

OHRNET

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A Return to Jerusalem

RAV MENDEL WEINBACH

*“I rejoiced when they said to me -
let us go to the House of Hashem.”*

We sang these words of King David, the Sweet Singer of Israel, as we walked to the Kotel in the wee hours of the morning 34 years ago. It was Shavuot Night, and countless thousands of Jews had been up all night studying Torah to make up for the shortcoming of their ancestors 3284 years earlier in sleeping the night before they received the Torah at Sinai.

Now those Jews were pouring out of all the streets onto the main thoroughfare leading to the Old City, forming a human sea brimming with song and ecstasy. For most of them this would be their first encounter with the Kotel. Many of them had not even been born when that last remnant of the site where once stood the House of Hashem fell into Jordanian captivity in the War of Independence in 1948. Others, like myself, had arrived in Israel only a few years before it was liberated by Israeli soldiers.

The Kotel had been in Israeli control for a week already, but the military authorities wanted to ascertain that there were no mines or snipers lurking on the way to the Old City before giving the public access to the Kotel. Some intrepid individuals had somehow infiltrated and brought back dramatic accounts of their inspirational experience. But the general public waited for the green light of the army, and it finally came on Shavuot.

Shavuot and the Kotel What a combination!

It was an updated version of the historic link between Torah and Jerusalem expressed in the passage said and sung by Jews for generations when the Torah is taken out of its ark: *“For from Zion shall come forth Torah and the*

Word of Hashem from Jerusalem.”

Zion was the site of the *Beit Hamikdash* with its celestial corps of *kohanim* steeped in Torah and the sacred service of the sanctuary; Jerusalem was the seat of the Sanhedrin, the supreme authority on interpreting the Word of Hashem. Small wonder, then, that when Yehoshua ben Gamla initiated the first system of public education for Jewish children who had no parents to teach them Torah, he chose Jerusalem as his national center. Where else would a youngster have such shining models as *kohanim* and judges of the highest court?

This extraordinary atmosphere of Jerusalem, suggests Rabbi Aharon Halevi, author of the classical “*Sefer Hachinuch*,” serves as part of the explanation for all of the commandments requiring a Jew’s physical presence in Jerusalem. In four years of the seven-year cycle of tithes, a Jew was required to bring almost ten percent of his crops - or their monetary value - and consume them as a “second tithe” in Jerusalem. The same was true of all the fruit which grew on his trees in the fourth year of its life. Add to this the ten percent of the cattle born each year which he had to bring for slaughtering in the *Beit Hamikdash* before he could eat their flesh, and you get a picture of the vast amount of food that a Jew could enjoy only in Jerusalem. Too much, points out the author, for any family to consume during their stay in Jerusalem three times a year on “*aliya laregel*” or on an occasional visit to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice. It was therefore advisable from a purely economic point of view, to have one member of the family permanently stationed in Jerusalem where he would have the opportunity to study Torah with most of his needs covered by the aforementioned foods whose consumption was lim-

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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, 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 transfer 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* 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 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, 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.

HAFTARA

HOSHEA 2:1 - 22

GHETTO FLOWER

“And it shall be in the place where it will be said of them ‘You are not My people,’ it will be said to them ‘The children of the living G-d.’ ” (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 have 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 of them ‘you are not my people’ ” — i.e., wherever Jews are rejected and scorned as foreigners — “it will be said to you ‘children of the living G-d’ ” — there they will guard well their source, the Torah, until becomes apparent that they are “Children of the Living G-d.”

Sources:
• Bikurei Aviv

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I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

When Yaakov blessed his sons at the end of his life, he hinted that the tribes of Reuven, Yehuda, Yosef and Dan would lead the four flag-camps. Anyone whom Yaakov addressed in the second person — “you” — became the head of a flag-camp. Reuven: “You are my firstborn”; Yehuda: “You, will your brothers acknowledge”; Yosef: “From the G-d of your father”; Dan: “For your salvation I long.”

• Ba'al Haturim 2:2

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THE EMPTY LANDSCAPE

"In the Desert..." (1:1)

Some 3,300 years ago, a little-known Middle Eastern people gathered around a small mountain in a trackless wilderness and underwent an experience which changed the history of the world.

For the first time since the beginning of the universe, the Creator spoke to an entire nation. The nation was called Israel. The mountain was called Sinai. At Sinai, G-d gave the Jewish People the Torah, the mystical blueprint of the Creation. Why did G-d choose a desert as the site for this encounter?

THE LANDSCAPE OF TIME

We tend to think of the Jewish festivals as remembrances to remind us of critical events in Jewish history and that these events recede further into the past every year. This is not so. Time is circular. Every year we re-visit the same place in time, the same reality. Every *Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Succot* we relive the original event. We do not merely remember what took place on these days, we re-experience them. The word for festival in Hebrew is *moed*. *Moed* means "an appointed time and place of meeting." Every year, we return to that same meeting place in time. We return to that same spiritual landscape.

There's something very unusual, however, about the landscape of *Shavuot*. It's a meeting place devoid of distinguishing features. It is an empty landscape. A desert. Our other meetings with the Creator all have much more visible scenery: At *Pesach* we experience the spiritual vista of *matzah*, the *seder*, the four cups of wine, *ma nishtana*. At *Succot* we return to the landscape of the "four species" and

the *succah*.

Shavuot, however, has no unique mitzvah, no identifying leitmotif, no recognizable landmark in its scenery. *Shavuot* is an empty landscape. Why?

Let me ask another question. In one of the highlights of the Shabbat morning prayers, the *mussaf kedusha*, we employ the language of those incorporeal celestial beings, the "angels" (for lack of a better English term). We say: "*His glory fills the world. His ministering angels ask one another 'Where is His glory?'*" If His glory fills the world, why should it be necessary for His ministering angels to ask where His glory is? Surely nothing is more visible than something that fills the world?

THE JIGSAW OF EXISTENCE

When something fills the whole world, when it fills all reality, you can't see it anymore. The ministering angels have to ask "Where is His glory" precisely *because* it fills the whole world.

Shavuot is the day which completes creation. When G-d gives the Torah to the Jewish People, the last piece in the jigsaw puzzle of creation falls into place. Instantly all the lines between the separate pieces of the jigsaw of existence vanish, revealing a complete and perfect whole.

Shavuot is the day of the completion of existence itself. The landscape looks empty because it contains everything. We can only determine features in a landscape when we see one thing as being separate from another. It is only the difference between things that allows us to see things at all. But if we were to look at "everything," we would see nothing.

Shavuot is the empty landscape — full with all creation.

A Return to Jerusalem...continued from page one

ited to that city.

With such an opportunity to grow in the Torah atmosphere of Jerusalem this member of the family would eventually return home to serve as a sort of "family resident scholar" capable of providing hands-on spiritual guidance for his relatives in a manner which no communal rabbi was capable of.

**Jerusalem and Torah -
even in name are they linked.**

The Midrash tells us that when Hashem came to designate a name for His favorite city, He was, as it were, faced with a dilemma. Malkitzedek, otherwise known as Shem son of Noach, first referred to the ancient city as "*Shalem*." Years earlier, Avraham, following his offer of his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice on what was to eventually become the Temple Mount, called it "*Yireh*." To call it only "*Shalem*" would be an affront to the righteous Avraham; to call it only "*Yireh*" would be an insult to the righteous

Malkitzedek. The Divine solution was to combine the two and call the city "*Yireh-shalem*" which English translation has formed into Jerusalem.

What's in a name? Plenty!

"*Yireh*" refers to the Divine choice of Jerusalem as His abode - "He will see and will choose this site." "*Shalem*" alludes to human striving for "*Shalom*" - peace and "*Shalem*" - perfection. By placing "*Yireh*" before "*Shalem*" - contrary to their chronological sequence - the name given to the Holy City communicated the timeless message that all of human striving for the noble goals of peace and perfection are exercises in futility if man fails to recognize the need for following the Divine directives for making these dreams come true.

Oh how we rejoiced that *Shavuot* night, singing in the streets of New Jerusalem as we headed for a *deja vu* with the House of Hashem in the eternal city of Torah and the Word of Hashem!

SICK LEAVE

If a Jewish slave who has an obligation to work for his master for six years fell ill for three of those years, he has no obligation to make them up by working another three years when his six-year servitude is completed.

Does this rule apply as well to a teacher or worker who has been hired for a long period and is unable to work for a substantial amount of time because of illness?

This is the subject of a major debate between the early commentaries. Tosefot cites the opinion of some authorities who compared the teacher to the slave and considered him entitled to full compensation without a need to make up for the time lost because of illness. This opinion appears in the commentary of Rabbi Mordechai bar Hillel Ashkenazi (*Mesechta Bava Metzia*, par. 347). It is based on the fact that if the slave who did something wrong (either by stealing or by selling himself into slavery against the wish of Hashem, Who wants Jews to be slaves only to Him and not to His slaves) is given such consideration, then this leniency should certainly apply to the teacher who did nothing wrong.

Tosefot, however, rejects this comparison between slave and teacher. One of the distinctions he makes is that the slave is considered the property of the owner during the six years of his servitude and the payment he received was for giving his master this ownership. His obligation to his owner is only to work as much as he is able; if he is unable to work because of illness, he has no obligation to make up for lost time. The teacher, on the other hand, is not the property of his employer and merely contracts to perform a service for pay. His failure to provide this service because of illness does therefore not entitle him to compensation.

Other distinctions are made by Tosefot here and by Rosh in *mesechta Bava Metzia* (*sixth perek par. 6*). The latter cites the opinion of Rabbi Meir that if the owner paid the teacher in advance then he has no obligation to make up the time lost because of illness. But if he has not yet paid him he must make up the lost time if he wishes to be paid in full. Both the opinion of Tosefot and the qualification of Rabbi Meir are cited by Rema (*Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 333:5*) as halachic conclusions.

• *Kiddushin 17a*

SLAVE OR MASTER?

The condition of the Jewish slave, who is the subject of so much of the first *perek* of our *mesechta*, was radically different from the image that the word slavery conjures up in our minds.

In Biblical and Talmudic times a Jew could become a slave in one of two ways. If he was convicted of theft and lacked

the funds to compensate his victim, the court sold him into slavery for six years so that the money paid by his purchaser could be used for such compensation. There was also the possibility of a Jew who reached such a desperate level of destitution that the only way he could provide for himself and his family was to sell himself as a slave.

In either case, the Torah laid down severe restrictions on the manner in which such a slave is sold and the nature of the work which can be assigned to him. These restrictions were to insure that his dignity as a Jew was maintained. As if these restrictions were not enough to achieve this goal, the Torah explains the reasons for a slave wishing to stay on with his master when his six-year period is over as “for it is good for him to be with you” (*Devarim 15:16*). This is interpreted by our sages as a directive to the owner of a Jewish slave to assure that he enjoys the same quality of food, drink and sleeping accommodations as his master, a requirement which led the sages to conclude that “one who purchases a Jewish slave is buying himself a master instead.”

Tosefot raises the question as to why the Jewish slave is considered like a master to his master when all that is demanded of his master is to show him equality? As an answer Tosefot cites the Jerusalem Talmud which discusses the case of a master who has only one good mattress in his possession. If he keeps it for himself and relegates the slave to a bed of straw, he has not fulfilled the requirement of equality. To withhold the use of the mattress from both would be behaving with Sodomite insensitivity. The only course available then is to give the mattress to the slave, which in a sense makes him enjoy the status of master of his master rather than being his slave.

• *Kiddushin 20a*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

Introduction to Bamidbar

- 1:3 The Draft Age
- 1:45 The Reason for Counting
- 2:2 The Organization of the Camp
- 3:14 The *Levi'im*
- 4:16 The Role of Elazar ben Aharon

IBN EZRA

- 1:19 Organization of the Camp

SFORNO

Introduction to Bamidbar

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 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?

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 Hashem.
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 - Hashem 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 firstborn 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 - Hashem.
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*.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS “QUESTION”)

The Tribe of Levi was the smallest tribe? Why?

Answer: Concerning the period of enslavement of the Jewish People in Egypt, the Torah states, “as they afflicted them, so they multiplied” (*Shemot 1:12*). The Jewish People reproduced miraculously, in direct proportion to the degree in which they were afflicted. Since the Tribe of Levi was not enslaved in Egypt, they reproduced in natural proportions.

• Ramban

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!

DINING OUT

From Name@Withheld:

Dear Rabbi,

I recently got a new job that requires I am often invited to lunch, dinner or "happy hour" on the company's expense. Along with this privilege, I also am required to take prospective clients out to lunch (once again company's treat) in order to "wine and dine." My problem is that I keep kosher (i.e., I only eat in certified restaurants and buy only kosher supervised products as well). Obviously, there arises a great conflict between my religious convictions and the norms of the American corporate world.

My question is: Are there good ways to possibly still keep kosher in non-kosher eating establishments? Are there any good resources for suggestions, etc.?

Dear Name@Withheld,

It's preferable not to enter a non-kosher restaurant, even if don't eat anything. Your being there gives the impression to onlookers that the restaurant is kosher. They may not realize that you are not eating, or that you have brought your own food.

But if you must attend a non-kosher restaurant, you can manage by eating only fresh, uncooked and uncut fruits and vegetables and kosher drinks. Or bring your own food. But if you do this, it may be wise to clear it with the restaurant beforehand.

Come to think of it, there are kosher caterers, like the ones who supply kosher food on airplanes, who can ship kosher meals almost anywhere overnight. These meals are sealed in a double layer of tin foil and therefore they can be heated in a non-kosher oven. With a little planning ahead, you may be able to arrange with some local restaurants to serve these to you, sealed and on disposable utensils.

Other than that, I have found that the best way to approach this issue is by being straightforward. Nowadays, people usually are very respectful of someone who adheres faithfully to their religious principles. On the contrary, if you don't explain yourself, folks will probably wonder why

your eating habits are so odd!

Think of Joseph Leiberman, a kashrut and Shabbat observant Jew, who was candidate for the U.S. vice presidency. His career doesn't seem to have suffered from his observance! On the contrary, the respect he commands is due in large part to his firm adherence to his religion.

An excellent book which contains a section on the topic of non-kosher restaurants is "After the Return" by Mordechai Becher and Moshe Newman, Feldheim Publishers.

WHY CAN'T WE BE FRIENDS?

From: Marjorie Wolfe
<wolfeny@webtv.net>

Dear Rabbi,

What are the Hebrew terms for "sorry" or "very sorry"? President Bush and Colin Powell said they were "very sorry" over the apparent death of a Chinese pilot. The U.S. was also "very sorry" that their severely crippled plane entered China's airspace and made an emergency landing on Hainan Island without verbal clearance. However, our political leaders did not express "deep apology." Question: Is there a Hebrew term for "sorry," "very sorry" or a "deep apology"? Do Jews differentiate between these forms of apology? I look forward to hearing from you.

Dear Marjorie Wolfe,

First let me say that I am sorry for the delay in answering your question. I apologize. Deeply.

An apology is a "regretful acknowledgment of fault," whereas "sorry" implies regret but does not necessarily imply fault. Saying I'm sorry could mean "I'm sorry the thing happened."

That's English. In Hebrew, the same distinction exists. You apologize by asking for "selicha" or "mechila" (pardon or forgiveness). But "ani mitzta'air" means "I'm sorry" without necessarily implying fault.

So, for example, if you go to a local Israeli store at 2:00 Tuesday afternoon only to find the owner locking up, and he says to you "Sagoor (closed). Ani mitzta'air,"

what he means is that he's sorry you didn't know that many stores close early on Tuesday, but he's happy to be going home and it's not his fault.

CRYING "WOLF" OVER SPILLED MILK

From: Aharon in Paris, France
<aharon@club-internet.fr>

Dear Rabbi,

Someone sent me an article from a Muslim website entitled: "The touch of non-Jews means millions in spilt milk." The article reported that "in April 2000, millions of liters of milk were thrown out because it had been touched by non-Jews, which violates Jewish law." Citing a Hebrew newspaper, the article claimed that Israel's High Rabbinat ordered Jewish farmers in the Jafa-Tel Aviv region to throw out about 2.4 million liters of milk because non-Jews had touched it. The article went on to compare this to the Hindu law of Manu Smirti that food gets spoiled by the touch of outcaste untouchables.

I can't believe that all this is correct. Something doesn't fit. We don't have "untouchables," do we? Could you help me find the right information?

Dear Aharon,

You are right, the above is false. A non-Jew may touch our milk and it is kosher.

Like all good lies, this one starts off with the truth: Kosher food needs special supervision. (Otherwise, how would we know if it was kosher?) Regarding milk, the Talmud requires that the milking be done under Jewish supervision to make sure no milk from non-kosher animals is mixed in. But a non-Jew may do the milking and may touch the milk and the milk remains kosher.

And if it happened that non-kosher milk were mixed in, we would still be able to sell the milk. There is no requirement to spill it out.

In sum, the article your friend sent you is the work of just another one of our many enemies; it's a willful distortion intended to defame Jews and Judaism.

• Sources: Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 115:1