

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BEMIDBAR

Haftarah: Hoshea 2:1-22

MAY 26-27, 2017 2 SIVAN 5777

Friday May 26th is Rosh Hodesh

Wednesday and Thursday May 31 and June 1 are Shavuot

DEDICATION: In memory of Sonny Mizrahi, Sivan 3, 5750

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Editors Notes

Aspiring to be angelic Bemidbar 5777

If one asks, "who is greater, man or angel?", one can expect many answers.

We read this week in the opening portion of BeMidbar, Hashem telling Moses that we should make camp with each person positioned by his flag according to the insignias (or otot signs or perhaps instructions) of our families. On this the Midrash comments that when Hashem revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, twenty-two thousand ministering angels came down... These angels were all assembled under banners. When the Jewish people saw that the angels were assembled under flags, the Jewish people too desired flags. So here, Hashem grants their wish and tells Moses, "Make them banners as they desired".

We must ask, why did the Jewish people desire these flags? Obviously there had to be something very powerful alluded to through the positioning of the tribes under banners for Hashem to agree with this request and command Moses to "make them banners as they desired?"

We are given a second reason as well for their formation as designed. The Midrash tells us that when Jacob called his sons to give them his final blessing, he concluded with the following instructions: "When you carry me to my last resting-place, you must escort me with proper reverence and respect. No other man shall touch my bier; neither an Egyptian nor any of your children.

We see that the Torah states; "and his sons carried him." The Midrash continues, "How did he command them to do it? He said to them: 'My children, when my bier is being carried, Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun shall be on the east side; Reuven, Shimon and Gad shall be on the south side; Efrayim,

Menasheh and Binyamin shall be on the west side; Dan, Asher and Naftali shall be on the north side."

One hundred and ninety three years later when the time came for his descendants to once again depart from Egypt, these instructions were followed; the otot that Jacob transmitted to his sons were meant for all of his descendants. And just as the Shevatim, the tribes traveled with Jacob in their center, the Jewish people traveled at first with Joseph in their center – perhaps Joseph being the extension of Jacob – and then with the fabrication of the tabernacle, it was the ark and the mishkan in the center surrounded by the 22,000 Levites – coincidentally the same number as the angels descending onto Mount Sinai. The focus was always on the center, and each member of the formation had a specific place and a specific role.

We can find two lessons here. The first on aspiring to be angelic and the second on the specific roles we play in this world and in our lives.

The rabbis teach us that angels are called omdim or those who stand, while men are called holchim or those who go. While man may be imperfect, an angel may be perfect, yet while a man can perfect himself and aspire to the level of an angel, an angel can move no further. Rabbi Abittan, z'sl, would teach us to never judge a person or ourselves based on his or our position on the spiritual ladder of life, rather we should look at the direction we are heading. Are we moving down or are we moving up. If we are moving up, we are even greater than an angel who cannot move at all.

It is crucial to understand that each of us is placed in this world within specific circumstances. The kabbalists teach that our soul knowing its own needs for its own path towards perfection specifically chooses every parameter of its upcoming manifestation in the physical world prior to birth. This means that we or at least at a soul level come prepared in some way to face the challenges of both nature and nurture. We are all born with different tendencies by nature; some of us have stronger physical drives and needs more difficult to overcome while others find it easier to maintain control. We are all born into the specific conditions of family dynamics, socio economic circumstances and

historical and environmental givens. Simply speaking, some are rich and some are poor, some are handsome and some are not, some are wise and some are less so, some have a loving environment and some must overcome the most dysfunctional of homes, some have health and some battle illness, some are blessed with wonderful parents and children and some are born of witches and the most difficult offspring. We all face our own challenges in overcoming deficiencies, lacking and predispositions. We all must strive to move forward.

One vital lesson the rabbi taught us we can learn from angels is in acknowledging and accepting our own place and position. He would explain that the difference between the ministering angels and man is that angels have no hatred, jealousy, nor competition. We say in the daily tefilah in the blessings of Shema, "They are all beloved; they are all flawless; they are all mighty... Then they all accept upon themselves the yoke of Heavenly sovereignty from one another and grant permission to one another to sanctify the One Who formed them". This teaches us that a ministering angel is not jealous of another's abilities. The rabbis teach that each angel is created for a specific purpose. The angels themselves in recognizing the differences and each one's distinct purpose for being acknowledge each other's greatness. The angels respect each other and in many ways display the requirement to love one another in granting permission to one another. Perhaps this is what the Jewish nation saw.

Perhaps this is what impressed them and formed within them the desire to emulate. Hashem appreciates this desire for self-growth and grants them their wish.

But the angels are perfect and we are not.

Jacob's instruction and the images of the people circling the mishkan and the ark remind me of the statement in the Talmud which teaches that in the time to come, Hashem will have the righteous form a circle in Gan Eden and Hashem will be in the middle. Rabbi Abittan would tell us, "No, this is not romper room. He would quote his teacher from Ponevitch, Rav Dessler who taught that the idea of the righteous dancing in a circle is that each member is equally close to the center--to Hashem. Additionally, when dancing in a circle, each member is constantly moving forward."

The rabbi would explain that although each of us is in a different position around the circle, although each of us may have his own perspective on serving Hashem, some through chesed, some through

learning and teaching and some through prayer, we are all equally distant and we are all within the circle prescribed by the rabbis. Yet in the dance, we all continue to move forward. We all have our positives and we all have our deficiencies, but we hold each other's hand and move forward together.

The lesson is that each person who uses his abilities to serve Hashem and who makes the effort will stand as close to Him as anyone else. As we mentioned, one person may have been born with less abilities, his task is simply to serve Hashem to the utmost of his intellect and his talents. Another, blessed with a keen mind and a piercing intellect, is challenged to not limit his effort and so to say swim along. He too must serve Hashem to the best of his abilities. Whatever gift Hashem blesses us with is only given so that we use it to serve, to help and to grow.

Although it's greater to be a man than an angel as a man can grow, we have lessons to learn from the angels. We must recognize our position and respect the position of others as long as they are within the Torah's circle, eliminating jealousy and strife. We must also recognize our position in that each of us is born into specific circumstances and no one can truly feel what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes. Each of us must strive to move forward to the best of our own abilities and also to hold each other's hand helping each other to move forward. As Rabbi Abittan taught, it's not where we are on the ladder that's most important; it's the direction we are heading. May we all move forward together.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

In Jerusalem, Trump vows to always stand by Israel

"Let us dream of a future where Jewish, Muslim and Christian children can grow up together and live together in trust, harmony, tolerance and respect," U.S. President Donald Trump says • Trump reiterates Washington's commitment to prevent a nuclear Iran. Erez Linn, Ilan Gattegno, News Agencies and Israel Hayom Staff

U.S. President Donald Trump used his centerpiece Holy Land speech on Tuesday to reaffirm his commitment to peace between Israelis and Palestinians, but he offered no new details on how to achieve a goal that has eluded U.S. leaders for decades.

Rounding out a 28-hour stay in Jerusalem, Trump praised Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas alike, saying both were ready for peace. But he avoided any mention of a Palestinian state and did not address a campaign promise to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Taking the podium at the Israel Museum, Trump thanked Netanyahu and museum officials for hosting him at the venue, saying the visit "reaffirms the unshakable bond" between the United States and Israel.

"It is a privilege to stand here in this national museum, in the ancient city of Jerusalem, to address the Israeli people -- and all people in the Middle East who yearn for security, prosperity and peace," Trump told Israeli and American officials attending the event.

"Jerusalem is a sacred city. Its beauty, splendor, and heritage are like no other place on earth. The ties of the Jewish people to this Holy Land are ancient and eternal. They date back thousands of years, including the reign of King David whose star now flies proudly on Israel's white and blue flag.

"Yesterday, I visited the Western Wall, and marveled at the monument to God's presence and man's perseverance -- I was humbled to place my hand upon the wall and to pray in that holy space for wisdom from God. I also visited and prayed at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a site revered by Christians throughout the world. I laid a wreath at Yad Vashem, honoring, remembering, and mourning the 6 million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust. I pledged there what I pledge again to those here today: Never again.

"Israel is a testament to the unbreakable spirit of the Jewish people. From all parts of this great country, one message resounds: and that is the message of hope. Down through the ages, the Jewish people have suffered persecution, oppression and even those who have sought their destruction. But, through it all, they have endured -- and they have thrived.

"I stand in awe of the accomplishments of the Jewish people, and I make this promise to you: My administration will always stand with Israel. Through your hardships, you have created one of the most abundant lands in the world. A land that is rich not only in history, culture, and opportunity, but especially in spirit.

"This museum where we are gathered today tells the story of that spirit -- from the two Holy Temples, to

the glorious heights of Masada, we see an incredible story of faith and perseverance. That faith is what inspired Jews to believe in their destiny, to overcome their despair, and to build here a future that others dared not to dream.

"In Israel, not only are Jews free to till the soil, teach their children, and pray to God in the ancient land of their forefathers. But Muslims, Christians, and people of all faiths, and both men and women, are free to live and worship according to their conscience, and to follow their dreams. While evil forces seeks to kill innocents of all faiths, your nation has responded with compassion, charity, and generosity.

"Today, gathered with friends, I call upon all people -- Jews, Christians, Muslims, and every faith, tribe, and creed -- to draw inspiration from this ancient city, to set aside our sectarian differences, to overcome oppression and hatred, and to give all children the freedom and hope and dignity written into our souls.

"Earlier this week, I spoke at a historic summit in Saudi Arabia. There, I urged our friends in the Muslim world to join us in creating stability, safety and security. I was deeply encouraged by the desire of many leaders to join us in cooperation toward these shared and vital goals. Conflict cannot continue forever -- the only question is when nations will decide that they have had enough.

"That historic summit represents a new opportunity for people throughout the Middle East to overcome sectarian and religious divisions to extinguish the fires of extremism, and find common ground and shared responsibility in making the future of this region. Change must come from within. No mother or father wants their children to grow up in a world where terrorists roam free, schoolchildren are murdered, and their loved ones are taken. No child is born with prejudice in their heart. No one should teach young boys and girls to hate and kill. No civilized nation can tolerate the massacre of innocents with chemical weapons," Trump said.

"My message to that summit was the same message I have for you: We must build a coalition of partners who share the aim of stamping out extremism and violence -- and providing our children a peaceful and hopeful future.

But a hopeful future for children in the Middle East requires the world to fully recognize the vital role of the state of Israel. And, on behalf of the United States, we pledge to stand by you and defend our shared values so that together we can defeat terrorism and create safety for all of God's children.

"Israelis have experienced firsthand the hatred and terror of radical violence. Israelis are murdered by terrorists wielding knives and bombs. Hamas and Hezbollah launch rockets into Israeli communities where schoolchildren have to be trained to hear the sirens and run to bomb shelters. ISIS targets Jewish neighborhoods, synagogues, and storefronts. And Iran's leaders routinely call for Israel's destruction.

"Despite these challenges, Israel is thriving as a sovereign nation -- and no international body should question the contributions Israel makes to the region."

'U.S. firmly committed to preventing a nuclear Iran'

"Today, let us pray for that peace -- and for a more hopeful future across the Middle East," Trump continued.

"There are those who present a false choice. They say that we must choose between supporting Israel and supporting Arab and Muslim nations in the region. That is completely wrong. All decent people want to live in peace, and all humanity is threatened by the evils of terrorism. Diverse nations can unite around the goal of protecting innocent life, upholding human dignity, and promoting peace and stability in the region. My administration is committed to pursuing such a coalition, and we have already made substantial progress during this trip.

"We know, for instance, that both Israelis and Palestinians seek lives of hope for their children. And we know that peace is possible if we put aside the pain and disagreements of the past and commit together to finally resolving this crisis which has dragged on for nearly half century. As I have repeatedly said, I am personally committed to helping Israelis and Palestinians reach that mutual commitment comprehensive peace agreement, and I had a great meeting this morning with President Mahmoud Abbas and I can tell you that he is ready to reach a peace deal.

"Making peace will not be easy. We all know that. Both sides will face tough decisions. But with determination, compromise on both sides, and the belief that peace is possible, Israelis and Palestinians can make a deal. But even as we work toward peace, we will build strength to defend our nations.

"The United States is firmly committed to keeping Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and halting their support of terrorists and militias that are causing

so much suffering and chaos throughout the Middle East.

"America's security partnership with Israel is stronger than ever -- including the Iron Dome missile defense program, which has been keeping the Israeli people safe from short-range rockets launched by Hezbollah and Hamas, and David's sling which guards against long range missiles. It is my hope that someday very soon Israeli children will never need to rush towards shelter as sirens ring out. Finally, the United States is proud that Israeli Air Force pilots are flying new American F-35 planes to defend their nation, and it was wonderful to see these mighty aircraft in the skies over Israel recently as you celebrated the 69th anniversary of Israel's independence.

"But even as we strengthen our partnership in practice, let us always remember our highest ideals -- let us never forget that the bond between our two nations is woven together in the hearts of our people -- and their love of freedom, hope, and dignity for all. Let us dream of a future where Jewish, Muslim and Christian children can grow up together and live together in trust, harmony, tolerance and respect.

"Israel is a thriving nation -- and has not only uplifted this region, but the entire world. The conviction of Theodor Herzl rings true today: 'whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind.'

"As we stand in Jerusalem, we see pilgrims of all faiths coming to this land to walk on this hallowed ground. Jews place the prayers from their hearts in the stone blocks of the Western Wall. Christians pray in the pews of an ancient church. Muslims answer the call to prayer at their holy sites. This city, like no other place in the world, reveals the longing of the human heart -- to know and worship God. Jerusalem stands as a reminder that life can flourish against any odds.

"When we look around this city, and we see people of all faiths engaged in reverent worship, and school children learning side-by-side, and men and women lifting up the needy and forgotten, we see that God's promise of healing has brought goodness to so many lives. We see that the people of this land had the courage to overcome the oppression and injustice of the past -- and to live in the freedom God intends for every person on this earth.

"Today, in Jerusalem, we pray and we hope that children around the world will soon be able to live without fear, to dream without limits, and to prosper without violence. I ask this land of promise to join with me to fight our common enemies, to pursue our

shared values, and to protect the dignity of every child of God.

"Thank you. God bless you. God bless the State of Israel. And God bless the United States," Trump concluded.

The presidential visit concluded on Tuesday afternoon, as Trump left Israel for a visit to the Vatican.

President Reuven Rivlin and his wife Nechama and Netanyahu and his wife Sara bid farewell to the American president and the first lady with a short ceremony at Ben-Gurion International Airport.

Trump summed up the visit with a series of tweets, writing, "Thank you for such a wonderful and unforgettable visit, Prime Minister @Netanyahu and @PresidentRuvli [Rivlin]," and "Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Middle East were great. Trying hard for PEACE. Doing well. Heading to Vatican & Pope, then #G7 and #NATO."

Rav Kook on the Perasha BaMidbar: Flags of Love in the Desert

Throughout their travels in the desert, the Israelites were commanded to set up their tents around tribal flags:

"The Israelites shall encamp with each person near the banner carrying his paternal family's insignia. They shall encamp at a distance around the Communion Tent." (Num. 2:2)

What is the significance of these banners?

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3) says that the inspiration for the banners came from Mount Sinai. Twenty-two thousand chariots of angels, each one decked out with flags, attended the Revelation of the Torah. The Israelites immediately desired to have flags just like the angels, and God agreed. This request for flags, the Midrash teaches, is described in the Song of Songs (2:4): "He brought me to the wine-house, and His banner over me is love."

From the Midrash we understand that banners relate to some inherent characteristic of angels, though not of people. But we are left with many questions. Why do angels bear flags? Why does the verse refer to Sinai as a 'wine-house'? And what is the connection between banners and love?

The Specialized Service of Angels

According to the Zohar, the banners of the four major encampments (in each direction: north, south, east and west) corresponded to the four sides or 'faces' of the supernal merkavah (chariot) in Ezekiel's mystical vision. Since these four 'faces' represent fundamental divine attributes, each encampment related to a particular divine quality.

Before we can explain the meaning of the flags and their connection to angels, we must first understand what an angel is. The Hebrew word mal'ach literally means 'messenger.' An angel is essentially a divine messenger meant to fulfill a specific mission. An angel cannot perform a task, important though it may be, other than the specific mission for which it was designated.

Now we can better understand the function of the angels' flags. A banner proclaims a distinctive function or trait. Each angel, limited to a very specific area of divine service, carries its own distinguishing flag. These flags may be compared to military uniforms, where the dress and insignia indicate a soldier's unit and assignment.

Human beings, on the other hand, are not limited to serving God in one particular manner. Our divine image encompasses all spiritual spheres (see Nefesh Hachaim 1:10). For us, a banner is too restricting; it does not reflect our true spiritual essence.

Nonetheless, the Jewish people saw in the angelic banners of Sinai an inspiring sight that appealed to them, albeit in a non-obligatory way. Every person has special talents and interests, based on individual character traits and his soul's inner root. We are not limited in serving God in this particular way, but we are certainly more inclined towards those activities for which we have a natural proclivity. For example, a kind-hearted person may concentrate on serving God with acts of compassion and chesed; a strong-willed individual, with acts of courage and self-sacrifice; and so on.

The Jewish people desired flags like those the angels bore at Sinai. They wanted every individual to be able to choose an aspect of divine service that suits his personality, just as each angel executes a specific function, as defined by his flag.

The Wine-House

It is now clear why the verse refers to Mount Sinai as a "wine-house." Drinking wine releases our inhibitions, revealing our inner character. In the words of the Talmud (Eiruvim 65a), "Wine enters, secrets emerge." The Israelites envied the beauty and joy

they witnessed in divine service of the angels. The root of this pleasantness lies in the innate affinity the angels feel towards their service. Each angel naturally identifies with its particular mission. The Jewish people sought to uncover and emphasize every individual's personal strengths, in the same way that wine liberates and highlights one's inner characteristics.

This individualized worship, however, only applies to the service of the heart and the character traits. The banners reflect our feelings of love and joy when serving God — "His banner over me is love" — but the banners are not directly connected to the service itself. Within the framework of Torah study and practical mitzvot, there is no need for distinctive forms of service. Therefore, no banners flew over the central Communion Tent where the luchot (the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments) were stored, since the Torah and its mitzvot relate equally to all souls. (Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 227-229. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 24-25)

Summary of the Perasha

- Moshe counts Benei Israel (year 2 in the midbar)
- 1- Hashem commands Moshe and Aharon to take a census. Leaders of each tribe are assigned
 - 2- The count for each tribe is listed. Levi is not counted. The job of the Leviim by the mishkan
 - 3- Discusses how Benei Israel camped around the mishkan (who camped next to who, leader of the tribe and number of people in each tribe) and how they traveled in the midbar
 - 4- Tells about the sons of Aharon. The Leviim are appointed to take care of the mishkan
 - 5- Moshe counts the Leviim. The parasha discusses the 3 children of Levi individually including where they camped, who their nasi was, and what their job in the mishkan was.
 - 6- Moshe counts the bechorim. The bechorim are redeemed by the Leviim.
 - 7- The special responsibilities of benei Kehat

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE "Who chose us from among all the peoples and gave us His Torah." (Daily blessing on the Torah)

The Talmud (Nedarim 81a) teaches us that the reason we lost the Land and the Bet Hamikdash was because we didn't say the blessing on the Torah first. The Ran quotes Rabenu Yonah who explains the concept of not reciting the berachah before learning. Their failure to say the berachah before learning was indicative of their level of regard for Torah. "The Torah wasn't important enough in their eyes." They didn't feel its true worth.

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro quotes Rabbi Aharon Kotler zt"l who wonders about this explanation. The Talmud in other places lists the specific sins that caused the destruction of the first Bet Hamikdash and the sin that destroyed the second. Why then does Rabenu Yonah tell us that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because we didn't appreciate the Torah, whereas the Gemara clearly states that the specified sins were the catalysts of destruction?

Rav Aharon explains with the following parable. Imagine that a man is driving his car on the highway and receives the news that he just won millions of dollars in a lottery. A moment later another driver cuts him off. How will this man respond? Perhaps, before he won the lottery, he would have responded with road rage. Now that he was won a fortune, he barely reacts to the person who cut him off, thinking, "I am not going to waste my time becoming frustrated and furious over something that is so inconsequential." The incident does not even register on his radar.

"The Torah is far more precious than pearls (or jewels)." One cannot compare winning the lottery to "winning" the Torah. If we realized what we won we would not allow ourselves to become angry or jealous or exhibit baseless hatred. If we valued the Torah we would not be lured into a lifestyle of sins.

With this explanation, Rav Aharon reconciles the contradiction in the Gemara. Both temples were indeed destroyed for the specific sins listed, but on a deeper level, we committed those sins because the Torah was not important enough in our eyes.

As we approach the holiday of Shabuot, we must ensure that the prominence of Torah is the purpose of our existence. We will then remove any obstacles to rebuilding the third and everlasting Bet Hamikdash. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The Talmud relates a fascinating episode. When Moshe went up to the heavens to receive the Torah, the heavenly angels didn't want to let the Torah go down to earth. Moshe was afraid to tackle the angels but Hashem told him to answer them. Moshe then told the angels, "Why do you want the Torah? Did you go out of Egypt? Do you have parents to honor? Do you steal, murder, etc.?" At that point they agreed with Moshe and let the Torah come down to the Jewish people and even gave Moshe "gifts." The question is obvious. What was the angels' point and how did Moshe convince them otherwise?

The Rabbis tell us that of course the angels knew they could not fulfill the Torah. However, they wanted to be the ones to decide the laws of the Torah. If ever there is a controversy or a question, the Heavenly Academy should be the decider. Moshe told them, you have to be involved and obligated in order to decide the laws of the Torah.

The Torah is not just a subject to voice our opinions on; it is a way of life. If we live a life of Torah and study thoroughly, we have the ability to expound upon it and indeed even be one of the deciders of the Torah. All of our great scholars were indeed permeated with Torah through and through and were able to decide the halachah. It's amazing that although no one would ever contradict a brain surgeon as to his field of expertise, many people venture an opinion in halachah without even studying the subject. Let us recommit ourselves this Shabuot holiday to study, to learn, to understand and indeed to live a life of Torah. 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 Meyer Laniado How The *Leviyim* Earned Their Role

Why were the *Leviyim* singled out from amongst the nation and given a special role? They were not part of the general census and were given the role and responsibility of caring for the *Mishkan*. One may suggest that the *Leviyim* had the trait of fighting for and protecting justice, as seen in how they stood up in defense of their sister Dina. Therefore, they are perfectly suited to be the guardians of the *Mishkan*. The difficulty with this theory is that there is another tribe which also seems to have a similar passion for justice, the tribe of Shimon.

Levi is joined by Shimon in the fight for their sister Dina. Ya'aqob, their father, saw the same trait in both of them, as he indicates with his immediate response and his '*berakha*' at the end of his life:

Shimon and Levi are brethren; weapons of violence their kinship. Let my soul not come into their council; unto their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they houghed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel; I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel[1].

Ya'aqob views both Shimon and Levi as passionate individuals who react out of emotion, rashly. Ya'aqob realizes that this is a dangerous trait that could have negative repercussions. Even if it may be just, it may not be the appropriate response.

And Ya'aqob said to Shimon and Levi: 'Ye have troubled me, to make me odious unto the inhabitants of the land, even unto the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and, I being few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and smite me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.' And they said: 'Should one deal with our sister as with a harlot [2]?'

Ya'aqob rebuked Shimon and Levi, expressing that he foresaw their actions leading to war and endangering the entire family. Both Shimon and Levi acted with their traits of dedication to justice, so, why is it that Shimon did not receive a special role? Furthermore, the tribe of Shimon did not receive their own portion of land in Israel, they were placed in the land of Yehuda [3]. The tribe of Levi also has no land portion of their own, but they are designated for service in the Temple. Shimon's on the other hand is left without their own portion of land or a special role. What differentiates Shimon and Levi and what makes

the *Leviyim* perfectly suited to be caretakers of the *Mishkan*?

In contrast to Shimon, the tribe of Levi internalizes Ya'aqob's words. During the incident of the *egel*, the golden calf, Levi are the ones who refrain from participating in the worship. Furthermore, and maybe most importantly, they do not express their passion by immediately killing all of the participants in the worship. They learned that while their passion for Torah is a positive trait, it needs to be channeled appropriately. That is why they refrain from taking action during the *egel*. It was only later, when the timing was right, under the guidance of the Torah, that the tribe of Levi takes action. Moshe called out: "*Mi laHashem elai!*" "Whoever is for God come to me!" Then the Levites gather in defense of the Torah. They can now channel their passion and drive appropriately. They do not act while they are furious, without properly thinking through the situation and seeking council. They wait for Moshe to instruct them. They make sure their actions are aligned with a full picture of the consequences of their actions.

Levi is passionate, and that is positive, but what makes them unique is that they learn from the rebuke of Ya'aqob to direct their passion in the proper manner. This is why the Levites are most appropriate as guardians of the *Mishkan*.

We may feel passionate about fighting for what we believe in, but we need make sure that our actions are well thought out and take into account the repercussions. We can do this through not reacting right away, and seeking council to make sure we are not solely acting out of emotion. In this way we can internalize the message of the designation of the *Leviyim* as the caretakers of the *Mishkan*. Let's make sure we properly channel our passion, to taking appropriate actions at the right time.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Meyer Laniado,
meyerlaniado@gmail.com

[1] Beresheit 49:5 / [2] Beresheit 34:30 / [3] Yehoshua 19 יהי, נחלתם, בתוך, נחלת בני-יהודה

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**Rabbi Wein
SHAVUOT**

Shavuot is a very difficult holiday to capture emotionally. It is very short in duration – in Israel is only one day while in the Diaspora is two days – and in many respects is over before we can make any valid assessment of its importance and impact. In the Torah itself it appears as an agricultural holiday occurring fifty days after the holiday of national freedom, Pesach.

By calculations on the calendar we are able to deduce that the holiday is the anniversary of the day of the granting of the Torah to the Jewish people at Sinai. In light of this association many special customs have arisen to mark the holiday; eating dairy foods and engaging in all-night study sessions are some of those customs. But we all know that mere commemoration of past days or events often times are not inspirational or meaningful to later generations.

For instance, the rabbis ordained that the Seder night would be a re-creation of the experience of the Exodus from Egypt itself. The same thing is true of the holiday of Succot, which we commemorate by actually sitting in booths outside of our homes, as did our ancestors long ago when they left Egypt. However, we find it very difficult to re-create the Shavuot experience. Most of us are not farmers and the agricultural aspect of the holiday does not really speak to us. And the moment of revelation was a one time event whose awe and grandeur cannot, by definition, be recaptured again. So, how is one to view and commemorate this great biblical holiday?

I have often thought of Shavuot as being our nation-building day. The Torah itself describes the day of the granting of the Torah to Israel in the statement: "today you will have become a nation!" Judaism is not only a religion but it is the national entity as well. Like all nations, it has its rules for citizenship, residence and behavior.

The key to understanding and appreciating Jewish history and Jewish life throughout the ages lies in the realization that we are telling the story of a nation, a people, and not merely philosophical and theological ideas. History has shown us clearly that Jews who abandoned this idea of nationhood and merely saw Judaism as a set of values or as a culture or purely as a religion eventually assimilated and disappeared from the Jewish scene.

It is this feeling of belonging to one nation that binds together Jews scattered throughout the world and geographically distant one from another. But by remembering our nationhood, we automatically came to remember Sinai and the Torah as the source of

our being a nation. The famous statement of Saadyah Gaon that we are a nation only by virtue of our Torah emphasizes this truism to us. And therefore the holiday of Shavuot takes upon itself the mantle of being a holiday of nationhood.

It is ironic in the extreme that this great holiday should therefore be almost a forgotten holiday for much of the Jewish world. This is especially true for Jews living in the Diaspora. Only in the observant Jewish world does this holiday get its due. And this, itself, is a symptom of the loosening of the concept of nationhood in our current Jewish world.

The day that can strengthen and revitalize Jewish nationhood is ignored by those who need it the most. I think that it must be clear to most, that without having a healthy and traditional narrative and understanding of Jewish nationhood and the unique history of the Jewish people, it is almost impossible to be able to understand the true nature of the events that surround the Jewish world today.

Every nation has as its basic and unifying ethos, a narrative story of how and why it became a nation. It is the reason countries have flags and anthems, pomp and circumstance. These are the necessary building blocks in creating the nationhood of a people and a group. The main building block that supports and validates Jewish nationhood is a connection of Jews to Torah and to the revelation at Sinai. The holiday of Shavuot is the special day that emphasizes this building block and points the way to the creation, survival and strengthening of Jewish nationhood. It is a day well worth observing and treasuring.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Ever-Repeated Story

Bamidbar 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 Nissan, 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 Bamidbar. 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 Bamidbar, 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 Bamidbar 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, demoralised, 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 driven 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 Bamidbar usually precedes Shavuot, the 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 Bamidbar, 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

As we approach the subject of the Dor Hamidbar (the generation of the Wilderness), also

known as the Dor Deah (the generation of True Knowledge), let us keep constantly before our eyes that this era was the time when Hashem's love was strongest. These men were chosen as witnesses of the most wondrous spectacles and demonstrations of Hashem's Presence among His people. At the same time, they were subject to the most severe chastisement, because "The one that Hashem loves, He rebukes, as a father to the son that He favors" (Mishle 3:12). The harshest punishments were bestowed upon this generation, as well as the greatest expressions of Hashem's love and the most sublime encomium and encouragement. All the chastisements and castigations of this period were because of Hashem's especial love: "to afflict you in order to test (or, to elevate) you, to do benefit to you in your end" (Devarim 8:16).

Rabbi Yochanan (Sanhedrin 110B) upholds the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that the generation of the Wilderness is very highly regarded by Hashem, who declared: "I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, when you followed me into the wilderness, a land unsown. (Therefore) Israel is holy to Hashem" (Yirmiyah 2:2-3)

"Gedolah Deah!" "How great is True Knowledge!" (Berachot 33A). The greatest revelation of Hashem for all time was at Har Sinai. And we can look back and see that the purpose of Yosef being sold by the brothers was to bring Jacob and his family to Egypt. The exile in Egypt and the Nation's witnessing of the 10 Plagues and the splitting of Yam Suf were all to prepare us for the great and fearsome day when we were going to meet and hear Hashem. In fact the purpose of the Creation of heaven and earth was only to bestow the Torah upon the Nation of Yisrael.

The Rambam says, regarding the Revelation at Har Sinai, "We must Exhalt it over all others" (Igeret Teman). This means that we must build this scene in the edifice of our minds. Picture that there were 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60, along with women, children and converts. Total over 2 million people. The thick cloud of Shechina was on the top of Har Sinai. Thunder and lightning and the strong sound of Shofar. The Voice is heard, "Anochi Hashem Elokecha", speaking directly to the Nation. The Nation was overwhelmed with the very greatest fear and the greatest love. The revelation at Har Sinai was the greatest injection of 'Deah', the acquiring of True Knowledge combined with actual sensory perception, which has remained an integral part of the Jewish Nation until today.

Adapted from
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