

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Naso seems, on the face of it, to be a heterogeneous collection of utterly unrelated items. First there is the account of the Levitical families of Gershon and Merari and their tasks in carrying parts of the Tabernacle when the Israelites journeyed. Then, after two brief laws about removing unclean people from the camp and about restitution, there comes the strange ordeal of the Sotah, the woman suspected by her husband of adultery.

Next comes the law of the Nazirite, the person who voluntarily and usually for a fixed period took on himself special holiness restrictions, among them the renunciation of wine and grape products, of haircuts, and of defilement by contact with a dead body.

This is followed, again seemingly with no connection, by one of the oldest prayers in the world still in continuous use: the priestly blessings. Then, with inexplicable repetitiousness, comes the account of the gifts brought by the princes of each tribe at the dedication of the Tabernacle, a series of long paragraphs repeated no less than twelve times, since each prince brought an identical offering.

Why does the Torah spend so much time describing an event that could have been stated far more briefly by naming the princes and then simply telling us generically that each brought a silver dish, a silver basin and so on? The question that overshadows all others, though, is: what is the logic of this apparently disconnected series?

The answer lies in the last word of the priestly blessing: shalom, peace. In a long analysis the 15th century Spanish Jewish commentator Rabbi Isaac Arama explains that shalom does not mean merely the absence of war or strife. It means completeness, perfection, the harmonious working of a complex system, integrated diversity, a state in which everything is in its proper place and all is at one with the physical and ethical laws governing the universe.

“Peace is the thread of grace issuing from Him, may He be exalted, stringing together all beings, supernal, intermediate, and lower. It underlies and sustains the reality and unique existence of each” (Akedat Yitzhak, ch. 74). Similarly, Isaac Abrabanel writes, “That is why G-d is called peace, because it is He who binds the world together and orders all things according to their particular character and posture. For when things are in their proper order, peace will reign” (Abrabanel, Commentary to Avot 2:12).

This is a concept of peace heavily dependent on the vision of Genesis 1, in which G-d brings order out of *tohu va-vohu*, chaos, creating a world in which each object and life form has its place. Peace exists where each element in the system is valued as a vital part of the system as a whole and where there is no discord between them. The various provisions of parshat Naso are all about bringing peace in this sense.

The most obvious case is that of the Sotah, the woman suspected by her husband of adultery. What struck the sages most forcibly about the ritual of the Sotah is the fact that it involved obliterating the name of G-d, something strictly forbidden under other circumstances. The officiating priest recited a curse including G-d’s name, wrote it on a parchment scroll, and then dissolved the writing into specially prepared water. The sages inferred from this that G-d was willing to renounce His own honour, allowing His name to be effaced “in order to make peace between husband and wife” by clearing an innocent woman from suspicion. Though the ordeal was eventually abolished by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Second Temple, the law served as a reminder as to how important domestic peace is in the Jewish scale of values.

The passage relating to the Levitical families of Gershon and Merari signals that they were given a role of honour in transporting items of the Tabernacle during the people’s journeys through the wilderness. Evidently they were satisfied with this honour, unlike the family of Kehat, detailed at the end of last week’s parsha, one of whose number, Korach, eventually instigated a rebellion against Moses and Aaron.

Likewise, the long account of the offerings of the princes of the twelve tribes is a dramatic way of indicating that each was considered important enough to merit its own passage in the Torah. People will do destructive things if they feel slighted, and not given



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their due role and recognition. Again the case of Korach and his allies is the proof of this. By giving the Levitical families and the princes of the tribes their share of honour and attention, the Torah is telling us how important it is to preserve the harmony of the nation by honouring all.

The case of the Nazirite is in some ways the most interesting. There is an internal conflict within Judaism between, on the one hand, a strong emphasis on the equal dignity of everyone in the eyes of G-d, and the existence of a religious elite in the form of the tribe of Levi in general and the Cohanim, the priests, in particular. It seems that the law of the Nazirite was a way of opening up the possibility to non-Cohanim of a special sanctity close to, though not precisely identical with, that of the Cohanim themselves. This too is a way of avoiding the damaging resentments that can occur when people find themselves excluded by birth from certain forms of status within the community.

If this analysis is correct, then a single theme binds the laws and narrative of this parsha: the theme of making special efforts to preserve or restore peace between people. Peace is easily damaged and hard to repair. Much of the rest of the book of Bamidbar is a set of variations on the theme of internal dissension and strife. So has Jewish history been as a whole.

Naso tells us that we have to go the extra mile in bringing peace between husband and wife, between leaders of the community, and among laypeople who aspire to a more-than-usual state of sanctity.

It is no accident therefore that the priestly blessings end – as do the vast majority of Jewish prayers – with a prayer for peace. Peace, said the rabbis, is one of the names of G-d himself, and Maimonides writes that the whole Torah was given to make peace in the world (Laws of Hanukah 4:14). Naso is a series of practical lessons in how to ensure, as far as possible, that everyone feels recognised and respected, and that suspicion is defused and dissolved.

We have to work for peace as well as pray for it. *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2017 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the real meaning of love? And why is it that the Priest-Kohanim, the ministers of the Holy Temple and Torah teachers of the nation, must administer their priestly benediction “with love”? What has “love” to do with their specific leadership role?

In our Biblical portion, the Almighty tells Moses to command Aaron (the High Priest-Kohen) and his sons, “... So shall you bless the children of Israel: Say to them, ‘May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May the Lord lift His face towards (forgive) you and grant you peace’. And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:22-27).

This priestly benediction was a regular part of the daily Temple service. To this very day, here in Israel, every morning during the repetition of the Amidah, the descendants of Aaron bestow this blessing upon the congregation. Prior to blessing the congregation, the Priest-Kohanim recite the following benediction; “Blessed are You, O Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron, and commanded us to bestow a blessing upon His nation Israel with love”. What is the significance of these last two words, “with love”? And if the Priest-Kohen does not feel love in his heart for every member of the congregation, does this disqualify his blessing?

A Midrash asks why the command to bless Israel is prefaced by the words “say to them”. It answers that this teaches that the Cantor, the representative of the congregation who repeats the Amidah for all the congregants, must say each word of the benediction, which is then repeated word by word by the Priest-Kohen (Midrash Sifrei 6, 143).

Rashi points out that the Hebrew Amor (say) is vocalized with a Kametz, as in Zakhor: Remember the Sabbath day, Remember the day you came out of Egypt). This implies an active form of the verb, as in remembering the Sabbath by our weekly repetition of the Divine primordial week of creation in which we too actively work for six days and creatively rest on the Sabbath, or in our re-experiencing the Egyptian servitude and exodus on the seder night. Apparently, the Kohen-priest must “actively” bless. Rashi adds that the Hebrew amor is spelled in the longest and fullest form possible, in order to teach us that the Priest-Kohen “must not bestow his blessing hastily but rather with intense concentration and with a full, loving heart” (Rashi, ad loc). There is even a French, Hassidic interpretation of the word which claims that the Hebrew amor is akin to the French amour, meaning with love!

Our G-d is a G-d of unconditional love, both before and after we sin, thus, the very opening of the

Ten Commandments, G-d's introduction to His Revelation of His laws, is "I am the Lord who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the House of bondage". The Almighty is telling His nation that by taking them out of difficult straits of Egyptian slavery, He removed our pain thus demonstrating His love for us! It is almost as if he is explaining that His right to command them is based upon His having demonstrated His love for them.

A religious wedding ceremony is fundamentally a ritual acceptance of the mutual responsibilities of husband and wife. The marriage document, or Ketubah, is all about the groom's financial obligations to his bride. And yet, our Talmudic Sages teach us that the young couple must love each other in order to get married, that the over-arching basis for every wedding ceremony is "You shall love your friend like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The nuptial blessings refer to bride and groom as "loving and beloved friends" (B.T. Kidushin, 41a). Our Sages are telling us that there can be no real love without the assumption of responsibility; when I declare my love for you, I must take a certain degree of responsibility for easing your life and sharing your challenges.

The Hassidic Rebbe, Reb Zushia told of how inspired he was by a marvelous conversation he overheard between two drunks at an inn. "I love you, Igor", said one drunkard to the other. "You don't love me", said his friend. "I do love you," protested the first. "You don't love me," insisted Igor. "How do you know that I don't love you?" shouted the first in exasperation. "Because you can't tell me what hurts me" answered Igor. "If you can't tell me what hurts me, you can't try to make it better. And if you don't try to make it better, you certainly don't love me."

Love and responsibility are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, the very Hebrew word *ahavah* is based on the Aramaic word for giving. The Kohen-Priest who is a Jewish teacher and a Jewish leader, simultaneously functions as the agent of the Almighty and of the nation. He must take responsibility for his nation, he must attempt to "brand" them with G-d's name, with G-d's love, and with G-d's justice. He must communicate with his nation, symbolized by the cantor or *shaliah tzibbur*, he must know what hurts his nation and what his nation needs, and then he must actively try to assuage that pain while raising the nation closer to the realm of the Divine. In short, he must love his people and take responsibility for them, as the benediction before the blessing explains so very well!

The Sages of the Talmud ordained that at the time of the priestly benediction, the congregation should think of their dreams – individual and corporate – crying out "Master of the Universe, I am yours and my dreams are yours..." The Hebrew word *dream*, *halom*, has the same letters as *hamal*, love, compassion, as well as *laham*, fight, struggle, wage war. Dreams which

continue to engage us when we are awake are dreams of love and passion, such as the return to Zion which was "as in a dream" (Psalms 126:1). Dreams, as loves, are the beginning of responsibility, a responsibility which often means struggle and even war. Kohen-Teachers must love their student-congregants and take responsibility for them teaching them likewise to take responsibility for each other and for the dream. Only then will our dreams and G-d's dreams be one dream: the perfection of the world, *Tikkun Olam*. ©2017 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The human drive to be unique and special, to stand out in a crowd, to identify one's self in terms of being of a different status than others, is common to all of us. Many times in life we measure ourselves not by our own lives but rather how we differ from all of the people that surround us. This is true in the usual and mundane events of life that occur to us daily. But it is also true in the holy drive for eternity and meaningfulness that is manifested by the soul that exists within each of us.

Because of this, we look for exceptionalism in areas of life that we deem to be the realm of the soul and of potential holiness. The Torah provides such an example of this inner drive for exceptional and more meaningful feelings of holiness in this week's Torah reading. The entire topic of a person becoming a nazir, a person of special holiness, with additional restrictions on one's personal life and behavior, is an example of this yearning. This is the drive to have one's soul achieve an exceptional holiness that will differentiate this person from his surroundings and from other human beings.

In the view of the Torah here, as in many other instances in religious life, motive is the key. What are the true forces and motives that drive this decision? Are these motives holy and noble, driven by pure altruism and religious fervor or are they merely an expression of ego, arrogance and one-upmanship being played out against the background of religious ritual?

Because of this question and the almost impossibility of answering it, the rabbis of the Talmud took a negative view of the entire concept of declaring one's self as being a nazir. There is something intrinsically dangerous and wrong in using religious ritual as a means of self-aggrandizement. In the time of uses, as an example, only one case, where according to one of its opinions, the creation of the status of a nazir was held to have been completely justified.

The drive for personal holiness and for raising oneself spiritually higher, especially in an age of decadence and moral depravity, is a positive one. However, to express that drive in a sincere, unobtrusive

manner is a very challenging task and it is one where most people fall short. Others are repelled by public displays of holy zeal and alleged religious fervor.

Instead of introducing greater holiness to society, this quest for personal holiness at the expense of others only serves to diminish the content and force of holiness in that society. This fact lies at the heart of the rabbinic disapproval, generally speaking, of those who invoke becoming a nazir as the means for their own spiritual attainments and perfection.

All through the history of Jewish religious observance, it is recorded for us in the Talmud and in the later works of the great Hasidic masters and the holy men of Mussar, modesty and self-effacing were encouraged above all else in the pursuit of holiness. This lesson of the nazir applies to our time and place as well. ©2017 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

If a thief robs by violence, swears falsely and then confesses his guilt, the Torah tells us that he is liable to return the value of the object plus an additional one-fifth to the plaintiff. (Numbers 5:6, 7) If, however, the plaintiff dies leaving no relatives, the money is returned to the Priest, the emissary of G-d. In the words of the Torah, "if the person has no kinsmen to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made shall be the Lord's, even the Priest." (Numbers 5:8)

An obvious question emerges: Is it possible that the plaintiff does not have any relatives? In the words of the great Rashi, "is there anyone in Israel who has no next of kin...or distant relation going back to Yaakov (Jacob)?" Rashi concludes that the text, therefore, must refer to a ger, a proselyte, who has died leaving no next of kin among the Jewish people. If the ger passes away, the law is that the money must be restored to the kohen.

In order to understand this idea, the special relationship between G-d and the proselyte must be examined. Nechama Leibowitz points out the following Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 8:2), "Proselytes are what they are, not by virtue of a family title, but simply through their own free will they have come to love G-d. He [G-d] therefore, responds by loving them, as it is written 'the Lord loves the righteous.'" (Psalms 146:8) For the Midrash, the righteous are converts for whom G-d feels a special love. Having accepted G-d through their own volition, G-d, in return, feels a unique love for them.

Hence, in our text, theft against a ger results in payment to G-d, as G-d is the closest kin of the convert.

The money is then given to the kohen, G-d's emissary.

It is often the case in our community that the convert is mistreated and not embraced equally in the fold. Here the Torah is teaching that the ger, far from being cast aside, is the most important. Being especially loved by G-d, we in that same spirit should have special love for them.

No wonder this law is always read close to the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot celebrates G-d's giving of the Torah. The law of *gezel ha-ger* (stealing from a proselyte) reminds us that the Torah was given to all Jews—including converts.

Shavuot also features the reading of Megillat Ruth, the Scroll of Ruth. Ruth is the convert par excellence. Not coincidentally, from her the Messiah will one day come, teaching once again that while we may be holy, the convert is the holy of holies. ©2017 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale



RABBI YISSOCHOR FRAND

RavFrand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

Parshas Naso begins with the instruction to "count also the family of Gershon" [Bamidbar 4:22]. Levi had three sons -- Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. We learned at the end of last week's parsha that the Levijim were counted separately from the rest of the Jewish people. Parshas Bamidbar contained the description of the counting of Kehas, one of Levi's sons. Our parsha, Naso, picks up where Bamidbar left off, with the instruction to count the family of Gershon. This will be followed by the commandment to count the children of Levi's third son, Merari.

The Abarbanel asks why the Torah split up the counting of Leviim in such a strange fashion. We would expect that either all three branches of the family of Levi should be mentioned in Parshas Bamidbar since they already began there with the counting of the Kehas branch of the family or else Parshas Naso should have begun with the counting of the Leviim and

should include all three branches of the family! What is the purpose of splitting up the counting of the Leviyim?

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos point out another anomaly. With the counting of Kehas, the Torah writes "By the word of G-d, in the hand of Moshe" (al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe). Likewise, with the counting of Merari, the Torah also writes "al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe." However, concerning the counting of the family of Gershon, the Torah only says "al pi Hashem" - it does not mention "b'yad Moshe."

The Daas Zekeinim concludes that apparently, the counting of the family of Gershon was done by the family of Gershon themselves! Moshe Rabbeinu just asked them to give him a number. The family performed a self-census and gave the tally back to Moshe, but Moshe himself was not involved in the counting. Why should that be?

With Abarbanel's answer to his question, we can perhaps understand the teaching of the Daas Zekeinim as well. The Abarbanel says a beautiful thought. Levi had three sons -- Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. Gershon was the eldest son. In Judaism (and in the world in general, for the most part) the first born always receives the preeminent position. He receives a double portion of his father's inheritance. He is the bechor. He always has special importance.

However, among the sons of Levi, the family of Kehas had the most significant duties. This was the family that was assigned to carry the Aron [Ark] and the other keylim ["vessels"] of the Mishkan. Gershon did other things, but the second born received the preeminent assignment, not the first born. As the Abarbanel points out, this was somewhat of a slight to the Bnei Gershon. The Abarbanel says that even though the Almighty had His reasons for giving the Bnei Kehas the more preeminent role, it is still necessary to take into account the feelings of the first born. He must be compensated with some sort of a "consolation prize". It is necessary to make him feel good, in spite of the fact that he has been slighted. Therefore, Parshas Naso begins with the words "Count also the Children of Gershon..." Gershon gets prime billing at the start of the parsha to make him feel good.

The Abir Yosef adds that this could also explain why the counting was done by the Bnei Gershon themselves rather than "through the hand of Moshe," as was the case with the other families of Levi. This is another attempt to compensate them for the "slight" of having their first-born status bypassed in the distribution of assignments. It is telling them "you have special status, you have special integrity. We will trust you to count your own family members and report back to Moshe without requiring Moshe to go around to your tents and count noses." This too was in order to make them feel a little better.

We see this theme in another place in the Torah as well. When Yaakov Avinu gave his blessings

to Yosef's sons, he gave the more preeminent bracha to Ephraim, rather than to his older brother Menashe. Yaakov wanted to put his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's head, but they were not standing in that direction. Yaakov could have said, "Ephraim, why don't you move over here and Menashe you move over there." However, Yaakov did not do that. Yaakov crossed his arms to place his hands where he wanted them to be without asking the boys to move. He did that because -- despite the fact that he felt it was necessary to "slight" the bechor, asking Menashe to "move over" would have been adding insult to injury. Yaakov was sensitive to Menashe's feelings and even though he did need to "slight" Menashe, he insured that this would be done in the gentlest fashion possible.

There is a lesson here for all of us. I will share with you where I use this lesson.

I have students who are in the stage of life where they are going out on dates in order to look for their destined partner in life, their shidduch. Many times, a bochur will go out with a girl three, four, five times or sometimes even longer and then he will decide "she is just not for me." So, he will need to "deliver the news." He will need to tell the girl "Thanks, but no thanks." I tell the bochur that when he is in that type of situation (For example when a boy from the yeshiva in Baltimore has been dating a girl from New York and now wants to terminate the relationship...) that he should go into New York, look the girl straight in the face, and tell her as gently as possible, "I do not think this is going any further." This is how a person should end such a relationship. It should not be done over the phone. It should not be done through the shadchan [matchmaker]. It should be done like a mentch [gentleman].

Now, I know that travelling from Mt. Wilson Lane (the location of the Ner Israel campus) to Ocean Parkway (in Brooklyn) involves at least \$100 in car expenses -- gasoline prices being what they are as well as tolls throughout Delaware, New Jersey, and New York. This is not a cheap trip for a "non-date." However, I tell them that it is worth it. It is worth it because phone calls are not the proper way to break up with a girl. "No"s are painful. When you give somebody a "No", you should try to deliver it in the gentlest way possible.

This is of course a mutual thing. When a girl drops a boy, it is very painful as well. So, do it the right way. I do not need to fire people, because I am not a boss. But I am sure that some in my audience have the need to sometimes fire employees. This is a very unpleasant experience. So, you should try to make it as painless as possible. Again, a "no" or a rejection are painful -- but leaving a person a voice mail or a text message that they are fired, is not the way to go. I am not speaking of a case of gross negligence or fraud or something like that. However, there are many situations

where an employer just does not need an employee anymore for no fault of the employee. It is sometimes necessary to "cut down expenses." Tough times occur. You cannot afford the person anymore. Do it right!

This is the lesson of "Count the Children of Gershon, also them..." The Torah places their census in this most prominent position in order to lessen the sting of losing out in terms of having the preeminent assignment among the family of Leviyim.

An Unbelievably Love-ly Vort

The second observation I wish to share is an amazing interpretation. It is so amazing that I did not believe it could be true. My lifelong friend Rabbi David Twersky, (editor of my weekly emails) sent me a vort [short insight] this week that his son, Mordechai Twersky, saw in a sefer he came across in the library of the Mir Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. I wrote my friend back that I did not believe the vort he sent me. I simply could not believe that it was authentic.

The vort was written in a sefer called Shivtei K-ah from Rav Moshe Dovid Valle [1697-1777]. This individual was a foremost student of the Ramchal, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto [1707-1746]. The Ramchal is the author of the classic mussar sefer -- Mesillas Yesharim. He also wrote the Da'as Tevunos and much more. He was an outstanding Kabbalist. He lived in Padua, Italy.

Here is what he says: "...So shall you bless the Children of Israel, say to them (amor lahem)"...the priestly blessing. When the Kohanim bless the nation, they precede their blessing with a birkas hamitzvah [blessing recited prior to doing a mitzvah] "...asher kideshanu b'kedushaso shel Aharon, v'tzivanu l'varech es amo yisrael b'Ahavah" [...who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless His nation Israel, with love]. The text of this blessing itself is a halachic anomaly. The Taz writes in Yoreh Deah [28:2] in connection with the blessing made when "covering the blood" following the slaughter of fowl and non-domesticated animals (...al kisui dam b'afar [...to cover blood with dirt]) that normally we do not go into details of halachic ritual in the text of a blessing. The Taz explains there why the mitzvah of Kisui HaDam is an exception.

Therefore, it is certainly noteworthy that "with love" is specified in the text of the Birkas HaKohanim blessing. Apparently, the kohanim are required to give over their blessing with love. This emotional requirement at the time of the blessing reflects a firm requirement on the part of the Kohanim in their mitzvah performance. (It is m'akev proper execution of the mitzvah.) If there is someone in the audience that the Kohen hates, such that he cannot bless him "with love", then he should not duchen (i.e. -- not go up to the platform where the priestly blessing is recited). It must be delivered "with love."

The Shivtei K-ah, the foremost student of the Ramchal says, "...and the Torah, by writing 'amor lahem' (literally 'say to them') implies with great focus and with complete love. And there is a hint in the pasuk that it must be said with love." What is the hint? "For the word amor in the language of other nations means 'love.'"

How does one say Love in French? Amour

How does one say Love in Italian? Amore

Rav Moshe Dovid Valle, the Italian disciple of the Ramchal, thus interprets the Hebrew expression 'amor lahem' [literally 'say to them'] as hinting at the idea of expressing the priestly blessing to the Jewish people with love. He then says, "Do not be surprised at this 'foreign allusion' because we find parallel ideas in the words of our Sages in a number of places." This is not the first case of a Biblical word deriving etymologically from foreign languages. The most famous example is the word totafos [Devarim 6:8]. The Talmud [Sanhedrin 4b] writes that we derive the fact that the head Tefillin are to contain four Biblical chapters based on exegesis of the word totafos since "tot means two in the Catfi language and fos means two in the Afriki language."

Rav Valle explains that the Torah is not suddenly speaking Swahili or Italian in describing in describing Tefillin or the laws of the Priestly Blessing. However, the Torah sometimes uses foreign words to convey ideas. The reason for this is that our holy language (i.e. -- Hebrew, lashon haKodesh) is the mother of all languages.

The world thinks that "Latin is the mother language of all tongues." The disciple of the Ramchal says, "Heaven forbid!" Lashon Kodesh is the mother of all tongues! The nuances of all other languages are derived from it. There is no word in any other language that is not alluded to in some derivation from the holy tongue.

Thus, according to the Shivtei K-ah, the expression amor lahem -- from the French amour and the Italian amore -- is a hint at the source of "bless the Children of Israel with love."

As I mentioned, if I would not have seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it! ©2017 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

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The Holiday of Shavuot

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When the Jewish people received the first tablets the Torah states "Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge" (Shmot19:12). Similarly this warning appears again when the Jewish people receive the second set of tablets "No man shall ascend with you nor may anyone be seen on the entire mountain. Even the flock and the cattle may not graze facing the mountain (Shmot 34:3). Thus the second

warning was harsher than the first in that no one, even the cattle, was allowed to approach the mountain, while in the first giving of the tablets the elders were permitted to ascend the mountain with Moshe.

From the sentence "Thou shalt not touch" (Lo Tiga Bo Yad) the Michilta deduces that this excludes the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Temple. Thus according to this view one may touch the Kotel wall. Though it is forbidden for a defiled (Tamei) person to enter the perimeter of the Temple, touching the outside is permitted. There are however views that one should not place their hand into the Kotel walls for that would constitute entering its perimeter. Thus there are those who do not come near the Kotel wall.

Just to note that there are those who posit that when it states 'Thou shalt not touch' it comes to include- not exclude- the Mishkan and the Temple. However this is not the dominant view. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the reasons given for reading the story of Rus (Ruth) on Shevuos is that she was the quintessential convert, and before the Children of Israel were given the Torah they had to undergo the conversion process as well. But when exactly did Rus convert? Was it before her marriage to Machlon (1:4)? Why, then, did her mother-in-law, Naomi, try to convince her to go back to her idolatrous ways (1:8-15)? Arpah, the other Moabite daughter-in-law, did in fact go back (1:14), and had she converted before marrying Khilyon, would have been an Israelite that Naomi pushed away from her (relatively) new religion. If they had not converted before marrying, then there was no real "marriage" (according to Jewish law) to Machlon or Khilyon. And Naomi would not (legally) be their mother-in-law. If there was no connection (even through marriage) to Machlon's family, why did Boaz feel the need to marry Rus, since she was not really his cousin's widow? And why did Peloni Almoni, after wanting to buy Machlon's fields, back off after realizing he would have to marry Rus too? If Rus was not really his nephew's widow, there should be no legal connection between Rus and Machlon's property!

The Zohar says that Machlon and Khilyon would never have married them if they hadn't converted. Naomi suspected, though, that they only followed their new religion because of their husband's influence on them. Now that their husbands had died, she feared that they would no longer stay with the religion of Israel, and therefore tested their loyalty to it. While Arpah (eventually) failed, Rus passed with flying colors, and became the mother of royalty.

The Ralbag is also of the opinion that their conversion took place prior to their getting married, and similarly (though not exactly the same way) explains

that Naomi suspected that they had converted not because of their attachment to Machlon and Khilyon's religion, but because of their attachment to Machlon and Khilyon themselves, and had (only) converted in order to marry them.

However, most sources/commentaries state that Rus didn't convert until she left Moav with Naomi to return to Israel (1:16-17). These include Rashi (1:12), Rus Rabbah (2:9), the Targum (1:4) and the Talmud (Yevamos 47b, where conversion law details are learned from Rus' conversion/conversation with Naomi). If Rus' conversion didn't take place until after Machlon had died, why do Boaz and Peloni Almoni treat her as if she was Machlon's widow?

Rashi sidesteps the issue by describing Boaz' marriage to Rus not as an obligation stemming from family law, but rather as a fulfillment of the condition of a business deal. When Boaz tells Peloni Almoni that when he acquires the field from Naomi and Rus he is also going to have to marry the latter (4:5), Rashi says that Rus is "not willing (to complete the transaction) unless he marries her." Rashi doesn't tell us whether the property was given to Rus by Naomi or was part of a legally binding document signed by Machlon upon their marriage (even though a "kesubah" would not be valid, a valid dowry for a former princess is likely). But once Rus was able to stipulate that the sale was contingent upon her marrying the "redeemer," and Peloni Almoni didn't want to marry her, he had to forgo buying Machlon's land.

If the sale was directly from Naomi (and Rus) to Boaz, then they can place such a condition on the sale. There are some, however, that say that Naomi had already sold the field to a third party. The verse itself (4:3) implies this, saying that "Naomi has (past tense, i.e. already) sold the portion of the field that belonged to our brother, Elimelech." The question was who would "redeem" the field from this third party. This mirrors the description in Vayikra (25:25) of the poor person that had to sell his field, where the relative has the right (even against the buyer's wishes) to (re)purchase the field. The Midrash Tanchuma (ibid) equates this with Boaz' purchase of the property that originally belonged to Uncle Elimelech. Although the relative is not required to "redeem" this land, he is permitted to, if he wants (Rambam, Laws of Shemitta 11:18). In this case, Rus (or Naomi) could not put any conditions on the sale, as the transaction is between the relative and the current owner. Why then did Peloni Almoni, who obviously had wanted to exercise his right to buy (redeem) the land, change his mind when told that by playing the part of the "redeemer" he would have to marry Rus? He could have insisted that Rus was not related to him in any way (since her conversion took place after Machlon had died), and therefore was not a necessary part of his "redeeming" the property!

"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 Metzia 30b). While Peloni Almoni 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, "redeem" the field, he was also allowing Rus to stay connected to the land that had belonged to the person that first introduced her to (the religion now known as) Judaism. He had seen the troubles that had befallen Elimelech and his family when they left for Moav to avoid having to support the needy (see Rashi 1:1) and wasn't going to turn his back on a downtrodden convert. Even if, had it gone to a rabbinical court, the law would have been decided in his favor (allowing him to buy the field unconditionally).

Perhaps this is another reason why we read Megillas Rus on Shevuos; to show that the Torah we received is not designed to be used as a weapon to get the things we want, or avoid those that we don't. The contrast with such a destructive attitude is the giving (and forgiving) necessary to form the ancestry that brought us the Messianic line, and our ultimate redeemer. ©2003 Rabbi D. Kramer

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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.

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