

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

On the first day of the Mishkan's full operations, Rosh Chodesh Nisan 2449 (see Rashi on Bamidbar 7:1), the Nesi'im (heads of each Tribe) brought "offerings" for its consecration. These included six wagons, and 12 oxen to pull them (7:3). Since the Mishkan was so heavy, especially the gold-covered beams ("kerashim") and their silver bases ("adanim"), the wagons made it much easier for the Levi'im to transport the Mishkan from place to place. Yet, Moshe refused to accept this gift from the Nesi'im until G-d gave His approval (see Rashi on 7:3), telling Moshe to "take it from them" (7:5). Why was Moshe hesitant to accept such a thoughtful and useful gift?

The Sefornu says that Moshe thought that just as the actual vessels (such as the ark and the menorah) had to be carried on the shoulders of the Levi'im (see 7:9), so too should all of the Mishkan be carried on their shoulders (see also Or Hachayim). G-d therefore had to tell Moshe that it was okay for the rest of the Mishkan to be transported by wagon, rather than being carried.

The Chizkuni (7:5) is of the opinion that 12 oxen were not enough to pull the weight of all of the material of the Mishkan; included in G-d's instructions to Moshe was permission to add as many as were needed. It can be suggested that Moshe was hesitant to accept these gifts because it would create additional expenses. Was it okay to place an additional financial burden on others just because the Nesi'im wanted to make things easier for the Levi'im? G-d hadn't asked for wagons (or oxen) to be donated, perhaps because He didn't want to include them in the donation for the Mishkan itself, or perhaps because He didn't want to create the additional expense. Even if the Nesi'im were covering the bulk of this expense, accepting their gift meant that others would have to cover the rest. Moshe may have been unsure whether or not this was appropriate. (See Bamidbar Rabbah 12:18, which says that Moshe was afraid that a wagon might break, or one of the animals might die. This would be an additional expense created by accepting the Nesi'im's gift.)

The types of activities prohibited on Shabbos are learned from the Mishkan; any activity necessary to put the Mishkan together is forbidden (Shabbos 49b). Included in the 39 categories of forbidden "work" is

"carrying," i.e. transporting something from one place to another. The Talmud (ibid) tells us that this occurred in the Mishkan when the beams were loaded onto the wagons (from the desert floor, which was a public domain, onto the wagon, which is a private domain) and unloaded (from the wagons to the desert floor). Similarly, transferring from one private domain to another private domain via a public domain is learned from the transferring of beams from wagon to wagon, passing over the desert floor that was between them (Shabbos 96a). According to the Rabanan, since the beams weren't "tossed" from wagon to wagon, only "stretched" from one to the other, only the latter is biblically prohibited. We also find that there are different classifications of prohibited activities, with the Talmud (ibid, 96b) telling us that things that actually took place in the Mishkan are called "avos" (fathers), while those that weren't (yet are similar) are called "toldos" (children).

Observing Shabbos was required way before the Mishkan was commanded (see Rashi on Shemos 15:25), and the Talmud (Shabbos 96b) tells us that the nation was told not to carry from their private homes to where Moshe was (which was considered a public domain) when they were donating materials for the Mishkan (obviously before it was built). It is therefore clear that these prohibitions are not solely based on what was done when building the Mishkan. Nevertheless, since our understanding of these activities comes from what was actually done in the Mishkan, the donation of the wagons affected how we learn about them. Now that the beams were transported by wagon, it is the loading and unloading to and from them that is used to describe transferring between public property and private property. If, on Mt. Sinai, G-d taught Moshe not just the 39 categories of "melachos" (forbidden activities) and all their applications, but also how they were used in the Mishkan, since there were no wagons in the picture yet, they could not have been used as examples. Even if there is no practical difference in the laws of Shabbos whether there were wagons or not, the way we learn about them changed after they were donated. It is therefore possible that this was why Moshe was hesitant to accept the wagons, knowing that it would change the way Torah is taught/learned forever.

Rashi (7:3) explains that the Nesi'im brought their offerings right away when the Mishkan was being

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

consecrated because they had made the mistake of waiting to see what was donated before donating themselves. Since everything for the Mishkan was donated by the rest of the nation, there was nothing left for them to donate. The Midrash Hagadol (Vayakhel 35:27, see also Tanchuma, Naso 27 and Yalkut Shimoni, Naso 713) takes it a step further, telling us that the Nesi'im wanted to donate everything for the Mishkan but were unwilling to "just" donate like everybody else. (The implication is that they wanted to prove that without them there wouldn't be enough material, so waited to see what was donated to show that their donations were needed; in the end it was proven that they weren't.) The reason their request to donate all of the material was denied was because G-d had told Moshe that He wanted everyone to participate.

The Midrashim (i.e. Bamidbar Rabbah 12:18) say that when the Nesi'im brought the wagons (et al), they gave them to the public, not to Moshe. The Pesikta de'Rav Kahana and the Yalkut Shimoni say that they gave their monetary value to the public (not the actual wagons). The Zais Ra'anon explains that rather than donating the wagons straight to the Mishkan, they gave the nation the money needed to buy them, then sold the wagons to the nation, so that the wagons would come from everybody (and not just from them). It would seem that the Nesi'im were trying to rectify not just their original lack of zealotry in donating to the Mishkan, but also their initial desire to be the sole donors. Knowing that Moshe may not accept the gift of the wagons if they came only from them, they gave the gift to the nation (by giving them the money to buy them) so that they could give it to the Mishkan. However, since the money actually came from the Nesi'im, was the gift really from everyone, or only from them? Perhaps this was Moshe's hesitation in accepting the wagons (et al), as he may have been unsure whether this "trick" really worked; whether they would be considered as a gift from the entire nation, or only from the Nesi'im (which had originally been rejected).

Whatever Moshe's hesitation was, by telling him to accept the offering from the Nesi'im, G-d was telling him that his fears were unfounded. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Our Biblical portion this week speaks of the ongoing voice of the Divine, which continues to be heard from within the Sanctuary (Mishkan) on a continual basis after the Divine Revelation, which has just been heard by the entire nation at Sinai. It is clear from the text that G-d will be speaking to Moses – and only to Moses – from between the two cherubs. (Numbers 7:89) The revelations that Moses will receive in the Sanctuary would later be communicated to the rest of Israel in the form of the Pentateuch (and perhaps even major principles of the Oral Law) which we have today. This is in contrast to the Ten Commandments (or at least the first two of the Ten Commandments) which – at least according to the majority of our Biblical commentaries – were initially revealed by G-d to the entire Israelite nation at Sinai (Exodus 20:1). It seems rather obvious that the subsequent Sanctuary revelations were targeted specifically to the Jewish people with the necessity of Moses' serving as intermediary; after all, many if not all of those commandments deal with the activities of the Israelites after they enter the promised Land of Israel. But what of the Ten Commandments? Were they initially meant for Israel – or, perhaps, were they, and are they, really meant for the entire world, for all of humanity?

The Midrash certainly seems to think that G-d initially was desirous of making His revelation a universal one, directed at all of civilization. In Moses' farewell message to the Israelites at the conclusion of his earthly life (and at the conclusion of the Pentateuch), he declares: "The Lord came from Sinai and above from Seir to them; He appeared from Mt. Paran...." (Deut 33:2). Rashi (ad loc) cites the Midrash, "He began with the children of Seir (Edom or Esau, and, in the Midrashic tradition, the progenitor of Rome and Christianity), offering that they accept the Torah (of the Decalogue), but they did not desire it, he then went on and offered it to the children of Ishmael (Midrashically, the Arab Moslem world), but they did not want it..." the famous Midrash goes on to describe how the entire world was not yet ready to accept the moral strictness and limitations of "Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery," whereas the Israelites declared, "We shall carry out (initially) and (only later attempt to) understand" the laws of the Decalogue, but we now accept them "wholesale" and in their entirety (Exodus 24:7). But in the first instance, according to the Midrash, G-d intended the Ten Commandments for everyone! It is also fascinating to note that even within the Biblical text itself the all-inclusive nature of G-d's revelation seems evident; the introductory verse of the Decalogue reads "And G-d spoke all these words saying..." without any

specific object or nation He was addressing (Exodus 20:1), whereas the very previous verse states, "And Moses descended to the nation and spoke to them..." (Ex 19:25). Moses' audience may have been Israel, but G-d's audience was – and is – the world!

And indeed each of the laws of the Decalogue are universally relevant and even critical for the preservation of humanity. The introductory statement, "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" refers not only to G-d's concern that Israel be free but also to G-d's concern that every human being – created in the Divine image be free; had G-d only been parochially concerned for the Israelites, He could have air-lifted them out of Egypt as we Israelis airlifted the Beta Yisrael Jewish community out of Ethiopia in Operations Moses and Solomon, and there would have been no necessity for all the ten plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea. These miracles clearly meant to teach Pharaoh – and all would-be totalitarian, enslaving despots of the future – that G-d demands freedom for each of His children; this lesson was meant to be learned by the entire world, so that the Israelites could justifiably sing at the Reed Sea: "The Nations heard and they became terrified, trembling grabbed hold of the inhabitants of Philistia; the generals of Edom were frightened... all inhabitants of Canaan melted... The Lord (and not any Pharaoh) shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:14-18).

The next two actual commandments prohibit idolatry, which is similarly prohibited by the seven Noahide laws of morality. I strongly subscribe to Rabbi Menahem Meiri's definition of idolatry, which has nothing to do with theology and everything to do with the ethically and morally repugnant sexual orgiastic excesses and child sacrifice –murders associated with idolatry (see Moshe Halbertal's important book, *Idolatry*). The third commandment prohibiting the taking of the Lord's name in vain (or to further falsehood or trickery) parallels the Noahide prohibition of blaspheming G-d; note that nowhere is belief in G-d explicitly mentioned as either one of the Noahide laws or one of the Ten Commandments. This is reminiscent of the trenchant midrashic comment, "Would that you forget Me, says G-d, but remember My laws of morality,"

The fifth commandment deals with respecting parents – who give life and usually sustaining nurture – with the final five forbidding murder, adultery, theft, false testimony and coveting that which does not belong to you. All of these are certainly universal in import and attribution.

The only commandment which may be seen as referring only to the Israelites is the fourth, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy... The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your G-d; you shall not do any creative physical activity, neither you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your Gentile manservant nor your

Gentile maid-servant, nor your animal, nor the stranger who is within your gates' (Exodus 20:8-10). Here, too, the work prohibition includes the stranger, the Gentile and even the animal, with the very next verse stressing the most universal of reasons for this Sabbath law: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and everything which is in them, and He rested on the seventh day" (20:11). Apparently the message of the Sabbath is that there is only one Creator, everyone and everything else is a creature, and so the Sabbath work prohibition comes to remind us to value every Divine creation and for one human being never to "lord" over any other human being – who is a creature just like he is a creature. All humans must together and separately only serve the single and singular Lord of the Universe. This idea is strengthened in second version of the Decalogue in the Book of Deuteronomy which stresses the reason for the Sabbath as being "in order that your male servant and your female servant may rest like you" (Dt. 5:14).

Although it is true that our Sabbath Amidah specifies the fact of the Sabbath as a sign between G-d and Israel forever, a day which G-d "did not give to the Gentiles of the earth but (only) to Israel did He give it with love," this may either refer to the fact that the Gentiles chose not to take it, or that the details of our Sabbath laws and the all-encompassing Divine Service which defines Jewish Sabbath observance does not apply to the Gentile world. But the ever-arching notion of a general day of rest for all creatures under the one Creator may well be necessary and crucial for Gentile as well as Jew.

In any event, the Ten Commandments is probably Judaism's greatest gift to the world, and our best chance at world peace were they ever to be universally adopted. And the fact that we read the Book of the convert Ruth on the Festival commemorating the Revelation at Sinai, is the best proof of the universal import of that revelation!

POSTSCRIPT:

Having said this, I would still argue that there can be no more meaningful ritual for the world to adopt than our Jewish Sabbath day: what can provide greater familial cohesiveness than a Friday evening song – feast around the table, replete with a song of peace, a poem of praise to wife and mother, and parents blessing their children? How personally refreshing and revitalizing it is for every individual to have one day free from work-place pressure, one day without car and traffic, set aside for family, community, individual meditation and introspection – or just catch-up time? And how liberating it would be to have one day without telephone, cell-phone or SMS, one day in which you set the agenda rather than have a caller or e-mailer set the agenda for you! In my life the telephone is much more of a nuisance interloper and disturber than a

mechanical aid and enabler. © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

One of the most famous passages in the Torah is the blessing by the Kohanim, which appears in this week's portion (Bamidbar 6:22-27). Even though this is indeed a very well known passage, the question of where it appears in the Torah portion is quite perplexing. It appears in between the passage about a Nazir, one who refrains from drinking wine, and the sacrifices brought by the tribal leaders. The connection between all of these passages is not at all clear. At first glance, it would seem reasonable for the text of the blessings to appear together with other passages about the laws of the Kohanim, such as in the portion of Emor, or in a passage which explicitly mentions the blessings (Vayikra 9:23; Devarim 10:8). Why do the blessings appear in this week's Torah portion?

Evidently the passage of the blessings is connected not to the two passages that are closest to it but rather to one passage before? that of Sottah, a woman suspected by her husband of adultery. Sottah can be directly linked to the issue of a Nazir, as we have seen in earlier articles about this Torah portion (this is clear, for example, from the similar texts used at the beginning and the end of both passages, from the role of the Kohen, from the ritual of picking up the sacrifice, and from the requirement to have disheveled hair). Thus, the passage about the Nazir directly follows that of Sottah, but the blessings of the Kohanim are also related to Sottah, in terms of contrasts between the two matters.

With respect to Sottah, the role of the Kohen is to curse? "Let the Kohen cause the woman to swear, taking the oath about a curse, and the Kohen shall say to the woman..." [Bamidbar 5:21]. With respect to the blessings, of course, the role of the Kohen is to bless. "This is how you shall bless Bnei Yisrael, say to them." [6:23]. There is a similar contrast between the words of the Kohen to the Sottah? "Let G-d make you into a curse and an oath in your nation, by having G-d make your loins collapse and your stomach fall" [5:21]? and the blessings? "Let G-d shine His face towards you and give you favor. Let G-d lift His face towards you and give you peace." [6:25-26]. The repeated reference to G-d's "face," which He will shine and will lift up, is in sharp contrast to the repeated reference that the Kohen causes the women to stand "before G-d" [5:16, 5:18, 5:30].

Why is this contrast significant? First, in the portion of Acharei Mot, we noted that it was appropriate to use the incense to atone for Bnei Yisrael, especially after Nadav and Avihu had brought incense into the

Tabernacle from a foreign source. A similar idea can be seen in this week's portion. After the Kohen plays his threatening role in the ritual of the Sottah, the Torah emphasizes the proper balance, in that the main task of the Kohen is to bless Yisrael and not to curse a Sottah. Second, the repeated emphasis in the two passages is very important, since it implies that the Kohen's role can be compared to that of a tool, and that the real source of the blessings and the curses is the Almighty.

We noted above that the Kohen emphasizes G-d's role in the affair of Sottah: "Let G-d make you into a curse and an oath in your nation, by having G-d make your loins collapse and your stomach fall." In the blessings of the Kohanim, the Torah emphasizes this point even more strongly. Even though at first glance it seems as if the Kohanim are the ones who cause the blessing to take effect? "This is how you shall bless Bnei Yisrael"? their real role is to ask G-d to bless the people. This is clear from the last verse in the passage, "And let them place my name on Bnei Yisrael, and I will bless them" [6:27].

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

S havuot is a celebration of that moment when we, the Jewish people, were wed to G-d. Note the parallel between that moment and the wedding of bride and groom.

At Sinai, G-d and the people of Israel stood at the base of the mountain, "be-tahtit ha-har." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on the word betahtit, the Midrash concludes that we, the Jewish people, were literally standing beneath the mountain-much like bride and groom stand under the huppah, the bridal canopy during the wedding ceremony.

At Sinai, G-d pronounces the words "ve-atem tihyu li...goy kadosh, and you will be to Me a holy nation." (Exodus 19:6) This formula is very similar to what the groom says to the bride when he places a ring on her finger-harei at mekudeshet li, behold you are betrothed to me.

At Sinai, G-d and the people of Israel signed a contract in the form of the ten declarations, aseret hadibrot. Bride and groom do the same – they enter into the marital agreement through the signing of a ketubah-a marital contract.

There are other traditions and rituals that point to a parallel between Sinai and a wedding ceremony. The Jews encircled Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:12) just as the bride circles the groom. There was lightning at Sinai. (Exodus 19:16) This is mirrored in the wedding ceremony as some have a tradition to carry lit candles to the huppah. In the end, the tablets were broken at Sinai. (Exodus 32:19) Similarly, a glass is shattered at the end of the nuptials. The Jewish people ate and drank at Sinai. (Exodus 24:11) In the same way, we also partake of a festive meal at a wedding celebration.

Thus, the Torah states, that “Moshe (Moses) brought the people forth from the camp toward G-d.” (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on this sentence, the Midrash compares this moment to a groom and bride coming toward each other.

There are emotional considerations that point to a connection between divine and human love. For example, feeling the presence of G-d means, no matter how lonely one is, G-d is near. Love, in the human realm, is also a response to loneliness. Moreover, when we connect to G-d, we connect to eternity, as G-d, of course, lives forever. Eternity is also a central component of marriage as we attempt to transcend our own lives by having children. Finally, loving G-d and loving a fellow human being can both give one a sense of deep fulfillment and meaning in life.

I believe that only through the experience of blissful marital love can one understand love of G-d. While each partner in the relationship maintains her or his own individuality, love is the uniting of two souls. This gives one a sense of the absolute oneness of G-d. Human love is also an emotion that is infinite in its scope, giving one a sense of the infinity of G-d. No wonder the Torah calls cleaving to one’s spouse *ve-davak* (Genesis 2:24), just as cleaving to G-d is called *deveikut*.

In one word: love of G-d and love of spouse and family interface. On this Shavuot, may each one show us the way to the other. © 2007 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 NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma’amar with a pasuk (and a Medrash) that come well into the parsha.

The fact that the Sfas Emes skipped over other potential topics means that he saw special significance in the subject that he did select. The pasuk that the Sfas Emes saw as especially meaningful comes in Bemidbar (6:2): “*ish oh isha ki yafli linder neder nazir...*” (ArtScroll: “... a man or a woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow...”).

The meaning of these words is not obvious, so the Sfas Emes elaborates. He explains that being a nazir means that a person separates himself from matters of *olam hazeh* (this world) even though in fact, he is involved in *olam hazeh*. That may sound like a contradiction. In fact, it is a contradiction. But the Sfas Emes does not hesitate to confront apparent cosmic inconsistencies. He explains that HaShem gives us the power to cling to the Source—of His Presence—which is present in all things. Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that this capacity to be part of—yet separate from—*olam hazeh* depends on our maintaining contact with

the *chiyus* (vibrancy, vitality) that HaShem put into all Creation. The Sfas Emes calls this phenomenon “*pehleh*”—from the same root as a word in the pasuk—“*yafli*”.

Clearly, the Sfas Emes regards the topic of the nazir as extremely important. And equally clearly, “*pehleh*” is a key word for understanding what nezirus is all about. How does the Sfas Emes arrive at his reading: namely, that the word “*pehleh*” refers to our capacity to maintain contact with the inner vitality that HaShem has placed in all Creation? A pasuk from the haftora of Parshas Naso (Shoftim, 13:18) provides some help. That pasuk contains the word “*peh*”—a word that all the commentaries render as “*mechuseh*” or “*ne’ehlam*”—i.e., hidden. That is to say: Our capacity to connect with *ruchniyus* even though we are involved in *olam hazeh* is a phenomenon beyond our understanding. Thus, we are dealing here with a familiar situation: our limited capacity to understand how the cosmos functions.

For further clarification of the word “*yafli*”, the Sfas Emes sends us to an unexpected source. He directs us to a remark of the Rema in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim, Siman 6. The Rema there comments on a phrase in the *berocha*—the blessing—of *asher yatzar*. The Rema observes that the phrase “*umafli la’asos*” (HaShem, “Who does wondrous things”) refers to a unique creature that HaShem has fashioned with His boundless creativity. What creature does the Rema have in mind?

Human beings, can, in principle, combine *ruchniyus* (spirituality) with *gashmiyus* (corporeality). Thus, following the Sfas Emes’s approach, we can translate the pasuk with which he began this ma’amar as: “If a person commits to doing that wondrous thing—something whose feasibility is to us, with our limited knowledge, hidden—that is, to take a Nazarite vow...”.

Notice what the Sfas Emes is doing here. Earlier he defined a nazir as a person who is not involved in *olam hazeh* even though in fact he is involved in *olam hazeh*. That sounds paradoxical. But by introducing us to the concept and halachos of nazir, the Torah is telling us that such a combination is indeed feasible. And the Sfas Emes brings support for this view by citing a *berocha* that celebrates the reality of such a combination, which HaShem has built into all humankind. The take-home lesson is clear: being *bahsar vedahm* (flesh and blood) need not bar us from living a life of spirituality.

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another line of thought. He quotes the Medrash Rabba on our pasuk. The Medrash, in turn, brings a pasuk from Shir Hashirim (5:15): “*Shokav amudei shesh...*” (“The Torah’s columns that support the world are marble...”). The Medrash (and the Sfas Emes) read “*shokav*” as coming from the same root as the Hebrew word “*teshuka*”—yearning. In other words, they read ‘*shokav*’

as “His yearning”. Thus, the Medrash tells us that HaShem yearned to create the world. This perspective implies that the world is— or can be—a good thing.

The Medrash continues in the same vein, quoting a pasuk that we say in the Friday night kiddush (Bereishis, 2:1): “ Va’yechu’lu ha’shamayim vеха’aretz...” In non-pshat mode, the Medrash chooses to read the word “va’yechulu” as coming from the root of another Hebrew word which also denotes yearning or longing. Thus we find a pasuk in (Tehillim, 74:3.) which says: ‘nichsefa vegam kalsa nafshi...’ (That is: ‘My soul yearns for...’) You see the link— by allusion— that connects “va’yechulu” and “kalsa”.

So far, the Sfas Emes has had to add little to the discussion. The Medrash is so much in a Sfas Emes mode that he can let the Medrash say it all for him. But at this point, the Sfas Emes enters with comment on the pasuk (quoted above): “Shokav amudei sheish...” As noted above, the pshat (simple, literal) meaning of the word “sheish” in this context is: “marble”. Hence, the literal meaning: “His columns that support the world are marble.” But in non-pshat mode, the Sfas Emes reads the word “sheish” as “six.” Hence, the Sfas Emes can now read the phrase as “The six support the world.” Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that during the six yemei hama’aseh (workdays), our ma’aseh (work) can connect us with HaShem!

The picture that the Medrash (and the Sfas Emes) give us is a picture in which HaShem, as it were, yearned to create the world. Further, the way He built the world, we can reciprocate His feeling. As the pasuk in Shir Hashirim (7:11) says: “ve’ahlai teshukaso” (“And I yearn for Him”). Taking the relationship a step further, the Sfas Emes endows that pasuk with a secondary meaning, “And His yearning for me depends on my yearning for Him”.

Thus, the Sfas Emes views this world in a very positive light. HaShem had a yearning to create this world. (In fact, the Medrash uses a word much stronger than ‘yearning’: “ta’ava”). As you see, what we have here is a deep, heartfelt relationship between HaShem and the world that He has created— that is, with us.

I suggest that this heartfelt relationship also brings with it a potential danger. HaShem yearns for us. But what if we do not yearn for Him? As we know, spurned love leads to frustration, and frustration leads to anger. And anger can lead to acts of anger. Sad to say, Tanach recounts many such episodes. So too does our people’s history in the post-Tanach years.

In any case, the Sfas Emes reminds us that on Shabbos we can come closer to HaShem. And our coming closer gives HaShem nachas (joy). We are told in Shemos, 20:1: “va’yanach ba’yom hashevi’i.” (ArtScroll: “And He rested on the seventh day.”) The Sfas Emes reads this pasuk as: “And He had nachas [joy] on the seventh day”. When we say this pasuk in kiddush on Shabbos morning, let us try to have in mind

that on Shabbos we can give HaShem nachas. © 2007 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week’s haftorah shares with us an incredible perspective on sanctity and self control. The focus of the haftorah is the heavenly message sent to the pious Manoach and his wife informing them of her miraculous conception of a special son, Shimshon. Manoach’s wife, a righteous woman who was barren for many years was suddenly informed by an angel that she would bear a child. She was also given specific instructions during pregnancy restricting her from all wine and wine-related products. She was informed that her son would be dedicated to Hashem from the day he was born and could never shave off his hair. The angel also stated that Hashem would bring much salvation to the Jewish people through this precious boy.

This is the first chapter in the life of the famous Jewish leader, Shimshon. However, in the subsequent chapters of his life we discover the life’s trials of the most perplexing leader in all of Jewish history. On the one hand, Shimshon was a powerful and effective judge who maintained the highest ethical standard. In fact, our Chazal (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana2:8) place Shimshon amongst the greatest of all Jewish judges paralleling him, in some ways, to Moshe Rabbeinu himself. Shimshon also merited that the Divine Presence of Hashem preceded him to secure his every step with success. And it was solely in Shimshon’s merit that Hashem constantly protected the Jewish nation (see Sota 9b, 10a). Yet, at the same time we discover a man succumbing to physical passions being constantly enticed by Philistine women. Eventually Shimshon fell prey to the persuasion of his Philistine wife Delila and forfeited all his sanctity and greatness. How can this glorious, yet so tragic life be understood and explained and what can be learned from this perplexing story? (See Derech Bina to Shoftim by Rabbi Avrohom Shoshana)

We begin with the words of the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 10:5) in explanation of Shimshon’s unique experience of Nezirus (restriction from wine). In general, one accepts the abstentions of a Nazir for a period of a month or two but never for an entire lifetime. This week’s parsha reveals that the purpose for the short restrictive period of Nazirus was to serve as a model lesson for life. Typically, the Nazir briefly abstained from certain mundane activities to gain control over his physical passions and cravings. This was obviously not the case for Shimshon who was obligated in Nezirus since his birth. The above Midrash clarifies this matter and states, “Hashem, knowing that Shimshon’s nature would be to stray after his eyes, restricted him from wine which leads to immorality.” Chazal continue, “And if Shimshon albeit a Nazir did

stray after his eyes one could only imagine what would have happened without the restriction of wine.” Our Chazal share with us an important insight into the life of Shimshon. Apparently, his nature and consequent role in life revolved around an attraction to women and it was intended for the Nezirus restriction to hold him back from sin.

To put this into perspective we refer to the words of the Radak (Shoftim 13:4) which explain the setting of Shimshon’s times. Radak explains that the Jewish people’s devotion to Hashem had severely fallen during those times. Because of this they did not merit total salvation by Hashem and remained under Philistine rule throughout this entire era. However, the Philistines deserved to be revenged for their harsh rule over the Jews and for this reason Hashem sent Shimshon to the scene. The Scriptures indicate (see Shoftim 14:4) that it was the will of Hashem that Shimshon mingle with the Philistines to cause them pain and strife from within their very own camp. It can be understood that for this reason Hashem actually sanctioned, in principle, Shimshon’s marriage to Philistine women, given their conversion to Judaism. Although they did actually convert (see Radak adloc. and Rambam Isurai Beiah 14:14) the potential did exist for Shimshon to be influenced by their foreign ideals and allegiances of their past.

In essence, Hashem provided Shimshon with the appropriate nature for his role and he was naturally attracted to the Philistine women he encountered. This allowed Shimshon to be regarded as one of the Philistines and set the stage for a perfect inside job. The Radak explains that Shimshon’s motive of bonding with Philistine Jewish converts to secretly attack the Philistine nation was a proper motive. However, this powerful drive to marry Philistine women served as a double-edged sword. And when Shimshon added to his pure motive small degrees of attraction to beauty his actions were disqualified. Granted that the overwhelming percentage of his motivation was proper and pure, nonetheless a subtle attraction to Philistine women’s beauty did accompany his thoughts. Eventually this soft physical drive overtook Shimshon, and after succumbing to his wife’s seduction, lost his pure motives and forfeited all of his sanctity and greatness.

We now appreciate Shimshon’s lifelong abstention period of Nezirus and its projected impact on his personal conduct. This perpetual state was intended to serve as an anchor for Shimshon to control and subdue his physical urges and steer him away from immorality. The comprehensive picture drawn from our haftorah is the following. Shimshon was ordained to live a life of sanctity from the moment of conception until the end of his life. His parents carefully protected him from all impurities and raised him in a perfect atmosphere of sanctity. This childhood groomed

him to be a perfect candidate for the constant manifestation of the Divine Presence itself. However, as we painfully discover none of the above guarantees one from foreign immoral influences. And when, alongside the purest of motives, one includes physical drives and passions the result can be devastating. Even the pure Shimshon was then prone to plunging deeply into immorality and open to forfeiting all that life had in store for him. From this we learn the importance of pure motives and that any degree of intended personal gratification can undo all the good we seek to accomplish. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week’s parsha is the longest one of the Torah. It is mainly so because of the description of the identical offerings to the dedication of the Mishkan by the heads of the individual tribes of Israel. What makes this lengthy repetitive section of the parsha so difficult to understand is the fact that each of the twelve leaders of the tribes brought the exact same identical offering to that dedication. In addition, the Torah itself at the end of the parsha lumps all of the offerings together to give us a total count of what was brought as the offerings to the dedication. The question naturally begs itself: Why the individual details about each identical offering when the sum total of the offerings is going to be summed up clearly at the end of the parsha?

This question has perplexed all of the commentators to the Torah throughout the ages. Like many another question regarding the mysteries of detail that are part of the Torah narrative regarding the Mishkan and its artifacts, there are many answers proposed but somehow at the end of the day the question still persists and gnaws at our understanding of Torah. All of the proposed answers naturally possess truth in them but somehow they are not truly satisfying. Perhaps the Torah wished to leave us with the question unanswered so that we can have some appreciation of the mystery of the Mishkan and to teach us that a structure that, so to speak, contains G-d’s presence within it is beyond our rational powers to explain and reduce to human terms.

Rashi points out that the Torah accommodated itself to the wishes of the heads of the tribes, who undoubtedly wanted public recognition for their individual, albeit identical, offerings to the dedication of the Mishkan. Having refrained from participating in the original drive for the raw materials and artisanship required to build the Mishkan, they wanted to make certain that they would not be shut out of its dedication ceremonies.

The Torah counts this as a positive act on the part of the leaders of the tribes and not as a negative honor-seeking device on their part. Oftentimes a false sense of presumed modesty possesses people when it

comes to participating in helping worthwhile holy causes. People turn down offers of recognition and honor, which could be of great help to others and to Jewish causes generally, out of a sense of modesty that is really not intrinsic to them and their personalities.

Perhaps this also is one of the lessons of the Torah in relating to us the offerings of the leaders of Israel. The offerings of the leaders constitute a long program for one event. Nevertheless, the Torah offers praise and detail to each and every one of those leaders of the tribes for their generosity and newfound willingness to help the Mishkan and all of Israel.

The pure length and repetitiveness of that section of this week's parsha emphasizes to us the positive spin that the Torah puts upon all such people and events. Human beings are very complex. The Torah reads our hearts and psyches accurately and compassionately.

Post-Shavuot Thoughts

Now that the great holiday of Shavuot has passed, the cheesecake has been safely digested, and the summer is right around the bend, I am struck by certain ideas that the holiday inspired within me. Firstly, I am always impressed by the fact that Shavuot is celebrated here in Israel by all sections of Jewish society. Shavuot is a live thing here. In the Diaspora, outside of the observant Orthodox world, the rest of Jewish society treats the holiday as practically being non-existent. Pesach has a Seder and Chanuka falls in December and the High Holy Days still exist for many Jews not otherwise really connected to Jewish tradition. But Shavuot is a lost holiday, one that does not exist for many Jews.

But here in Israel, Tnuva and the Strauss have a vested interest in keeping Shavuot alive and present. And even though this preoccupation with dairy products is not really the essence of the holiday it does serve to notify all and sundry that there is such a holiday. Eventually, thinking Jews will ask themselves what all this fuss concerning dairy goods is about and out of that simple question, a world of Jewish thought, tradition and knowledge can blessedly flow.

For that small triumph of memory and Jewish identification—that there is such a wonderful holiday as Shavuot in the Jewish calendar and psyche—the State of Israel has fulfilled an important mission. Often it is the supposedly small and side-issue triumphs of a sovereign Jewish society that pass unnoticed in the noisy distractions of our daily national life. But in the long run of Jewish life it is these small triumphs that are the most influential and long lasting of our manifold accomplishments.

All night study groups and lectures are also now very much in vogue for Shavuot night. Again, this type of mishmar—all night study session—was originally the exclusive province of the Orthodox yeshiva world. For those less committed or youthful,

Jewish tradition provided a series of Torah lessons called Tikun Leil Shavuot that allowed one to have a short review of Torah knowledge with excerpts from the Bible, Mishna, Talmud, etc. However over the past few decades, the all night, mishmar, learning program has spread outside of the walls of the yeshiva.

Synagogues, social groups, schools, adult educational centers, Orthodox, non-Orthodox and secular venues have all adopted the all night mishmar learning model as the main commemoration of Shavuot in this country. This is truly a remarkable occurrence. There was a time here that the Zionist movement dwelt upon Shavuot as being a purely agricultural holiday—chag habikurim—the holiday of the first ripened fruits and crops as described in the Bible and Mishna. Elaborate agricultural pageants were the norm and no mention of the Torah and its study appeared in the programs then planned for Shavuot.

Though the Bible does call Shavuot chag habikurim, Jewish prayer and tradition has shifted the emphasis to the day of the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Sinai over thirty-three hundred years ago. As is always the case, the Torah eventually wins out over staged, currently cutting-edge but eventually slightly ridiculous pageantry. There are many Jews who are truly interested in knowing about their faith and traditions. Shavuot night mishmar sessions are a great way to foster this interest and to unite Jews—and not to divide them unnecessarily.

The Shavuot holiday is also used in Jewish tradition to mark the day of the death of King David. A very large yahrzeit candle was traditionally erected in the synagogue and the occasion was marked by the recitation of the book of Tehilim—Psalms, of which he was the principal contributor and author. King David is intimately associated with the holiday of Shavuot since he is a direct descendant of Ruth whose story from the Book of Ruth is read in the synagogue service of the day of Shavuot.

So Shavuot, like all of the Jewish holidays, comes to remind us of our past and, at the same time, of our future. King David is the past great king of Israel and the man who established Jerusalem as our spiritual and national capital. But he is also the symbol of the messianic age, of the better world that we hope and pray for to be revealed yet, before our eyes. I think that Shavuot represents this as well. It represents the eternal Torah that has guided our past and present lives and will guide our future as well. But it is also chag habikurim when we will be able to offer our best and finest contributions to the G-d of Israel in the future as well. I am always grateful to be here in Israel. On Shavuot, I am especially grateful. © 2007 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.