

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR-SHAVUOT • 2 SIVAN 5770 • MAY 15, 2010 • VOL. 17 NO. 30

PARSHA INSIGHTS

SHABBAT DESERT

“And they came to the desert of Sinai” (1:1)

The Shabbat before Shavuot contains a special power to prepare us for that momentous day. Shabbat was given to the Jewish People before the Torah was given at Sinai and is a preparation for its acceptance, as it says, *“And the people rested on the seventh day” (Shemot 16:30)*. From there they journeyed immediately to Mount Sinai. It was the power of that Shabbat that propelled them towards Sinai.

At Sinai itself the Torah tells us, *“And Yisrael encamped opposite the Mount.”* That encampment was like one man with one heart. What was the power that unified the Jewish People thus?

Shabbat.

A desert represents the nullification of everything; nothing exists in the desert – except the opportunity to serve G-d.

Each Shabbat there exists in each Jew this same “desert space” when we desist from all halachic

creative endeavor. By doing this we make ourselves like a desert — empty of all distractions and united in our service of G-d.

So just as the desert is a preparation in space for receiving the Torah, so Shabbat is like a desert in time that prepares us for receiving the Torah.

In the Pesach Haggada we say, *“And He gave us the Shabbat”* and only then do we say *“and He brought us close to Mount Sinai.”* We see from this that Shabbat is the preparation that brings us to Mount Sinai.

It is also for this reason that Brit Mila takes place on the eighth day after birth — so that the baby may ‘travel’ through Shabbat before entering the covenant of Mila, for it was at Sinai that we all entered together the covenant when we said as one, *“We will do*

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• Sources: Based on Sfat Emet

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of Bamidbar — “In the desert” — begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty — old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* and its furnishings and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the *levi'im*, whereby

the *levi'im* take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided into three main families, Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the *kohanim* — the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat carried the *menorah*, the table, the altar and the holy ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the *levi'im* prepare them for travel.

ISRAEL Forever

PROTECTING SHABBAT FROM FOREIGN DIGNITARIES

When UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon recently arrived in Israel for a visit he was not met at the airport by any member of the Israel Foreign Ministry staff as usually demanded by protocol. The reason was that he arrived on a Friday night and the Foreign Ministry has a rule that no member of its staff goes to the airport to meet visiting dignitaries who arrive on Shabbat.

In explaining this rule, Foreign Ministry Chief of Protocol Yitzchak Eldan, who himself is not observant, stated that in

a Jewish state outward observance of Shabbat must be upheld by all government officials.

The UN Chief showed an understanding of this policy, spent Saturday instead in the Palestinian Authority, and scheduled a meeting with Israeli officials after Shabbat was over.

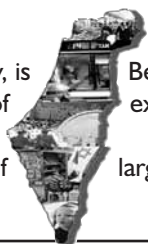
If outward observance of the Shabbat such as this would penetrate into general society, we will merit the Heavenly promise of Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

CARMIEL – HOUSE OF THE VINEYARD

In the heart of Galilee, next to the Akko-Tsefat highway, is this town whose population is composed mainly of immigrants from various countries. Its name is based on the ancient Jewish community of



Beit Kerem (House of the Vineyard), which once existed in that region.

Founded in 1964 it has developed into one of the largest immigrant centers in Israel.

Wishing our readers a happy and meaningful Shavuot

חג שבועות שמח

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an “ot” and a “degel”?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed “*techum Shabbat*” - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 *amot* on *Shabbat*?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon’s sons called “sons of Aharon and Moshe”?
9. Who was Nadav’s oldest son?
10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week’s Parsha?
11. Why did the *levi'im* receive *ma'aser rishon*?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *levi'im*?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of *levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *levi'im*?
18. The first-born males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five *shekalim*. Why five *shekalim*?
19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe’s flag was the color of that tribe’s stone in the breastplate of the *kohen gadol*.
4. 2:2 - An “ot” is a flag, i.e., a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A *degel* is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 *amot* from the *Ohel Mo'ed*. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the *Ohel Mo'ed* on *Shabbat*.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Mo'ed* departed and the *kohanim* sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it’s as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the *levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, they received tithes as “payment.”
12. 3:15, 40 - The *levi'im*, and the first-born of *B'nei Yisrael*.
13. 3:15 - Levi’s daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 – G-d.
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous.
17. 3:39 - Each *levi* served to redeem a first-born of the Jewish People. Since 300 *levi'im* were themselves first-born, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel’s firstborn, who was sold by his brothers for five *shekalim* (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The *kohanim*.

- The miracle of Chananya, Mishael and Azariah in the fiery furnace and the aftermath
- The fiery fate of two false prophets
- The failed messiah
- The destruction of Sancheriv's army
- The Torah dissemination of King Chizkiyahu
- The rescue of King David by Avishai
- The bitter fate of Sancheriv
- Chiziyahu's recovery and the letter sent to him
- Nebuzraden in Yerushalayim and the *Beit Hamikdash*
- The righteous descendants of evil people
- Signs of messianic era
- Comparison of the *tzaddik* and the *ba'al teshuva*
- The importance of learning and teaching Torah

THE SECRET WEAPON

When the Babylonian general Nebuzraden succeeded in destroying the *Beit Hamikdash* he felt very proud of himself. A Heavenly voice then put him in his place with this announcement:

"You have merely slain a dead people;

You have merely burned a consumed Sanctuary;

You have merely grinded a ground flour."

Our commentaries point out that the holiness of the *Beit Hamikdash* was of such supernatural intensity that it was

beyond the power of humans to destroy it. The sins of the Jewish people, however, robbed it of this spiritual power and made it vulnerable to enemy destruction.

The mention of this destruction together with the catastrophe that befell the people as well indicates that Jews as well are beyond the power of humans to harm them unless they lose their spiritual armor through their sins.

What still needs explanation is the third allusion to ground flour. Perhaps this is a reference to the once powerful kingdom of Israel whose strength was sapped by the sinful ways of its leaders.

• *Sanhedrin 96b*

What the SAGES Say

"Whoever teaches Torah to another's child is considered as if he created him."

• *Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish - Sanhedrin 99b*

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לע"נ

הרה"ח ר' דוד בן הרה"ח ר' אהרן זצ"ל

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

FUTURE IN THE TORAH

From: Benny

Dear Rabbi,

If Moses received the Torah at Mount Sinai seven weeks after the Jews left Egypt, how does the Torah describe events that took place long after that during the forty years that the Jews wandered in the wilderness?

Dear Benny,

This is a very good question and one which the Sages of the Talmud themselves addressed and answered.

When we say that Moses received the entire Torah at Sinai, it doesn't mean that he wrote it there. Rather the understanding is as follows:

G-d revealed to Moses at Sinai as much as was humanly possible to understand about the Torah. This included understanding of the nature of G-d, Creation and its purpose, the spiritual realm and the soul, the commandments and their details, ethical teachings, and much, much more. In short, G-d taught Moses the entire body of knowledge that we refer to generally as "Torah" which is much larger than the actual words of what we refer to as the Five Books of Moses. But Moses did not write this down (we find no mention of his having prepared or having brought up the necessarily materials); rather G-d "downloaded" this vast body of knowledge called Torah into Moses during his forty days on the Mount.

Now G-d may have revealed to Moses at Sinai certain events in the future, but even without Moses' writing them down this is problematic. For one, if Moses was told of future events, he would have warned the Jews against making future mistakes such as serving the golden calf. Lest we suggest he knew but didn't want to interfere with G-d's will, that would mean he knowingly went through the motions of his own mistake thereby barring his entry into the Land of Israel. This seems highly unlikely and G-d would not have tampered with free will in this way. Also, the actual events as recorded in the Torah are described in past tense.

So if G-d didn't reveal these future events to Moses, or at least Moses didn't write them at Sinai, the real question is, "Who wrote the Written Torah and when?"

According to one opinion in the Talmud (Gittin 60a), regarding the historical information that G-d revealed to Moses

at Sinai, He taught him from Creation until that time. When Moses came down from the Mount, he wrote that in what became the books of Genesis and Exodus. From then on, Moses wrote the rest of the Five Books piecemeal — as events occurred and as teachings were revealed — in wording dictated by G-d. According to another opinion, G-d dictated the Five Books to Moses at the end of the fortieth year in the wilderness. In the view of both opinions, whatever G-d revealed to Moses at Sinai but was not written remained as the Oral tradition.

This, therefore, is the answer to your question. G-d revealed to Moses at Sinai the entire body of knowledge called Torah, which did not necessarily include foresight of what would become all historical events. Parts of this body of knowledge, together with the historical events as they occurred, were written later by Moses as commanded by G-d.

One interesting exception to this, to which your question also applies, is regarding the description of Moses' death in the last eight verses of the Torah. If Moses recorded events as they occurred, how did he write, "And Moses died"? If he was alive to write, he didn't die; and if he died, how did he write?

The Sages also discuss this question in the Talmud (Menachot 30a). According to one opinion, until that point, Moses wrote; from here on, Joshua wrote. This fits your premise that Moses did not write about future events. However, another opinion posits that given that Moses wrote the entire Torah, we must explain that until that point Moses wrote [normally]; from here on Moses wrote in tears. This explanation seems to mean that Moses wrote the entire Torah, including the description of his future death, which he wrote while crying.

Parenthetically, a modern-day commentary found this latter explanation difficult. For one, Moses' writing in the Torah that he died while still alive would make the Torah false, G-d forbid. Furthermore, the truth and power of the Torah are such that if he wrote, "And Moses died", he would, in fact, have died. For these reasons, this commentary explains the opinion "from here on Moses wrote in tears" to mean that unlike the rest of the Torah which Moses wrote in ink, regarding the final passages in which G-d revealed to Moses his death, Moses dipped his quill in puddles of his tears and stenciled the concluding verses on the parchment with his teardrops. After his death, Joshua then filled in the stenciled verses with ink. This way, Moses wrote the entire Torah in a way which wouldn't cause his death, while his mission was completed by Joshua who filled in the void of his death.

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HEARING AND DOING

BY RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

“Na’aseh V’Nishma!” “We will do and we will hear!” This was the response of our ancestors to the offer made by G-d of His Torah. Our celebration of the Festival of Shavuot focuses on the precious gift we received at Sinai as a result of that response.

The simple meaning of this response was that we were different from the other nations who first asked to hear what the Torah demanded of them and turned down the offer as a result. The Jewish People, however, declared that they had such faith that G-d would only require of them what was for their ultimate benefit that they were prepared to accept the Torah before even hearing what those requirements were.

There is, however, another perspective to the commitment made at Sinai, which is based on a Midrash that presents the following parable:

A king gave a servant two precious goblets to bring to his palace ahead of him and urged him to be very careful with them. As the servant was about to enter the palace he tripped over a calf lying in the way and one of the goblets fell and broke. Struck with fear as to what the king would say the servant stood in his place trembling in anticipation. When the

king approached him and asked why he was trembling the servant explained what had happened. To the servant’s surprise the king merely said: “If you have only one goblet left make sure to guard it even more carefully lest it too break.”

When Jews said, “We will do and we will hear”, they received two precious goblets – one of hearing the Divine wisdom of the Torah and another of doing what its *mitzvot* dictated. The collision with the golden calf weakened their ability to perform in accordance with the King’s commands. It then became imperative for them to carefully guard the surviving goblet representing their ability to connect with the King through hearing Him speak to them through the words of the Torah.

Those who have the good fortune to be involved in the *teshuvah* revolution of our generation have learned that the road to return begins with the study of Torah, which eventually leads to fulfillment of *mitzvot*. The wisdom and sanctity of Torah study strike a responsive chord in the soul of an alienated Jew. It may indeed be said that the formula for outreach today is based on the reverse of that original commitment and takes the form of “we will hear and we will do.”

WHAT’S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE PLAGUE OF PLAGIARISM

Question: I have been asked to deliver a talk at a community affair. In preparing my speech I came across a copy of a talk given by an eloquent speaker which I would like to use. May I present this material as my own or must I give credit to its source? What is the right thing to do?

Answer: There are several reasons for mentioning the source. First of all there is a moral responsibility for giving credit since plagiarism is really a subtle form of deceit. Secondly, you will

gain as much respect from your audience when you quote something worth hearing as if you were the originator.

Finally there is a very pragmatic reason for avoiding flagrant plagiarism. Joe Biden is only vice-president of the US today because a number of years ago he was dropped as a possible Democratic Party candidate for president after being caught plagiarizing a speech in the Senate.

So watch out because you may also get caught!

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

GOING THROUGH THE GATE

When the great rosh hayeshiva Hagaon Rav Aaron Leib Shteinman was about to board a flight to the US he was certain that he would encounter no difficulty upon passing through the metal detector at the airport. To his surprise the alarm did go off as he passed through.

Assuming that the machine had somehow malfunctioned, the security guard asked the rabbi to pass through once more. Although he was not carrying any metal the alarm sounded once again.

It then dawned on him that what was responsible for this was

the metal screws that had been placed in his leg when it was operated on because of a serious fracture.

Rav Shteinman then turned to those escorting him and pointed out the lesson to be learned.

“When a Jew arrives at the gates of Gan Eden after departing this world he may have full confidence of his merits in his lifetime gaining him easy entrance. But he may suddenly be surprised to hear the alarm go off signaling that he was not as perfect as he thought he was.”