

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR-SHAVUOT · 2 SIVAN 5773 - MAY 11, 2013 · VOL. 20 NO. 33

Why Was Six Scared of Seven?

BY RABBI REUVEN LAUFFER

In the Land of Israel the Festival of Succot lasts for a majestic eight days. The Festival of Pesach lasts for an almost-majestic seven days. And the Festival of Shavuot lasts for just one day. It seems a little paltry compared to the other two and yet the Festival of Shavuot represents the absolute foundation of Judaism – the day that the Holy Torah was given to the Jewish Nation.

Why would it be that this day which exemplifies everything that Judaism stands for be encapsulated in just one day? And why is it that Shavuot is a Festival that seems to be devoid of any real trappings? It's true that cheese-cake appears extensively on the Shavuot menu, but there is no obligation to eat it (what a relief for the lactose-intolerant and the cheese-cake intolerant!). Pesach and Succot, on the other hand, are chock-a-block full of symbolism with special activities and special foods.

In Jewish philosophy numbers are very significant. The Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Yehudah Loew, explains that the number seven represents the natural world. The number seven stems from the seven days of the creation and the seven days of the week. A number seven will always be connected to nature. The number eight, on the other hand, represents something that is beyond the natural world, something that belongs to the spiritual realms. With this in mind we can understand why Succot lasts eight days, since it's a time of intense spirituality culminating in Simchat Torah and our expression of love for G-d. But why would Pesach last for only seven days? Why is Pesach, the Festival of Freedom – the time that we commemorate all of the super-natural miracles that God wrought for His Chosen Nation – represented by the number seven? And, last of all, Shavuot, one of the holiest and spiritually transcendent days of the year, is just one day. Why?

Because Pesach does not finish when Pesach ends! The Festivals are given to us to draw closer to G-d and to join together with Him in such a way that we feel their influence throughout the entire year. Pesach is the Festival of

Freedom, but Pesach does not define for us what freedom means. Freedom from what? Freedom for what? Pesach is the beginning of a process that ends with Shavuot. Shavuot, the Giving of the Torah – the defining moment in Jewish history and theology. Of what use is freedom from slavery and subjugation if that freedom is not harnessed to aspirations and goals that will transform us into something better than we were? It transpires that Pesach really does have eight days in a sense. However, the eighth day – the culmination of everything that Pesach truly represents – is seven weeks later on Shavuot. Shavuot is the moment that we, the Jewish Nation, moved out of the physical realms and into the spiritual ones instead. By accepting the Torah on Sinai we declared our absolute allegiance to G-d. We took our oh-so-precious, new-found freedom from Egypt and slavery and we dedicated it to G-d. That is why there are no unique activities on Shavuot that set it apart from the other Festivals. On Shavuot we celebrate by learning G-d's Torah. What could be more Heavenly than that? We do not base the Festival around physical signs because to do so would be too “seven-like” and would detract us from the very essence of the day.

There is a famous children's joke, “Why was six scared of seven? Because seven eight (ate) nine”. The children think it's hilarious and the adults think that it's ridiculous.

And I think that without Shavuot we would really have to be scared of the number seven, scared of the tremendous power that physicality has in the world and how it overwhelms and consumes us so easily. But we don't remain in the realm of seven. From Pesach through Shavuot we push forward and metamorphose into the number eight, leaving the physicality behind as we soar into the spiritual spheres that contain nothing but ourselves and Our Father in Heaven.

Bliss. Pure bliss. Far, far more sublime than even the tastiest cheese-cake in the world.

SECURITY CHECK

“Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (1:2)

One of my more interesting experiences was a brief trip across the Jordan River to the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan.

This was occasioned not by a great love of tourism but because I wanted to renew my visa. It was not uncommon to spend an entire day in the hallowed cloisters of the Israeli Ministry of the Interior to perform such a feat. In fact, it's possible to review great swaths of the Babylonian Talmud courtesy of the waiting room of the Ministry of the Interior. There was even a rumor that a cobweb was once seen growing between the wall and the head of someone who was sitting awaiting his turn.

So on a trip to the north of Eretz Yisrael, I attempted to renew my visa in a different and hopefully more time-efficient way. Just outside of Beit Shean, the King Abdullah Bridge links Israel and Jordan. To cut a long and quite interesting story short, I presented myself at the border there and after a short bus ride found myself on the other side of the Jordan in the midst of a very foreign culture. Had I thought about it before, I would probably have made some attempt to conceal the more obvious signs of my Jewishness, but there I was clad in a dark blue suit and a fedora, looking about as Arabic as a cheese blintz.

As I entered the immigration building on the Jordanian side of the river, something struck me immediately — something was missing. However, it took me a few minutes to register what it was.

There was no security.

Absolutely no security. None. Zero. Zilch. No metal detectors. No X-ray machines. It was like walking through a time-warp into the late fifties, when hijacking was something only done by pirates under sail in the southern seas, and the word “terrorist” had yet to enter the lexicon.

In spite of my eye-catching ethnic garb, no one searched me; no dog whetted its tongue nor sniffed its nose in my direction.

There was no inspection, quite simply, because they knew they had nothing to fear. When was the last time you read a news report of a phylactery-clad Jew detonating himself in downtown Amman?

Checking is a double-edged blade. A check can be for the good, or for the bad.

In this week's Torah portion, G-d instructs Moshe to “take a census of the entire assembly...” The Hebrew idiom for taking a census is “to lift up the head”. This phrase has two possible connotations. Either it can mean exaltation and elevation, or, as the Torah says in connection with Pharaoh's baker (Gen. 40:13, 19), it can mean that the head is lifted higher than the body with a rope in execution.

The result of scrutiny can go either way. Similarly at Rosh Hashana, the ‘head’ of the year, when G-d dissects our actions and thoughts, when He takes the yearly census of our *mitzvot* and negative actions and thoughts, He can “raise our heads” in one of two ways in this ultimate security check.

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.

The Sky's the Limit!

LINKING SHAVUOT AND THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

BY RABBI YONASAN ARENIAS

This year, as on most years, the weekly Torah reading on the Shabbat before Shavuot is Parshat Bamidbar. There is a simple connection between this Torah portion and Shavuot. It opens with the words, “G-d spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert.” Why does the Torah need to tell us where Moshe was? He and the people had been there for almost an entire year, since the giving of the Torah that was recorded all the way back in the Book of Exodus. By pointing out the place, the Torah is alluding to an important idea: The Torah was given in the Sinai Desert, and not in a populated area, to teach us that just as no one owns the desert, so too no one owns the Torah. It’s free. There’s no copyright holder. Whoever wants a copy can have one. G-d wants us to read it and learn it. What better message to hear at this time, just before the Festival that celebrates the giving of the Torah. And, by the way, it seems that G-d achieved His goal since it’s the best selling book in history!

There is, however, a deeper connection between Shavuot and Bamidbar. Bamidbar opens with G-d instructing Moshe and Aharon to count the Jewish People. Why did they need to be counted now? They had been counted just seven months earlier, so what special event took place now that necessitated a new count? The answer appears in the next chapter of the Torah portion. While counting the people Moshe and Aharon also clarified the tribal lineage of each and every person. When the count was concluded, G-d allocated a new position for each of the tribes, and each person now knew where to go.

There were four large camps in all, each made up of three tribes, and they camped around the Mishkan (Tabernacle) in the four directions of the compass. The tribe of Levi, which included the priests (*Kohanim*), encamped a little closer to the Mishkan.

So G-d counted the people in order to rearrange the camp. But why did it need to be rearranged in the first place? To answer this we now need to go back to Shavuot. The experience of standing at the foot of Mount Sinai and hearing G-d speak was an awesome event beyond our compre-

hension. The Torah tells us what happened: “There was thunder and lightening and a thick cloud over the mountain, and an extremely loud shofar blast... All of Mount Sinai was smoking because G-d had descended upon it in fire” (Ex. 19:16-17). Then the voice [of G-d came] from within the darkness and the mountain was burning with fire” (Deut. 5:20). If that was not enough, the Midrash tells us that G-d did not appear alone. He descended on the mountain with His hosts of ministering angels. There were thousands of them and they were arranged in four camps, with each angel having a special position and role.

When the Jewish people saw this vision of G-d surrounded by Heavenly legions of angels, they desired to be similarly arranged. They longed to be G-d’s “legions on earth,” an organized, united community, with each individual and tribe having a special position and role. They realized that this would bring them even closer to G-d and allow them to fulfill their calling: to be a light unto the nations and reveal G-d’s ways to the world. The people never forgot the experience. They held on to their wish, and eventually G-d granted it. Almost a year after the giving of the Torah, one month after the Mishkan was erected, G-d instructed the people to form four camps, just like the angels.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the significance of the four-camp arrangement and the special qualities and roles of each of the tribes. Suffice it to say that every person and tribe was needed, and had a unique contribution to make. And it had to be made together as a united people.

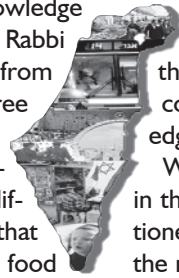
So now we see that Parshat Bamidbar completes the story of Shavuot. We see that if a person really desires something, G-d fulfills His will. In this very special way, one might indeed say, “The sky is the limit”!

*Ohr Somayach graduate Rabbi Yonasan Arenias has just published his first sefer: **Journey of Faith – A Comprehensive Commentary on Sefer Bamidbar**, available at Eichlers and other good Jewish book stores near you, or call 1-347-446-5884 to order a copy.*

WHEAT – THE FOOD OF KNOWLEDGE

In the debate among the Talmudic Sages (*Sanhedrin* 70b) as to what exactly was the food of the Tree of Knowledge from which Adam ate, it is the position of Rabbi Yehuda that it was wheat. This is a sharp departure from the positions of his colleagues who identify that tree as one which bore grapes or figs.

The basis of Rabbi Yehuda's compulsion to identify this sinful food as wheat, despite the obvious difficulty of connecting wheat with a tree, is the fact that this tree is described by the Torah as one whose food



imparts knowledge. A baby, he points out, does not have the understanding to say the words "father" and "mother" until it eats wheat. It is logical, therefore, to assume that only food which imparts such understanding in a child could be considered the food which gave man the knowledge to distinguish good from evil.

Wheat was the principal ingredient of the flour offerings in the *Beit Hamikdash*. It, and its subspecies spelt, are mentioned (*Pesachim* 35a) as ingredients which qualify for use in the matzah we eat on Pesach to fulfill our mitzvah.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

THE YOUNG MITZVAH ENTREPRENEUR

Ever watch little boys pouncing upon the candies thrown at the *aufzug* of a *chatan* or at any occasion when sweets are for the grabbing?

It doesn't take much imagination to figure out what these tots are going to do with those treats. But even the wildest imagination could not anticipate what an eight-year old youngster in the Arzei Habirah neighborhood of Jerusalem does with the sweets he gathers.

This little boy has succeeded in amassing quite a collection of toffee candies he has acquired at celebrations. But he has not eaten them. Instead he has made a practice of persuading youngsters like himself and even younger to say *tehillim* by offering them these candies as a reward.

This young mitzvah-entrepreneur has succeeded in demonstrating what a sacred initiative can accomplish at any age.

Remembering Rav Weinbach

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OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

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Love of the Land, What's the Right Thing to Do?, The Human Side of the Story written by Rav Mendel Weinbach, zt"l

Parsha Insights written by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair • General Editor and Talmud Tips: Rabbi Moshe Newman • Design: Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro

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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 first-born, 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*.

ERUVIN 65 - 71

“Night was created only for Torah study”.

This is a teaching of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish (“Reish Lakish”) on our *Daf* and is codified in Jewish Law in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 238:1 and Yoreh De’ah 246:23.

Although the word that appears in the text of the gemara is the Aramaic word for “moon” and not the word for “night”, Tosefot Rabbenu Peretz explains that intent of the statement is for the night, which is the time of the dominion the moon. The Mahasha, however, translates the statement more literally, and states that the *gemara* is referring to the “light of the moon.”

• *Eruvin 65a*

“Rabbi I’lai said, ‘A person’s character is discerned in three ways: his ‘cup’, his ‘wallet’ and his anger’.”

Aside from the wise message taught by this Sage, he also worded this teaching in a quite clever and “poetic” manner in his Hebrew statement. He called the “three ways” as follows: “*b’Koso, b’Kiso u’v’Ka’aso*”.

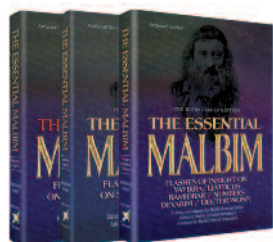
Rashi explains that these are three ways to determine if a person is proper, and he elaborates on each of these traits. According to Rashi the first way – *Koso*, his cup — is a reference to the way he departs himself when drinking wine; whether his thinking is still focused. *Kiso*, his wallet — is a check to see if his financial dealings with others are fair and honest. The third way — *Ka’aso*, his anger — is discerning that he is not excessively strict towards his fellow person.

• *Eruvin 65b*

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RUTH AND SHAVUOT

From Joy:

Dear Rabbi,
Why do we read the Book of Ruth on Shavuot? Thanks!

Dear Joy,

There are seven reasons I am aware of as being the source of this custom. Here they are and I wish you a meaningful and joyous Festival!

The events occurred during the harvest season. Shavuot is the Harvest Festival.

Ruth was a convert to Judaism. Conversion is an individual “*Kabbalat HaTorah* – Receiving the Torah.”

Ruth the Moabite was permitted to marry Boaz, based on a teaching of the Oral Law for the verse, “A Moabite may not marry into the Congregation of G-d” (Deut. 23:4). This hints at the unity between the Written Torah and the Oral Torah.

David HaMelech was born on Shavuot. The Scroll of Ruth concludes with David’s lineage.

To teach the greatness of *Gemillut Chassadim* - acts of loving-kindness.

To teach that the Torah is truly acquired only through “affliction and poverty” – dedication and commitment.

The name “Ruth” has the numerical value of 606. At Mt. Sinai the Jewish People accepted 606 *mitzvot* in addition to the 7 Noachide Laws.

@ OHR Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students

written by Daniel Keebler

David Olesker
Har Nof, Jerusalem
Sunderland Polytechnic
Director of Jerusalem Center
for Communication and Advocacy Training
Beit Midrash Alumnus

David Olesker is at the center of a global media war against Israel and the Jewish people. From university students to Jewish Federation missions, from the IDF Spokesman’s Office to the pro-Israel Gentile world, David Olesker trains and inspires thousands of people every year in Israel advocacy, all while wearing his Orthodox garb.

In 1982 David made *aliyah* to Israel while working for the Jewish Agency in Israel advocacy. He took the job on condition that he be allowed time to learn more about Judaism in Ohr Somayach as well. What began as three days a week of learning Torah eventually became full-time learning with side contracting in advocacy. David says, “I got a lot of support from Ohr Somayach for what I was doing. They felt it was good for the Jews.” After he got married he began building the Jerusalem Center for Communication and Advocacy Training.

The JCCAT works with major Jewish organizations on five continents, such as AIPAC and Jewish Federations; the Israeli Ministries of Defense, Police, Tourism, and the Foreign

Ministry; and most importantly, says David, student leaders on over 500 campuses in North America.

David says that student leaders act as role models for the rest of the Jewish students. If the leaders make a powerful and successful stand for Israel, the other Jewish students will want to identify with that position, and hence with the Jewish People as a whole. This identity remains for most of their lives afterwards. “I don’t do *kiruv*,” David remarks. Yet, he concedes that identifying with the Jewish People, who we are and what we are, is a common first step both in Israel advocacy and *kiruv*.

How has David’s own Torah observance impacted his work? The combination of his sophisticated advocacy training and his hat-and-jacket appearance shatters stereotypes for many secular students. Additionally, David shares that “it is infinitely easier to speak to Gentiles [about advocating for Israel] when you’re a religious Jew. I’m standing up there wearing my ‘tribal dress,’ talking about my people, my history, and my Land – they feel that this guy is the real thing.” He also notes that secular Jews are generally not comfortable enough with religion to work with pro-Israel religious Gentiles, placing David in a unique position to bolster Israel advocacy from that sector.

David continues to learn three days a week with Ohr Somayach’s Rabbi Eli Merl, and provides his own training to Ohr Lagolah students weekly. For information on Israel Advocacy with David Olesker, visit: www.jccat.org.



Hi, Old Buddy!

Question: Someone whom I haven't seen in years came up to me the other day with the big smile and warm handshake one gives a long-lost friend. Although he remembered me, I could not recall his name and was afraid to ask him in order not to embarrass him. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: Almost every one of us encounters such a situation and different people have different solutions as to how it is possible to carry on a conversation without revealing that they don't remember their greeter's name.

Perhaps the best thing to do is to be perfectly frank and confess that the passage of time has caused you to forget who your greeter is despite the fact that he seems so famil-

iar to you. This will almost always elicit a reaction of pride in the fact that he remembers you although you have forgotten him. Once he tells you his name it will invariably trigger memories about him which will enable you to ask the right questions expected from one whom he hasn't seen for so many years.

Remember that people generally do not expect you to remember them before they identify themselves since the passage of time changes their appearance and dulls your memory. So go right ahead and excuse yourself for forgetting his name and enjoy your reunion.

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