

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BEMIDBAR and SHABUOT
MAY 25-28, 2012 5-7 SIVAN 5772

**DEDICATIONS: Mazal Tov to our dear friends Serge and Nina Muller
on the engagement of their daughter Michal Leah to Uri Bollag –
Chantelle is coming to Jerusalem for the LeChayim and brings best wishes from all of us.**

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Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach Schedule and Announcements

Please let us know if you will be
around for Shabuot – Reply to
this email. We have a
commitment from a number of
guys for Shaharit at around
4:30AM after all night study on
Sunday morning. Amidah at 5:28
Vatikin. Avraham Ashkenazi will
read the Torah, Rabbi Steve and
Aharon Siegel will be with us, Mr
Yadgarov, Herman, Sam, Hal, Me
B'H. We want to make sure we'll
have enough guys for the 9AM
minyan with Rabbi Colish and Uri
Lemberger. We need
commitments.

We also need as many of you to
come for each Mincha and Arbit
Service. Typically when we have
a three day Shabbat and Holiday,
people get a bit holidayed out.
But we really need each of you to
make sure we have a minyan
each day and on time. Thanks

Friday Night: Candles: 7:58PM -
Afternoon and Evening service
(Minha/Arbith): 7:00 PM

Morning Service (Shaharith):
9:00AM
Please say Shemah at home by
8:19 AM
Soul Schmoozing Shabbat
Mornings 11:30 AM for teenage
girls with Leah Colish.
Kiddush is sponsored by Jack
and Patti Azizo in honor of their
daughter Lilly's birthday.

Pirkei Avot with Rabbi Aharon at
6:30 PM –
Childrens program at 6:30 with
Rabbi Colish followed by Minha:
7:15 PM
Seudah Shelishi and a Class with
David 7:45 – Megilat Ruth
Evening Service (Arbith): 8:50 PM
- Shabbat Ends: 8:58PM
Light Candles for Shavuot after
9:00 PM

- Special Women's
learning Session given by Aliza
Siegel at her home 11:30pm-
2:00am - 271 West Olive St.
(Corner Laurelton)

Tikun Lel Shabuot at the
Synagogue
Midnight to 4:30 AM
Followed by Shaharit Sunday
morning at 4:30

SUNDAY 1st Day Shabuot
Shaharit 9:00 AM
Everyone who comes to Minyan
is invited to Phyllis Wagner's
house for Kiddush and dessert.

Azharat and Megilat Ruth for the
first day of Shabuot 7:15
Mincha 7:45 follow by Arbit
For those who light candles –
Light at 8PM

MONDAY 2nd Day Shabuot
Shaharit 9:00 AM

Yizkor – about 10:30 to 10:45
The Sisterhood invites the entire
congregation for a dairy lunch

Azharat and Megilat Ruth for the
second day of Shabuot 7:15
Mincha 7:45 follow by a short
class
Arbit at 8:50 – Holiday ends at
9:00 PM

Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays
and Thursdays)
Continue Yehi Shem

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

6:30 AM class – Shelah
Hakadosh on the Perasha

Men's Halacha class – Tuesday
evening at 8:30 PM

Kiddush Celebrating Dan and
Daniella Kahen – Shabbat
Shelach LeCha – June 16th –
Please join those sponsoring –
Speak with Albert Yusupov

NEED PLANTS?

The Rabbi's gardens are
overflowing with extra plants. For
a minimum of \$5.00, (check made
out to the Sisterhood) you can
have cone flowers (perennials),
Russian sage, prickly pear cactus
(sabra), ornamental grasses
straw flowers and, of course,
mint. See Phyllis to arrange to
get the plants or call her at 432-
8637. And thank her for doing
such a beautiful job in the garden

Because of the response we got
to Rabbi Eliyahu Yanay's class,
we will continue it thanks to
Gregory and Boris Safaniev on

Monday night June 4th at 7:30 PM – Mincha at 7:15

Hebrew Reading Crash Course Starting Monday June 18th in the Study 8-9 PM and continuing Monday Nights throughout the Summer. Beginner and intermediate levels welcome!

EDITORS NOTES

To all those writing last night and this morning, I apologize for the delay. I have been traveling this week and hoped to get the newsletter out this morning. I apologize to those in Israel and points east if this comes in too late. Thanks for thinking of me.

This week we begin the portion of Bemidbar. In English the book of Bemidbar is referred to as Numbers. We are counted in the beginning and then towards the end. About 600,000 Israelites leave Egypt and forty years later about 600,000 will enter the Holy Land. And this bothers me.

The Torah tells us that 70 souls arrived in Egypt and 210 years those 70 souls becomes 600,000 plus women, children and elders. Going from 70 to 600,000 required the population to double every 15 years. Considering the midrashic sources which tell of multiple births this is very possible. You may recall us writing about Mrs Yitta Schwartz who passed away in 2010 at the age of 93 had over 2000 descendants over the course of 65 years. That's doubling every five and a half years.

My problem is that assuming they grew so much during a period which was marred by at least 80 years of harsh slavery, what happened in the idyllic desert where they had all of their needs met; food, water, clothing, protection, education and what we imagine to be the ultimate in

holiness living under the wings of the Divine. So what happened? Why was there no growth? It's difficult for me to understand and I haven't seen an answer to the question.

I was pondering this as I traveled this week. As I understand, there are 600,000 primary souls. These were the souls that left Egypt and these were the souls that stood at Mount Sinai to receive the Torah. These same souls should have then entered the land, conquered the nations and built a Bet HaMikdash.

The Zohar Chadash tells us that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah. The Megaleh Amukot explains that these each letter corresponds to the each of the primary souls and says that the name Yisrael – Israel is an acronym for "Yesh Shishim Ribo Otiyot Le-Torah" – There are 600,000 letters in the Torah.

Adam HaRishon had a job to accomplish in this world, but he failed – and this failure is depicted through the story of eating the forbidden fruit. Then came Noah who could have completed the job, but he too fails through the story of his drinking the wine. Adam and Noah represent all of mankind. But mankind on a whole can't complete the job, thus Abraham accepts the responsibility for him and his descendants. Esav rejects the responsibility as does Yishmael. So everything rests with Jacob and his children who go down to Egypt and 400 years after the birth of Isaac, they become 600,000 souls which in totality comprise an earthly manifestation of Jewish People. United at Sinai on the 6th day of Sivan they receive the commandments and in that unity represent Adam when he was created on the 6th day of creation, prior to his sin.

The 600,000 souls (or pairs of souls – as a man and woman represent two halves of the same soul) represent all the parts of Adam Kadmon or Primordial Man.

When the bodies of these 600,000 failed, first on the 17th of Tamuz through the golden calf and then a year later on the 9th of Ab through the spies, those bodies were slated to die over the next 40 years. But the souls didn't die. The souls came back through the next generation. Those same 600,000 primary souls in 600,000 bodies needed to complete the Exodus and the receiving of the Torah, but entering the land, conquering the land and building an eternal Temple. Unfortunately they too failed. They entered the land. They began the conquest, but then backed off. We don't learn much about that failure, but I have been thinking that that failure must have been as great as the ones in the desert. Time to re learn the book of Joshua.

So what happened to those 600,000 souls? I guess that they needed to come back and fix what they messed up, but it must have been too difficult for one body to repair every aspect of one of those primary souls. So G-d in his mercy allowed each part of each soul to come back and take a shot at fixing just a small part of what needed repair. Depending on how we calculate, each soul may have 3 parts which are divided by 3 and again divided by 3 and so on. (We could also use the number 5 there representing Nefesh (life force), Ruah (spirit), Neshama (soul), Chayah (Higher Life Force) and Yechidah (spark of divinity) (Pardon my translations). So in essence 600,000 multiplied by 5 and again by 5 can represent the Jews in the world today.

Each of our souls, a fragment of one of the 600,000, represents a part of the millions of souls today. And now we can understand how each of us stood at Sinai. For each of us is part of one of those 600,000 souls. Each of us left Egypt and crossed the sea, each of us heard G-d say Anochi Hashem – I am Hashem, each of us was there when we messed up by the golden calf and with the spies, and each of us traveled 40 years through the desert. Each of us heard Moses give his final speech. Each of us crossed the Jordan and each of us took part in the conquest and every one of us failed in that conquest.

Now each of us has to fix the segment of the soul that needs fixing. And no two of us have the same thing to fix. At the same time though, each of us is responsible, not only for ourselves, but for each other, for the fragment that is part of our primary soul and for the fragment that is part of any of the 600,000 souls that make up Israel. Because no matter how much fixing I do for my soul, if I don't help you, then we're all messed up and we all ultimately share in the failure.

It's interesting that at the point we become Adam before the Sin, the verse tells us we stood there as one nation, with one heart. We were unified to the point that we represented one unified body, with all her organs working in unison. More than anything else this is the test of our generation as the pieces of those 600,000 in the final days of repair. Our little piece of soul is being asked, "Do you want to be a part of the 600,000 or do you reject your responsibility?" And there are only two answers, there is Yes and there is No. We said Naaseh VeNishmah – We will do and we will listen, 3500 years ago – will we say it and mean it today?

This Shabbat we begin Debarim – the book of Numbers and this Sunday we again stand at Sinai. And as we hear the commandments, we need to strive to connect with our soul which undoubtedly remembers standing there when the heavens and earth joined. We need to ask ourselves, is the answer yes or no, are we committed to ourselves and each other or not. And if the answer is yes, we need to commit to being part of Am Echad – one nation, with lev Echad – one Soul.

May we all make that commitment this Shabuot and with it bring the final redemption, speedily in our days, Amen!

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Sameyach

David Bibi

PS ... Much of what I have written above is based on my own concept of 600,000 and may be completely wrong. I would love to hear your thoughts.

I saw the following posted by Congregation Toras Chaim of Dallas. A more detailed accounting can be found in INSIGHTS INTO THE DAILY DAF - daf@dafyomi.co.il on Page 30 of Kidushin.

The Zohar Chadash on Shir ha-Shirim makes the famous statement that there are 600,000 letters in the Torah. The Megaleh Amukos explains that these 600,000 letters correspond to the souls of the Jewish people. Interestingly, the Megaleh Amukos sees a hint to this fact in the very name "Yisroel," the initial letters of which are an acronym for "Yesh Shishim Ribo Osiyos Le-Torah" – There are 600,000 letters in the Torah.

The Zohar Chadash's statement is, however, difficult in light of the

fact that our Sifrei Torah only contain 304,805 letters! As far back as can verify, via ancient texts, this has always been the case. There is no evidence nor mention anywhere of there ever having been a 600,000-letter Torah Scroll.

There are several possible answers to this problem, most of which require the realization that a single Hebrew letter is, more often than not, not a single Hebrew letter. There are two way of understanding this:

1 – every Hebrew letter can be formed by a combination or permutation of six letters: Dalet, vov, zayin, yud, kaf, or nun. For example, the letter mem is a kaf with a vov attached to its front while a alef can be reduced to a vov with yud attached up top and down below. When one counts letters according to their constituent parts (i.e. alef = 3 letters and Mem = 2) instead of as single letters (i.e. alef = 1 and mem=1) you find that the total number of letters is almost exactly 600,000. This understanding is suggested by the Megaleh Amukos, the Pnei Yehoshua to Kiddushin 30a, and the Mishnas Avraham.

2 – The Beis Yosef YD 275 points out that when the Halacha speaks in general terms of "letters," this usually implies the smallest letter that there is, the yud. Additionally, the Beis Yosef points out that we describe the dimensions of the letters in terms of "yuds." A shin, for example, is three-yuds wide, while most other letters are two-yuds wide and a few are only one-yud in width. If one totals all of the yud-widths of all the 304,805 letters, the result is supposedly 600,000 letters.

Curiously, I have calculated both of these totals only to find that understanding #1 results in a total

of 552,865, while #2 results in a total of only 575,376!

Indeed, very few of any of the proposed solutions to this problem, when calculated out precisely, get us close to 600,000.

Part of the problem may be that don't fully understand the counting methods described by the sages who have tackled this question. For example, Rav Saadia Gaon wrote that he once counted the letters in the Torah and arrived to a total of over 700,000 letters! We are not sure how Rav Saadia got this number and, to this day, no one has ever duplicated his method of counting.

However, I think that a solution may lay in reexamining the Beis Yosef who proposed that one should count the letter-widths of the total number of letters.

Ideally, the halachah is that a Sefer Torah should be written in 245 columns with 42 lines per column, which translate to a total of 10,290 lines of text. Now, the dimensions of an ideal line of text are such that it should be wide enough to accommodate 62 yud-widths. If we multiply 10,290 lines of text by 62 yud-lengths per line, then the total yud-lengths encompassed by a sefer torah are 637,980.

Now, there are certain places in the Torah text that must be left blank, such as the breaks between the paragraphs of the Torah and the spaces between the lines of Shiras ha-Yam and Haazinu, both of which are written in a different format than the rest of the Torah. The total average yud-widths of these blank sections is about 56.7 yud-widths. If we subtract the total yud-widths of the sections that must remain

blank from the total yud-widths of a Sefer Torah, then we arrive at

637,980 (total yud-lengths of lines for writing) – 37,932 (the total number of blank lines) = 600,048 yud-widths.

As far as I can tell, this explanation gets closer to the 600,000 letter count than any other ever offered. But note, that according to this interpretation, the 600,000 letter count mentioned by the Zohar Chadash is not a count of the actual letters of the Torah, but rather an enumeration of the total amount of written space that is occupied by the letters of the Torah. Indeed, as we have just shown, the total amount of writable space is almost exactly 600,000 yud-widths.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe counts all males over the age of 20, and registers them according to their paternal ancestry. The total, not including Shayvet Layvie, was 603,550. The total number of Jews was around 3 million.

3rd Aliya: The tribes are each assigned their position within the camp, and in the order of the traveling.

4th Aliya: In preparation for separating the tribe of Layvie, the Torah establishes Aharon's genealogy. Although the Kohanim were also from the Tribe of Layvie, they were counted by themselves.

5th Aliya: Moshe counts the Leviyim according to their three basic families: Gershon, Kehas, and Mirarri. Their individual responsibilities in transporting the Mishkan is stated, and their total was 22,000.

6th Aliya: Being that the Leviyim were to be in direct exchange for the first born, Moshe counts all the first born in the rest of the nation. Their total was 22,273. The extra 273 first born are instructed to redeem themselves from Aharon the Kohain for 5 silver shekels.

7th Aliya: The Parsha concludes with detailed instructions for the family of Kahas. Their primary responsibility was to transport the vessels of the Mishkan. Only Aharon and his sons were allowed to cover the vessels in preparation for transport. Once covered, the family of Kahas did the actual carrying.

This week's Haftorah is from Hoshea 2:01- 2:22. Hoshea's prophecy is a seemingly contradictory presentation of the relationship between the Jews and G-d. On the one hand Hoshea compares the Jews to a Harlot who betrays her husband and can not in good conscience claim that her husband has fathered her children. On the other hand, Hoshea concludes his prophecy with G-d's promise that he will never abandon the Jews and that despite the nations betrayal and disloyalty, the children are still His.

In order to understand this prophecy, a little background is in order. G-d had stated to Hoshea that the Jews had sinned. Hoshea responded by suggesting to Hashem that He exchange the Jews for another nation. As a Prophet, it was Hoshea's responsibility to follow Moshe's example and fight on behalf of the nation, not reaffirm their guilt and sins. In essence, Hoshea had spoken Lashon Harah about the Jews.

As a part of Hoshea's training, Hashem instructed him to marry a woman who was a prostitute. He

fathers three children whom he gives unusual names reflecting his personal frustration with the Jews. His oldest is named Yizrael - The G-d Who plants. His second child, a daughter, he names Lo Ruchamah - One who does not deserve mercy. His third child, a boy, he named Lo Ami - Not My nation.

Hashem then told him to send away his wife and children. Hoshea begged G-d to rescind His order because he loved his family and did not want to be apart from them. G-d then says to him, "Isn't your wife a prostitute, and don't even know if your children are yours? Yet you love them! So too is my relationship with the Jews. No matter how they betray me I still love them and do not want to be apart from them!"

Hoshea understood the lesson and changed his entire attitude toward the Jews. Instead of presenting the angry demeanor of harshness and judgment, Hoshea prophesied some of the most beautiful and optimistic prophecies that we have.

The final words of the Haftorah capture the eternity of G-d's love for His Chosen People. "I shall marry you to Me forever..."

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

Rabbi Reuven Semah **"Honor your father and your mother."** (Shemot 20:12)

On the holiday of Shabuot, Israel received the Torah. The Ten Commandments are inscribed on two tablets, five on each. The first tablet contains laws regarding man's relationship to Hashem, while the second refers to relationships among people. This shows us the significance that Hashem attaches to the honor He wants

us to show parents, because Hashem included this commandment on the first tablet. When people honor their parents Hashem regards it as if they honored Him.

A great story (quoted in Tubecha Yabiu) illustrates this point. Once a Jewish person went to a faraway land in order to make a livelihood and bring it back home to his family. The man went with his father and the son was able to acquire gold and silver items that had great value. Finally the man decided to go back home, but his father stayed. The son packed his precious cargo in a sack and got ready to leave. The father noticed that the sack was very heavy so he advised his son to make it a little easier to carry. He told him that instead of carrying the whole load on one shoulder, he should balance it by placing another sack full of rocks on his other shoulder. If he had balance it would be easier and he will arrive safely home. The son asked no questions and did exactly as his father told him, and carried an extra sack of stones. However, people who saw him didn't understand the purpose of the extra sack. When he explained what his father commanded, they still didn't understand. If all he needed was balance, why the rocks? The balance could be accomplished by dividing the gold and silver into two sacks! The son ignored them and continued on his way.

Finally he boarded a ship to take him home. However, during the trip they ran into a terrible storm at sea. The crew did all they could to lighten the load to prevent the ship from sinking. Finally the captain gave the order that in order to save the lives of the passengers, each passenger must throw overboard one half of his cargo. Each one

must divide his property and throw half away. Now everyone realized the good fortune of the son. In the merit of listening to his father he was able to throw away a sack of rocks instead of half of his fortune. His father's instructions didn't seem to have any logic, but the son followed anyway.

Perhaps this is part of the reason why honoring parents were placed on the first tablet. There might be times that we should not question a parent in the same way that one would not question Hashem.

As we stand on the threshold of Shabuot, the holiday of the receiving of the Torah, we would do well to read the Mishnah in the last chapter of Pirkei Abot which lists the forty-eight qualities necessary to acquire the Torah. Among them are refinement of character, humility, happiness, empathy and so on.

The first one, however, is the most important, for that is STUDY. If we want to know anything in the Torah we must, first and foremost, study at a set time, preferably with a teacher. Many are those who have made a commitment to study some parts of Torah, be it Midrash, halachah or Gemara, and those who have dedicated themselves to it have benefited tremendously. Now is the time to say to ourselves, let's try some serious Torah learning. We will then have reenacted the Receiving of the Torah as on Mount Sinai, and we and our families will be the benefactors.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Perfecting Our Middot Through Parenting

The Torah in Parashat Bamidbar briefly recounts the death of Nadab and Abihu, Aharon's two older sons: "Nadab and Abihu died before God...and they had no children" (3:4). The Gemara in Masechet Yebamot interprets this verse to mean that Nadav and Abihu died because they did not beget children. On this basis, the Gemara establishes that one who does not involve himself in Periya Ve'ribya – the Misva of begetting children – is liable to death, just as Nadab and Abihu died because of their refusal to have children.

The commentators raise the question as to how the Gemara can attribute Nadab and Abihu's death to their decision not to have children. After all, the Torah right here in this Pasuk states explicitly that they died on account of their irreverence toward the Mishkan, for bringing an unwarranted offering. And the Midrash gives other reasons for their untimely death – drinking wine before entering the Mishkan, and acting disrespectfully toward Moshe and Aharon. How, then, are we to understand the Gemara's comment that Nadab and Abihu died because of their decision not to beget children?

The Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839) explained that Nadab and Abihu's refusal to have children is the root cause of their other sins, which all have to do with a lack of respect. The irreverence they showed toward Moshe and Aharon and toward the Mishkan was the result of their failure to cultivate proper Middot (character traits) – a failure which could have been averted if they had begotten children. Parenting, the Hatam Sofer says, is the most effective

means of perfecting one's character. Children look to their parents as examples to follow, and thus parents have no choice but to be careful how they speak and act. Keenly aware of the effect our behavior has on our children's character development, we are forced to conduct ourselves in a dignified, respectful and becoming manner. Strange as it may seem, parenting is not only about building our children, but also about building ourselves. We perfect our characters by being parents, as the role forces us to conduct ourselves in the way we want our children to behave. And so, the Hatam Sofer says, Nadab and Abihu died because they did not have children. Being childless denied them the opportunity to develop their characters and their sense of humility and respect, and thus indirectly caused their untimely death.

On Shabuot we read the Aseret Hadibberot – the Ten Commandments that Beneh Yisrael heard at Sinai. The Midrash comments that the Ten Commandments are divided into two sets of five, and each commandment corresponds to the parallel commandment in the other set. Thus, for example, the first commandment – "I am Hashem your God" – corresponds to the sixth commandment – murder – because murder constitutes the destruction of the divine image. The second commandment – idolatry – corresponds to the seventh commandment – adultery – because worshipping a foreign deity is a betrayal of God comparable to marital infidelity. Interestingly enough, according to this structure, the fifth commandment – honoring parents – corresponds to "Lo Tahmod," the prohibition against envy. The Midrash explains that somebody who is envious of other

people will have children who disrespect him and will show respect to other people in their lives, instead, and this accounts for the implied link between these Misvot.

Why are disrespectful children the consequence of envy? If children grow up around envious parents, who frequently speak of their desire to have what others have, then they, the children, will naturally become envious people. And it is then likely that they will be envious of their friends' parents. If we cause our children to be jealous people, we may very well be causing them to disrespect us – because they will be jealous of their friends and show greater respect to their friends' parents than to their own parents.

Parenting is a precious privilege and opportunity for many reasons, and one reason which we should not overlook is the way it can help us become better people. But this will only happen if we remember how much our behavior affects our children's development, that the way we act directly impacts upon their characters. By being careful how we act and speak around our children, we not only help them develop and cultivate proper Middot – but we help ourselves perfect our own characters, as well.

Rabbi Wein

Among the customs that accompany the holiday of Shavuot, the public reading of the book of Ruth is personally one of my favorites. The beauty and simplicity of language, the conciseness and majesty of its narrative and the great moral lessons that are embedded in its four short chapters have always fascinated me. There is much that we and our current society can

learn and apply from the ideas and events described in the book of Ruth.

Firstly and perhaps most importantly is the value that Judaism places upon compassion and help to the widow, the orphan, the stranger – the disadvantaged in our society. The great future of the Jewish people, even of all Western civilization, is founded on acts of compassion – Ruth to Naomi, Naomi to Ruth, and Boaz to Ruth. There are no great intellectual or theological discussions related to us in the book of Ruth. It is deceptively simple in its shining message that we are to be nice to each other.

We are here to help others and such help oftentimes comes not in grandiose social welfare programs or numerous organizations but rather in small personal acts of kindness and sensitivity towards others. The Davidic dynasty is created by giving a tired, poor and strange woman a rather meager lunch and some comforting words.

The book of Ruth purposely details for us the “menu” that Boaz offered Ruth for her midday meal in order to emphasize to us that true human kindness rests in the small things in life and the everyday accommodations to others that sustain us in an otherwise difficult world.

The attitude towards the stranger amongst us is also one of the highlights of the book of Ruth. Human beings are very territorial and xenophobic. We look askance at strangers, at those who are not like us physically and temperamentally. In our schools the “different” child is rarely if ever accommodated. Bullying and violence are condoned if not even sometimes encouraged.

The Jewish people over the ages have been victimized simply for being different. No amount of Nobel prizes won can erase the fact that we are different and the refusal of most of human society to tolerate differences within the human race inevitably leads to outrage and atrocities.

The gleaners and the harvesters and their supervisors all looked askance at Ruth – the different one – as she bent down to take the fallen grain. They identified her to Boaz and to themselves as, that “Moabite” person. It was not only meant as a term of derision as well. The different person always bears the stigma of being different.

The Torah warned us thirty six times to be careful to treat the stranger, the convert, the different one, fairly and with justice and compassion. We are taught that “the world is constructed and built upon compassion towards others.” The book of Ruth perhaps more than any other book in the canon of the Bible illustrates this value in a most emphatic fashion.

The book of Ruth also drives home to us the unseen but omnipresent hand of God, so to speak, in the seemingly ordinary affairs of humans. Though we are all accorded almost unlimited free will in our choices, decisions and behavior, we are yet operating within boundaries of events that are subject to the Will of the Divine.

Boaz is free to choose how he will treat Ruth, kindly or otherwise, but as Rambam explains, this freedom in no way impinges on God’s ultimate master plan for the Jewish people and the Davidic dynasty. “Many are the thoughts of humans but it is God’s plan that will ultimately prevail.” We should

always operate as agents of our own freedom of will and choice while at the same time being mindful that it is God’s plan that will certainly prevail.

King David need not have arrived through Boaz and Ruth. The Lord has many paths to effectuate His will. Yet because of the compassionate behavior of Boaz and Ruth, the Lord made them the eternal parents of Jewish monarchy. This is a confirmation of the statement of the rabbis of the Talmud: “Good and meritorious events occur to us through the acts of good and meritorious people while other types of events occur to us through the behavior of sinners.” These lessons from the book of Ruth should be guideposts for us all year long - not limited to the holiday of Shavuot itself.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky - Parsha Parables

The words resounded like the battle cry of our destiny, “we shall do and we shall listen!” (Exodus 19:8). They were words that characterized a superhuman commitment to observance of G-d’s Torah. After all, most people listen, ponder, and then accept to execute. The Jews, however, when asked if they want the Torah, used a terminology that is only expressed by angelic beings - first we shall do, then we shall listen. That being the case, the Tosfos (French medieval commentators) in Tractate Shabbos question a Talmudic interpretation of a difficult verse.

The Torah, in painting the scene at Sinai, places the Jews in a very strange location in relation to Mt. Sinai. “And the Jews stood under the mountain” (Exodus 19:17). The wording is strange. The Torah should have written that the Jews stood at the foot of the mountain or at the bottom of the

mountain. The wording "under the mountain" seems to be unsuitable.

The Talmud in Tractate Shabbos explains this verse in a literal sense. Hashem, the Talmud explains, literally placed the Jews under the mountain by lifting the mountain above them like a giant pot! And in that state, the Talmud continues, Hashem decreed, "If you will accept the Torah, fine. However, if you do not accept the Torah, this will become your final resting place."

On any level this Talmudic interpretation is difficult to understand, but in the light of the Jewish nation's unwavering acceptance of Torah - we shall do and we shall listen -- it is almost incomprehensible. Thus Tosfos asks a powerful question: "why did Hashem force the Torah upon a nation that had already accepted it, lovingly and willingly in superhuman terms?"

When Queen Victoria (1819-1901) of England was about to marry Prince Albert, she wanted to have him bestowed with the title King Consort through an act of the British Parliament.

Prime Minister William Melbourne, knew the strong opposition he would face in making such an unprecedented move, especially since Albert was of German descent. He strongly advised the Queen against such a move. "Your Majesty," the Prime Minister explained, "we can't have any of that." After all, if the English people get into the habit of making kings, they will get them into the habit of unmaking them as well!"

The Torah, the Maharal of Prague (1526-1609) explains, is a vital necessity for worldly existence. It is more than the blueprint of creation, it is the *raison d'être* of

the entire universe. And its presentation had to personify such. Though there was unmitigated love and wholehearted enthusiasm in the Jewish nation's acceptance of the Torah, Hashem had to make a point that would be as eternally powerful as Torah itself. He presented the Torah with unmitigated force -- a manner that characterized its essence -- a vital necessity for mortal and universal existence. Torah's acceptance could not be left to the fortunate goodwill of a very spiritual and wanting nation. It was wonderful that the Jews accepted the Torah as such, and their acceptance merited endless reward. But it was time to show what the Torah truly meant to the creation at large. Otherwise, for generations, the emergence and observance of Torah would be an outcome of mortal benevolence -- and that is not the case.

The Torah is plains above the mortality of its observers, and its transmission and acceptance must represent that immortality -- even if it takes raising Sinai!

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
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Bemidbar takes up the story as we left it toward the end of Shemot. The people had journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai. There they received the Torah. There they made the Golden Calf. There they were forgiven after Moses' passionate plea, and there they made the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, inaugurated on the first of Nisan, almost a year after the exodus. Now, one month later, on the first day of the second month, they are ready to move on to the second part of the journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

Yet there is a curious delay in the narrative. Ten chapters pass until the Israelites actually begin to travel (Num. 10: 33). First there is a census. Then there is an account of the arrangement of the tribes around the Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting. There is a long account of the Levites, their families and respective roles. Then there are laws about the purity of the camp, restitution, the sotah, the woman suspected of adultery, and the nazirite. A lengthy series of passages describe the final preparations for the journey. Only then do they set out. Why this long series of seeming digressions?

It is easy to think of the Torah as simply telling events as they occurred, interspersed with various commandments. On this view the Torah is history plus law. This is what happened, these are the rules we must obey, and there is a connection between them, sometimes clear (as in the case of laws accompanied by reminder that "you were slaves in Egypt"), sometimes less so.

But the Torah is not mere history as a sequence of events. The Torah is about the truths that emerge through time. That is one of the great differences between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. Ancient Greece sought truth by contemplating nature and reason. The first gave rise to science, the second to philosophy. Ancient Israel found truth in history, in events and what God told us to learn from them. Science is about nature, Judaism is about human nature, and there is a great difference between them. Nature knows nothing about freewill. Scientists often deny that it exists at all. But humanity is constituted by its freedom. We are what we choose to be. No planet chooses to be hospitable to life. No fish chooses to be a hero. No peacock

chooses to be vain. Humans do choose. And in that fact is born the drama to which the whole Torah is a commentary: how can freedom coexist with order? The drama is set on the stage of history, and it plays itself out through five acts, each with multiple scenes.

The basic shape of the narrative is roughly the same in all five cases. First God creates order. Then humanity creates chaos. Terrible consequences follow. Then God begins again, deeply grieved but never losing His faith in the one life-form on which He set His image and to which He gave the singular gift that made humanity godlike, namely freedom itself.

Act 1 is told in Genesis 1-11. God creates an ordered universe and fashions humanity from the dust of the earth into which He breathes His own breath. But humans sin: first Adam and Eve, then Cain, then the generation of the Flood. The earth is filled with violence. God brings a flood and begins again, making a covenant with Noah. Humanity sin again by making the Tower of Babel (the first act of imperialism, as I argued in an earlier study). So God begins again, seeking a role model who will show the world what it is to live in faithful response to the word of God. He finds it in Abraham and Sarah.

Act 2 is told in Genesis 12-50. The new order is based on family and fidelity, love and trust. But this too begins to unravel. There is tension between Esau and Jacob, between Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel, and between their children. Ten of Jacob's children sell the eleventh, Joseph, into slavery. This is an offence against freedom, and catastrophe follows – not a Flood but a famine, as a result of which Jacob's family goes into exile in

Egypt where the whole people become enslaved. God is about to begin again, not with a family this time but with a nation, which is what Abraham's children have now become.

Act 3 is the subject of the book of Shemot. God rescues the Israelites from Egypt as He once rescued Noah from the Flood. As with Noah (and Abraham), God makes a covenant, this time at Sinai, and it is far more extensive than its precursors. It is a blueprint for social order, for an entire society based on law and justice. Yet again, however, humans create chaos, by making a Golden Calf a mere forty days after the great revelation. God threatens catastrophe, destroying the whole nation and beginning again with Moses, as He had done with Noah and Abraham (Ex. 32: 10). Only Moses' passionate plea prevents this from happening. God then institutes a new order.

Act 4 begins with an account of this order, which is unprecedentedly long, extending from Exodus 35, through the whole of the book of Vayikra and the first ten chapters of Bemidbar. The nature of this new order is that God becomes not merely the director of history and the giver of laws. He becomes a permanent Presence in the midst of the camp. Hence the building of the Mishkan, which takes up the last third of Shemot, and the laws of purity and holiness, as well as those of love and justice, that constitute virtually the whole of Vayikra. Purity and holiness are demanded by the fact that God has become suddenly close. In the Tabernacle, the Divine Presence has a home on earth, and whoever comes close to God must be holy and pure. Now the Israelites are ready to begin the next stage of the journey, but only after a long introduction.

That long introduction, at the beginning of Bemidbar, is all about creating a sense of order within the camp. Hence the census, and the detailed disposition of the tribes, and the lengthy account of the Levites, the tribe that mediated between the people and the Divine Presence. Hence also, in next week's parsha, the three laws – restitution, the sotah and the nazir – directed at the three forces that always endanger social order: theft, adultery and alcohol. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites, this is what order looks like. Each person has his or her place within the family, the tribe and the nation. Everyone has been counted and each person counts. Preserve and protect this order, for without it you cannot enter the land, fight its battles and create a just society.

Tragically, as Bemidbar unfolds, we see that the Israelites turn out to be their own worst enemy. They complain about the food. Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses. Then comes the catastrophe, the episode of the spies, in which the people, demoralized, show that they are not yet ready for freedom. Again, as in the case of the Golden Calf, there is chaos in the camp. Again God threatens to destroy the nation and begin again with Moses (Num. 14: 12). Again only Moses' powerful plea saves the day. God decides once more to begin again, this time with the next generation and a new leader. The book of Devarim is Moses' prelude to Act 5, which takes place in the days of his successor Joshua.

The Jewish story is a strange one. Time and again the Jewish people has split apart, in the days of the First Temple when the kingdom divided into two, in the late Second Temple period when

it was riven into rival groups and sects, and in the modern age, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it fragmented into religious and secular in Eastern Europe, orthodox and others in the West. Those divisions have still not healed.

And so the Jewish people keeps repeating the story told five times in the Torah. God creates order. Humans create chaos. Bad things happen, then God and Israel begin again. Will the story never end? One way or another it is no coincidence that Bemidbar usually precedes Shavuot, anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. God never tires of reminding us that the central human challenge in every age is whether freedom can coexist with order. It can, when humans freely choose to follow God's laws, given in one way to humanity after the Flood and in another to Israel after the exodus.

The alternative, ancient and modern, is the rule of power, in which, as Thucydides said, the strong do as they will and the weak suffer as they must. That is not freedom as the Torah understands it, nor is it a recipe for love and justice. Each year as we prepare for Shavuot by reading parshat Bemidbar, we hear God's call: here in the Torah and its mitzvot is the way to create a freedom that honours order, and a social order that honours human freedom. There is no other way.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

Please prove the authenticity of our Torah? That's a question I like to get!

ANSWER: So we say to the questioner, you have the floor, please disprove it. Please disprove the authenticity of our

Torah. The Torah is here. Here it is, and we are here. We are the nation that claims our fathers gave us this Torah that they received from their fathers, and we received a tradition that Moshe our teacher gave it to them, and our entire nation stood at Har Sinai and they heard Hakadosh Baruch Hu say to Moshe and give him a mandate in their presence. Moshe Rabbeinu, you're going to speak to this people for Me from now on, and therefore Moshe Rabbeinu when he gave us the Torah was mandated by Hakadosh Baruch Hu in the presence of 600,000 males between 20 and 60 years of age, not to mention the elderly ones, the young ones and the women. That's our claim; no nation in the world ever claimed such a claim. Not the Mohammedans. Of course the Mohammedans claim that the Bible is true because the Jews say so. Christians claim the Bible is true, because the Jews say so. The Vikings didn't have any traditions, the Buddhists didn't have any traditions, they made no such claims.

We are the only ones who claim that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave it to us. And if you'll ask, how do we know that it's true? So we'll ask you a question: How do you know that there was a George Washington? Prove George Washington. So you say there are books. We also have books. We have books, too. So you say Washington was recent and our claims are old. Anybody around here saw George Washington? Anybody saw a man who saw George Washington around here? How do you know he was there? It's emunah; you believe people. So should we believe nations of disorderly people, there were so many shikurim among them, and so many club wielders, so many roughnecks. Such a nation testifies that George Washington was present, and we

accept their testimony. Well, there are so many documents; there are a lot of documents. You want documents? Josephus wrote two thousand years ago a big document. So that's thousands of years ago, so that's as good evidence as any evidence that you'll produce for anything that happened three hundred years ago in America.

Therefore we are standing on solid ground, we have a historic tradition. We are not one person, we are a nation. And our nation always was united behind this. We never had a single Jew who disbelieved that Moshe received the Torah from Hashem, up till a hundred fifty years ago. Not the Karaites, not the Sadducees, none of them disbelieved that, - they all believed. There wasn't a single Jew up to the time of the German assimilationists and reformers one hundred fifty years ago; there wasn't a single Jew who disbelieved in the Torah. So our entire nation was behind this tradition. Not to mention the fact that the Christians and Mohammedans all say the same thing about our Torah, that we received the Torah.

So therefore if anybody wants to bring proofs against the authenticity of the Torah, we'll give him the floor.

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