

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

There have been times when one passage in today's parsha was for me little less than life-saving. No leadership position is easy. Leading Jews is harder still. And spiritual leadership can be hardest of them all. Leaders have a public face that is usually calm, upbeat, optimistic and relaxed. But behind the faade we can all experience storms of emotion as we realise how deep are the divisions between people, how intractable are the problems we face, and how thin the ice on which we stand. Perhaps we all experience such moments at some point in our lives, when we know where we are and where we want to be, but simply cannot see a route from here to there. That is the prelude to despair.

Whenever I felt that way I would turn to the searing moment in our parsha when Moses reached his lowest ebb. The precipitating cause was seemingly slight. The people were engaged in their favourite activity: complaining about the food. With self-deceptive nostalgia, they spoke about the fish they ate in Egypt, and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. Gone is their memory of slavery. All they can recall is the cuisine. At this, understandably, G-d was very angry (Num. 11:10). But Moses was more than angry. He suffered a complete emotional breakdown. He said this to G-d: "Why have You brought this evil on your servant? Why have I failed to find favour in Your eyes, that You have placed the burden of this whole people on me? Did I conceive this whole people? Did I give birth to it, that You should say to me, Carry it in your lap as a nurse carries a baby?... Where can I find meat to give to this whole people when they cry to me saying, Give us meat to eat? I cannot carry this whole people on my own. It is too heavy for me. If this is what You are doing to me, then, if I have found favour in Your

eyes, kill me now, and let me not look upon this my evil." (Num. 11:11-15)

This for me is the benchmark of despair. Whenever I felt unable to carry on, I would read this passage and think, "If I haven't yet reached this point, I'm OK." Somehow the knowledge that the greatest Jewish leader of all time had experienced this depth of darkness was empowering. It said that the feeling of failure does not necessarily mean that you have failed. All it means is that you have not yet succeeded. Still less does it mean that you are a failure. To the contrary, failure comes to those who take risks; and the willingness to take risks is absolutely necessary if you seek, in however small a way, to change the world for the better.

What is striking about Tanakh is the way it documents these dark nights of the soul in the lives of some of the greatest heroes of the spirit. Moses was not the only prophet to pray to die. Three others did so: Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Jeremiah (Jer. 20:7-18) and Jonah (Jon. 4:3).

(So of course did Job, but Job was not a prophet, nor according to many commentators was he even Jewish. The book of Job is about another subject altogether, namely, Why do bad things happen to good people? That is a question about G-d, not about humanity.)

The Psalms, especially those attributed to King David, are shot through with moments of despair: "My G-d, my G-d, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps. 22:2). "From the depths I cry to You" (Ps. 130:1). "I am a helpless man abandoned among the dead... You have laid me in the lowest pit, in the dark, in the depths" (Ps. 88:5-7).

What Tanakh telling us in these stories is profoundly liberating. Judaism is not a recipe for blandness or bliss. It is not a guarantee that you will be spared heartache and pain. It is not what the Stoics sought, apatheia, a life undisturbed by passion. Nor is it a path to nirvana, stilling the fires of feeling by extinguishing the self. These things have a spiritual

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beauty of their own, and their counterparts can be found in the more mystical strands of Judaism. But they are not the world of the heroes and heroines of Tanakh.

Why so? Because Judaism is a faith for those who seek to change the world. That is unusual in the history of faith. Most religions are about accepting the world the way it is. Judaism is a protest against the world that is in the name of the world that ought to be. To be a Jew is to seek to make a difference, to change lives for the better, to heal some of the scars of our fractured world. But people don't like change. That's why Moses, David, Elijah and Jeremiah found life so hard.

We can say precisely what brought Moses to despair. He had faced a similar challenge before. Back in the book of Exodus the people had made the same complaint: "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this desert to starve this whole assembly to death" (Ex. 16:3). Moses, on that occasion, experienced no crisis. The people were hungry and needed food. That was a legitimate request.

Since then, though, they had experienced the twin peaks of the revelation at Mount Sinai and the construction of the Tabernacle. They had come closer to G-d than any nation had ever done before. Nor were they starving. Their complaint was not that they had no food. They had the manna. Their complaint was that it was boring: "Now we have lost our appetite (literally, "our soul is dried up"); we never see anything but this manna!" (Ex. 11:6). They had reached the spiritual heights but they remained the same recalcitrant, ungrateful, small-minded people they had been before.

(Note that the text attributes the complaint to the asafsuf, the rabble, the riffraff, which some commentators take to mean the "mixed multitude" who joined the Israelites on the exodus.)

That was what made Moses feel that his entire mission had failed and would continue to fail. His mission was to help the Israelites create a society that would be the opposite of Egypt, that would liberate instead of oppress, dignify, not enslave. But the people had not changed. Worse: they had taken refuge in the most absurd nostalgia for the Egypt they had left: memories of fish, cucumbers, garlic and the rest.

Moses had discovered it was easier to take the Israelites out of Egypt than to take Egypt out of the Israelites. If the people had not changed by now, it was a reasonable assumption that they never would. Moses was staring at his own defeat. There was no point in carrying on.

G-d then comforted him. First He told him to gather seventy elders to share with him the burdens of leadership, then He told him not to worry about the food. The people would soon have meat in plenty. It came in the form of a huge avalanche of quails.

What is most striking about this story is that thereafter Moses appears to be a changed man. Told by Joshua that there might be a challenge to his leadership, he replies: "Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them" (Num. 11:29). In the next chapter, when his own brother and sister begin to criticize him, he reacts with total calm. When G-d punishes Miriam, Moses prays on her behalf. It is specifically at this point in the long biblical account of Moses' life that the Torah says, "The man Moses was very humble, more so than any other man on earth" (Num. 12:3).

The Torah is giving us a remarkable account of the psychodynamics of emotional crisis. The first thing it is telling us is that it is important, in the midst of despair, not to be alone. G-d performs the role of comforter. It is He who lifts Moses from the pit of despair. He speaks directly to Moses' concerns. He tells him he will not have to lead alone in the future. There will be others to help him. Then He tells him not to be anxious about the people's complaint. They would soon have so much meat that it would make them ill, and they would not complain about the food again.

The essential principle here is what the sages meant when they said, "A prisoner cannot release himself from prison." It needs someone else to lift you from depression. That is why Judaism is so insistent on not leaving people alone at times of maximum vulnerability. Hence the principles of visiting the sick, comforting mourners, including the lonely ("the stranger, the orphan and the widow") in festive celebrations, and offering hospitality -- an act said to be "greater than receiving the Shekhinah." Precisely because depression isolates you from others, remaining alone intensifies the despair. What the seventy elders actually did to help Moses is unclear. But simply being there with him was part of the cure.

The other thing it is telling us is that surviving despair is a character-transforming experience. It is when your self-esteem is ground to dust that you suddenly realize that life is not about you. It is about others, and ideals, and a sense of mission or vocation. What matters is the cause, not the person. That is what true humility is about. As C. S. Lewis wisely said: humility is not about thinking less of yourself. It is about

thinking of yourself less.

When you have arrived at this point, even if you have done so through the most bruising experiences, you become stronger than you ever believed possible. You have learned not to put your self-image on the line. You have learned not to think in terms of self-image at all. That is what Rabbi Yohanan meant when he said, "Greatness is humility." Greatness is a life turned outward, so that other people's suffering matters to you more than your own. The mark of greatness is the combination of strength and gentleness that is among the most healing forces in human life.

Moses believed he was a failure. That is worth remembering every time we think we are failures. His journey from despair to self-effacing strength is one of the great psychological narratives in the Torah, a timeless tutorial in hope. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**S**peak unto Aaron, and say unto him: when you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the menorah." (Numbers 8:2) Is it permissible to study science and philosophy in the beit midrash (religious study hall)? Should a yeshiva curriculum include "secular" studies? Our Torah portion opens with the kindling of the seven lights of the branches of the menorah, specifically ordaining that it be kindled by the kohen-priests and that it be beaten of gold, in one piece, from "its stem until its flower" (Num. 8:4).

At first glance, it would seem that this biblical segment is misplaced; its more natural setting would have been the portions of Truma or Tetzaveh in the Book of Exodus, which deal with the Sanctuary, its sacred accoutrements and the task of the kohen-priests in ministering within it. Why revisit the menorah here, in the Book of Numbers?

The classical commentary by Rashi attempts to provide a response: "Why link this segment of the menorah to the segment of the tribal princes (which concludes the previous Torah portion)? Because when Aaron saw the offerings of the princes (at the dedication of the Sanctuary), he felt ill at ease that he was not included with them in the offerings, neither he nor his tribe. The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him, 'By your life, your contribution is greater than theirs; you kindle and prepare the lights'" (Rashi, Num. 8:2).

Why would such a task give comfort to Aaron? Since when is cleaning and kindling a candelabrum a greater honor than participating in the opening ceremony of the Sanctuary? We cannot expect to penetrate the significance of Rashi's words (which are taken from Midrash Tanhuma 8) unless we first attempt to understand the significance of the menorah. At first blush, the lights of the menorah symbolize Torah: "For

the commandment is a candle, and Torah is light," teaches the psalmist. But the ark (aron kodesh) is the repository of the Tablets of Stone, and that is what represents Torah in the Sanctuary.

Moreover, the menorah has a stem, or trunk, and six branches which emanate from it, each with its respective flowers – together making seven lights. And the "goblets" on the branches are "almond-shaped" (meshukadim, cf. Ex. 25:33) reminiscent of the almond tree, the first tree to blossom and thus the herald of spring. The imagery is certainly that of a tree. If the Sanctuary symbolizes a world in which the Almighty dwells—"And they shall make for me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell among them," a world of perfection manifesting the Divine Presence and its consummate goodness and compassion—then the Sanctuary symbolizes a return to Eden, to universal peace and harmony.

If so, the menorah may well represent the Tree of Life—after all, Torah is aptly called "a tree of life to all who grasp it"—or perhaps a tree of knowledge, especially since the ancient Greek tradition speaks of "the seven branches of wisdom," paralleling the seven branches of the menorah (including the central stem). One may even suggest that the menorah is the amalgam of both trees together: Torah and wisdom united in one substance of beaten gold, a tree of life-giving and life-enhancing learning when the light of Torah illumines every branch of worldly wisdom.

I believe that this fundamental unity encompassing Torah and all genuine branches of wisdom was recognized clearly by the Sages of the Talmud. Indeed, from their viewpoint, all true knowledge would certainly lead to the greatest truth of all, the existence of the Creator of the Universe.

Hence the Talmud declares: "Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi in the name of bar Kappara: 'Anyone who has the ability to understand astronomy/astrology [the major science of Babylon] and does not do so, of him does the Scripture say, 'Upon the words of the Lord they do not gaze and upon the deeds of His hands they do not look'" (B.T. Shabbat 75a). The Sages are saying that one cannot begin to properly appreciate the world without a grounding in the sciences.

The 12th-century philosopher-legalist Maimonides also understood the crucial inter-relationship between what is generally regarded as secular wisdom and Torah. He begins his halakhic magnum opus Mishne Torah with the Laws of Torah Fundamentals, which includes cosmogony, philosophy and science.

He concludes the fourth chapter in saying that these studies are necessary for anyone desirous of learning about G-d, the command to love, know and revere G-d. Most amazing of all, Maimonides ordains that the scholar must divide his learning time into three

segments: one third for the Written Torah, one third for the Oral Torah, and one third for Gemara: and Gemara includes extracting new laws, as well as science and philosophy! Apparently an advanced yeshiva led by Maimonides would include in its curriculum the study of science and philosophy as a means of understanding the world, human nature and G-d.

Let us now return to the relationship between the task of the kohen-priest in the Sanctuary. If indeed the menorah represents knowledge in its broadest sense, enlightenment in terms of the seven branches of wisdom, the tree of knowledge, then the duty of the kohen-priest becomes clear. All of knowledge, indeed the entire world, may be seen as "matter"; Torah must give "form," direction and meaning to every aspect of the material world and the life which it breeds. The kohen, who is mandated to "teach the Torah laws to Israel," must prepare, clean and purify the lights of the menorah. This is the highest task of Torah and the greatest calling of the kohanim: to utilize all branches of knowledge to bring us closer to the G-d of love, morality and peace. ©2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Somehow, things start to go very wrong for Moshe and the Jewish people regarding their sojourn in the desert of Sinai, on their way to the Promised Land of Israel. The defection of Yitro, though for honorable and seemingly noble reasons, weakens the resolution of the rest of Israel to somehow enter and conquer their G-d-given homeland.

The rabbis warned us that wise people and leaders should be very careful as to what they say publicly and privately. This certainly applies to what they do and how people will view their behavior and decisions in life.

We always feel that leaders are somehow entitled to a private life as well, distinct from their public persona. However, we also all know that that is not really true and that private decisions taken by public figures have a great, if even only subliminal, influence on the general public that they serve.

There were elements within the Jewish people that reasoned that if Yitro, the father-in-law of Moshe and one of the outstanding and prominent converts to Judaism, felt that dwelling in the Land of Israel is not really for him, then there will be many others among the masses of Israel that will justify their refusal to enter the Land of Israel as just being a case of following his example.

And so, because the great vision of the Jewish homeland promised to their forefathers was no longer paramount in their lives, some of the people began to gripe and complain about all sorts of personal absurdities. This eventually led to open rebellion against G-d and against Moshe that doomed that

generation to destruction and death in the desert of Sinai.

Without going into specifics or mentioning names, I am always astounded by how former political leaders here in Israel, even those who attained high office and are now freelancing and lecturing their way around the world, take it upon themselves to be openly critical – and many times unfairly so – of the government, state and people of Israel.

Can it be that they do not realize the direct and subliminal harm that they inflict upon our cause and our future? This must be the case, since I cannot imagine that they have truly evil intentions with pursuing this type of behavior. They mean well and have legitimate reasons for their opinions and statements.

But they have forgotten the adage of the rabbis that I quoted above – wise men should be careful with their words and actions. Other people are listening and are influenced - and one may even inadvertently grant aid and succor to those who wish to destroy us and our nation. It does not take much in our world to have people begin murmuring in dissatisfaction about Jews, Judaism, Israel, Torah and even G-d, so to speak.

One must always see the big picture and not be overwhelmed by the imperfections and difficult issues that are part of our existence, and in fact, of life itself. Retaining our faith in our cause and our beliefs and using good judgment in what we say and do will certainly stand all of us in good stead. ©2016 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's parsha, G-d tells Moshe (Moses) that a person (ish) who is impure because of contact with a dead body (tameh lanefesh) or too far away from Jerusalem (derekh rehoka) is given a second chance to eat the paschal lamb. (Numbers 9:10-11)

The phrase tameh lanefesh speaks about a spiritual deficiency – when one has contact with a dead body, emotional and religious turbulence sets in.

The phrase vederekh rehoka, speaks of a physical impediment – one who is simply too far away to partake of the paschal lamb on time.

Indeed, throughout Jewish history we have faced both spiritual and physical challenges. What is most interesting is that in the Torah the spiritual challenge is mentioned first. This is because it is often the case that the Jewish community is more threatened spiritually than physically.

Despite its rise, anti-semitism is not our key challenge. The threat today is a spiritual one. The spiraling intermarriage rate among American Jews

proves this point. In America we are so free that non-Jews are marrying us in droves. The late Prof. Eliezer Berkovits was correct when he said that from a sociological perspective, a Jew is one whose grandchildren are Jewish. The painful reality is that large numbers of the grandchildren of today's American Jews will not be Jewish.

And while we are facing grave danger in Israel, thank G-d, we have a strong army which can take care of its citizens physically. Yet, in Israel, it is also the case that it is the Jewish soul, rather than the Jewish body, that is most at risk.

Most interesting is that even the phrase *vederekh rehoka*, which, on the surface, is translated as a physical stumbling block, can be understood as a spiritual crisis. On top of the last letter of *rehoka* (the *heh*), is a dot. Many commentators understand this mark to denote that, in order to understand this phrase, the *heh* should be ignored. As a consequence, the term *rahok*, which is masculine, cannot refer to *derekh* which is feminine. It rather refers to the word *ish*, found earlier in the sentence. (Jerusalem Talmud *Psakim* 9:2) The phrase therefore may refer to Jews who are physically close to Jerusalem yet spiritually far, far away.

The message is clear. What is needed is a strong and passionate focusing on spiritual salvation. The Torah teaches that the Jewish community must continue to confront anti-Semitism everywhere. But while combating anti-Semitism is an important objective in and of itself, the effort must be part of a far larger goal – the stirring and reawakening of Jewish consciousness throughout the world. ©2016 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.

RAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

In light of the difference between the parshios being read in Eretz Yisrael and in Chutz La'aretz, and in consideration of the message of last week's dvar Torah encouraging us to get to know ourselves, I have decided to digress from the regular *divrei Torah* and concentrate on getting to know ourselves. Rav Wolbe himself guides us to this end in one of the most well known sections in his *sefer Alei Shur* titled "Da'as Atzmaeinu" (vol. I p. 141).

As with any mussar idea, the purpose is not to merely appreciate the thought, but rather to understand and integrate the idea into our lives thereby effecting long lasting positive changes. My *tefillah* is that we succeed in achieving this objective, thus bringing ourselves closer to perfection and in turn increasing the glory of the *Ribbono Shel Olam!*

The truth is that knowledge of one's self is not a

subject that can be learned. Even one who is cognizant of a few positive and negative *middos* that are nestled inside himself has still not achieved the goal of self knowledge. Rather, it is an experience that one encounters at a certain juncture in his life. It is the realization, on one hand, that he has unlimited potential for greatness, and on the other hand, it is the acknowledgment of the fact that his self interests dictate every single solitary action that he performs. As one philosopher pithily summed up this experience, "It feels like descending into Gehinom while still alive." We all like to believe that if we are not entirely righteous, we're at least straight and upstanding individuals. The revelation that every one of our actions is rooted in selfishness gives us the feeling that the rug has been pulled out from underneath us. This shakeup could and should be the impetus for one to search for a truer existence.

In contrast, how pathetic is the fellow who lives his life "serenely" without any knowledge of his true self. He subconsciously refuses to pop his bubble of his imagined righteousness and therefore is unwilling to reveal all that lingers under the surface. Such a person is certainly not wicked and he will definitely receive great reward for his numerous good deeds, for Hashem does not hold back reward from anybody. However, he will not be a *ben aliyah* or a man of truth.

Our goal is to get to know ourselves. Acquiring this knowledge will automatically prompt us to invest serious effort into improving ourselves. Moreover, this very knowledge itself is elevating. Many years ago in Germany they found a man who from birth was raised in a cellar. He never saw the light of day nor had he ever even seen another person. Only after he was released did he become aware that he had spent his entire life in a dungeon. As long as he was inside he had no way of realizing that he was living a most vacuous existence in the cellar.

Similarly, one who has not revealed his true self identifies himself with his desires. The revelation of who he really is, in and of itself, separates a person from this subjectivity. While his negative *middos* still must be dealt with, he has succeeded in coming to a realization that those *middos* are not his true lofty self. As long as one is living complacently he simply has no idea that he is residing in a spiritual cellar. Join us for the next few weeks and *b'ezras Hashem* we will begin living in earnest! In *Parshas Shelach*, Rashi tells us that the Torah compares the departure of Spies to their return. This teaches us that just as they returned with bad intentions, so too, when they departed, they set off with bad intentions. Rav Wolbe explains (*Shiurei Chumash*) that had there been no negativity when they departed there is no way such a fiasco would have occurred. He cites the *Zohar* which states that the *nese'im* knew that when they would enter Eretz Yisrael they would lose the coveted position of being *nese'im* --

and they simply weren't willing to give it up. Thus, although they were from the greatest men who lived during the greatest era in history, nevertheless, they were blinded by a personal bias! When one is unaware of his biases he doesn't even realize how it affects everything he sees and does. In the above scenario, the outcome was forty years in the desert and the death of the entire generation. Unfortunately, they had not worked on "Da'as Atzmeinu!" ©2016 Rav S. Wolbe z"l and AishDas Foundation

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And the people were complaining in a bad way in the ears of the Almighty" (Numbers 11:1). Why were the people complaining?

Rashi comments that when the people were complaining, they had no real cause to complain; they were just looking for an excuse to separate themselves from the Almighty. By finding what would sound like a complaint, they felt justified in keeping a distance from the Creator.

When someone realizes all that the Almighty does for him, he will not have a complaining attitude. There are times when a person has unfulfilled needs and times when he is suffering. That is a time for action and prayer.

Complaining, however, is wrong. The underlying theme behind a complainer is not necessarily that he wants the situation to improve, but that he wants to have the benefits of complaining -- to feel free from the obligations for all the good that the other person (or the Almighty) has done. Ultimately, a person who goes through life complaining does not appreciate the good in his life.

When one focuses only on what he is missing, he blinds himself to what he does have. No matter how much you do have, there will always be something to complain about if you look hard enough. This attitude is not merely a means by which a person causes himself a miserable existence. It is a direct contradiction to our obligation to be grateful to the Almighty. Anyone having this negative attitude must make a concerted effort to build up the habit of appreciating what he has and what happens to him. This is crucial for both spiritual reasons and for happiness in life. This especially applies to one's relationship with his or her spouse! Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2016 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And from 50 years of age he (the Levi) should return from the army of workers, and not work anymore. [Rather,] he will serve with his brothers in the Tent of Meeting to guard what needs

guarding, [but as for] work, he shall not work." These verses (Bamidbar 8:25-26) tell us that after the age of 50, the Levi'im no longer "work" in the Mishkan, but they do "serve" there. Which leads to a discussion about which specific tasks they can no longer do, and which they can.

Rashi tells us that the "work" they can no longer do is "carrying on their shoulder," while locking the gates (an expression used to mean guarding the perimeter, as there were no "gates" in the Mishkan, and there was nothing to "carry by shoulder" after the Temple was built), singing (praises to G-d while the offerings are brought) and loading/unloading the wagons (which carried the Mishkan's parts during travel) are all tasks they can do after 50. The Sifre is usually attributed as Rashi's source, and his commentary on the previous verse, as well as on part of this verse, is clearly from or at least consistent with, the Sifre. However, the last two items on Rashi's list of things that Levi'im can do after 50 (as well as specifying which work they can no longer do) is not in the Sifre. Instead, besides "locking the gates," the Sifre says the 50+ year old Levi "returns" (an expression Rashi also uses) "to do the work of the sons of Gersho[n]." There are numerous issues raised regarding Rashi and the Sifre (see Ramban, the commentaries on Rashi and the commentaries on the Sifre), but I would like to focus on just one; why Rashi deviated from the wording of the Sifre. I will point out, though, that Rashi's "list" more closely resembles the Sifre Zuta, which says those over 50 do "the work of carrying," while the tasks they "return" to do are being "gatekeepers, watchmen and singers." With the exception of "loading/unloading the wagons," this list is the same as Rashi's. If we assume that Rashi merged the Sifre and the Sifre Zuta (and that the version of the Sifre Zuta we have was not amended to reflect Rashi's commentary), or chose one over the other, the question still remains why he did so.

[Interestingly, although in Avos (5:21) Rashi explains the source for "50 years old for advice-giving" to be our verses, with "serving his brothers" after 50 meaning giving them advice, he doesn't mention this "service" here (see Tz'ror Hamor). I would attribute this to Rashi making a point of explaining 8:26 as "serving with his brothers," i.e. alongside them, and not "serving his brothers" i.e. assisting them. Since the role of an advisor, as important as it is, is one of assistance, not doing the same tasks as, Rashi could not include it here.]

Only one of the three families of Levi'im, K'has, carried anything on their shoulder; the other two were given wagons to help them transport the things they were responsible for (7:7-9, it should be noted that the tasks of all three are referred to as "work," which our verses say can only be done by Levi'im between the ages of 30 and 50). Some (e.g. Chizkuni) therefore say that Rashi understood the "Levi'im" being described

here to refer only to the family of K'has, whose primary task of carrying the Mishkan's vessels could not be done after reaching the age of 50, at which point they could do all of the tasks that the other two families of Levi'im did. Numerous questions are asked on this, including why the age of service was 30-50 for all three families if only the task of K'has necessitated this age limit (see Mizrachi's answer; I don't think we have to categorize any service done after 50 as "voluntary" in order to call the "army of workers" those between the ages of 30 and 50), but the biggest issue for me is limiting the meaning of "Levi'im" to just one family when every textual indication is that it refers to all three families.

Others (e.g. B'er BaSadeh) say that even though the families of Gershon and M'rari had wagons for transport, and therefore didn't need to carry anything on their shoulders, since they were not prohibited from doing so, and could have if they wanted to, their task of transport is included in the category of "the work of carrying" forbidden to those 50 and older. [The Torah describes it this way as well, see 4:24, 4:27, 4:31-32.] However, this works (pardon the pun) better with Sifre Zuta's wording than with Rashi, who uses the word "shoulder." Nevertheless, since had the wagons not been donated they would have "carried their shoulders," and they were still allowed to, it qualifies as "carrying on their shoulder." [Netziv, in his commentary on the Sifre, suggests that they "carried on their shoulders" from the Mishkan to the wagons.] Additionally, since according to Rashi those over 50 could help load/unload the wagons, he had to use the expression "carry by shoulder" in order to differentiate between what they couldn't do (carry things from station to station) and what they could do (lift things onto and off of the wagons). The question remains, though, why Rashi says that those over 50 can help load/unload the wagons despite it being physical labor (and therefore more easily classified as "work"), necessitating clarifying the "work" that they can't do as "carrying on their shoulder."

One of the things the over-50 Levi'im are supposed to do is "keep watch," or "take care of" (8:26), which Rashi (consistent with his commentary on the previous verse) explains as "to camp around the [Mishkan] and to put [it] up and take [it] down when they travel." The term "mishmeres" (8:26), "what they are responsible for," appears in the description of what the families of Gershon (4:27-28) and M'rari (4:31-32) did, but not K'has. It is also the term used by the Sifre Zuta ("watchers," or "caretakers") for one of the three tasks the Levi'im over 50 could do. How do they "take care of" those things under their "watch"? They are responsible for taking the Mishkan apart, putting the pieces on the wagons, taking them off the wagons at the next station, and reconstructing the Mishkan. [K'has, on the other hand, only transported the

Mishkan's vessels; the Kohanim took care of them until they were wrapped up and ready for transit and then again as soon as they reached the next station.] It would seem that this is why Rashi said the tasks of the families of Gershon and M'rari could be done even by those over 50 (as long as they don't carry the items "on their shoulder").

That Levi'im over 50 can serve as "gatekeepers" is mentioned by both the Sifre and the Sifre Zuta, and is implied in the task of "guarding that which they are in charge of" (8:26).

Although the Sifre says that the Levi'im over 50 can do what the family of Gershon (even those 30-50) was assigned to do, Rashi does not. There is a discussion whether the Sifre also means the family of M'rari when it says Gershon (see Mizrachi), or distinguishes between them because the items M'rari had to load onto and off of the wagons were much heavier than those Gershon was responsible for, and was therefore considered "work" that those over 50 couldn't do (see B'er BaSadeh). Either way, Rashi has it covered. If the Sifre meant both, Rashi includes both by saying "loading and unloading the wagons," a task done by both. And if the Sifre meant only Gershon, Rashi omitted it because he is of the opinion that the Levi'im over 50 can in fact do the tasks of M'rari.

Which leaves us with "singing," mentioned by Rashi (and the Sifre Zuta), but omitted by the Sifre. Here too, some (e.g. Nachalas Yaakov) say that the Sifre would agree that those over 50 can sing, but does not need to mention so explicitly. Others (see Ramban) are adamant that according to the Sifre no Levi over 50 could sing in the Mishkan; it wasn't until the Temple was built that they could sing no matter how old they were (as long as their voice held out). If Rashi thought that the Sifre meant they could sing, we can certainly understand why he felt the need to mention it explicitly (especially if some might understand the Sifre otherwise). If, on the other hand, Rashi thought that the Sifre and Sifre Zuta disagreed (Bamidbar Rabbah 6:9 says explicitly that Levi'im could not sing in the Mishkan after 50), Rashi chose to follow Sifre Zuta. Perhaps he did so for the same reason so many commentators thought it was so obvious that Levi'im over 50 could sing that the Sifre didn't need to even mention it. Or perhaps, as Keser Kehunah (a commentary on the Sifre) suggests, the Sifre followed its own opinion (on Bamidbar 15:2) that until the nation entered the Promised Land there were no wine libations, and since the Levi'im sang during the wine libations, there was no singing in the desert. (We'll put aside for now the singing in the Mishkan from the time they crossed the Jordan until the Temple was built.) Rashi, on the other hand (see Kidushin 37b) says that it was only private offerings that were not accompanied by wine libations before they entered the Promised Land. Since the offerings brought on behalf of the community did have

them, the Levi'im sang in the desert too, and this could/should therefore be included in the list of tasks those over 50 were allowed to do. Some (e.g. Netziv), based on Arachin 11a, point out that the term "serve" refers to singing, so Rashi including singing in the tasks the over-50 Levi'im could do when they "served with their brothers." [That Rashi (4:47) says "the work of the work" refers to the singing done with instruments does not contradict this, as (a) it itself is not called "work," but "work done during other work," and (b) there is a difference between the vocals, which is called "serving," and the instrument playing, which might be considered "work" (see Meshech Chochmeh). I will add that Netziv's suggestion that "Gershon" includes the singing because this was one of their main tasks is not persuasive, if for no other reason than that his logic applies to gatekeeping too, yet the Sifre mentions gatekeeping separately.]

The bottom line is that Rashi may be based on the Sifre, but he is more likely based on Sifre Zuta (if he had the same version we do), adjusting the wording regarding the kind of lifting not allowed after 50 and what being "watchmen" meant for added clarity. Or, for the reasons outlined above, he rejected some aspects of the Sifre, and explained the verses the way he thought they should be understood, like the Sifre Zuta.
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Sounding the Trumpets

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit
by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

According to the text of this week's portion the Mitzvah of sounding the trumpets presents itself during a time of war (*Vchi Tavou Milchama B'artzchem*) and also a time of suffering and oppression (*Al Hatzar Hatzorer Etchem*). Some place these two requisites together and question (*Avnei Ezer*) whether this applies to wars that we are commanded to engage in (*Milchemet Mitzva*), since in such a case we are guaranteed success by Almighty G-d and it is not a time of suffering or oppression. The proof for this can be found in the war against Jericho when they blew the Shofar and not the trumpets (Joshua 6; 2).

On the other hand there are those (*Pri Magadim*) who say that the emphasis is on the word "*B'artzechem*" (in your land), implying that the blowing of the trumpet is only in the land of Israel when there is distress and persecution or if the majority of the Jews are in despair and sorrow. With this backdrop we can understand the actions of *Harav Shragai Faival Frank*, when in a time of anguish for the Jewish people he would sound the trumpets by the Wailing Wall (*Kotel*) to fulfill the positive Mitzvah of "And you shall sound the blasts of the trumpet (*V'hareotem B'chatzrorot*).

In a time of war we sound the trumpets during a special prayer service designed for this purpose. This prayer service is similar to the prayers that we recite on Rosh Hashanah, in that the body of the silent Amidah is divided into three parts—*Malchiyot, Zichronot and Shafarot*. Some believe that this service is held at the place where the war is actually transpiring as we see from various references and descriptions of the wars of the *Maccabim*. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Torah Musings

Bamidbar 10:35: "Vayhi binsoa' ha'aron So it was, when the ark set out."

We are suddenly confronted with the parashah bracketed by the inverted nuns. The letters are inverted because what follows is a story which inverted our historical process. Alas, the parashah is really one sad tale which changes Jewish history completely. The parashah of "Vayhi binsoa' ha'aron" did not seem misplaced before the great reversal took place, before the Jews alienated G-d, before they fell from Him, before they had doubts and sent the spies. Indeed, it was the continuation of the great story of the final, triumphal messianic march into the Land of Israel, which was supposed to take place approximately 3,500 years ago. There would have been no need for an inverted nun at the beginning and an inverted nun at the end. The verse would have been the climax of the whole story, not an inversion. Jewish history would have taken a different course. Had Moses entered the Land of Israel, our history would never have been taken from us. The messianic era would have commenced with the conquest of the Land of Israel by Moses. (Vision and Leadership, p. 166, 171).

According to the Tanna Rebbi, these two verses constitute a book in and of itself: that there are in fact seven books of Moses instead of five (Shabbos 116a). However, these two verses in reality constitute the first and last verses of a book that Moses had yet to write regarding the victorious battles and the great salvation that would lead to the ultimate redemption. Had Moses led Israel into the Promised Land, this book would have been completed. Because Moses never entered the land, Israel's history took a precipitous turn and all that remains are these two verses. (Birchas Yitzchak, pp. 212-213). ©2016 A. Lustiger & torah.org

