

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**A**fter completing the census (Bamidbar 1:44-46) and delineating the role of the Levi'im (1:48-53), the arrangement of the "D'galim," the four sets of three tribes and how they camped, is described (2:1-31). A straightforward reading of the text indicates that this was where the "D'galim" were set up--after the census, which took place in the second month of the second year after the nation left Egypt (1:1). And this is precisely how most understand the sequence of events (see Ibn Ezra on Sh'mos 29:42 and Ramban on Vayikra 7:38; see also M'chilta, Yisro, end of "Vayishma Yisro," Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3, and Tanchuma, Bamidbar 14). However, in "B'tzaysi MiMitzrayim" (Appendix 86), several Midrashim (e.g. Tanchuma, Bamidbar 12, Sh'mos Rabbah 20:5, Midrash Rabbah on Shir HaShirim 4:12, and Midrash Lekach Tov on Sh'mos 12:51) are quoted that seem to say that the "D'galim" were arranged right after we left Egypt, not over a year later. Since the arrangement was already well-known from Yaakov's instructions for carrying his casket from Egypt to Canaan (see Rashi on Bamidbar 2:2), once the nation started their own journey from Egypt to Canaan, they moved into this previously-known formation.

[It should be noted that these Midrashim can be (and are) explained in ways that allow the point of the Midrashim to be made even if the D'galim weren't set up until the second year. Nevertheless, a simple reading of at least some of them has the "D'galim" in operation right after the exodus, and there are commentators (e.g. Panim Yafos on Sh'mos 14:22; see also Chizkuni on Vayikra 24:10) who understand them this way.]

If the "D'galim" were set up right away, there are several things that need to be explained (such as using twelve separate paths through the split sea--one for each tribe--if the nation was traveling in one unit). I will focus on only one issue, though; if the "D'galim" weren't first instituted after the census described at the beginning of our parasha, why is this where they are described? Along the way, we may encounter other issues raised by having earlier "D'galim," but will only include them insofar as it helps us understand the timing/placement of the commandment to set them up.

Previously (<http://tinyurl.com/bscn6sj>, pg. 3), I have discussed how the Nesi'im, the Tribal Chiefs,

could be described as having first been appointed for the census (1:4-5), if the census began in the second month of the second year (1:1) and the Nesi'im had already been considered Tribal Chiefs at the Mishkan's dedication a month earlier (see Sh'mos 40:17 and Rashi on Bamidbar 7:12). Netziv explains that they had been appointed as leaders by their respective Tribes earlier, but G-d verified/gave His official approval to the people's choices when He told Moshe to have them help with the census. It could be suggested that something similar occurred with the D'galim; the nation, on their own, moved into the formation they knew about from Yaakov, with G-d making it the official, mandated formation in the second month of the second year. [Even though the wording of some of the Midrashim quoted to show that the "D'galim" were set up right away (e.g. Tanchuma, Bamidbar 12) say explicitly that they were G-d's instructions, the expression "when they came out of Egypt" only has to refer to the actual exodus when said before they reached the Promised Land. Once they are already there, the entire process of getting from Egypt to the Land of Israel can be referred as "when they came out of Egypt," even if it happened well after the actual exodus.]

One of the details of the census is that every individual was counted by name and lineage (see Rashi on Bamidbar 1:18), not just by counting half-shekalim. If the "D'galim" were already in operation, wasn't everyone's lineage already verified? It would seem that before this census was taken, being associated with a particular Tribe did not require any fact-checking. There would normally be little incentive to live with the wrong Tribe, and even if someone, for whatever reason, did, it wasn't considered an issue worth pursuing. Now, however, when everything was being finalized for the trip to the Promised Land, which included inheriting the land by Tribe, it became necessary to verify that everyone really belonged; "and the Children of Israel shall camp, each person with his [appropriate] camp and each person with his [appropriate] degel" (1:52). It is therefore possible that the "innovation" here wasn't the formation itself, but that everyone in the formation had to be exactly where he belonged. [This would explain why it was at this point that the "blasphemer" had to leave the area of the Tribe of Dan (see Rashi on Vayikra 24:10).]

Besides making the formations "official" and verifying that everyone was where they belonged, another aspect that seems to have been added with the

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instructions here was the "osos," the signs, the flags each "degel" flew (see Rashi on Bamidbar 2:2). However, while these three features, along with the fact that the previously-used formation hadn't been described yet, may justify telling us about the "D'galim" here, I think there may be a more fundamental reason why the "D'galim" weren't mentioned until now.

The focal point of the "D'galim" was the Mishkan, which was surrounded on all four sides by the orderly encampments of the Children of Israel. But if there were "D'galim" before there was a Mishkan, what had been in the center? The Talmud (Sotah 13a) says that throughout the journey in the desert, there were two "boxes" that traveled side by side, Yosef's casket, and the holy Ark, as "this one (Yosef) fulfilled what is written in that one (i.e. the Torah)." It would certainly be tempting to suggest that before there was a Mishkan, and therefore before there was a second "box," the one "box" they did have, i.e. Yosef's coffin, was in the center of the "D'galim." However, Maharsha says that the reason Yosef's coffin in the center was because Moshe was taking care of it, and he (along with the rest of the Tribe of Levi) was in the center. Granted, Maharsha is discussing the situation after the Mishkan was built (when there were two "boxes"), but if the other Tribes were in their respective places in the formation from the get-go, it makes sense for the Levi'im to have been in theirs as well.

In Egypt, the Levi'im had not been subject to the servitude that the rest of the nation was (see Rashi on Sh'mos 5:4), with the assumption being that they continued studying and teaching Torah in the Yeshiva that Yehudah had established before Yaakov and his family moved there (see Rashi on B'reishis 46:28). The Mishkan was referred to as "Mishkan Ha'Eidus" (Sh'mos 38:21, see also Bamidbar 17:22), its focal point was the "Aron Ha'Eidus" (Sh'mos 26:33, see Rashi on Bamidbar 9:15), within which was the "Eidus," referring to the Torah (see Rashi on Sh'mos 25:16). In other words the focal point of the Mishkan was the Torah (see <http://tinyurl.com/d97jjm6>). Since the Levi'im were the nation's Torah (see D'varim 33:10), it follows that they would have been the center of the "D'galim" before there was a Mishkan.

Even though the Levi'im were in the center of the "D'galim" from the time they were set up, after the Mishkan was built they played an additional role

(Bamidbar 1:50-53 and 2:7-8), taking care of the Mishkan and protecting it from intruders (those unauthorized to perform the service and those who were ritually impure). Whereas until then they were the center of the formation, they were now a newly-created layer between the center of the formation (the Mishkan) and the other Tribes. This is a major change, as instead of every Tribe having direct access to the focal point of the "D'galim," they would now have to go through the Mishkan's security personnel (the Levi'im) to get to the focal point. The location of each Tribe (and group of Tribes) in relation to the center of the formation (east, west, north or south) may have been the same, but it could not be considered the same as it had been; there was now an additional barrier between the outer layer of the formation and its inner core.

Once the Levi'im were given this new role and mention was made of the "D'galim" (1:53), it became necessary to teach us what those "D'galim" were. Even if there were "D'galim" that had been in operation for over a year, since there were several aspects that had changed, including a major change in the relationship between each "degel" and the focal point, the most appropriate place for the Torah to describe the "D'galim" was after the census was taken and the role of the Levi'im defined. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

**O**n the face of it the connections between the sedra and haftarah of Bemidbar are slender. The first has to do with demography. Bemidbar begins with a census of the people. The haftarah begins with Hosea's vision of a time when "the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand on the sea-shore which cannot be measured or numbered." There was a time when the Israelites could be counted; the day will come when they will be countless. That is one contrast between the future and the past.

The second goes deeper. The sedra and the book that bears its name are called Bemidbar, "in the wilderness". The book is about the wilderness years in both a physical and spiritual sense: a time of wandering and internal conflict. Hosea, however, foresees a time when G-d will bring the people back to the desert and there enact a second honeymoon: I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her . . . There she will respond as in the days of her youth, As in the day she came out of Egypt.

What gives the haftarah its special resonance, however, is the fact that Bemidbar is always read on the Shabbat preceding Shavuot, the festival of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The fact that tradition chose this of all prophetic passages tells us something deeply moving about how the Jewish people understood this festival and about the Torah itself as the living connection between a people and G-d. The story of

Hosea is one of the strangest of that great chain of visionaries we call the prophets. It is the story of a marriage. The prophet married a woman called Gomer. He was deeply in love with her. We can infer this, because of all the prophets, Hosea is the most eloquent and passionate on the subject of love. Gomer, however, proved faithless. She left home, had a series of lovers, was serially unfaithful, and was eventually forced to sell herself into slavery. Yet Hosea, caught between anger and tender longing, found that he could not relinquish his love for her.

In a flash of prophetic insight, G-d leads him to understand that his own personal experience mirrors that between G-d and the Israelites. He had rescued them from slavery, led them through the wilderness and brought them to their new home, the land of Israel. But the people proved faithless. They worshipped other gods. They were promiscuous in their spiritual attachments. By rights, says G-d, I should have abandoned them. I should have called them (as the prophet called his third child) Lo-ammi, "you are not My people". Yet G-d's love is inextinguishable. He too cannot let go. Whatever the people's sins, He will bring them back into the desert, scene of their first love, and their marriage will be renewed.

The Talmud in Pesachim gives an extraordinary account of the dialogue between G-d and Hosea – the unwritten story of the episode that precedes chapter 1 of the book of Hosea: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Hosea, "Your children have sinned." To this, the prophet should have replied, " – they are Your children, the children of your favoured ones, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Be merciful to them." Not only did he not say this, but he actually said, "Lord of the universe, the whole world is yours. Exchange them for another nation." The Holy One, blessed be He, said, "What shall I do with this old man? I will tell him to go and marry a prostitute and have children by her. Then I will tell him to send her away. If he can, then I too will send Israel away."

There are few more telling passages in the whole of rabbinic literature. If I were to summarise it, I would say: Who is a leader of the Jewish people? Only one who loves the Jewish people. Reading the prophetic literature, it is easy to see the prophets as social critics. They see the people's faults; they speak them aloud; their message is often a negative one, foretelling disaster. The Talmud is telling us that such a view is superficial and misses the essential point. The prophets loved their people. They spoke not out of condemnation but from the depths of deep desire. They knew that Israel was capable of, and had been summoned to, great things. They never criticised in order to distance themselves, to set themselves above and apart. They spoke in love – G-d's love. That is why, in Israel's darkest nights, the prophets always had a message of hope.

There is one verse in the haftarah so deep that it deserves special attention. G-d is telling the prophet about the time yet to come when He will bring His people back to the places they once visited, the desert where they first pledged their love, and there they will renew their relationship: In that day – declares the Lord – you will call Me 'my husband'; you will no longer call Me 'my master'.

The resonances of this sentence are impossible to capture in translation. The key words in Hebrew are Ish and Baal, and they both mean 'husband'. Hosea is telling us about two kinds of marital relationships – and two kinds of culture. One is signalled by the word Baal, which not only means 'husband' but is also the name of the Caananite god. Baal, one of the central figures in the pantheon of the ancient Near East, was the storm god of lightning and the fertility god who sends rain to impregnate the ground. He was the macho deity who represented sex and power on a cosmic scale.

Hosea, punning on the name, hints at the kind of world that emerges when you worship sex and power. It is a world without loyalties, where relationships are casual and people taken advantage of and then dropped. A marriage predicated on the word Baal is a relationship of male dominance in which women are used not loved, owned not honoured. The word Baal means, among other things, 'owner'.

Against this Hosea describes a different kind of relationship. Here his literary device is not pun but quotation. In using the word Ish to describe the relationship between G-d and His people, the prophet is evoking a verse at the beginning of Genesis – the words of the first man seeing the first woman: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man."

Daringly, Hosea suggests that the making of woman from man mirrors the creation of humanity from G-d. First they are separated, then they are joined again, but now as two distinct persons each of whom respects the integrity of the other. What joins them is a new kind of relationship built on fidelity and trust.

How we understand the giving of the Torah depends on how we see the relationship between G-d and the people He chose to be His special witnesses on earth. Inevitably, the language of Judaism when it speaks of G-d is metaphorical. The Infinite cannot be compassed in finite categories. The metaphors the prophets use are many. G-d is, among other things, artist, creator, king, master, warrior, shepherd, judge, teacher, redeemer and father. From the point of view of G-d-as-king, the Torah is the code of laws He ordains for the people He rules. From the perspective of G-d-as-father-and-teacher, it represents the instructions He gives His children as to how they should best live. Adopting the image of artist-creator, Jewish mystics throughout the ages saw the Torah as the architecture of the universe, the deep structure of existence.

Of all the metaphors, however, the most lovely and most intimate was of G-d as husband, with Israel as His bride. Isaiah says: For your Maker is your husband, The Lord Almighty is his name . . . (54:5)

Likewise Jeremiah: 'Return, faithless people,' declares the Lord, 'for I am your husband.' (3:14)

This is how Ezekiel describes the marriage between G-d and Israel in the days of Moses: Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you — declares the Lord G-d — and you became mine. (16:8)

From this perspective, the Torah is more than a constitution and code of laws, more than a set of instructions or even the metaphysical DNA of the universe. It is a marriage contract – a token and gesture of love.

When attraction, that most fleeting of emotions, seeks to perpetuate itself as love, it takes the form of marriage: marriage as covenant, in which both parties pledge themselves to one another, to be loyal, steadfast, to stay together through difficult times as well as good and to achieve together what neither could do alone. A marriage is created not by force or coercion but by words – the word given, the word received, the word honoured in faithfulness and trust. There are such things as the laws of marriage (the respective responsibilities of husband and wife), but marriage of its essence is more than a dispassionate set of obligations and rights. It is law suffused with love, and love translated into law. That, according to this metaphor, is what the Sinai event was.

The supreme poet of marriage was Hosea. By reading this haftarah on the Shabbat before Shavuot, we make a momentous affirmation: that in giving the Torah to Israel, G-d was not asserting His power, dominance or lordship over Israel (what Hosea means when he uses the word ba'al). He was declaring His love. That is why it is no accident that the words with which the haftarah ends – among the most beautiful in the entire religious literature of mankind – are the words Jewish men recite every weekday morning as they wind the strap of the hand-tefillin like a wedding ring around their finger, renewing daily the marriage covenant of Sinai: I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and justice, love and compassion; I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, And you will know G-d. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**W**herever you go, I shall go...Your nation will be my nation, your G-d my G-d...” (Ruth 1:16) Despite the conventional wisdom that

Judaism attempts to "push away" converts, and despite the many horror stories about aspiring converts who were alienated, discouraged and even "turned off" by the road blocks they experienced at the hands of a bureaucratic and insensitive Orthodox rabbinate, Judaism as depicted in the Biblical Book of Ruth, which we read on Shavuot, is truly welcoming to those desirous of entering the fold. It shows that Jews by choice are worthy of much praise.

The heroine of this story of "autumnal" romance - with its sub-plots of the tragedy of living in an assimilating and destructive exile versus a rags-to-riches redemptive life in Israel - is a convert to Judaism. She is not an ordinary convert at that; she is a Moabite convert. The Bible demands that Moabites never be allowed to become "Jewish", but our rabbis teach that it was the religious court led by Boaz which ruled that this prohibition applied only to male Moabites, but not to females.

Jewish tradition maintains that King David (who was born and died on Shavuot) was the progenitor of and prototype for our anxiously awaited Messiah. Is it not mind blowing that his pedigree harkens back to Ruth, a Moabite convert? Moreover, is it not remarkable that we read of the odyssey of a Jew by choice specifically as part of our celebration of the giving of the Torah at Sinai? Clearly, throughout the Book of Ruth, Judaism is urging our user -friendly attitude towards sincere converts.

This sacred text sets the stage for what is expected of the convert as well as from the people around him/her. Ruth's initial motivation had a great deal to do with her deep affection for her mother-in-law, Naomi. (The halakha is to accept a convert, even if what initially sparked their Jewish interest was a personal or romantic interest, as long as by the end of the process the convert has sincerely become enamored with Judaism as a philosophy and lifestyle (B.T. Shabbat 31, Shulhan Arukh, Yoreh Deah 268: 12). In the authoritative words of the Shakh (note 23), "everything depends on the assessment of the judge," as to whether the candidate is now sufficiently interested in Judaism. Indeed, many of the official Israeli religious courts are more predisposed to accept converts who wish to marry a religious Jewish person.

Naomi felt it incumbent to explain to Ruth and Orpah that since it was biologically impossible for her to have more sons, she would not have husbands for them. Moreover, she was returning in a penniless state to Israel for she "has been struck down by the hand of G-d," and her lot is a bitter one (Ruth 1:13). When Ruth, nevertheless, made her commitment, Naomi accepted her as a daughter.

This is reflected in the Talmud's teaching that one must explain to the would-be convert that the Jews are a persecuted people - but once the aspiring Jew says he knows that, and still feels unworthy, he is to be

accepted as a Jew at once. This is because it is a mitzvah to convert, and a mitzvah must be done as soon as possible (B.T. Yevamot 47b).

Ruth's commitment is likewise what is required today: "Your nation is my nation" reflects the acceptance of Jewish nationality, its history, culture, and allegiance to a specific land as expressed through ritual immersion - "rebirth" and circumcision for males. "Your G-d is my G-d" reflects the acceptance of the commandments. However, no Talmudic Sage maintains that the convert must initially be thoroughly conversant with all the 613 commandments. The conversion candidate must be informed of several of the more stringent laws and several of the more lenient laws. The Religious Court is not to be heavy handed or exacting (ibid. 47b). Conversion is seen as the beginning of a process and not necessarily its conclusion.

When Ruth joins other indigent Jews to glean the left-over or forgotten sheaves of the harvest, she sees the kindness of Boaz and asks. "Why have I found grace in your eyes, so that you singled me out (for protection and sensitivity)? I am a stranger." Boaz, perhaps a bit embarrassed by his burgeoning amorous interest, responds by comparing Ruth to the first Hebrew, the primary Jew-by-choice, Abraham: "All that you did for mother-in-law has been told to me; you left your father, your mother and the land of your birth for a nation which you did not know yesterday or the day before" (Ruth 2:11; cf. Gen 12:1).

Hence, it is not at all surprising that Rabbenu Sa'adiah Gaon invokes the biblical imperative to "love the stranger" from the moment an individual shows some interest in Judaism. Maimonides also takes the commandment to love the Lord to mean that "one must attempt to make G-d beloved to the Gentile world" by exposing His great deeds and just laws to all of humanity (Book of Commandments, Positive Command 3). Ruth joins Jethro as a prototypical Gentile who must be inspired by the teachings of our Torah. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

I have always been fascinated as to why this book of the Bible and this week's Torah reading is called Bamidbar – in the desert. The rabbis of Midrash have stated that the lesson involved here is that the Torah only remains in a person who empties all other causes from one's midst, and is as open and unoccupied as is the desert.

Nevertheless, there may be other insights that may be gleaned from the use of the desert as the backdrop for the events and laws contained in this fourth book of the Torah. One of these different insights has to do with the ability of water to transform a barren

desert into a productive place of lush fields and orchards.

Here in Israel, the Negev desert that began fifty years ago just south of Chevron has now expanded many kilometers far south of Beersheba. This is due to the national water carrier system and other means of bringing water to that area of our country. Literally, the desert has bloomed in fulfillment of the ancient prophecies of Isaiah.

Water can overcome the arid dryness and barrenness of the desert of the Negev. In California, desert valleys have been transformed into America's vegetable basket by systems of water diverted from the Colorado River. Again, in that case water was the key to transforming a desert into a garden and orchard. There are plans afloat all over the world to transform deserts into arable land. However, fresh water is a valuable and oftentimes scarce commodity and the struggle to discover and harness more of it for agricultural and human use is a continuous one.

Throughout the books of the prophets of Israel and as well as within the Talmud, the Torah itself is metaphorically compared to and even called water. Just as water has the ability to convert desolate and nonproductive desert land into a veritable Garden of Eden, so too can Torah fill the void in our hearts and souls and make us productive holy people.

Torah, like the water that represents it, has this enormous regenerative power. The book of Bamidbar will, in its narrative of the many sad and tragic events that befell Israel in its sojourn in the desert, constantly remind us of the powers of water/Torah to restore the Jewish people to a purposeful existence with greatly productive achievements in spite of all of its failures and backsliding.

No matter how bleak and barren the desert landscape in which we currently find ourselves, we should always be cognizant of the ability of Torah to refresh and renew us. The Jewish people are an old nation and yet our powers of rejuvenation have never waned. We were and are constantly nourished by the waters of Torah irrespective of whatever desert we found or find ourselves in.

Thus the choice of Jewish tradition to call this book of the Torah by the name of Bamidbar - in the desert - is meant to convey to us this message of hope, constant redemption and rebirth. © 2013 *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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)*

#### RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

## TorahWeb

Our nationhood and redemption started with Emunah -- faith, it progressed with faith and is perpetuated by faith. When Moshe acquiesced

and accepted the mantle of leadership to be the spokesman of Hashem to His enslaved nation, the Torah (Shemos 4:31) informs us that the people believed Moshe, that he was the messenger to lead their emancipation. The Medrash (Shemos Rabbah 5:13) comments on this verse that it was not the signs and wonders that Moshe performed that won them over, rather the faith that the one who brought the message of "pakod yifkod -- Hashem will redeem you" is the true representative of Hashem.

Regarding the Jews at Yam Suf we are told, "and they had faith in Hashem and in Moshe, His servant" (Shemos 14:31.) Finally, at Sinai "Hashem said to Moshe, Behold! I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you, and they will believe in you forever"(Shemos 19:9.) Thus, the revelation at Sinai was predicated on faith and maintains that faith.

The Talmud (Shabbos 88B) relates the Rava was questioned, how could the Jewish nation at Sinai not question Hashem as to the content of His Torah prior to accepting it? Unlike all other nations that asked, "What is written in it?", "What are its laws?", "Let us see if we can comply with it?" (Sifrei 343), the Jewish nation responded "Naaseh v'nishmah -- we will do and we will obey" (Shemos 24:7). Rava answered by citing the verse from Proverbs (11:3), "tumas yesharim tanchein -- the perfect faith of the upright shall lead them". Rashi understands this to mean we trusted Hashem out of love, and relied on Him that He would not burden us with something we could not do. Kabolos haTorah was based on the pure faith of our ancestors, that not only could we observe and follow His Torah but that this is the best possible life for us.

The Talmud (Nidah 70b) asks what should a person do to become rich? Rebe Yehoshua answered that (1) he should invest time in his business, (2) he should conduct his business affairs with integrity and (3) he should pray to Hashem, the source of all wealth. The above is understandable, as the Kli Yakor (Vayikra 25:36) explains the prohibition of charging interest to a Jew is based upon the reality that for all business transactions one needs Divine assistance. Will they be successful, will they and their merchandise find favor in the eyes of the next one? Willy-nilly, the merchant looks heavenward, prays for success in his endeavors. Not so the one who lends on interest, he has taken care of matters himself. He is ensured of his success and profit by stipulating in advance the interest he will take. Such an individual has removed Hashem from the equation. The Torah therefore prohibits lending with interest, to bolster and maintain the faith of the businessman.

What is fascinating however, is the earlier question posed in the above gemara. What should a person do to become a scholar? Rebe Yehosua answered that he should spend more time studying in the Yeshiva, spend less time in business, and pray to Hashem for wisdom, as He is the source of all wisdom.

Regarding wealth it is understandable that one is to pray, as this reinforces the faith and recognition that ultimately it all comes from On High. What role does prayer play with Torah knowledge?

Every morning we are privileged to recite two blessings prior to the recitation of the Shema. The first speaks of Hashem as the Creator, and His daily renewal of nature. In the second blessing we thank Him for the gift of Torah. In fact, if one is late in coming to Synagogue and did not yet recite birkas haTorah, the daily blessings in honor of a Torah, one can satisfy their obligation with this second beracha of Ahava Rabbah (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 46.) Note, in it we not only ask Hashem for Divine assistance "to instill in our hearts the desire to understand and discern, to listen learn and teach, to observe perform and fulfill all the teachings of Your Torah in love". We also ask Hashem in the merit of our ancestors who trusted in You and to whom You taught the laws of life, be gracious also to us and teach us). As the original kabolos haTorah was predicated on emunah, so too our personal and communal kabolos haTorah is only meaningful if it is coupled with faith. Specifically, we have faith that the Torah speaks to our generation and provides meaning and purpose for life as it did for the generation at Sinai and to all subsequent generation. We Pray to Him daily that we remain steadfast in our faith.

Perhaps this is why we most always read Parshas Bamidbar on the Shabbos prior to Shavuos. While there are no specific mitzvos found in this parsha, the setting of the desert, and as our Rabbis (Mechilta) inform us "The Torah was only given to those who ate and were nourished by the mun -- the daily ration of manna that descended from heaven". Hashem, who could have provided them with their gift of mun annually, chose to do so daily to bolster their emunah. We, their proud descents, are the beneficiaries of their basic training in emunah, enabling us to take Hashem's Torah and "transform wastelands into Eden" (Yeshaya 51:3.) © 2013 Rabbi B. Yudin & The TorahWeb Foundation

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yisrael Rosen, Dean of the Zomet Institute

One of the greatest of the rabbis of North Africa was the Rashbatz, Rabbi Shimon Ben Tzemach Duran (who passed away in Algeria in 1444). He discusses the sanctity of Jerusalem in our time with respect to the law that "everyone can force another to go to Jerusalem" (such as forcing a mate to move to the holy city) and other issues related to the high status of the city as the capital of the world. The responsa ends with a note that makes a direct link between Jerusalem (Day) and the holiday of Shavuos:

"The halachic conclusion is that by Torah law the sanctity of the land is no longer in effect, and we are only required to observe the laws of teruma and maaser

because of a rabbinical decree. But the sanctity of the city has not been canceled with respect to issues concerning Jerusalem... And one proof of the fact that the sanctity of the Temple and the city still exists is that people continue with a pilgrimage for the holidays from Egypt and from other lands... It is said that some of the miracles of Jerusalem continue, in that no man ever said to his colleague, I do not have enough room. All year round all the people of the city are needed in the synagogue, but it is crowded from end to end on the holiday of Shavuot, when more than three hundred men come. They all sit there with room to spare, for the city maintains its holiness, and this is one of the symbols of the third redemption."

Anyone with any sensitivity at all can hear in his heart and with a bit of imagination can see through the above words the great yearning for Jerusalem which beat throughout the exiles of Yisrael in all the generations. And the above quote also gives us a specific fact: the holiday of Shavuot was the "special day" for a pilgrimage of crowds who came, as he said, "from Egypt and other lands." The people came to Jerusalem, destroyed and desolate as it was, in order to absorb the holy scent which never stopped and by their very presence to declare the news of the signs of the Third Redemption.

These words are appropriate for this Shabbat, between Yom Yerushalayim and Shavuot, and especially so for our generation, when we have been merited to return to Jerusalem, to rebuild it gloriously, and to thereby strengthen one of the signs of the Third Redemption. This corresponds to the way the GRA enlightened us, as we are told by his disciple, who wrote the book, "Kol Hator" – "According to our mentor the GRA, all the labor of ingathering of the exiles, building Jerusalem, and expanding settlements in Eretz Yisrael are part of the role of the Machiach who begins the process... The mending of the sin of the scouts must take place by building the Temple. But before the Temple is built Jerusalem must be rebuilt, corresponding to the verse, 'He who says to Koresh... say that Jerusalem will be built and the Temple will be established' [Yeshayahu 44:28]." © 2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

## **Haftarah**

**T**his week's haftarah 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. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

Is there any significance to the Jewish people camping around the Tabernacle during their wanderings in the desert? (Numbers 2:2) We can best understand this through seeing the striking similarities between the way the Jews wandered and the revelation at Sinai.

When receiving the Torah the Jews encircled Sinai; in the desert the Jews encircled the Tabernacle. At Sinai Jewish leadership ascended higher up the mountain than the larger community to hear the voice of G-d; in the desert an inner circle comprised of leaders of the Jewish nation camped around the Tabernacle, encompassed in turn by a larger outer circle made up of the tribes of Israel. And, of course, the presence of G-d hovered over Sinai; in the Tabernacle, the spirit of G-d was similarly omnipresent.

It could be argued that when leaving Sinai the Jews felt disconnected from G-d and it was therefore necessary to create a kind of continuous Sinai experience. Benno Jacob points out this possibility when he states, "the Tabernacle was a mobile Sinai in the midst of them [Jewish people]."

Just as there was a simulation of the Sinai moment every day in the desert, we simulate the experience of the giving of the Torah in contemporary times where we read the Torah in public. After all, the reader could be seen as Moshe (Moses) reading the word of G-d, surrounded by two gabbaim (helpers), much like Moshe was surrounded by helpers when the Torah was given at Sinai. Indeed, for many the custom is to stand during the public reading of the Torah, just as the Jewish people did at Sinai.

No wonder that this week's portion, Bamidbar, is always read on the Shabbat prior to Shavuot. Shavuot is the day when we recall that moment when Israel was wed to G-d. What better way to prepare for the reenactment of that great experience than to gather as a community and read how we, as a people encircled the Tabernacle as we did at Sinai, symbolic of a bride walking around her groom. Just like a couple who renews their vows, it reminds us of that ultimate moment of the promises that we made to G-d and G-d made to us. We renew our covenantal relationship and pray that we continue to be betrothed to each other forever. © 2003 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.

