

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### The Problem of Slippers

*“The Children of Yisrael will encamp, each person by his banner, according to the insignia of their fathers’ household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting they will encamp.” (2:1)*

Ryan Ramsey was the captain of the nuclear submarine HMS Turbulent between 2008 and 2011 and once spent 286 days at sea without seeing the sky. He shared an 84 meter steel tube with 130 people. In the middle of the total lock-down, the BBC screened an interesting interview with him. Two of his tips resonated with me. The first was to be careful to attend to one’s personal appearance. It’s all too easy in a time of lock-down to let one’s personal grooming slip, which can lead to a general decline. For an observant Jew this translates as not *davening* in your slippers. Man is created *b’tzelem Elokim*, and he preserves that *tzelem* by preserving *tzurat ha’adam*.

The other tip he had was to maintain a routine. *Shigra* – or routine – is a double-edged blade. One of the great Rabbis of a previous generation (please let me know who it was), when visiting his son in his Yeshiva, would first of all go and check his son’s bedroom rather than go and see how his son was learning in the Beit Midrash (study hall).

Personal order is both a barometer and a cause of application and organization. It also accelerates time. The monotony of living in a submarine or locked up at home is reduced by routine – hours become links between set activities – hours become days. Days become months. It’s exactly that same difficulty we find when we try to remember a specific day three years ago that helps us deal with monotony. It’s a G-d-given amnesia that helps the

mind deal with boredom. I have no problem whatsoever remembering the day of my wedding, or my son’s first haircut, but try me on a specific day two months ago!

A slave’s life is very monotonous, but it’s also very regular. In one sense, it’s very relaxing. You just keep doing the same thing every day without thinking. When the Jewish People left Egypt and experienced the most memorable event of any life time – the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai – they were challenged by an event that could easily destabilize them. And a few million people wandering around an uncharted desert after the comfort and stability of the fleshpots of Egypt could have been a disaster waiting to happen.

*“The Children of Yisrael shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignia of their fathers’ household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp.” (2:1)*

This week’s Torah portion goes into great detail about the precise location and the job of each one of the priestly tribes. There is a hint here that order and routine are fundamentals of both sanity and the ability to serve our Creator appropriately – and that starts with not wearing slippers for *davening*.

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Shabbat 79-85

### I'm Just Dying to Learn Torah!

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, "The teachings of the Torah are not established within a person unless he "kills himself" for the Torah."

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish bases this teaching on a verse that seems to call out "Explain me!" The Torah states, "This is the Torah [law]: If a man dies in a tent, anyone entering the tent and anything in the tent shall be ritually impure for seven days." (Bamidbar 19:14) Why in the world is the Torah mentioned in this verse? As Rashi explains in Masechet Berachot (63b), "Where do we find that a person should die *in tents of Torah*?" And why should it be that a person needs to "kill himself over the Torah" in order for the Torah's teachings to be established within him?

Reish Lakish's teaching is cited as halacha by the Rambam in his Mishneh Torah. The Rambam writes: "The words of Torah will not be permanently acquired by a person who applies himself feebly to obtain them, and not by those who study amid pleasure and an abundance of food and drink. Rather, one must give up his life for them, constantly straining his body to the point of discomfort, without granting sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids."

The Rambam continues, writing: "Our Sages alluded to this concept, 'This is the Torah, should a man die in a tent,' " meaning that the Torah cannot be permanently acquired except by a person who gives up his life in the tents of wisdom. (See Bamidbar 19:14.)

He notes an additional hint from our Sages to the utmost importance of extreme dedication to Torah study: "A covenant has been established that anyone who wearies himself in Torah study in a house of study will not forget it quickly. Anyone who wearies himself in Torah study in private will become wise, as the verse states in Proverbs (11:2), 'Wisdom will come to one who is modest.'" (Rambam, Laws of Torah Study 3:12)

The Rambam explains the phrase "killing oneself for the Torah" in two main ways. One approach is that a person must invest great effort in his search for understanding the Torah. In this light, our Sages taught that if a person will say that he has discovered the meaning of a Torah matter without investing extreme effort – do not believe him." (Megillah 6b)

In addition to this investment of great effort, the Rambam explains a second approach to the concept of "killing oneself for Torah" in order to truly internalize and establish it within oneself. True acquisition of the Torah requires that a person deny himself life's comforts that may serve as distractions or

tempt him to waste valuable time and energy from his Torah study. As our Sages taught, "Eat bread with salt and drink water in measure." (Pirkei Avot 6:4)

I'm reminded of a story I once heard from a Rosh Yeshiva regarding the topic of "dying in a tent of Torah." I will tell it as I remember it, but I request that the reader not judge it too harshly and not "try it out at home," as they say. A businessman with limited time for Torah study was constantly interrupted by visitors and calls in the evening during the time he had set aside for his precious Torah study. "What can I do?" he wondered. His solution was to ask his wife to tell all callers that he was unavailable because he was "dead." Of course, as soon as the callers gasped and started offering condolences, she quickly explained that during the limited time he carved out for himself for Torah study, he "killed himself," as it were, in order to avoid any outside distractions.

Allow me to add an additional point on the topic of physical comfort/acquisition of Torah wisdom. Although the teaching in Pirkei Avot clearly indicates the need for avoiding comfort or luxury that might prevent personal growth in Torah, it is important to learn the *entire* teaching in Pirkei Avot. "Such is the way of Torah: Bread with salt you shall eat, water in small measure you shall drink, and upon the ground you shall sleep; live a life of deprivation and toil in Torah. If so you do, 'Fortunate are you, and good is for you' – 'Fortunate are you in this world, and it is good for you in the World-to-Come.'" (Tehillim 128:2)

I once asked my revered teacher, Rav Moshe Shapiro, *zatzal*, if this teaching means to serve as an absolute decree that a Torah student or scholar must avoid the beauty and pleasure that Hashem created in the world. He answered in the name of the Gaon from Vilna that the warning in Pirkei Avot is a directive for a student of Torah who is in need of finding the correct path to follow in order to learn Torah. In the words of Pirkei Avot, "This is the path (*darkah*) of the Torah." However, he concluded, this is not so for a Torah scholar who has already firmly and steadily travelled on a successful path of Torah acquisition. This category of Torah scholar shares the Creation in all its beauty and pleasures. Regarding him we are taught, "Fortunate are you in this world, and it is good for you in the World-to-Come."

• Shabbat 83b

## Questions

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 leviim is referred to in this Parsha?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *temeim* (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 Yissachar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Answers

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *leviim* 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* may eventually bring 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 Yissachar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea **that** the *nesiim* should offer gifts.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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## Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

### Where's The Gold?

**K**ing David famously said that the Torah is more precious than gold. In one passage he writes, “The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands of gold (*zahav*) and silver” (Ps. 119:72). Later in that chapter he exclaims, “I love Your commandments more than *zahav* and *paʿz*” (Ps. 119:127). In yet another passage, King David writes, “They (the Torah’s Laws) are more desirable than gold and much *paʿz*” (Ps. 19:11). In these few passages we have so far encountered two words for “gold” – *zahav* and *paʿz*. In addition to these two words we will find another three words in the Bible that refer to “gold”: *ketem*, *chanutz*, and *betzer*. This essay will explore these five different words for “gold” and discuss whether or not they are truly synonymous. Various commentators suggest that these different words connote different places in which gold is found and/or different hues of gold.

The most common Hebrew word in the Bible for “gold” is *zahav*. Along with its Aramaic counterpart *dahav* – which is explained by the Hebrew ZAYIN morphing into an Aramaic DALET – this word appears more than four-hundred times throughout the Bible. The Talmud (*Yoma* 44b-45a) states that there are seven types (or grades) of *zahav*: regular *zahav*, *zahav tov* (“good gold”), *zahav Ophir* (gold imported from Ophir, I Chron. 29:4), *zahav mufaz* (explained below), *zahav shachut* (“beaten gold,” I Kings. 10:16-17 and II Chron. 9:15-16), *zahav sagur* (“fine gold,” this term appears eight times in I Kings 6-7, II Chron. 4 and 9), and *zahar parvaim* (“gold from a Parvaim,” or “gold whose color resembles a cow’s blood,” II Chron. 3:6). A similar tradition about seven shades of gold in King David’s blonde hair can be found in *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* #70). [For an alternate list of the seven types of gold, a list that replaces regular *zahav* and *zahav Ophir* with *zahav tahor* (“pure gold”) and *zahav mezuḳak* (“refined gold”), see *Shemot Rabbah* 35:1.]

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) explains that the root of the word *zahav* is ZAYIN-HEY (or perhaps even just the letter ZAYIN alone), which means “this,” because

something shiny and sparkling like “gold” calls attention to itself. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) similarly explains that *zahav* is derived from the biliteral root ZAYIN-BET which means “flow,” because when one refines gold the unalloyed gold simply “flows” away from its impurities. [Interestingly, though *zahav* literally means “gold,” Ibn Janach and Radak write that the word *zahav* can be borrowed to refer to anything pristine and clean (see, for example, Jer. 51:7 and Zech. 4:12).]

A popular etymology of the word *zahav* argues that it is a contraction of the phrase *zeh hav* (“give this”) – an allusion to gold’s role as legal tender. This explanation is cited by such luminaries as *Peirush HaRokeach*, Rabbi Todros Abulafia (1247-1306), Rabbi Binyamin HaRofeh Anav (a brother of the author of *Shibbolei HaLeket*), the Maharal of Prague (1520-1609), Rabbi Eliezer Papo (1785-1828), and more.

The Torah describes the Pishon River as circumscribing the Land of Havilah, reporting that the especially good gold is found there (Gen. 2:11-12). In explaining those passages, Nachmanides explains that this “good gold” is found in the sand and on the shores along the Pishon River. Based on this, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) writes that the word *zahav* is related to the word *zav* (“flow”), and denotes the type of gold found near “flowing” bodies of water.

Havilah is probably named after a person named Havilah son of Joktan (son of Eber), who was a brother to someone named Ophir (Gen. 10:29, I Chron. 1:23). The name Ophir also appears as a place name for the location from which both *zahav* (I Chron. 29:4, I Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:49, and II Chron. 9:10) and *ketem* (Isa. 13:12, Ps. 45:10, Iyov 28:16) are brought. Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz (1765-1821) writes in his *Sefer HaBrit* that Ophir refers to the South American country Peru, where large deposits of gold are supposedly concentrated in the Andes Mountains and in the many rivers that flow across its

jungles. Others identify Ophir as someplace on the Indian subcontinent, with the legendary lost city of Atlantis, with the Phillipines, and even with Australia. Nonetheless, the accepted understanding amongst scholars is that Ophir is somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula or in the Horn of Africa (i.e. Ethiopia). Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1832-1909) identifies *zahav Ophir* as “white gold” (perhaps platinum or an alloy of gold and some other white metal), which he claims is found in Russia. The American archeologist William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971) identifies Ophir with Punt in Somalia.

The word *paz* appears nine times in the Bible. Although most commentators understand *paz* to mean “gold” (as Radak to Ps. 19:11 writes, it specifically means “good and unadulterated gold”), others disagree. Ibn Ezra (to Ps. 19:11 and Song of Songs 5:11) explains *paz* as a “precious stone,” while Rabbi Moshe David Valle (1697-1777) explains that *paz* refers to “royal jewels” that happened to be made out of gold. As Rabbi Wertheimer puts it, *paz* is the best type of gold in the world and is the most rare form of gold.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the two-letter root PEH-ZAYIN – from which the word *paz* is derived – refers to “fast movement.” Thus, when the Bible describes King David as being *mifazez* before the Holy Ark (II Sam. 6:16), this refers to him furiously dancing in honor of the Torah. Based on this understanding of the root, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word *paz* refers to extremely pure gold that shimmers in the sunlight as though it were dancing. He also explains that the adjectives *mufaz* (I Kings 10:18), *me’ufaz* (Jer. 10:9), and *ufaz* (Dan. 10:5) all refer to shiny gold that has a glistening and glowing glimmer. [Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 49:23-24) notes that there ought to be a connection between *mifazez* and *paz*, but confesses that he does not know what it is. See also Rabbi Hirsch’s comments to Ps. 19:11.]

Others (like Ibn Janach and Radak) explain that the trilateral root PEH-ZAYIN-ZAYIN is separate from the word *paz*, and refers to “strength.” They explain *mifazez* as referring to the “strength” and “vigor” with which King David danced before the Ark. These commentators explain that when these words are used to describe gold, *mufaz* and *ufaz* refer to gold that is especially unalloyed and thus “stronger” than other, adulterated types of gold. Radak explains that *me’ufaz* means “from [a place called] Uzaf,” which is identified by Targum as Ophir (possibly because the ZAYIN of Uzaf is interchangeable with the REISH of Ophir).

The word *ketem* appears nine times in the Bible. Although Ibn Janach first defines *ketem* as “jewels,” he concludes that it more likely means “gold,” which is how most commentators explain the word. Like *zahav*, *ketem* is also said to be imported from Ophir, and according to Dr. Chaim Tawil the very word *ketem* is said to be derived from the Akkadian word *kutimmu* and the Sumerian word *kudim* which mean “goldsmith.” [Interestingly, Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138) writes that the word *ketem* in Iyov 31:24 actually means “silver,” even though he agrees that elsewhere it is a synonym for “gold.”]

Alternatively, *ketem* is derived from the Hebrew root KAF-TAV-MEM, which also means “stain” or “dirtied” (for example, see Jer. 2:22). Rabbi Pappenheim writes that both meanings of *ketem* are actually derived from the monoliteral root KAF, which refers to “hitting.” He explains that KAF-TAV specifically refers to “beating something through repeated rubbing,” such that *ketem* refers to especially pure gold whose malleability allows it to be beaten into something very thin. Since such fine gold is especially eye-catching, the term *ketem* was borrowed to mean anything which noticeably sticks out, such as a “stain” or “dirt” on an otherwise pristine background.

The Modern Hebrew word *katom* (for the color “orange”) is derived from the same root as *ketem*, and the Modern Hebrew word *tapuz* (for the fruit “orange”) is a contraction of the Hebrew phrase *tapuach zahav* (literally, “Golden Apple”) – an expression found in Proverbs 25:11. The English word *orange*, by the way, is related to the Hebrew/Aramaic word *etrog/trunga*, as both are derived from the Old Persian word *narang* and refer to various citrus fruits. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the initial *o* in the English form of this word is probably influenced by the place name Orange, famous for the House of Orange.

The word *charutz* in the sense of “gold” appears six times in the Bible. This word is actually the standard Phoenician (Tyrian) and Akkadian word for “gold,” and so some scholars claim that Hebrew borrowed the word from those languages. On the other hand, Rabbi Marcus explains that since the root CHET-REISH-TZADI refers to “cutting/digging with a sharp instrument,” gold is called *charutz* because it is dug up from underground. Indeed, Rabbi Wertheimer writes that the word *charutz* refers to gold found by “digging.” Rabbi Yishaya of Trani (1180-1250) explains that gold is called *charutz* because the pursuit of gold makes people “diligent” and “industrious,” which are alternate meanings of the Hebrew word *charutz*.

Psalms 68:14 refers to something called *yerakrak charutz* (“greenish *charutz*”), which Menachem Ibn Saruk explains as a type of gemstone. However, Dunash Ibn Labrat and others explain that *charutz* refers to “gold” (see also *Tosafot* to *Nedarim* 32a) such that this term references greenish gold (perhaps a reference to electrum or gold alloyed with cadmium). Indeed, Radak also defines *charutz* as “gold,” while noting that some say that *charutz* refers to gemstones.

The Israeli archaeologist Dr. Shmuel Yeivin (1896-1982) wrote (under the pen name Shebna) that the words in question reflect different *colors* of gold (usually depending on what other metals are present in the alloy). In fact, the Mishna (*Yoma* 4:4) teaches that on normal days the fire pan used for the incense in the Holy Temple would be made of greenish gold, but on Yom Kippur, they would use one made of reddish gold. Yeivin thus explains that *zahav* is yellowish gold, *ketem* is reddish gold, and *charutz* is greenish gold. That *ketem* refers to something reddish is hinted to in the Mishna (*Niddah* 8:1), which uses the word

*ketem* as a “blood stain.” Indeed, gold alloyed with copper – known as “Red Gold” or “Rose Gold” – boasts a reddish color. Additionally, Yeivin argues that the word *paz* focuses on the shine/luster of gold, without regard to its particular hue.

The last word in our discussion is *betezer*. The debate concerning this word centers on a specific verse in which Eliphaz the Temanite tells Iyov that man’s best hope is to repent “and then you would have a *betezer* on the ground and *Ophir* (i.e. gold) with the rocks of the brooks” (*Iyov* 22:24, see also *Iyov* 22:25, 36:19). Ibn Janach, Radak, and Gersonides explain that the word *betezer* in this context refers to “gold.” However, other commentators disagree with this assessment and explain the word differently: Ibn Ezra writes that *betzer* is “silver,” while Rashi (following Menachem) writes that it is a “stronghold.” Rabbi Isaiah of Trani explains that *betezer* does not actually mean “gold,” but is still related to gold because it refers to the crude ore which, when refined, can yield gold.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at [rklein@ohr.edu](mailto:rklein@ohr.edu)

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## LOVE OF THE LAND

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### A Mountain of Names

"The Tzidonim call Mount Hermon 'Siryon,' and the Emori call it 'Senir'."  
(*Devarim* 3:9)

"To Mount Sion, which is Hermon."  
(*ibid.* 4:48)

Hermon, Siryon, Senir and Sion.  
Four names for one mountain!

"To teach you the praise of Eretz Yisrael, that four different nations took pride in having some connection with it, each of them demanding that the mountain should bear the name that it gave it."  
(*Sifri*, quoted by Rashi)

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## Blessing Two – The Thrill of Being Jewish

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me a non-Jew.”

The next three blessings are unique. With the exception of the Morning Blessings, there is no other time when we recite what can only be described as negative blessings. In Judaism, a blessing is recited over what we have, not over what we do not have. For example, a person who is about to eat an apple does not thank G-d for not having given him a potato. And yet we now have three blessings, one after the other, that all begin with the words, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me...” More than that, two of the blessings seem to be phrased in a derogatory fashion. “Blessed are You... for not having made me a non-Jew,” and “Blessed are You... for not having made me a woman.” How are we to understand why the Sages deemed it correct to compose the blessings in the negative? And why did the Sages feel that it was appropriate to speak in such a language about non-Jews and women?

Many, many years ago I posed these questions to Rabbi Uziel Milevsky. Rabbi Milevsky was a senior lecturer at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and was one of the most erudite, insightful and humble people that I have merited knowing. He began by explaining that the most sublime activities in this world are doing the Will of G-d. And, specifically, keeping G-d’s commandments and learning His Torah. G-d granted the obligation and the responsibility to do so to the Jewish People. That is the reason why the Jews are called the Chosen Nation. The ability to live a life that reflects the teachings of the Torah is truly an indescribable gift. But, it is not always such an easy thing to do. The daily obligations of a Jew are myriad and complex. The Code of Jewish Law is a primer that stretches from pre-birth to post-death. There is not supposed to be even a moment in our day that does not reflect the depth of our relationship with G-d. Rabbi Milevsky emphasized that it is the potential for such infinite profundity that can make our constant striving to connect to the Divine either inestimably exhilarating or just as equally discouraging. The numerous commandments are tools that have been given to us to help us try to overcome the seductive attractions of this

physical world. And, when we are successful, we are connecting ourselves to G-d in the most absolute way possible. But, for someone who finds that immeasurably difficult to do, the commandments can also be regarded as hurdles and barriers to living “the good life” in this world. It is hard to remain focused all the time on what G-d wants. And it is definitely hard to ignore the many corporeal delights that the Torah forbids us to enjoy.

How does this connect to the blessing of thanking G-d for not having made us a non-Jew? In spiritual terms, perhaps the most basic definition of who I am is that I am a Jew. I belong to G-d. And my task in this world is to live my life accordingly. Therefore, when I recite the Morning Blessings, which are – in part – a description of who I am, one of my first obligations is to thank G-d for having given me the most wonderful gift of all: To proclaim that I am a Jew.

However, just because G-d made me a Jew doesn't mean I can behave however I want. Being Jewish carries with it an enormous responsibility to adhere to the ways of the Torah. If I were to declare that I am Jewish by saying, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, *for having made me a Jew,*” it would mean that I would be testifying to the fact that I live my life as a Jew without deviating from any of my responsibilities. The problem is, I do not always live exactly as G-d wants me to. I am not always so careful about the things that I do or the things that I say.

When I make a blessing, I am bearing witness that what I am saying is absolutely true. By proudly making a blessing proclaiming that I am Jew, it would be as if I were telling G-d, “Look at me! Look how wonderful I am!” And, perhaps, that is exactly what G-d would do. It is conceivable that my blessing would be the direct cause of an extremely exacting Divine “investigation” into the way that I live my life. In effect, G-d would do exactly as I asked – plus more. He would not just *look* at me. He

would *scrutinize* all of my actions as well, to see if they really match up to my overconfident declaration that I am a Jew.

In the spiritual realms, being Jewish is not just being born Jewish. Being Jewish is *living* Jewish.

And that leaves us with a most challenging dilemma. On the one hand, my being Jewish is possibly the most fundamental definition of myself, a definition that cannot be ignored. My being Jewish absolutely requires recognition within the Morning Blessings, to proclaim with joy and unbridled passion that I am a Jew. To acknowledge the One Who made me Jewish. And to recognize what an enormous privilege it is. I am not looking down on anyone else. Perish the thought. Rather, I am “counting my blessings” and offering up thanks. But, on the other hand, to do so directly might be the cause of an unwanted Divine accounting. Therefore, the Sages, in their infinite wisdom, composed a blessing that is an indisputable fact: “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d,

King of the universe, for not having made me a non-Jew.”

Obviously, the only conceivable meaning of the blessing is that I am a Jew. But the Sages understood that when it is said in the negative form it becomes a statement of fact, rather than a brash, defiant announcement that could spark an unwelcome Divine reaction.

Finally, let me conclude with a very important point made by Rabbi David HaLevi Segal, who was known as the Turei Zahav (or the Taz for short) after his seminal work on the Code of Jewish Law and one of the most eminent authorities in sixteenth century Poland. He writes that this blessing should not be taken to mean that non-Jews are considered to be of a lower status than Jews. This would be a serious and unfortunate mistake. Every category of being has a powerful purpose in this world, and each one is an absolutely necessary creation. I bless G-d for not creating me as one of the other necessary categories, but, rather, as a Jew – because of the unique role the Jew has in serving the Creator.

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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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, but, rather, it brings her 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



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# TORAH AND EMUNAH!

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by Rabbi Reuven Zail

At the heart of the festival of Shavuot we encounter two concepts that form the foundation for all of Jewish life: Torah and Emunah (faith). In our prayers we refer to Shavuot as "*Zman Matan Torateinu*," the time of the giving of our Torah, and on this date, historically, Hashem spoke the first two of the ten commandments directly to our entire nation, imbuing us with Emunah that to this day forms part of our spiritual genetic make-up.

What is it about Torah and Emunah that touches our souls and draws us closer to Hashem, opening us up to a real and more meaningful relationship with Him?

Both Torah and Emunah share a unique feature. While we are able to experience and grasp the wisdom, beauty and depth of a passage of Talmud, at the same time our sense of attainment might slip away as we begin to realize that Torah is also completely beyond us in scope and magnificence. Similarly, when we give thought to the astounding creativity and design in nature, we become inspired and acknowledge our Creator with a firm belief, and yet moments later this Emunah might remain elusive and beyond our grasp when facing difficult challenges in our own lives and in the world around us.

Both Torah and Emunah elevate us and fill us with meaning and direction. Yet there are times when we engage with them that leaves us with an uncomfortable

sense of our own limitations. The Nesivos Shalom writes: "There is no end to Emunah, and in the same way that Hashem is infinite, it follows that there is no end to our belief in Him as well." There will always be levels of faith higher and more subtle than the levels we attain. The process of acquiring Emunah is always one of seeking and aspiring. It's the quest for Emunah that gives us satisfaction. "*Vedorshei Hashem lo yachseru kol tov*" – "And those who seek Hashem will not lack any goodness." (Tehillim 3 34:11)

So too this is true when we engage in learning Torah. The quality of wanting to know more, of being a "*mevakesh*," is what distinguishes great Torah scholars from lesser ones, who might even have more knowledge, sharper minds and broader intellects. When we study Torah with a sense of wonder and anticipation, we open up our understanding, while simultaneously exposing our intellectual shortcomings. Our curiosity reminds us that there is more to know and we might not have the capacity to know it! "*Yismach lev, mevakshei Hashem*" – "The heart will rejoice when seeking Hashem." (Divrei Hayamim 16:10)

May our Shavuot experience this year, in uncertain times, help us appreciate that, although we might be left with unanswered questions and gaps in clarity, our effort to acquire Torah and Emunah gives us the joy, security and sense of purpose that we all desire.

**WISHING ALL OUR READERS  
A CHAG SHAVUOT SOMAYACH  
A FESTIVE SHAVUOT HOLIDAY!**

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# ASK!

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## The Torah of Eretz Yisrael

**From: Aharon**

Dear Rabbi,

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

Dear Aharon,

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

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

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

Another reason was to indicate that even though the ultimate place for Torah learning and observance is the

Land of Israel, nevertheless, it is not dependent on the Jewish People being in the Land, and even in exile they connect to G-d through the Torah. In fact, this implies that the importance of the Torah precedes that of the Land. While it's best for the Jewish People to be committed to Torah in the Land, it's better to be committed to Torah outside of Israel than to be in Israel with no Torah.

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

Another interesting idea is that if the Torah had been given in Israel, the Jewish People might come to think that the teachings of the Torah are just for them, or non-Jews might think that they have no connection to it. So G-d gave the Torah outside of Israel to indicate that also non-Jews may be inspired by the truths of the Torah.

Eventually, it was the Jewish People who received the Land of Israel, from which they are to be a light among the nations and from Zion shall go forth the Torah. But the fact that the Torah was originally given outside of Israel enables its universal message to be heard by all.

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman*

## Sotah and Sanctity

The Torah introduces the topic of *Sotah* by describing the infidelity of the disloyal wife as “straying from the path, and committing a breach of trust against [her husband].” The word for “stray” – *tisteh* – from which the term *Sotah* derives, is related to the term “*shoteh*” – fool – one who deviates from the path of rationality. Every moral lapse involves a mental aberration, for no one sins unless he has lost the true perspective.

When she is brought to the Kohen, the first step in the *Sotah* procedure for determining her guilt or innocence involves taking “holy water” – water that was sanctified in the *kiyyor* which was used to wash the hands and feet of the Kohanim – and putting dust from the floor into the water. The dust is not to be stirred and mixed into the water.

By contrast, the ashes from the red heifer – used to purify individuals who have had contact with a corpse – are mixed completely into the water. In that context, the individual to be purified is reminded that although his body will ultimately decay and revert to dust, his true essence is “living water.” (Bamidbar 19:17)

But the *sotah*, a woman who is suspected of sexual and moral impurity, is to be reminded that although her earthly body is dust, and she is gifted with the power of motherhood and with natural urges, she herself is analogous to “holy water.” Her true essence is moral holiness. Her sensual bodily energies, whose nature is like that of dust, are to form only the *external* side of herself. She is to bear them and rule over them, but they are never to mix with her and muddy her purity.

Now, this dust that is placed in the water is taken from the ground on which the people stand in G-d’s sanctuary. This is in recognition that superhuman demands are not made of the people; the earthly sensual side forms the floor, the foundation upon which life is established. The water is drawn from the *kiyyor*, the vessel fashioned from the mirrors donated by the Jewish women who thronged at the entrance to the Sanctuary. The symbolism in the water she drinks is to remind this woman how far she has strayed from the ways of those ancestors, and the sanctity expected of her. While a woman who drinks the *sotah* waters has not necessarily committed adultery, she has been seen in seclusion with another man, and this is sufficient to warrant the reminder of the higher expectations of her modesty.

Citing the Ramban, Rav Hirsch notes that the *sotah* procedure is unlike any other legal institution of Biblical law, in that it depends on a direct miracle – after the woman drinks the *sotah* waters, her bodily reaction will reveal her guilt or innocence. This shows that G-d is the Witness and Judge of every Jewish couple that enters into the union of marriage. He is present in every marriage, because sexual purity is the root of spiritual and moral welfare. Thus, a question concerning the purity of sexual life must be brought before the all-seeing G-d.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 15:31