

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

I constantly marvel at the extent to which the Hebrew calendar educates - and never more subtly and strikingly than in the Megillah Scroll with which our spring festivals begin and the Megillah Scroll with which our spring festivals conclude: from Purim to Shavuot, from the Scroll of Esther to the Scroll of Ruth.

Purim falls out exactly four weeks before Passover and serves as a kind of introduction, or warm up, for the Festival of our freedom. Indeed, our Sages made sure to link Purim with Passover even in a leap year, when there are two months of Adar, and when logic would dictate that we ought celebrate Purim on Adar I, our first opportunity to do so; nevertheless, the Talmudic ruling insists that the Purim Festival be established on Adar II, so that the holiday of the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar always be celebrated just one month before the Passover holiday of the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Nissan.

Passover is in turn linked by the counting of the Omer to its concluding Festival of Shavuot, seven weeks later; the Talmudic Sages even refer to Shavuot as Atzeret, or the Closing Holiday (paralleling Shemini Atzeret, the Eighth Day which concludes the fall festival of Succot). And while Passover only celebrates the very first burgeoning expressions of our freedom, when we left Egyptian slave-labor and suffering but only got as far as a hostile and homeless desert, Shavuot marks the Festival of the first fruits brought by the Israelites who have not only reached their Israeli homeland but have also established their Holy Temple in Jerusalem!

Remarkably enough, the holidays of this spring period are sandwiched between the public readings of two of our five Biblical Scrolls (Megillot) each of which features a heroic woman as its main personality: Purim is marked by the reading of the Scroll of Esther and Shavuot by the reading of the Scroll of Ruth. And just as Passover moves from the description of a nation still smarting from slavery and only tasting the beginning of a mere desert freedom to the far more satisfying Shavuot realization of home and hearth, State and Sanctuary, the Purim (pre-Passover) Esther Scroll centers upon Jews in vulnerable galut (exile) and inexorably leads into the culminating Shavuot Scroll of Ruth, with its majestic reach for messianic geulah (redemption). A study of the contrasts and comparisons

between these two feminist - featuring Scrolls from galut to geulah will clearly elucidate the upward march of our calenderical journey, which clearly points us in an Eastward direction to Zion.

First of all, the entire story of the Scroll of Esther takes place in Persia, and opens with an exquisitely detailed description of the Dining Hall of the Persian King in Shushan. (Esther 1:6). The Scroll of Ruth, on the other hand, opens in Bethlehem, Israel - and although the rest of that chapter takes place in Moab, the succeeding three chapters of the Book all take place in Israel, in Bethlehem and Efrat. It is even fascinating to note that ten years of life in Moab are described in that first chapter, whereas it takes the next three chapters to detail the crucial events in Israel of only three months duration: from the beginning of the barley harvest to the end of the wheat harvest. These three months prepare the stage for Jewish eternity!

Secondly, according to the Midrash (B.T. Megillah 11a), the Scroll of Esther describes Jews who have the opportunity to return to Judea but opt to remain in the "diaspora;" Ahasveros was King of Persia immediately following Cyrus - who conquered Babylon and permitted the Jews who were exiled there to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple. Esther even has had her name changed from the Hebrew "Hadassah" to the more Persian "Esther" (probably from the Persian word for star, and the Persian Goddess Astarte). In the Scroll of Ruth, however, the text makes fairly short shift of the sons of Elimelekh, who leave Bethlehem (Lit. House of Bread) for the falsely glittering fields of Moab (lit. "from father," a reminder of a Biblical act of incest between Lot and his daughter); their names, Makhlon (illness) and Kilyon (destruction) succinctly sum up their galut experience of assimilation and intermarriage. The remaining three quarters of the Book tell of Naomi's return to her homeland, and of the triumph she eventually experiences there as the "ancestor" of the Messiah David. The Scroll of Ruth describes Jews who leave exile for return to Israel.

Thirdly, the Scroll of Esther tells the story of a Jewess in exile who is forced to forsake the home of her relative Mordecai (cousin, uncle, nephew, husband?) and live with a Gentile King in order to save her people; moreover, the salvation she achieves is only temporary, with the Talmud ruling that we don't even recite Hallel on Purim since we still remained

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slaves of Ahasveros even after Haman's demise (B.T. Megillah 14). The Scroll of Ruth on the other hand, tells the story of a Gentile Moabite who becomes a Jewess - by - choice, journeys to Israel to live with her Jewish mother-in-law, and enters the royal family of Judah when she marries Boaz; moreover, she becomes the progenitrix of ultimate Jewish salvation through the eventual descendant of her great - grandson, David.

Finally, the manner in which we celebrate Purim is by drinking until "we can no longer distinguish between praising Mordecai and cursing Haman," perhaps because it was the arch anti-Semite Amalekite Haman who forcibly reminded the assimilating Jews of Persia that they were after all - Jews; nevertheless, such raucous celebration is certainly not identified with the way in which our Sages generally asked us to celebrate. Shavuot, however, is celebrated by our bringing first fruits to the Temple and singing praises to G-d. Apparently true Jewish piety, Jewish future and eternal Jewish salvation can only come out of Zion!

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#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

**“T**orah is acquired through 48 things" (Avos 6:6). The 48th requirement necessary before one can "acquire" Torah is attributing the original source whenever an idea or thought is said.

The Mishnah continues by telling us that "we can learn from this that saying something in the name of the one who [originally] said it brings redemption to the world." How the fact that properly attributing things is required before Torah is "acquired" shows that doing so brings redemption, however, is not explained in the Mishnah. What connection is there between quoting the source and being redeemed? And how can we learn this from it being one of the 48 things needed in order to acquire Torah?

Various reasons are given why quoting the original source is so vital. The most obvious, given by many commentators (please forgive me for not quoting all of them by name; the Tiferes Yisroel is one of them), is because saying something without proper attribution has an element of theft, as it is being presented as if it one's own original thought. Other reasons are given as well, some of which address our issue.

Pirkay Moshe says that quoting those of a lesser stature encourages them (and other lay people) to learn Torah too, as it shows them that their learning has value. Additionally, the possibility of being quoted by respected scholars provides motivation to study further. Since Torah study is the "redemption" of the soul/intellect, freeing it from its mundane surroundings, encouraging others to study Torah brings "redemption." While this explains the connection between redemption and quoting the source, it doesn't explain how the latter being one of the 48 ways teaches us this.

The Abarbanel and Rabbi Avraham Pritzul point out that "redemption" often refers to returning something to its owner, such as when a poor person sells his property and a wealthy relative "redeems it" by purchasing it from the buyer. Here too, by including who it was that taught something, the teaching is "returned" to its rightful owner. This also explains its connection to "redemption," but does not explain how we know this from the fact that proper attribution is one of the 48 things needed to acquire Torah.

Others (such as the commentary attributed to Rashi printed with the Maharal) retranslate "ha lamadeta" from "this teaches you" (its usual meaning) to "for you have learned." Therefore, instead of inclusion in the 48 things being the "proof" that proper attribution brings redemption, our having previously known that it brings redemption becomes an explanation as to why it is one of the 48 things (i.e. "proper attribution is one of the 48 things because, as you already know, it brings redemption to the world"). Aside from the awkwardness of this "retranslation," we are still left wondering why its bringing redemption qualifies it as being necessary to acquire Torah.

The Kabbalists teach us that "Israel, the Holy One, blessed is He, and the Torah are one." The inseparability of G-d and the Torah was one of the reasons necessitating the building of the Mishkan, so that the Divine Presence can be near the Torah, which had just been given to Israel (see Shemos Rabbah 33:1). It is for this reason that whenever someone learns Torah, the Shechina (Divine Presence) descends (see Avos 3:6).

While the Shechina is "with" a person learning Torah, if someone has accomplished the 48 things necessary to acquire Torah, the Shechina resides "within" that person. He becomes like a "walking Sefer Torah," accompanied by G-d at all times. (Obviously, if he loses any of the 48 things, even temporarily, this level is lost until he re-masters all 48.)

Although "redemption" can refer to returning something to its rightful owner, the "complete redemption" (ge'ulah shelaima) refers to the Shechina returning to Israel, i.e. resting on the entire nation. Learning Torah, which causes the Shechina to be with those who are learning, is like a "mini-redemption," while acquiring Torah is a fuller redemption (bringing

the Shechina to the circle of people that associate with the one within whom the Shechina resides), even if its not a complete redemption (since its not with the nation as a whole).

This can be seen from the wording towards the very end of Maseches Kallah: "Whomever says something in the name of a scholar that he never (really) said causes the Shechina to depart from Israel, [while] whomever attributes something to the person who (actually) said it brings redemption to the world." In other words, the flip side of bringing redemption is causing the Shechina to leave, and redemption must mean (or at least include) bringing the Shechina closer.

It can therefore be suggested that the Mishnah is telling us that we know that attributing something to its source is one of the 48 things necessary to bring the Shechina (which is accomplished by acquiring Torah) because we have already learned that it brings redemption to the world.

While all 48 things are necessary in order to acquire Torah, it would seem that the order in which they are reached is not; as long as a person accomplishes these 48 things, he "acquires Torah." Nevertheless, when the list of 48 things was compiled, it makes sense that they would be listed in the order recommended that they be accomplished. If attributing things to their original source is listed as the 48th and last thing to attain in order to "acquire Torah," it must usually be the last step before the Torah is acquired, before the Shechina starts to dwell within that person. Based on the fact that it is specifically attributing things to their original source that brings about this redemption, we can learn that quoting the person who said something brings redemption to the world. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### MACHON ZOMET

### **Shabbat B'Shabbato**

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

**T**his week's Torah portion describes the sequence of dismantling the Tabernacle before a journey in the desert, including covering various utensils with cloth. But one very surprising detail appears in the description of covering the Ark. "And they shall cover it with a cover made of leather from the hide of a 'Tachash,' and they shall spread out a garment made completely of techeilet, and they shall put its rods in place" [Bamidbar 4:6]. That is, after the Ark is covered with various types of cloth, the rods are to be put into the rings, as is done with the other utensils. "A cloth of techeilet shall be spread out over the Table... And they shall cover it with leather from the hide of a 'Tachash,' and put its rods in place" [4:7-8]; "And over the Golden Altar they should spread a cloth of techeilet and cover it with leather from the hide of a 'Tachash,' and put its rods in place" [4:11], among others. However, this seems to be in direct conflict with what is written earlier

in the Torah: "The rods shall be in the rings of the Ark, they shall not be removed" [Shemot 25:15]. This means that the rods remained in the rings of the Ark permanently and are not only put there when preparing for a journey.

Different approaches have been suggested to solve the problem of this contradiction. Ibn Ezra and the Ramban explain that the verse about the Ark does not refer to placing the rods into the rings but rather to putting the rods on the shoulders of those who carry it. Perhaps this is hinted in the slightly different wording. The preposition "et" appears in all the other verses, but not in the verse about the Ark. Ibn Ezra also proposes a different solution: that the rods were removed before the Ark was covered, and only after the covers were in place were the rods returned to the rings. Other commentators have proposed different explanations.

The straightforward interpretation of the verse indeed implies that the rods were put in place only during a journey. Thus, the two passages, in Shemot and Bamidbar, refer to two different viewpoints of the role of the rods. In this week's portion, the rods are viewed as having a functional purpose? to carry the holy utensils? which means that it is not necessary for them to be in the rings while the Ark is at rest. In Shemot, the fact that the rods remain in the Ark all the time is emphasized, as we have discussed in the past, in order to show that the situation is temporary, and that the revelation of the Shechina is not linked to a specific geographic site but rather to wherever the Ark is at a given moment. That is, the rods signify the fact that the Ark will move from its position, until it finally arrives at its permanent place in the Temple (see Radak on Melachim I 8:8). This explains why the command to leave the rods in place is linked to the Ark, which is the symbol of the presence of the Shechina, and not to other utensils.

According to Chizkuni, there were four rods. Two were kept permanently in the rings, and two were not permanent. From the conceptual point of view, this is a practical and symbolic solution. The permanent rods are symbols of the temporary position of the Ark, while the movable ones signify the practical aspect, that they are used to carry the Ark during a journey.

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**his week's portion contains a counting of the Jewish people. Nachmanides offers several ideas to explain the reason for such a census. Each reason has a deep message.

First, the census expresses G-d's mercy. When Yaakov (Jacob) came to Egypt he brought with him only seventy souls. Now, thanks to G-d's strong and compassionate hand in Egypt, the Jews were a stronger nation as they prepared to enter the land of Israel in large numbers.

The message: one should not take G-d's gifts for granted. Proper thanks is due the Almighty for the existence, growth and success of the people of Israel. The census was a way of saying "todah rabbah" to G-d.

Nachmanides also explains that each person received a special merit by virtue of being counted separately. Every single person, no matter their status in society, had to pass by the leaders, by Moshe (Moses) and Ahron (Aaron) and be counted. They set their eyes upon each person as an individual.

The message: in most countries-like here in the US-when a census is taken, there is a great danger that the very people who the census is supposed to benefit, become mere numbers. As individuals, their names are secondary. In the Torah census, the accent is on every persona, showing us that each is created as unique and irreplaceable images of G-d.

Finally, since the Jews were preparing to enter the land of Israel, the count was necessary. It was important to find out how many soldiers were available for pending war. Invariably, before wartime the Bible almost always tells us that a census was taken.

The message: while G-d is always there to help, no individual or nation should rely on miracles. As humans, we must do what we can in order to help ourselves. In this case, proper preparation was necessary before entering Israel.

These three views actually interface. A comment made by S. Y. Agnon illustrates the point: Once a king reviewed his returning soldiers who had been victorious in battle. He was ecstatic and joyous upon their valiant return. But G-d is not like this type of king. G-d, the King of Kings, when reviewing the returnees, understands that they are not necessarily those who left with the same battalion. Individuals were killed in the war and they, unfortunately, would not be coming back. Here we have the co-mingling of the three opinions offered by Nachmanides. When going to war, each soldier must be viewed as a person with endless value. Upon returning safely, all returnees ought give thanks to the Lord.

These are important ideas worth remembering especially when considering current events. Too often it is tragically the case that an Israeli soldier is struck down and, we in the Diaspora don't know, or having become so accustomed to these losses, fail to reflect on the tragedy. Those murdered become a mere number and we fail to feel the pain of the bereaved families and friends.

It should not be this way. The loss of a soldier killed defending the land and people of Israel is a deep loss not only for his family and friends, but for all Jewish people. Similarly, the loss of any of our sisters and brothers who are victims of terror.

May we be spared such losses. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open

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#### **RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF**

### **Sfas Emes**

Let's work with the last paragraph on the first page of the Bemidbar Sfas Emes, That paragraph begins: "R. Meir omeir: 'Kohl ha'oseik baTorah lishma...' " (ArtScroll: "Whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake...").

What, exactly, is "Torah lishma?" ArtScroll's translation, just quoted, is the mainline pshat. But we should be aware that great debates have swirled around this question. Thus, for example, a major theme of R. Chayim Volozhiner's sefer Nefesh Hachayim is clarifying what is "Torah lishma" (and what is not!)

The Sfas Emes begins with a definition that looks simple. "Torah lishma", says the Sfas Emes, is exactly what its sheim (name) indicates. The word "Torah" means instruction. Hence, "Torah lishma" means learning to provide instruction; that is, learning in order to know how to live one's life.

Note how far we have come from the mainline pshat of "Torah for its own sake". And the Sfas Emes immediately adds new ingredients making for a much richer dish. He quickly dispels any notion that intellectuality per se is part of the story. On the contrary, as the Sfas Emes told us last week (Bechukosai, 5632), our objective in learning Torah should not be "lei'da"-to acquire knowledge-and/or "le'hasig "-to make intellectual achievements. Rather, our goal in learning Torah should be to subordinate our personal intellect, so that we can know and follow retzon HaShem (the will of HaShem).

(It would be a mistake to conclude from the preceding sentences that the Sfas Emes was anti-intellectual. He was so involved in intellectual activity that he completed his chidushim on Shas before he was 25 years old. And thereafter, when he became Gerrer Rebbe, his ma'amarim always conveyed deep thought.)

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another topic. This parsha-and the Sefer that it begins-are called: "Bemidbar"; that is, "in the desert". Accordingly, the Sfas Emes focuses on the meaning of the key word: "midbar"-to see what additional information it may contain. First, he alludes to two Medrashim in Medrash Rabba which work with the word "midbar". These Medrashim resonate with the word "midbar" in other contexts. Conceivably, they may provide additional information on the word "midbar" in the present context.

One Medrash (Medrash Rabba, Bemidbar, 1:7) tells us that to progress in the study of Torah, a person must de-emphasize his ego. That is, he must consider himself "hefkair"-accessible to all claimants-like the midbar, the desert. A second Medrash (in Medrash Rabba, 1:2) cites the midbar as the place where Bnei

Yisroel welcomed HaShem's Presence. The Sfas Emes then gives us his own non-pshat on "midbar." We know the shoresh (root) DBR in leshon hakodesh means "to speak". The Sfas Emes points to another meaning of that root: namely, "to lead". So far, the Sfas Emes is on solid, non-controversial etymological ground. He then proceeds to more allusive territory. If DBR means "to lead", he finds it plausible to read MDBR as an Aramaic passive form; i.e., "to be led". Thus, Bnei Yisroel in the midbar on their way to Eretz Yisroel conducted themselves as people who had given themselves over totally to HaShem's leadership. Similarly we, in traversing segments of our lives that may resemble a midbar, should try to live in accordance with HaShem's will. This perspective follows directly from the Sfas Emes's reading of "midbar" as "being led."

The Sfas Emes offers us a simile, from Yeshayahu (10, 15) to help us achieve this new self-image. He suggests that we view ourselves "ka'garzen be'yad he'chozhev" ("as the axe in the hand of the wood-cutter". This simile should sound familiar. We encounter it in one of the piyutim on the night of Kol Nidrei). There is a great paradox/challenge here. For this subordination of our will to retzon HaShem itself requires a strong act of volition on our part.

The Sfas Emes concludes this paragraph of his text by calling up another pasuk in Yeshayahu (43:7): "Kohl ha'nikra bi'shemi ve'lichvodi berasiv". ("Everyone who is called by My Name and whom I have created for My glory... ") But wait! The pasuk just quoted contains the word "shemi". That word rings a bell. Earlier in this ma'amar, we saw a word from the same root (sheim), when the Sfas Emes was discussing "Torah li'shma." So, with his artful crafting of the ma'amar, the Sfas Emes is telling us his concluding thoughts on this subject. "Torah Li'shma", says the Sfas Emes, means: that we live our lives in a way that redounds to HaShem's glory! © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

#### **DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## **What's Bothering Rashi?**

**T**he Book of Bamidbar (Numbers) begins with G-d's command to Moses to count the Children of Israel. Each of the Twelve Tribes had a leader-Prince-who would be in charge of the census of his tribe. After the names of these princes are enumerated, we find the following sentence: "And Moses and Aaron took these men who were designated by name." (Numbers 1:17)

"These men"-Rashi: "These twelve princes."

"Who were designated"-Rashi: "Here, by [their] names."

These Rashi comments have puzzled all the commentators. What has he added, they ask, to our understanding of the verse by his comments? What he says, we already know from the verse itself. Certainly Rashi wouldn't waste ink to repeat in his own words

what the Torah itself tells us. Can you think of an answer that explains the necessity of these comments?

If you don't have an answer yet, let me show you what some of the major commentators suggest as the reason for Rashi's comments.

The Mizrahi (the most famous of Rashi commentators) says: "The verse ordinarily should have used a pronoun and said 'And Moses and Aaron took THEM...' But since it went out of its way to elaborate and say 'these men who were designated by name' we might have mistakenly thought that these were some other men than those mentioned in the previous list. Therefore Rashi comes to set us straight; he tells us that in fact these are the very same men referred to above." But this answer is problematic. Why would you say it is problematic?

A Problem: First of all, maybe they are different men! How does Rashi know they are not? Rashi's sole source of information is the words of the Torah unless he cites a Midrash. Here he doesn't cite a Midrash, so he knows what he knows from the Torah itself. How does he know that these are not different men? And if we insist that they are the same men, then why did the Torah use all these extra words?! They tell us nothing more than the single word "them" would have told us. This question seriously weakens the validity of the Mizrahi's answer.

The Gur Aryeh (this is the Maharal of Prague) offers his answer: The words "these men" makes them sound like ordinary men. But they were of a higher stature, they were princes. Therefore Rashi changes the wording by saying "these twelve PRINCES." But there are problems with this answer as well. What?

Some Problems: Again we ask: So why did the Torah refer them as "men" and not as princes, as the Maharal thinks they should be called? It wouldn't make sense to think that Rashi knows better than the Torah itself!

Another problem is that Rashi himself says (Numbers 13:3), when the Torah calls the spies "anashim" ("men"), that the term "anashim" always means important people, not ordinary people. And here the Torah refers to these men as "anashim." So the Gur Aryeh's answer is twice weakened!

Another early commentator, the Mesiach Illmim, offers the following strange answer: Since the names of the princes include the father's name, like Nachshon son of Aminadav, I might have thought these are two different people (Nachshon AND Aminadav) and that there were in fact 24 (!) men. Therefore, Rashi's comment is meant to straighten us out by saying "these TWELVE princes."

The problem here should be obvious: No one would ever make such a mistake. Therefore Rashi does not need to tell us there are only 12 and not 24 men here, I understand that on my own.

Why then does Rashi make this comment? This is a real brainteaser. Can you think of an answer? Hint: See Rashi on Exodus 28:10.

The previous time, before this verse, where the Torah refers to the princes of the tribes is in Exodus 35:27 There it says that the princes brought the stones for the ephod and the choshen mishpat (the High Priest's breastplate). In them were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes.

We gave a hint above to look at Rashi's comment on Exodus 28:10. There Rashi tells us who the twelve tribes were whose names were inscribed in the stones in the High Priest's ephod. He names them. Did you notice a difference between those twelve tribes and the twelve tribes listed here?

Of course you did. (Right?) On the stones of the ephod the tribe of Levi was included while the tribes of Ephraim and Menashe were excluded. We can reasonably assume that the princes who brought these stones were the princes of these twelve tribes. So, it turns out that the twelve princes enumerated here in Bamidbar were not the same princes referred to earlier. That is Rashi's point. He is stressing that these men, THESE PRINCES, and not those princes in Exodus. Therefore the Torah does not say just "Moses...took them" as we would have expected, but it rather states explicitly "These men who were designated by name." Because these princes are designated by name while those in Exodus were never designated by name (Rashi just tells which tribes they came from).

The Torah itself here (not just Rashi) stresses "These men" because this is the first time that Menashe and Ephraim take their place among the twelve tribes. This necessarily must push one tribe out (because there can only be a total of twelve tribes). Levi is the tribe excluded as the Torah itself stresses and repeats three different times in this chapter. See 1:47: "But the Levites...were not numbered among them." Again in verse 1:49; and again in verse 2:33.

We now understand why the Torah stressed that Moses and Aaron took "These men" because these men were never before considered princes. And these twelve tribes (which included Menashe and Ephraim and excluded Levi) were never before considered the twelve tribes.

And this is what Rashi is clarifying for us. This I believe is the point of Rashi's enigmatic comment.  
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### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah reveals Hashem's indescribable love for His people. The prophet Hosheia opens with warm words of blessing and says, "The Jewish people will be likened to the sand of the sea that cannot be measured or counted." Hosheia digresses then and says, "And in place of not being

recognized as My nation, they will be regarded as 'the sons of Hashem.'" This passage indicates that, prior to this prophecy, they experienced serious rejection. In truth, the preceding chapter reveals that they temporarily forfeited their prominent status of Hashem's people. Scriptures state, "Declare them no longer My nation because they are not Mine and I am not theirs" (1:9) Yet, one passage later we find Hashem blessing His people in an unlimited capacity conveying upon them the elevated status of "sons of Hashem." We are amazed by this sudden, drastic change of attitude from total rejection to full acceptance in an unparalleled way. What brought about this change and what can we learn from it?

Chazal address these questions and answer with the following analogy. A king was enraged by his wife's atrocious behavior and immediately summoned a scribe to prepare her divorce document. He calmed down, shortly thereafter, and decided not to carry out his original plan. However, he faced a serious dilemma because he was unwilling to cancel the scribe and reveal his drastic change of heart. He finally resolved his problem and ordered the scribe to rewrite his marriage contract doubling its previous financial commitment. Chazal conclude that the same was true of Hashem. After instructing Hosheia to deliver sharp words of reprimand Hashem retracted them. However, instead of canceling the initial prophecy Hashem tempered it with warm words of blessing. These words were so uplifting that they reflected the Jewish people in a newly gained status of "sons of Hashem". (Sifrei, Parshas Balak)

We can attempt to uncover Chazal's hidden lesson in the following manner. When studying the analogy of the king and his wife we sense the king's deep affection for her. Although he was angered to the point of total rejection this anger was short-lived. He was appeased within moments and his true affection immediately surfaced. In order to compensate for his initial rash response, he strengthened his relationship with her by doubling his expression of affection. The queen undoubtedly understood her husband's compassionate response to her outrageous behavior. Instead of totally rejecting her he actually increased his commitment to her. She sensed this as his way of securing their relationship even after her previous conduct. This unbelievably kind response evoked similar feelings from her and she reciprocated with her fullest expression of appreciation to him.

This analogy reveals Hashem's deep love and affection for His people. The Jewish people in Hosheia's times severely strayed from Hashem's will and engaged themselves in atrocious idolatrous practices. Hashem's was enraged by their behavior and summoned the prophet Hosheia to serve them their rejection papers. This severe response elicited Hashem's counter response of unlimited compassion

for them and He immediately retracted His harsh decree. However, Hashem did not stop there but saw it appropriate to intensify His relationship with His cherished people. He therefore elevated them from their previous status of merely His people to the highly coveted status of His children.

We now understand Chazal's message to us. Hashem was sincerely angered by the Jewish people's conduct and sent Hosheia to reject them. Yet, even this angry response could not interfere with Hashem's boundless love for His people and He immediately retracted His harsh words. The Jewish people however, needed to understand the severity of their actions. Hashem therefore instructed Hosheia to reveal the entire story, their intended rejection and ultimate acceptance. Hosheia's prophecy served its purpose well and the Jewish people sensed Hashem's boundless love for them. Although their actions called for total rejection Hashem's compassion for them would not allow this. Instead of rejecting them Hashem actually increased His display of affection towards them. This undoubtedly evoked their reciprocal response which ultimately produced their side of their newly gained status of "sons of Hashem". They previously enjoyed the status of Hashem's people but after this they would be known as His cherished children.

We find a parallel to the above in this week's sedra which describes the Jewish nation's encampment. They were previously stationed at the foot of Mount Sinai for nearly a year. During that time they developed a special relationship with Hashem receiving His Torah and witnessed many revelations. This intimate bond, however, was interrupted by their inexcusable plunge into idolatry. Hashem was enraged by their atrocious behavior and immediately summoned Moshe Rabbeinu to deliver their rejection papers. Hashem informed His loyal prophet of His intention and Moshe Rabbeinu pleaded on their behalf. Moshe subsequently sensitized the people to their severe wrongdoing and they returned from their shameful inappropriate path. Hashem accepted their repentance and reclaimed His nation. But Hashem's compassion extended far beyond forgiveness and He therefore consented to dwell amongst them resting His Divine Presence in the Mishkan.

In our sedra we discover that even the Mishkan was insufficient expression of Hashem's love for His people. He therefore acquiesced in their request and permitted them to camp around the Holy Ark and encircle His Divine Presence. This special opportunity created an incredible feeling of affection, tantamount to embracing Hashem Himself. Indeed Shlomo Hamelech refers to this unbelievable experience of intimacy in the following terms, "And His flag was for me an expression of love". (Shir Hashirim 2:4) Although Hashem initially rejected His people this did not interfere with His

boundless love for them. After rededicated themselves to Him they deserved all of His warmth and affection, even the sensation of embracement itself.

We learn from this the unbelievable love Hashem possesses for His people and that even during moments of rejection Hashem's true affection for us is never effected. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**

## You Can Be a Kohein and a King

**“V**’atem tihyu Li mamleches kohaim-and you should be for me a kingdom of kohanim." As a prerequisite to receiving the Torah, the Jewish people are commanded to become a kingdom of kohanim. This obligation is difficult to comprehend, since only a select group of individuals were chosen to be kohanim. Before the cheit haeigal this group was comprised of the first born, and afterwards the leviim, and specifically the descendants of Aharon, took their place. How, then, could the entire Jewish people be called upon to be kohanim?

A similar problem exists with the word "mamleches-kingdom". This term refers to royalty, yet the realm of royalty is reserved for the tribe of Yehuda and specifically the descendants of Dovid Hamelech. How can the entire Jewish people be called upon to be kings when most of us are excluded from this role?

Upon further examination, we see that the kohein and the melech have dual roles. While our immediate association with being a kohein is serving in the Beis Hamikdash, each kohein served in the Beis Hamikdash for only a few days a year. The system of mishmaros which divided the kohanim into different groups and enabled each kohein to have a chance to serve in the Beis Hamikdash also limited each individual kohein to a small amount of time per year to actually offer korbanos. What else was the kohein expected to do during the year? When the Torah describes the talmedei chachamim who sat on the highest court, the beis din hagadol, it refers to them as kohanim, leviim v'shoftim. Even a yisroel can be part of the beis din hagadol, yet many of the greatest Torah leaders were kohanim and leviim. Furthermore, the navi Malachi describes in detail the kohein as the model teacher of Torah. Free from the responsibilities associated with owning land, the kohanim were expected to devote themselves to becoming the talmidei chachamim and teachers of the entire Jewish people.

Just as a kohein had a dual leadership role, so too did the melech. While the melech was the political and military leader, this was only one dimension of his leadership. The melech was also commanded to carry the sefer Torah with him constantly, thereby showing that the ultimate authority is Hashem and His word.

Additionally, not only did the melech personally study the Torah, but he was charged with teaching the entire Jewish people its message. Every seven years during hakheil when the Jewish people as a whole learned Torah together in the Beis Hamikdash, it was the melech who was given the privilege to read from the Torah publicly.

The Rambam (Hil. Talmud Torah) elaborates on the three crowns that were presented to the Jewish people, i.e. the crowns of kehuna, malchus, and Torah. In contrast to the crowns of kehuna and malchus that were bestowed upon particular families, the crown of Torah was given to anyone who wants to acquire it through hard work and dedication to its study. However, the crown of Torah is not entirely distinct from the other two crowns. The crown of kehuna is made up not only of offering korbanos, but also of teaching Torah. Similarly, both the military and political leadership of the Jewish people as well as the communal teaching of Torah are included in the crown of malchus. Each and every Jew can become a partial kohein and melech, since the dimension of Torah study and teaching that is such an integral part of kehuna and malchus doesn't depend on genealogy.

As we approach zman mattan Toraseinu it is incumbent upon all of us to rededicate ourselves to our role of being a mamleches kohanim. Whether we are kohanim and melachim, i.e. formal teachers of Torah, or have followed any other calling in life, we are each required to respond to the call of mamleches kohanim. Let us each become, each in our own way, a proud member of the mamleches kohanim. By reaffirming our commitment to the Torah ideals of kehuna and malchus, may we merit to see the kohanim and the malchus beis Dovid teaching us the Torah in the Beis Hamikdash, bimeheira biyameinu. © 2007 The TorahWeb Foundation, all rights reserved

### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## **Wein Online**

**T**he Chumash of Bamidbar is devoted to the narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel during their forty-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai. However, the Torah's narrative of any event or historical happening is never restricted to dry facts alone. In its nuanced phrasing the Torah comes to reveal to us the human factors and the psychological and spiritual import of these events.

The Torah is not intended to be a history book and to view it as such will only raise problems of text and misunderstanding of message. It is rather the book of humankind, of its achievements and foibles, its grandeur and pettiness, its great capacity to do good and to be evil. Thus the entire narrative here in Bamidbar has to be seen in this light. The Torah is going to tell us the story of people and not just of events.

Therefore the book of Bamidbar is full of character sketches and descriptions of people who by their actions changed the course of Jewish history, not only in the desert of Sinai but for all times as well. Those who complained about the manna, the overriding ambition of Korach, the selfishness and timidity of the ten spies who were sent by Moshe and the contradistinction in attitude with their colleagues, Yehoshua and Calev, the love of the Land of Israel exhibited by the five daughters of Zlafachad, all of these - the analyses of people and their attitudes and motivations - are on display here in this book of Bamidbar. It is therefore no exaggeration to state that the book of Bamidbar ranks with the Chumash Bereshith in describing and teaching us about human beings and their individual but somehow common natures.

I think that this insight into the Chumash Bamidbar explains the often discussed issue of why this Chumash should begin with names of people and of the count of the tribes and the general population of Israel. The Torah, so to speak, is preparing us for the analysis of people and human characteristics that make up the bulk of this book. People have names, are part of a larger society and are distinct individuals. Not to recognize this basic fact of human existence will prevent anyone from having any meaningful understanding of the narrative of Chumash Bamidbar.

The commentators to Chumash point out that some of the tragedies of Chumash Bamidbar were indirectly caused by Moshe's overoptimistic assessment of human beings and their behavior. The great men named in this week's parsha - the beginning of the book of Bamidbar - are in the main no longer there at the end of the book. Positions of power take their toll on their holders.

The names therefore are recorded for us as an example of the pitfalls of power and office. By expecting people to be people and not saints and angels, great errors of judgment and policy can be avoided or at least mitigated. The desert was a harsh learning place for the Jewish people. If its lessons were truly absorbed and translated into Jewish individual and public life, then the experience will have proven to be of eternal value.

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