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Tidbits

ISSUE 1660

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ישראל



כ"ט אייר תשפ"ו - MAY 16TH 2026

במדבר - BEMIDBAR

AVOT 6 | SHABBAT MEVARCHIM
EREV ROSH CHODESH



**The Mitzvah of Eruv
Tavshilin This Shavuot**
Rabbi Eli Ozarowski Page 74



**How Much Should Family
Background Matter in Dating?**
Aleeza Ben Shalom Page 88

שמרים משמרת המקדש במדבר ג:ל"ח

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT BEMIDBAR ZMANIM

CANDLES 6:53 PM • EARLY 6:03 PM • HAVDALA 8:10 PM • RABBEINU TAM 8:47 PM



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COVER PHOTO

Photographed by Rochel Krantman - I was fortunate enough to capture this photo of a dove and its shadow on the Kotel wall after davening Mincha on Chol Hamoed Succot 2024. I think it expresses our yearning for שלום על ישראל.

My husband and I and our 4 children made aliya to Rehovot in 1991. Baruch Hashem we have grown to a family of many grandchildren and great grandchildren, all living throughout Israel, from Rehovot to Ramat Bet Shemesh, Modiin, Efrat, Migdal Oz, Yerusalaim and Yeruchum.

REMINDERS



Rosh Chodesh Sivan is on Sunday May 17th

מולד חודש סיון יהיה בליל ראשון בשעה 18, 2 דקות ו 15 חלקים
ראש חדש סיון יהיה ביום ראשון הבא עלינו ועל כל ישראל לטובה

SHAVUOT



Eruv Tavshilin is prepared on Thursday May 21 before Yom Tov. See page 74 for details.



Yizkor is recited on Shavuot. (Light a Yizkor candle before Yom Tov).



Light an extended candle before Yom Tov in order to light candles Friday night for Shabbat.



The Book of Rut is read on the morning of Shavuot

CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
May 13 - 23 | 26 Iyar - 7 Sivan

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	4:47-4:40
Sunrise	5:44-5:38
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:09-9:07
Magen Avraham	8:29-8:25
Sof Zman Tefila (According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya)	10:18-10:16
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:35-12:36
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:10
Plag Mincha	6:01-6:06
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:32-7:38



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7 Hartum Street, Jerusalem, 9777507 PoBox 45268
phone: (02) 560 9100 | fax: (02) 561-7432
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	BEMIDBAR			SHAVUOT	NASO*	
	Candles	Early	Havdala	Candles	Candles	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	6:53	6:03	8:10	6:57	6:58	8:16
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	7:10	6:05	8:12	7:14	7:15	8:17
Beit Shemesh/RBS	7:12	6:04	8:11	7:16	7:17	8:16
Gush Etzion	7:09	6:03	8:10	7:13	7:13	8:16
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	7:11	6:05	8:13	7:15	7:15	8:18
Modiin/Chashmonaim	7:09	6:04	8:11	7:14	7:14	8:17
Netanya	7:11	6:05	8:13	7:15	7:16	8:19
Be'er Sheva	7:09	6:04	8:11	7:13	7:14	8:16
Rehovot	7:10	6:05	8:12	7:14	7:15	8:18
Petach Tikva	6:53	6:05	8:12	6:57	6:58	8:18
Ginot Shomron	7:10	6:04	8:12	7:14	7:14	8:17
Haifa / Zichron	7:02	6:05	8:14	7:06	7:06	8:20
Gush Shiloh	7:09	6:03	8:11	7:13	7:13	8:16
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	7:11	6:05	8:13	7:15	7:15	8:18
Givat Zeev	7:13	6:03	8:11	7:17	7:18	8:16
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:08	6:03	8:10	7:12	7:13	8:15
Ashkelon	7:11	6:05	8:13	7:15	7:15	8:18
Yad Binyamin	7:10	6:04	8:12	7:14	7:15	8:17
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	7:04	6:03	8:12	7:08	7:09	8:18
Golan	7:09	6:03	8:11	7:13	7:14	8:17
Nahariya/Maalot	7:01	6:05	8:14	7:05	7:06	8:20
Afula	7:10	6:04	8:12	7:14	7:15	8:18

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Bemidbar - 8:47 PM • Naso - 8:51 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities; 40 mins in Yerushalyim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat, Nahariya, Maalot and Haifa)

* Candles for Naso should be lit from a preexisting flame

Daf Yomi: Chulin 16



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Editor: Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider | aarong@ouisrael.org
Advertising: Ita Rochel 02-5609125 | ttads@ouisrael.org
Editor Emeritus: Phil Chernofsky
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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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One of the basic rules at OU Israel's teen centers across the country is that the advisors who work with the teens must live in the city where they serve. A staff member working with teenagers in Dimona, Sderot, or Kiryat Shmona cannot be parachuted in every evening from somewhere else. The reason is simple. If you don't live in a certain place, if you don't breathe it and walk its streets and *daven* in its *shuls* and shop in its supermarkets and see the signs plastered on its walls, you can never truly integrate into the community or feel that you are fully part of it. Teens will see through you in a second.

There's no doubt that we carry a special bond with the places where we grew up. I myself moved around a lot, and set roots in many places. I was born in Brooklyn, then my family moved to Staten Island, and then back to Brooklyn. We made *aliyah* to Kedumim, then we moved to Ma'ale Adumim, Kochav Ya'akov, and Har Nof. I got married and moved to Shilo, then to Vancouver for NCSY, and then back to Israel, settling in Givat Ze'ev, where, *Baruch Hashem*, I have lived with my family for the last twenty years.

All of those places contributed to who I am

לעילוי נשמות

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Baer ז"ל
on his eighteenth *yahrzeit*- 2 Iyar

and

Rebbetzin Hannah Baer א"ה
on her fifth *yahrzeit* - 29 Iyar

אשרי תמימי דרך ההולכים בתורת ה'

today. I am able to relate to North America, to Canada, to Israel, to Yehuda v'Shomron, to Yerushalayim. One place that shaped my family in a tremendous way was the community of Har Nof.

When my grandparents, *aleiheim hashalom*, my *Bubby* and *Zaidy*, made *aliyah* in 1989, they arrived on the very same day that my youngest sister Elana was born. They had purchased a place in Har Nof back in the late 1980s, bought it on paper, and eventually moved in. Har Nof became their home, where they had the *zechut* of davening in Rabbi Sholom Gold zt"l's *shul*, Zichron Yosef, established in memory of Joe Silver from Toronto, *alav hashalom*. That was one of the main reasons my family ended up moving to Har Nof, to be close to my grandparents.

After living in Israel for years without extended family nearby, without grandparents, aunts, uncles, or cousins, it was so nice to know that suddenly we had a *Bubby* and *Zaidy* that we could go to every Friday night for the Shabbos meal. It created an incredible bond between us, and I have such wonderful memories of it. Growing up in Har Nof was a wonderful time, and I am sure that many of the Anglos who moved to Har Nof and raised their families there know exactly what I am talking about.

I met some amazing friends in Har Nof. But more than that, I met my best friend, my wife, there. Her family had moved from France and eventually settled there. My wife grew up in Har Nof and was my sister's friend, and I met her at my sister's wedding. *Baruch Hashem*, it has been 29 wonderful years since, and

be'ezrat Hashem ad me'ah ve'esrim together. We continue sending our children to school in Har Nof, which brings us back there every single day.

About a month ago, I received a phone call from a wonderful woman in Har Nof named Diane. She asked if I would be willing to come and speak at the 30th *yahrzeit* of Dovid Boim, *hy"d*. Dovid grew up davening together with us in Rabbi Yaakov Warhaftig's *shul* Naveh Nof, in Har Nof. In May of 1996, at the age of seventeen, Dovid was tragically killed by terrorists near Beit El, where he was studying in yeshiva. He was a real sweet, sweet person, even volunteering with Magen David Adom. It was a tragic loss to his family and *Klal Yisrael*.

I couldn't believe it's been 30 years since that day. Diane invited me, telling me that a group of women were having a *siyum Tanakh* in Dovid's memory, together with his mother Joyce, Ad Meah Veerim. I knew I had to be there.

I did not know exactly what to expect, but I walked into a room filled with about forty-five women, many of whose children I grew up with. The *siyum* they were having for completing the Tanakh was not their first time. In fact, they have been doing this *siyum* for 30 years, without interruption, together in memory of Dovid Boim! I stood there looking at this incredible group and thinking about the amazing symbolism in that act. They were studying the very *sefer* that promised them, through its prophecies, exactly what we are witnessing today. Every prophecy about *Kibbutz Galuyot*, the ingathering of the exiles. Every prophecy about the agriculture and the fruit trees flourishing in the Land of Israel. The growth of the Jewish population, the roads, the train tracks, the medicine. All of it unfolding before our eyes.



I decided that my speech would be to tell Dovid Boim in *shamayim* what has happened in the 30 years since he was taken from us. Together with the help of my team, I prepared a presentation of about forty-five slides going through the incredible things that have happened to the Jewish people in the last three decades.

It is Dovid, and many others who gave their lives for the State of Israel, who ultimately enable us to live here today. I wanted to be able to say to him: Dovid, you gave your life. You are missed at every Shabbat table, you are missed

**May the Torah learning
in this issue
be in loving memory of
my dear brother**

Joshua M. Neumann ז"ל
ישעי' מאיר בן
הרב קלמן גרשון הכהן ז"ל

On his 31st yearzeit
כ"ט אייר תשנ"ה

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ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

at every *Yom Tov* table. But I want you to know that we are continuing on. What you gave your life for was a *yishuv* called Beit El, because you felt that the Torah you were going to learn there was the right Torah for you. You felt that every Jew should be able to travel wherever they need to in the Land of Israel. And I want you to know that *Klal Yisrael* is continuing to do exactly that. I showed how many new *yishuvim* have been built and how many Jews lived in the Land of Israel in 1996 compared to how many live here today. It demonstrates so well the tremendous growth of our nation, growth made possible because of countless soldiers and civilians who gave their lives for the Jewish people, for the Land of Israel, and for the Torah of Israel.

It was my opportunity to express gratitude to a boy who davened in *shul* with me, who was in my brother's class, who traveled on the same roads that I traveled. I was going to Shilo; he was going to Beit El. But I got to see firsthand what it means for his mother and father and siblings to lose a child, and yet to continue on with strength, to keep building themselves up, to persevere and build a family in the Land of Israel while missing Dovid deeply, yet understanding that the future is being built because of Dovid.

I told all the women sitting in that room, almost all of whom had made *aliyah* themselves from North America and other English-speaking countries, that they are part of the *geula*. The fact that they left their comforts, left their houses and families in America, and decided to move home to Israel to build a future here, & that they get to see their children & grandchildren building up this country in the most beautiful way possible, is truly remarkable. It was a *zechut* to speak to such incredible women.

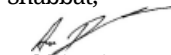
I shared with this incredible group of women that while it would be natural to expect friends to return to their busy routines after the shiva of a friend's son, seeing these women learning together to honor Dovid's memory for over 30 years is extraordinary and beyond impressive.

Something that really warmed my heart that evening was the number of women that thanked me publicly and profusely for Torah Tidbits. I told them that I really appreciate them coming over to thank me because I work hard on my article every single week but even more so, there is an incredible team that works tirelessly to make sure that Torah Tidbits is published every single week and they deserve that appreciation and they deserve those thanks.

My own parents also lived in Har Nof and knew pretty much everyone in that room. They made the right move to come to Israel, and ultimately I am here because of them. I thank them every day. And I am sure that the children of all those wonderful women who listened to my talk on Sunday evening know that their parents did not have an easy time making *aliyah*. But when they look back, they are so grateful that they made the right move for the Jewish people and for themselves.

May we continue for many, many more years in good health, in their name, moving *Klal Yisrael* forward. *B'ezrat Hashem*, may we merit to see all Jews coming and living in the Land of Israel and may we see the building of the *Beit HaMikdash*, hopefully very, very soon.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman

Executive Director, OU Israel
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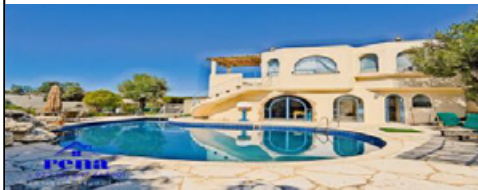
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ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

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PARSHAT BEMIDBAR

Sefer Bemidbar is the march to the Land of Israel. The central story of the entire Torah is the promise to the Jewish people of the Land of Israel and the journey to make that happen.

The Promise of the Land was made to Avraham. And Yitzchak. And Yaakov. Moshe was told at the burning bush that G-d would take the people out of Egypt because of the promise He made. To give them the Land of Israel. That has been the goal from the time of Avraham. The overlay narrative of the entire Torah is the promise of the Land and the march to it. There are plenty of other themes along the way, but that is the grand plan, the march to the Land.

Now *we* know that it is going to take 40 years to get there. But we need to read the Torah trying hard to stay in real time as the story unfolds. And as the story is unfolding, as far as the people know they will enter the Land of Israel imminently.

Bemidbar is the dawn of the march to the

Land and as such the Torah changes dramatically. Since Mt. Sinai, the focus of the Torah has been the encounter of G-d and man. Because the society we are going to build in the Land will have the encounter of G-d at its core. We built the Mishkan as a place to rendezvous. The book of Vayikra outlined how we approach Him and when we may not approach Him. And that the approach to G-d occurs not only in the drama of the Mishkan but in the holiness of our daily life as well. All of that is to describe the type of society we are to build in the Land.

Now, the entire narrative changes. No more talking about the society in the Land. Now we need to make it happen. We are pivoting from holiness to, well, earthiness. Marching. Conquering. Dividing the Land. Moving from the rarified air of pursuing holiness to the messy business of a national aspiration of taking the Land.



1ST ALIYA (BEMIDBAR 1:1-19)

On Rosh Chodesh Iyar of the second year since leaving Egypt, Moshe and Aharon are to take a census of all men over the age of 20. The leaders of each tribe are to assist. These leaders are named. Moshe, Aharon and the leaders gather the people who establish to which tribe each person belongs.

The census is to be conducted by tribe. The leader of the tribe conducts the census. The names of the leaders of each tribe are listed.

The census numbers are striking. The book of Shemot began with just 70 Jewish people. And now, 600,000! My how things

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can change.



2ND ALIYA (1:20-54)

The census, by tribe, of all men over the age of 20, the age of army service is presented. The tribe of Reuven: 46,500. Shimon: 59,300. Gad: 46,500. Yehuda: 74,600. Yissachar: 54,400. Zevulun: 57,400. Ephraim: 40,500. Menashe: 32,200. Binyamin: 35,400. Dan: 62,700. Asher: 41,500. Naftali: 53,400. The total of this census done by Moshe and Aharon and the 12 leaders of the tribes was 603,550. However, the tribe of Levi is not included. They are to safeguard the Mishkan: camping around the Mishkan, transporting it, dismantling and assembling it. The tribes camp in distinct groups, while the Leviim encamp around the Mishkan.

The census is taken by tribes. The numbers vary. That too is striking. They all started from the same spot. One person. And they vary. Oh how similar beginnings can bear wildly different results.

The emphasis on tribes, or shevatim, is new. Up until now, the Jew has functioned in 2 realms; individual and Am Yisrael, the Jewish people. We have mitzvot for the individual. And we have mitzvot for the people, like the daily offering. It is for the Jewish people.

But why is there a notion of tribe? Why identify in 3 ways, as individual, as tribe and as a people? It is somewhat akin to: I am a Jew, I am an Israeli, and I am a Yerushalmi. While that is true, what does it convey?

And this theme of tribal affiliation will animate much of the book. We camp as a tribe. The Land of Israel will be divided by tribe. If land is sold in the Land of Israel, it reverts back to its original owner in Yovel, in order to maintain tribal integrity. The tribe is like a state within the nation, a province within

a country.

Now, we in these parts of the world are familiar with large family units, hamulas in the parlance.

But perhaps the persistence in maintaining tribal units is an introduction to diversity. In the pivot from holiness to the reality of the march to the Land, we also move from what we all share, holiness, to how we are different. We are different due to our genetics, our upbringing, the influence of our surroundings.

And in the march to the Land, this diversity will be challenging. There will be disputes and disagreements. I don't think it is an overstatement to say that diversity is the single biggest challenge to mankind. Managing differences is terribly difficult. Things would be a lot simpler if we were all the same. And bland. Diversity brings color to life but that color comes at a cost.

This book of Bemidbar will be preoccupied with diversity and the challenges that it brings.



3RD ALIYA (2:1-34)

The tribes are to camp in a designated manner. For each of the tribes the name of their Nasi, the number of their tribe and the place in the formation is given. On the east side, the front, are Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun. Their combined number is 186,400. On the south side are Reuven, Shimon and Gad. Their combined number is 151,450. The Ohel Moed, surrounded by Levi, both camps and travels in the middle. On the west side are Ephraim, Menashe and Binyamin. Their combined number is 108,100. On the north side are Dan, Asher and Naftali. Their combined number is 157,600. The total count of the army age men is 603,550 without the tribe of Levi.

The people travel and camp with the Mishkan in their midst. Physically and metaphorically. We travel through history with G-d in our midst. The distinct feeling you get in the detailed description of where each tribe encamped is the feeling of an army encampment. But with the Mishkan in the middle.



4TH ALIYA (3:1-13)

Aharon's sons' names were Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar. Nadav and Avihu died without children. Elazar and Itamar serve as kohanim with Aharon. Take the Leviim: they are to serve Aharon. The Leviim are responsible for the Mishkan: to support the kohanim and the people, to facilitate the running of the Mishkan. The Leviim shall take the place of the first-born, who became obligated to me when saved in Egypt.

There are 2 groups mentioned here: Kohanim and Leviim. The lineage of the kohanim is given. It just doesn't take much room. Because Aharon is a kohen and his sons are. And he only has 2. So the entire lineage of the kohanim is 3 people. The Leviim, on the other hand, are an entire tribe, descendants of Levi, son of Yaakov. Their lineage, at quite some length, is given in the next aliya.



5TH ALIYA (3:14-39)

Count the tribe of Levi by households, from 1 month and older: the households of Gershon, Kehat and Merari, the sons of Levi. The sons of Gershon, Kehat and Merari are listed. Gershon's family, from a month and above, is 7,500. They camp to the west of the Mishkan. Their task was to transport and be responsible for the curtains and coverings. Kehat numbered 8,600, camping to the south. They were responsible for the vessels: Aron, Menorah, Table, altars. Merari numbered 6,200, camping to the north.

Responsible for the structure of the Mishkan; the walls, supports and beams. The total of the tribe of Levi is 22,000. On the front side, east of the Mishkan, Moshe and Aharon and families camped.

The encampment around the Mishkan had 2 layers. The Leviim were in close, on 3 of the 4 sides of the Mishkan. The 4th side, the leading side, had Moshe and Aharon. The entire 12 tribes were farther removed on all 4 sides.

The 3 sons of Levi were family groups; Gershon, Kehat and Merari. They had full responsibility for the Mishkan. Their tasks fell in categories. Gershon; textiles. Kehat; furniture. Merari; building. Gershon took care of the curtains and coverings. Kehat, the important main vessels of the Mishkan. And Merari the structure of the building.



6TH ALIYA (3:40-51)

Count all the firstborn of the age of a month and above. The Leviim are to replace the firstborn. There were 273 more firstborn than Leviim; these were redeemed.

The firstborn are replaced as public servants by the Leviim. The notion that the firstborn shall be the public servants has great appeal; every home becomes infused with public service by virtue of the firstborn dedicated to holy work.

But, as appealing as that is, it is not implemented. The firstborn are switched off for the Leviim.

Perhaps because it would be an inequitable burden. The poor families rely on their firstborn to work, to be the first to contribute to the family wellbeing. The replacement of the firstborn by the Leviim may be recognition of the inequity that would inevitably result in requiring the firstborn of every family to leave their home for public service.



7TH ALIYA (4:1-20)

Take from Kehat all men from the age of 30 to 50 to do their work of the holy of holies. But since Kehat was to carry the vessels of the Mishkan, Aharon and his sons covered each vessel to prevent Kehat from touching them. The Aron was covered by: the Parochet (curtain), then leather, then techelet covering. The Shulchan: techelet, then the extra utensils, then red, then the tachash skin. Menorah: techelet, then tachash. Incense altar: techelet, then tachash. Outer altar: purple, then tachash. In this way, calamity will not befall Kehat in transporting the holy things.

The Torah describes how the different parts of the Mishkan are to be wrapped for transport. Because the Leviim are not to touch these holy vessels.

We have encountered this theme before. Holiness is desirable, it is our goal. But handle with care. Too close is dangerous.

Closeness to the Divine, as symbolized by these vessels, has to be tempered. We want to encounter the Divine. But we need to keep our distance. Perhaps to emphasize that while our deepest desire is to encounter the Divine, we need to be aware of the Mystery, the Infinite, the incomprehensible. Mind the gap.

Special Haftarah is read of Machar Chodesh (Shmuel Alef, chapter 20)

HAFTARAH 1 SHMUEL 20:18-42

Today's *haftarah* is read on a Shabbat that is immediately followed by Rosh Chodesh. The reading opens with the words, "Yonatan said, 'Tomorrow is the [first of the] new month.'"

The story is one of loyalty and devotion. David and Yonatan are dear friends. Yonatan's father, King Shaul, despises David, fearing that he will depose him from the throne. Sensing danger, Yonatan told David to hide in the field rather than attend Shaul's Rosh Chodesh feast. Yonatan then attended the feast and gauged the king's mood. Realizing that Shaul was determined to kill David, Yonatan went out to the field, shot three arrows and called to his assistant, "The arrow is beyond you," a predetermined signal to his friend that it was not safe to return to the king's palace.

Before parting, the two friends kissed and wept, and swore to maintain their friendship for generations to come. ■



STATS

34th sedra of 54; first of 10 in Bamidbar. Written on 263 lines, ranks 3rd. 30 parshiyot; 23 open, 7 closed, 4th. 159 pesukim - rank 3 (3rd in Bamidbar). 1823 words - rank 13 (4th in Bamidbar). 7393 letters - rank 9 (3rd in Bamidbar).



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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

“Of the children of Yosef, namely of the children of Ephraim (1:32) ...Of the children of Menashe” (1:34) - לבני יוסף לבני אפרים (א:לב)...לבני מנשה (א:לד).

When counting the tribes in this week's Parsha, Ephraim is enumerated before Menashe and yet in the second reckoning of the tribes in Parshat Pinchas (26:28), Menashe is numbered first. Why? Is there significance to the order mentioned?

The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman 1194-1270) answers that as per Yaakov's blessing, Ephraim was to be deemed the first born, giving him initial priority over Menashe. However, at the second counting of the tribes, Menashe is counted first since at this time, Menashe had more descendants than Ephraim, giving him preference over the two.

However, in the narrative of the spies, the tribe of Ephraim is once again mentioned first (13:8;11), seemingly, due to the praised role of Yehoshua Bin Nun, the spy from the tribe of Ephraim who actively interfered with any evil tidings about the Land of Israel, giving his tribe precedence in the counting.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin 1816-1893) explains that the ordering of Ephraim before Menashe is based on the spiritual and physical reality of the Israelites at that time. In the first census, the tribe of Ephraim represents the spiritual greatness which the Israelites owed to a miraculous existence in the desert, completely relying on G-d's open daily participation. The change to Menashe leading, in the second census, demonstrates the transition from relying on miracles to working within the laws of nature upon entering the Land of Israel.

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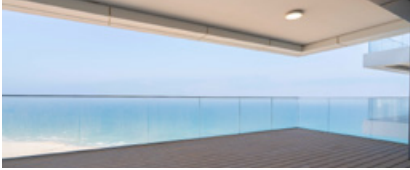
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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
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“The Wilderness First”

My first exposure to the study of the Bible was in the Yiddish language. We spoke only English at home, but almost all the teachers we had in the *yeshiva* I attended were Holocaust survivors who had escaped to the safety of these shores only a few years prior.

I must admit that we learned to translate into Yiddish by rote and had little conception about what the words meant in English. Thus, we translated the very first verse of the Torah as “*In der anfang hatte der Oibeshter bashaffen*”, not having a clue that “*In der anfang*” meant “in the beginning,” that the “*Oibeshter*” was “the One Above,” and that “*bashaffen*” meant “created.”

When we reached the *Book of Numbers*, *Sefer Bamidbar*, we finally had a teacher who, although he continued to provide the Yiddish translation, told us, in his broken English, what the words meant in the language we understood. And he would even provide visual aids, photographs and drawings, which would help us truly grasp the meaning of what we were studying.

I’ll never forget his opening lesson. He told us that we were beginning a new book of the Torah, and a new weekly Torah portion, that both went by the name “*Bamidbar*”. “In Yiddish”, he said, “the word means ‘*in der veesternisht*.’ “ We were all about nine years old and the word “*veesternisht*” triggered a giggle which soon morphed into hilarious laughter.

There is something about the sound of the word that is comical to me to this very day.

He waited for our laughter to subside, and then said that “*veesternisht*” in English meant “a desert.” And he showed us a picture of the Saharan desert. “The Jewish people were wandering through such a desert,” he explained, “and the entire book that we are beginning to study took place there.”

He then asked us if we remembered coming across the word “*veesternisht*” earlier in our studies, in a slightly abbreviated form.

It was my dear friend Michael, who passed away some years ago now, who remembered that first verse in *Genesis*, which contains the phrase “*tohu va’vohu*”, which is generally translated as “unformed and void”. In Yiddish, the phrase is rendered as “*poost und veest*, empty and desolate.”

Bamidbar is the Torah portion which we read this week, and which is always read on the Shabbat before Shavuot. I researched about a dozen biblical translations, including some non-Jewish ones, and found that only a few translated “*Bamidbar*” as “in the desert”. The vast majority preferred the word “wilderness” to “desert,” so that the key phrase in the first verse of our *parsha* reads “...The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai ...”

Although the dictionaries I consulted did not distinguish sharply between “desert” and “wilderness,” it is the latter that rings

true as the English equivalent of the Yiddish “*veesternisht*.” An empty, confusing, and frightening wasteland.

It was in that wasteland that our ancestors wandered for forty years, and it is that wasteland where we received the Torah.

Why? Why was the Torah given in this wild and chaotic terrain?

Like most questions of this sort, numerous answers have been given over the ages. I would like to share with you an answer which makes great sense to me.

If one reads further than just the first verse of this week’s *parsha* (*Numbers* 1:1-4:20), he discovers that although the image we have of the wilderness is one of disorder and confusion, the narrative theme of these several opening chapters is one of order and systematic organization. The tribes are divided into 12 distinct units, each one is assigned its own unique flag or banner, and its place in the procession through the wilderness is precisely specified. The entire *parsha* can be summarized as “making order in the midst of chaos.”

It strikes me that the ability to organize one’s environment in a beneficial and orderly manner is a basic human skill that every society must first possess before it can proceed toward greater cultural achievement. Having said that, we can appreciate that before the Torah could be given to the Jewish people there was a necessary prerequisite: the establishment of a functional society in which people could get along with each other in a peaceful and productive manner. Only in such a context could the Torah be properly absorbed.

There is an ancient saying which states this idea unequivocally: “*Derech erez kadma leTorah*.” Literally translated as, “The way of

the world precedes Torah.” (*Midrash Vayikra Rabba*, 9:3). More generally, it means first one must have an ethical, just and humane society. Only then can one proceed to Torah.

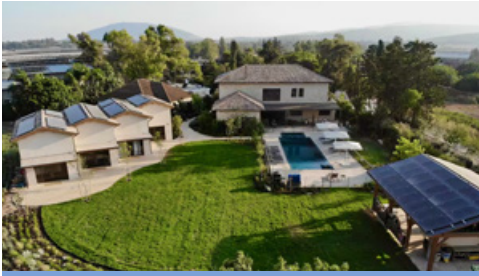
We can classify this week’s Torah portion as the *parsha* of *derech erez*, because in it a nation successfully copes with the trials and tribulations of its environment. It tamed a wilderness by creating a civilization. It dealt with a wasteland by establishing a functioning and equitable society.

That is why it is precisely this *parsha* that precedes Shavuot. Shavuot is the anniversary of *Matan Torah*, of the Divine revelation, the giving of the Torah. The Almighty does not reveal Himself to a people who cannot get along with each other in an orderly and civilized manner. He does not express His will to individuals, communities, or nations who, in today’s jargon, “can’t get their act together.”

He does not give His Torah in a wilderness, in a wasteland, in a “*veesternisht*.” He expects us to first act toward each other with *derech erez*, respectfully and courteously. He demands that we first tame that wilderness and cultivate that wasteland. Only then are we deserving of His great gift.

Derech erez kadma leTorah. Humane behavior first, and only afterwards the Torah. That’s how it was that very first time in the wilderness of Sinai, and that’s how it must be this weekend, when the Shabbat of Bamidbar immediately precedes the festival of *Matan Torah*. ■





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PREPARE FOR SHAVUOT

Shrouded in Mystery

Finally, having completed the Omer count, we arrive at Shavuot, the festival that is widely seen as commemorating Matan Torah, the Revelation at Sinai.

Things, however, are not as simple as they seem...

By all rights, we should encounter a festival that is clear and direct. Revelation is the single most important event in Jewish history, marking the moment of God's closest contact with man. The fundamental character of our nation and the foundation of the world's moral code emerge from Matan Torah, as Divine law is handed to man.

We would expect this monumental event to be clearly demarcated in the Torah and the festival that marks its onset to be unambiguously defined.

Instead...

We are confronted with a festival and a historical event shrouded in mystery. A series of enigmas surrounds both the festival of Shavuot and the onset of Revelation, clouding what should have been the clear commemoration of a monumental event:

Consider the following:

- Nowhere in the Torah do we find a linkage between Shavuot and Revelation. It remains for the rabbis, generations later, to clearly identify the festival as *Zman Matan Torateinu*, the time of the giving of our Torah.
- Nowhere in the Torah do we find a specified calendar date for the festival of Shavuot. Most glaringly, when the Torah lists the festivals and their offerings in Sefer Bamidbar, calendar dates are given for all, with one exception. Shavuot is the only festival listed with no calendric reference, at all.
- Strikingly, the Torah is also vague concerning the facts surrounding revelation, itself. The arrival of the Israelites to the Wilderness of Sinai, is simply recorded as follows: "In the third month from the Exodus of the children of Israel from the Land of Egypt, *on this day*, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. It is left for the rabbis to determine exactly "which day" is the narrative's "this day."
- To complicate matters further, debate emerges concerning the timetable of events immediately prior to Revelation. At issue is whether or not Moshe "adds an additional day" to the divinely mandated three days of preparation for Revelation."

The majority opinion maintains that Moshe, following God's instructions to the letter, retains the count of three days. Rabbi Yossi argues, however, that Moshe



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added a fourth day to God's three.

- This disagreement leads to an even more significant divergence of opinion concerning the exact date of Revelation. According to the majority view, three days of preparation directly lead to Revelation's onset on the sixth day of Sivan, the date of the Shavuot festival. According to Rabbi Yossi, however, an extra day of preparations delays Revelation by a day, moving its onset to the seventh day of Sivan, the day after Shavuot. We are thus faced with the startling conclusion that, according to Rabbi Yossi, the festival commemorating Matan Torah does not correspond to the day of the actual event.
- Finally, the Festival of Shavuot is noteworthy for what it lacks. In our time, there is no unique mitzvah associated with this day. Shavuot is governed solely by the generic mitzvot common to every Biblical Festival.¹

In short, there seems to be a deliberate attempt, Biblical and beyond, to surround both the festival of Shavuot and the historical event upon which it is based with mystery. Why should this be so? As we have noted, one would think that the single most important event in Jewish history would be clearly and decisively marked.

A fascinating, far-reaching answer is hinted at in a well-known Midrashic observation and elaborated upon by later authorities.

The Midrash focuses on the aforementioned Torah passage that describes the arrival of

the Israelites at the site of Revelation: "In the third month from the Exodus of the children of Israel from the Land of Egypt, *on this day*, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai."

How strange! The Torah is clear about the calendar date of numerous other events. Why is it conspicuously silent in this case, leaving it up to the rabbis to determine which day is "this day"?

This text, however, is even more puzzling than it seems at first. Not only is the Torah ambiguous concerning the timing of the nation's arrival at Sinai, but the terminology actually used by the text is inherently problematic. The Torah does not say, as we would expect: "*on that day [ba'yom hahu]*, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai." Instead, as indicated above, the text reads: "*on this day [ba'yom hazeh]*, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai."

Why does the Torah refer to a millennia-old moment as "*this day*"?

Because, suggest the rabbis, the text means to convey an overarching message: "When you study Torah, [its words] should not be ancient in your eyes, but as if they were given to you 'this day.'"

Or, as Rashi puts it: "At all times, the Torah's words should seem as new to you [variant: as dear to you] as if they were given to you today."

There is, I believe, much more to these rabbinic observations than meets the eye. In essence, the rabbis are emphasizing that:

Revelation is not a historical event.

The Patriarchal era, the Exodus, the wandering in the wilderness, the entry into the land of Canaan, and so much more are periods and incidents rooted in the past. They are meant to be learned from, reexamined, reexperienced, even seen as prototypes for the present – but they are all past events.

1. For the sake of completeness, I would point out that there is another festival that arguably features this phenomenon—Shemini Atzeret. A full discussion of the relationship between these two festivals and the place of each in the flow of the calendar, however, is beyond the parameters of this study.

Revelation is different. Matan Torah is a process that continues to this day and beyond. Every time we study a text, ask a halachic question, or share a Torah thought, we stand again at Sinai receiving the Torah. Every time the rabbis apply the law to changing circumstances, suggest new insight into an age-old text, or enact new legislation to protect the community, we participate in Revelation. When concerns ranging from in vitro fertilization to stem cell research to the definition of death and its impact on organ donation are actively addressed and debated within Jewish law, Matan Torah unfolds.

We can now understand the Torah's reluctance to pinpoint both the date and the holiday marking Revelation. Either of these two acts would root Matan Torah in the past. Like so many other historical events, Revelation would become an event to celebrate and commemorate, rather than a process in which to participate.

The Torah, therefore, leaves it to the rabbis to determine the date on which the Israelites actually stood at Sinai and to draw the inevitable conclusion that the Shavuot festival marks that date.

The text itself remains silent concerning these issues in order to remind us that we stand at Sinai today

We can now understand, as well, why no unique mitzvah populates this festival. *Shavuot is a celebration of the entire Torah and all of its mitzvot.*

To the uninitiated, the allure of Torah study is often difficult to comprehend. What is this fascination with age-old, seemingly archaic text? What satisfaction can be found in poring over rabbinic observations authored centuries ago?

The following story begins to answer these

questions.

Many years ago, I made the acquaintance of a young man who came to Talmud study late in his educational development. One day, he turned to me and said: "You know why I love the Talmud? Because when I begin to study Talmud, *the boundaries of time disappear*. Suddenly I am sitting at a table, present at a discussion between Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael, dating back to the beginning of the Common Era.

"As the conversation continues, Rav Huna [third century] offers a thought; Abbaye [fourth century] makes a comment, only to be countered by Rava [fourth century], as Rav Ashi [fifth century] joins in.

"Then Rashi [1040–1105] makes an observation and is immediately challenged by his descendants, the Tosafists [twelfth–thirteenth centuries]. Others soon join the discussion, including the Rambam [1135–1204] and Rabbi Yosef Karo [1488–1575], all making their positions known...

"And I, I am there too, at the table, asking my questions and adding my thoughts to a dialogue that will continue long after I am gone, as well."²

To be part of an eternal conversation, to connect both with God's will and with generations long gone, *to stand at Sinai in our day*: that, in essence, is the adventure that the Torah provides...and that the Festival of Shavuot celebrates. ■

2. Many of you may be familiar with an essay recorded in the name of Rabbi Soloveichik in which he eloquently describes a similar experience. I have chosen to record this version, because of my personal involvement.

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the OU Press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text," and "Unlocking the Haggada."



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Love as Law, Law as Love

On the face of it the connections between the sedra and haftara of Bamidbar are slender. The first has to do with demography. Bamidbar begins with a census of the people. The haftara begins with Hosea's vision of a time when "the number of the children of Israel will be like the sand on the seashore which cannot be measured or numbered." There was a time when the Israelites could be counted; the day will come when they will be countless. That is one contrast between the future and the past.

The second goes deeper. The sedra and the book that bears its name are called Bamidbar, meaning "in the wilderness". The book is about the wilderness years in both a physical and spiritual sense: a time of wandering and internal conflict. Hosea, however, foresees a time when God will bring the people back to the desert and there enact a second honeymoon:

...I will lead her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her...

There she will respond as in the days of her youth,

As in the day she came out of Egypt.
(Hosea 2:14)

What gives the haftara its special resonance, however, is the fact that Bamidbar is always read on the Shabbat preceding Shavuot, the festival of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The fact that tradition chose this of all prophetic passages tells us something deeply moving about how the Jewish people understood this festival, and about the Torah itself as the living connection between a people and God.

The story of Hosea is one of the strangest of that great chain of visionaries we call the Prophets. It is the story of a marriage. The prophet married a woman called Gomer. He was deeply in love with her. We can infer this, because of all the prophets, Hosea is the most eloquent and passionate on the subject of love. Gomer, however, proved faithless. She left home, had a series of lovers, was serially unfaithful, and was eventually forced to sell herself into slavery. Yet Hosea, caught between anger and tender longing, found that he could not relinquish his love for her.

In a flash of prophetic insight, God leads him to understand that his own personal experience mirrors that between God and the Israelites. He had rescued them from slavery, led them through the wilderness, and brought

them to their new home, the land of Israel. But the people proved faithless. They worshipped other gods. They were promiscuous in their spiritual attachments. By rights, says God, I should have abandoned them. I should have called them (as the prophet called his third child) *Lo-ammi*, “you are not My people”. Yet God’s love is inextinguishable. He too cannot let go. Whatever the people’s sins, He will bring them back into the desert, the scene of their first love, and their marriage will be renewed.

The Talmud in Pesachim gives an extraordinary account of the dialogue between God and Hosea – the unwritten story of the episode that precedes chapter 1 of the book of Hosea.

The Holy One, blessed be He, says to Hosea, “Your children have sinned.” To this, the prophet should have replied, “they are Your children, the children of your favoured ones, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Be merciful to them.” Not only does he not say this, but what he actually says is, “Lord of the universe, the whole world is yours. Exchange them for another nation.” The Holy One, blessed be He, says, “What shall I do with this old man? I will tell him to go and marry a prostitute and have children by her. Then I will tell him to send her away. If he can, then I too will send Israel away.”

There are few more telling passages in the whole of rabbinic literature. If I were to summarise it, I would say: Who is a leader of the Jewish people? Only one who loves the Jewish people. Reading the prophetic literature, it is easy to see the prophets as social critics. They see the people’s faults; they speak them aloud; their message is often a negative one, foretelling disaster. The Talmud is telling us that such a view is superficial and misses the essential point. The prophets loved their people. They spoke not out of condemnation but from the



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depths of deep desire. They knew that Israel was capable of, and had been summoned to, great things. They never criticised in order to distance themselves, to set themselves above and apart. They spoke in love – God’s love. That is why, in Israel’s darkest nights, the prophets always had a message of hope.

There is one verse in the haftara so deep that it deserves special attention. God is telling the prophet about the time yet to come when He will bring His people back to the places they once visited, the desert where they first pledged their love, and there they will renew their relationship:

On that day – declares the Lord – you will call Me ‘my Husband’; you will no longer call Me ‘my Master’.

The resonances of this sentence are impossible to capture in translation. The key words in Hebrew are *Ish* and *Baal*, and they both

mean ‘husband’. Hosea is telling us about two kinds of marital relationships – and two kinds of culture. One is signalled by the word *Baal*, which not only means ‘husband’ but is also the name of the Caananite god. Baal, one of the central figures in the pantheon of the ancient Near East, was the storm god of lightning and the fertility god who sends rain to impregnate the ground. He was the macho deity who represented sex and power on a cosmic scale.

Hosea, punning on the name, hints at the kind of world that emerges when you worship sex and power. It is a world without loyalties, where relationships are casual and people taken advantage of and then dropped. A marriage predicated on the word *Baal* is a relationship of male dominance in which women are used not loved, owned not honoured. The word *Baal* means, among other things, ‘owner’.

Against this Hosea describes a different kind of relationship. Here, his literary device is not pun but quotation. In using the word *Ish* to describe the relationship between God and His people, the prophet is evoking a verse at the beginning of Genesis – the words of the first man seeing the first woman:

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called ‘woman’ for she was taken out of man.”

Daringly, Hosea suggests that the making of woman from man mirrors the creation of humanity from God. First they are separated, then they are joined again, but now as two distinct persons each of whom respects the integrity of the other. What joins them is a new kind of relationship built on fidelity and trust.

How we understand the giving of the Torah depends on how we see the relationship

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between God and the people He chose to be His special witnesses on earth. Inevitably, the language of Judaism when it speaks of God is metaphorical. The Infinite cannot be compassed in finite categories. The metaphors the prophets use are many. God is, among other things, Artist, Creator, King, Master, Warrior, Shepherd, Judge, Teacher, Redeemer and Father. From the point of view of God-as-king, the Torah is the code of laws He ordains for the people He rules. From the perspective of God-as-father-and-teacher, it represents the instructions He gives His children as to how they should best live. Adopting the image of Artist-Creator, Jewish mystics throughout the ages saw the Torah as the architecture of the universe, the deep structure of existence.

Of all the metaphors, however, the most lovely and most intimate was of God as husband, with Israel as His bride. Isaiah says:

For your Maker is your husband, The Lord Almighty is His name... (Isaiah 54:5)

Likewise Jeremiah:

'Return, faithless people,' declares the Lord, 'for I am your husband.' (Jeremiah 3:14)

This is how Ezekiel describes the marriage between God and Israel in the days of Moses:

Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of My garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you My solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you — declares the Lord, God – and you became Mine. (Ezekiel 16:8)

From this perspective, the Torah is more than a constitution and code of laws, more than a set of instructions or even the meta-physical DNA of the universe. It is a marriage contract – a token and gesture of love.

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OU ISRAEL 27

the form of marriage: marriage as covenant, in which both parties pledge themselves to one another, to be loyal, steadfast, to stay together through difficult times as well as good and to achieve together what neither could do alone. A marriage is created not by force or coercion but by words – the word given, the word received, the word honoured in faithfulness and trust. There are such things as the laws of marriage (the respective responsibilities of husband and wife), but marriage of its essence is more than a dispassionate set of obligations and rights. It is law suffused with love, and love translated into law. That, according to this metaphor, is what the Sinai event was.

The supreme poet of marriage was Hosea. By reading this haftara on the Shabbat before Shavuot, we make a momentous affirmation: that in giving the Torah to Israel, God was not asserting His power, dominance, or lordship over Israel (what Hosea means when he uses the word *baal*). He was declaring His love. That is why it is no accident that the words with which the haftarah end – among the most beautiful in the entire religious literature of humankind – are the words Jewish men recite every weekday morning as they wind the strap of the hand-tefillin like a wedding ring around their finger, renewing daily the marriage covenant of Sinai:

I will betroth you to Me for ever;
 I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, love, and compassion;
 I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,
 And you will know God. ■

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Renewal Demands Reunion “Machar Chodesh”

At first glance, we might assume that few haftarot would have a more obvious reason for their selection than today’s reading. The opening words alone express the significance of this day: “Machar Chodesh” – “tomorrow is a new month”, and, indeed, it is! And yet, it is difficult to imagine that these mere two words would motivate Chazal to choose this selection from Shmuel A, and none other.

HaRav Yissachar Ya’akovson, in his classic work “Chazon HaMikra,” wonders why as well, and therefore, he points to a number of other connections between the haftarah and the upcoming Rosh Chodesh. Among them is the fact that the beginning of a month which is declared upon witnessing the renewal of the moon, reminds us of the general concept of renewal - a fresh beginning, a new start, a **beginning!** This simple truth is the most basic teaching for Israel as she faces a new

month, a Rosh Chodesh. In the same way, we can sense an emerging “power struggle” between the King Sha’ul and the future King David, a struggle that is reflected in the events depicted in this haftarah. The eventual flight of David from the royal family must be seen as the dawning of a new beginning and fresh start for the entire kingdom of Israel. In fact, as Rav Ya’akovson suggests, the Midrash that declares that the moon’s brightness was reduced when it complained that “two kings cannot share the same crown”, can be well understood as a description of the Sha’ul vs. David struggle, with these two kings vying for one crown.

We would be mistaken, however, were we to see this struggle as a personal battle between these two righteous men. Sha’ul, depicted in the Tanach as having lost G-d’s “spirit”, struggled with bouts of depression and as a result, was often not in control of his own actions. Indeed, during his moments of clarity, he admitted that he had behaved poorly toward David, admitting that his son-in-law would succeed him upon the throne. David,

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meanwhile, never actively sought the kingdom, despite the fact that he had been promised the throne and had even been anointed by the navi Shmu'el. When we study David's behavior throughout his years, we might well be surprised to find that he eschewed using violence to rise to power and punished those who did so in attempting to place him on the throne. David would accept the crown only if he was both the choice of G-d **AND** the will of the people.

And with that "mandate", David left us with a lesson for today.

David HaMelech understood that there could not be a renewal, a rebirth, without a reunification. A new era could not be forced upon a reluctant people. Change would be successful only if the nation united behind the change and supported it. We must therefore realize that "Machar Chodesh," tomorrow could be the beginning of an age of renewal, the messianic era. It **could** be the time when the Mashiach, the scion of David, arrives. But he will not take his rightful place on the throne until we, as a united people, support it, desire it and work together peacefully to make it happen. ■

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Consistency at Home and on the Road

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... **Just as they encamped, so must they travel** — each person in his place, by their banners. (Bamidbar 2:17)

The Menachem Tzion (son-in-law of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank) offers a striking *drash* on this *pasuk*.

Human behavior is often inconsistent. At times, we swing between extremes depending on where we are and who is watching. When we are in our own environment like in our home, our shul, or our neighborhood, people recognize us, so we are careful to behave appropriately and preserve our reputation. Yet when we leave that environment and go on vacation or travel out of town, where no one knows us, we may allow ourselves liberties that would be unthinkable back home.

For others, the opposite is true. At home, among familiar faces, they may feel comfortable “letting loose,” assuming that people understand them or will excuse their behavior. Yet when they leave their community, they suddenly become careful, reserved, and measured, taking special care to make a good impression on those who do not know them.

The Torah speaks directly to this inconsistency. **“Just as they encamped, so must they travel.”**

Our behavior should not change based on geography. The same standards that guide us when we are settled at home must guide us when we are on the move. Who we are in familiar spaces should be who we are everywhere.

Rabbi Benjamin Blech points to a related idea in the mitzvah of Chanukah. We place the menorah near the doorway, opposite the mezuzah. The mezuzah, on the left as we enter, reminds us to maintain a high level of spirituality inside our homes. When we leave the house, the menorah stands on our right, reminding us that we defeated the Greeks and must carry that confidence and commitment beyond our private space into the public world, even when it feels hostile or challenging.

True *avodat Hashem* is not situational. It does not depend on comfort, familiarity, or who happens to be watching. The Torah asks us for integrity. We should exhibit one identity and one set of values whether we are encamped or traveling.

May we merit to live lives of consistency and inner strength, serving Hashem with the same sincerity at home and on the road, in the safety of our communities and in the uncertainty of unfamiliar places. When our *penimiyut* (inner- spirit) and *chitzoniyut* (outer- behavior) align, we become walking sanctuaries wherever we go. ■



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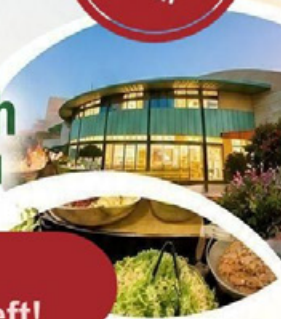


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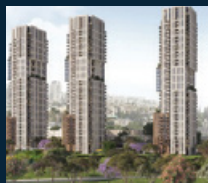
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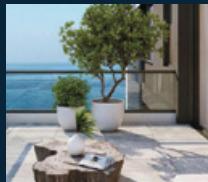
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Deep Desire

The book of Bamidbar opens with the command to take a census of the people. The section concludes, “*Vaya’asu bnei Yisrael kechol asher tziva Hashem et Moshe kein asu* — And the children of Israel did according to all that Hashem had commanded Moshe, thus did they do.” (*Bamidbar* 1:54) Why the repetition — “they did, thus did they do”? What is the relevant message here?

The *Alshich Hakadosh* finds a fundamental lesson. Chazal teach that Hashem links a good thought to an action (*Kiddushin* 40a); if one has a good thought he is credited as if he actually accomplished what he intended to do. Therefore, by accepting Hashem’s command, they are credited with doing it. Once they actually implemented the command, it is recorded as well.

What is a “good thought” that is considered as an action? Rav Weissblum in *He’arat Derech* understands that these thoughts are one’s *ratzon*, his positive intention to do a mitzvah. One’s sincere desire is the foundational spark of the mitzvah; its actual fulfillment is solely in Hashem’s hands. Yet, if one is willing to be *moser nefesh*, to go to any extent to do a mitzvah, he will have the Divine assistance to succeed.

“*Bederech she’adam rotzeh leleich bah molichin oto* — along the path a person wishes to proceed, one leads [and assists] him.” (*Makot* 10b) The commentators note that *molichin*

is expressed in the plural form, meaning, each determined effort, every step one takes toward achieving a mitzvah, generates angels that help and assist him to overcome any obstacles that may lay in the way of his goal. The essence of a mitzvah lies in one’s internal commitment and dedication to its fulfillment.

It is important to be honest about one’s desire. How far are we willing to go? At what point might we give up and blame outside circumstances? If we really want to do a mitzvah and can envision all possible challenges, **and** are nevertheless ready to push forward, that desire is credited as a fulfillment of the mitzvah. This was the great declaration of *Am Yisrael* at Har Sinai, “*na’aseh v’nishma*.” Their burning desire to align with Hashem’s Will expressed itself in the word *NA’ASEH* — we will do even before we hear anything at all!

The *Shelah Hakadosh* teaches that Shavuot is a day of judgement. Just like on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem decides our material success, on Shavuot, Hashem judges one’s commitment to mitzvah observance to determine one’s overall success in Torah learning for the coming year. Hashem calculates how much a person will be inspired in his *avodat Hashem*, how one’s Torah learning will affect change and how successfully he will develop his middot. Dovid Hamelech declares, “*Pote’ach et yadecha u’masbia lechol chai ratzon* — You open Your hand and satisfy every living thing [with] its **desire**.” (*Tehilim* 145:16) The *He’arat Derech* explains

that Hashem fulfills one's spiritual desires depending on his *ratzon*, his level of sincerity. It is no wonder that we spend seven complete weeks in preparation for Shavuot, developing and refining our deep desire to serve Hashem.

The Tosher Rebbe *zt"l* in *Avodat Avodah* teaches that Elul, which is known as an "*et ratzon*," is not solely about adding and committing to do more and more mitzvot. It is about strengthening one's *ratzon*, engaging one's drive to do the mitzvot that he is already doing with heightened resolve. Similarly, as we prepare for Shavuot, we can focus on our ultimate desire, to passionately fulfill the Will of Hashem. This genuine yearning will merit us the most positive judgement on Shavuot to have a year filled with spiritual growth, Torah learning and continued inspiration. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
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Each year on *Shavuot*, we are granted the opportunity to return — if only symbolically — to that awe-filled moment in Jewish history, when we stood אחד בלב אחד, united as one, to receive the *Torah* at *Sinai*.

The first of the *Aseret HaDibrot* proclaims: “*Anochi Hashem Elokecha Asher Hotzeiticha Me’Eretz Mitzrayim, Mi’Beit Avadim*” — “I am *Hashem* your G-d, Who has taken you forth from the Land of Egypt, from the house of servitude...”

Many of our *mefarshim* are troubled by a fundamental question: Why does *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* choose to introduce Himself specifically as the One Who redeemed us from Egypt, rather than as the Creator of heaven and earth? Why is the defining attribute, as it were, in this opening declaration, the redemption from servitude, rather than the act of creation itself?

The *Kedushat Levi, Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, zy”a*, offers a deeply moving insight. *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, he explains, deliberately emphasizes that the *Torah* is given to *Am Yisrael* only after their redemption from Egypt. Had the *Torah* been presented to them while they were still enslaved, their acceptance might have been perceived — internally or externally — as compelled, as though their very freedom were contingent upon their acquiescence.

By first redeeming them, by lifting them out of the *Beit Avadim*, and only then offering the *Torah*, *Hashem* affirms that *Kabbalat HaTorah* is not an act born of coercion, but rather one rooted in love — an expression

of the deep and enduring relationship between the *Ribbono Shel Olam* and His people.

Hashem first freed us, teaches *Reb Levi Yitzchak*, so that we might shed the very mindset of servitude, so that we could stand at *Sinai* not as subjects under duress, but as בני חורין — free souls — capable of entering into a covenant of love. The *Torah*, then, is not imposed; it is bestowed. It is a gift — like that of a loving parent to a cherished child.

In this spirit, we find a foundational teaching of the *Baal HaTanya zy’a* is that the *Torah* and *mitzvot* are an expression of divine *chesed*, through which *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, metaphorically, binds Himself to *Knesset Yisrael*. Like a parent who gives not as a formal obligation but as an expression of essential love and identity, so too *Matan Torah* is the revelation of an unbreakable bond between *Hashem* and His children, the Jewish People.

This foundational idea, embedded within the very first of the *Aseret HaDibrot*, is one that we are called upon to revisit each year on *Shavuot*. It reminds us that the *Torah* is, at its core, a manifestation of divine love, and that our acceptance of it is meant to mirror that love in return.

Yehi ratzon, as we prepare for *Chag Matan Torateinu*, may we merit to internalize this profound message — to receive the *Torah* anew, not because we feel compelled to accept it, but rather to accept it with love.

Chag Sameach ■

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Beyond Numbers

Rebbe Yitzchak of Vorka, zy'a, was respected for his deep, inner work, and beloved for the close friendship that defined his Chasidic court. Once, one of his Chasidim, R' Yankel, needed to marry off his daughter, but lacked the funds for dowry. He approached his good friend and neighbor R' Moishe, and asked for a loan of 1,000 rubles, promising that he would do everything he could to pay back the money right after the wedding.

R' Moishe happily lent him the money, suspecting that his friend wouldn't be able to follow through with his good intentions to repay anytime soon. And that's what happened. Years passed and R' Yankel was never able to get the money together. Then, money became tight for R' Moishe as well, and the friends awkwardly avoided the issue of the debt.

One day, R' Moishe happened to see Rebbe Yitzchok on the way to visit R' Yankel. R' Moishe stepped out onto the street, hoping for an opportunity to broach the sensitive subject; perhaps the Rebbe would help broker a solution to the outstanding loan. R' Moishe was

successful and the Rebbe agreed to speak with the two friends together.

"My dear Yankeleh," said the Rebbe in a soothing, low voice, "the time has come for you to repay your debt to Moishe." The Rebbe was fully aware that there was no real possibility for the simple yid to gather the funds, but he also knew of Yankel's sincerity of heart, and that Hashem would help.

Yankel went and turned over his house searching for anything he could find. Half a rubble here, a kopek there... After searching high and low, he came up with a whopping total of 57 rubles. The Rebbe smiled at Yankel with gratitude, then closed his eyes and entered a meditative state. With deep *kavana*, intention and concentration, he then proceeded to count the rubles one by one: 1, 2, 3... 55, 56, 57... However, the Rebbe didn't stop there, and continued counting the same 57 coins, over and over again until counting the small pile of rubles a thousand times.

With a joyful wink, the Rebbe pushed the small pile of coins across the table to R' Moishe, and told him, "Here is your 1,000 rubles!"

Soon thereafter, R' Moishe became the most wealthy *gvur* in Vorka.

Our sedra opens with these verses: "Hashem spoke to Moshe, *Bamidbar Sinai*, saying, 'Take the sum of all *Bnei Yisrael*, by families following their fathers' houses; a head count of every male according to the number of their names... you and Aharon shall count them.'"(1:1-3) This begins another census of

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the Jewish People, and Moshe and Aharon are instructed once again to collect half-shekels to make this accounting of Am Yisrael.

Rashi tells us that we are directed to count Am Yisrael “often”: *mitoch chibasan l’fanav*, “because they are dear to Him.... When they left Egypt He counted them; when many fell because of the Sin of the Golden Calf, He counted them to know the number of the survivors; when He came to cause His Divine Presence to rest among them, He counted them. On the first of Nissan, the Mishkan was erected, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them.”

A Divinely mandated census aims not just to clarify how many Jews there are, but also to “lift up the heads” of Am Yisrael and show that every one of us is important and beloved. When we each contribute a half shekel, we express our value as part of an inseparable whole.

Rabbeinu Bachayei explains the reason for the *hanhaga*, the custom we have until this day of not counting people individually: as individuals, we may not have enough personal *zechus* or merit to withstand judgment, so we refrain from singling anyone out. However, when we are counted as part of a community, even if an individual is lacking merit, the shared spiritual assets and identity as part of the larger whole is always meritorious.

The incessant counting of Am Yisrael

suggests that ‘we count’ in an infinite way. Hashem sees us in terms of His promise that we will be as the stars and the sand — uncountable in quantity, as well as measureless in quality.

In the world of nature, the act of counting is a quantification, defining and limiting the amount that is observed. This is a cold, objective assessment, the goal being an abstraction, a specific number. However, Tiferes Shlomo of Radomsk teaches that the counting of Am Yisrael has to be done specifically by Moshe and Aharon, the *tzadikim* of the generation. With eyes of *chiba*, love, they see the infinite worth of each individual in Klal Yisrael. They understand the value of the struggles and small victories of each person, and the infinite treasure of every mitzvah they perform, whether in ease or under duress.

Imagine for a moment the immeasurable value of all the *mitzvos* and acts of kindness, all the impassioned words of prayer and *emunah*, and all the loving self-sacrifices of every Jew throughout history.... May we be blessed with the ability to count as the *tzadikim* — and to know our own infinite worth! ■

.....
Excerpt from Baderech: Along the Path of the Torah, forthcoming (Mosaica Press, Elul 5786)



Dairy Bread

The prohibitions against cooking, consuming, or deriving benefit from a mixture of meat and milk are well known and extensively detailed in Halacha. Equally significant are the rabbinic safeguards instituted by Our Sages surrounding these prohibitions. These include restrictions such as eating meat and dairy on the same table without a separation, waiting between the consumption of meat and milk, and many others.

Chazal established these safeguards because both meat and milk are independently permissible foods. Since they are intrinsically kosher and commonly consumed, the possibility of accidentally mixing them is substantial. Therefore, strict preventative measures were enacted to avoid any violation even close to *Basar Bechalav*.

One of the lesser-known rabbinic decrees in this area is the prohibition against producing dairy bread.

THE SOURCE

The *Gemara* in *Pesachim* (31:a) relates that רבי יהושע בן לוי advised his sons to knead dough with milk. The *Gemara* questions this practice and concludes that it is prohibited to bake bread with milk because it may lead to sin. Rashi explains that the concern is straightforward: dairy bread may mistakenly be eaten together with meat, resulting in a violation of *Basar Bechalav*.

The *Pri Chadash* (YD 97:1) further explains

the rationale behind this decree. Bread is a staple food served at virtually every meal, and it is uncommon to designate bread specifically for either dairy or meat meals. *Chazal* therefore feared that if dairy bread were permitted, it could easily be consumed with meat.

Although the *Gemara* discusses dairy bread explicitly, it is evident from other sources that the same concern applies to meat bread as well (see *Pesachim* 30:b). The *Gemara* does not focus on meat bread because such cases were either less common or because visible pieces of meat in the bread would generally make its status obvious, thereby reducing the concern for confusion (see *Aruch Hashulchan* YD 97:3).

BASIC PARAMETERS OF THE DECREE

Like many rabbinic enactments, this decree functions as a broad and binding prohibition with practical ramifications in numerous situations. Although the *Gemara* itself records certain exceptions, we will focus here on the fundamental parameters of the prohibition.

If milk or dairy products such as butter or cream are mixed into dough and baked into bread, the bread becomes prohibited for consumption — even when eaten with dairy foods. Once such bread is produced in violation of the decree, it may not be eaten and must be discarded. It may not be given to others for consumption (*Shulchan Aruch* YD 97:1).

This prohibition applies regardless of the circumstances. For example, it remains in effect even if the baker is vegetarian or if the bread was made during the Nine Days, when meat consumption is traditionally avoided.



Likewise, the decree still applies even if the only available meat is chicken, even though the prohibition against mixing chicken and milk is rabbinic rather than Biblical in nature (see *Pri Megadim* 97:1).

The *Chatam Sofer* (YD 107) adds that the prohibition is not limited to bread kneaded by a Jew. Even if a Jew instructs a non-Jew to prepare the dough, the resulting bread remains prohibited because it was produced on behalf of a Jew.

INADVERTENT MIXING

The *Poskim* discuss a case in which milk was inadvertently added to bread dough. Does the prohibition still apply *bedi'eved* (after the fact)?

The *Pri Megadim* (Ibid) analyzes this issue by examining the nature of the decree itself. He questions whether the prohibition serves primarily as a penalty for disregarding the enactments of Our Sages, or whether it is fundamentally rooted in the practical concern that dairy bread may eventually be eaten with meat.

If the prohibition is punitive in nature, one could argue that bread baked accidentally with milk should remain permitted, since no intentional violation occurred. However, if the decree is based on the ongoing concern of confusion and accidental mixing, then the bread would remain prohibited regardless of how the milk was added.

The accepted ruling appears to follow the more stringent approach: even when milk was added inadvertently, the bread remains prohibited (See *Pesakim Uteshuvot* 97:3).

CRACKERS AND SIMILAR PRODUCTS

Later authorities discuss whether this decree applies only to bread or also to other baked goods made from dough whose *berachah* is *Borei Minei Mezonot*. Although products such as bourekas and croissants warrant separate discussion, crackers present a particularly relevant case because they are commonly eaten with both meat and dairy foods.

Some *Poskim* adopt a stringent position regarding dairy crackers (*Pesakim Uteshuvot* 97:5). However, Yisroel Belsky maintained that crackers were never included in the original decree of Chazal, which was directed specifically toward bread and bread-like staples.

Based on Rav Belsky's ruling, OU Kosher certifies certain dairy crackers and labels them with an "OU-D" designation.

We will continue in the coming weeks by exploring additional details and applications of these *halachot*. ■

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@ Bet Knesset HaNassi,
24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia

9:15 AM

Holy Poetry

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler

10:20AM

Contemporary Issues in Halacha
& Hashkafa **Rabbi Anthony Manning**

11:25 AM

Mussar and Self Improvement:
A study of Rav Kook's sefer
Midot HaRayah

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

12:30 PM

Jews in the Middle Ages:
External Threats and Internal
Developments **Dr. Deborah Polster**

*The schedule is subject to change



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Rabbi Sam Shor



1:45AM Why Choose a Nation, and Why Choose Us?
Rabbi Jesse Horn



2:45AM Halachic Man:The Stories Rav Soloveitchik
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Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider



3:45AM After Mt. Sinai...Why Did We Blow it?
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4:45AM Megillat Rut
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Yom Yerushalayim: A City the World Cannot Ignore

In the Moreh Nevuchim (3:45), the Rambam addresses the striking absence of Yerushalayim from the Torah. Though Tanach later overflows with references to the city, the Torah itself never names it explicitly, even when describing visits to it. The Rambam explains that this omission is deliberate. Had the Torah clearly identified the site of the Mikdash and the resting place of the Shechinah, it would have drawn the attention and hostility of surrounding nations, who might have seized or desecrated it. The city would have been engulfed in violence.

Evidently, not every element of this plan, as described by the Rambam, has unfolded as envisioned. From as early as 500 BCE, Yerushalayim has stood at the center of relentless struggle, fought over, claimed, and reclaimed across generations. That struggle has not faded. To this day, we continue to grapple with asserting a fully recognized and internationally accepted Jewish sovereignty over our city.

Though the name Yerushalayim does not appear explicitly in the Torah, each of our Avot encountered this mountain. Avraham's original journey to the Akeidah already traces the future path and trajectory of our city.

A MORAL CITY

In truth, Avraham had already visited

Yerushalayim long before the Akeidah. After defeating the four tyrants who had imposed a reign of terror across the region, Avraham arrives at the city then known as Shalem. There he encounters a mysterious religious figure, Malki Tzedek, a priest-king who presides over the city.

Something about this place stands apart. Unlike Sedom, already marked by corruption, unlike the culture of Egypt which seizes women from their husbands, and unlike the empires of the four kings who ruled with brute force, this city carries a different tone. They offer bread and wine to a war-weary Avraham and extend hospitality and shelter as he recovers.

This behavior is not incidental. The city is called Shalem, suggesting a human striving toward moral wholeness, guided by a religiously attuned leader who seeks to shape a city worthy of that name.

It is also not incidental that the first moral city in Sefer Bereishit emerges on this mountain of Hashem. There is an instinctive recognition of a divine moral presence, and an attempt to shape human life in that image. Chazal identify this figure as Shem, the son of Noach who had already grasped a form of monotheism even before Avraham's discovery.

WITHOUT TRANSCENDENCE

This encounter between Avraham and Malki Tzedek shows what had already been achieved. It also shows what still remained beyond reach and begins to point toward what Avraham himself would later introduce. They had built a moral city and were striving for ethical refinement. Yet their vision of *shleimut* was limited. They could not grasp that full religious perfection or completion cannot be achieved on human terms, through human logic or moral intuition alone.

Religious perfection requires transcendence, an encounter with the Divine “Other,” a presence that does not conform to human categories. That encounter arrives in Parashat Vayeira, when Avraham is summoned up the mountain to meet Hashem on His terms, beyond human comprehension and beyond moral instinct, to perform a command that defies understanding.

HOSPITALITY, NOT SACRIFICE

This is why the Torah spotlights the bread and wine. Rashi comments that this gesture foreshadows the *korbanot* that Avraham’s descendants will one day bring upon this mountain, particularly the *menachot*, composed of flour and wine. There is a quiet contrast embedded in this moment. Malki Tzedek does not offer these items as a sacrifice. The bread and wine remain gestures of hospitality and expressions of human courtesy. They are noble gestures, but they remain within the human sphere. One day, Avraham and his children will take these same materials and place them upon a *mizbe’ach*, redirecting them toward a Higher Being and transforming them into a *korban*. The same bread and wine will be lifted from the human sphere of courtesy into the divine

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realm of *avodah*. From morality to divine encounter.

The meeting between Avraham and Malki Tzedek becomes a quiet transfer, a passing of the baton. Malki Tzedek and his community introduced moral aspiration into a violent and fractured world. But transcendence had not yet entered the picture. Avraham, by returning to this mountain for the Akeidah, acknowledges and absorbs what they achieved, yet recognizes that something deeper still lies beyond it.

SEEN, BUT NOT SEEING

At the Akeidah, Avraham hears the mountain named as the site where Hashem “sees,” or *behar Hashem yera’eh*. It is not a place where human beings come to see or comprehend Hashem. That remains beyond reach. Hashem cannot be grasped, and His commands, as the Akeidah so sharply illustrates, do not submit to the limits of the human mind. This is not a mountain we ascend to see Hashem, but to be seen by Him. It is not Shalem but Year’eh.

Eventually, the city carries both original names, preserving the achievement of Malki Tzedek alongside Avraham’s breakthrough. It is formed from the joining of Shalem and Yir’eh, becoming Yerushalayim.

For generations, we retraced Avraham’s steps, ascending to Yerushalayim three

times a year, not to behold Hashem but to stand before Him. *Shalosh pe'amim yera'eh kol zechurecha et pnei Hashem Elokecha*. We came without expecting to understand, without expecting to see, but ready to stand there before Hashem.

1967, BEYOND LOGIC

In 1967, we returned to this city in a manner that echoes the Akeidah- beyond calculation and beyond logic. In the weeks and months leading up to the war, fear dominated. The prospect of returning to Yerushalayim did not enter the imagination. It was a war for survival. A dark joke captured the mood: “the last one out should turn off the lights at Ben Gurion Airport.”

What followed defied expectation. In a sudden and astonishing turn, Hashem restored us to His city. The victory unfolded with a swiftness and scope unlike anything familiar in military history. Just as the natural world was formed in six days, so too, after thousands of years, the world of redemption took shape in six days. Not through the steady logic of history, but in a moment that stood beyond comprehension.

INTUITIVE ATTRACTION

The story of Malki Tzedek reveals a second dimension of Yerushalayim. Even without direct divine instruction or an explicit compass, humanity is drawn to the mountain upon which human history was launched. Hashem formed man from the earth of Har HaMoriah, and something within the human spirit recognizes that origin. People gravitate to this mountain and attempt to build upon it.

There is something subliminal about this site. Humanity senses it, even without the language to explain it. That was true then, and it has remained true across history. There is an intuition that this is where history begins and

where it will ultimately find its resolution. And for that reason, whenever Jews return to this place, it stirs the world. They recognize that when we return to Yerushalayim, history moves forward.

As we crossed the Yam Suf, far from Yerushalayim, there was already an awareness that our arrival there would unsettle the world. During the song of Az Yashir, we gave voice to that awareness: “The nations will hear and tremble; the inhabitants of the surrounding lands will be seized by fear; the leaders of Edom and Moav will panic; the residents of Canaan will melt away. And then we will be brought and planted upon the mountain of Hashem’s inheritance, the place He established as His dwelling, the sanctuary fashioned by His hands.”

When the people of Hashem return to Yerushalayim, the world reacts. History does not stand still. It begins to move forward in a visible way, and that movement unsettles. It stirred then, and it stirred again in 1967.

1948 VS. 1967

In 1948, the world did not respond in the same way. A fractured parcel of land was granted. In part, this reflected a world still burdened by the memory of the Holocaust and confronted by a Jewish refugee crisis. It was a necessary act, even a moral gesture, but it did not yet carry the weight of history shifting course.

1967 was different. The response was sharper and more charged. Some embraced it, and many religious non-Jews continue to support our presence with conviction. Others recoiled. This return signaled more than survival. It suggested that history itself was advancing, that Hashem’s presence was reentering the world in a more visible way.

In Shir HaShirim, the nations of the world

are described as the daughters of Yerushalayim. The Midrash teaches that in the future, every nation will stand in relation to Yerushalayim, as branches extending from a central city that reclaims its place at the heart of human experience, under the gaze of Hashem.

People sense, even if they cannot explain it, that Yerushalayim will one day stand at the center of history. That is why events in and around the city draw the attention of the entire world. Not everyone can articulate it. Malki Tzedek himself could not fully give it language. But the intuition remains. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: mtaraginbooks.com.



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SHMUEL I: 20: 18-42 MACHAR CHODESH

This Shabbat we read a special Haftorah titled Machar Chodesh, *tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh* as Sunday is the first day of Rosh Chodesh Sivan. The directive to read this portion on the day before Rosh Chodesh is mentioned in the Talmud (Megilah 31a), suggesting a deep-rooted practice rather than a custom. While the words machar chodesh, *tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh*, are in the opening verses of the Haftorah, the message of the haftorah itself does not seem in any obvious way related to erev Rosh Chodesh. The story unfolds with the description of the strained dynamic between Shaul and David and the deep friendship of Yonatan and David.

When one faces an upcoming month, there are mixed feelings. How do we garner this new opportunity, a new beginning? We bring into our new month the

ups and downs of the last month, our accomplishments and also our failings. Once the month starts, we may feel that it is too late to evaluate and reflect, to process and to plan. It is on the day before Rosh Chodesh that we are given the chance to utilize these tools and tap into our narratives to learn from our past to impact our future.

The challenges of the Shaul and David relationship highlight that life is complicated and complex while the loyalty of David and Yonason demonstrate that loyalty and friendship can serve as a buoy in difficult times. Each upcoming month gives us a new chance to forge forward, with the day before given to highlight this message. May we be able to fill this upcoming month of Sivan with meaningful moments of growth and achievement. ■



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TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

REBBETZIN ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI
DIRECTOR OF OU ISRAEL WOMEN'S DIVISION

Matan Torah: Transmitting the Mesorah Across Generations

Every year on Shavuot, we celebrate Matan Torah, the moment when Hashem gave the Torah to Am Yisrael and began the eternal chain of mesorah, the transmission of Torah from one generation to the next. This sacred transmission is the responsibility of each and every one of us.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explained that there are actually two different forms of mesorah. In his tribute to the Rebbetzin of Talne, he discusses the verse, *שמע בני מוסר* “*Hear, my child, the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the Torah of your mother.*” Rav Soloveitchik explains that “מוסר אביך” refers to the transmission of Halachic knowledge and discipline. But then there is “תורת אבך”. *Torat Imecha* is the transmission of the feeling of Judaism. It is the warmth of Shabbat, the excitement before Yom Tov, the sound of Zemirot floating through the house on Friday night, and the feeling that Torah is not only something we do, but something we love.

Parents need to teach their children not only how to observe Judaism, but how to experience it. And this role extends far beyond parents alone. It belongs to grandparents, teachers, relatives, mentors, and every

person who helps shape the emotional and spiritual atmosphere surrounding the next generation. Shavuot reminds us that transmitting Torah is not only about teaching information. It is about creating connection.

Children absorb far more from the atmosphere than from lectures. We often think of Chinuch as the formal moments: teaching a child to say a bracha, reviewing Halachot, or correcting behavior. But some of the deepest messages children absorb happen quietly and unintentionally. They notice how we react when preparing for Shabbat. They hear the tone in our voice when we speak about Mitzvot. They observe whether Torah feels precious to us or burdensome. They watch whether davening is something we rush through or something we value.

Rebbetzin Slovie Jungreis-Wolff writes that children are like “sponges.” They absorb every interaction, every conversation, every reaction. A child who sees a parent speaking honestly learns to be honest. A child who watches a parent treat Mitzvot with seriousness and joy, learns that Torah matters. Children are always asking one silent question: Does this make my parents happy? If Torah is constantly associated with pressure,

frustration, and exhaustion, children absorb that message. But if Torah fills a home with warmth, singing, laughter, and meaning, that becomes part of their emotional world forever.

This does not require perfection. It does not mean every Shabbat table needs to look picture-perfect or every Yom Tov needs elaborate decorations and creative projects. *Torat Imecha* is not about putting on a performance, it's about authenticity. Sometimes it is the smallest things that children remember most - a parent singing while cooking for Shabbat, excitement over buying flowers for Yom Tov, special family minhagim, or simply hearing "L'kavod Shabbat Kodesh" while setting the table. Those moments create emotional memories that stay with children long after specific lessons are forgotten.

At the same time, one of the greatest challenges of parenting is that it is often difficult to remember the significance of what we are doing. Parenting can feel buried beneath endless practical responsibilities—laundry, dishes, carpools, bedtime routines, and exhaustion. It is easy to become so overwhelmed by the details that we lose sight of the bigger picture. But parenting is one of the holiest opportunities a person can have. There is a beautiful Tefillah about raising children that ends with the words:

“ושנדע מהי התכלית העצומה, הטמונה בחינוך בנים לתורה והיותם חוליה קדושה בשרשרת הדורות”
“*May we recognize the tremendous purpose hidden within educating children towards Torah and helping them become a holy link in the chain of generations.*”

So much of parenting feels repetitive and unnoticed. Yet every small interaction helps shape another human being and another link in the mesorah of Klal Yisrael. And perhaps

this is one of the deepest lessons of Shavuot itself. The Torah was not only given in a desert thousands of years ago. It must be given over again in every generation, in every home. The survival of Torah depends not only on the schools we send our children to, but on the atmosphere they grow up breathing every day. A child who grows up in a home where Torah is alive absorbs something powerful that cannot easily be taught in a classroom. In such a home, Mitzvot are treated with love, parents continue learning and growing, and Shabbat feels beautiful and meaningful.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe writes that the strongest tool in chinuch is the loving bond between parent and child. Values can only take root when they are planted in an environment of love. Children need not only guidance and discipline, but warmth, affection, attention, and connection. When children feel deeply loved, they become far more open to receiving the values their parents hope to transmit.

Ultimately, *Torat Imecha* is about much more than parenting techniques. It is about creating an emotional world in which Torah feels precious. As we celebrate Shavuot and recommit ourselves to Torah, perhaps we should ask not only what we are teaching our children, but what feeling we are giving over to them. Are they experiencing Torah as a source of joy? Do they see that Mitzvot matter to us? Do they feel warmth, love, and meaning in the Judaism of our homes? Because long after children forget specific lectures or rules, they will remember how Torah felt. And that emotional connection often becomes the strongest link in the chain of Mesorah.

Please note: This parenting series has now come to a close. I look forward to restarting the “Towards Meaningful Tefilla” series in my next column. ■

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(Rashi on Shemot 22:21)

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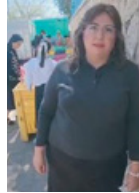
Who do you turn away?

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Rav Kook on
Pirkei Avot 6:10

“The Holy One, Blessed is He, acquired for Himself five acquisitions in His World... The *Beit Hamikdash* is one acquisition...”
(*Avot* 6:10)

Pirkei Avot, in its penultimate teaching, lists five items that the Holy One “acquired for Himself.” The meaning of “acquire” in this context connotes the idea that these items comprise the essence of creation, leading to the revelation of God’s glory in the world. The concept of “acquisition” indicates the importance of these items to God, just as a person acquires something that is meaningful to him. “Acquisition” has an additional connotation as well. When a person acquires something, he develops a great attachment to it. (See Rav Lau on *Pikei Avot*, vol. 3, p.1070)

Regarding this unique bond of Hashem with the Beit HaMikdash, the Mishnah quotes as a proof-text a verse from *Tehillim*: “He brought them to His holy boundary, this mountain that His right hand acquired” (*Tehillim* 78:54).

Without a doubt, Rav Kook’s exquisite vision of the Almighty bringing his people to the holy borders of Israel in the twentieth century was seen as a profoundly significant step towards bringing the ultimate redemption. Rav Kook’s intense longing for the rebuilding of the Beit

Hamikdash is evident in his writings and can be gleaned from numerous anecdotes that have been lovingly passed down about his life.

In this vein, Rav Kook’s eminent student, Rav Moshe Zvi Neriyah, shared the following touching anecdote. When Rav Kook arrived in Jerusalem for the first time in his life he went to visit his father-in-law, the famed Rav Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim known as the *Aderet*. The Temple Mount could be seen through a window in his home. Rav Kook peered through the window, and he was thoroughly shaken by the site; his heart shattered by sorrow and pain, seeing the sacred space bereft of the holy Beit Hamikdash. Rav Kook took leave of his father-in-law and stepped outside with a friend who was accompanying him and said: “I am amazed that the *Aderet*, such a sensitive man, can bear to see the Temple Mount in ruins every day.” (Celebration of the Soul, Neriyah, p. 259)

Already as a young man Rav Kook expressed a deep yearning for the Beit Hamikdash by observing the custom of *Tikkun Chatzot*, rising at midnight and mourning the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Rav Kook’s childhood friend Avrahan Sho’ar described how they would recite *Tikkun Chatzot* together during the Three Weeks: “Every night at midnight,

Avraham Yitzchak would close the Talmud. We would descend from the *bimah*, where we learned at night, and stand near the large furnace, remove our shoes, and sit on the floor to recite *Tikkun Chatzot* - two small boys weeping over the destruction.

“After completing *Tikkun Chatzot*, we recited Psalms in a sorrowful voice. He selected the chapters that recount Israel’s misfortunes, lament the destruction, and speak of consolation for Zion and Israel. For me, he translated the most appropriate verses into Yiddish. He possessed an uncommon love for Eretz Yisrael and a longing for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash and the coming of the Mashiach.

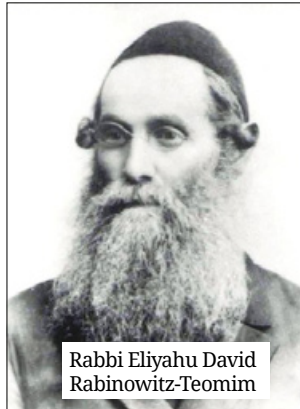
“I once asked him in my childish naivete, ‘Why do you weep so intensely during the reciting of *Tikkun Chatzot*? I also love Eretz Yisrael and my soul, too, yearns to immigrate to the precious Land.’ His answer, spoken with natural innocence, started me into silence. ‘You are not Kohen, I am Kohen!’ (Ibid., p.251)

THE CHAFETZ CHAIM AND RAV KOOK’S SHARED YEARNING

The Chafetz Chaim and Rav Kook were both *kohanim*. Both of them felt the profound honor and weight of their unique lineage and their intimate connection to the priesthood and the *avodah* in the Beit Hamikdash. The Chafetz Chaim later in life actually assembled *kohanim* who were Torah scholars to intensively study the laws of the Beit Hamikdash in the Mishnaic order of *Kodashim*. When Rav Kook was a young man supported by his father-in-law in Ponevez, the Chafetz Chaim

met with him and invited him to join this special cadre of *kohanim* with the intent of being prepared to engage in the *avodat Hamikdash* which would hopefully be soon rebuilt.

The Chafetz Chaim later requested Rav Kook to curtail his studies in this area in order



Rabbi Eliyahu David
Rabinowitz-Teomim

to enter the rabbinate and put to use his enormous talents to be a leader of *Klal Yisrael*. Rav Kook followed the saintly sage’s advice and assumed his first position in the rabbinate in Zoiemel. However, the sacrificial laws remained a central focus of Rav Kook’s studies, as he writes in the essay printed at the beginning of his responsum collection, *Mishpat Kohen*. Not only did he study the sacrificial

laws in depth, he also encouraged his best students to follow suit. (Ibid., pp. 264-265)

AN AMAZING APPROBATION FOR THE CHAFETZ CHAIM

The Chafetz Chaim authored a volume in which he compiled the sacrificial laws in a structured order of the sacrifices entitled *Likutei Halachot*. He sent a copy of the manuscript to the Aderet, Rav Eliyahu David Rabinovitz-Teomim (1843-1905) asking that he write a *haskama* (a letter of approbation) which he would publish with the book. The Aderet was ill of health at the time he received this request from the saintly Chafetz Chaim so he turned to his eminent son-in-law, Rav Kook, and asked him to write the text on his behalf. Rav Kook wrote the approbation and the Aderet signed his name to it. The content of the letter speaks of the importance of mastering the laws concerning the service in the Beit Hamikdash and the importance of the Chafetz Chaim’s work at this auspicious time.

The Aderet made one edit in the *haskama*. He stated that he could not take credit for an insight which was suggested by Rav Kook himself. He therefore added to the *haskama* that the following idea came directly from Rav Kook:

The Talmud (Menachot 110a) says that the *Talmidei Chachamim* who engage in the study of the Temple service, it is as if the Temple was built in their day. Rav Kook asked, why does the Talmud emphasize that the learning of *Talmidei Chachamim* has a special impact? Is the same not true for any Jew who studies the topic of the Temple service? Rav Kook answered that the Talmud emphasizes *talmidei chachamim* because of their unique role as decisors of Jewish law. They study the law not merely theoretically but with practical implications in mind. It is for this reason that their study of the laws of the Temple have singular importance. In their efforts to determine the implementation of the law, they represent the exalted Jew's faith who sincerely anticipates the Temple's restoration.

This is a lesson as to how every Jew must anticipate the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash - with a palpable sense of earnest longing and deep yearning. (*Sichot Ha'Reiyah*, Neriya, pp. 123-124) (This *haskama* is the first that appears in the sefer, *Haskamot HaReiyah*, Jerusalem 2017). ■



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Lending Money Without Witnesses

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: I learned that it is forbidden to lend money without witnesses. Yet, many *shomrei mitzvot* do so. How can this be, and how should I act?

Answer: Rav Yehuda (Bava Metzia 75b) forbids lending money without witnesses, as a violation of *lifnei iver*, causing the borrower to sin if he denies owing the money. Reish Lakish says that the lender brings curse upon himself, as people may suspect him of fabricating the loan. The Rambam (Malveh 2:7) and Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 70:1) cite the prohibition and curse and apply them (based on a story in the *gemara*) even to a borrower who is a *talmid chacham*. They permit a loan only with witnesses, collateral, or, preferably, a contract. So, your understanding appears correct.

Your observation, that few good Jews are

careful about this prohibition, is also documented for hundreds of years by *Acharonim*, some of whom offer explanations, which they admit do not fit well with the Rambam/Shulchan Aruch. Following are some unlikely reasons for leniency compiled in Tzitz Eliezer (VII:47) and Yabia Omer (VII, CM 7):

1. Nowadays we know whom we can trust;
2. The *gemara* discusses frequent lenders.
3. The *gemara* discusses a rich person, regarding whom borrowers may rationalize not paying.
4. It is permitted when the restriction impacts one's business;
5. The oath instituted after Rav Yehuda's time for one who denies a loan, prevents lying.

However, what I believe is the most important reason for leniency is that it is rare for classical problem of *lifnei iver* to exist here. A basic rule of *lifnei iver* is that it does not apply if there a good chance one's counterpart will not sin as feared (Avoda Zara 15b). The *gemara* also says that people rarely simply deny borrowing money (Bava Metzia 3a; see Erech Shay to Shulchan Aruch ibid.). This helps explain the following opinions: 1. *Lifnei iver* applies here only on the level of *midat chasidut* (Ritva, Megilla 28a); 2. Reish Lakish holds there is only a curse (if the lender persists to claim after denial) and no *lifnei iver* (Pilpula Charifta to Bava Metzia 75b); 3. The *lifnei iver* element does not apply to people

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who are clearly honest (Bach, CM 70).

Even within the strict opinions, we find practical ideas to allow permission. The Rambam and Shulchan Aruch, without a known Talmudic source, allow lending based on collateral alone. The Maggid Mishneh says this solves the problem of not having witnesses. Since they do not state that the collateral must cover the entire loan principal, it follows that classical *poskim* suffice with a partial solution.

The case for leniency is bolstered by a factor that is probably more prevalent in recent times than in ancient ones. It is likely insulting to a borrower to require a loan contract for a moderate amount of money. If everyone followed the *gemara*, borrowers could hardly be insulted by the lender's requiring contracts or witnesses. However, since in practice, borrowers rarely ask for them and given the *mitzva* to lend money while maintaining the borrower's dignity (see Shemot 22:24), the mandates impinge on each other. (See Minchat Shlomo, I:35 regarding "collateral damage" from stringency on *lifnei iver*). On the other hand, it is difficult

to allow one to ignore a codified *halacha*. We therefore suggest plans to keep the *halacha* while maintaining dignity.

If one lends a small amount of money, have in mind that if the borrower forgets about it, to turn the money into a present or *tzedaka* (see Ketubot 67b regarding about loans becoming presents). If the loan is too large to be willing to waive, in our times, it is standard to naturally have documentation, i.e., checks and bank transfers. According to most approaches (see Yabia Omer *ibid.*), witnesses did not fully prevent the borrower from refusing to pay, but were used to jog his memory or make it difficult not to pay. Checks and bank transfers should suffice for this end, especially if one writes "loan" on the memo line, which is not insulting. ■

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PREPARE FOR SHAVUOT

The Mitzvah of Eruv Tavshilin

BACKGROUND

Since Shavuot falls on Friday this year, there is a mitzvah to perform *eiruv tavshilin* on Thursday (Erev Yom Tov). Although one is permitted to cook on Yom Tov using a pre-existing flame, preparing on Yom Tov for after Yom Tov is generally prohibited rabbinically due to *hachana* (preparing for a later time). Chazal therefore instituted *eiruv tavshilin* to be performed before Yom Tov, which permits preparing food on Friday Yom Tov for Shabbat. Let's explain a bit more how this works:

According to the Gemara (Pesachim 46b), cooking on Yom Tov (Friday) for Shabbat is fundamentally permitted on a biblical level for one of two reasons:

1. Shabbat and Yom Tov are considered one continuum of sanctity, and it is therefore permitted to cook on one for the other (Rashi's understanding of the Gemara).
2. Since unexpected guests may arrive on Yom Tov, any food cooked on Yom Tov could theoretically still be needed for Yom Tov itself.

Nevertheless, Chazal prohibited cooking on Yom Tov for Shabbat without an *eiruv tavshilin* for one of two reasons (Beitzah 15b):

1. One might use all of one's food for Yom Tov and neglect the needs of Shabbat. Chazal therefore instituted *eiruv tavshilin* before Yom Tov in order to begin and remember the preparations for Shabbat.

2. If cooking on Yom Tov for Shabbat were entirely unrestricted, one might mistakenly come to cook on Yom Tov for a weekday, which is prohibited by the Torah. *Eiruv tavshilin* therefore serves as a reminder that preparing on Yom Tov for another day is generally forbidden and is permitted here only because the preparations began before Yom Tov (see commentaries to the Gemara for other variations of these explanations).

WHAT DOES EIRUV TAVSHILIN PERMIT AND FOR WHOM

An *eiruv tavshilin* permits all forms of food preparation (*ochel nefesh*) allowed on Yom Tov to be performed for the sake of Shabbat as well. Thus, cooking, reheating food in a manner prohibited on Shabbat, sorting, grinding, lighting candles from a pre-existing flame, and washing dishes with hot water are all permitted for the needs of Shabbat. *Eiruv tavshilin* also permits activities done for Shabbat that do not involve *melachah*, such as cleaning or changing clothing (Piskei Teshuvot 527).

Even one who does not plan to cook on Yom Tov for Shabbat should perform an *eiruv tavshilin* if one will light Shabbat candles at home, although most *poskim* recommend doing so without a *beracha* (Shulchan Aruch [S.A.], O.C. 527:19; M.B. 527:55; R. Simcha Bunim Cohen, "The Laws of Yom Tov," p.256). Some Sephardic *poskim* rule that in this case

one should not make an *eiruv* at all (*Chazon Ovadia* [C.O.], *Yom Tov, Eiruv Tavshilin* 2).

HOW IS IT DONE?

The *eiruv tavshilin* is performed using both a baked item and a cooked item. The baked item should preferably be bread or matzah, ideally whole. If neither is available, a *mezonot* item may also be used (*Sefer Eruv Tavshilin Ha'aruch*). The cooked item may be a hard-boiled egg, piece of fish, or piece of chicken, or another significant cooked food (S.A., O.C. 527:2; M.B. 527:8). Each item should be at least a *k'zayit* (approximately 28 cc) (S.A., O.C. 527:3). Ashkenazim preferably use a baked item that is at least a *k'beitzah* (approximately 55 cc) (*Rema*, O.C. 527:3). Any baked or cooked item may be used, including food purchased from a store, although the most ideal practice is to use food prepared specifically for the mitzvah of *eiruv tavshilin* (M.B.).

The *eiruv tavshilin* should be performed at some point on Thursday, before Yom Tov begins. Hold these items in one's right hand and recite the following *berachah*:

בְּרִינָה אֲתָהּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ
בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל מִצְוֹת עֵרֹב,

Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with his mitzvot and commanded us concerning the mitzvah of the *eruv*.

This is followed by a declaration:

“בעירוב זה יהיה מותר לנו לאפות ולבשל ולהדליק
נר ולעשות את כל צרכנו מיום טוב לשבת”

It can also be recited in English: “With this *eruv*, it will be permitted to us to bake, cook, light a flame, and do everything necessary on Yom Tov for the sake of Shabbat” (S.A. and *Rema*, O.C. 527:12). One should understand the declaration in whatever language it is recited.

The foods used for the *eiruv tavshilin* should be set aside carefully so that they will not spoil

or be eaten before Shabbat (S.A., O.C. 527:15). It is customary to use the bread or matzah of the *eiruv tavshilin* as the second loaf for *lechem mishneh* of the Friday night and Shabbat day meals, and then again for *seudah shlishit*, at which point it is eaten. Since one mitzvah was already performed with this bread, we seek to use it for additional mitzvot as well (M.B. 527:48). The cooked food should likewise be eaten during one of the Shabbat meals.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTERS

All cooking done on Friday for the sake of Shabbat should ideally be completed early enough in the day that the food could theoretically still be eaten before sunset. This is because, as mentioned earlier, according to one explanation in the Gemara, cooking on Yom Tov for Shabbat is permitted only when the food could potentially still be used for Yom Tov itself before the end of the day (M.B. 527:3; *Bi'ur Halachah* 527:1).

A family living together is included in the *eiruv tavshilin* performed by one member of the household (M.B. 527:56). According to many poskim, guests staying in the host's home, such as friends or married children, who wish to cook or light candles are likewise automatically included in the host's *eiruv tavshilin* (*Piskei Teshuvot* 527:17; *R. Simcha Bunim Cohen, The Laws of Yom Tov*, p.286). Some have the custom that the other family members or guests are present when the *eiruv* is performed, but this is not required (*Aruch Hashulchan* 527:22).

Some poskim are stringent and maintain that guests are not automatically included unless the host explicitly acquires the *eiruv tavshilin* on their behalf. This may be done by having the guests, or another non-household member acting on their behalf, lift the *eiruv* at least a handbreadth (approximately 8-10 cm)

before handing it to the host, who then recites the *berachah* and declaration for everyone included (Chut Shani, p. 154).

It is preferable that someone from the household perform the *eiruv tavshilin* (Kaf Hachaim 527:57). However, in cases where this is difficult for whatever reason, it is permitted to appoint someone else, such as a neighbor, to come to the house and perform the *eiruv tavshilin* using the food of the person for whom it is being performed (Bi'ur Halacha 527:12; Piskei Teshuvot 527:14).

One who will be staying in a hotel over Yom Tov should perform *eiruv tavshilin* since Shabbat candles will need to be lit, but a *berachah* should not be recited, as discussed above (C.O., p.276; Piskei Teshuvot 527:17).

COMMON EIRUV TAVSHILIN PROBLEMS

If one performed *eiruv tavshilin* using only a cooked item and no baked item, the *eiruv* is still valid (Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 527:2). However, an *eiruv tavshilin* made without a cooked item is invalid.

If one forgot to perform *eiruv tavshilin* entirely, one may rely after the fact on the *eiruv tavshilin* performed by the local rabbi, who customarily does so while explicitly intending to include anyone who forgot to perform an *eiruv tavshilin* themselves (S.A., O.C. 527:7). According to many poskim, the same applies if the *eiruv tavshilin* was accidentally lost or eaten before Shabbat (*ibid.*), or even if one recited the *berachah* but forgot to recite the declaration afterward. However, many poskim maintain that one may not intentionally neglect to perform *eiruv tavshilin* and rely on the rabbi's *eiruv* (*ibid.*; M.B. 527:26).

If one remembers before sunset that one did not perform *eiruv tavshilin* but has already left home, one may ask a family member at home to perform it instead. If that is not possible, some

poskim allow one to recite the *berachah* and declaration remotely while having a specific baked and cooked item in mind (Tiferet Yisrael, Beitza 2:1), whereas others maintain that this is not effective (Maharsham 2:36). If necessary, one may rely on the lenient opinion (Maor HaShabbat, vol.2; "The Laws of Yom Tov," p.285)

EATING THE YOM TOV MEAL ON FRIDAY

One may not generally eat an especially large meal on Friday in order to maintain an appetite for the Shabbat meal (Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 249:2). However, this restriction does not apply to a *seudat mitzvah*, which certainly includes the Yom Tov meal.

Nevertheless, one should ideally begin the meal before the tenth halachic hour of the day (see Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 249:3; Rema 529:1; Mishnah Berurah 529:5-8 and Bi'ur Halachah).

Some poskim recommend beginning even before *chatzot*, based on discussions regarding other Friday *seudot mitzvah*. Others, however, do not require this, and in practice this is not always feasible on Shavuot, particularly for those who remain awake learning throughout the night and sleep later in the morning (see Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 249:3; Shulchan Aruch HaRav 249:7; Mishnah Berurah 249:13 and Sha'ar Hatziun 249:17; Dirshu edition of the Mishnah Berurah to O.C. 249). ■

Rabbi Eli Ozarowski serves as editor of the *Tzurba M' Rabanan* English Series, an innovative, systematic learning program covering hundreds of major topics in the Shulchan Aruch from Tanach through modern-day halachic application. He is also the author of the OU's Torat Imecha Halacha Series. Rabbi Ozarowski received semicha from the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and holds an M.A. from the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration. He lives in Mitzpeh Yericho with his wife, Zemira, who serves as Director of Women's Programming at OU Israel, together with their nine children.



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Possibilities in Parenthood

We recently had the pleasure of hosting two remarkable medical professionals working in the field of uterine transplants. To appreciate the importance of their work, a bit of background is helpful.

In rare cases, a woman is born without a uterus. One such condition is Mayer-Rokitansky-Küster-Hauser syndrome (MRKH), often simply called Rokitansky syndrome. Women with this condition are born without a functioning uterus. Others may lose their uterus, or its ability to carry a pregnancy, later in life due to illness, surgery, or medical complications.

For decades, these women faced only two paths to parenthood: adoption or the use of a gestational carrier, previously known as a surrogate. For many, neither option fully addressed the deep desire to experience pregnancy firsthand.

Both options come with significant emotional and halachic considerations. Adoption, for example, has become increasingly complex. Today, there are far fewer infants available for adoption than in the past, due in part to the increased prevalence of terminating unwanted pregnancies. This is particularly noticeable when it comes to Jewish infants. As a result, many couples turn to international adoption, which can involve political, legal and social challenges. In addition, the child may require conversion, adding another layer of halachic

complexity. While many families have built beautiful lives through adoption, it is not the path every couple chooses, especially given the uncertainties and long timelines often involved.

Surrogacy, too, presents its own challenges. It is often a complicated and costly process, and it introduces another woman into an intimate aspect of family life. The gestational carrier is not merely an “incubator,” but a person with her own emotions and perspectives. There have even been highly publicized cases in which carriers sought to keep the baby, leading to long and complex legal disputes over parenthood. Although detailed contracts are now standard practice to prevent such situations, they can make the relationship feel overly legalistic, sometimes at the expense of empathy and mutual respect.

From a halachic standpoint, surrogacy raises additional questions, particularly around how motherhood is defined when one woman provides the genetic material and another carries the pregnancy. These questions influence who may serve as a gestational carrier and whether conversion is required after birth.

While many couples have successfully and positively built families through surrogacy, it is not an option for everyone, and not all halachic authorities permit it.

This brings us to a new and developing possibility; uterine transplantation.

More on this next time. ■

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Collaboration and Conflict: David and Yoav

One of the personalities we have seen evolve both as an individual and in his relationship to David HaMelech is that of Yoav ben Zruyah, David's nephew and the general of his army. The Talmud teaches that if not for the merit of David's Torah learning, Yoav would not have been successful in battle, and if not for Yoav's military prowess, David would not have been free to engage in the study of Torah.¹ The symbiotic relationship between these two leaders was a key factor in the success of David's kingdom.

The relationship between David and Yoav was far more nuanced than this text may lead us to believe. Beyond the inherent tension of navigating a personal connection and a sense of national duty, there lay a critical difference in their two personalities that led to conflict.

As the general of David's army, Yoav displayed leadership, initiative and strength. His skill as a military tactician is perhaps most clearly evidenced by his capture of Yerushalayim from the heretofore undefeated Yevusim. Yoav's loyalty to David is demonstrated in two instances in which he followed David's direct orders despite his own misgivings - the death of Uriah HaChiti and the carrying out of the census. Further

proof of Yoav's concern for David is his role in bringing Avshalom back to Yerushalayim when he sensed David's prolonged anguish over his absence. Nevertheless, we see the relationship between the two begin to fray in the early days of David's kingship, when Yoav killed Avner ben Ner, the general of Shaul who had crowned Ish Boshet as a rival king to David. After a rift with Ish Boshet, Avner had approached David and proposed an alliance. When Yoav became aware of the impending deal between David and Avner, he enacted a subterfuge and killed an unsuspecting Avner. Although Yoav's overt reason for killing Avner was that he suspected him of being a spy, the Navi reveals to us that his underlying motive was that Avner had killed Yoav's brother, Asahel. David unequivocally criticized Yoav's behavior and disassociated himself from Yoav in this endeavor, but did not dismiss him as general of the army.

The breach between David and Yoav widened at the conclusion of Avshalom's rebellion. Despite David's impassioned plea that his army deal gently with Avshalom, and the refusal of all David's supporters to violate David's request, Yoav killed Avshalom, placing the dignity and security of the kingdom above any personal feelings for his cousin or his

1. Sanhedrin 49a, Rashi and Maharsha ad loc.

uncle. The relationship between David and Yoav suffered a further blow when Yoav killed Amasa, the former general of Avshalom's army whom David had appointed as chief of his own army, replacing Yoav, after Avshalom's defeat. This killing chillingly echoes that of Avner ben Ner, unfolding in a similar subterfuge and couched as a legitimate execution.

The final blow to the relationship between David and Yoav was sustained when in the last days of David's kingdom, Yoav allied himself with Adoniyahu, who staged a rebellion against his father and sought to prevent the dynasty from being handed down to Shlomo. Following the suppression of this final rebellion and the coronation of Shlomo, David in his last instructions to Shlomo commanded him to deal wisely with Yoav, and not allow him to live out his life and die peacefully, as he is guilty of unjustly killing two righteous men, Avner and Amasa. David's symbiotic relationship with Yoav as described above precluded him from punishing Yoav directly, but he instructed Shlomo not to tolerate Yoav's duplicity.

In the final analysis, Yoav is remembered both for his righteousness and his perfidy. The text records that Yoav was deserving of capital punishment for having taken the lives of Avner and Amasa, generals of the army of Israel, for which crime there could be no peace in the kingdom of Israel until justice was served. Yoav's downfall lay in allowing his militancy to extend beyond the limits of his professional life and became personal. In stark contrast, David was successfully able to harmonize between his military might and his deep spiritual sensitivity.

The complex character of Yoav and his nuanced relationship with David foreshadow a long and ongoing history of uncomfortable

alliances between leaders of Israel who balance their personal and national identities and ideologies. We pray that this balance be carefully and honestly calibrated as a preface to the establishment of a peaceful kingdom and the building of the Beit HaMikdash. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi series**, which just began its fourth cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women's Initiative to register for additional content.

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PREPARE FOR SHAVUOT

Staying Up all Night: A Practical Guide

Many have the custom to stay up all night on Shavuot, engaged in the study of Torah. While considered meritorious and praiseworthy, staying awake all night creates a number of questions and poses some potential problems. Below is a practical guide for those staying up all night.

AL NETILAT YADAYIM

There is a dispute as to the very reason for the mitzvah of washing one's hands in the morning, and whether one who remains awake all night is obligated to wash his hands. Therefore, one should use the bathroom prior to davening, and then may recite the beracha of *Al Netilat Yadayim* and *Asher Yatzar*. Alternatively, one may touch a part of his body typically covered, and then recite the beracha before washing his hands. Sephardim wash their hands without a beracha.

TALLIT KATAN

If one is wearing his *Tallit Katan* all night,

he does not make a new beracha on it in the morning. Instead, the beracha he makes on his *Tallit Gadol* exempts the *Tallit Katan*. One who does not wear a *Tallit Gadol* may shake the *tzitzit* on his *Tallit Katan* and recite the beracha.

ELOKAI NESHAMAH & HAMA'AVIR SHEINAH

As it is unclear whether one who remains awake all night may recite *Elokai Neshamah* and *Hama'avir Sheinah*, it is preferable to have one who slept (minimally 30 minutes in a bed) recite these berachot for others, exempting them of their obligation. If there is no one present who slept, many authorities rule that these berachot may be recited by one who stayed up all night.

BIRKOT HATORAH

Here too, there is a dispute as to what generates the obligation of *Birkot HaTorah*, and if one who does not sleep is obligated to recite them in the morning. The common custom is to have one who slept recite these berachot for others, exempting them of their obligation. If there is no one who slept, many authorities rule that these berachot may be recited even by one who stayed up all night. Some suggest that he should instead have intent to fulfill his obligation in *Birkot HaTorah* while reciting *Ahavah Rabba/Ahavat Olam* prior to

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the Shema, and study some Torah or recite p'sukim immediately following the Amidah.

One who slept during the afternoon of Erev Shavuot, even though he remained awake Shavuot night, may recite *Birkot HaTorah* in the morning.

Wishing you a Chag Same'ach and a good Kabbalat HaTorah! ■

Shimshon HaKohen Nadel lives and teaches in Jerusalem, where he serves as mara d'atra of Har Nof's Kehilat Zichron Yosef and rosh kollel of the Sinai Kollel.

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How Much Should Family Background Matter in Dating?

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The question: Hi Aleeza, my candidate has a complicated family background, and I see that some people reject her because of it. I feel it's not fair to her - but I also understand why some are hesitant. Should family background affect the decision whether to date someone?

Aleeza answers:

∨A complicated background is not a character flaw. It's a life circumstance. And sometimes, it's the very thing that builds resilience, depth, empathy, and strength.

However, we need to approach this from a mature perspective: people aren't wrong for thinking about family. Marriage isn't just two individuals, it's two systems coming together. Culture, communication style, emotional

health, expectations and all of that is shaped by family.

It's not about her situation being unfair, her situation was divinely decreed to be so. What it is about, is her being aware of her situation and gracefully navigating through it.

There's a big difference between someone who comes from complexity and has done the work, and someone who is still living reactively inside it.

Someone's background is not what disqualifies them from a match. It's more about who they are now and who they have become. Self-awareness and self growth matters is key.

How does she speak about her story? Can she speak about her family without only blame or denial? Has she built stability, boundaries, and emotional health independent of where she came from?

Those are the real indicators.

Now, on the other hand, if someone automatically rejects her without asking questions, that tells you something too. It may mean they are looking for simplicity, predictability, or a very specific type of family system. That's not cruelty. Perhaps it's all they can handle.

Family background is more of a conversation, and you'll have to personally speak to people so they know who she is and not only who she comes from.

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between people with perfect families. They're between people who are emotionally responsible. Who know their struggles. Who are committed to building something healthier than what they inherited.

While we do marry someone's past. We also marry their present character and their future direction.

So yes, family matters. But what matters more is who she is now and who she is continuously choosing to become.

And the right person won't be scared of her story, they'll be impressed by her growth and strength.

Blessings,
Aleeza ■

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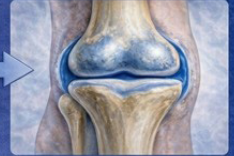
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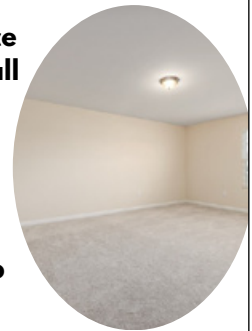


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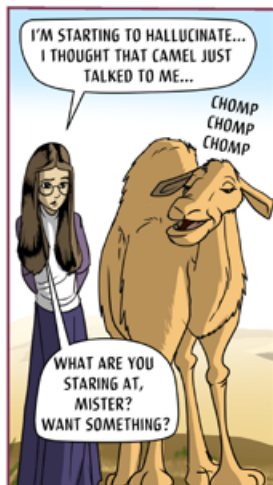


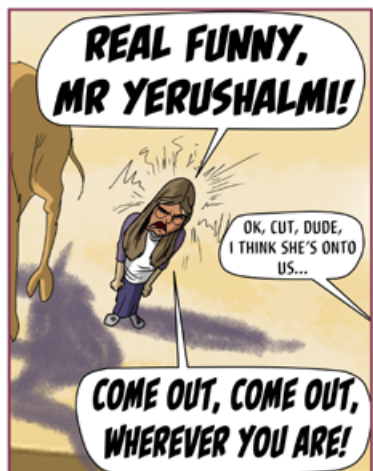
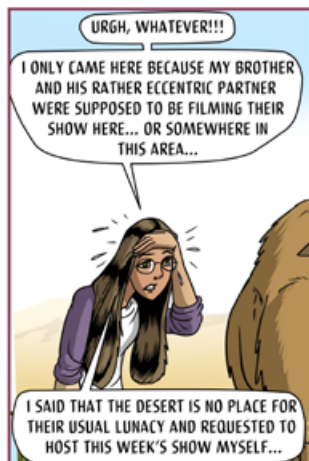
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Surprisingly at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah describes the encampment of Bnei Yisrael in the desert, where each tribe is assigned its own flag and position around the Mishkan. One striking question arises: Why did Hashem wait until the second year, after the Mishkan was built, to give each tribe its unique flag representing how it would travel and camp?

On one hand, a flag represents individuality and distinct identity. Each shevet had its own unique strengths, role, and spiritual mission. However, individuality also carries a risk: it can lead to comparison, competition, and ultimately division. If introduced too early,

the expression of tribal uniqueness could have emphasized separation rather than unity among the nation.

This is why the timing is so significant. Only after the Mishkan was established—a shared center of holiness and purpose—could the tribes safely express their individuality. The Mishkan created a central point of unity ensuring that despite their differences, all of Israel were directed toward the same goal: serving Hashem. When there is a common purpose, people are not pulled apart by competition; instead, they work together, each contributing their unique role to a greater whole. ■

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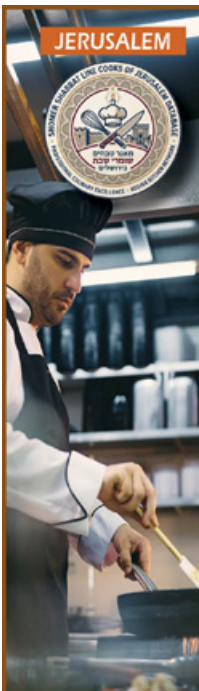


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