

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

BEMIDBAR/SHABUOT
Haftarah: Hoshea 2:1-22
MAY 18-19, 2018 5 SIVAN 5778

DEDICATION: Refuah Shelema for all in need by anonymous

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EDITORS NOTES

Aspiring to be angelic Bemidbar 5777

If one asks, "who is greater, man or angel?", one can expect many answers.

We read this week in the opening portion of BeMidbar, Hashem telling Moses that we should make camp with each person positioned by his flag according to the insignias (or otot signs or perhaps instructions) of our families. On this the Midrash comments that when Hashem revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, twenty-two thousand ministering angels came down... These angels were all assembled under banners. When the Jewish people saw that the angels were assembled under flags, the Jewish people too desired flags. So here, Hashem grants their wish and tells Moses, "Make them banners as they desired".

We must ask, why did the Jewish people desire these flags? Obviously there had to be something very powerful alluded to through the positioning of the tribes under banners for Hashem to agree with this request and command Moses to "make them banners as they desired?"

We are given a second reason as well for their formation as designed. The Midrash tells us that when Jacob called his sons to give them his final blessing, he concluded with the following instructions: "When you carry me to my last resting-place, you must escort me with proper reverence and respect. No other man shall touch my bier; neither an Egyptian nor any of your children.

We see that the Torah states; "and his sons carried him." The Midrash continues, "How did he command them to do it? He said to them: 'My children, when my bier is being carried, Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun shall be on the east side; Reuven, Shimon and Gad shall be on the south side; Efrayim,

Menasheh and Binyamin shall be on the west side; Dan, Asher and Naftali shall be on the north side."

One hundred and ninety three years later when the time came for his descendants to once again depart from Egypt, these instructions were followed; the otot that Jacob transmitted to his sons were meant for all of his descendants. And just as the Shevatim, the tribes traveled with Jacob in their center, the Jewish people traveled at first with Joseph in their center – perhaps Joseph being the extension of Jacob – and then with the fabrication of the tabernacle, it was the ark and the mishkan in the center surrounded by the 22,000 Levites – coincidentally the same number as the angels descending onto Mount Sinai. The focus was always on the center, and each member of the formation had a specific place and a specific role.

We can find two lessons here. The first on aspiring to be angelic and the second on the specific roles we play in this world and in our lives.

The rabbis teach us that angels are called omdim or those who stand, while men are called holchim or those who go. While man may be imperfect, an angel may be perfect, yet while a man can perfect himself and aspire to the level of an angel, an angel can move no further. Rabbi Abittan, z'sl, would teach us to never judge a person or ourselves based on his or our position on the spiritual ladder of life, rather we should look at the direction we are heading. Are we moving down or are we moving up. If we are moving up, we are even greater than an angel who cannot move at all.

It is crucial to understand that each of us is placed in this world within specific circumstances. The kabbalists teach that our soul knowing its own needs for its own path towards perfection specifically chooses every parameter of its upcoming manifestation in the physical world prior to birth. This means that we or at least at a soul level come prepared in some way to face the challenges of both nature and nurture. We are all born with different tendencies by nature; some of us have stronger physical drives and needs more difficult to overcome while others find it easier to maintain control. We are all born into the specific conditions of family dynamics, socio economic circumstances and historical and environmental givens. Simply speaking, some are rich and some are poor, some

are handsome and some are not, some are wise and some are less so, some have a loving environment and some must overcome the most dysfunctional of homes, some have health and some battle illness, some are blessed with wonderful parents and children and some are born of witches and the most difficult offspring. We all face our own challenges in overcoming deficiencies, lacking and predispositions. We all must strive to move forward.

One vital lesson the rabbi taught us we can learn from angels is in acknowledging and accepting our own place and position. He would explain that the difference between the ministering angels and man is that angels have no hatred, jealousy, nor competition. We say in the daily tefilah in the blessings of Shema, "They are all beloved; they are all flawless; they are all mighty... Then they all accept upon themselves the yoke of Heavenly sovereignty from one another and grant permission to one another to sanctify the One Who formed them". This teaches us that a ministering angel is not jealous of another's abilities. The rabbis teach that each angel is created for a specific purpose. The angels themselves in recognizing the differences and each one's distinct purpose for being acknowledge each other's greatness. The angels respect each other and in many ways display the requirement to love one another in granting permission to one another. Perhaps this is what the Jewish nation saw.

Perhaps this is what impressed them and formed within them the desire to emulate. Hashem appreciates this desire for self-growth and grants them their wish.

But the angels are perfect and we are not.

Jacob's instruction and the images of the people circling the mishkan and the ark remind me of the statement in the Talmud which teaches that in the time to come, Hashem will have the righteous form a circle in Gan Eden and Hashem will be in the middle. Rabbi Abittan would tell us, "No, this is not romper room. He would quote his teacher from Ponevitch, Rav Dessler who taught that the idea of the righteous dancing in a circle is that each member is equally close to the center--to Hashem. Additionally, when dancing in a circle, each member is constantly moving forward."

The rabbi would explain that although each of us is in a different position around the circle, although each of us may have his own perspective on serving Hashem, some through chesed, some through learning and teaching and some through prayer, we are all equally distant and we are all within the circle

prescribed by the rabbis. Yet in the dance, we all continue to move forward. We all have our positives and we all have our deficiencies, but we hold each other's hand and move forward together.

The lesson is that each person who uses his abilities to serve Hashem and who makes the effort will stand as close to Him as anyone else. As we mentioned, one person may have been born with less abilities, his task is simply to serve Hashem to the utmost of his intellect and his talents. Another, blessed with a keen mind and a piercing intellect, is challenged to not limit his effort and so to say swim along. He too must serve Hashem to the best of his abilities. Whatever gift Hashem blesses us with is only given so that we use it to serve, to help and to grow.

Although it's greater to be a man than an angel as a man can grow, we have lessons to learn from the angels. We must recognize our position and respect the position of others as long as they are within the Torah's circle, eliminating jealousy and strife. We must also recognize our position in that each of us is born into specific circumstances and no one can truly feel what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes. Each of us must strive to move forward to the best of our own abilities and also to hold each other's hand helping each other to move forward. As Rabbi Abittan taught, it's not where we are on the ladder that's most important; it's the direction we are heading. May we all move forward together.

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameyach,

David Bibi

Gaza's Miseries Have Palestinian Authors By Bret Stephens May 16, 2018

Palestinians protesting at the Gaza border on Sunday. The large wooden key the boy is holding symbolizes the Palestinians' belief in their right of return. Mahmud Hams/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

For the third time in two weeks, Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have set fire to the Kerem Shalom border crossing, through which they get medicine, fuel and other humanitarian essentials from Israel. Soon we'll surely hear a great deal about the misery of Gaza. Try not to forget that the authors of that misery are also the presumptive victims.

There's a pattern here — harm yourself, blame the other — and it deserves to be highlighted amid the torrent of morally blind, historically illiterate criticism to which Israelis are subjected every time they defend themselves against violent Palestinian attack.

In 1970, Israel set up an industrial zone along the border with Gaza to promote economic cooperation and provide Palestinians with jobs. It had to be shut down in 2004 amid multiple terrorist attacks that left 11 Israelis dead.

In 2005, Jewish-American donors forked over \$14 million dollars to pay for greenhouses that had been used by Israeli settlers until the government of Ariel Sharon withdrew from the Strip. Palestinians looted dozens of the greenhouses almost immediately upon Israel's exit.

In 2007, Hamas took control of Gaza in a bloody coup against its rivals in the Fatah faction. Since then, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and other terrorist groups in the Strip have fired nearly 10,000 rockets and mortars from Gaza into Israel — all the while denouncing an economic “blockade” that is Israel's refusal to feed the mouth that bites it. (Egypt and the Palestinian Authority also participate in the same blockade, to zero international censure.)

In 2014 Israel discovered that Hamas had built 32 tunnels under the Gaza border to kidnap or kill Israelis. “The average tunnel requires 350 truckloads of construction supplies,” The Wall Street Journal reported, “enough to build 86 homes, seven mosques, six schools or 19 medical clinics.” Estimated cost of tunnels: \$90 million.

Want to understand why Gaza is so poor? See above.

Which brings us to the grotesque spectacle along Gaza's border over the past several weeks, in which thousands of Palestinians have tried to breach the fence and force their way into Israel, often at the cost of their lives. What is the ostensible purpose of what Palestinians call “the Great Return March”?

That's no mystery. This week, The Times published an op-ed by Ahmed Abu Artema, one of the organizers of the march. “We are intent on continuing our struggle until Israel recognizes our right to return to our homes and land from which we were expelled,” he writes, referring to homes and land within Israel's original borders.

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His objection isn't to the “occupation” as usually defined by Western liberals, namely Israel's acquisition of territories following the 1967 Six Day War. It's to the existence of Israel itself. Sympathize with him all you like, but at least notice that his politics demand the elimination of the Jewish state.

Notice, also, the old pattern at work: Avow and pursue Israel's destruction, then plead for pity and aid when your plans lead to ruin.

The world now demands that Jerusalem account for every bullet fired at the demonstrators, without offering a single practical alternative for dealing with the crisis.

But where is the outrage that Hamas kept urging Palestinians to move toward the fence, having been amply forewarned by Israel of the mortal risk? Or that protest organizers encouraged women to lead the charges on the fence because, as The Times's Declan Walsh reported, “Israeli soldiers might be less likely to fire on women”? Or that Palestinian children as young as 7 were dispatched to try to breach the fence? Or that the protests ended after Israel warned Hamas's leaders, whose preferred hide-outs include Gaza's hospital, that their own lives were at risk?

Elsewhere in the world, this sort of behavior would be called reckless endangerment. It would be condemned as self-destructive, cowardly and almost bottomlessly cynical.

The mystery of Middle East politics is why Palestinians have so long been exempted from these ordinary moral judgments. How do so many so-called progressives now find themselves in objective sympathy with the murderers, misogynists and homophobes of Hamas? Why don't they note that, by Hamas's own admission, some 50 of the 62 protesters killed on Monday were members of Hamas? Why do they begrudge Israel the right to defend itself behind the very borders they've been clamoring for years for Israelis to get behind? Why is nothing expected of Palestinians, and everything forgiven, while everything is expected of Israelis, and nothing forgiven?

That's a question to which one can easily guess the answer. In the meantime, it's worth considering the harm Western indulgence has done to Palestinian aspirations.

No decent Palestinian society can emerge from the culture of victimhood, violence and fatalism symbolized by these protests. No worthy Palestinian government can emerge if the international community continues to indulge the corrupt, anti-Semitic autocrats of the Palestinian Authority or fails to condemn and sanction the despotic killers of Hamas. And no Palestinian economy will ever flourish through repeated acts of self-harm and destructive provocation.

If Palestinians want to build a worthy, proud and prosperous nation, they could do worse than try to learn from the one next door. That begins by forswearing forever their attempts to destroy it.

Did God Speak at Sinai? by Rabbi Nechemia Coopersmith and Rabbi Moshe Zeldman

What supports the claim that God spoke to the entire Jewish people at the foot of Mount Sinai?

Who did God give the Torah to at Mount Sinai? Most people reply, "God gave the Torah to Moses."

And what were the Jewish people doing while Moses was receiving the Torah? "Worshipping the Golden Calf." Correct answers – but NOT according to the Bible.

The above answers come from Cecil B. DeMille's classic film, "The Ten Commandments." Amazing the impact one movie can have on the Jewish education of generations of Jews. It's a great film, but DeMille should have read the original.

The version found in the Torah is quite different. The Torah's claim is that the entire people heard God speak at Mount Sinai, experiencing national revelation. God did not just appear to Moses in a private rendezvous; He appeared to everyone, some 3 million people. This claim is mentioned many times in the Torah.

[Moses told the Israelites]: 'Only beware for yourself and greatly beware for your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have beheld. Do not remove this memory from your heart all the days of your life. Teach your children and your children's children about the day that you stood before the Lord your God at Horev [Mount Sinai]...

God spoke to you from the midst of the fire, you were hearing the sound of words, but you were not seeing a form, only a sound. He told you of His covenant, instructing you to keep the Ten Commandments, and He inscribed them on two stone tablets.' (Deut.4:9-13)

'You have been shown in order to know that God, He is the Supreme Being. There is none besides Him. From heaven he let you hear His voice in order to teach you, and on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words amid the fire.' (Deut. 4:32-36)

Moses called all of Israel and said to them: 'Hear, O Israel, the decrees and the ordinances that I speak in your ears today — learn them, and be careful to perform them. The Lord your God sealed a covenant with us at Horev [Mount Sinai]. Not with our forefathers did God seal this covenant, but with us — we who are here, all of us alive today. Face to face

did God speak with you on the mountain from amid the fire.' (Deut. 5:1-4)

The Torah claims that the entire Jewish nation heard God speak at Sinai, an assertion that has been accepted as part of their nation's history for over 3,000 years.

DeMille's mistake is such a big deal because the Jewish claim of national revelation, as opposed to individual revelation, is the central defining event that makes Judaism different than every other religion in the world.

How so?

History and Legends: Two types of stories are part of any national heritage.

The first kind is legends. Included in this category is George Washington's admission to chopping down the cherry tree, along with his statement, "I cannot tell a lie." Johnny Appleseed planting apple trees across America with his discarded apple cores is another legend.

Then there is history. For example, George Washington was the first president of the United States. William the Conqueror led the Battle of Hastings in 1066 in which Harold, King of England, was killed. The Jews of Spain were expelled from their country in 1492, the year Christopher Columbus set sail.

What is the difference between legend and history?

A legend is an unverified story. By their very nature legends are unverifiable because they have very few eyewitnesses. Perhaps little George did chop down the cherry tree. We can't know if it happened. This does not mean that the legend is necessarily false, only that it is unverifiable. No one thinks legends are facts, therefore they are not accepted as reliable history.

History, however, is comprised of events we know actually happened. It is reliable because we can determine if the claimed event is true or false through a number of ways. One key to verification is the assertion that large numbers of eyewitnesses observed the specific event.

Why is the number of claimed original witnesses a principal determining factor in making historical accounts reliable? This can be understood through looking at the nature of the following series of claims and weighing their levels of credibility. The nature of

the claim itself can often determine its degree of believability.

The Believability Game: Gauge the level of credibility of the following scenarios.

Some claims are inherently unverifiable. For example, would you believe me if I told you the following:

Scenario #1: "Last week after dinner, I went for a walk through the forest near my house. Suddenly everything was awash in a tremendous light and God appeared to me, designating me as His prophet. He told me to announce this revelation to you at this time."

Believable?

In theory this could have happened. It doesn't seem likely, but you don't know I'm lying. Would you choose to believe me?

Without any substantiating evidence, why choose to believe me? A foolish move, indeed.

Scenario #2: Would you believe me if I told you the following:

"Last night while I was eating dinner with my family, the room started to suddenly shake and God's booming voice was heard by all of us. He designated me as His prophet and commanded me to announce this revelation."

Believable?

This could have happened too. If I were to bring in my family to confirm the story it would be more believable than the first story. You certainly don't know if I'm lying.

Would you believe me? Would you fork over \$10,000 dollars if I told you God commanded you to do so?

No way. There is still not enough evidence to trust my claim — because it is very possible that my family is lying.

Scenario #3: There is another type of claim that you can know is false. For example, would you believe me if I told you this:

"Do you remember what happened 10 minutes ago just as you began reading this article? Remember how the room started shaking, then the ceiling opened up to the skies, and you and I together heard God's booming voice come down and say 'Thou shalt hearken to the voice of Nechemia Coopersmith for he

is my prophet!' And then the room went back to normal and you continued reading. You remember that, don't you?"

Is this believable?

This kind of claim is completely different. The two previous scenarios at least had the possibility of being true. You chose not to accept them because they were unverifiable. However this third scenario is impossible to believe. I'm claiming something happened to you that you know did not happen. Since you didn't experience it, you know I'm lying. I cannot convince you of something that you yourself know didn't happen.

This first type of claim — that something happened to someone else — is unverifiable, because you do not know for certain that the claim is a lie. Therefore it is possible for a person to decide to accept the claim as true if he really wanted to and take that leap of faith.

However, the other type of claim — that something happened to you — you know if it is inherently false. People do not accept patently false assertions, especially those that carry significant consequences.

Sinai: An Impossible Hoax

So far we have seen two types of claims — one is unverifiable and the other is inherently false.

Could the revelation at Sinai have been a brilliant hoax, duping millions of people into believing that God spoke to them?

Let's imagine the scene. Moses comes down the mountain and claims, "We all today heard God speak, all of you heard the God's voice from the fire..."

Assuming Moses is making it up, how would the people respond to his story?

"Moses! What are you talking about?! Boy, you sure had us going there for awhile. We may have even believed you if you came down and claimed that God appeared to you personally. But now you blew it! Now we know you're lying because you're claiming an event happened to us that we know didn't happen! We did not hear God speak to us from any fire!"

If the revelation at Sinai did not occur, then Moses is claiming an event everyone immediately knows is an outright lie, since they know that they never heard God speak. It is preposterous to think Moses can get away with a claim that everyone knows is lie.

Revelation Claimed Later in History?

Perhaps a hoax such as this could have been attempted at a later period in history. Perhaps the claim of national revelation did not originate at Sinai, but began, for example, 1,000 years after the event was said to have occurred. Perhaps the leader Ezra, for example, appears on the scene, introducing a book purported to be written by God and given to a people who stood at Sinai a long time ago.

Could someone get away with this kind of hoax? For example, would you believe the following:

"I want to let you in on a very little-known, but true fact. In 1794 over 200 years ago, from May until August, the entire continent of North America mysteriously sank under the sea. For those four months, the whole continent was submerged and somehow all animal, plant and human life managed to adapt to these bizarre conditions. Then, on August 31, the entire continent suddenly floated up to the surface and life resumed to normal."

Is there a possibility that I'm telling the truth? Do you know for a fact that it is a lie? After all, it happened so long ago, how do you know it didn't happen? Maybe you learned about in school and just forgot about it.

You know that North America did not sink hundreds of years ago for one simple reason: If it did, you would have heard about it. An event so unique and amazing, witnessed by multitudes of people would have been known, discussed, and passed down, becoming a part of history. The fact that no one has heard of it up until now means you know the story is not true, making it impossible to accept.

An event of great significance with a large number of eyewitnesses cannot be perpetuated as a hoax. If it did not happen, everyone would realize it is false since no one ever heard about it before. Thus, if such an event was indeed accepted as part of history, the only way to understand its acceptance is that the event actually happened.

Introduced Later? Let's assume for the moment that the revelation at Mount Sinai is really a hoax; God did not write the Torah. How did the revelation at Sinai become accepted for thousands of years as part of our nation's history?

Imagine someone trying to pull off such a hoax. An Ezra figure shows up one day holding a scroll.

"Hey Ezra – what are you holding there?"
"This is the Torah."

"The Torah? What's that?"

"It's an amazing book filled with laws, history and stories. Here, take a look at it."

Very nice, Ezra. Where did you get this?"

"Open up the book and see what it says. This book was given thousands of years ago to your ancestors. Three million of them stood at Mount Sinai and heard God speak! God appeared to everyone, giving His law and instruction."

How would you respond to such a claim?

The people give Ezra a quizzical look and say,

"Wait a second, Ezra. Something is a little fishy here. Why haven't we ever heard of this before? You're describing one of the most momentous events that could ever happen, claiming that it happened to our ancestors – and we never heard about it?"

"Sure. It was a long time ago. Of course you never heard about it."

"C'mon Ezra! It's impossible that our grandparents or great-grandparents would not have passed down the most significant event in our nation's history to some of the people! How could it be that no one has heard about this up until now?! You're claiming all my ancestors, the entire nation, 3 million people heard God speak and received a set of instructions called the Torah, and none of us have heard about it?! You must be lying."

If one cannot pull off a hoax with regard to a continent sinking, so too one cannot pull off a hoax to convince an entire people that their ancestors experienced the most unique event in all of human history.

Everyone would know it's a lie.

For thousands of years, Sinai was accepted as central to Jewish history. How else can this be explained?

Given that people will not fall for a hoax they know is a lie, how could national revelation have been not only accepted — but faithfully followed with great sacrifice by the vast majority of Jews?

The only way a people would accept such a claim is if it really happened. If Sinai did not happen, everyone would know it's a lie and it would never have been accepted. The only way one can ever claim a nation experienced revelation and have it accepted is if it is true.

Sinai: The Only Claim Of National Revelation

Throughout history, tens of thousands of religions have been started by individuals, attempting to convince people that God spoke to him or her. All religions that base themselves on some type of revelation share essentially the same beginning: a holy person goes into solitude, comes back to his people, and announces that he has experienced a personal revelation where God appointed him to be His prophet.

Would you believe someone who claims to have received a personal communication from God appointing him or her as God's new prophet?

Maybe He did. Then again, maybe He didn't. One can never know. The claim is inherently unverifiable.

Personal revelation is an extremely weak basis for a religion since one can never know if it is indeed true. Even if the individual claiming personal revelation performs miracles, there is still no verification that he is a genuine prophet. Miracles do not prove anything. All they show — assuming they are genuine — is that he has certain powers. It has nothing to do with his claim of prophecy.

Maimonides writes: Israel did not believe in Moses, our teacher, on account of the miracles he performed. For when one's faith is based on miracles, doubt remains in the mind that these miracles may have been done through the occult and witchcraft...

What then were the grounds of believing him? The revelation on Sinai which we saw with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, not having to depend on the testimony of others... (Mishna Torah - Foundations of Torah 8:1)

A Bold Prediction

There are 15,000 known religions in all of recorded history. Given this inherent weakness, why do all of them base their claim on personal revelation? If someone wanted their religion to be accepted, why wouldn't they present the strongest, most believable claim possible — i.e. national revelation! It's far more credible. No one has to take a leap of faith and blindly trust just one person's word. It is qualitatively better to claim that God came to everyone, telling the entire group that so-and-so is His prophet.

Why would God establish His entire relationship with a nation through one man, without any possibility of verification, and still expect this nation to obediently

follow an entire system of instructions, based only on blind faith?

Yet, Judaism is the only religion in the annals of history that makes the best of all claims — that everyone heard God speak. No other religion claims the experience of national revelation. Why?

Furthermore, the author of the Torah predicts that there will never be another claim of national revelation throughout history!

'You might inquire about times long past, from the day that God created man on earth, and from one end of heaven to the other: Has there ever been anything like this great thing or has anything like it been heard? Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fires as you have heard and survived?' (Deut. 4:32-33)

Let's consider the option that God did not write the Torah, and its author successfully convinced a group of people to accept a false claim of national revelation. In this book, the author writes a prediction that over the course of history no one will ever make a similar claim. That means if such a claim is ever made at some future time, the prediction will end up being false and his religion is finished.

How could the author include in the book he is passing off as a hoax the prediction that no other person will ever attempt to perpetuate the same hoax when he just made that exact claim? If he could do it, he can be certain that others will too, especially since it is the best possible claim to make. If you are making up a religion, you do not write something you know you cannot predict and whose outcome you would think is guaranteed to be exactly the opposite.

However, aside from the Jewish claim of Mount Sinai, it is a fact that no other nation has ever claimed such a similar national revelation.

Let's summarize two primary questions:

1. Out of 15,000 known religions in recorded history, why is Judaism the only one that claims national revelation, the best of all claims? Why do all other religions base themselves on the inherently weak assertion of personal revelation?
2. If Judaism's claim is indeed an example of a successful hoax that falsely asserts national revelation, the author just got away with passing off the best possible claim, and others will certainly follow suit. Why then would he predict that no one else will ever make a similar claim, a prediction he

knows he cannot foresee, and whose outcome is likely to be the exact opposite?

There is one simple answer to both questions. A national revelation — as opposed to personal revelation — is the one lie you cannot get away with. It is one event you cannot fabricate. The only way to make this claim is if it actually happened.

If the claim is true, the people will believe it because they are agreeing to something they already know. Either they personally witnessed it, or their ancestors collectively passed down the account as part of their nation's accepted history.

If the claim is false, it's like trying to convince you that God spoke to you or your parents and somehow you never heard of it. No one would ever accept such a claim.

Therefore no other religion has ever made the best of all claims, because it is the one claim that can only be made if it is true. One cannot pass national revelation off as a hoax.

When inventing a religion, the originator must resort to personal revelation, despite its inherent weakness, since it is a claim that is unverifiable. The originator can hope to find adherents willing to take a leap of faith and accept his or her religion. After all, no one can ever know it is a lie. [Of course, no one can know if it's true either.] This simply cannot work with national revelation since it's the one claim that everyone will know is a lie.

Only Judaism can claim national revelation since the Jewish people is the only nation in the history of mankind who ever experienced it.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the other major religions of the world both accept the Jewish revelation at Sinai, including the Five Books of Moses in their Bible, and hold the Sinai revelation as a key component of their religion.

When starting their own religions, why did they build upon the Jewish claim? Why didn't they just deny the revelation ever happened?

The answer is that they knew that if national revelation can never be fabricated; so too, its validity can therefore never be denied.

Now it is understandable how the Author of the Torah can confidently predict that there will never be another claim of national revelation in history.

Because only God knew it would happen only once, as it did — at Sinai over 3,000 years ago.

Based on a segment of Aish HaTorah's Discovery seminar.

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Bamidbar - Moshe counts Benei Israel (year 2 in the midbar)

- 1- Hashem commands Moshe and Aharon to take a census. Leaders of each tribe are assigned
- 2- The count for each tribe is listed. Levi is not counted. The job of the Leviim by the mishkan
- 3- Discusses how Benei Israel camped around the mishkan (who camped next to who, leader of the tribe and number of people in each tribe) and how they traveled in the midbar
- 4- Tells about the sons of Aharon. The Leviim are appointed to take care of the mishkan
- 5- Moshe counts the Leviim. The parasha discusses the 3 children of Levi individually including where they camped, who their nasi was, and what their job in the mishkan was.
- 6- Moshe counts the bechorim. The bechorim are redeemed by the Leviim.
- 7- The special responsibilities of benei Kehat

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

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

It is traditional to read the parashah of Bemidbar before the holiday of Shabuot. The Shabbat before Shabuot is known as Shabbat Derech Eress, the Shabbat of Good Character, because we always say “Derech Eress Kadmah LaTorah – good character comes before Torah.” As a matter of fact, Parashat Yitro, which contains the Ten Commandments, has in it advice from Yitro to Moshe that according to some opinions took place before the giving of the Torah. He said, “And you shall make known to them the path in which they should go and the deeds that they should do.” In the Gemara (Baba Kamma 99a), Rav Yosef understands this to mean that Moshe should teach them to do hesed and bikur holim and to bury the dead. Yitro told Moshe to teach this to the people even before receiving the Torah.

Rav Paysach Krohn related the following beautiful anecdote. An elderly woman, who was a friend of Rabbi Krohn's, went to visit her friend who was sitting shiva in Washington Heights, NY. The mourner, who was close to 90 years old, had just

suffered the passing of her husband and was sitting shiva alone.

The widow was speaking with her lone visitor when a Jewish couple from Boro Park entered the apartment. As the husband and wife sat down, the widow began conversing with them. She didn't know them, so she asked if they knew her late husband. "No," they responded.

In the politest manner, the widow asked them why they had come. After all, they didn't know her and they didn't know her husband. Why come all the way from Boro Park to Washington Heights to visit someone they didn't know?

"You see," they explained, "we regularly review the listings of Misaskim organization of people who are sitting, along with the mourner's locations and hours. Whenever we see that a person is sitting shiva alone, we make sure to visit and console that mourner.

It is so difficult for a person to sit shiva. But imagine having to sit shiva all alone. The pain of the loss is compounded by the solitude. There are two people somewhere in Boro Park who recognize this fact, and expend time and effort and money to address this. As we said, Derech Eress Kadmah LaTorah. Rabbi Reuven Semah

As we know, the holiday of Shabuot is known as Yom Matan Toratenu, the day we received the Torah on Mt. Sinai. On this day, there was a special korban offering called Shte Halehem, two loaves which were offered. An unusual aspect of this offering was that the loaves needed to be hametz, even though all year round, almost every other flour offering needed to be matzah. What is the significance of this?

The Keli Yakar explains that hametz represents the yeser hara (evil inclination). If someone is baking matzah and he delays for too long, it turns into hametz. This is a technique of the yeser hara. When we decide to do a certain misvah, he tries to distract us and to get us to procrastinate, so that we won't perform the misvah. However the Gemara teaches that even though Hashem created the yeser hara, He also created the Torah as its antidote. The best way to protect ourselves from the yeser hara is through Torah study. Therefore, on the holiday of Shabuot,, the offering is from hametz, to symbolize that when we latch onto the Torah, the yeser hara has no power over us.

The Keli Yakar continues and says that if not for the fact that we have a yeser hara, Moshe would not have been able to bring the Torah down from shamayim. He quotes a Gemara which tells how the angels objected when Moshe went up to receive the Torah, because they wanted to keep it up in shamayim. Moshe responded to them, "Do you have

a yeser hara for which you need the Torah? We humans have a yeser hara, and we therefore need the Torah to help us overcome it." Since the reason Moshe was able to bring down the Torah was due to the fact that we have a yeser hara, we commemorate this by bringing an offering which is hametz.

On this holiday, let's rededicate ourselves to setting aside times for Torah study. It is our greatest treasure, and the best way to ensure that we continue to serve Hashem properly and follow in His ways. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

A Balanced State of Mind

"It is truly remarkable to see how people have the natural ability to balance themselves on two legs even while walking over rough terrain and snow. Animals also have the ability to balance, but they walk on four legs and so the accomplishment is not as striking."

Through challenging times, life can be perceived as being off balance. Faith in Hashem and living a Torah based life will ensure a well-balanced state of mind. (Norman D. Levy, Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind.)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR Decisions

It is customary on Shabuot to read Megilat Rut, which tells the extraordinary story of Rut, a Moabite woman who converted to Judaism and moved to Eretz Yisrael. The story began when a famine struck Eretz Yisrael, prompting Elimelech, one of the wealthiest men among Beneh Yisrael, to leave the country and settle in Moab. He feared that as poverty became widespread, more and more Jews would be knocking on his door asking for assistance, and so he left. In Moab, his two sons, Mahlon and Kilyon, married Moabite women.

G-d punished Elimelech for abandoning his people during their time of crisis, and he lost his entire fortune. Shortly thereafter he died, as did his two sons. His wife, Naomi, who had previously been a wealthy, prominent woman, was now left as a poor, penniless widow. She decided to return home to Bet Lehem, and her two Moabit daughters-in-law, who were named Rut and Orpa, expressed their desire to join her. Naomi pleaded with them to stay in their homeland, Moab, rather than move with her to what was for them a foreign country. After all, she was penniless, and they would not find anyone in Eretz Yisrael willing to marry them. Orpa heeded her mother-in-law's advice and

went home, but Rut insisted on accompanying Naomi to Eretz Yisrael. Ultimately, she ended up meeting and marrying a wealthy landowner named Boaz, with whom she had a child, Obed, who was the grandfather of David Hamelech.

One of the many meaningful lessons we can learn from this story is the impact of the decisions we make in life. When Naomi urged Rut to stay in Moab, but she insisted on accompanying her to Bet Lehem, she could not possibly have imagined what kind of long-term impact this decision would have, and how it would change world history forever. From her perspective, this was simply a matter of performing kindness for a family member in need to whom she was very devoted. But at that moment, when she told Naomi that she was joining her regardless of what she said and what happened, she laid the groundwork for the birth of David Hamelech who would establish the eternal Jewish dynasty, from which Mashiah will emerge.

It is frightening to consider how even the small decisions we make in life – not to mention the larger decisions – can have such far-reaching effects. This is not to suggest that everyone should fret and panic when planning what to eat for dinner or choosing a shirt to wear. It does mean, however, that we must exercise care and patience when making the significant decisions in our lives. We never know which decision we make can change the entire direction of our and our families' lives. I still recall several occasions when as a student I had to decide whether or not to attend a certain Shiur. There were various considerations that had to be taken into account, and ultimately, I decided to go. In those Shiurim, I heard ideas and insights that literally changed my life and profoundly impacted upon the direction I took. At the time I had to make the decision, it seemed like a relatively trivial and minor matter. But in the end, this decision altered the direction of my life.

We must not be flippant when it comes to making decisions in life. This is certainly true when it comes to larger decisions such as where to live and where to send our children for schooling, but also with regard to the seemingly small decisions, such as whether to attend a Shiur, whether to go to the synagogue, whether to make the humorous, not-so-nice remark that we want to make, or whether to share a Devar Torah with a friend. The implications of these decisions can often be far more profound than

we think, and they therefore must be made carefully and responsibly, after serious thought and consideration

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Rabbi Wein

I realize that I am making a very bad pun, but I must state that numbers really do count. The Torah takes us through the counting of the Jewish people many times and in detail. Though it may be difficult for us to understand why this should be so, the basic lesson that it teaches us is an important one for national survival. Simply put, we are being instructed that for Judaism and Jewishness to survive there must be a significant Jewish population.

The Jewish people have always been a small people, numerically speaking, and since they suffered great persecution and attempts at extermination, maintaining significant numbers has always been a challenge and a necessity for Jewish survival. The interesting thing is that Jewish demographics are hard to measure in our time. Much of it depends on our defining who is Jewish and, perhaps even as important, who is likely to remain Jewish and have Jewish children and grandchildren.

Estimates on the size of the Jewish community in the United States for instance ranges from 5 million souls to as many years 15 million people. Seventy years ago, the estimates for the American Jewish community stood at 5 million people. Under a normal rate of population growth and in the blessed absence of pogroms and plagues, there should be about 20 million Jews now living in the United States. Sadly, that is certainly not so and stands as mute testimony to the ravages of intermarriage and assimilation that so undermines the future of the Jewish community in the United States.

Here in Israel the Bureau of Statistics records that as of 2017 there were 6.58 million Jews living in the country. This is perhaps the greatest number of Jews living in the land of Israel in our history. It is an astounding amount when we recall that 70 years ago, when the state was founded, only 600,000 Jews were present in the country. Much has happened in these 70 years that accounts for this dramatic increase.

The process of the ingathering of the exiles from the Arab countries and the Soviet Union as well as the immigration of the survivors in Europe after World War II, plus the continuing small but steady immigration of Jews from the West has provided for this astonishing growth in the Jewish population in the land of Israel. Population matters.

One of the most hopeful statistics here in Israel is the continuing strength of the fertility rate amongst all segments of the Jewish population here in the country. Having children is the ultimate vote of confidence in the permanence and success of the Jewish people in creating a state in our ancient homeland. The pessimists amongst us have long threatened that the demographics of the area are against us. It seems that they were unduly pessimistic about our future. The necessity to rebuild the Jewish people physically and spiritually remains the ultimate task that lies before us in our generation.

Rabbi Yosef Farhi BOOTLEG TORAH

Enjoying Torah, making it sweet, is not just Torah with extra credit. Sweet Torah, Torah that is enjoyable, is the only Torah. If it is not sweet, if you do not enjoy it, it is not Torah; it is just a bootleg version of it. A bootleg recording is an audio or video recording of a performance that was not officially released by the artist. Torah that is without your being involved in it, wanting more of it, is not the original Torah G-d gave at Har Sinai. It is just a bootleg version.

Enjoying Torah is so important that we pray for its sweetness every day in *אנן ברעהו*, in *Birkot Hatorah*. If a teacher does not make the Torah sweet to his students, it is better that he should not teach. (Midrash Shir Hashirim 2; Midrash Tanchuma Ki Tisa 16; Shemot Raba 41) Why is this infraction so serious that Rabbi Sugarfree should find another job? Because Torah is not a subject or a discussion of philosophy, or even a religion. It is a way of life, and an ongoing conversation of the ages between G-d and His People.

This is where we face a huge problem. There is so much Torah learning, so many boys in Yeshiva. So many girls in school. So many audio and video recordings on line. It seems as if everything is bliss. But, the individual is lacking the practical tools to make his Torah learning sweet and enjoyable. Parents and teachers are lacking guidance in how to make Torah sweet for their disciples. The purpose of a Yeshiva, the purpose of Bais Yaakov, is to make the learning sweet for life. As Albert Einstein said, education is what remains after

one has forgotten what one has learned in school. The purpose of a yeshiva is to transmit the real Torah, in all of its sweetness, to give a taste of something so sweet that the taster wants more and more.

The Mishna in Avot mentions 48 ways to acquire Torah, and these 48 are the secret to its sweetness. The Or Hachaim breaks down these 48 ways mentioned at the end of Pirkei Avot into three groups. All three groups are found in the passuk in Yitro, וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבָר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בְּמִדְבַּר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגֵד רַהֵקָה. And they travelled from Refidim, and they came to Midbar Sinai, and Yisrael camped there opposite the mountain.

The first group is *מידיפרמ ועסיו*, to grow in your Torah-learning efforts. *ויפר* hints at the idea of *ויפר*, weakness. They travelled away from weakness in Torah. The first of the three groups of the 48 is to take learning seriously. To taste the sweetness in Torah you need to invest not just time and effort, but to make your investment in a specific way, a way that is already built into the yeshiva system. The yeshiva system is structured after the dimensions of the Aron Kodesh, the Holy Ark. The Aron represents the Torah, and just as the Aron's measurements are expressed as breadth and depth, so too the sweetness of Torah is found in the blend of breadth (Bekius) and depth (Beiyun). (Toldot Yitzhak, Terumah)

The second group is to conduct yourself with humility, hinted in the words of the Passuk, *יניס רבדמ*. The Torah was given on Har Sinai, the lowest of mountains, to teach us that G-d comes down to teach Torah to the humble. (Megillah 29a ;Sotah 5a) The Kotzker and the Chidushei HaRim ask, if Hashem chose Har Sinai because of its lowliness, why wasn't the Torah given on the ground or in a valley? The answer is brilliant. In order to receive the Torah, one needs to believe in himself, to feel that he can grow, think of new ideas, ask questions and find the answers. If you learn like a *shmatteh*, if you can't fight for your *chiddush*, you will never be able to taste the Torah's sweetness. Again, the balance between humility and esteem is the key.

Although we read earlier the parasha of the curses for those who do not toil in Torah, the week immediately before Shavuot, we read *Bamidbar*, where G-d counts every Jew, regardless of his spiritual standing. There is a balance between having a broken heart, feeling so disappointed in oneself, and then believing in oneself again, similar to what we feel on Rosh Hashanah, when we read the curses of *Ki Tavo*, and then we read *Nitzavim*, that Moshe gives us back encouragement. (Megillah 31b) The Yeshiva is all about balance, about training its students to learn in a balanced way and to have a balanced self-perspective. To recognize that G-d

counts each and every Jew, each Neshama is called a Yechida, for its uniqueness. And each person has his part of Torah that he connects to. When a person learns higher than his level, or lower than his level, it is difficult to taste the Torah's sweetness.

And the third group of the 48 is לארשי מש נחיו, the idea of unity, of Achdut, א' בלב א' שיא, as one man with one heart. What does that mean? One man, I understand to mean unity. But what do the words "one heart" add to the idea of unity?

You cannot be focused on two ideas at one time. One heart, then, means total focus. It is so hard to focus when there is jealousy, hatred, competition among us. Jealousy, hatred and competition blur one's concentration, making it impossible to be focused on Torah. Only when there is Achdut, is there focus. At Har Sinai, we were like one man, with none of those negative emotions, so we were able to be totally concentrated, with one united heart.

The holiday of Pesach is in the merit of Avraham; Sukkot in the merit of Yaakov and Shavuot in Yitzhak's merit. Why is Yitzhak linked to Shavuot? The Shofar at Har Sinai was the horn of the ram that replaced Yitzhak on the altar. (Tur Rosh Chodesh 417) In Yitzhak's merit, we have Har Sinai. How so? Where did Har Sinai come from? R' Yossi said that it was separated like Challah from the dough, from the place of Yitzhak's Akeidah, from Har Hamoriah. G-d said, "Since their father, Yitzhak, was bound to the altar on this spot, it is appropriate that his sons will accept the Torah there (Midrash Shochar Tov, Tehillim 68).

Yitzhak is the representative of total Mesirut Nefesh. Giving up everything to G-d. The way that we can tap into Yitzhak's Mesirut Nefesh is by totally focusing when learning. Because the only way we can stay focused is if we give up all of our emotions to G-d. This concept of self sacrifice is the secret power of עמשנו השענ . We accepted - before even knowing what we were accepting. Because at Har Sinai, we all tapped into the Mesirut Nefesh of Yitzhak, of giving all we have to G-d. That is the secret to focusing when learning.

There are many ingredients to make your Torah learning sweet. The first is to pray to taste its sweetness, in the Torah blessings in the morning and in Arvit before Shema. The second is to understand its value, הטמל רועיש ול ניא, and the Torah is דגנכ הלוקש . The reward for learning even one letter of Torah is equal to performing and observing all of the 613 mitzvot (Gra, Sh'not Eliyahu Peah 1; 1). And to understand that every word of Torah a person learns is as if it comes "from G-d's mouth", ריפ תרות (R Chaim Volozhin Ruach Chaim 6;9). The Chazon Ish says that by internalizing the 13 principles of Emunah, one acquires love for Torah. R Baruch Ber

says that tasting Torah's sweetness is not possible when someone is living a life of lies, or learning false philosophies. (Birkat Shmuel Kiddushin 27) Someone once asked R Aharon Lev Shteinman how to make Torah sweet. He responded "How do you make honey sweet? Torah is similar to honey תחת בלחו שברד , but if you have sores in your mouth, you won't be able to taste its sweetness." Another idea, presented by the Vilna Gaon, is that lack of clarity brings lack of sweetness (Mishlei 1;22-23).

If we want our children and disciples to love Torah, we need to love Torah ourselves, and enjoy it ourselves. We need to learn from King David. He had this Kinor and Nevel that he would play at midnight while he was learning. His friends would hear him play, and they would say, if King David is learning Torah, we should do so as well. (Yerushalmi Berachot 1,1; see Bavli Berachot 3b)

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Two Journeys

The books of Shemot and Bamidbar have some striking similarities. They are both about journeys. They both portray the Israelites as quarrelsome and ungrateful. Both contain stories about the people complaining about food and water. In both the Israelites commit a major sin: in Shemot, the golden calf, in Bamidbar, the episode of the spies. In both, God threatens to destroy them and begin again with Moses. Both times, Moses' passionate appeal persuades God to forgive the people. It is easy when reading Bamidbar, to feel a sense of déjà vu. We have been here before.

But there is a difference. Shemot is about a journey from. Bamidbar is about a journey to. Shemot is the story of an escape from slavery. Exodus, the English name of the book, means just that: departure, withdrawal, leaving. By contrast, in Bamidbar the people have already left Egypt far behind. They have spent a prolonged period in the Sinai desert. They have received the Torah and built the Sanctuary. Now they are ready to move on. This time they are looking forward, not back. They are thinking not of the danger they are fleeing from but of the destination they are travelling toward, the Promised Land.

If we had never read the Torah before, we might have assumed that the second half of the journey would be more relaxed, the people more optimistic, the mood more hopeful. After all, the great dangers had passed. After prolonged refusal, finally Pharaoh had let the people go. Miraculously they had been saved at the Red Sea. They had fought and defeated the Amalekites. What else did they have to worry

about? They knew that when God was with them, no force could prevail against them.

In fact, though, the opposite is the case. The mood of Bamidbar is palpably darker than it is in Shemot. The rebellions are more serious. Moses' leadership is more hesitant. We see him giving way, at times, to anger and despair. The Torah, with great realism, is telling us something counterintuitive and of great significance.

The journey from is always easier than the journey to.

So it is in politics. It may take a revolution to depose a tyrant, but it is easier to do that than to create a genuinely free society with the rule of law and respect for human rights. The Arab Spring, with its high hopes and its legacy of failing states, civil war and terror, is a compelling example. So is the history of post-Tito Yugoslavia or present-day Russia.

Likewise in the life of individuals. There have been endless stories in the modern world of Jews who were determined to break free of "the ghetto" and what they saw as Jewish provincialism and backwardness. They became great successes in one field after another, only to find themselves – like the marranos of fifteenth century Spain – deeply conflicted and doubly alienated, having lost a home in the old world and failed to find full acceptance in the new.

There is a biological reason why this is so. We are genetically predisposed to react strongly to danger. Our deepest instincts are aroused. We move into the fight-or-flight mode, with our senses alert, our attention focussed, and our adrenalin levels high. When it comes to fleeing-from, we often find ourselves accessing strengths we did not know we had.

But fleeing-to is something else entirely. It means making a home in place where, literally or metaphorically, we have not been before. We become "strangers in a strange land." We need to learn new skills, shoulder new responsibilities, acquire new strengths. That calls for imagination and willpower. It involves the most unique of all human abilities: envisaging a future that has not yet been and acting to bring it about. Fleeing-to is a journey into the unknown.

That was the difference between Abraham and his father Terach. The Torah tells us that "Terach took his son Abram ... and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan; but when they came to Haran, they settled there" (Gen.

11:31). Terach had sufficient willpower for the journey-from (Ur Kasdim) but not for the journey-to (Canaan). It was left to Abraham to reach the destination.

To be a Jew is to know that, in some sense, life is a journey. So it was for Abraham. So it was for Moses. So it is for us, collectively and individually. Hence the importance of knowing at the outset where we are travelling to, and never forgetting, never giving up. Leaving is easy, arriving is hard.

Which is why, when students ask me for advice about their careers, I tell them that the most important thing is to dream. Dream about what you would like to do, to be, to achieve. Dream about the chapter you would like to write in the story of our people. Dream about what difference you would like to make to the world. "In dreams," said W. B. Yeats, "begin responsibilities." I'm not entirely sure what he meant by that, but this I know: in dreams begin destinations. They are where we start thinking about the future. They signal the direction of our journey.

I am amazed by how many people never really dream a future for themselves. They can spend months planning a holiday, but not even a day planning a life. They take it as it comes. They wait, like Charles Dickens' Mr Micawber, for "something to turn up." This is not the best recipe for a life. "Wherever you find the word Vayechi, 'and it came to pass,'" said the sages, "it is always the prelude to pain." [1] Letting things happen is passive, not active. It means that you are letting outside factors determine the course of your life. Of course, they will always affect it. However sure we are of what we want to achieve, we are always subject to unexpected occurrences, wrong turns, bad decisions, setbacks and failures. But if we know where we want to be, eventually we will get back on track.

Timothy Ferris, compiler of the book *Tribe of Mentors*, asked me an interesting question: "When you feel overwhelmed or unfocussed, what do you do?" I told him that just before I became Chief Rabbi, in 1991, I realised that the sheer pressure of unexpected happenings, especially when you are in public life, can blow anyone off course. When someone asked British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan what he most feared, he replied, "Events, dear boy, events." So it became clear to me that I had to set out my objectives in advance, in such a way as to ensure I would never forget or be distracted from them.

In 1991 we did not yet have smartphones or computerised diaries. I used a pocket notebook

called a Filofax. So on the first page of my Filofax I wrote my life goals. This meant that I saw them every time I looked in my diary. I was reminded of them several times daily. I still have them, and they have not changed in all the intervening years. How far I was successful, I do not know. But this I know: that I never forgot where I was travelling to. I never lost sight of the destination.

Travelling-from is easy. I knew I had to overcome my ignorance, Jewish and secular. I knew I had bad habits I had to cure – I am still working on them. But the real challenge is to know where Hashem wants us to travel to. What task were we put in the world, in this time and place, with these gifts, to do? The answer to that constitutes the destination we key in to our satellite navigation system for the journey called life.

The Israelites, in their journey, made a series of mistakes. They focussed too much on the present (the food, the water) and too little on the future. When they faced difficulties, they had too much fear and too little faith. They kept looking back to how things were instead of looking forward to how they might be. The result was that almost an entire generation suffered the fate of Abraham's father. They knew how to leave but not how to arrive. They experienced exodus but not entry.

So, in answer to Tim Ferris's question, "What do you do when you feel overwhelmed or unfocussed?" I replied with this life-changing idea: Remember your destination. This will help you make the single most important distinction on life, which is to distinguish between an opportunity to be seized and a temptation to be resisted

Rav Kook on the Perasha

For Rav Kook, it was axiomatic that the Jewish soul and the Torah are a match made in heaven. In his book analyzing the essential nature and value of Torah study, *Orot HaTorah*, he categorically asserted that "The Torah is bound together with the spirit of Israel" (12:1). This is true not only for the Jewish people as a whole, but also for each individual:

"Just as Knesset Yisrael [the national soul of Israel] can only realize its full potential in the land of Israel [see *Kuzari* 2:12], so, too, each individual Jew can only fulfill his spiritual potential through the Torah, which is the spiritual 'land' suitable to the special qualities of the Jewish soul. All other studies

are like foreign lands with regard to the spiritual development of Israel." (12:7)

While this is nice in theory, in practice things are not so simple. Not everyone takes to Torah study like a fish to water. If Torah study is indeed so natural to the Jewish soul, why do Jewish educators need to work so hard?

Rav Kook was aware of this problem. There are a number of reasons why the words of Torah may not find a place in one's heart — some practical, some spiritual. In analyzing the reasons why a person may feel disconnected from Torah, Rav Kook noted several underlying causes.

Appreciating Torah: To properly appreciate the value of Torah study, we must recognize the essential nature of the Torah. The Torah is a revelation of *ratzon Hashem*, God's Will in the world. It is only due to the limitations of our physical state that we are unable to recognize the Torah's true greatness.

Similarly, we need to have a proper appreciation for our Divine soul and its natural sense of morality. People occasionally err and stumble; but overall, we should have faith in our innate moral sensibilities. Thus there exists an inner correlation between the Torah's ethical teachings and the soul's inner qualities. The extent that one enjoys studying Torah is a function of refinement of character; the greater one's moral sensitivity, the more readily one will identify with the Torah and its teachings.

This fundamental insight is essential in order to properly appreciate Torah study. When Torah is studied in holiness, one may sense the greatness of the Torah and how it emanates from the very source of holiness.

Elevating the Details: A basic appreciation for Torah, however, is not enough. Even if one recognizes the Divine nature of the Torah, one may feel a sense of impatience when faced with its myriad laws and complex details. One may be attracted to lofty matters, and feel restricted and frustrated when studying the detailed minutiae of Halachah.

The remedy for these feelings of restriction is not to avoid Halachic studies but rather "to elevate the significance of each detail of practical studies to the richness of its spiritual source" (*Orot HaTorah* 9:8). A detail may acquire great significance when illuminated by a flash of insight or sudden inspiration. Success in "elevating the details" requires spiritual refinement and perseverance in the contemplative pursuit of the boundless heights of holiness.

In fact, each word of Torah contains infinite light, a reflection of the Torah's absolute morality. One who has learned to perceive this light will gain insight into the inner spiritual content of each detail.

Find Your Portion in the Torah: An additional aspect that needs to be addressed is that not all areas of Torah appeal to all people equally. In general we should occupy ourselves with those pursuits that interest us. This is especially true regarding Torah study, as the Sages taught, "One only learns that which one's heart desires" (Avodah Zarah 19a).

Some have strayed from and even abandoned the Jewish people because they failed to follow their personal inclinations when choosing what area of Torah to study. They may have been predisposed to philosophical inquiry, but lacking appreciation for their own innate interests, they dedicated themselves to conventional Halachic studies. Unsurprisingly, they felt an inner resistance to this course of study, since it was not compatible to their natural inclinations. Had they focused on learning more suitable topics, they would have realized that their inner opposition to Halachic studies was not due to some flaw in this important area of knowledge, but because their soul demanded a different field of Torah study.

Since they failed to understand the root cause of their inner conflict with Torah study, they attempted to suppress their natural tendencies. But as soon as an alternative path became available, they rejected the Torah and the faith of Israel. Some of these individuals subsequently attempted to promote great ideals lacking practical foundations, and they misled the world with their false visions.

Others are naturally drawn to the sciences and secular studies. These individuals should follow their natural interests, while setting aside set times for Torah study. Then they will succeed in both areas. As the Sages counseled in Pirkei Avot 2:2, "It is good to combine the study of Torah with worldly endeavors."

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Orot HaTorah, sections 2:1, 4:4,

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

As we approach the subject of the Dor Hamidbar (the generation of the Wilderness), also known as the Dor Deah (the generation of True Knowledge), let us keep constantly before our eyes that this era was the time when Hashem's love was strongest. These men were chosen as witnesses of the most wondrous spectacles and demonstrations of Hashem's

Presence among His people. At the same time, they were subject to the most severe chastisement, because "The one that Hashem loves, He rebukes, as a father to the son that He favors" (Mishle 3:12). The harshest punishments were bestowed upon this generation, as well as the greatest expressions of Hashem's love and the most sublime encomium and encouragement. All the chastisements and castigations of this period were because of Hashem's especial love: "to afflict you in order to test (or, to elevate) you, to do benefit to you in your end" (Devarim 8:16).

Rabbi Yochanan (Sanhedrin 110B) upholds the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that the generation of the Wilderness is very highly regarded by Hashem, who declared: "I remember for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, when you followed me into the wilderness, a land unsown. (Therefore) Israel is holy to Hashem" (Yirmiyah 2:2-3)

"Gedolah Deah!" "How great is True Knowledge!" (Berachot 33A).

The greatest revelation of Hashem for all time was at Har Sinai. And we can look back and see that the purpose of Yosef being sold by the brothers was to bring Jacob and his family to Egypt. The exile in Egypt and the Nation's witnessing of the 10 Plagues and the splitting of Yam Suf were all to prepare us for the great and fearsome day when we were going to meet and hear Hashem. In fact the purpose of the Creation of heaven and earth was only to bestow the Torah upon the Nation of Yisrael.

The Rambam says, regarding the Revelation at Har Sinai, "We must Exhalt it over all others" (Igeret Teman). This means that we must build this scene in the edifice of our minds. Picture that there were 600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60, along with women, children and converts. Total over 2 million people. The thick cloud of Shechina was on the top of Har Sinai. Thunder and lightning and the strong sound of Shofar.

The Voice is heard, "Anochi Hashem Elokecha", speaking directly to the Nation. The Nation was overwhelmed with the very greatest fear and the greatest love.

The revelation at Har Sinai was the greatest injection of 'Deah', the acquiring of True Knowledge combined with actual sensory perception, which has remained an intregal part of the Jewish Nation until today.

Adapted from "Journey into Greatness" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L