “spheres” of influence that enlightened their minds and enabled them to perceive the depths of the Torah.

Unfortunately, the Talmud describes, when the Jews transgressed, twice as many angels were sent to dislodge these crowns, and the Jews were left dejected and spiritually bareheaded: “So the children of Israel divested themselves of their crowns from Mount Horeb (Sinai)” (Ex. 33:6).

The Zohar discusses what happened to these crowns, since once the Torah was given and brought into the world, it cannot be returned. The answer given is that all the crowns were given to Moses, enabling him to attain the highest possible understanding of the Torah.

Is there any hope that the Jews will ever regain these crowns? Interestingly enough, the Zohar states that Moses, in his great love for the Jewish People, returned the crowns to them “behind their back” as it were, and they’re there for the taking for whomever wholeheartedly and unconditionally accepts the Torah from Moses our Teacher. Every person in every generation, then, according to his or her degree of “*na’aseh v’nishma*”, is privy to regaining a certain degree of Torah understanding as those who received it at Sinai.

This is true regarding the righteous of each generation in general, and especially applicable to us on Shabbat, which is the actual day on which the Torah was originally given! It’s for this reason that even if a person has little opportunity to learn Torah during the week, he should make a special effort to learn on Shabbat — and the value of Torah study during the week, as great as it is, does not compare to that on Shabbat.

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RECITING A BLESSING

When reciting a blessing on different foods or mitzvot one must have in mind the meaning of the words he is reciting. (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 5:1)

Our Talmudic Sages explain that it is not proper to say a blessing out of habit, spouting out words hurriedly (Berachot 47, cited in Mishneh Berurah). G-d became angry regarding this matter, sending Isaiah the Prophet with these words: “The L-rd said: Inasmuch as this people has drawn close, with its mouth and with its lips it has honored me, yet it has distanced its heart from Me.” (29:13)

The Piskei Teshuvot explains that when reciting a blessing one should imagine that he is standing in G-d’s presence, speaking directly to Him (Avodat Yisrael). One should also say the blessing loud enough to hear his own words, since hearing the words helps one to concentrate properly. (Shnei Luchot HaBrit)

It is forbidden to pronounce G-d’s four letter name as it is spelled: *yud, hei, vav & hei*. In fact, according to the Arizal it is even forbidden to say all four letters unless one inserts another word in between them. Accordingly, G-d’s four letter name is written one way, while pronounced another. The written word is spelled *yud, hei, vav & hei* – but it is pronounced *Adonai*, meaning “my Master”. This name is usually only pronounced this way during prayer; when not praying

the widespread custom is to say “Hashem”, literally: “The Name”.

When reciting G-d’s name one should have in mind that the name as it is pronounced means that G-d is Master of all, and the written name means that G-d is eternal, namely that G-d was, is, and always will be. When reciting G-d’s name *Elohim* (when not praying the custom is to say *Elokim*, making a “k” sound so as not to pronounce G-d’s actual name), one should have in mind that G-d is powerful, all-able and the true possessor of all worldly powers (Shulchan Aruch *ibid.*). According to the Vilna Gaon, when reciting G-d’s four letter name, halacha requires only that one have in mind that G-d is Master of all, except for the first verse of the *Shema*, when both explanations are required (cited in Mishneh Berurah).

One must be careful never to recite a blessing in vain, or to recite a blessing that is not necessary. If one says a blessing in vain or utters G-d’s name in vain, he should immediately say: Blessed is His name, Whose glorious kingdom is forever and ever. In Hebrew: *Baruch Shem Kavod Malchuto Le’olam Va’ed*. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 6:4)

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

אחינו כל בית ישראל

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

CONFRONTING DEATH

The Torah introduces the laws of the sacrificial services of Yom Kippur by noting that G-d relayed them to Moses *after the deaths* (*acharei mot*) of Aharon's two sons (Lev. 16:1). The Torah then continues to discuss various other topics, running the gamut from sacrifices outside of the Temple, the prohibition of eating blood, forbidden relationships, and various interpersonal and agricultural laws (Lev. 16-20). All in all, the theme of death underlies all of these passages and, in fact, permutations of the Hebrew words *mavet/mitah* (death) appear twenty-four times in the *parshiot* of *Acharei Mot* and *Kedoshim* that we recently read — more than any other two joined *parshiot* in the Torah. The Talmud does not generally use the word *meit* (died) to refer to someone's passing on, but rather uses the expression *nach nafshei* (literally, "his soul has rested"). Regardless, the Hebrew word commonly used when colloquially referring to someone who died, or "passed away", is *niftar* and the noun for death is known as *petirah*. In what way is the Hebrew word *niftar* different from the seemingly synonymous word *meit*?

The term *niftar* in reference to somebody dying is first found in the Mishnah which uses the expression "niftar from the world" (*Peah* 8:9). The root of the word *niftar* is *peh-tet-reish* (exit) which can refer to a firstborn animal exiting its mother's womb (*peter rechem*) or somebody who takes leave of his friend (*niftar*). In the context of death, a person is *niftar* when he exits This World in anticipation of entering the Next World. However, the most common use of the word *patur* is in the legal sense of a person who is exempt from a given punishment or obligation. This, of course, begs the question as to why the death of a person is connected to the concept of a legal exemption.

In contemporary times, the controversy over the changing definition of death rages on. However, in Judaism, the definition is pegged to the exit of the soul from one's body. Based on this, we can understand the correlation between death and the idea of being exempt. All the while a person's body houses his soul, his inner soul obligates his outer body to live for a higher purpose and existence. It represents his accountability to law and order, as well as G-d's oversight of the world. When a person's soul leaves his body, then the body is no longer bound to those higher callings — it is exempt from all obligations. For this reason a person who dies is said to have been *niftar* — a word related to *patur* (exempt).

In truth, only a person who lives for a higher purpose is considered living. A person who lives for no other reason

than to enjoy life itself is considered dead even as he breathes and walks and bungee-jumps off the Empire State Building. To this effect, the Talmud (*Berachot* 18a-18b) unequivocally states that the righteous (*tzaddikim*) — even when dead — are considered alive (*chaim*), while the wicked (*reshaim*) — even when alive — are considered dead (*metim*). A person who lives a life that looks to a higher purpose is *niftar* when he dies because his physical life was not his end-all objective, but was simply a means to reaching a higher goal. Such a person is akin to somebody who exits one room to enter another. The term *mitah*, on the other hand, can be applied to any living being (even an animal) that experiences the separation of body and soul. *Mitah* is the conclusion of life; it does not connote anything to come afterwards. Even the wicked experience what is called *mitah*, while the term *petirah* is reserved for the righteous.

The late Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935-2017) observes that plants, which are firmly rooted in the ground, are also connected to their lifeline in the soil, just as man is attached to his soul. That very connection shows that the plant does not simply grow of its own accord, but connects to something loftier. On the other hand, mushrooms, like other fungi, rise from the ground without roots. They are disconnected from any sense of responsibility or accountability. They are free-floating, self-serving entities. For this reason, mushrooms are called *pitriyot* in Hebrew — they are *patur* from any obligations. While they too might technically be considered alive, such a life is more akin to death than to life. Thus, what scientists call the largest living organism on Earth — a certain honey fungus in the Blue Mountains of Oregon — is actually dead!

Rabbi Avraham Chaim Schor (d. 1632) takes a slightly different approach to explaining the difference between seemingly synonymous words *niftar* and *meit*. Almost by definition, righteous people do not focus on the carnal pleasures of This World, while the wicked generally tend to indulge in such pursuits. As a result, the worldly existence of a pious man can be characterized as relatively full of suffering. When the righteous man dies and moves to the Next World, he has effectively become "exempt" from the life of suffering in This World and can now move forward. This is why the term *niftar* applies specifically to the death of a *tzaddik*, while *mitah* refers to death in general.

Author's note:

Le'Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

MOSHE MOCH

Age 21 - Johannesburg, South Africa

Yeshivat Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem - Pisgah Program, Center Program and Beit Midrash Program, 2013-2016
Yeshivat Toras Chaim in Jerusalem, 2016 to present

Most yeshiva students who go home on vacation for the “Pesach Break” slow down and unwind from the pace of their studies and activities during the “winter zman”. They get up a bit later in the morning, eat a larger and more leisurely breakfast and spend quality time with family and friends. Not so Moshe Moch.

Moshe is a high achiever from a family of high achievers. His mother is a lecturer at University of Witwatersrand and his father is a psychiatrist. At the Torah Academy High School in Johannesburg, Moshe was a class leader and the captain of both the school soccer team and the cricket first team.

This past Nissan, Moshe flew to Johannesburg, his hometown, with a mission. He organized a “Chodesh Nissan Bein Hazamanim” program at the Ohr Somayach Beit Midrash there for yeshiva students who were coming home to South Africa from yeshivot all over the world for the Pesach vacation. This would be a daunting task for any experienced professional administrator. Moshe is 21 and a bachur (unmarried young man) in Yeshiva in Jerusalem. Apart from organizing the program, advertising it, recruiting students, getting speakers and cater-

ing, etc., he also did the fundraising to pay for it.

The *bein hazamanim* (intercession) program was a huge success. There were about 100 yeshiva students participating in it every morning. They came to Ohr Somayach to *daven*, have breakfast, learn, and to hear inspiring lectures from the Av Beit Din of Johannesburg, the Chief Rabbi of South Africa, HaRav Shimon Wolpe, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Somayach-South Africa, and from HaRav Yechezkiel Auerbach, the *Morah D’Asra* of the Ohr Somayach Community of Johannesburg. Rabbi Avi Ziskind, the son of Rabbi Ivan Ziskind (presently of the JLE in London and formerly part of our staff here in Jerusalem), who is a *magid shiur* (teacher of Talmud) in the Yeshiva of Rav Tzvi Kaplan of Jerusalem, was a featured lecturer at the program, teaching classes every day for a week on various topics in the Talmud.

By way of explaining his extraordinary service to Torah and his community, Moshe says: “It’s a small paycheck for all the *hakaras hatov* (gratitude) I have for the unbelievable experience I had at Ohr Somayach.”

Kudos to Reb Moshe Moch – a real *macher*.



LOVE OF THE LAND

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

ARIEL — TOMB OF A FAITHFUL SPY

Next to Ariel on the Trans-Samaria Highway is the village of Cheresh where tradition has it that Kalev ben Yefuneh is buried.

Kalev was one of the twelve spies sent by Moshe to inspect the Land promised to Israel by G-d. When ten of them tried to discourage the people by slan-



dering the Promised Land, it was Kalev who bravely defied them and tried to convince the people with the truth.

He was the leader of the tribe of Yehuda when Jews finally entered Eretz Yisrael and inherited Hebron as a reward for his faithfulness.

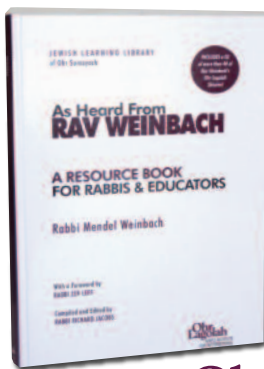
continued from page six

the Tabernacle, the Torah has divided the nation into the *Kohanim*, the *Levi'im* and each of the tribes under its individual banner. The nation is further purified by the separation of those afflicted by *tzara'at* and other forms of ritual impurity, and in this *parsha* there is the implied separation of the illegitimate child of a proven adulteress. This sets the stage for the *Nazir*, who represents an even higher level of personal spiritual purification. His level of sanctity differs from the *kohanim* in that it is not inherited, nor is it permanent. It is entirely voluntary. Furthermore, he has the additional restriction of not cutting his hair, which is not shared by the *kohanim*.

Abarbanel explains that the word *Nazir* is rooted in the concepts of 'turning away', 'distancing' and 'vigilance'. It is also related to the word for 'crown' since the Torah explicitly states "For the crown of his G-d is upon his head." His first obligation is to refrain from wine and, as an additional precaution, all grape products, since intoxication can obviously interfere with proper judgment and prevent him from attaining the goal of cleaving to G-d. The second obligation, to refrain from cutting his hair, symbolizes that since the head is the repository of all the wisdom and intelligence that G-d has granted him, he must refrain from removing even a part of a single hair emanating from that head. Additionally, just as a king is recognized by the crown upon his head, likewise the unruly hair of the *Nazir* is his

crown of sanctity. To fortify that striving for a higher level of spiritual purity, the unruly physical appearance serves to minimize the natural tendency toward exaggerated emphasis on our physical appearance. His third obligation is to refrain from all contact with the deceased. This puts him on an even higher level than the *kohen*, who is permitted to come into contact with his deceased close relatives. Abarbanel states that a verse in the prophet Amos is also an indication of this heightened spiritual level: "I established some of your sons as prophets and some of your young men as Nazarites" — an indication that a Nazarite is on an even higher level than a prophet.

The language of the Torah itself attests to the difficulty of accepting these obligations. At the beginning of the section, the Torah states, "A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow of abstinence for the sake of G-d..." The Hebrew word which is here translated as 'dissociate' is the word '*pela*' which literally means 'wondrous' or 'astounding'. Abarbanel explains that this vow is truly astounding and unusual. Finally, the heightened spiritual level implied by the vow of the Nazarite is also indicated by the fact that one of the sacrificial offerings that he is required to bring at the conclusion of his commitment is a transgression-offering to atone for his 'transgression' of giving up his lofty status and returning to the world of physical desires.



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BAVA BATRA 123 - 136

Bamidbar

THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

“My sword” refers to tefillah (prayer), and “my bow” refers to bakashah (request).

In this manner does our *gemara* interpret the words of Yaakov Avinu to Yosef, which promise him a double portion in the Land of Israel. The verse states, “And I have given you one portion over your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow” (Ber. 48:22).

The *gemara* questions how we can understand this verse at face-value, since another verse states, “For I do not trust in my bow, neither will my sword save me” (Tehillim 44:7). The *gemara* responds to this by explaining, “My sword” refers to tefillah (prayer), and “my bow” refers to bakashah (request). This does not mean that Yaakov merited conquest without his prayer and bow, since there is a rule that a verse also needs to be interpreted according to its meaning as written. Rather, we should understand that Yaakov merited victory not only with sword and bow, but also (and primarily) due to his prayers and supplications.

The Maharsha points out that a different explanation is taught in the *midrash* for “my sword and my bow”. The *midrash* teaches that these refer to Yaakov’s mitzvot and good deeds. The Maharsha also points out that Rashi in Chumash explains the “sword and bow” to be Yaakov’s wisdom and prayer, which leaves us with a question: Why does Rashi in Chumash choose to explain the verse neither like the explanation in our *gemara* nor like the explanation in the *midrash*? (Also, see the Maharsha for a beautiful elucidation of the metaphorical uses of “sword” for “prayer” and “bow” for “supplication”.)

• Bava Batra 123a

Naso

THE INTENSITY AND JOY OF TORAH STUDY

The Rabbis said about Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel: When he was involved in Torah study, every bird that flew above him was burned.

This statement concludes a *beraita* on our *daf* that is also taught in *Masechta Succah* 28a. The *beraita* teaches the lofty qualities and merits of the eighty closest students of the Sage Hillel the Elder. Thirty of them were exalted enough that the *Shechina* (G-d’s Divine Presence) should surround them, and thirty others were illustrious enough that the sun should stand still on their account, as it did for Yehoshua. The greatest of these disciples was Yonatan ben Uziel, about whom said, “When he was involved in Torah study, every bird that flew above him was burned.”

continued on page thirteen

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

continued from page twelve

BAVA BATRA 123 - 136

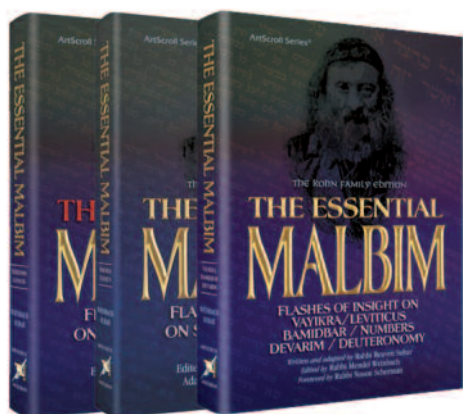
Rashi, Tosefot and Rabbeinu Chananel, in *Masechet Succah*, explain the source of this “fire from him to Heaven”. Rashi states that the *malachei hasharet* (G-d’s administering angels) gathered around him to listen to the words of Torah that came directly from his mouth and were the source of this effect. Rabbeinu Chananel writes that it was a result of the “Glory of the Divine Presence” being with him at his place of Torah study. Tosefot explains that when Yonatan ben Uziel was involved in Torah study, his words of Torah were as joyous as they were as when they were given at Mount Sinai. His Torah involvement was a re-creation of that seminal event of the giving of the Torah with fire, the fire that surrounded the mountain top at the time when the Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish People.

Nowadays, Yonatan ben Uziel may be best known for his translation of the *Nevi'im* (The Books of the Prophets, see *Masechet Megillah* 3a), which are read publicly in the Synagogue in our time in some communities together with the reading of the *haftara* on Shabbat.

• *Bava Batra* 134a

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