

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR · 29 IYAR 5769 · MAY 23, 2009 · VOL. 16 NO. 30

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE GOOD BOOK

*"In the desert" (1:1)*

**T**his week we start reading the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers. The Hebrew name "Bamidbar" means "in the desert". Why was the Torah given in the desert?

The desert is the archetype of desolation, the antithesis of life and activity. The symbol of civilization, of the flow and vitality of life, is the city. A city consists of houses, and the houses, stones.

The words of a sentence are like stones. Just as each stone by itself is devoid of life but when combined together into a house they form a setting for life and vitality, so too are the letters of a word. When left by themselves they radiate no light or life. They are merely lifeless stones. But when they are built into words and sentences, sayings and utterances, they radiate the light of intellect that infuses life into man, that leads him and guides him.

"With the word of G-d the heavens were made." The entire world was created with the combination of the letters of the Hebrew *aleph-beit*. The letters and the words are spread out and dispersed over the whole face of the earth.

We have a choice. If, through these letters and words, we recognize G-d in the world; if they are like beads of a necklace revealing the G-dly thread that weaves the world into One, then the world is no longer a desert of desolation but a populous city vibrant with life and purpose.

However, if we fail to comprehend the writing of the Divine Hand, if we make no effort to assemble the letters of existence into words and sentences, then the world remains a desolate wilderness.

Picture two people reading the same book. One reads with insight and understanding; the other spews forth a jumble of letters and words without grasp or comprehension. The first reader kindles the light of wisdom that is in the words and he brings them to life. The second leaves behind him a trail of dead stones.

The world is a large book. Fortunate is he who knows how to read and understand it.

• Sources: Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin in Torah U'Moadim

*"The entire world was created with the combination of the letters of the Hebrew aleph-beit. The letters and the words are spread out and dispersed over the whole face of the earth."*

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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

### TALE OF TWO GENERATIONS

**D**or *Hamidbar* – the Generation of the Wilderness – is the term attached to our ancestors who spent forty years in the wilderness before reaching Eretz Yisrael.

This term has often been applied in our own times to the first generations involved in the development of the modern Jewish State of Israel.

As Jews throughout the world begin this Shabbat to read the Chumash called Bamidbar it is a time for reflection on this comparison of generations. A wilderness is not merely a geographical designation but can also serve as a descrip-

tion of an era of transition.

Many challenges have faced the current *Dor Hamidbar* just as many faced the original one. The big difference, however, is that our ancestors began their trek by receiving the Torah and successfully continued on their way, enjoying the leadership of the greatest of prophets.

As our own generation strives to finally come out of the wilderness into an era of peace and prosperity, it would be wise if we followed the model of our predecessors and allowed Torah and Torah leadership to lead us to our promised land.

## LOVE OF THE LAND- THE PLACES

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

### THE MEZUZAH-LESS GATES OF JERUSALEM

It is rare to see a home or a public building in Israel without a mezuzah on its doorposts. But the Torah explicitly commands that a mezuzah be placed not only on houses but also on the city gates. Why then are there no *mezuzot* on the gates to the Old City of Jerusalem?



The answer, of course, is that since the majority of the residents in the Old City are not Jewish there is no obligation to place a mezuzah upon them.

So when one passes through one of those gates and sees no mezuzah he is reminded that we still have a way to go before seeing a “rebuilt Jerusalem”.

לע"נ  
מרת לאה בת יצחק אייזיק ע"ה  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

## 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*.

- Handling and mishandling a found object till it is claimed
- Who is exempt from responsibility of returning lost object
- When is it assumed that an animal is a lost object
- The double terms in the Torah which mandate repeated fulfillment
- Compensation for returner of lost object who sustained loss
- Finding animal in an unlocked barn or in the street
- When a father's wish must be disobeyed
- The obligation to help unload or load an animal in distress
- Torah source for consideration of an animal's suffering
- When it is a choice between returning the lost object of his father and that of his own or that of his Torah teacher
- The relative importance of *Mishna* and *Gemara*
- The reward of the guardian who pays the owner of the animal stolen from him rather than free himself by taking an oath
- The oath taken even when the guardian pays
- When borrower and lender disagree on value of object given as security
- Does borrower have option of reclaiming property confiscated by the court for lack of payment
- When the guardian appoints another guardian in his place

## THE THIRD OATH

When a *shomer* responsible for guarding the object placed in his custody claims that he is unable to return it to its owner because of circumstances that exonerate him, he is obliged to take three oaths to prove this innocence. He must swear that he was not negligent in guarding the object, that he did not make unwarranted exploitation and that the object is no longer in his possession.

In the event that his claim does not exonerate him and he pays the owner, he is still obligated to swear that the object is no longer in his possession. The reason for this is the sus-

picion that the *shomer* coveted the object, and because he knew that it was not for sale decided to appropriate it and pay the owner who assumed that it was really lost.

RaMbaM (Laws of Borrowing and Guardianship 6:1) points out that this law presented by Rabbi Huna in our *gemara* applies only to such objects that are not available for purchase in the marketplace, such as a particular sort of animal, garment or vessel. But if the object placed in his safekeeping is something that can easily be purchased, there are no grounds for suspecting the *shomer* of lying, and therefore no need for him to take an oath that it is no longer in his possession.

• *Bava Metzia 34b*

## What the SAGES Say

"There is no part of Torah study which is as valuable as *gemara* (which explains the *mishnayot* and reconciles the conflicts between them – Rashi)."

• *Beraita, Bava Metzia 33a*

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## G-D'S WAYS

### From: Fahim (Moshe) in Iran

Dear Rabbi,

*Why do the people who are bad and do only a few mitzvot live well and without problems, but those who are good and do many mitzvot live bad and with difficulties and problems in their lives?*

Dear Fahim (Moshe),

You are in good company when you ask this question, as the Talmud teaches that your namesake, Moshe Rabbeinu, also asked G-d this very same question (Berachot 7a). Unfortunately, it's admittedly unclear if and how G-d answered.

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yossi: Moshe requested three things from G-d and G-d granted him all three requests. One of these was, "Reveal to me Your ways" (Ex. 33:13), by which Moshe intended to ask, "Master of the Universe, why are there righteous who prosper and righteous who suffer; wicked who prosper and wicked who suffer?" G-d replied, "Righteous who prosper are 'righteous sons of the righteous' and righteous who suffer are 'righteous sons of the wicked'; wicked who prosper are 'wicked sons of the righteous' and wicked who suffer are 'wicked sons of the wicked'.

The Talmud is not satisfied with this explanation as it implies that the judgments on one's parents are conferred to oneself, which counters the following teaching: Behold an apparent contradiction — one verse states, "G-d delivers the transgressions of the fathers onto the sons" (Ex. 34:7); while another verse states, "Sons shall not be punished on account of their fathers" (Deut. 24:16). The Talmud then suggests that this may be resolved as follows — the first verse is referring to a case where the sons continue in the evil ways of their fathers, while the second verse is referring to a case where the sons reject their fathers' evil ways. Accordingly, one will not be punished (note the discussion does not address reward) *solely* on account of one's parents' deeds, so the original answer does not suffice.

Based on this difficulty the Talmud offers an alternative answer from G-d to Moshe's question. Rather, the Talmud posits, a righteous man who prospers is completely righteous, whereas a righteous man who suffers is not completely righteous; a wicked man who prospers is not completely wicked, whereas a wicked man who suffers is completely wicked. This is based on the idea that a person's

deeds are reckoned such that he receives his full reward in the world of his primary concern. Namely, a completely righteous person can enjoy reward in this world without diminishing his reward in the World-to-Come whereas a nearly righteous person is cleaned of transgression by suffering in this world in order to receive full reward in the World-to-Come. Conversely, the not-completely-wicked person is rewarded in this world for his good deeds in order to receive full retribution for his wickedness in the World-to-Come, whereas a completely evil person may suffer in this world without diminishing his punishment in the World-to-Come.

Apparently, the Talmud is not completely satisfied with this explanation either, as the Talmud then notes that regarding the original opinion of Rabbi Yossi that G-d granted all three of Moshe's requests, Rabbi Meir differs and is of the opinion that G-d never answered the question of why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. Rabbi Meir's opinion is based on the continuation of G-d's reply to Moshe's "Reveal to me Your ways" where G-d says, "I shall show favor on those that I show favor to, and have mercy on those that I am merciful to" (Ex. 33:19), implying that G-d may 'arbitrarily' decide to be good to people even if they don't deserve it and we have no way of understanding this. According to Rabbi Meir, G-d effectively "answered" Moshe's question as to why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper by saying, "because that's the way it is", or "because I said so". While this power-pulling answer is used by many parents, it's not an answer in the true sense.

So to summarize, from this section of the Talmud (keep in mind that the classical commentaries also deal with this question at great length), an innocent person will not suffer on account of his parents. If he is wicked as they are/were, his suffering may be compounded. Still, it seems that this is only regarding punishment. As far as reward is concerned, a wicked person may nevertheless receive Divine favor on account of a righteous ancestor. That being said, since a righteous person doesn't suffer on account of parents, his suffering may be because of his own few or minor transgressions which are atoned for in this world in order to receive full reward in the next. Conversely, in a case where the wicked man prospers without the merit of his fathers, this may be because of his few or minor good deeds which are rewarded in this world in order to receive full punishment in the next. However, at the end of the day, what's happening behind the scenes in any particular case can only be speculated, because, in these matters, it may just be that G-d 'arbitrarily' decides what's best based on considerations that we simply don't perceive or can't conceive.

## RISK OF VISITING THE SICK

**Question:** In regard to visiting the sick there sometimes arises a situation in which there is a danger of the visitor contracting the illness of the patient. What is the right thing to do in such a case?

**Answer:** Our Talmudic Sages have already ruled that even though a visitor contracts one sixtieth of the illness of the patient he is visiting, he is still obligated to visit. The obvious inference is that when a danger greater than this relatively insignificant amount is involved there is no obligation to risk

contagion.

Even though you cannot visit in person, you still have the option of calling the sick person on the phone, cheering him up with some encouraging words and a prayer for his speedy and complete recovery.

Although there are authorities who have reservations about fulfilling the mitzvah of visiting the sick via telephone instead of a personal visit, there is no doubt that this is the preferred way when a real danger to health is involved.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### “I AM YOUR BROTHER!”

“Have a cigarette,” said the Russian officer to each of the Jews brought to him for interrogation. This was an unusual offer coming from a Russian officer to people that had been arrested following the end of World War II on suspicion of being Nazi officers masquerading as Jews to escape their Soviet hunters.

But his offer was refused by each member of this group who were arrested while desperately looking for a haven after experiencing the horrors of the Holocaust.

The officer was outraged by this refusal of such a generous offer and threatened to punish them if they persisted in their refusal.

When they reiterated their refusal he asked what they did want.

“Two loaves of bread” was the reply.

The officer then locked the door to his office and turned to the group declaring, “I am your brother, a fellow Jew!”

He then explained that he suddenly realized that their refusal to smoke was because it was Shabbat and that their request for two loaves was in order to honor that special day. Thus was he convinced that they were Jews and not disguised Nazis. He also revealed that he was a descendant of the great Chassidic leader Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev who was famous for always praising the merits of the Jewish people to Heaven. Now that he saw Jews ready to risk punishment for observing Shabbat he felt that he could follow in the path of his ancestor and praise Jews to Heaven.

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