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SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR-SHAVOUT • 5 SIVAN 5778 - MAY 19, 2018 • VOL. 25 NO. 32

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## PARSHA INSIGHT

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

### Ofsted Off-course

*“In the desert...” (1:1)*

**I**t's not so often that Orthodox Jews find themselves on the same team as the Vatican, but an article entitled “First They Came For The Jews — UK Education Overlords Seek To Prohibit Judaism By Stealth” states:

“A London school with an excellent academic record is being threatened with closure for its apparent lack of sufficient enthusiasm in indoctrinating children between the ages of 3 and 8 in the concepts of ‘gender reassignment’. This is the lesson learned by Britain’s hounded faith schools, most recently Vizhnitz Girls’ School, an Orthodox Jewish school in Hackney, London.

“The Office of Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) has threatened to close this high-performing school not for any academic transgression, but for failing to prioritize the Education Department’s equalities charter over the school’s teaching of the Jewish faith. Among the accusations, Ofsted claims the school does not adequately promote LGBT and gender reassignment.

“Vizhnitz Girls’ School, a private Haredi school with 212 students, has been praised for its high academic standards. Ofsted’s admissions of the excellence of the school go further, noting the high-quality classroom resources, the quality of teaching and good subject knowledge. Elsewhere in the report Ofsted begrudgingly admits that: the school’s culture is, however, clearly focused on teaching pupils to respect everybody, regardless of beliefs and lifestyle.

“How then, after recognizing this, can Ofsted castigate the school for being disrespectful to alternate orientations and lifestyles? Ofsted claims that schools are not expected to ‘promote’ certain ideas over orientation or gender fluidity, but to ‘respect’ them. By Ofsted’s own admission, however, Vizhnitz Girls’ School has a culture of ‘teaching pupils to respect everybody.’

“This contradiction in Ofsted’s report has led some parents from Vizhnitz School to suggest they are being unfairly targeted by the educational authorities. Indeed, the school has already been inspected three times in just one year; far more often than many of the poorly performing schools of Britain’s widely-derided education system. Despite being the 6th largest economy in the world and having a much higher education budget than most nations, Britain has slipped to 21st in reading and 27th in maths worldwide (OECD rankings).

“This comes at a particularly troubling time for Britain’s Jewish community, which has seen anti-Semitism rise in recent years. In April this year, four British universities opposed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance’s definition of anti-Semitism, the standard definition most UK institutions adhere to. This follows increasing academic boycotts of Jewish speakers on campuses and an 11% rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the UK...

“Ofsted’s defense... is that they are not imposing secularism but promoting ‘fundamental British values.’ This is ironically a new, ham-fisted imposition on schools

*Continued on page fifteen*

ADVICE FOR LIFE

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

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BY RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN

## Zevachim 23 - 29

### It's the Thought that Counts

*“One who ritually slaughters an offering... to eat it tomorrow (“machar”)... it is pigul, and the person is obligated karet (extirpation).”*

The outcome of offering a sacrifice with intent to eat it after the permitted time is referred to in the *mishna* as *pigul*. It is forbidden to be eaten even if all of the four parts of the service — slaughter, followed by receiving, carrying and sprinkling the blood — were otherwise done correctly. The “mere thought” of eating it past the permitted time is a serious deviation from correct sacrificial service procedure and renders the offering as *pigul*, with the punishment for consuming it — even during the permitted time — being *karet*.

The source in the Torah for this halacha is the verse (Vayikra 7:18): “If some of the meat of his peace offering will be eaten on the third day... it will be *pigul*, and the one who eats it will bear his sin.” Although a superficial reading seems to refer to a sacrifice that is actually eaten after the permitted time, the *gemara* explains why the correct interpretation is the one stated in the *mishna*: a *thought* during any one of the four parts of the service to eat from the sacrifice *after the permitted time* renders it *pigul*.

What does the word *pigul* mean? Rashi in Vayikra 19:7 defines it as “*mitu'av*,” meaning abominable or repulsive. Targum Onkelos translates it as “*merachak*,” alluding to something that should be kept at a “distance.” Rav Hirsch states that the Hebrew root of this word is not clear. He writes that this word (or a form of it) is found in these two places in Chumash, and in Yeshayahu 65:4 and Yechezkel 4:14, in each place referring to a sacrifice made invalid in the manner described in our *mishna*. Rav Hirsch avers that even finding another word with a similar pronunciation, and therefore likely a related meaning, is difficult. He reluctantly suggests that the word *pigul* is perhaps related to the word *peleg*, which means “separated” and would imply something that is greatly separate and foreign from what is acceptable.

*(It should be of interest to note that the mishna states “machar,” which if translated as “tomorrow” would indicate that the mishna refers to thanks or sin offering, which may be eaten for only one day. However, this is not the peace offering that is actually mentioned in the verse, which may be eaten for two days. This is how Rashi interprets the word “machar” and the case in the mishna. The Tiferet Yisrael, in his commentary on the mishna, however, offers a different interpretation. He points out that the word “machar” can also mean “after some time.” In the case of our mishna this means “two days forward,” and refers to the case of a peace offering, which is the actual textual source for the halacha of pigul in the Chumash in Sefer Vayikra.)*

• Zevachim 27b

### Acting Responsibly

*Ben Azai says: It will be a transgression for you — for you, but not for your wife.*

This teaching is based on a careful reading of the verse: “When you make a vow to the L-rd your G-d, you shall not delay in paying it, for the L-rd your G-d will demand it of you, and it will be counted as sin for *you* (Devarim 23:22). Ben Azai teaches here that when a husband is late in bringing an offering that he vowed to bring, he alone is held responsible, but not his wife.

Although this is seemingly an obvious idea, the *gemara* explains why this teaching is necessary. Rabbi Elazar (or Rabbi Yochanan) taught that a man's wife does not die unless he does not have money that he owed others who are demanding payment. This teaching is based on a verse in Mishlei 22:27. The *gemara* states that without Ben Azai's teaching regarding a husband who brings a vow-offering late, we would think that this would also lead to a harsh decree for his wife. Ben Azai teaches that this is not so (despite the extremely serious need to fulfill one's vows and to do so in a timely fashion).

*Continued on page fourteen*

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## PARSHA Q&A?

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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?
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## PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this week’s questions! - All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

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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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## LOVE of the LAND

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

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# The Land of Milk and Honey

**D**uring a visit to the Bnei Brak of Talmudic times the Sage Rami bar Yechezkel observed a scene which offered him a graphic understanding of the meaning of a “land of milk and honey,” which is the description given in the Torah of Eretz Yisrael.

He saw goats grazing beneath fig trees. The



honey oozing from the very ripe figs merged with the milk dripping from the bountiful goats to form a large stream of milk and honey.

Milk represents nutrition while honey is associated with sweetness. Eretz Yisrael offers both physical and spiritual nourishment achieved with an accompaniment of sweetness.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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**T**he Book of Bamidbar — “In the Desert” — begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty — old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Efraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born

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

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BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

## The Holy Writ

**From: Vicky**

*Dear Rabbi,  
As we approach the holiday of Shavuot commemorating the receiving of the Torah, would you please explain how and when the first Torah scroll was actually written?*

Dear Vicky,

The Talmudic Sages actually differ about this point.

According to one opinion, the Torah was written on separate parchments in separate installments throughout the sojourn in the wilderness. These segments were then assembled at the end of the forty years, before crossing into the Land of Israel.

Accordingly, immediately after Sinai, G-d dictated to Moses the entire book of Genesis, and the book of Exodus until the portion of Yitro that recounts the giving of the Torah. As further events occurred and further precepts were given, G-d dictated to Moses how to record these events and precepts in additional parchments. The book of Deuteronomy was dictated as a type of summary at the end of the fortieth year.

The other view expressed by the Sages is that the entire Torah was dictated by G-d to Moses at one time, and not in installments of separate scrolls. Accordingly, the Torah was written at the end of the fortieth year in the wilderness, just prior to the death of Moses.

In fact, the concluding eight verses of the Torah which describe the death of Moses raise an additional difference of opinions as to who actually wrote these final verses.

The Talmud states (Bava Batra 15): “And Moses the servant of the L-rd died there’. Can it be that while Moses was still alive he could have written, ‘And Moses died there’? Rather, until these verses describing his death, Moses wrote. From here on, after the death of Moses, Joshua wrote. Rabbi Shimon said, ‘Is it possible

that the Torah should be lacking a single letter (i.e., Is it possible that Moses did not write the entire Torah?). Rather, we must conclude that until the account of Moses’ death, G-d dictated and Moses wrote. From here on, G-d dictated and Moses wrote with tears.”

One explanation of the above is that because of the truth of the Torah, Moses could not have formally written about his death in the Torah: In order to write he’d have to be alive, and could not write that he died. Conversely, if he wrote about his death, he would necessarily die. Thus, the first opinion concludes that Joshua wrote these last eight verses. However, since this negates the integrity of the Torah, the second opinion posits that Moses actually wrote the entire Torah to the very end, including his death. But these last eight verses were informally stenciled by Moses using the tears he shed over his death. Joshua then later filled in the tear-stenciled verses with proper ink. In this way, Joshua literally filled the void left by Moses’ death and continued the story where Moses left off.

The Gaon of Vilna, however, offers another explanation. He notes that the Hebrew term used in the Talmud for Moses’ concluding the final eight verses of the Torah in tears is *dema*. He writes that *dema* also connotes something that is mixed. Thus, he explains that when the Talmud states that Moses concluded the Torah with *dema*, this means that the concluding letters, words and verses of the Torah were written without interrupting spaces. In this way, the concluding section of the Torah describing Moses’ death was dictated to him by G-d in a cryptic way, where many possible “readings” of the text were mixed together in various letter combinations. Therefore, the final words, “And Moses died there,” were not explicitly apparent in the Torah that Moses wrote. Rather, these words emerged from the mixture of possible readings only as a result of the “space” left by his death.

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## WHAT'S IN A WORD? Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

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BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

### Stop! It's Shavuot!

The Festival of Shavuot is known under many different names. Although these names are all synonyms for the holiday, each name focuses on a different aspect of Shavuot, and, by elaborating on the meanings of the holiday's different names, we can gain a better appreciation for the ideas associated with the holiday.

First of all, the Bible calls the holiday *Chag Shavuot* (Ex. 34:22, Deut. 16:10) or *Chag HaShavuot* (Deut. 16:16, II Chron. 8:13) because its date is not given in the Torah, but is rather determined by using a fixed formula related to weeks (*shavuot*)\*. In other words, since the Torah says to mark this holiday seven weeks after Pesach, it became the Festival of Weeks.

The commentators explain why the Torah does not give a fixed calendar date for Shavuot: As opposed to other times of the year, during the Shavuot season many people were camped out in their fields. Because they were not in urban areas they would not be aware of exactly when Rosh Chodesh Sivan was declared by the Sanhedrin. Therefore, instead of giving a specific calendar date, the Torah says that Shavuot will occur seven weeks after Pesach. Those in the field certainly knew when Pesach was, and so they simply had to count seven weeks to get to Shavuot.

Why were people in the field during Shavuot-time? This leads us to another name for the holiday, *Chag HaKatzir* ("Festival of the Harvest"), which appears in Exodus 23:16. Shavuot always occurs during the time when farmers would be harvesting grain, more specifically wheat. Incidentally, the harvest season for grain lasted exactly seven weeks (see Rashi to Jer. 5:24).

A third name for Shavuot in the Bible (Num. 28:26) is *Yom HaBikkurim* ("Day of the Bikkurim"). *Bikkurim* are the first fruits of the season which Halacha mandates must be brought to the Temple (see Deut. 26:1-11), and the Mishnah (*Bikkurim* 1:3) teaches that the first day on which these fruits can be brought is Shavuot.

The three names *Shavuot*, *Chag HaKatzir*, and *Yom HaBikkurim* all appear in the Bible. However, there are another three names for the holiday which appear exclusively in post-Biblical sources. Firstly, Josephus and other Jewish-Hellenistic sources refer to Shavuot as *Yom HaChamishim* (literally, "the Fiftieth Day"), from which the English word Pentecost is derived. This name is appropriate because the Holiday of Shavuot always falls

out on the fiftieth day of the Counting of the Omer. Secondly, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria apparently called the holiday *Chag HaTene* ("Festival of the Basket"), an allusion to the baskets in which the *bikkurim* would be brought. Thirdly, Josephus writes in *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book III) that the Jews customarily called Shavuot, *Asartha* — which is an Aramaic rendering of *Atzeret* ("[festive] gathering" or "stoppage [from work]"). In fact, the Mishnah and Talmud generally refer to Shavuot as *Atzeret*, not Shavuot.

Rabbi Tuviah ben Eliezer, the 11th century author of *Midrash Lekach Tov* (also known as *Pesikta Zutrata*), addresses this issue. He notes that he examined the *parshiyot* related to the holidays and not once does he find the word *atzeret* associated with Shavuot. In fact, the word *atzeret* appears in the context of other holidays, like the eighth day of Succot, which is known as *Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah* (Lev. 23:36, Num. 29:35), and the seventh day of Pesach (Deut. 16:8) — but not Shavuot. Nonetheless, Rabbi Tuviah concludes that *atzeret* is an appropriate name for the holiday of Shavuot because the Targum (to Num. 28:26) translates *b'shavuoteichem* in Aramaic as *b'atzarteichon* (although in other instances the *Targumim* use Aramaic renderings of the word *Shavuot* itself), showing that *atzeret* is somehow an Aramaic rendering of Shavuot.

How does *atzeret* refer to Shavuot? Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapiro of Munkatch (1868-1937) explains that *atzeret* means "stop" (like in Israel, where stop signs say "atzor"), and in this context denotes "the end" of something. Shavuot is called "the end" because it is the conclusion of Pesach in the same way that *Shemini Atzeret* is the conclusion of Succot, and is also called *Atzeret*. In fact, rabbinic literature sometimes refers to Shavuot as "Atzeret of Pesach", because Shavuot is itself viewed as Pesach's conclusion (see also Ramban to Lev. 23:36 who offers a similar idea). Rabbi Moshe Zacuto (1625-1697) adopts a related approach.

Likewise, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev (1740-1810) writes in *Kedushat Levi* that the reason behind calling the holiday Shavuot and calling the holiday *Atzeret* is the same. Both names view the holiday in the context of completing a certain span of time, *Shavuot* as completing the weeks leading up from Pesach, and *Atzeret* as the festive finale of Pesach itself. However, Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hofmann (1843-1921) rejects this

*Continued on page eleven*

NEW  
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## ANATOMY OF A MITZVAH

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

### Rising Above the Angels

*The Torah is compared to water. Just as water causes all things to grow, Torah study likewise causes a person to grow. If one waters a field, that field will grow. If there are weeds under the surface of the ground together with planted seeds they will grow as well.*

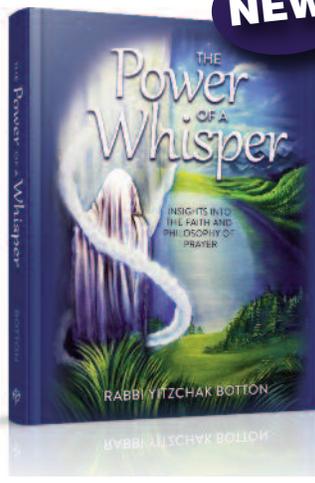
Based on this we are taught that it is not enough to learn the laws of the Torah to become righteous. One must also study the moral and ethical ideas included in the Torah, as well as the different techniques on how to properly develop good character traits. This is one of the reasons why there is a widespread custom to study *Pirkei Avot*, Ethics of the Fathers, between Pesach and Shavuot.

The fifty-day counting alludes to this very concept. We begin counting and elevating ourselves, one level at a time, until we become proper vessels to receive the Torah. To emphasize this point, G-d commanded us to offer up the Omer, which is made up of barley — food that our Sages tell us is fit for animals — on the first day of counting. At the end of fifty days we would make an offering called *Shnei HaLechem*, the two breads, made from wheat, food fit for humans. The message is quite clear. People must work to refine their base animal characteristics and transform themselves into

creatures that stand upright, with head above heart, looking upward towards Heaven.

The Heavenly angels have no evil inclination. They dwell in peace and are totally devoted to fulfilling the Divine will. Our devotion to the study and fulfillment of the Torah, as well as developing refined character traits, will transform us from human creatures to Heavenly beings. Then we will merit living as the angels do, void of the evil inclination, dwelling in peace, and fulfilling the will of G-d with total devotion. In the words of the Rambam: “The Torah was given to bring peace (i.e., completeness and perfection) to the world.”

In light of the above we can explain a difficult episode found in the Midrash. When Moshe ascended Mount Sinai, which was considered an entry into Heaven, he had to “battle” the angels for the Torah. How did he defeat the angels? Moshe’s supreme level of spirituality showed the Heavenly hosts the exalted levels that mankind can reach. Upon seeing this, the angels acquiesced, allowing Moshe to take the Torah from Heaven and bring it down to this world.



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# Letter & Spirit

Insights based on the writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch

BY RABBI YOSEF HERSHMAN

## The Census: Where Everyone Counts

The opening command of this fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar, is to take a census of the nation as an *eidah*, a community united by a common calling. The counting of individuals conveys that every individual personally 'counts' as an important member of the community, and that the communal mission may be accomplished only when each member devotes himself to it. The manner of counting was by donation of a half-shekel, and the total sum collected was used for the upkeep of the Sanctuary. The message in this mode of counting is that every Jew is counted and valued only on the basis of his commitment to the Torah; the census is taken in the service of the Sanctuary.

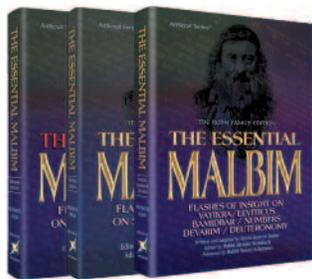
This *eidah*, community of the *Children of Israel*, is counted in their subgroups — according to their *families*, which in turn comprise their *tribes*. The tribes are called *matot*, literally *branches*, on account of their one common stem, and they are also called *beit avot* on account of the numerous families in each tribe.

This is the uniqueness of the Jewish nation: The nation as a whole is considered one house, the House of Israel, and its members are called the children of one

man, the Children of Israel. Our myriads descend from one man — our forefather Yisrael. And although multitudinous, and even diverse, not a single member is left without the impression of the same stamp, the stamp that bears throughout the ages our heritage of one mission and one destiny.

Amidst this fundamental unity, the counting also emphasizes the diversity of qualities unique to the tribes and families of Israel. This diversity is nurtured and preserved as much as is the unity of mission. Indeed, the unified mission can be accomplished *only* when diversity is embraced, and the special character traits, variety of professions and positions in life, are given their full expression, and passed on to the next generation. This is why the hundreds of thousands of members of the *Children of Israel* do not come to the nation as unorganized multitudes, but rather according to *their families*, according to *their father's heads* (tribes), *by name*. The sum here is a sum only of its parts — each indispensable part with a name, a family and a tribe.

• Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 1:2



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BY RABBI ZE'EV KRAINES

## Sharing the Mitzvah

**Q:** I am making a “Chanukat Habayit” dedication ceremony on the day that we move into our new home. I invited my rabbi and told him that I would be honored if he put up the mezuzah on my front door. I also mentioned that my plan was to share my joy by asking my father and each of my brothers to put up a mezuzah.

He responded that he was grateful for the honor, but that I should really place all the mezuzot myself. I was puzzled by this answer because I remembered that when the local Jewish Old Age Home was inaugurated, the rabbis present and some of the donors were honored with mezuzah placement.

When I told him how important it was for me to honor him and my family who stood by me through thick and thin, he accepted the honor and told me that I could also honor my father and even my brothers, with these conditions:

- I should place at least the first mezuzah.
- Ideally, I should appoint each one of them as my agent.
- I should inform them ahead of time, so that when I make the *beracha* for them they would know I meant to include them in my *beracha*.

Can you explain to me his concerns?

**A:** Firstly, Mazal Tov on the new home! It is special that you made a *Chanukat Habayit* at the time of the mezuzah placement. In this way you are dedicating the

house to its higher purpose.

Your rabbi was referring to our Sages’ instruction that “It is greater to do one’s mitzvah by himself than to appoint an agent.” The authorities write that this is applicable to *mitzvot* in general, and to mezuzah in particular. We find that the great Sages were careful to perform their *mitzvot* themselves, even when this entailed menial and arduous labor.

In contrast, the placing of *mezuzot* on the doors of the Jewish Old Age Home was a communal and not a personal obligation. Therefore, there was no issue in distributing the honors among the community leaders.

Even so, many authorities record that it is a common custom for individuals to forgo their rights in deference to a revered rabbi or other community leaders worthy of distinction. Your father would certainly fit into this category. Perhaps your trusted friends could be included as well, if your intention is to honor their loyalty. This is why your rabbi acceded to your desire in the end.

Your rabbi made sure to tell you to at least start off the mitzvah in order to minimally fulfill the concept of doing the mitzvah on your own. He instructed you to preferably appoint the others as your agents for the same reason. As for having them listen to your *beracha*, this was in order that your *beracha* should count for them.

- Sources: *Sha’arei HaMezuzah* 16:1:2-3; *Agur B’ohalecha* 8:17,19; *Kiddushin* 41a; *Mishnah Berurah* 250:3; *Pischei Teshuvah* O.C.

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Free “Mezuzah Maven” book for every question or story submitted (when published in the near future!)

חג שמח

Wishing all our readers a  
happy and meaningful Shavuot

BY RABBI SHLOMO SIMON

## Belief — The Challenge of Our Time

The Ohr Somayach “travelling Yom Iyun lectures,” directed by Rabbi Chaim Salenger of our staff, just wrapped up another banner year of touring North America. Rabbis Drs. Dovid Gottlieb, Akiva Tatz and Yitzchok Breitowitz were the speakers. The topic was “Belief – The Challenge of Our Time”. The schedule was “punishing”. Beginning in Los Angeles on April 23rd, then to Toronto on April 25th, on Sunday April 29th the speakers were in Woodmere, New York (one of the Five Towns), and then in Baltimore on Monday night April 31st, Chicago on Tuesday night, May 1st, Cleveland on Wednesday night May 2nd, and ending with Detroit on Thursday night May 3rd. Yet, in spite of the heavy travel schedule, the rabbis electrified the audiences, which were large and diverse.

I was at the events in the Five Towns and Cleveland and can personally attest to the enthusiasm of the participants and their audiences. The location of the event in New York was the Young Israel of Woodmere, reputed to be the largest Young Israel in the world. Its main shul, which seats approximately 600-700, was full. Jews from all over the New York metropolitan area were there and many expressed to me their gratitude to Ohr Somayach for arranging such an impressive panel. Rabbi Zechariah Fruchthandler, the chairman of the Ohr Somayach Mentors Missions was the emcee. He introduced the speakers and gave a brief description of the Mentors Missions. After the lectures a number of people approached us about joining the Mentors next trip in July. Many thanks are due to Rabbi Hershel Billet, the Rabbi of Young Israel of Woodmere, Rabbi Shay Schachter and Rabbi Shalom Axelrod, also of Young Israel of Woodmere, who made the event possible. Thanks are also due to Mr. Yehoshua Shloush and his daughter Aliza Shifra, of North

Woodmere, who provided essential help in the planning and running of the event.

When I invited people to the event in Cleveland the response was consistent: “Are they going to be on a live feed from Jerusalem?” “No,” I said, “they’re coming to the Young Israel of Cleveland.” People were almost incredulous that such an illustrious trio would be there in person. The crowd was large and enthusiastic and included a wide spectrum of the community. Having lived in Cleveland before making *aliyah*, it was a special treat for me to see so many old friends at the event. Much thanks is due to Rabbi Dan Olgin, an alumnus of Ohr Somayach and a *kiruv* rabbi in Cleveland and Columbus, who organized the event, and to his family who aided in the preparation and running of it.

Detroit was the last stop on the tour and had a standing-room-only crowd of more than 400 people. Many thanks are due to Rabbis Dovid Shapero and Michael Hochhauser for organizing the event.

The speakers were likewise very satisfied with the audiences and the synergy created by their talks. Rabbi Gottlieb told me during a conversation I had with him that he sensed that the order of speakers — him, followed by Rabbi Tatz, and then lastly Rabbi Breitowitz — created a structure that he likened to a person. His lecture — a logical approach to belief — was the “head”; Rabbi Tatz — whose lecture was esoteric and spiritually oriented — was the “heart”; and Rabbi Breitowitz, who spoke of how the performance and underlying structure of *mitzvot* leads us to belief, provided the “limbs”.

Ohr Somayach is very proud that we have such talented, intellectual and professional speakers to offer to the Jewish World. We are looking forward to next year’s tour, *Iy”H*.



understanding, arguing that there is no evidence that the word *atzeret* is associated with conclusions.

Instead, Rabbi Hoffmann, as well as Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865), favor a different understanding. The Bible (Deut. 18:16) refers to the day on which the Jews received the Torah as *Yom HaKahal* (“Day of the Congregation”). According to tradition Shavuot was the day on which the Torah was given at Mount Sinai. With this in mind it makes sense that the Rabbis refer to Shavuot as *Atzeret*, which literally means “gathering” or “congregating,” because the Torah already used a similar phrase for that very day.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev proposes another way of understanding the name *Atzeret*. When a person experiences a spark of inspiration to the love or awe of G-d, he can easily lose that inspiration unless he does something to contain and preserve it. The only way to contain this type of positive inspiration is to put it in a worldly receptacle and store it there. Fulfilling a mitzvah immediately after experiencing such an inspiration can serve as the incarnation of such a vessel within which the inspiration can be contained. That said, when the Jewish people experienced the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai they did not yet have any *mitzvot* to perform that would ensure their ability to preserve the inspiration seen there. Nonetheless, they did have the commandment to refrain from touching the mountain. By fulfilling that commandment, the Jewish people fashioned for themselves a vessel by which they can eternally store the inspiration from Mount Sinai. All of this is alluded to in the word *Atzeret*, which means both “stop” (as in refrain from touching the mountain) and “gather” (as in gathering the inspiration inside a proverbial container).

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky (1886-1976) notes that the two holidays which are called *Atzeret* (the eighth day of Succot and seventh day of Pesach) are notable in that they do not have any specific commandments associated with them. This is in contrast to every other holiday prescribed by the Bible, which has at least one specific mitzvah that is to be done: On (at least) the first day of Succot one must take the *lulav*; on the first day of Pesach one must eat *matzah*; on Rosh Hashana, blow the *shofar*; on Yom Kippur, fast. But on the days called *Atzeret* the only demand made of celebrants is to refrain — “stop” — from doing work.

Following this thought, Rabbi Abramsky notes that when the Temples stood, the holiday of Shavuot also had a special commandment associated with it, i.e. offering two goats and two leavened loaves (Lev. 23:16-20). However, when the First Temple was destroyed and this commandment was no longer in effect, the holiday of

Shavuot lost its special commandment and became like the eighth day of Succot and seventh day of Pesach, which have only a prohibition against doing work, but no special commandment to do something. For this reason, in later times, people began to call Shavuot, “*Atzeret*”. (Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev also writes that Shavuot is called *Atzeret* because it has only a prohibition of work, but no other mitzvah).

Even if we can understand why or how the name *Atzeret* refers to Shavuot, we have not answered the more important question: Why did the Jews stop using the Biblical names for the holiday and instead develop/adopt other names? Rabbi Baruch Epstein (1860-1941) writes that once the Jews were exiled from the Holy Land, so that cultivating the Land was no longer a central part of their lives, they no longer called the holiday *Chag HaKatzir* or *Yom HaBikkurim* because those elements of the holiday became impossible to fulfill.

But why did the Rabbis stop using the term *Shavuot* if that was seemingly not associated with agriculture, *per se*, but with the time measured in weeks between Pesach and Shavuot?

Some explain that because the word *shavuot* means “weeks,” this implies that the date of the holiday should be determined by calendar weeks that always start on Sunday, not by common weeks that refer to any seven-day period. As such, using the term *Shavuot* may lend credence to the heretical view of the Sadducees who believed that Counting the Omer always begins on a Sunday, so Shavuot will always be on a Sunday — after seven complete calendar weeks. However, rabbinic tradition dictates that Counting the Omer always begins the second day of Passover — regardless of the day of the week — so Shavuot need not necessarily occur on a Sunday, but on whatever day is after exactly seven common weeks from the second day of Pesach. Accordingly, to avoid the appearance of supporting the Sadducean approach, the Rabbis discontinued the name *Shavuot* and instead called the holiday *Atzeret*. Now that the Sadducees are no longer a relevant force we can revert back to the Bible’s name for the holiday, *Shavuot*.

\*NOTE: The word *shavua* in Hebrew has two meanings: It refers to a seven-day period (a week), and it also refers to a seven-year period (a *shemita* cycle). In Biblical Hebrew the plural form of the former is *shavuot*, while the plural of the latter is *shavu'im*. Nonetheless, for some reason, Rashi in his commentary to the Talmud sometimes uses the word *shavu'im* when referring to weeks.

*Eiluy Nishmat* my mother Bracha bat R' Dovid  
and my grandmother Shprintza bat R' Meir

## If I Forget You, O Jerusalem...

*Reflections on the eternity of Jerusalem and the new location of the US Embassy*

Entering a Jewish home can be an intriguing experience. Almost the first thing that you will see is the very incongruous sight of...nothing. From the simplest to the most luxurious homes there will be a prominently placed piece of unpainted wall. Your first sight inside the home will be an unmissable bare square. Why is it there? It serves as a reminder of the destruction of Jerusalem and the two Holy Temples. In our days we truly have so much to be thankful for. The mere fact that we are able to live in Jerusalem today is something that previous generations, because of economic realities and religious persecution, could only dream about. But that bare patch on the wall reminds us that our joy is incomplete. Despite the unbelievable and dizzying growth of Jerusalem over the last half a century, the innermost, spiritual dimension of Jerusalem is not yet whole. And that is why the walls in Jewish homes for millennia have had a blank space, to characterize our feelings of loss.

So, too, at a Jewish wedding, at the moment of greatest joy and happiness, a glass is broken. The *Chatan* (groom) recites the immortal words from the Book of Psalms (137), “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget. Let my tongue stick to my palate if I fail to recall you; if I fail to elevate Jerusalem above my greatest joy.” He then, under the *chupa*, stamps on a glass (that is carefully wrapped so that nothing will happen to him, and so the glass won’t go flying off all over the place!). It is true that there is an age-old adage that the reason why the *Chatan* stamps on the glass is because, now that he is married, it is the last time that he will “put his foot down.” (Yes, I know that it is not very funny...). But, of course, that is not really the reason. The real reason is that in our greatest and most sublime moments — and what could be more sublime than that very first instant when a new Jewish home is established? — we deflect some of our joy by remembering that Jerusalem is not yet whole.

What is it about Jerusalem that makes it so incredibly central to our lives? We do not only remember Jerusalem when we look at the bare patch

on our wall and not just when we attend weddings. Rather, we remind ourselves of Jerusalem throughout the day, when we pray and when we eat. It as if there is some kind of inherent Jewish phobia that we might forget the Holy City of Jerusalem, and we therefore need to keep mentioning it and using visual reminders over and over again in order that it remain uppermost in our minds.

So, let’s put one canard to rest. Jerusalem is the eternal capital of the Jewish Nation. It is not something new that came into being with the State of Israel seventy years ago, as some are trying their best to suggest. More than three thousand years ago King David conquered the area that is today Jerusalem. But King David didn’t just rely on a military conquest. He also made sure to buy the mountain that bordered Jerusalem as well. As the Book of Samuel II (24:21-25) describes, King David paid Aravnah the Jebusite to take ownership of the land. The Sages clarify that King David paid with money that he had collected from each of the Twelve Tribes. The Rabbis explain that King David could easily have afforded to pay for the area himself, but he wanted that specific location — the place that was going to become the Temple Mount — to belong equally to the entirety of the Jewish Nation. That small mountain, teach the Rabbis, was Mount Moriah, the site where Abraham had earlier built his altar, and the same site at which Jacob dreamed his dream — events of extraordinary significance for the future of the Jewish People.

The Talmud states (Tractate Yoma 54b), “The world was created from Zion”. When G-d created the world, Zion —which is Jerusalem — was the very epicenter of the Creation. In effect, the whole world is built around Jerusalem. In fact, the whole world is *established* on Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the spiritual foundation of the world. That is why the Temple was constructed there and that is why we turn towards it (both physically and spiritually) three times a day to pray.

Much has been written and pontificated over recently with the American government’s decision to move their Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. From

*Continued on page fourteen*

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# SEASONS THEN & NOW

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BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

## Shavuot: Moshe and the Angels

**R**abbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: When Moshe Rabbeinu went up High (to receive the Torah), the ministering angels said before G-d... The hidden precious gem that was hidden before You, 974 generations before the creation of the world, You wish to give to flesh and blood?... G-d told Moshe... Hold on to My throne of glory and give them an answer... Moshe said: What is written in the Torah that You want to give to me? 'I am the L-rd your G-d who took you out of Egypt.' Moshe told the angels: Did you go down to Mitzrayim? Were you enslaved to Pharaoh? It also says 'You shall have no other gods.' Do you, the angels, live among the nations that serve idols? 'Remember the Shabbat to sanctify it.' Do you perform *melacha*, so that you need to desist from it? 'Don't take G-d's name in vain.' Do you do business that you would swear in G-d's name? 'Respect your father and mother.' Do you have a father and mother? 'Don't kill. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal.' Do you have jealousy that you would come to do any of those things? Do you have a *yetzer hara*? Right away they accepted Moshe's argument. (Shabbat 88b)

While this Gemara involves many details that deserve much attention, we will focus on one, somewhat obvious, question. What were the angels thinking? Didn't they realize that the Torah didn't apply to them?

To answer this question, we will first explain some very fundamental ideas in Torah thought. When spiritual things descend to this world, they are clothed in physicality. A perfect example of this is a person's soul, which needs to be put inside a body to come to the physical world. Each part of the body corresponds to a spiritual "part" of the soul, making the body a physical manifestation of the soul. This idea also applies to the Torah. By its very nature the Torah is completely spiritual. Therefore, like the soul, the Torah needs to be clothed by physicality before coming into the world. This means that every physical phenomenon mentioned in the Torah is, in a deeper sense, referring to spiritual ideas (see *Nefesh Hachaim* 4:28).

Chazal tell us in many places that the Torah preceded the world, and that G-d used it as a blueprint

for the world (see *Pesachim* 54a; *Zohar*, *Terumah* 161a). The commentaries explain that the Torah which preceded the world was entirely spiritual, and didn't include spaces to separate the letters into words, like the Torah we have now. As Chazal tell us, the Torah is filled with names of G-d. He took these ideas and translated them into physical manifestations, such as stories and tangible *mitzvot*, after He decided to give it to physical beings who occupy a physical world (Introduction of Ramban on the Torah, *Shut Radbaz* 1068, Gra on Bava Batra 15a, Chatam Sofer on Shabbat 88b, Ben Ish Chai, *drush* 4 on Shabbat Kallah).

The Radbaz says this is why a Torah scroll is neither punctuated nor vowelized — so that it should not be limited to one reading. The only reason we have it punctuated in *Chumashim* is due to the concern that we may come to forget the physical form of the Torah. This is similar to the Oral Torah, which was meant to remain strictly oral, but was eventually written because of the same concern (*Shut Radbaz* 1068). The Ramban uses this idea to explain why a missing letter invalidates the entire Torah. Regardless of the fact that it is just one simple letter and the meaning is still intact, the Torah scroll is invalid because its depth changes (Ramban, Introduction on the Torah).

This idea also explains that certain segments of the Torah that may seem insignificant in fact come to teach hidden and deeper things. An example is the listing of the kings of Edom at the end of Parshat Vayishlach. At first glance it seems like the Torah is giving us a history lesson by listing the names of the kings of Edom. However, the Ramchal explains that this section includes some of the deepest secrets about how G-d runs the world. In the words of the Ramchal: *And see how Hakadosh Baruch Hu arranged the words of the holy Torah, that something that is the root of all fundamentals He included in one small section that no one pays attention to... Hakadosh Baruch Hu hid all the secrets in a way that only someone who merits will see them.*

Based on this, the commentaries explain that just like the Torah we have is a physical version of the

*Continued on page fifteen*

the very first moment, the general tone set for these “discussions” can only be described as one of hysteria. “How dare the Americans make such a move!” the world cries. The nations of the world imagine that by ignoring over three thousand years of history they can create a moral imperative that will allow them to erase our eternal connection — both theological and historical — to the Holy City of Jerusalem. Not just that, but nearly all nations of the Western World think they can turn a blind eye to *their own* history. After all, Western civilization is built upon Christian beliefs, which, in turn, are built on Jewish beliefs. And yet they have waged hundreds of years of battles and wars in an attempt to “redeem” Jerusalem. They think that by ignoring their own history they can create a rationale that removes any kind of Jewish ownership or Jewish

connection to the Holy City.

Winston Churchill, the legendary prime minister of Great Britain during the Second World War, once said, “The truth is incontrovertible. Malice may attack it, ignorance may deride it, but in the end, there it is.”

How true (pun intended) — in the end all that remains is the truth.

Nikki Haley, the US Ambassador to the United Nations, in her recent address to AIPAC made a very simple but definitive statement, “I knew that Jerusalem was, is and will always be the capital of Israel.”

Let us but hope that what is so obvious to Nikki Haley and the American government will become obvious to the other leaders of the world. Soon. Very, very soon.

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### Talmud Tips...continued from page two

Nevertheless, Rabbi Elazar’s statement needs further clarification: Why should a debtor’s wife be liable for severe punishment from Heaven if her husband fails to pay a debt? And especially if he doesn’t have money to repay it with, as Rabbi Elazar indicates!

One explanation is that the Rabbi Elazar is speaking about a debtor who in fact has land with which he could repay his debt. However, he claims that the land is unavailable to use as payment, since it is a lien for the *Ketuba* document for his wife. In addition, his wife completely supports his claim to refuse payment of the loan with “her land.” The one seeking payment needs the money that is owed him *now*, in order to feed him

and sustain him. Therefore, denying payment to him is tantamount to bringing about his demise. Since the debtor’s wife is an enabler of her husband in withholding the field from being used as repayment for the debt, she is complicit in the potential tragedy and is also held responsible in Heaven for this misdeed. She and her husband should be more sensitive to the needs of the other. The other’s need is dire and immediate, whereas it is altogether doubtful whether she will ever come to a situation where she will need to collect her *Ketuba* from this field. (See Shita Mekubetzet on the *daf*.)

• *Zevachim 29b*

## 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:

אֲחֵינוּ בְּלִבְיַת יִשְׂרָאֵל

*“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.”*

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## Seasons Then and Now...continued from page thirteen

Torah, according to the physical nature of our world, the *malachim* (angels), too, saw a version of the Torah that was spiritual, according to the nature of their world. When they saw that G-d wanted to give it to man, they didn't understand how, as they only saw its spiritual manifestation, which to them seemed irrelevant to the physical man. That's why they mentioned *the Torah that was hidden before the world's creation for many years*, meaning that it is above the physical nature of this world. This is the same reason why they referred to Moshe as "flesh and blood," meaning that man is physical while the Torah is diametrically spiritual.

Therefore, G-d told Moshe to hold onto His Throne of Glory and answer them, meaning to show them how Moshe understands both the deepest parts of the Torah, which reach the Throne of Glory, and also understands the physical parts of the Torah. This was meant to demonstrate to them that Moshe can understand and fulfill the Torah on all its levels (Chatam Sofer on Shabbat 88b). Moshe then responded by asking, "What's in the Torah that You are giving me?" The Duvna Maggid suggests that the phrase "giving me" means "according to the nature of

*my world*," as opposed to the Torah according to the world of the *malachim* (commentary on Parshat Yitro). With every halacha that Moshe mentioned, the *malachim* understood how it is a physical manifestation of a spiritual idea that they were familiar with. They therefore finally relented and agreed for the Torah to be given to man, who, unlike them, can fulfill it even in its physical sense (*Shut Radbaz* 1068, Chatam Sofer on Shabbat 88b, Shem M'Shmuel, Ki Tisa 5677).

With this we can appreciate this precious gift, the Torah. It is not just a book of stories and rules, but rather a blueprint of both the physical and spiritual realms. Through it we can learn everything. When involved in intellectual pursuits, one begins with a less intricate read, and slowly moves to more complex and difficult books. This is not so with the Torah. From the beginner who has just started learning Chumash to the scholar who is deriving esoteric ideas according to different readings of the same verses, it is truly a wonder how the same Chumash can offer something to everyone (Rav Yerucham Halevi, Da'at Chochma U'mussar, 24). May we merit appreciating the depth of the Torah and thereby come to learn and fulfill it.

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## Parsha Insights...continued from page one

in the wake of radical home-grown radical religious terrorism. Supposedly teaching the 'fundamental' British value of gender fluidity to a five-year old Jewish schoolgirl will prevent the next terrorist killing dozens of people with a nail bomb at a pop concert.

"The elephant in the classroom.

"One wonders how energetically Ofsted is imposing the LGBT agenda on the UK's 156 Muslim schools. In recent months, of the 95 persons killed in British terrorist attacks, 92 were victims of Islamic terrorism — that's a total of zero from Jewish orthodoxy. But regardless of the facts (or common sense), Ofsted chief Amanda Spielman seems intent on using the shabby disguise of counter-terrorism to enforce the LGBT agenda upon schools. When asked exactly what were the success/failure parameters for the promotion of 'British values' Amanda Spielman failed to give an explanation. This allows Ofsted to rule on an ad hoc basis, guided only by its own prejudices.

"Ultimately it will be the schoolgirls of Vizhnitz who will suffer most when their school is closed, their education halted and their future thrown into chaos.

"It is now increasingly clear, that for the liberal institutions that rule over us, tolerance is segregated into

whom they consider to be the deserving and the undeserving. For those who don't have the good fortune to fall into one of the liberal establishment's officially-designated victim classes, religious freedom is the most disposable of all rights.

"Can Jewish and Christian schools exist in any meaningful sense under Ofsted? The evidence suggests not — and some might suggest that is perhaps the intention."

This week marks the beginning of our reading the Book of Bamidbar - "In the Desert." The Torah was given to us in the desert to enshrine the principle that in order to keep the Torah the Jewish People must make themselves like a desert — free of all alien values. And, if necessary, we must be prepared to go out once again into the desert of societal rejection to protect those values.

• Source: *The Dignitatis Humanae Institute (DHI)*, also known as *the Institute for Human Dignity and Istituto Dignitatis Humanae*, a Catholic-inspired NGO based in Rome. Its mission is to "protect and promote human dignity through the recognition that man is born in the image and Likeness of G-d." Article date - Thursday, 26 April 2018

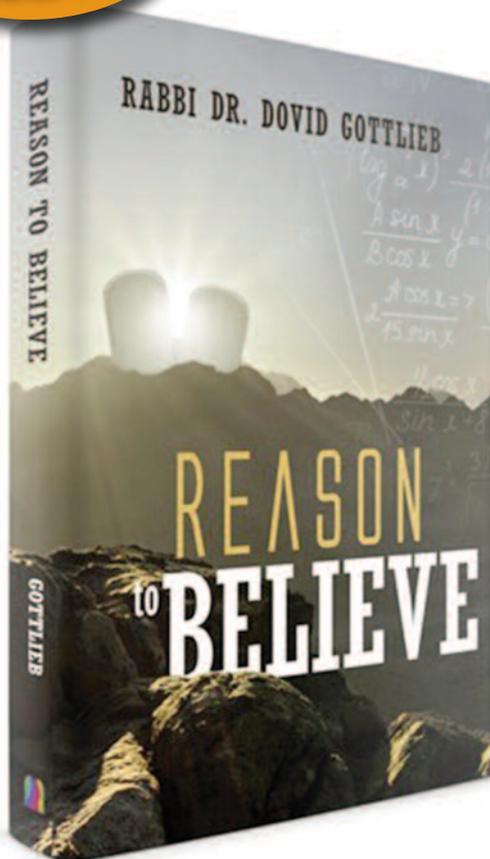
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