

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

This week's sedra begins with a continuation of the census begun in last week's -- the act that gives the entire book its English name: the book of "Numbers." Two things, though, are puzzling. The first is the very act of numbering the people. Jewish tradition conveys two quite different, apparently contradictory, attitudes toward the taking of a census.

Rashi notes that this is not the first time the people had been counted. Their number ("about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children") had already been given as they prepared to leave Egypt (Ex. 12:37). A more precise calculation had been made when the adult males each gave a half shekel toward the building of the sanctuary (yielding a total of 603,550; Ex. 38:26). Now a third count was taking place. Why the repeated calculations? Rashi's answer is simple and moving: Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, G-d counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the sanctuary), He counted them again. (Rashi to Bamidbar 1:1)

For Rashi, the counting of the people was an act of Divine love. Yet this is not the impression we receive elsewhere. To the contrary, the Torah sees the taking of a census as profoundly dangerous: "Then G-d said to Moses, 'When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to G-d a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them.'" (Ex. 30:11-12).

Centuries later, when King David counted the people, there was a moment of Divine anger, during which 70,000 died. It seems hard to reconcile the idea of counting as an act of love with the fact that counting involves great risk.

The second source of perplexity is the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: naso/se'u et rosh, literally, "lift the head." There are many verbs available in classical Hebrew to indicate the act of counting: limnot, lifkod, lispor, lachshov. Why, in the books of Exodus and Numbers, does the Torah

resort to the strange circumlocution, "lift the heads" of the Israelites?

To understand the revolution the Hebrew Bible brought to the world, we have first to enter imaginatively into the consequences for humanity of the birth of civilization. In the earliest hunter-gatherer societies, people lived together in small groups. There were, as yet, no cities, no states, no large concentrations of population. The Torah attributes the building of the first city to Cain (Gen. 4:17). Cities emerged with the birth of agriculture -- in the fertile alluvial plain in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates, and the well-irrigated Nile delta. Twice in the book of Bereishit the Torah sketches a portrait of urban culture: first, the Tower of Babel, second, the Egypt to which Joseph is brought as a slave. They are both highly critical accounts. In Babel, human life was cheap (when the Tower was being built, said the sages, if a person fell and died, no one noticed. If a brick fell, they wept). In Egypt, entire populations -- among them, eventually, the children of Israel -- could be pressed into service as a labour force to build pyramids, temples and monuments, many of which still stand today.

The birth of agriculture and the growth of towns had huge social implications. For the first time, surplus wealth was possible and could be stored in the form of money (initially, precious metals such as silver and gold). So too, as populations expanded and the division of labour became more elaborate, social stratification began. Inequality -- deep, pervasive and systemic -- became one of the universal features of the earliest societies. At the top was the king, emperor or Pharaoh, seen as no less than a god or child of the gods, who held a massive concentration of power. Below him (or her) were the various ranks of privilege: court circles, military chiefs, administrators and priests. The mass of the people -- poor, illiterate, expendable -- was significant, whether as an army or a construction force, as a mass, by sheer weight of numbers. Hence the significance of censuses in the ancient world (and in this respect, little has changed from then to now). Size meant strength, military or economic. Population counts gave rulers information about the size of the army they could muster, or of the income they could raise by taxation.

The religion of Israel is a sustained protest against this view -- military, political and economic -- of the human situation. At this distance in time it is hard fully to appreciate the breathtaking novelty, the

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transformative potential, of the cluster of ideas generated by a single revelation -- that the human person as such, man or woman, rich or poor, powerful or powerless, is the image of G-d and therefore of non-negotiable, unquantifiable value. We are each equally in the image of G-d, therefore we stand equal in the presence of G-d. Much of Torah, Jewish history and the development of Western civilization is about the slow translation of this idea into institutions, social structures and ethical codes.

It should now be clear why the taking of a census is fraught with spiritual risk. The numbering of a people is the most potent symbol of mankind-in-the-mass, of a society in which the individual is not valued in and for him -- or herself but as part of a totality whose power lies in numbers. That is precisely what Israel is not. The G-d of Israel, who is the G-d of all mankind, sets His special love on a people whose strength has nothing to do with numbers, a people that never sets itself to become an empire, that is never commanded to wage holy war in order to convert populations, that was and remains tiny in both absolute terms and relative to the empires with which it was and is surrounded, standing as it does at the vulnerable crossroad between three continents.

Both questions with which we began are now answered. There is a difference between a human census and one commanded by G-d. David's was a human census. Israel's second king had laid the foundations of a nation. He had waged successful wars, united the tribes and established Jerusalem as his capital. Shortly after his death, Israel reached its zenith as a power in the Middle East. Under Solomon, through strategic alliances, it became a centre of trade and scholarship. The Temple was built. It must have seemed at the time as if, after many centuries of wandering and war, Israel had become a power to rival any other. It was a shortlived, cruelly-shattered illusion. Almost immediately after Solomon's reign, the kingdom split in two, and from then on its this-worldly fate was sealed. A history of defeats, exiles and destructions began, which has no parallel in the annals of any other nation. The Hebrew Bible is not wrong in seeing the starting-point of this decline in the moment at which David acted like any other king and ordered a census of the people.

A Divine census is utterly different. It has nothing to do with strength-in-numbers. It has to do, instead, with conveying to every member of the nation that he or she counts; that every person, family, household is held precious by G-d; that distinctions between great and small, ruler and ruled, leader and led, are irrelevant; that we are each G-d's image and the object of His love. A Divine census is, as Rashi says, a gesture of endearment. That is why it cannot be described by the usual verbs of counting -- limnot, lifkod, lispor, lachshov. Only the phrase naso/se'u et rosh, "lift the head", does justice to this kind of enumeration, in which those entrusted with the task are commanded to "lift the head" of those they count, making every individual stand tall in the knowledge that they are loved, cherished, held special by G-d, and not merely a number, a cipher, among the thousands and millions.

There is a wonderful verse in Psalm 147 which we say every morning in our prayers: "He counts the number of the stars and calls them each by name." A name is a marker of uniqueness. Collective nouns group things together; proper names distinguish them as individuals. Only what we value, do we name (One of the most chilling acts of dehumanisation in the extermination camps of Nazi Germany was that those who entered were never addressed by their names. Instead they were given, inscribed on their skin, a number). G-d gives even the stars their names, all the more so human beings -- on whom He has set His image. G-d counts to signal to us that each of us counts, for what we are as individuals, not en masse. He "lifts our head" in the most profound way known to mankind, by assuring each of us of His special, enduring, unquantifiable love.

That is the nature of the census in the book of Numbers. As the Israelites prepared to become a society with the sanctuary -- visible home of the Divine presence -- at its centre, they had to be reminded that they were to become the pioneers of a new and revolutionary social order, whose most famous definition was given by the prophet Zechariah as the Israelites prepared to rebuild the ruined temple: "Not by might, nor by strength, but by My spirit, says the Lord."

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's reading of Naso describes the "Sota," the woman who acts immodestly. At the very least, she sequesters herself alone with a man despite the fact that her husband warned her against seeing that person. She therefore undergoes the test of the bitter waters. However, during the spring holiday period, we saw two other women - great heroines of our people, Esther (Purim) and Ruth (Shavuot) who also commit immodest acts, for which they are ultimately

praised and through which salvation and redemption are brought about. Let us revisit their stories to see how they differ from that of the Sota.

Both heroines compromise their modesty and perhaps even their chastity, Esther with Ahasuerus in the palace of the king and Ruth with Boaz on the threshing floor in Efrat. Moreover, both of these outstanding women hail from gentile countries of exile and one even from gentile stock: Esther from Persia and Ruth from Moab.

But here is where the comparisons end. Although each of these two women undergoes a profound, existential change, a switch in direction with profound ramifications, they part company in very significant ways.

Esther seems to have been an assimilating Jewess who was eager to become the Queen of Persia. She used her Persian name - from the pagan goddess Astarte - rather than her Hebrew name Hadassah; she is taken for the nighttime beauty contest and undergoes a 12-month preparatory beauty treatment without protest. She even concurs with Mordecai (her cousin, or even perhaps her husband as the midrash suggests) not to reveal her national heritage (lest she be rejected on the grounds that she is Jewish - see the suggestion, albeit rejected by the Ibn Ezra).

It is only when Mordecai publicly demonstrates in front of the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes against Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews of Persia, bidding Esther to "come out of the closet," as it were, and go before the king on behalf of her people, that Esther puts her life on the line. By doing so, she becomes one of the greatest penitents of Jewish history.

The words Mordecai uses to convince Esther have reverberated throughout Jewish history: "Do not imagine in your soul that you will be able to escape in the king's palace any more than the rest of the Jews. For if you persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether it was just for a time such as this that you attained the royal position" (Esther 5:13,14).

The Jews in Shushan gather for three days of prayer and fasting, Esther persuades the king to allow the Jews to protect themselves during the Persian "pogrom" against them, Haman and his sons are killed, and the Jewish community survives.

The Talmud (B.T. Megila 14a) rules that despite all the other festivities, Hallel (psalms of praise) is not to be chanted on Purim; since "we still remained slaves to Ahasuerus" - and an Ahmadinejad can still become a replacement for Haman.

Esther, was born of Jewish parents but married the gentile Ahasuerus, Ruth was a Moabite, she followed Naomi to the Land of Israel, changing geographically and existentially by converting to

Judaism. Her ancestor Lot had defected from Abraham when he left Israel and moved to Sodom, now she repaired this by becoming a second Abraham.

Like our forefather, she left her birthplace and homeland for the Land of Israel, a strange nation and the G-d of ethical monotheism. In her own words, "Where you go, I will go" (to the Land of Israel) - "your nation will be my nation, your G-d shall be my G-d" (Ruth 1:16).

In the deepest sense, Ruth entered Abraham's "Covenant between the Parts" (Genesis 15). G-d promised Abraham that he would be an eternal nation, his seed would never be destroyed and his descendants would live in their homeland, Israel and through this nation, "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:1). This is more than the survival of the Jews in Persia, this is world redemption.

Hence Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor to seduce Boaz, to bear his Jewish seed, just as Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi's ancestor Judah the son of Jacob, had seduced her father-in-law in order to bear his seed (Gen. 38).

But Ruth is not satisfied. She understands that Jewish eternity is linked to two crucial components: Jewish seed in the land of Israel. She doesn't consummate their relationship on the threshing floor; she asks him to "redeem" her, to buy back Naomi's familial inheritance and to marry her "in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel" so that her descendants can be Jews in the Jewish homeland.

Through their actions, Esther succeeded in gaining a respite in persecution, which is the most we can hope for in galut (exile). Ruth succeeded in entering Jewish eternity, the Abrahamic Covenant, and due to her compassionate righteousness and loving-kindness toward Naomi she became the herald of Jewish redemption. Her journey leads to the day when the nations of the world will join the family of Abraham, father of a multitude of nations. ©2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The term that the Torah uses for counting the Levite family of Gershon is nasso - to raise and lift up.

The word can also mean to carry and bear a burden. It can also mean to lead. When such words appear in the Torah with multiple, differing meanings - and Hebrew is replete with so many of them - the commentators remark that all of the possible meanings of that word are nuanced and meant to be part of the verse of the Torah itself.

I think this insight is especially pertinent regarding the word nasso as it appears in this week's parsha. The family of Gershon, as is the tribe of Levi generally, is quite small in number but nevertheless laden with great responsibilities. It can use its paucity in

numbers as an excuse for shirking its responsibilities and for refusing to perform the holy tasks assigned to it. But since it is meant to assume a leadership role in Jewish society, it is bidden to rise to the occasion.

There is no question that this role of leadership will be burdensome and frustrating. Yet it is enjoined at the beginning of its public service to bear up under the yoke of the Jewish people and to serve as the leaders, role models and mentors of the generations of the Jewish people. The Levites are not to shirk their duties and role but rather are to proudly lift themselves up to a higher level of Torah dedication and service to all of Israel. All of this is implicit in the word *nasso* that introduces this week's parsha to our attention.

Rambam, in a famous statement from his *Mishne Torah*, states, in effect, that all human beings who enter this world can reach the spiritual status of being a Levite. One must devote one's self to the service of G-d and of man, practice compassion and goodness and be satisfied and not too over ambitious with one's physical lot in life, in order to aspire to such a status. The Levites were the bearers of the Torah both literally and figuratively. Rambam indicates that they avoided the petty foolishness in our daily lives and instead concentrated on the holy and noble task to which G-d assigned them.

The tasks and goals of the Levites were clearly delineated for them by the Torah. And even in our time when the service of the Temple is not yet present within Jewish society, the uniqueness of the role of the Levites in our midst has been preserved. At the time of the Golden Calf, when all of Israel was threatened with physical destruction and spiritual annihilation, it was the tribe of Levi that redressed the situation.

In the difficult times and circumstances that surround us today we are also in need of potential Levites who will rise to the occasion and its challenges. One cannot alter one's genealogy but one's spiritual aspirations to become a Levite have no limits or restraints. © 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

As sefiras hamoer reaches its culmination, we are actually concluding two different counts; Chazal (Menachos 66a) teach us that there are two parts to this mitzvah, i.e. the counting of days and the counting of weeks. These two dimensions of sefiras hamoer conclude with the yom tov of Shavuos, which celebrates the completion of both days and weeks. Although we are all familiar with the one-day celebration of Shavuos (with a second day outside of Eretz Yisroel), during the time of the Beis Hamikdash there was an entire week of celebration. Specifically, if a person

couldn't bring the korbanos of Shavuos on the first day, there was a week of tashlumin to make up these korbanos.

The Ohar Sameach suggests that there may be halachik ramifications that emanate from the dual count. The counting of days which culminates in the one day celebration of Shavuos does not depend on the Beis Hamikdash as this one day celebration occurs in all places at all times. Therefore, the counting of days is a mitzvah d'oraysa even today. The counting of weeks, on the other hand, which concludes with the week-long celebration in the Beis Hamikdash does not apply midioraysa today in the absence of Beis Hamikdash. This is the rationale for the view of Rabbeinu Yeruchum who maintains that, in fact, the counting of days today is midioraysa, whereas the counting of weeks is midirabanan as a *zecher lamikdash*.

These dual aspects of counting go beyond the actual mitzvah of sefiras hamoer and subsequent celebration on yom tov; there is a fundamental distinction between the unit of time of a day and that of a week. Days correspond to the physical reality of the earth rotating on its axis. Other units of time, such as a month and a year are also rooted in the world of astronomy -- a month measures a lunar cycle and a year measures the earth's revolving around the sun. A week, however, corresponds to nothing in the physical universe. The unit of a week only has meaning because Hashem created the world in six days and sanctified the seventh. The counting of days relates to this world, whereas the counting of weeks belongs to the world of kedusha. Counting of days can exist even without a Beis Hamikdash, whereas the counting of weeks is in the realm of the Beis Hamikdash. Shavuos is the culmination of both counts, because the essence of zman mattan Torahseinu is our ability to count both days and weeks.

Chazal relate to us how the angels tried to dissuade Hashem from giving the Torah to the Jewish People. It was only the response of Moshe that we, as human beings, need the mitzvos of the Torah which are not relevant for pure, spiritual beings such as angels, which ended the argument in favor of giving us the Torah. On Shavuos we celebrate our ability to infuse kedusha into a physical world, our ability to combine the counting of weeks to complement our counting of days.

As we approach the yom tov of Shavuos, we realize that our ability to truly transform our physical world into a world of kedusha is inhibited by our lack of a Beis Hamikdash. Chazal understood that even without an actual Beis Hamikdash we must continue to count weeks, albeit as a *zecher lamikdash*. It is our constant yearning to once again have a Beis Hamikdash that keeps us focused on the fact that our physical world is not yet complete. As we anticipate the counting of weeks and the celebrating of the entire week of Shavuos in the Beis Hamikdash, we look forward to the day when kedusha will infuse our physical world. When Hashem returns to us that opportunity, zman mattan

Torahseinu will have finally achieved its goal. May we merit that day very soon. © 2013 Rabbi B. Yudin & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Shavuot 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-tahit ha-har." (Exodus 19:17) Commenting on the word be-tahit, 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 tihiyu 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 vedavak (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. © 2013 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg,
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

“Take care and guard your soul very much, lest you forget the things that you saw with your own eyes... the day you stood on Chorev before your G-d" [Devarim 4:9-10]. Rashi feels that this is referring to the study of Torah, but the Ramban writes, "this is not true at all... rather I want to warn you... not to forget the events of Mount Sinai."

The main element of Mount Sinai was the intimate encounter between Bnei Yisrael and the Holy One, Blessed be He. As is written by the sages, "'He will kiss me with kisses on the mouth' [Shir Hashirim 1:2] -- this can be compared to a young child who comes home from school and finds his father eating cake. He asks for a piece and his father cuts him one. But he says, what I want is to have some of what is in your mouth." That is how the Holy One, Blessed be He, gives the Torah to Moshe: "I speak to him from one mouth to another" [Bamidbar 12:11]. This direct contact is what is called an "enlightened face," as opposed to a situation when the Divine face is hidden. That is why we say in our prayers, "Our Father, bless us all together with the light of Your face, since with the light of Your face You gave us, our G-d, a Torah of life."

Where do we encounter the light of G-d's face after the events of Sinai? In the Tabernacle. Here is what the Ramban writes in the Torah portion of Teruma: "When G-d spoke to the nation of Yisrael face to face... this is the main thing desired in the Tabernacle, which is the Ark... And the mystic side of the Tabernacle is that the glory that was revealed at Mount Sinai rests there in a hidden manner." The "Keruvim," the images of angels facing each other on the cover of the Ark, continue the intimate face to face contact of Mount Sinai.

And what happens when the Tabernacle has been dismantled? The Rambam writes, "When the Ark is being carried, it is not carried on an animal... but the mitzva is to carry it on the shoulders... And it is carried face to face." That is, even when the Ark is being

carried the Levites continue with the principle of face to face contact from Sinai, which is a sign of affection.

How can we continue this "light of the face" today, when the Temple does not exist? This is done in the synagogues, as the sages explained that it is written, "'This is how you shall bless Bnei Yisrael' [Bamidbar 6:23] -- face to face" [Sotta 38]. In this way the Kohanim extend the light of the face that G-d presented to Yisrael with the giving of the Torah. That is why they say, "Let G-d light up His face to you" [6:26]. The sages explain, "This refers to the light of the Torah." And therefore the Kohanim are commanded to "bless His nation Yisrael with love." They are obligated to make an effort to bless the nation out of love, as an expression of the light of the face of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

It is written in the Midrash, "'Behold he stands behind our wall' [Shir Hashirim 2:9] -- This refers to Sinai." In addition, "'Behind our wall' -- this refers to the synagogues. 'Supervising through the windows' -- from between the shoulders of the Kohanim. 'Peering out from the cracks' -- from between the fingers of the Kohanim." And here we have the link to Sinai, through the carrying of the Ark on the shoulders of the Levites. And today the Shechina peeks out from between the fingers of the Kohanim when they bless the Jews. Our sages have written, "How did Yisrael merit the blessings of the Kohanim? As is written, 'This is how you shall bless Bnei Yisrael' [Bamidbar 6:23], and 'This is what you should say to the House of Yaacov' [Shemot 19:3]." [Bereishit Rabba 45].

The fact that the blessings of the Kohanim precede the dedication of the Tabernacle teaches us that the revelation of the Shechina does not depend on the existence of the Temple. Rather, G-d says, "every place where I mention My name I will come to you and bless you" [Shemot 20:21]. © 2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the key moments of M'gilas Rus is the conversation between Boaz and another relative of Elimelech's (Rus 4:1-6). Although originally the unnamed relative agreed to "redeem" the field that had been Elimelech's and was sold by his widow Nu'umi, after being told that doing so included marrying Rus, he backed out. However, it is unclear why the two were connected. Why was being able to "redeem" the land dependant on marrying Rus, the widow of Machlon, Elimelech's son? Why couldn't the unnamed relative insist on taking the field without having to take Rus too?

In 5763, I suggested the following: "Rabbi Yochanan said, 'Jerusalem was destroyed because [its inhabitants] insisted on acting [with each other] based on the dictates of the law, rather than going above and beyond that which the law requires" (Bava M'tzia 30b).

While the relative might have been within his legal rights to insist that he be able to buy the field without any other conditions, he also knew that doing so would not be fair to Rus. By allowing Boaz, who wanted to marry her, to "redeem" the field instead of him, he was thereby allowing Rus to stay connected to the land that had belonged to the person who first introduced her to (the religion now known as) Judaism, land that would stay with her progeny. He had seen the troubles that had befallen Elimelech and his family and wasn't going to turn his back on a downtrodden convert. Even if, had he gone to a rabbinical court, the law would have been decided in his favor (allowing him to buy the field unconditionally), he went beyond what the law required (yet was within its parameters) to do what he knew was right. Looking into this issue again this year, I found that the Akeidas Yitzchok makes a similar suggestion, boruch she'kivanti. Nevertheless, there are other possibilities as well.

In order to figure out how redeeming the field that Nu'umi sold required marrying Rus, we have to figure out how Nu'umi even had a field to sell. After all, when Elimelech died, his property was inherited by his children, Machlon and Khilyon, not by his wife. When they died, their wives didn't inherit what had been Elimelech's property, and neither did their mother. It would have gone to the males in Elimelech's family, i.e. Boaz and this unnamed relative. How could Nu'umi have sold a field that had belonged to Elimelech (4:3) to a third party, thereby requiring that it be "redeemed" by those same relatives to whom the field should have belonged?

One possibility is based on Nu'umi being a family member even before she married Elimelech, as she was his brother's daughter (see Bava Basra 91a). If she had no brothers, she would have inherited her father's property. It might have still been referred to as "the portion of the field that was our brother Elimelech's" because while he was alive, he was the administrator even though Nu'umi was the actual owner. [A similar scenario would result if Elimelech, or Machlon or Khilyon, had given Nu'umi the property as a gift, with the field being referred to as "Elimelech's" because at one time it did belong to him.] When she sold this field (because she needed the money), other family members could then redeem it from the buyer, whether the buyer wanted to sell it back to the family or not. However, under these circumstances, after the field was "redeemed" it wouldn't belong to the redeemer, but would go back to Nu'umi. Yet, this transaction, besides being described as a "redemption," is also described as an "acquisition" (4:4), with the redeemer "acquiring it from Nu'umi and Rus" (4:5). It is therefore possible that there were two steps to this redemption; first the field would be brought back to the family by redeeming it from the person Nu'umi had sold it to, then it would be acquired by the redeemer in exchange for marrying Rus. The other relative was willing to redeem the field

so that it would go back to Nu'umi, but he wasn't willing to marry Rus. He therefore let Boaz redeem the field instead, since he would fulfill the second part of the transaction—marrying Rus and taking possession of the field that would have belonged to her first husband (and would eventually belong to her children).

Most understand Nu'umi having a field to sell to be the lien she had on Elimelech's field to cover her k'suba (marriage contract); she sold "part of one of Elimelech's fields" in order to get the money she was owed from her k'suba. After it was sold to a third party, Boaz wanted to "redeem" it, i.e. bring it back into the family. In this case, since Elimelech's property had no other inheritors, it would go to his brothers (and their families), i.e. Boaz and this unnamed relative. As opposed to the standard "redemption," where the redeemer doesn't keep what was redeemed, here the redeemer would "acquire" it. (However, whichever relative took possession of the field would get the corresponding amount less of the rest of Elimelech's property.) Rus would have had a lien on property from her k'suba as well. If she hadn't sold that field yet, she could insist that whomever buys it agrees to marry her (see Rashi on 4:5). It is also possible that Nu'umi hadn't actually sold her field yet, and this "redemption" meant selling it to a relative rather than to a third party, in which case she could make the same stipulation—in order to take "possession" of these fields the "redeemer" would have to marry Rus. (If the two fields were next to each other, even if Nu'umi had already sold hers, the relative who would redeem it would likely want to "own" both of them; without Rus agreeing to sell her part, there would be less interest in redeeming Nu'umi's.)

Even if both Nu'umi and Rus had already sold their fields, it is still possible that they could have determined who gets to redeem them. Relative are not required to perform a "redemption" (see Rambam's Hilchos Sh'mita 11:18), but if one of them wants to, the person who bought the field cannot prevent it. Normally, there would be no reason for the person who sold the field to tell the relative willing to redeem it "no thanks," and if they did, the potential redeemer would probably be thrilled that he didn't have to spend any money on a field he couldn't benefit from. In this case, however, Nu'umi and Rus already received the money owed for their k'subos. They wouldn't get any additional use from the field after it was redeemed (unless one of them married the redeemer); the redeemer would have full use of the property. Can such a field also be "redeemed" against the buyer's will? What if both the buyer and the seller don't want the "redemption" to occur, can the "redeemer" still proceed? In Meishiv Nefesh (his commentary on Rus), the Bach says it's likely that he could not. If so, in order for the unnamed relative to be able to buy Nu'umi's field back against the will of the buyer, she would have to want it to happen as

well. And she could insist that she'll only "want" it if the redeemer agrees to marry Rus.

It is clear that the underlying concept behind the relationship between Boaz and Rus was "yibum" (levirate marriage), where a relative of the deceased marries the widow and "their firstborn takes the place of the deceased brother" (D'varim 25:6). This is apparent from the fact that when Rus first mentions Boaz marrying her, she refers to him as "the redeemer" (Rus 3:9), from Boaz describing the purpose of "buying" Rus' field to be "taking the place of the deceased" (4:5), and from his similarly describing the essence of his marriage to Rus (4:10). Even though the "yibum" described in the Torah (and halacha) is only the brother of the deceased and not other relatives, this is likely because there is no prohibition against the widow marrying any of the other relatives; the Torah (and halacha) has to teach us that even though usually the wife of a brother is forbidden, in the case of "yibum" it is not. The concept, and advantages, of "yibum" (from a kabbalistic perspective) also apply to other close relatives if there is no brother. As Ramban puts it (B'raishis 38:9), "this subject is one of the great secrets/mysteries (read: kabbalistic concepts) of the Torah regarding human reproduction, which is recognized by those who have eyes to see, to whom G-d has given eyes to see and ears to hear... that there is a great benefit when the brother performs 'yibum,' and it is appropriate that he (the brother) should have precedence and afterwards the closest member of the family, for [regarding] all relatives who are close to him from his family—in the sense that they inherit them—a benefit results through [the widow marrying] him." On 38:8, Ramban included the marriage of Boaz to Rus as an example of "yibum."

The Talmud (Y'vamos 24a) says that the expression "taking the place of the deceased" (literally: "establishing upon the name of the deceased"), used in the Torah to describe "yibum" and in M'gilas Rus to describe the relationship between Boaz and Rus, refers to inheriting the land that had belonged to the deceased. As Rashi paraphrases it (D'varim 25:6), "the one who performs "yibum" with [the dead person's] wife takes the inheritance of the deceased." For example, if there were three brothers (none of whom were the firstborn), they would normally divide their father's estate in thirds, each brother inheriting a third. If the older brother died without children and the second brother performed "yibum," the second brother now receives two thirds of their father's estate, his original share and the share that would have gone to his older brother. (Had there been no "yibum" despite the oldest brother having no children, the two surviving brothers would each get half of the estate.) To put it succinctly, the estate of the deceased is transferred to the one who performs "yibum."

"And Boaz said to the nation, 'you are witnesses today that I have acquired all that belonged to

Elimelech, and all that belonged to Khilyon and Machlon" (Rus 4:9). Everything? Nothing went to the other living relative(s)? Well, since upon Elimelech's death all of his possessions went to Machlon and Khilyon, and Khilyon died without children, by marrying Machlon's widow (Rus), Boaz took over Elimelech's entire estate. Now let's look back at the conversation between Boaz and the unnamed relative. Why couldn't the other relative "redeem" the property that Nu'umi had sold without marrying Rus? Technically, he might have been able to. But if he didn't marry Rus, Boaz was going to. And once Boaz marries Rus, all of Elimelech's fields will be transferred to him. What would be the point of redeeming Elimelech's field if it was going to belong to Boaz anyway? © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states regarding a nazir (the person who takes a vow to abstain from wine): "For the crown of the Almighty is on his head"(Numbers 6:7).

The Ibn Ezra writes, "The term nazir comes from the Hebrew word meaning crown. You should know that almost all people are slaves to the pleasures of the world. The only person who is truly a king and has the royal crown on his head is someone who is free from desires."

People who are addicted to pleasures might mistakenly view themselves as fortunate that they have so much pleasure. The truth is that they are enslaved by those pleasures. When they don't have them, they feel the suffering of deprivation. Their thoughts are fixated on what they can do to obtain their desires. They spend more time worrying about how they can obtain pleasures than actually enjoying themselves. Seeking pleasure is an illusory goal. A pleasure-seeker will never be fulfilled.

Happiness is a much more sensible goal than pleasure, and the way to acquire happiness is by being in control of one's desires. When you derive pleasure from self-discipline, your situation is reversed. You will be free from worrying about obtaining desires and you will constantly experience the pleasure of being the ruler over yourself!

Every time you experience self-discipline, view yourself as a king. You are obtaining mastery over yourself. The pleasure you have from self-discipline will enable you to rule over your desires. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz and torah.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

On Shavuot we received the Torah, where the Rabbis recount the Jews' proclamation that "we



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will do and we will hear" the laws of the Torah. The Rabbis explain that the other nations of the world were offered the Torah, and rejected it because they claimed that it was in their nature to steal and kill. But we know that both social and Noachide Laws both prohibit killing and stealing, so what was the reason for them to reject a law that they must already follow?

As Rabbi Zweig explains, to answer this question we must ask another: On the third day of creation, the earth was commanded to produce all trees, and that the branches should all taste like the fruits of that tree (1:11). The earth did create the trees, but not all branches tasted like the fruits. How is this possible? If G-d commanded the earth to produce something, how can it not? The answer is that G-d also created the ability to disconnect from G-d and nature, and that's what the earth did in that instance. By extension, anything that came from the earth, such as man, also contains the ability to disconnect from G-d (this was essential to give Man free choice).

With this perspective, it makes sense that when presenting the Torah, G-d was telling the nations that their true nature was not to want to kill or steal, but the nations were blinded by their disconnect, rejected this notion, and therefore couldn't accept the Torah (they still had to abide by the laws, but they rejected the notion that it was their nature to adhere to them). On the other hand, the Jews embraced this connection to G-d, and understood that doing G-d's will reinforces the connection that they already have, which is why they committed to doing before even hearing of all the laws. That's why doing good things makes us feel good, why we feel guilty when we act improperly, and that's why Shavuot is so important to reconnect to the source of our being, and the purpose of our being here. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem'." (6:2) Rashi z"l writes: "Why is the section dealing with the Nazirite placed adjacent to the section dealing with the sotah? To teach that one who sees a sotah in her disgrace should abstain from wine, because wine may lead to immoral behavior."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) writes that there is broader lesson here: Everything that we see during our lives is a mirror placed there by Divine Providence in which to see ourselves. If a person happens to be in the Bet Hamikdash at just the right moment to see a sotah's disgrace, he should know that he was sent there to witness that event as warning to him that he is at risk of behaving immorally and needs to take precautions. The same is true any time one Jew sees another Jew commit any sin. (AleI Shur I p.137)

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