

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Bamidbar is generally read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, z'man matan torateinu, "the time of the giving of our law," the revelation at Sinai. So the Sages, believing that nothing is coincidental, searched for some connection between the two.

To find one is not easy. There is nothing in the parsha about the giving of the Torah. Instead it is about a census of the Israelites. Nor is its setting helpful. We are told at the beginning that the events about to be described took place in "the wilderness of Sinai," whereas when the Torah speaks about the great revelation, it talks about "Mount Sinai." One is a general region, the other a specific mountain within that region. Nor are the Israelites at this stage walking towards Mount Sinai. To the contrary, they are preparing to leave. They are about to begin the second part of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

The Sages did, nonetheless, make a connection, and it is a surprising one: "And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness" (Numbers 1:1). Why the Sinai Wilderness? From here the Sages taught that the Torah was given through three things: fire, water, and wilderness. How do we know it was given through fire? From Exodus 19:18: "And Mount Sinai was all in smoke as God had come down upon it in fire." How do we know it was given through water? As it says in Judges 5:4, "The heavens dripped and the clouds dripped water [at Sinai]." How do we know it was given through wilderness? [As it says above,] "And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness." And why was the Torah given through these three things? Just as [fire, water, and wilderness] are free to all the inhabitants of the world, so too are the words of Torah free to them, as it says in Isaiah 55:1, "Oh, all who are thirsty, come for water... even if you have no money."¹

The Midrash takes three words associated with Sinai – fire (that was blazing on the mountain just before the revelation), water (based on a phrase in the Song of Deborah) and wilderness (as at the beginning of our parsha, and also in Exodus 19:1, 2), and it connects them by saying that "they are free to all the inhabitants of the world."

This is not the association most of us would make. Fire is associated with heat, warmth, energy. Water is associated with quenching thirst and making things grow. Wilderness is the space between: neither starting point nor destination, the place where you need signposts and a sense of direction. All three would therefore make good metaphors for the Torah. It warms. It energises. It satisfies spiritual thirst. It gives direction. Yet that is not the approach taken by the Sages. What mattered to them is that all three are free.

Staying for a moment with the comparison of Torah and the wilderness, there were surely other significant analogies that might have been made. The wilderness is a place of silence where you can hear the voice of God. The wilderness is a place away from the distractions of towns and cities, fields and farms, where you can focus on the presence of God. The wilderness is a place where you realise how vulnerable you are: you feel like sheep in need of a shepherd. The wilderness is a place where it is easy to get lost, and you need some equivalent of a Google-maps-of-the-soul. The wilderness is a place where you feel your isolation and you reach out to a force beyond you. Even the Hebrew name for wilderness, midbar, comes from the same root as "word" (davar) and "to speak" (d-b-r). Yet these were not the connections the Sages of the Midrash made. Why not?

The Sages understood that something profound was born at Mount Sinai, and this has distinguished Jewish life ever since. It was the democratisation of knowledge. Literacy and knowledge of the law was no longer to be confined to a priestly elite. For the first time in history everyone was to have access to knowledge, education and literacy. "The law that Moses gave us is the possession of the assembly of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4) – the whole assembly, not a privileged group within it.

The symbol of this was the revelation at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when God revealed Himself not only to a Prophet but to an entire people, who three times signalled their consent to the commands and the covenant. In the penultimate command that Moses gave to the people, known as Hakhel, he gave the following instruction: "At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their

¹ Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7

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hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deut. 31:10-13)

Again, the whole people, not an elite or subset within it. This is echoed in the famous verse from Isaiah 54:13, “And all your children shall be learned of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children.” This was and remains the unique feature of the Torah as the written constitution of the Jewish people as a nation under the sovereignty of God. Everyone is expected not merely to keep the law but to know it. Jews became a nation of constitutional lawyers.

There were two further key moments in the history of this development. The first was when Ezra and Nehemiah gathered the people, after the Babylonian exile, to the Water Gate in Jerusalem, on Rosh Hashanah, and read the Torah to them, placing Levites throughout the crowd to explain to people what was being said and what it meant, a defining moment in Jewish history that took the form not of a battle but of a massive adult education programme (Neh. 8). Ezra and Nehemiah realised that the most significant battles in ensuring the Jewish future were cultural, not military. This was one of the most transformative insights in history.

The second was the extraordinary creation, in the first century, of the world’s first system of universal compulsory education. Here is how the Talmud describes the process, culminating in the work of Joshua ben Gamla, a High Priest in the last days of the Second Temple: Truly the name of that man is to be blessed, namely Joshua ben Gamla, for but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all...They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] but if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Joshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town, and that

children should enter school at the age of six or seven.²

Universal compulsory education did not exist in England – at that time the world’s leading imperial power – until 1870, a difference of 18 centuries. At roughly the same time as Joshua ben Gamla, in the first century C.E., Josephus could write: Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.³

We now understand the connection the Sages made between the wilderness and the giving of the Torah: it was open to everyone, and it was free. Neither lack of money nor of aristocratic birth could stop you from learning Torah and acquiring distinction in a community in which scholarship was considered the highest achievement.

With three crowns was Israel crowned: the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood and the crown of Kingship. The crown of Priesthood was conferred on Aaron...The crown of kingship was conferred on David...But the crown of Torah is for all Israel...Whoever desires it, let them come and take it.⁴

I believe that this is one of Judaism’s most profound ideas: whatever you seek to create in the world, start with education. If you want to create a just and compassionate society, start with education. If you want to create a society of equal dignity, ensure that education is free and equal to all. That is the message the Sages took from the fact that we read Bamidbar before Shavuot, the festival that recalls that when God gave our ancestors the Torah, He gave it to all of them equally. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z”l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they came out of the Land of Egypt" (Numbers 1:1) Bamidbar, or “In the desert,” is the name by which this fourth of the Five Books of Moses is most popularly known—an apt description of the 40 years of the Israelite desert wanderings which the book records.

Indeed, this desert period serves as the precursor of—as well as a most appropriate metaphor for—the almost 2,000 years of homeless wandering from place to place which characterized much of Jewish history before the emergence of our Jewish

² Baba Batra, 21a

³ Contra Apionem, ii, 177-78

⁴ Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 3:1

State in 1948.

The Hebrew word for desert, midbar, is also pregnant with meanings and allusions which in many ways have served as a beacon for our Jewish exile. The root noun from which midbar is built is D-B-R, which means leader or shepherd. After all, the most ancient occupation known to humanity and specifically to the descendants of Abraham is shepherding, and the desert is the most natural place for the shepherd to lead his flock: the sheep can comfortably wander in a virtual no-man's-land and graze on the vegetation of the various oases or their outskirts without the problem of stealing from private property or harming the ecology of settled habitations. And perhaps D-B-R means leader or shepherd because it also means "word": The shepherd directs the flock using meaningful sounds and words, and so the leaders of Israel, most notably Moses, inspired and educated with the verbal message which came from God, initially in the form of "Ten Words" (or "Ten Commandments," Aseret Hadibrot). They were revealed in the Sinai desert, have been greatly expanded upon throughout the generations, and they are the most fundamental teachings which govern Israel—as well as a good part of the world—to this very day.

Moreover, wherever the Israelites wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert Mishkan, or Sanctuary, a word which is derived from Shechina, Divine Presence. However, God was not in the Sanctuary; even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, declared King Solomon when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:27). It was rather God's word, dibur, which was in the Sanctuary, in the form of the "Ten Words" on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing word of God which He would speak (vedibarti, Ex. 25:22) from between the cherubs on the ends of the Kapporet above the Holy Ark. It was by means of these divine words that even the desert, the midbar—a metaphor for an inhospitable and even alien exile environment which is boiling hot by day, freezing cold by night, and deficient in water that is the very elixir of life—can become transformed into sacred space, the place of the divine word (dibur). Indeed, another name for our Holy Temple or Sanctuary is D'vir, the place of the word. And those words from the desert of Mount Sinai (diburim) succeeded in sanctifying the many Babylons, Marrakeshes, Vilnas, and New Yorks of our wanderings! God's word can transform a desert—any place and every place—into a veritable Sanctuary; indeed the world is a midbar waiting to become a dvir (sanctuary) by means of God's dibur, communicated by inspired leaders, dabarim.

I believe that this understanding will serve to answer another question which is asked by our sages, the answer to which is especially relevant on the week

of BaMidbar leading into Shavuot. The Midrash di Rabbi Yishmael Commentary on Parshat Yitro queries why God's Revelation was given in a par'osia—a desert, a no-man's-land, an open space—rather than at Mount Moriah, the place of Abraham's sacrifice later to become the Temple Mount. Is it not strange that the most important message—a kerygma to use the Greek—given to Israel emanated from a mountaintop in a desert outside Israel rather than from the sacred land which God Himself bequeathed to His chosen people? The response given by the Midrash has many ramifications for us today. The midrash maintains that had the Torah been given on the Temple Mount, the Israelites would have assumed that it was only for them. God specifically chose a par'osia in order to demonstrate that the Torah was ultimately meant for the entire world; in the very words of the Mechilta, "Let any human being who wishes to accept the Torah take it upon himself."

This will help us understand the midrash in the beginning of V'zot habrachta which pictures God as first offering the Torah to the Edomites of Mount Seir and then to the Ishmaelites of Mount Paran (BT Avoda Zara 2b, see also Rashi to Deut. 33:2). Unfortunately, they were not ready to accept it at that time; only Israel was willing to say, "We shall perform [the commandments] and we shall internalize them." It then became our task as a "Kingdom of Priest-Teachers and a Holy Nation" to expose and eventually teach the Torah as "a light unto the nations of the world." At that time there will be a second revelation in which "God will inform us a second time before the eyes of every living being that He is to be their God," a prayer which we repeat every Sabbath in the Kedusha of the Musaf Amida prayer. The desert then becomes a symbol of a no-man's-land which will eventually become an every-person's-land.

If the word can sanctify even a desert it can certainly sanctify every other place on our planet.
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This section of the Torah is entitled, Bamidbar, in the desert. It is hard for us to imagine, though it may be less hard in our current situation than it was before we were put into quarantine, how the Jewish people lived in the desert for four decades. Since they had no gainful occupations and they had no struggle to feed themselves for the miraculous bread from heaven fell and the well of Miriam and of Moshe provided them with water and sustenance. What did they do with their time? The apparent answer is that they absorbed themselves in understanding, studying, and assessing the laws and values of the Torah. In any event, they had to raise a new generation of people, a generation that would pursue the goal of entering the land of Israel and settling it and creating a more normal,

so to speak, Jewish society.

Our rabbis have characterized the generation of the desert as being one of great intelligence, knowledge and understanding. Yet it was a generation of seemingly no purpose because it was doomed to die in the desert and not accomplish the goal that was entrusted to it when it left Egypt. It was told that it would accept the Torah and then march into the land of Israel. Moshe was successful in having them accept the Torah, but he was unsuccessful in attempting to have them move to the land of Israel. In fact, an element of the people would say that not only would they not go forward to the land of Israel, but they would be willing to retreat and go backwards into the land of Egypt, the land of affliction and of plagues.

It is hard for us to imagine such a generation, with its sole task only to mark time until it passed away and made room for the next generation, which would perforce enter the land of Israel and build there a society. The desert had however positive aspects to it as well. The Talmud teaches us that the Torah was given to a generation that could live in the desert. If one can relieve oneself of desires and of outside pressures and live as though one is in a desert, then the Torah can find a real home and purpose in the life of that person.

The generation of the desert represents to us a two-faced and double-edged society. On the one hand, negative because of its refusal to progress towards its ultimate goal, the land of Israel and, on the other, a society of blessedness, free from daily wants and pressures with the ability to intellectualize Torah into its very being.

In Jewish tradition, the generation of the desert is always represented not so much as a transitional generation but as a wasted generation. One who has opportunity and ability and does not employ that ability to fulfill the opportunity presented, is seen, in the eyes of the Torah, as wasting one's existence. And the Torah has a prohibition against wasting anything, certainly time and opportunities.

Because of this, we are always troubled when reading these portions of the Torah that will follow for the next few weeks and this section of the Torah which bears the name of the desert as its title. We are struck with a feeling of pity and sadness that the generation that had the possibility of being the greatest ended up being a wasted generation, dying in the desert, having no home, and little or no opportunity, after its great start when freed from Egypt.

Every generation must be on the watch, that it should not be a generation of the desert. We can learn to take advantage of situations which allow us to study and to employ intellectual realism, but we have to also beware that a generation of the desert that does not build for the future and does not take hold of its opportunities will not be remembered as a positive and

great generation amongst the story of the people of Israel. We are faced with great challenges, but with great opportunities. And our generation certainly will not be remembered as a generation of the desert, but rather as a generation of Jews who helped build the land of Israel and who have rebuilt the Jewish world, wherever Jews exist. ©2020 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

Sinai, Mishkan (also called Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting) and midbar (desert). At the outset of the Book of Numbers, the Torah mentions these three places in a sentence, "the Lord [spoke] to Moshe in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting." (Numbers 1:1) In the Torah, they mark the focal point from where God speaks:

1)At Mt. Sinai, God gave the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:1)

2)Once leaving Sinai, the Mishkan was built. There, God speaks "from above the ark cover, from between the two kruvim." (Exodus 25:28) While Mt. Sinai was God-made, the Mishkan was built – as per God's instructions – by people.

3)As the Jews begin journeying through the desert, the Mishkan is no longer stationary, it "walks" with the nation through the wilderness.

In sum: when the Jewish people is first formed, God reveals Himself intensely at Sinai, soon afterwards in the Mishkan. Ultimately the Mishkan is replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem. In all these places, God's presence is intense, compressed into one space – above Mt. Sinai, above the Ark in the Tabernacle and Temple. So intense is God's presence that like a high voltage wire, we are enjoined not to come too close. (Exodus 19:12,13)

The destruction of the Temple was a horrific moment in Jewish history. But a sliver of light emerged. Replacing the Temple were small temples as Jews set up synagogues and learning centers worldwide. With God more diffuse, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg suggests, the voltage is lower. People can come closer.

Indeed, over time, the idea of Mishkan evolved into Shechina. In fact, the noun Shechina first appears in rabbinic literature after the Temples were destroyed. The God who particularly appeared in the Mishkan manifests as Shechina – literally, the God who is omnipresent. The Midrash makes this point when it says: "there is no place devoid of God." (Exodus Rabba 2:5)

A parable sheds light on how the post-Temple era has aspects that are more conducive to feeling the presence of God: "When a king is in his palace it is

difficult to approach him. Once he leaves and mingles amongst his constituents, even the lowest of commoners is able to interact with him. Similarly...when the Shechina has been exiled from His Temple, it is as if the Ruler of rulers, the Holy One Blessed Be He roams amongst His subjects. This is a more favorable time for the average person to gain access to Him. (Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, Sefer Or Gedalyahu)

Our parsha speaks of God who appears at Sinai and the Mishkan and ultimately in the Temple. It is in these places that He is more visible. But post-Temple – while God is less visible, He is more present. ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN

The Task of Kahat

Parashat Bamidbar describes the responsibilities of each division of the Leviim in terms of the transportation of the various parts of the Mishkan. Gershon had the responsibility of the various covers and curtains of the outer courtyard and the Mishkan and the various ropes that supported the curtains. M'rari transported the planks of the Mishkan which included the bars, pillars, and sockets, the pegs, and the ropes which supported those planks and pillars. Kahat was responsible for the holiest of objects, namely, the Aron Kodesh, the Shulchan (Table), the M'norah, the Mizb'chot (the two altars) and the sacred utensils that were used by these objects, the Masach (Screen), and all of its accessories. These objects that were the responsibility of Kahat carried with them a specific warning which is found at the end of our parasha.

The Torah tells us: "Do not cut off the tribe of the Kahatite families from among the Levites. This shall you do for them so that they shall live and not die, when they approach the Holy of Holies, Aharon and his sons shall come and assign them every man to his work and to his burden. But they shall not come and look as the Holy is (inserted, covered) lest they die." Onkelos, the Aramaic translation, tells us that the word HaKodesh should be rendered Manei Kudsha, which means that the warning is applicable to the covering of the Aron Kodesh and also to all of the holy objects within the Mishkan. Each were then covered and only then could the B'nei Kahat approach them to carry them by their poles. The B'nei Kahat did not have permission to enter the Mishkan until these objects were all covered. This opinion is supported by Rashi. Other meforshim insist that this warning was limited to the Aron Kodesh since this is where Hashem rested between the angels on the lid of the Aron Kodesh.

The warning itself is somewhat strange. The

Kohanim are cautioned not to cut off the Kahatite families from among the other Leviim. The pasuk which follows implies that the solution to this problem was for the Kohanim to divide up the tasks and assign which families within Kahat would be responsible for which tasks each time that the Mishkan was disassembled. What was to be gained by this procedure? Professor Nechama Leibovits explained this solution by quoting two Midrashim from Bamidbar Rabbah with seemingly opposite opinions as to the problem involved.

In the first Midrash, "Reb. Eleazar ben Pedat said in the name of Reb. Yose ben Zimra: The sanctity of the [Aron Kodesh] caused the people to be struck down by it, and all would run away preferring at all costs to take some other vessel...." He suggests that the tribe of Kahat would be severely punished for shunning that responsibility of the Aron Kodesh because of their fear. In the second Midrash, Reb Shmuel bar Reb. Nachman explains that the people understood that greater honor would befall the few who were chosen to carry the Aron Kodesh and they would fight over the right to carry it and shun their responsibility to the other Holy objects. Since the Kohanim would now assign the tasks to the individuals involved there would be no fighting and no shunning and the B'nei Kahat would not be endangered with annihilation because of the insult involved in their behavior. These Midrashim do not deal with the why the B'nei Kahat had to wait until the holy objects were covered before entering the Mishkan.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains why the B'nei Kahat should not see holy objects until they were covered. The holy objects that were the responsibility of the B'nei Kahat were mostly inside of the Mishkan. Only the mizbei'ach, the altar for the sacrifices, was outside of the Mishkan and visible to all of the B'nei Yisrael. The other objects were only seen by the Kohanim who were servicing these objects inside of the Mishkan. Hirsch believed that these objects must remain as symbolic objects to the B'nei Kahat rather than becoming "actual tangible objects". "We suggest that the reason for this was that the holy vessels should not be regarded simply as material articles of use. The people should realize their inner, symbolic significance. The Levites were charged with understanding the symbolic nature of the vessels that had been entrusted to their care. Had they kept their gaze directed on the holy vessels whilst they were being covered, this inner perception of their sacred purpose would have suffered, and they would have profaned their task."

Hirsch presents to us one of the most difficult problems that was faced by the B'nei Kahat. The task which Kahat was given required diametrically opposed emotions: closeness and familiarity yet at the same time distance and separation. The desire to serve

Hashem would encourage them to understand every aspect of those vessels. Yet the viewing of these vessels could have a negative effect. Seeing them would bring familiarity which could lead to a blasé attitude towards them. Had the vessels not been covered completely before being carried, the B'nei Kahat might have begun to minimize the importance of each object which might have affected their concentration while carrying them.

Every Jew faces a similar problem each day. We are required to recite our tefillot three times each day and additional tefillot on Shabbat and Chagim. In order to become proficient at this responsibility, one must be extremely familiar with the words and the order of the tefillah. Schools and synagogues encourage students to learn prayers by heart so that the words flow with ease. While this is encouraged, they also stress the importance of understanding the “meaning” of each tefillah. The negative effect of this may cause our minds to wander as we recite the tefillot by rote.

This same problem occurs with every mitzvah that we do. We must be able to step back from the mitzvah itself so that we can see the broader picture of our task in this world and the beauty of the breadth and scope of the way of life that Hashem has given us. This requires distancing, but we also need closeness and attachment. This takes a lifetime of study and practice and a life dedicated to Hashem and His Torah. It is a task which we must be willing to undertake.

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RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"You shall put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle of the Pact, all its furnishings... and they shall camp around the Tabernacle. (Bamidbar 1:50)" When told to count the Jewish People, Moshe was instructed to not count the Tribe of Levi amongst them. The Midrash tells us that Moshe was worried that perhaps Shevet Levi, his tribe, had done something wrong that they could not be included.

Therefore, Hashem said this verse to especially highlight why they were not counted among the rest of the nation. The Midrash gives a parable to a King who had many legions. He told his officers to count his legions, but not to include his special personal guard, as it would be insulting to count them simply among the rest of the soldiers. It would be equating their personal service to the King with the service of the ordinary soldiers who might protect the countryside or a port. That would be a degradation of the King's honor.

By placing the Tribe of Levi in charge of the Mishkan, it was assigning them a greater honor and responsibility than the rest of the populace. Though at first glance it might seem that they were so closely bound up in Temple Service that they could not be part of the main society; having no land and not working for

themselves, this was, in fact, because what they were given as their portion was greater.

Rashi comments that the word “appoint” conveys the meaning of ascribing a level of greatness to the person charged with this responsibility. This underscores that the reason the Levi'im were not counting among the rest of the populace was not because they were less important, but on the contrary, because their mission was so much greater that they could not simply be lumped in with everyone else.

This message especially resounds when Bamidbar is read before Shavuot (or immediately thereafter) because when we accepted the Torah, we became Hashem's special legion, His honor guard. No longer are we “just like everyone else.” Indeed, we are deserving of special notice because we directly serve our King, and we are responsible for protecting His honor by standing up for His principles and values.

We do not seek to be counted among the nations of the world nor standing as an independent nation of our own. Rather, we seek to be viewed as Hashem's People. We are dedicated to our role and through it act as a light for other nations to follow. Rather than being insulted by not being viewed as equals, we are proud that there is no comparison between them and us. Like the trees which are judged on Shavuot, we produce a different type of fruit.

Like the Levi'im, we stake no claim in the world of the nations because we know that our existence of surrounding Hashem and being part of His world is the greatest gift and privilege we can have.

The city looked like a ghost town. Doors were bolted; windows were shuttered, and no one dared to walk the streets. There was a lion loose on the streets! Whether it had escaped from a royal menagerie or come from the forests, no one dared to go outside.

Finally, R' Yaakov Yehoshua Falk, author of the Pnei Yehoshua, had to do something. He opened his door, wearing his Talis and Tefillin, and marched down the street until he came face to face with the beast. They stood there for a moment until the lion turned tail and ran. The Pnei Yehoshua chased after it until it had left the city far behind.

“He saw my Tefillin and was afraid,” he explained, referring to the posuk in Devarim that “the name of Hashem is called upon you” which refers to the Tefillin of the head. The king of the jungle had been humbled by a Jew who knew that there was a much greater King to be considered. ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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Establishing Paternity

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Torah tells us that “The people registered their ancestry by their clans and families” (Bamidbar 1:18). Rashi comments: “They brought their

documents of lineage and witnesses to the status of their birth, each and every one of them, so as to trace his ancestry to the tribe."

Even after these clarifications, some doubts remained in certain cases. For example, a divorcee or widow might have remarried immediately (without waiting the required three months after the death or divorce), in which case the paternity of her child born soon after was uncertain. Halachic literature discusses how to ascertain paternity in such cases.

According to the Talmud in *Yoma* 75a, the manna could be used to establish paternity. The Torah states that each person in a household was entitled to an *omer* of manna (*Shemot* 15:15). If the household members gathered more, it would rot. In the case of uncertain paternity, when either of two men might be the father, all that was necessary was to check which of the two households had enough manna for the extra child. That would be the father's household.

May we really clarify someone's lineage using heavenly signs? *Tosefet Yom Ha-Kippurim* explains that the rabbinic courts would establish parenthood using conventional halachic principles. The manna was used only to corroborate what they had already established, and to remove any lingering doubts that people may have harbored.

Sefer Chasidim describes another interesting method to establish paternity. There was once a question as to which of two boys was the biological son of a man who had died. The people took a bone from the dead man. They filled two cups with blood, one from each boy. They then dipped the bone into each cup of blood. Only the blood of the biological son was absorbed by the bone. Here too, some maintain that this was done only after the courts had already established the facts through conventional methods, and the bone test was used only to corroborate their conclusion and make people feel better about it.

Nowadays, we can determine paternity through a simple DNA test. Current decisors discuss the acceptability of this tests. Some write that it should not be relied upon unless classic halachic methods back it up. Others argue that a DNA test may be relied upon absolutely, as can any law of nature to which there are no exceptions. According to them, the test is so reliable that even if witnesses gave testimony which contradicted the DNA evidence, we would reject the testimony and declare them false witnesses. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Many stories that have emerged in the last few months are prime examples of "people who missed the point." I am reminded of the joke about the fellow who complained to an old college buddy: "Sadly I think my family are a bunch of racists. I

recently started dating a black girl and decided to bring her home to meet the family. My kids wouldn't even talk to her and my wife told me to pack my bags and leave."

We have all seen the media stories portraying Orthodox Jews as being tone deaf and insensitive to the concerns of local governments and either ignorantly or defiantly gathering for religious services or large funerals. Unfortunately, these issues have also torn the social fabric of many Jewish communities worldwide.

While it's true that there have been some egregious violations and flouting of both communal standards and the lawful guidelines put into place by local governments, the overwhelming majority of Orthodox Jews have been compliant. The well publicized instances of violators have primarily been the acts of an incredibly small percentage of misguided individuals. Still, these are the ones that get all the publicity. I often lamented to our beloved friend and mentor, Rabbi Kalman Packouz of blessed memory: "People should not judge Judaism by the Jews."

Rabbi Packouz himself was a paragon of personal and professional behavior. He was innately connected to the Almighty and viewed himself as His representative in the world. If one of his donors sent an unusually large gift, one that didn't fit into their pattern of giving, the good rabbi would call and make sure they didn't make a mistake and send too much. I have many such examples that I myself experienced during the time we spent together. As I write this I reflect on the fact that today would have been his 70th birthday and I am once again reminded of how much we all lost through his untimely passing.

He certainly internalized the teachings of our sages that the Torah was given to man so that he could perfect himself and bring perfection to the world. He knew that those who hold themselves to the standard of following God's laws, as given in our Torah, also have to hold themselves accountable to a much higher standard of behavior as well. This is because they portray themselves as following the will and desire of the Almighty; they therefore have to be EXTRA careful in all their behavior. Whether it's fair or not, others will look at them and judge "Judaism by the Jews."

Similarly, my father has always taught his students the importance of being sensitive to others. One of his oft-cited examples has been his general opposition to forming a minyan (of ten men praying) on a plane (as is commonly seen on long transatlantic flights to Israel). He challenges his students to consider whether their desire to pray with a minyan at the back of a plane should come at the expense of inconveniencing the stewardesses who are serving or fellow passengers trying to access the restrooms. My father regularly refuses to participate in those gatherings unless he is certain there will be no disruptions to anyone else.

Jewish law, as codified in the 1500's by Rabbi

Joseph Karo, has been organized under four broad categories. The proper application of personal ethics while we are doing our best to follow all the mitzvos in the Torah, fits into what my father likes to call the fifth column of Jewish law -- that of "Common Sense." Unfortunately, common sense sometimes simply isn't all that common.

Of course, this week's Torah reading is very relevant to this discussion.

"They gathered together the entire assembly [...] according to their families and their fathers' houses" (Numbers 1:18).

The commentaries explain that every individual was required to bring proof of his lineage in order to establish the tribe to which he belonged. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Bamidbar 1-684) further states that the other nations of the world also asked Hashem to give them the Torah as well, but Hashem refused to grant their request because they were unable to establish their own genealogy. Why is the establishment of genealogy a prerequisite to receiving the Torah?

The reason is because the ultimate goal of the Torah is the proper development and refinement of one's character; the Torah emphasizes the importance of maintaining moral and ethical standards. Unfortunately, in today's society, we are constantly inundated by influences that run counter to this ideal.

For example, contemporary culture not only idolizes the notion of amassing great wealth, but it especially idealizes the concept of amassing wealth without working for it. This shift in values is evidenced by the great success of Ponzi schemes, get rich email scams (a Nigerian prince died with no heirs...), the investments in penny stocks "with insider information," etc.

The reason so many people are taken in by these con artists is not that people have become less intelligent; rather, it is that they have absorbed the message that hard work is not a prerequisite for making a living or even being wildly successful. The appeal of these schemes lies in their promise of massive profits without the need to invest any time or effort.

Thanks to the influences of modern society, people tend to hope so desperately for those promises to materialize that they become willing victims of the purveyors of any such hope.

How can a person develop an inner moral compass that will help him resist the temptation to search for shortcuts, or worse, to cheat and steal? In order to achieve this it is crucial to have the proper role models at home. The key to raising good and ethical children is being the ultimate example of an honest and moral person. A child who sees the values of hard work, integrity, compassion, gratitude, perseverance, and responsibility modeled at home will most likely build his life on those foundations as well.

Thus, Hashem told the nations of the world that

since their genealogy was uncertain (they did not even know who their own fathers were) it was unlikely for them as a society to have grown up with proper role models. Sadly, we have seen the same in our society. Children who come from unstable family units, homes with absentee fathers, etc. regularly repeat the same mistakes in their lives as adults. This is why those without family history and proper legacy were unworthy of receiving the Torah.

This understanding should serve as a source of a tremendous insight into the crucial significance of parental influence and teach us how we must deal with our own children. The key to raising good children is being an honest and moral person. External displays of religiosity are merely the trimmings; the essence of a person is measured by his moral compass.

Unfortunately, this is a fact that is sometimes lost even on members of the "religious" community. Many families have no issue breaking the spirit of the law as long as they aren't breaking the letter of the law. An example of this is buying something that you intend to use, but with the knowledge that after using it you will return it to the place of purchase for a full refund (growing up I knew someone who before each Super Bowl would buy the most expensive big screen T.V. and then after the game he would use the store's 7 day "no questions asked" return policy to return it). Another is amassing many tens of credit cards (sometimes hundreds) in order to receive all the incentives offered by each credit card issuer without ever intending to use the cards, which is why those incentives were there in the first place.

In fact, in many ways this type of behavior is more devastating to a child's moral development than growing up with parents who steals outright. Eventually a child might learn that stealing is wrong, but he will almost certainly never learn on his own that breaking the spirit of the law is wrong.

We should all begin to consider what our family's core moral values are; those ideals that we want to see transmitted to future generations. We should then take steps to articulate and define these ideas into a "family mission statement." We should do this for our children and grandchildren and in this way ensure that those who follow us will live up to the traditions of our proud Jewish heritage and that they will transmit those essential beliefs to many succeeding generations to come. © 2020 Rabbi Y. Zweig & torah.org

