

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In this week's parsha Moshe reaches his lowest ebb. Not surprisingly. After all that had happened -- the miracles, the exodus, the division of the sea, food from heaven, water from a rock, the revelation at Sinai and the covenant that went with it -- the people, yet again, were complaining about the food. And not because they were hungry; merely because they were bored. "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free -- and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic." "As for the miraculous "bread from heaven," although it sustained them it had ceased to satisfy them: "Now our appetite is gone; there's nothing to look at but this manna!" (Num. 11:4-6)

Any leader might despair at such a moment. What is striking is the depth of Moses' despair, the candour with which he expresses it, and the blazing honesty of the Torah in telling us this story. This is what he says to God: "Why have You brought this trouble on Your servant? What have I done to displease You that You put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land You promised on oath to their ancestors?... If this is how You are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me -- if I have found favour in Your eyes -- and do not let me face my own ruin." (Num. 11:11-15)

Every leader, perhaps every human being, at some time in their lives faces failure, defeat and the looming abyss of despair. What is fascinating is God's response. He does not tell Moses, "Cheer up; pull yourself together; you are bigger than this." Instead He gives him something practical to do: "Gather for Me seventy of the elders of Israel...I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself."

It is as if God were saying to Moses, "Remember what your father-in-law Jethro told you. Do not try to lead alone. Do not try to live alone. Even you, the greatest of the prophets, are still human, and humans are social animals. Enlist others. Choose associates. End your isolation. Have friends."

(To be sure, Rav Joseph Soloveitchik wrote a famous and poignant essay, "The Lonely Man of Faith" (published in Tradition, 1965; now available as a book, Maggid Press, 2012). My first published essay, "Alienation and Faith," (published in Tradition, 1973; reprinted in Tradition in an Untraditional Age, 1990, 219-244), was a critique of this view. It was, I argued, one possible reading of the tradition but not the only one. I still take the view that Rav Soloveitchik's account in that essay flowed from the specifics of his life and times. It remains a classic of the genre, but it is not the only way Jewish spirituality has been understood through the ages.)

What is moving about this episode is that, at the moment of Moses' maximum emotional vulnerability, God Himself speaks to Moses as a friend. This is fundamental to Judaism as a whole. For us God is not (merely) Creator of the universe, Lord of history, Sovereign, Lawgiver and Redeemer, the God of capital-letter nouns. He is also close, tender, loving: "He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds" (Ps. 147:3). He is like a parent: "As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you" (Is. 66:13). He is like a shepherd; "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for You are with me" (Ps. 23:4). He is always there: "God is close to all who call on Him -- to all who call on Him in truth" (Ps. 145:18).

In 2006, in the fittingly named Hope Square outside London's Liverpool Street Station, a memorial was erected in memory of Kindertransport, the operation that rescued 10,000 Jewish children from Nazi Germany shortly before the outbreak of war. At the ceremony one of the speakers, a woman by then in her eighties who was one of the saved, spoke movingly about the warmth she felt toward the country that had given refuge to her and her fellow kinder. In her speech she said something that left an indelible impression on me. She said, "I discovered that in England a policeman could be a friend." That is what made England so different from Germany. And it is what Jews



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discovered long ago about God Himself. He is not just a supreme power. He is also a friend. That is what Moses discovered in this week's parsha.

Friends matter. They shape our lives. How much they do so was discovered by two social scientists, Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, using data from the Framingham Heart Study. This project, started in 1948, has followed more than 15,000 residents of Framingham, Massachusetts, examining their heart rate, weight, blood levels and other health indicators, on average every four years. Its purpose was to identify risk factors for heart disease. However, Christakis and Fowler were interested in something else, namely the effects of socialisation. Does it make a difference to your health whether you have friends, and if so, what kind of people they are.

Their discoveries were impressive. Not only does having friends matter; so too does having the right ones. If your friends are slim, active, happy and have healthy habits, the likelihood is that so will you, and the same is true of the reverse. Another study, in 2000, showed that if at college, you have a roommate who works hard at his or her studies, the probability is that you will work harder. A Princeton study in 2006 showed that if one of your siblings has a child, you are 15% more likely to do so within the next two years. Habits are contagious. They spread through social networks. Even your friends' friends and their friends can still have an influence on your behaviour. (Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler, *Connected: the Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*, Little, Brown, 2011.)

Jordan Peterson, in his 12 Rules for Life, marshals his own experience and that of his contemporaries, growing up in the small, isolated town of Fairview, Alberta. Those who chose upwardly mobile individuals as friends went on to success. Those who fell into bad company fared badly, sometimes disastrously. We can choose the wrong friends, he says, precisely because they boost our self-image. If we have a fault and know we do, we can find reassurance in the fact that the people we associate with have the same fault. This soothes our troubled mind but at the price of making it almost impossible to escape our deficiencies. Hence his Rule 3: Make

friends with people who want the best for you. (Pp. 67-83)

None of this would come as a surprise to the sages, who pointed out, for example, that the key figures in the Korach rebellion were encamped near one another. From this they concluded, "Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbour." In the opposite direction, the tribes of Yehudah, Issachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moses and Aaron, and they became distinguished for their expertise in Torah. Hence, "Happy the righteous and happy his neighbour." (Tanhuma (Buber), Bamidbar 13; Bamidbar Rabbah, Korach, 18:5) Hence Maimonides' axiom: It is natural to be influenced in character and conduct by your friends and associates, and to follow the fashions of your fellow citizens. Therefore one ought to ensure that your friends are virtuous and that you frequent the company of the wise so that you learn from the way they live, and that you keep a distance from bad company. (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Deot, 6:1)

Or, as the sages put it more briefly: "Make for yourself a mentor and acquire for yourself a friend." (Mishnah Avot 1:6)

In the end that is what God did for Moses, and it ended his depression. He told him to gather around him seventy elders who would bear the burden of leadership with him. There was nothing they could do that Moses could not: he did not need their practical or spiritual help. But they did alleviate his isolation. They shared his spirit. They gave him the gift of friendship. We all need it. We are social animals. "It is not good to be alone." (Genesis 2:18. To be sure, Bilaam famously called Israel "a people that dwells alone," but collective singularity is not the same as individual solitude.)

It is part of the intellectual history of the West and the fact that from quite early on, Christianity became more Hellenistic than Hebraic, that people came to think that the main purpose of religion is to convey information (about the origin of the universe, miracles, life after death, and so on). Hence the conflict between religion and science, revelation and reason, faith and demonstration. These are false dichotomies.

Judaism has foundational beliefs, to be sure, but it is fundamentally about something else altogether. For us, faith is the redemption of solitude. It is about relationships -- between us and God, us and our family, us and our neighbours, us and our people, us and humankind. Judaism is not about the lonely soul. It is about the bonds that bind us to one another and to the Author of all. It is, in the highest sense, about friendship.

Hence the life changing idea: we tend to become what our friends are. So choose as friends people who are what you aspire to be. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and*

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"The nation was 'kvetching' evilly in the ears of the Lord, and the Lord heard, and His anger inflamed" [Num. 11:1]. Why is there a marked difference between God's reaction to the complaints recorded here in the Book of Numbers compared to His reaction to the Israelites' complaints in the Book of Exodus? After all, merely three days after the splitting of the sea, they found only "bitter" waters to drink [Ex. 15:24]. God immediately – and without comment – provides Moses with the bark of a special tree that sweetens the waters.

Then, only thirty days after the exodus, upon their arrival at the Tzin Desert, they complain because they have no food [ibid., 16:1-3]. God immediately – and without comment – provides the manna.

And finally, when they encamp in Rephidim, they again quarrel with Moses over their lack of water, God tells Moses to strike a large boulder at Horev with the same staff used to strike the Nile River and turn it into blood; this time water would flow from the rock [ibid., 17:1-7]!

And although Moses names this place "Testing and Strife" (Masa u'Meriva), what immediately follows is the successful war against Amalek, won for the Israelites by the Divine response to Moses' hands upraised in prayer to God.

How different is God's reaction to the similar complaints only one year later [see Num. 1:1], when a fire consumes the edge of the camp and a plague results in mass graves. Why the change?

Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein suggests that it is because the requests and complaints in Exodus were for the basic necessities of life, water, and bread. Although the Israelites should have had greater faith, one can hardly fault them for desiring their existential needs.

In our portion, Beha'alot'cha, however, they complain not about the scarcity of water, but about the lack of variety in the menu! The verse even introduces the subject by stating that the nation was kvetching evilly in the ears of God – without even mentioning what they were complaining about [Num. 11:1]. And it is for this unspecified complaint that God's fire flares.

After this punishment, the nation cries out, "Who will give us meat to eat?" and then continues with, "We remember the fish we ate for free in Egypt, and the cucumbers and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; our spirits are dried up with nothing but manna before our eyes" [ibid., v. 4-6]. What do they want – meat, or fish, or melons, or garlic?! All of the above for the sake of variety? That it what it seems to be!

God's response is also curious; He tells Moses

to appoint seventy elders [ibid., v. 16], and sends the Israelites quails to eat. They ask for meat and God gives them rabbis!? And while they eat the quail, they are smitten by the severe plague. Why are they complaining, and why is God so angry? And if, indeed, He is disappointed, even upset, by their finicky desires, why give in to their cravings? And why send them the seventy elders?

Herein lies the essential difference between the complaints in Exodus and Numbers. In Exodus, the nation had a clear goal; they were committed to the mission of becoming a kingdom of priests and a sacred nation, and were anxiously anticipating the content of that mission, a God-given doctrine of compassionate righteousness and moral justice which they must impart to the world.

In order to receive and fulfill their mission they had to live, and so they (legitimately) requested water and bread, survival food. If they did not survive, they would certainly not be able to redeem.

One year later, in Numbers, they had already received the Torah. And, since their necessities were provided for, they were complaining, kvetching, without having substantive issues about which to complain. And they had various gourmet cravings, from meat to garlic.

God understood that had they still been inspired by their mission, had they remained grateful for their freedom and the opportunity it would afford them to forge a committed and idealistic nation, they would not be in need of watermelons and leeks, foods that they themselves had never even tasted. They were really searching for a lost ideal, for their earlier inspiration of becoming a holy nation and kingdom of kohen-teachers.

No wonder God was disappointed and angry. And so he sent them the quails, knowing that once they received it, they would cease craving for it, just as once they gained their freedom from Egyptian servitude they took their freedom for granted, and once they received the Torah at Sinai, the Torah lost its allure.

The Almighty therefore felt that it would be necessary for many religious role models – seventy wise and sensitive men – to hopefully become the adjutant generals under Moses, who would personally reach out to large numbers of Jews and re-charge their batteries as members of a holy nation and a kingdom of kohen-teachers! ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Human beings are by their very nature creatures who are eternally dissatisfied and fearful. It is a rare person that, even at a joyous family occasion, can grasp the moment and fully enjoy it. Even as the bridal couple stands under their marriage

canopy, observers and the families of those concerned are already fretting about what the future will hold for the young couple. Rarely can a person truly live and enjoy the present.

In the Torah reading of this week the generation that left Egypt, received the Torah on Sinai and witnessed all of God's miracles on a first-hand basis, nevertheless begins to fray and fall apart. Their main concern, the doubt that hovers in their minds throughout the 40 years of existence in the Sinai desert, is how they will fare when they finally do reach and settle the promised land of Israel.

This task appears to be so daunting that it frightens them. The reassurance given them by Moshe, that God will continue to perform miracles on their behalf does not resonate with them. Their frustration will eventually burst forth in the Torah reading of next week with the story of the spies and their evil report regarding the land of Israel. The father-in-law of Moshe himself leaves them and no arguments or persuasions can change his mind. In its way, this was a crushing blow to the morale of the Jewish people and only confirmed their doubts as to whether they have a future in the land of Israel.

In effect, the mindset of the people was that today's miracles do not guarantee the presence of miracles tomorrow and that the land of Israel is too risky an adventure to entertain.

The fear and disaffection for the land of Israel lies at the root of all of the upheavals and rebellions that we will read about this Shabbat and in the coming Torah readings as well. They may complain about food, their leaders and all sorts of other gnawing issues that trouble them but that is only a cover for their fear of the future and for the unknown that the land of Israel represents to them.

This is a situation that exists even today in the Jewish world. It is a lack of self-confidence that we paper over with bravado. Deep down we are aware of the precarious nature of our situation and of the hostility of the world towards our state and us. To a great extent we whistle when passing the graveyard because of our lack of faith in ourselves, our future and even in the God of Israel.

We cannot be satisfied with the moment because of our concerns, no matter how unwarranted they may be regarding the future. Naturally, we are somewhat traumatized by our past and it is not a simple matter to simply ignore the problems and enemies that loom over us. Nevertheless, we are bound to rely upon our faith that all will yet turn well for the Jewish people and the state of Israel and we attempt to live our lives and order our priorities accordingly. ©2018 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, God 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 God, 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 Psakhim 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. ©2018 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is

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RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Passing Over the Firstborn

At the beginning of the sixth section of the Torah reading this week we find an unusual notation within the Torah itself. The letter nun is written inverted and backwards prior to the reading and the same occurs two p'sukim later at the end of the pasuk (sentence). These are two p'sukim with which we are quite familiar as they are recited whenever we take the Torah from the Aron Kodesh in order to read from it. The Torah tells us, "Vay'hi binso'a ha'aron vayomer Moshe kumah Hashem v'yafutzu oy'vecha v'yanusu m'san'echa mipanecha, and it was when the Ark journeyed forth that Moshe said, rise up Hashem, that your enemies will be dispersed and those that hate you will flee from before Your Face. Uv'nucha yomar shuvah Hashem rivavot alfei Yisrael, and when it came to rest he said, come home again Hashem to the myriads of the thousands of Yisrael." Our Rabbis have offered many interpretations of this section and it is obvious that it is a section which troubled many of them.

We find a discussion of the two inverted nuns in the Talmud, Masechet Shabbat (115b-116a). "The Rabbis taught in a Baraita 'and it was when the Ark journeyed forth that Moshe said', this section the Holy One Blessed is He made signs above and below it. Rabbi said it is not for this reason, rather because this section ranks as a significant book unto itself." We see that Rabbi considers this section to be a book unto itself, thus dividing the book of Bamidbar into three separate books. The Kli Yakar asks an interesting question: "If this thing is unusual for you to say since the purpose of the Torah was that it was given for its mitzvot and in this "book" there is no hint to any mitzvah," the Kli Yakar responds that the reference to the myriads of Yisrael indicate that it is a reassertion of the mitzvah of "be fruitful and multiply." Since this is a mitzvah which is necessary for the establishment of a nation, the Torah assigned these two p'sukim to their own Book so as to emphasize the importance of that mitzvah at this time.

Those who wish to say that the nuns are an indication that this section was moved all point to the place where this section belongs, perek bet (chapter two) of Sefer Bamidbar. There the Torah describes the banners of the tribes and the order in which they proceeded when they traveled in the desert. The question then becomes why was it moved from its appropriate place? Rashi paraphrases the opinion of Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel by saying that it was moved to interrupt between two times of trouble or punishment. The Torah did not wish to record two such troubled

times in succession. Everyone agrees that the second time of trouble was the rebellion by those who demanded meat from Hashem. Rabbi Ari Kahn explains that it would have been very simple for them to have meat if they only had wanted to bring a korban. They did not want to bring from their own animals to quiet this desire for meat. They wanted Hashem to take care of their needs. Their gluttony upon receiving this meat caused their deaths. The more difficult question for the Rabbis has always been what sin occurred before the first nun. The Midrash indicates that the sin that occurred was that the Jews left Har Sinai gleefully. HaRav Mordecai Gifter zt'l, Rosh Yeshivah of Telshe in Cleveland, explains this phenomenon. "When attending classes, a child must compel himself to listen and obey. He views the day's lessons as a burdensome yoke, which – like it or not – he must assume. When the bell rings and the day ends, a child feels that he is free of this yoke." Even though he knows that he will willingly attend the next day, he treasures that brief interlude of rest. The B'nei Yisrael were at a spiritual elevation at Har Sinai. Even though they left for their own good, they ran away from that spiritual high and relished the rest from that burden.

It is important to understand these two p'sukim to discover why these were chosen as our interruption. When the B'nei Yisrael marched forward the Aron Kodesh preceded them by a three-day journey in order to lead the way. Our enemies would see the Aron and flee from before it. The Torah tells us, "your enemies will be dispersed and those that hate you will flee from before Your Face." Our enemies include both those who will chase after us and those who will stand and fight. Our Rabbis tell us that the term m'san'echa, those who hate you, includes those who hate Hashem and for that reason hate the children of Hashem. Both will flee before the Aron of Hashem. When the Torah finally comes to rest peacefully it will return to the myriad of thousands of Jews.

According to Rabbi Ari Kahn's explanation of S'forno, these two p'sukim were an uncompleted book which would have given us a different universe, much like an alternate or parallel universe to our own. Our history proceeds from this time to the twelve spies that were sent into the land. We are aware of the sin of ten of the spies and their evil report and the bravery of Yehoshua and Calev in opposing them. We know what happened when the people believed the ten spies and were punished with the death of a generation before entering the land forty years later. Moshe and Aharon would also die and Yehoshua would lead the B'nei Yisrael. S'forno's parallel history that would have followed those two sentences did not include the spies being sent into the land. The people would have maintained their faith in Hashem and they would have been brought into the land without a single battle being

fought. The Aron would have preceded the people into the land and their enemies would have fled. Moshe and Aharon would have led the people into the land and the B'nei Yisrael would have lived in the whole of Eretz Yisrael in Peace. Many of the sadder stories of our history would have been removed. According to Rabbi Kahn there would not have been a four hundred year wait before the Bet HaMikdash was built. Moshe would have led the people directly to Jerusalem and we would have immediately begun to serve Hashem there.

Unfortunately, we did not experience the miraculous events described by Sforno. The Jews did sin and we suffered with our history as it has unfolded. But we have been given a second chance as Hashem always leads us on His directed path even when we divert from it. We are slowly witnessing the Redemption in our time and we must do our best to fulfill Hashem's plan while we have the opportunity. May we soon be given the permission to rebuild our Temple and may we witness our answered prayer of "come home again Hashem to the myriads of the thousands of Yisrael." ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

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"Dayo Lavo Min HaDin"

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

This law cited in the title is a rule derived from the principle of "Fortiori" (Kal V'achomer), one of the principles of logic that are followed in the Torah from which our Sages derive laws. Thus, for example when the brothers of Joseph said to him "Behold the monies that we found in our sacks we returned to you..so how can we be accused of stealing from the house of your master silver or gold?" is not a logical conclusion for the brothers could not establish that they did not take the silver or gold using this logic. We must apply the principle that the derived law (the stealing of the gold or silver) cannot be more stringent than the source law (the returning of the money).

The basis for this principle is derived from the sentence that appears in this week's portion (12;14), "Were her father to spit in her face, would she not be humiliated for seven days?" Thus, if Miriam's father became angry at her, would she not be punished for at least seven days? Surely when Almighty G-d became angry at her she should be punished for more time than that! However Miriam's punishment was indeed only for seven days thus the stringent cannot be more stringent than the source law (the lesser punishment).

However, were it not for this principle of "Dayo"("it is sufficient" cited in the title) how many days would Miriam be punished for? The Talmud states fourteen days.

How do we arrive at this assumption?

Some believe that logically the penalty from G-d should be double that of man, while others derive this amount from the portion in the Torah dealing with

leprosy (Mitzorah) since each of the units for which one must be isolated before the Kohen declares one as a leper is seven days and the maximum time of isolation is fourteen days. Others simply state that if you wish to derive a number, you simply double it. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Speak to Aharon and tell him: 'When you light the lamps, the seven lamps must cast their light toward the face of the Menorah.'

(Bamidbar 8:2) THE LAST PART of the previous parsha was consumed with the gifts presented by the leaders of each tribe as part of the inauguration ceremony of the Mishkan. As explained in the past, the weight of the gifts, 130 shekels, had great significance. They are connected to the "damaged" souls Adam HaRishon "created" during his 130 years of teshuvah, and which eventually reincarnated into the Erev Rav. It was the Erev Rav who made the golden calf for which the Mishkan was a "tikun."

We have also spoken in the past about how the Torah presents each prince's gift as if it is unique, when in fact it was an exact replica of the first one. It is one of the easier sections for a "Ba'al Koreh" to read on Shabbos, because the duplication of paragraphs results in a certain rhythm when read.

If someone were to present that section of the Torah to an audience, they would probably just say, "And all of the leaders of the tribes brought the same thing: one silver bowl weighing 130 [shekels], one silver sprinkling basin [weighing] 70 shekels, etc." They might mention the individual names of the princes, because that did vary from gift to gift.

So, why did the Torah do the opposite, and "drag" us through all the details? To make sure the Torah had a certain amount of words and letters? They could have been made up elsewhere, and in a more interesting way.

Rather, the Torah is making a very IMPORTANT but subtle point. It is sharing with us HEAVEN'S perspective on our service of God. It is reminding us of how personalized service of God does not have to mean using your OWN or different words each time, but infusing the SAME words or act with a PERSONAL perspective.

Every prince was different. They had different souls, and that automatically varied their experiences of life. They came from different families, had different upbringings. They married women who were different from each other for the same reason, impacting their husbands' view on life. Who knows how many other factors made one prince different from another?

When it came time to offer their gifts for the Mishkan, no two moments were the same. Nachshon ben Aminadov was first, so he did not have someone

before him to learn from. Nesanel ben Tzu'ar, who was second, did. But the actual moment he brought his gift was different, because time does not stand still. History had changed by the time his turn was up, and it changed the nature of the same gift of his predecessor. The same was true about each subsequent prince and gift.

The same can also be said about every individual, especially when it comes praying the same Shemonah Esrai, three times a day, six days a week. It's the EXACT same words, phrased the EXACT same way EACH time. For people for whom the phrase, "familiarity breeds contempt" is a natural instinct, how is one supposed to put "umph" into their tefillah time-after-time?

That's where THIS week's parsha picks up. The first section returns to a discussion about the Menorah, which the Ramban sees as an allusion to Chanukah. But, the basic mitzvah discusses how to light the Menorah: "Speak to Aharon and tell him: 'When you light the lamps, the seven lamps must cast their light toward the face of the Menorah.'" (Bamidbar 8:2)

"When you light": Literally, when you cause to ascend. Since the flame rises, the Torah describes kindling in terms of ascending. He is required to kindle the lamp until the flame rises by itself." (Rashi)

All societies survive because of traditions that are passed down from one generation to the next, but Torah society DEPENDS upon it. It depends not just upon the accurate transmission of the material that is meant to technically guide us through life. It depends upon the accurate transmission of the "soul" meant to inspire each new generation to sincerely and energetically serve God.

Therefore, the education job of one generation is not complete until the light of the next generation is able to stand on its own. If the inspiration that first "sold" our ancestors on Torah is not successfully passed on from one generation to the next, then most Jews will be unable to maintain much of a connection to Torah in general.

What is the best way to measure the Torah inspiration level of a generation? By the way people perform their mitzvos, but primarily, by the way they pray.

Learning Torah is enjoyable, and it can even become competitive. Everyone wants to become a talmid chacham, and maybe even a Rosh Yeshivah one day. There is plenty to be excited about when learning Torah even without the kind of inspiration we are talking about. You can find people who zealously learn Torah, but who also unzealously perform their other mitzvos, ESPECIALLY prayer.

Tefillah is something that you cannot become inspired about, unless you are generally inspired in your service of God. Not only does such a person pursue a close and intimate relationship with God, they

usually already have one. They are real with God as their benefactor, and they use prayer to both show their appreciation for what they have, and to ask God for what they need. They know that when they "show up" to prayer, God does as well.

What does this mean? Of course God is ALREADY everywhere at ALL times. But, for a person to SENSE this, which changes the entire nature of the way they perform mitzvos, and especially the way they pray, they have to be both INTELLECTUALLY and EMOTIONALLY involved. This is what it means to "show up" for anything.

Being somewhere intellectually is the less difficult of the two. Just being there already makes that easier, and focusing on what is being done adds to it. A person who comes to shul to pray, does what is expected of him, and even thinks about what he is doing is, for the most part, is intellectually "there."

The question is, where is their heart? Where are they emotionally? Back at home, or the office, still thinking about what they were doing before they went to shul, or worrying about something they have to do once they leave? There are countless things that can distract a person's heart from one moment to the next, and will continue to do so, if what the person is currently doing is not their activity of choice.

Every person works differently, but every person is like the kohen who lights the Menorah. A person's inspiration will not kindle on its own, and if not ignited properly, the flame will go out. The question is the same for everyone: How do I kindle my soul so that it burns brightly and strongly towards God? How a person answers that question is their own personal service of God while down here on earth. ©2018 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

DAN LIFSHITZ

Weekly Dvar

Chapter 11 of the book of Bemidbar marks a sharp turning point in the trajectory of the story. The previous chapters emphasized the holiness of the Israelite camp and their closeness to G-d, but chapter 11 begins a series of sins that will lead to a distancing from G-d and 40 years of wandering in the desert. This transition begins with the verse, "the people were ke'mitoninim (like mitoninim), evil in the ears of G-d." The word mitoninim is very unusual, and the commentators grapple both with what it means as well as why the people are described as "like" mitoninim as opposed to actually being mitoninim.

The Ramban explains that mitoninim comes from a root word that means suffering; the Jews began complaining as if they were suffering greatly, despite the fact that G-d was providing all their needs (literally, manna from heaven). The Abarbanel believes that the proper root word is one that means to find a pretext; the people were trying to find a pretext in order to speak

against G-d. Still, why does it say "like trying to find a pretext" as opposed to simply "trying to find a pretext"?

He explains that the people's challenges and statements against G-d were never stated in an outright fashion but instead were expressed through jokes and snide comments. The "ke" ("like") illustrates an important reality. Offhanded comments can be as corrosive as outright attacks, and are arguably more dangerous because they are more acceptable to say. If a child constantly hears negative comments about a person, institution or G-d himself, even if they are ostensibly jokes, it will almost certainly erode their respect for the subject of the jokes. The jokes are likely to have a similar effect on the speaker as well. This teaches us how careful we must be to avoid even joking speech that will be damaging, and instead use words that will be rewarding. ©2018 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

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*

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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (13:9), "The light of the righteous will rejoice, but the lamp of the wicked will flicker out." Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 14th century) explains: King Shlomo compares the soul of a tzaddik to light because the soul, like the concept "light," is eternal and is independent of the life-span of the tzaddik's body. In contrast, the soul of a rasha is like the light of a lamp; when the candle or wick is snuffed out, the light is gone. So, too, when the rasha's body dies, nothing remains of him.

In reality, R' Bachya continues, a soul never dies. But, the soul of the wicked will suffer eternal punishment, which is a fate worse than death. This comes about because the rasha did not pursue "light" during his lifetime. Therefore, King Shlomo says that the lamp will "flicker out." A faint memory of the light that could have been will remain, but it will not give light.

In contrast, "the light of the righteous will rejoice." This rejoicing is the tzaddik's reward, and it refers to attaining levels of understanding of G-d that one could not attain in his lifetime. [See below.] Because tzaddikim serve Hashem with joy, they to rejoicing in the World-to-Come, for the trait of happiness causes the soul to draw sustenance and exist forever.

R' Bachya continues: Another reason the soul is compared to light is that they both were created on the first day of Creation. Unlike man, who lights a candle from an existing flame, Hashem created light out of nothing. Nevertheless, though He is "light" and doesn't need our light, He commanded us to light a menorah in His Temple for the honor of the Shechinah, as described in our parashah. (Beur Al Ha'Torah) ©2014 S. Katz & torah.org

