

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's parsha, Bamidbar is always read on the Shabbat prior to the Shavuot holiday. This year is no different. Rabbi Isaiah Halevy Horowitz, author of the Shnei Luchos Habrit, suggests that this Torah reading teaches us important lessons about the holiday.

Parshat Bamidbar presents the names and leaders of each of the tribes of Israel. It can be suggested that the delineation of the leaders of each tribe is linked to Shavuot as it promotes the idea that the heads of the community should be paragons or teachers of Torah.

The parsha also describes the way that the Jews encamped around the Tabernacle. Rav Umberto Cassuto echoes the similarity to Shavuot as he calls the Tabernacle a "walking-Sinai." We simulated Sinai as we wandered through the desert, constantly reliving the experience of revelation.

Bamidbar begins by telling us that G-d spoke to Moshe in Midbar Sinai. Rabbi Nachman Cohen in 'A Time for All Things,' maintains that the confluence of Bamidbar and Shavuot is "to underscore the great significance of the Torah having been given in the desert-no man's land." Rabbi Cohen points out that the location of the vast expanse of the wilderness is significant for it teaches us that the Torah is not "the exclusive property of given individuals." Living a desert existence makes us feel vulnerable. Giving the Torah in the desert also teaches that "Torah can only be acquired if a person humbles himself."

A talk from one of my dear colleagues, Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky, inspired a final idea. Perhaps the key relationship between Bamidbar and Shavuot is "counting." Not only does our portion deal with the census-the counting-of the Jewish people, but the Torah, when mentioning Shavuot, stresses the counting of days between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot. In the words of the Torah, "seven weeks shall you count." (Leviticus, 23:15) This teaches that as important as the holiday of Shavuot may be, equally important is the count toward the holiday.

An important lesson emerges. Whenever we are engaged in a particular project, whether we are working toward a professional goal or striving to achieve in our personal lives, it is important to reflect

and to evaluate how much time has already been spent on the endeavor and what is the time required to achieve its realization.

Evaluating forces us to consider the gift of every moment we have. Rabbi Joseph Lookstein points out that we must not only realize what the years have done to us, but what we have done with our years.

Hence the confluence of Bamidbar and Shavuot. Bamidbar teaches the significance of each person and Shavuot teaches the importance of every moment for the individual. In the words of the Psalmist, "Teach us to number our days." (Psalms, 90:12) © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the purposes of the census taken in our Parasha was to set up the formation of the camp as they began their trip from Mt. Sinai towards the Promised Land. There were five distinct components of this camp; four of them were sets of 3 Tribes, with each set located in one of the four directions (east, west, north and south) surrounding the fifth component, the Tribe of Levi and the Mishkan. Each set had it's own banner ("Degel"), and the eastern Degel, comprised of Yehudah, Yisachar and Zevulun, were designated to be the first to travel whenever the camp left one location to go to their next one (Bamidbar 2:9)

Rashi tells us the procedure for the journey to begin: "When they saw that the Anan (cloud of glory) had moved, the Kohanim sounded the horns and the camp of Yehudah would travel first." Apparently, two things had to happen before they started going; the Anan had to leave the Mishkan to start going and the horns had to be sounded. The Mizrachi asks why Rashi lists only these two things, when elsewhere (9:18 and 10:2) he indicates that there were three things that had to happen before they left; the two that Rashi mentions here plus Moshe saying "kumah Hashem" ("G-d please rise").

Although the Mizrachi leaves this question unanswered, several other commentators attempt to explain Rashi's omission. The Maharal suggests that Rashi is not trying to tell us what had to happen before

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they traveled (as all 3 had to happen), only how Yehudah knew to start traveling; since they couldn't actually hear Moshe say "kumah Hashem," it wasn't mentioned here. The Sifray Chachamim says that Rashi is only listing the things that gave Yehudah notice that they should prepare to leave; "kumah Hashem" was said when they were about to actually leave, having already prepared based on the earlier warnings. However, a closer look at Rashi and his sources may give us a different perspective.

Our Rashi seems to be based on the Beraisa deMelech haMishkan (13:6, mirrored by Yalkut Shimoni 427). This is one of the sources Rashi quotes by name later in a similar Rashi (9:18). "Since Israel was about to travel, the Anan pillar would fold up and extend onto Yehudah like a beam. They sounded the horns and the Degel of Yehudah traveled." Again, only two things are mentioned- the Anan and the horns-with no mention of Moshe. Yet, a bit later (13:7) that same Beraisa tells us that "Israel traveled based on three things; on G-d, on Moshe and on the horns." This is the same source given (not by Rashi, but by the editors of various printings of Rashi) for Rashi's comments on 10:2, that since "the horns had to be sounded before the nation traveled, it turns out that they traveled based on three things-G-d, Moshe and the horns." So the same question the Mizrahi asked on Rashi can be asked on the Beraisa!

The Beraisa continues by telling us exactly how we relied on Moshe: "[He] would say the night before that early in the morning you will be leaving. Immediately Israel began to get their animals ready and prepare their things to go." It would seem, then, that the Beraisa only mentioned the (two) things done when they were about to travel, omitting things done earlier.

Although this contradicts the Maharal and the Sifray Chachamim (as Moshe was now an integral part of their knowing they were leaving and their preparing to leave Rashi could learn otherwise. This is bolstered by the fact that Rashi, on 9:18, which quotes the first part of the Beraisa, also references (by name) the Sifray (Piska 26), implying that the role that Moshe had in starting a journey was his saying "kumah Hashem."

The Sifray mentions "kumah Hashem" in two contexts. At the beginning of Piska 26 it is attempting to explain how the journeys could be by G-d's approval if

Moshe needs to first give his permission (by saying "kumah Hashem"), while towards the end it is trying to understand how Moshe could ask G-d to both "arise" ("kumah") and "return" ("shuvah"). First it gives an example to illustrate that although G-d decides when to go, He won't actually go until Moshe says it's okay to (so they both must give their approval before the trip actually starts). The latter part of the Sifray gives us insight into the first part.

"When Israel was about to travel, the Anan pillar would fold up and stay (where it was), and wouldn't go until Moshe said 'kumah Hashem.' And when they were about to set up camp, the Anan pillar would remain folded and would not spread out (over the Mishkan) until Moshe said 'shuvah Hashem.'" Even though G-d wanted to either start moving or to set up camp, He waited until Moshe gave the cue. We already quoted the similar part of the Beraisa (quoted by Rashi on 9:18) regarding the start of a journey. The encampment process is also described by the Beraisa (14:1): "Since Israel was about to set up camp, the Anan pillar would spread out like [the leaves of] a date tree extending over Yehudah like a tent and covering the [Mishkan] from the outside and filling [it] on the inside."

Rashi (9:18) quotes the Beraisa regarding the Anan pillar folding up and extending over Yehudah like a beam and the sounding of the horns, and then adds that it (the Anan) didn't go until Moshe said "kumah Hashem," attributing the last part to the Sifray. The parts of each midrash that Rashi quotes do not contradict each other; first the Anan indicated it was time to leave by folding up, then Moshe said "kumah Hashem."

Although he doesn't attribute it to either source, Rashi seems to combine both sources concerning setting up camp as well. The Anan starts to spread out, but doesn't spread out completely until Moshe says "shuvah Hashem." But is it really consistent with the Sifray at all? The Sifray implies that the Anan doesn't even *start* spreading out until Moshe says "shuvah Hashem," while Rashi says it starts to spread out even beforehand. Rather, it seems as if Rashi is following the Beraisa, only adding the Sifray's position regarding "kumah Hashem" and "shuvah Hashem." If so, we can apply this to the beginning of the journey as well, by contrasting it with the setting up of camp.

The Anan stops moving, so the nation stops moving. The Kohanim set up the Mishkan so that the Anan can return there. Even after the Mishkan is ready, and the Anan has started to spread out towards it, it will not re-enter the Mishkan until Moshe says "shuvah Hashem."

Now let's reverse it. The Anan, which is in, and covering, the Mishkan, starts to fold up and extend to Yehudah. Yehudah knows from Moshe's warning the night before that they will be traveling today, so they

are already ready. But they can't leave until the Anan has completely left the Mishkan, when the Kohanim can sound the horns. Even though the Anan has indicated that it's time to go (by folding up and moving towards Yehudah), until it vacates the Mishkan, the horns won't sound and they can't leave. Only after Moshe says "kumah Hashem" will the Anan leave the Mishkan completely, making him an integral part of the leaving. Once he says it, the Anan moves completely over Yehudah, the Kohanim sound the horns, and Yehudah starts to move.

Now let's look at our Rashi (2:9) again. What has to happen before Yehudah can leave? The Anan must be *fully removed* from the Mishkan (not just starting to move towards Yehudah) so that the Kohanim can sound the horns. Rashi is not disregarding Moshe's saying "kumah Hashem," as it must have already occurred if the Anan has completely left the Mishkan. The Mizrahi's third step is included in Rashi's first step. Yes, all three steps are necessary. But the bottom line, as Rashi points out, is that what has to happen before Yehudah can start to go is for the Anan to completely vacate the Mishkan and the Kohanim to sound the horns. Nothing more and nothing less.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Bamidbar, the Hebrew name for the fourth of the five books of the Bible, literally means desert, but it is built around the smaller root word Davar, which means object or word; indeed, the ten commandments-which were given in the desert (midbar) at the Revelation at Sinai-are called aseret hadevarim, or the ten words, perhaps because these are the words which can transform a desert no-man's land into a habitable community of people. And the festival of Shavuot, which takes place this year immediately after the Sabbath of Bamidbar, is our holiday of the Giving of the Torah, or the words of G-d, divrei HaShem. (And the fifth of the five books is Devarim, or the words of the Divine).

The study of the words of our Torah is a positive Biblical Commandment, emanating from the verse "This book of Torah shall never leave your mouth; you shall meditate therein by day and by night" (Joshua 1) as well as "you shall teach (these Divine words, devarim) diligently to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:7). But what is the nature of the Commandment? Is the Jewish Ideal that we study all day and all night-spending our lives in a perennial Kollel of Torah study if it is at all possible for us to do so-or are we to combine Torah study with professional pursuits and/or other activities? To what end are we to study Torah?

There is a fascinating incident in the Talmud (B.T. Betzah 15b) which, upon further analysis, will supply the answer to our questions.

"It has been taught by our Sages that R. Eliezer once taught and expounded the laws of the Festival for the entire day of a Festival. (One by one of the various groups of students began to leave, group by group). R. Eliezer looked with scorn at those who left... since they were forsaking the eternal world in exchange for the temporal world (of eating with their families). But rejoicing on the Festival is a Divine command (so why criticize them for leaving study in order to rejoice?)" R. Eliezer is true to his position that rejoicing on the Festival is merely a voluntary act and not an obligatory one, as it has been taught: "R. Eliezer says, an individual on the Festival may either eat and drink all day or sit and study all day whereas, R. Joshua says: Divide the Festival Day, half for G-d and half for you.

"R. Yohanan explains that each of the disputants bases his position on (the same two) Biblical verses. One verse teaches that 'The festival (Atzeret) is for the Lord your G-d' while another verse teaches that 'The Festival (Atzeret) is for you' R. Eliezer interprets them to mean 'either, or,' either wholly to G-d (in study) or wholly to people (in eating and drinking with family and friends), whereas R. Joshua interprets them to mean that each festival day must be divided in half, with part of the day for G-d (in study and prayer) and part of the day for people (in the joy of family meals)."

On this Talmudic discussion there is a fascinating exchange between two leading Hasidic leaders of the nineteenth century, the Kotzker Rebbe and the Voorker Rebbe (and here, for the first time, I believe that the Voorker bests the Kotzker), each of whom understanding that the normative practice accords with R. Joshua. The Kotzker Rebbe, after spending the first half of the Festival in prayer and study, would then loudly proclaim, "I have just concluded the half of the day which was given over to me, to human rejoicing. I shall now go to the meal, which is the portion for G-d." Apparently for him-seeing as the Kotzker Rebbe was a great Torah scholar-the deepest rejoicing emanated from Torah study and prayer.

The Voorker Rebbe, on the other hand, taught that yes, we divide the Festival day in half, -- half for G-d (Torah) and half for human beings (rejoicing at the family meal), -- but that we divide the day in accordance with its width and not in accordance with its length. What did he mean?

I believe he was basing himself upon a fascinating postscript to the difference of opinion between R. Eliezer and R. Joshua in the tractate Pesachim(68): "R. Eliezar says, Everyone agrees that on Shavuot the Festival is to be celebrated half for G-d and half for us human beings. What is the reason? Shavuot is the day on which the Torah was given."

What could R. Eliezar possibly mean? I should think that if there is any time when the entire day should be spent in Torah study it ought be on Shavuot, when the Torah was given. Yet the other Festivals be divided in half, but Shavuot should be given over exclusively to G-d and His words!?

However, there is a charming midrash which teaches that when Moses arrived in heaven to receive the Torah, the angels began to complain. They wanted the Torah to remain in heaven, with them. Moses argued that the Torah belonged on earth with people. After all, the Torah prescribes laws of husband-wife, parent-child relationships, and the angels have no families; Torah laws deal with food, warfare, fields and produce, areas which are entirely foreign to the lives of angels. And Moses won the day!

The Voorker Rebbe understood that the Torah is not an ethereal, heavenly, mystical document, divorced from human life and worldly affairs. Much the opposite, the Torah is a Torah of life, a method of perfecting our world and making our daily lives more satisfying, enriching and joyous. Torah is a prescription for life, not a substitute for life. We dare not escape the world in our pursuit of Torah; we must rather pursue the Torah in order to sanctify and ennoble the very world in which we live.

Hence the Voorker Rebbe taught that we must learn from Shavuot to divide each festival day, and even every single day of our lives, in half: part for G-d and Torah, part for us and the world. But the division is width-wise, not length-wise. Our meals, our family gatherings, our professional activities must all be uplifted and inspired by the Torah infrastructure by which they must be informed; and our Torah study must be directed towards teaching us how to live a better life, how to perfect our present society and world. Torah and world must be involved in constant interplay so that the one is never divorced from the other.

Hence our Sages teach that "Torah is greater than action because the study of Torah must lead to inspired action"(B.T. Kiddushim 36a), and that (Mishna Avot) "It is truly good to combine Torah with professional pursuit"-in the width and the depth of how you make your living and how you spend the hours of your life and not nearly in the length of the hourly division of your day. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

Above the Law

Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered an alien fire before Hashem, and they had no children (Bamidbar 3:4). Four times the Torah mentions the death of Nadav and Avihu, as well as their sin. This indicates that this was their only sin, so that people should not say that they committed terrible sins

secretly for which they were punished (Yalkut Shimoni 624).

Why was the Torah afraid that people would suspect Nadav and Avihu of "ma'asim mekulalim baseiser," of hidden destructive acts? Apparently, prominent individuals sometimes consider themselves above the law. Nadav and Avihu were considered greater than Moshe and Aharon (Rashi Vayikra 10:3). Their untimely death, despite their outward greatness, aroused suspicion of clandestine indiscretion (see Shabbos 13b). The Torah testifies that their only sin was the offering of an alien fire.

Remarkably, the Yalkut Shimoni proceeds to enumerate an entire series of causes that led to Nadav and Avihu's death. While this may represent a Midrashic dispute, the Yalkut may be suggesting a series of character flaws which led to the single sin and the ultimate tragedy.

Let us begin with the causes based on the last phrase of the aforementioned pasuk in Bamidbar-and they had no children. One who is blessed with children has a greater sense of responsibility and is less inclined to make reckless mistakes. Perhaps if Nadav and Avihu had children, they would not have taken chances. The risk of leaving behind orphans might have prevented their sin.

R' Levi said that Nadav and Avihu never married. Many women were waiting for them, but they said "our uncle (Moshe) is the king, our uncle (Nachshon) is a prince, our father (Aharon) is the kohein gadol, we are his assistants, what woman is worthy of us?"

While we must approach biblical giants with appropriate deference, the Yalkut is clearly teaching us lessons for all generations. Greatness, whether inherited or achieved, can breed arrogance. This negative trait, which prevented Nadav and Avihu from getting married and having children, convinced them that they were above the law forbidding alien fires. Moreover, a wife, to whom they would be accountable, could have saved them from their fatal decision (see Sanhedrin 109b).

Failure to consult contributed to the death of Nadav and Avihu as well. The Yalkut teaches that they did not consult Moshe Rabbeinu or respect their father Aharon. In addition, they issued halachic rulings in the presence of their rebbe, a sin punishable by death.

Moreover, their greatness led them to grossly inappropriate impatience. "Moshe and Aharon were walking ahead. Nadav and Avihu walked behind them and said, 'when will those two elders die so that we can rule in their place.'"

While another view holds that they did not verbalize these thoughts, their attitude led them to their fatal error. Nadav and Avihu, despite, or perhaps because of, their greatness, did not know their place-in the mishkan or in the hierarchy of leadership.

Finally, and most incredibly, Nadav and Avihu did not consult one another. Each entered the innermost sanctum (kodesh hakodoshim, Zayis Ra'anani on the Yalkut, no. 17) independently. The Midrash implies that had they consulted one another they would not have sinned.

Even consulting a peer provides a measure of humility which could have prevented their misdeed. A discussion of the plan might have revealed the dangers inherent in it, which were overlooked in the individual and private musings of Nadav and Avihu. In addition, each brother may have brought the alien fire in an attempt to be the greatest kohein. The knowledge that they would have to share this status would likely have averted the disaster altogether.

Notwithstanding the character flaws detailed in the Yalkut Shimoni, the basic desire to offer the alien fire stemmed from an unquenchable thirst for greater ahavas Hashem. This led Nadav and Avihu to cross the boundaries of halacha and bring an unauthorized ketores. A similarly fatal mistake was made by the two hundred and fifty men who offered the ketores when Korach rebelled. Their desire for closeness to Hashem was so strong that they were willing to give up their lives (Netziv Vayikra 9:6, Bamidbar 16:1).

Nadav and Avihu were concerned with their own spiritual advancement. As they tried to raise themselves above the klal, Hashem's name was sanctified through them as they were separated from the klal (Meshech Chochmo Vayikra 10:3).

As we strive for spiritual growth, we should do so in order to better serve Klal Yisrael, by teaching and by example. This attitude instills the requisite humility which prevents the violation of halachic boundaries. Indeed, no man is above the law. © 2006 Rabbi M. Willig & TorahWeb.org

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Adapted by Ron Kleinman/Translated by Kaeren Fish

Take the sum of all the congregation of Bnei Yisrael..." (Bamidbar 1:2). Rashi explains: "Since they are so beloved to Him, He counts them all the time." Likewise, when the children of Israel are enumerated at the opening of Sefer Shemot, he comments: "To express their dearness, that they are compared to stars... as it is written, 'Who brings out their host by number, calling each by name.'" Thus, we may say that counting is undertaken out of love.

On the other hand, we find it written concerning David (Divrei Ha-yamim 21:1): "Satan stood against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." This census resulted in a catastrophic plague. Ramban (Bamidbar 1:2) explains that G-d was angry at David for

counting the nation needlessly, "only to bring joy to himself, that he ruled over a great many people."

Counting, then, raises a problem. We count things that are alike; hence, counting implies that each item is equal. People are not to be counted. Each person is unique.

It is written, "Each man by his banner, according to his otot" (Bamidbar 2:2). "Otot" refers to insignia, but literally it means also "letters;" hence the idea that each individual has his own letter in the Torah.

In his commentary to Mishlei (16:4), the Vilna Gaon explains that the task of the prophets among Am Yisrael was to instruct each person as to his unique path in Torah and in Divine service. Many different paths exist;

"Your commandments are exceedingly expansive" (Tehillim 119:96).

Nevertheless, Am Yisrael in the desert needed to be counted-an act emphasizing their common denominator. The very formation and start of the nation required its unification and consolidation.

I often refer to a teaching from the Yerushalmi Talmud, at the beginning of Massekhet Peah:

The generation of King David was entirely righteous, but because there were slander-mongers among them, they would go out to war and suffer casualties. This is what David means when he says (Tehillim 57), "My soul is among lions; I lie down among those who are aflame"-this refers to Avner and Amasa, Doeg and Achitofel, the people of Ke'ila, etc.

The generation of King Achav, on the other hand, was an idolatrous one. But since there were no slander-mongers among them, they went out to war and were victorious.

There is terrible hatred today between the various groups and sectors of our nation. Our era is like the era of David, with mutually hostile camps: the camp of Avner and the camp of Doeg, the camp of the people of Ke'ila, etc. Some time ago I had a conversation with someone close to Charedi circles, and he insisted that the hatred within each camp is greater than the hatred between them. They radiate hatred towards us, and we respond in kind. We will end up, heaven forefend, in a situation of Kamtza and Bar-Kamtza: a very great love for fellow Jews-but only those who are like us, people of our circle. Anyone who is not part of our camp should kindly keep to himself.

Rav Kook used to say that the Temple was destroyed because of baseless hatred, and it will be rebuilt only by virtue of baseless love.

We dare not close our eyes to what is going on around us. A person must react to his environment, but at the same time we must preserve and guard the unity of the nation, and avoid responding to hatred with more hatred. (*This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Bamidbar 5747 [1987].*)

RABBI LEVI COOPER

Sweet Torah Study

In hassidic communities, the formal education of children begins at the age of three. For boys, this is signified by the first haircut, leaving the youngster's peiyot (side locks) while cutting the rest of his hair. Some have the custom that girls begin to light a solitary candle on Friday eve from the age of three as a mark of their entry into the world of Jewish education. As children embark on the lifelong pursuit of Torah, their first official encounter with our texts and traditions is also customary at this auspicious age.

Yet the Torah that children study on this day does not involve books; there is no grappling with difficult texts, no exploring lofty ideas. Instead, children are offered an aleph-shaped cookie. As they successfully identify the Hebrew letter, it is then dipped in honey and the children joyfully partake of this sugary treat. Thus we bless our children that their Torah study should always be as sweet as honey.

Indeed, at this young age we aspire to provide appealing experiences for our children. We hope that their encounters with Torah are engaging and alluring. This is an approach we can all adapt and adopt - even if we are not of hassidic ilk.

Is this, however, the ideal for Jewish adult life? Do we seek sweetness whenever we delve into our texts?

One hassidic master felt that enjoying Torah study was not the ideal. Rabbi Yerahmiel Yisrael Yitzhak Danziger (1853-1910), from the town of Aleksandrow Lodzki, just outside the Polish city of Lodz, quotes his father, Rabbi Yehiel (d. 1894), as deploring those who seek pleasurable Torah study. True Torah research can only be accomplished through difficulty, toiling over texts while probing the depths of our traditions. Anything less is an act done for the pleasure of the individual, not out of devotion to the Almighty or commitment to our heritage.

Thus according to Rabbi Danziger, the honey-dipped letters are a childish experience that preferably should not be echoed in adulthood.

A contemporaneous Polish hassidic master, responding to this notion, decried the ideal of not enjoying Torah study. Rabbi Avraham Borenstein of Sochaczew (1839-1910) held that the epitome of Torah study is a pleasurable encounter with the tradition. He felt that it is only through such an idyllic experience that Torah can enter our bloodstream, becoming part of our essential nature and infusing us with life.

This notion - that the apex of Torah study is an enjoyable experience - seems to be based on the words of our sages that have been canonized in our daily prayers. In the talmudic discussion of the blessings over Torah study, one sage opines that the benediction should include the words: "Now sweeten,

Lord, our G-d, the words of Your Torah in our mouths and in the mouths of Your nation, the House of IsraelÉ" (B. Berachot 11b).

Beseeching G-d that what we are about to embark upon should be sweet is indeed unique. The fulfillment of no other mitzva is preceded with such a request. We pray, take the lulav, partake of matza and do so many mitzvot each day, but we never beseech G-d that the experience of prayer should be pleasant, that shaking the lulav should be pleasurable, that the matza should taste sweet! Why are we so concerned that the study of Torah should be enjoyable?

This request may give voice to the supreme place of Torah in Judaism. Torah is the soul of our people, and as such we hope that we can integrate it into our lives and absorb it in our bones without undue hardship. Distaste for a particular mitzva is a challenge that does not jeopardize the identity of our people; aversions to the life force of our nation - Torah - may be seen as spiritually life-threatening for the community.

This leads us to the other inimitable aspect of this blessing - the mention of future generations: "ÉAnd may we be - we, and our descendants, and the descendants of Your nation, the House of Israel, all of us - of those who know Your name and who engross themselves with your Torah."

We may wish that our children follow in our very footsteps, yet we know that as individuals they need to walk their own path. The desire for continuity focuses only on matters that reflect our essence. Just because our favorite color may be blue, we don't hope that our children will continue in our path by preferring this color; we have no hallowed tradition of revering the color blue and our preference for blue is not key to our being. Torah, however, is sine qua non for meaningful Jewish existence, and as such we pray that our children will also find the words of Torah sweet.

Thus the blessing before Torah study appears to support the notion that the encounter with our heritage should be a gratifying experience, as voiced by Rabbi Borenstein. How are we then to understand the position of Rabbi Danziger who maintained an ideal of non-enjoyable Torah study?

Perhaps we can read these two hassidic masters as presenting complementary concepts of the Torah encounter. Certainly the pinnacle is to enjoy the sweetness of Torah study; this ideal is embodied in the words of the sages and enshrined in our daily prayers. Temporal life and our human frailty, however, necessitate an awareness of an opposing reality. As our experience makes evident, not every passage in the Torah arouses our emotions and arrests our intellect. There are times when - despite our daily request for a divine sweetening of our Torah encounter - the text does not come alive and learning is a laborious chore that carries no joy.

It is at such gloomy junctures that the words of Rabbi Danziger offer encouragement: Today we may not be excited about Torah study, yet that exact feeling makes the experience all the more valuable!

Indeed, these contradictory philosophies are handy tools to carry in our satchel as we enter the beit midrash (study hall) with the prayer and the hope of enjoying our Torah study, but with the knowledge that at times this encounter may not be as sweet as a honey-coated cookie. © 2006 Rabbi L. Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The count of the people of Israel and the recording of the names of the leaders of its tribes, which forms the major part of this week's Torah reading, is especially poignant and bittersweet. We, the listeners to the parsha, know in advance that all those counted and named, with few exceptions, are doomed to die in the desert, never to reach the Land of Israel. The Torah also knows that. So why did the Torah bother to take up so much space in recording for us in detail all of these matters and names when at the end of the day they apparently serve no purpose in the development of the Jewish people and the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel?

As far as I am able to see, the major commentators to the Torah deal with this problem only in an oblique and indirect fashion. I am not presumptuous enough to tread here on ground that the greats of Israel in the past have apparently avoided. Yet, I think that there is here a great and important relevant message to us and to all generations of Jews. And that is that one should realize the tragedy of opportunity and inherent greatness squandered and brought to naught. Wasted potential is a tragic thing and in national affairs it is often the deciding weakness that dooms a people. The careful detailing of the numbers and names of the generation that died in the desert emphasizes to us the tragedy of what could have been and the failure to achieve that goal.

"Implicit in Judaism's idea of free will and free choice for human beings is the fact that the Lord presents us with opportunities..."

Implicit in Judaism's idea of free will and free choice for human beings is the fact that the Lord presents us with opportunities. In His omniscience, He is aware of what use man will make of those opportunities. But as Maimonides explains, G-d's foreknowledge of the results of our choices in no way influences or guides our abilities to make those choices as we wish. The generation of the desert did not have

to destroy itself with its wrong behavior and mistaken attitudes. It had the opportunity, because it was the dor deah - the generation of intellect and great potential - to build the Jewish state and people in a most positive fashion.

Its tragedy therefore lies not only in its behavior of folly but rather in its failure to exercise its potential in a positive manner. Heaven apparently measures us not only by who and what we are but also by who or what we could be. Opportunities squandered are much more painful and damaging than having no opportunities present at all. Our current State of Israel is a miraculous opportunity that has been extended to our generation. What we will make of this opportunity is the central question of current Jewish life and society. Hearing the names and numbers of the generation of the desert read to us this Shabat should sober us and make us realize that such an opportunity should not be frittered away because of lack of vision, faith and will. We can ill afford another generation of the desert. © 2006 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

At the end of the first census of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, it is written, "And the Levites according to their fathers' families were not counted among them" [Bamidbar 1:47]. This note is surprising, since immediately after this a command is given: "However, do not count the tribe of Levi and do not take a census of them among Bnei Yisrael" [1:49]. This implies that even before they were given a direct command, Bnei Yisrael refrained on their own initiative from counting the Levites (see Ramban). After the command is given, another description of the census appears, this time in the sequence of the camps within the nation, tribe by tribe. Once again the Torah emphasizes the same point, this time in a more structured way:

"The Levites were not counted among Bnei Yisrael, as G-d commanded Moshe" [2:33]. Since the command not to count the Levites appears before this verse, it is reasonable to note that Bnei Yisrael observed the command. But this only makes the question stronger: Why were the Levites not counted originally, in Chapter 1, even though no command had been given not to count them?

It seems likely that the two chapters are related to two different reasons for not counting the Levites. The first chapter places an emphasis on counting "all those in Yisrael who will join the army" [1:3]. Therefore, only the other twelve tribal leaders are mentioned, without the tribe of Levi, since the people of Levi were

not expected to be part of the army. There was no point in including them in a census whose purpose was to prepare the army for the entry into Eretz Yisrael. Thus, there was no need for a direct command not to include the Levites, and there was no formal prohibition to count them. At most, including the Levites would have been a useless act that might have led to confusion among the commanders of the army at a later date.

In contrast, the second description implies that the Levites are not counted not because of what they refrained from doing but rather because of their appointed task: "However, do not count the tribe of Levi and do not take a census of them among Bnei Yisrael. And you shall put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle and all of its utensils..." [1:49-50]. Throughout the passage, the special role of the Levites is emphasized again and again, using the root *peh-kuf-daled* (the same root used in chapter 1 for the word "to count"): "Aharon and his sons shall be appointed, and they shall guard over their priesthood" [3:10]; "The laws of the guards of sanctity" [3:32];

"And the laws of the guards of the family of Merari" [3:36]. Thus, it seems that because the Levites are in charge of the Tabernacle, they should not be included in a census of Bnei Yisrael. As noted by Rashi, "It is proper for the king's legions to be counted separately" [Bamidbar 1:49]. This is a direct prohibition to count the Levites among Bnei Yisrael, since counting them would have interfered with their special status.

Compensatory Discrimination

By Irit Halevi, Midreshet Noga, Negohot, Chevron Hills

An important feature of the plan of Bnei Yisrael's camp described in this week's Torah portion is the way the sons of Levi and the sons of Aharon are explicitly separated from the other tribes. The modern western-oriented reader who reads these passages may be forgiven for feeling at least some degree of unease. A person who is born into one of the other eleven tribes, not from Levi, is not allowed to approach the holiest site. Even one from the tribe of Levi who is not a descendent of Aharon cannot perform the holy service. Why, the modern reader will wonder, shouldn't there be an equal opportunity for all? Why shouldn't a member of the tribe of Naftali who wants to be close to the Almighty be allowed to enter the Divine sanctuary and perform the holy service? Is it right that the role of a person and his social status are established before he is even born? Is it by chance that this hierarchy guarantees that the members of a single family will always remain in charge of the Temple?

One of the cornerstones of the accepted liberal approach of modern times is that a person has a right to be treated with equality. According to this approach, inequality, if it exists, is always due to random factors and is not related to the inherent essence of the person. Inequality is bad, and any civilized society must

provide equal opportunities for everybody to achieve whatever somebody else can.

The prohibition of discrimination is an ancient Jewish principle (especially during a court case), but it is different in essence from the liberal interpretation of equality, which—no matter how unpopular this may seem—is foreign to the spirit of Judaism. As far as I am concerned, the Jewish concept is not at all ethically flawed. The assertion that there is an inherent difference between various groups of people and that one person may have an advantage over another in the very essence of his being does not imply any inferiority of the other person, as long as the attitude is based on truth and not on an arbitrary approach or self interest. There are several reasons for this: First, any advantage is a source of an obligation with respect to the community and not a reason for obtaining special benefits. The Kohanim in the Temple provide a perfect example of this principle. Second, being placed at the top of the social ladder does not automatically bring a person extra joy or happiness. A person of truth will find most satisfaction in life if he is in his appropriate position, whether it is royalty or working as a lowly water carrier. Third, the liberal principle of absolute equality is a denial of the true nature of man. There are real differences between groups, nations, and cultures. The elements that differentiate one man from another and one nation from another are part and parcel of the identity of each and every one of us. It is only natural that where there are differences, there will be some who have an advantage over others. Removing from the social lexicon the differences and the advantages that some have implies that everybody will be required to fit into the same bed, as in Sodom, insisting that any differences must be ignored in order to satisfy the demand for a feeling of equality.

Chag Samayach!



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