

# OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE TORAH CENTER

**“And the Tent of Meeting journeyed in the camp of Levi in the midst of the camps...” (2:17)**

Go into any *shul*. Where is the *bima* — the large reading lectern on which the Torah is read? In the middle. Why isn't it at one end?

When the Children of Israel journeyed through the desert, the Tent of Meeting traveled within the camp of Levi, which was right in the middle of the camp. The Tent of Meeting was right in the middle because the within the Tent of Meeting was the *Aron* — the Holy Ark in which the Torah was kept.

The Torah has to be in the center. It is not closer to one person, nor further from another. Every Jew can be as close to the Torah as any other.

Similarly, the Tree of Life was planted in the middle of the Garden of Eden. The Torah is called the Tree of Life to those who grasp it. The handles by which we lift it up are called *'Eitz Hachaim'* — the Tree of Life. The handles are at the center of each of the scrolls just as the Tree of Life was in the center of the Garden. And similarly, the Torah is the center of the life of the Jew. If he moves it to one side and relegates it to a weekend activity, his life becomes distorted and unbalanced. Materialism rushes to fill the void that he has left by putting the Torah 'to one side.'

The Torah requires concentration. We must *concentrate* it at the center of our lives. For it is the heart of our faith. Just as from the heart flows life itself, and thus its place is in the center of the body, thus the Torah was at the center of the camps of Israel.

The heart pumps the blood, to all the extremities of the body equally, without discrimination, and every limb

is sustained by it. The Holy Torah pumps the life-force of Judaism to all limbs of the Jewish People, without discrimination, regardless of whom they are.

### ZEIDE'S COAT-TAILS

**“And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai” (1:1)**

The Janowska Road camp was just another way to kill Jews. The Nazis were building a road across Poland, but no one knew its primary purpose — to

“...the Holy Torah pumps the life-force of Judaism to all limbs of the Jewish People...”

finish off the road, or to finish off the Jews. At any rate, the latter purpose was certainly moving at a quicker pace.

One night the Allies bombed the road. The emaciated Jews huddled in their bunks as hundreds of tons of TNT exploded all around them.

Miraculously, the air-raid injured nobody. The road, however, was a different story. It looked more like the surface of the moon, with craters the size of pock-marks all the way up to a giant yawning abyss.

The Nazis wanted to have a little 'fun.' Shouting and screaming, they ordered all the Jews out of the hut. In the freezing Polish winter, they made them run on the double in bare feet down to the road, to the biggest crater.

“You Jews need some exercise! You pitiful specimens! One by one you will jump across this bomb crater. If you make it, you can go back to your beds; but if you fall into the crater, you will be machine-gunned to death before you can crawl out. I'm sure you'll agree that this should make for an interesting evening's entertainment.”

The stillness of the night was punctuated by the brittle crackle of machine-gun fire and the last cries of a holy Jew taking his leave of this world.

In that silent queue of destiny, stood a giant of the soul — the Bluzhever Rebbe, *zatzal*. And behind him, there was a young fellow who had lost his faith through the torment of war.

The young man said to the Bluzhever “Why should we entertain these sadist pigs. When it's my turn, I'm not going to jump. Let them shoot me where I stand. I'm not going to entertain them. I'm not going to perform for them like a dog!”

Quietly, the Bluzhever replied: “My friend. What a precious gift the Creator has given to us! We have been given the ultimate gift — the gift of life. However, He gave it to us on a condition: That we should not send it back to Him. Rather, He Himself will come and take it back from us.

“Every second of our life is precious. While it is still in our power to carry on living, we must hold on to life with all our might. If we jump and we make it to the other side, we will have honored the gift that He gave us. And if we jump and we fail, we will arrive in the next world just a few short seconds later than if we had refused to jump.”

The moment of truth had arrived. The Bluzhever stood on the mouth of the abyss. Summoning what little strength was left in his frail body, he closed his eyes.

# PARSHA OVERVIEW

The book of *Bamidbar* ('In the desert') begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a census of all the men over the age of 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 putting them together when the nation encamps. The Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: to the East, South, West and North. Since Levi is singled out, Yosef is split into Efraim 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 exchange is made between the first born and the *Levi'im*, whereby the *Levi'im* take over the role the firstborn would have had serving in the *Mishkan* before the sin of the golden calf. The exchange is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *Levi'im* from one month old and up, even though only *Levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining firstborn sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our firstborn today. The sons of Levi are divided in three main families, Gershon, Kehas and Merari (besides the *Kohanim* – the special division from Kehas' family). The sons of Kehas had to carry the *Menorah*, the Table, the Altar and the Holy Ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the Ark and the Altar are covered only by Aaron and his sons, before the *Levi'im* prepared them for travel.

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

It seemed to the young man that a smile came over the Bluzhever's angelic face — as though he had recognized an old long-lost friend. The Bluzhever took a few steps back and then leapt into the darkness.

The Bluzhever opened his eyes. He was on the other side. Seconds later, the young man landed next to him.

"How did you possibly have the strength to make it across?" said the young man.

"Just before I jumped," said the Bluzhever, "I saw a vision of my *zeide*. In front of him was his father and his *zeide* and all the holy Jews through the ages back to Moshe Rabbeinu, to Avraham Avinu. All those Jews who kept our holy Torah even when it cost them their lives.

I saw my *zeide* jumping across the crater in front of me. I stretched out my hands and grabbed onto his coat-tails. And he pulled me across."

The two remained in silence for some moments. Finally, the Bluzhever said. "May I ask you a question?" The young man nodded. "I understand how I made it across. But how did you manage to jump so far?"

The young man paused before he replied. "I was hanging on to *your* coat-tails" he said.

From where does this power to hang on to the coat-tails of our forefathers come?

The Torah was given in Fire, in Water, and in the Desert.

Through Avraham Avinu we received the Torah in Fire. Avraham went through the fiery furnace of Ur Kasdim rather than deny Hashem. He is the father of the Jewish People. The progenitor.

At the Reed Sea, the Jewish People as a nation passed an ordeal by Water. The Egyptians army was poised to drive them into the sea. At God's command the entire nation jumped into the water, and the sea parted.

And if you'll say that this was merely a moment of bravado, then look at a third event that sealed their capacity for self-sacrifice: They followed Moshe into the vastness of the wilderness, without food, without water, with nothing more than the promise of miracle food from Above, and no more companionship than snakes and scorpions.

It was these three ordeals, in Fire, in Water and in the Desert, which anchored in the spiritual genes of the Jewish People the capacity for self-sacrifice and the love of the Torah which, to this day, has allowed us to reach out and hang on to our holy Torah and our faith.

By hanging on to the coat-tails of our *zeides*.

Sources:

- **The Torah Center** - *Chafetz Chaim*
- **Zeide's Coat-Tails** - *Midrash Rabbah; R' Meir Shapiro in Mayana Shel Torah; R' Mendel Weinbach*

לע"ז  
מדת מורים בתר' יחזקאל דב"ע ה'  
תנ"צ.ב.ה.

# PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What was the minimum age for drafting someone?
3. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
4. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed 'techum Shabbos' — the prohibition against traveling more than 2000 amos on Shabbos?
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 Aaron and Moshe?"
9. Who was Nadav's oldest son?
10. Which two people from *Megillas Esther* does Rashi mention in this week's *Parsha*?
11. Why did the *Levi'im* receive 'ma'aser rishon'?
12. Why were the *Levi'im* chosen to serve in the *Ohel Mo'ed*?
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 of *Levi'im* was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 *Levi'im*?
18. The firstborn 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?

## BONUS QUESTION?

**“Take the Levites in place of every first-born amongst the Israelites.... And as for the redemption of the 273 first-born exceeding the amount of Levites... take five shekels per person... and give the money to Aharon and to his sons as redemption for those extra ones among them.” (3:45-48)** The above verse commands that each firstborn be redeemed in one of two ways: He must either be redeemed by means of a *levi*, or he must give five *shekalim* to a *kohen*. Later (*Bamidbar 18:16*) the Torah commands that the firstborn throughout the generations redeem themselves in only one way: By giving five *shekalim* to a *kohen*. Why did the Torah allow the first generation of *levi'im* to redeem the firstborn Israelites, whereas later generations of *levi'im* are not able to do so?

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Every tribe had its own flag, and each tribe's flag had a picture on it. Reuven's flag pictured a man and wild flowers (*dudaim*), Shimon's flag the city of Shechem, Levi's flag the breastplate of the *Kohen Gadol*, Yehuda's flag a lion, Yissachar's flag the sun and moon, Zevulun's a ship, Dan's a serpent, Naftali's a deer, Gad's an eagle, Asher's an olive tree, Efraim's an ox, Menashe's a *r'eim* (type of wild ox) and Binyamin's a wolf.

• *Midrash Rabba, Ibn Ezra*

## HAFTORAH: HOSHEA 2:1-22

### GHETTO FLOWER

**“And it shall be in the place where it will said of them ‘You are not My people,’ it will be said to them ‘The children of the living God.’” (2:1)**

The history of the Jewish People shows that it is specifically in those lands in which they have been oppressed and separated into ghettos, that Jewish Life has flourished.

Ironically, where they have experienced acceptance and dwelled in comfort with equal rights, the scourge of assimilation and the disappearing Jew has taken root.

This spiritual holocaust has caused a hemorrhage which has ravaged whole limbs of the body of the Jewish People.

The prophet Hoshea teaches us here that “*It shall be in the place that it will be said to them ‘you are not My people’*” — i.e., specifically in those places where the Jews will be rejected and scorned as being inferior — “*it will be said to you ‘children of the living God.’*” — i.e., there it will also be that you will guard well your source, the Torah, until it will become apparent and clear that you are the “*children of the living God.*”

• *Bikurei Aviv*

## WEEKLY DAF

KRISOS 18 - 24

### AN EXPENSIVE DOUBT

Just as there is a sacrifice of *korban chatas* to serve as an atonement for involuntary transgression of a sin whose punishment for intentional transgression is *kares* (premature death), there is a sacrifice of *korban asham taluy* to protect one who is not certain that he has even committed such as sin.

If someone ate *chelev* (forbidden animal fat) which he mistakenly assumed was *shuman* (permissible fat) he is considered a *shogeg* (involuntary sinner) and must offer a *chatas* (sin offering) as atonement.

But a different scenario introduces a different sort of sacrifice. There were two pieces of fat before him, one *chelev* and one *shuman*, and he mistakenly assumed that both were *shuman* and ate one of them. After both pieces were gone he was informed that one of them had been *chelev* but he is not certain as to which piece he ate. Since there is a doubt as to whether he actually ate the forbidden piece and incurred an obligation to offer a *chatas* he is required to offer an *asham taluy* (a doubtful guilt offering). Its purpose is to protect him from Heavenly punishment, and if he eventually clarifies that he did indeed eat the forbidden piece he must offer a *chatas*.

It is interesting to note that the ram which must be used for the *asham taluy* must have a minimal value of two *shekalim*, while the lamb or goat used for the *chatas* need not be more valuable than a *danka*, which is one forty-eighth of two *shekalim*.

Why must so much more be spent on atonement for a doubtful sin than for one which was certainly committed?

Rabbeinu Yonah of Gironi, one of the classical Talmudic commentaries, offers a fascinating explanation in his commentary

on *Mesechta Berachos* (1b). When one is certain that he committed a sin by being careless and involuntarily eating forbidden fat or violating Shabbos, he takes the matter to heart, regrets his behavior and repents wholeheartedly. But when he is not certain that he actually committed a sin he tends to rationalize that the piece he ate was not the forbidden one and therefore does not set his mind to repenting. The Torah therefore required him to spend much more money on the animal for this sacrifice so that he will realize the gravity of his action and properly repent.

• *Krisos 18a*

### SCENE OF THE UNSEEN

Although the Torah prohibited the consumption of the blood of animals and fowl it did not forbid the consumption of human blood. The Sages, however, banned human blood because of *maris ayin* — a fear that the observer of such consumption may mistakenly assume that animal blood is being consumed and conclude that it is permissible.

The rule, therefore, is that if one's mouth is bleeding and the blood touches the food he is eating he must remove that part of the food tainted by the blood before eating the rest. If the blood only oozed from his gums but never left his mouth he is permitted to swallow it (because no one saw it — Rashi in *Kesubos* 60a).

An interesting challenge is presented to this distinction by one of the early commentaries from a Gemara in *Mesechta Shabbos* (146b) which states the principle that wherever the Sages prohibited an action because of *maris ayin* the ban applies to that action even in a place where no one can see it. The case there is the prohibition against hanging up one's

clothes to dry on Shabbos if they become wet, because the observer will mistakenly assume that he washed those clothes on Shabbos and that it is permissible to do so. This ban applies even to hanging those clothes in his innermost rooms, far removed from any human view. If so, why is it permitted to swallow the blood oozing from the gums just because no one sees it, since a *maris ayin* ban extends even to situations when there is no viewer?

Two resolutions are suggested by the commentaries. One is that something which is not possible to view in a public place never came into the category of *maris ayin*. Wet clothes hanging on a line would be viewed if they were in a public place and the ban on hanging them therefore extends even to the most private place where no one sees them. Blood in the mouth is obscured from view even in a public place so that it never entered the category of *maris ayin*.

A second approach is that it is permitted to swallow the blood from the gums not because it is not visible, as suggested by Rashi, but because there would be no problem even if it was visible since it is obviously human blood. This is similar to the rule concerning fish blood, which is permitted by Torah law and prohibited by the Sages on the grounds of *maris ayin* if such blood is detached from the fish and gathered in a bowl. If fish scales are visible in this blood it is permitted because it obviously came from the fish. In similar fashion, blood seen coming from human gums is clearly seen as human blood and there is no need to extend the ban.

The difference between these two approaches will be when the blood in the mouth is indeed visible. According to the first it will be forbidden; according to the second it will be permitted.

• *Krisos 22a*

## FATHERLY ADVICE

Tidbits From the 'Ethics of the Fathers' Traditionally Studied on Summer Sabbaths

“ENVY, PASSION AND HONOR TAKE A PERSON OUT OF THIS WORLD.”

Rabbi Eliezer Hakapar (*Avos* 4:2)

This warning about self-destructive elements parallels the one issued by Rabbi Yehoshua (*Avos* 2:11) that “an evil eye, evil inclination and hatred of people take a person out of this world.” Envy of others is the product of an evil eye which is not content with what it has, while passion is the instrument of the evil inclination. But what is the symme-

try between the lust for honor and the hatred of people? One explanation is that nothing is so hateful to people as one who seeks honor, and even if they openly flatter him they hate him in their hearts. Another approach is that the pursuit of honor inevitably leads a person to hate others as a response to their failure to accord him the honor he feels is due to him.

# ASK the RABBI

## LIVING IN ISRAEL

[Name withheld] wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

*This is not really a halachic question, but rather a small dilemma. I am 18 years old. I have a close relative now living in Israel who is very extremist when it comes to living in Israel. He has always disapproved of people living outside Israel for he never really sees them as 'worthwhile Jews' or Jews who are so dedicated to Yiddishkeit.*

*Lately, he has criticized me for living outside of Israel, and claims that there will be a price I will have to pay for doing such a 'sin.' I know I want to come to Israel once I get an education so I could support myself later on in the future. Neither does he agree that this is the right way to go and they claim that by the time I will get to Israel (when I will be about 20 - 22 years of age), I will be 'too old' and therefore it won't have an impact on me.*

*I have decided to write to you for, as a Rabbi, I would respect your opinion(s). I don't want to believe that I'll be too old to go to Israel at 22 or that my life outside Israel is a waste of time, yet, by the letters I receive from them, I am beginning to feel guilty.*

*Do you think I should work now so I could support myself in the future and meanwhile help in Jewish outreach activities, or should I ignore the Jews outside Israel and go to Israel now, so I won't be 'too old' in a couple of years? Thank-you.*

Dear [name withheld],

The Land of Israel is central to Judaism. It's an intrinsic part of the covenant between God and Abraham, and it's where the Patriarchs and Matriarchs lived and are buried. Most events recorded in the Tanach took place in Israel.

Israel is the only land conducive to developing the faculty of prophecy. All the prophets either received prophecies in Israel, or prophecies that related to the Land of Israel. For example, Abraham's only prophecy outside Israel was the command to go there.

Even today, people who live in Israel experience extraordinary Divine assistance in Torah study and spiritual growth. As the Sages said: "There's no Torah like the Torah of the Land of Israel;" — "The air of the Land of Israel imparts wisdom." In Israel one can experience a higher level of tranquillity than can be experienced elsewhere.

Furthermore, most of the commandments only apply when the majority of Jews are in Israel; nowadays, when most Jews live outside Israel, only 270 of the 613 mitzvot can be fulfilled.

Is there a specific mitzva to live in Israel? Many authorities say it is a mitzva to live in Israel, in keeping with the verse, "and you shall possess the land and dwell in it (*Bamidbar 33:53*)."

Maimonides, on the other hand, states that "one should always dwell in the Land of Israel," yet he does not list it as one of the 613 commandments. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that according to Maimonides there's no obligation to go to Israel, although it is a good thing to do.

Since living in Israel affects almost the entire range of mitzva observance, all factors should be considered. Will you be able to find work that provides you with the time and money to fulfill the mitzvot — for example, study Torah, give charity, and provide a Torah educa-

tion for your children? Halachic authorities throughout the ages have emphasized that a person should come to Israel only if reasonably sure he can support his family and guarantee his children a Torah education.

However, one shouldn't seek luxuries — the importance of living in Israel outweighs driving a Ferrari and eating steak every day for breakfast.

Other factors to consider: How will you deal with living far from family? How will you adapt to a new culture? What suitable marriage prospects are available? What appropriate Torah study program will you connect with? Will you be able to live in a Torah neighborhood?

G-d forbid anyone should say a life isn't 'worthwhile' just because it's lived outside of Israel. A life dedicated to Torah and Mitzvot is certainly worthwhile, wherever it is. Sometimes a person's contribution to the Jewish People can be even greater outside of Israel, especially a person involved in Jewish education or outreach.

Coming to Israel is sort of like getting married: Everyone should do so eventually, but not because a well-meaning relative bullies you into it. And if you do so when **you** want to, you're more likely to fall in love.

#### Sources:

- *After the Return*, Rabbi Mordechai Becher & Rabbi Moshe Newman (Feldheim Publishers) Ch. 7.

## YIDDLE RIDDLE

Explain how the following situation could occur: You take a certain item and before deriving benefit from it you say the required blessing. One minute later you take the exact same item and derive the exact same type of benefit from it. However, this time the required blessing beforehand is a different blessing. (The item contains no grain. The item undergoes no change whatsoever.)

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# PARSHA Q&A!

## Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

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|--|--|---|
| <p>1. 1:1 - They are very dear to Hashem.<br/>         2. 1:3 - Twenty years old.<br/>         3. 1:18 - They brought birth records proving their tribal lineage.<br/>         4. 2:2 - Each tribe's flag was the color of that tribe's stone in the the <i>Kohen Gadol's</i> breastplate.<br/>         5. 2:2 - Hashem commanded them to camp no more than 2000 <i>amos</i> from the <i>Ohel Mo'ed</i>. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the <i>Ohel Mo'ed</i> on Shabbos.<br/>         6. 2:9 - The cloud over the <i>Ohel Mo'ed</i> departed and the <i>kohanim</i> sounded the trumpets.<br/>         7. 2:32 - 603,550.<br/>         8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it's as if he gave birth to them.</p> | <p>9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.<br/>         10. 3:7 - Bigsan and Seresh<br/>         11. 3:8 - Since the <i>Levi'im</i> served in the <i>Mishkan</i> in place of everyone else, they received tithes as 'payment.'<br/>         12. 3:12 - The <i>Levi'im</i> did not partake in the sin of the golden calf. They were chosen to replace the first-born who sinned and were therefore disqualified.<br/>         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.<br/>         14. 3:16 - Hashem.<br/>         15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid</p> | <p>living near the wicked.<br/>         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.<br/>         17. 3:39 - Each <i>Levi</i> served to redeem a first born of the Jewish People. Since 300 <i>Levi'im</i> were themselves first born, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.<br/>         18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel's firstborn, who was sold by his brothers for five <i>shekalim</i> (20 pieces of silver.)<br/>         19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50 years old.<br/>         20. 4:5 - The <i>kohanim</i>.</p> |
|--|--|---|

## BONUS ANSWER!

In that first generation, the firstborn were redeemed by transferring their holiness to the *levi'im*. Thereafter, that holiness was 'inherited' by the children of the *levi'im*. Since *levi'im* are 'born holy,' they are not available to redeem future firstborn.

• *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh*

## RECOMMENDED READING LIST

<p><b>RAMBAN</b>          Introduction to <i>Bamidbar</i>          1:3 The Draft Age          1:45 The Reason for Counting          2:2 The Organization of the Camp</p>	<p>3:14          4:16            1:19</p>	<p>The <i>Levi'im</i>          The Role of Elazar ben Aaron  <b>IBN EZRA</b>          Organization of the Camp</p>	<p><b>SFORNO</b>          Introduction to <i>Bamidbar</i></p>
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