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from: **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald** <ezbuchwald@njop.org> via njop.ccsend.com reply-to: ezbuchwald@njop.org date: Mon, May 20, 2013 at 5:42 PM subject: Weekly Torah Message from Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald
B'ha'alot'cha 5773-2013
"Contemporary Implications of Ancient Rebellions"
by Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat B'ha'alot'cha, we read of two egregious rebellions that occurred on the heels of the momentous Revelation at Sinai.
In three brief opening verses of Numbers 11, we read of the episode of the "Mit'oh'n'neem," a group of complainers. The Torah states in Numbers 11:1: "Va'y'hee hah'ahm k'mit'oh'n'neem rah b'ahz'nay Hashem, va'yish'mah Hashem va'yee'char ah'poh, va'tiv'ahr bahm aysh Hashem, va'toh'chahl bik'tzay ha'mah'chah'neh," And the people took to seeking complaints, speaking evil in the ears of the L-rd. And when G-d heard, His wrath flared, and a fire of G-d burned among them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp.

The Torah relates that when the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to G-d and the fire died down. Moses proceeded to name the place, "Tahv'ay'rah," which means the place at which the fire of G-d had burned against the people.
Immediately following those verses, we read of another rebellious group, the "Ah'saf'soof," the mixed multitude. In Numbers 11:4, the Torah relates, "V'hah'saf'soof ahsher b'kir'boh hit'ah'voo tah'ah'vah, vah'yah'shoo'voo va'yiv'koo gahm B'nay Yisrael, vah'yohm'roo: Mee yah'ah'chee'lay'noo bah'sahr," And the rabble that was among them, the mixed multitude, cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more, and said, "Who will feed us meat?" The people then cry out, "We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt, free of charge, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now, our life is parched, we have nothing to anticipate, but the manna."
The Ramban, suggests that the people complained because they were afraid to leave Sinai, which was closer to populated areas, and go into a desolate and unknown wilderness.
The Sifre (a Midrashic commentary on the book of Numbers), indicates that the word, "Vah'y'hee," relates to the peoples' previous situation. Once they departed from that spiritually-elevating atmosphere of Sinai, says the Sifre, they reverted back to the corrupt nature of their existence in Egypt.
The Ramban, commenting on Numbers 10:33-35, notes that when the verse states that the people traveled from the mountain of G-d a distance of three days, the Midrash states that, "They fled from the mountain of G-d like a child running away from school." Why were they running? Because, says the Ramban, they were afraid that G-d might give them more commandments to observe. With such an attitude, it would be impossible for them to succeed in the wilderness.
Rabbi Yaakov Philber, in his wonderful commentary on the weekly portion, Chemdat Yamim, attempts to explain how the Children of Israel, who had reached the loftiest heights of spirituality at the splitting of the Red Sea and the Revelation at Sinai, could possibly have turned on G-d, worshiped the Golden Calf, and complained continuously throughout their long sojourn in the wilderness.
The Talmud, in Shabbat 88b, cites Ulla's interpretation of the verse in Song of Songs 1:12, "While the king sat at his table, my spices gave its fragrance." On this verse, Ulla said, "Shameless is the bride who plays the harlot within her bridal canopy." Rashi explains that this refers to the people of Israel who made the Golden Calf while they were still at Mount Sinai.
Many explanations are offered to account for the momentous fall of the People of Israel from the greatest spiritual heights, to the lowest depths. Some commentators suggest that the sin of the people was, in reality, not so great, but because of their exalted spiritual stature, G-d was punctilious in judging the People of Israel, and punished them severely.
Rabbi Philber suggests that this was a corrupt generation who had sinned before, and who now returned to their previous state of corruption.
Rabbi Philber argues, that it is impossible for a religious experience, no matter how powerful, to penetrate a perverted heart and change habits that have been long established. A new personality cannot be created free from a person's past sinfulness.
Rashi claims that the "Ah'saf'soof" were actually a mixed multitude of Egyptians who had attached themselves to the Jewish people. This interpretation is quite plausible, after all, since the mixed multitude were not Israelites and had never absorbed the original spirituality of the people, they became a thorn in the side of Israel.
Rabbi Shimon the son of Menasse surprisingly suggests that the "Ah'saf'soof" were actually the elders of Israel. He derives this from the verse (Numbers 11:16), "Ehs'fah lee shiv'eem eesh," gather for me seventy elders. If they were elders, how could they have sinned so grievously? The verse (Numbers 11:4) states, "V'hah'saf'soof ahsher b'kir'boh hit'ah'voo tah'ah'vah," they lusted. While the souls of the leaders soared, their bodies' physical desires never rose. This is quite similar to the Torah's description of theophany at Mount Sinai in Exodus 23:11, where the leaders of Israel saw G-d, and indifferently continued to eat and drink during that exalted spiritual moment.
Rabbi Philber cites the Sifre, which says, that "Mit'oh'n'neem" means those people who were simply looking for an excuse to escape their spirituality. This is why the people demand, "Who will feed us meat to eat?" Clearly, there was no shortage of meat. The Torah itself testifies (Numbers 32) that when the tribes of Reuben and Gad approached

Moses with the request to remain with their families and belongings on the east side of the Jordan, their excuse was that they needed to remain there because they had too many flocks, and that the west bank will not be able to support them all. Obviously, there was plenty of food.
It is impossible to read these verses without noting a strong parallel to contemporary times. While it is true that there are historic numbers of Jews studying Torah today, there are also significant numbers of those who come from strong Jewish educational backgrounds, who are running away, much like the ancient Israelites.
From the episodes of the complainers and the mixed multitude, we see that, often, a purely spiritual diet is insufficient. To be effective, a heightened intellectual regimen of spirituality must be accompanied by positive, joyous Jewish experiences and positive role models. The physical world must join the spiritual world with joy and happiness, and must not be allowed to become a purely intellectual exercise.
The deeds of our fathers are signposts for our children's future. It is important for contemporary leaders and educators to learn from these examples. The Torah is not a book intended for the ancients, it is a book that is very close and near to us. Let us embrace its message and learn from its timeless lessons.
May you be blessed.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>
genesis@torah.org, to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Thu, May 23, 2013 at 10:22 PM subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Behaaloscha

What Makes You Sad? What Makes You Happy?

There is a theme that emerges from Parshas BeHaloscha that at first glance is not readily apparent. The 9th Perek mentions a group of people who were not able to bring the Korban Pessach at the proper time because they were ritually impure as a result of contact with a corpse. They came to Moshe and asked, "Why should we be deprived of offering the Pessach offering together with the rest of the Children of Israel?" Moshe then taught them the law of the Pessach Sheni ["Second Pessach"] offered as a "make up" offering, one month later for people who were either Tameh Mes [ritually impure] or too far from the Temple on the 14th of Nissan to offer the primary Paschal Sacrifice.
The Sifrei comments that these people were righteous individuals and they took great effort (literally "trembled" = Charedim) to observe the commandments. What exactly is the Sifrei emphasizing by telling us this?
The matter can be understood as follows. These people were excused (patu r) from bringing the Paschal offering. Patur is patur. They had no obligation to bring it. There was no need to get upset about this fact. They could have just walked away from the mitzvah and calmly accepted the fact that they were excused. The Sifrei points out that these were righteous people. Their attitude was "why should we be deprived?" (lamah neegarah?). Those words were a testimony to the type of people they were.
"Good, I'm patur! But how can I miss out on a mitzvah? Their attitude was that missing a mitzvah is a deprivation. It is something that I am going to miss, and I do not want that to happen. It is not a question of punishment and it is not a question of blame. It is a sense of lacking something if they miss the opportunity. This is what the Medrash calls "charedim al haMitzvos" [trembling to do the commandments].
There is a similar concept in the beginning of the sixth chapter of Tractate Berochos [35b]. The Talmud asks "What is the difference between the earlier generations and the later generations?" The Gemara explained that the earlier generations brought their crops in through the front door (so that they would be sure to be obligated to give the tithes from the crop) while the latter generation purposely sought out loop holes and brought in the crops through the back-door, so to speak, in order to become exempt from the need to tithe their crops.
This is the difference between the earlier generations and the later generations. The earlier generations had an attitude "Why should we be deprived?" The latter generations are looking for every excuse they can find to circumvent the laws requiring them to give.
At the beginning of the Parsha, the pasuk says: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Aaron and say to him: 'When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah shall the seven lamps cast light.'" Rashi famously asks "Why is there a juxtaposition of the section relating to the Princes ' offerings with the section relating to the lighting of the Menorah?"
Rashi answers that when Aaron saw that the leaders of all the other tribes participated in the dedication of the Mishkan and neither he nor his tribe participated, he felt badly about it (chalsha da'ato – he became depressed).
Here too we should note: What was Aaron depressed about? There were 12 Tribes with 12 Princes. Their job was to bring offerings during the 12 day consecration period of the Mishkan. That was not his job. What is he getting so depressed about?
The phenomenon is the same as those of the people who were impure and could not offer the Pessach offering in its proper time. Aaron felt deprived. "Why should I be left out?" Winston Churchill once said, "It is the measure of a man – what makes him angry." We can paraphrase that: "It is the measure of a man of what makes him depressed."
Some people get depressed when the Orioles (or whichever favorite sports team / location) lose. It can be a bad week in Baltimore for a lot of people when their baseball team goes on a losing streak. Some people get depressed when their stocks take a hit or when they lose a lot of money on some other investment. What depresses Aaron? He is depressed because he missed out on a mitzvah, because he could not participate in the dedication of the Mishkan.
Later in the Parsha, there is another example of people who were depressed – but they were depressed about something else. They were depressed because they missed the luscious cucumbers and watermelons they had in Egypt. These people became depressed about food.
This is a question we must ask ourselves. What makes us depressed and what makes us happy? Aaron became depressed about not participating in a mitzvah. The carriers of Yosef's coffin became depressed about not being able to bring a Korban Pessach. The "Complainers" became depressed about not having cucumbers and watermelons! The measur e of a man is what makes him sad and what makes him happy.

People Always Complain About Their Leaders

Parshas Be'Haloscha and the story of the "complainers" begins a long series of episodes that stretch all the way through the end of the book of Bamidbar with tale after tale of complaints against Moshe Rabbeinu and challenges to his leadership. We read of crises after crises. Moshe Rabbeinu goes around putting out fires and he always seems to be at the center of it.
Rav Chaim Kanievsky writes a very interesting homiletic thought in the name of his father, the Kehillas Yaakov or Steipler Gaon. The Steipler Gaon once gave an insight on the pasuk in Tehillim [106:16] "They were jealous of Moshe in the camp; of Aaron, Hashem's holy one." The Steipler points out that the people's primary complaint against Moshe was "in the camp". They complained that he was not a man of the people but he rather sequestered himself in an ivory tower. Their problem with him was that he was "too holy". He talked to G-d the whole day and was not involved with the people. Their com plaint about Aaron (who was the consummate man of the people – loving peace and running after the ability to make peace between husband and wife and warring factions) was just the opposite – he is not holy enough!
What is the problem with your leaders? Are they too holy or are they not holy enough? The Steipler says we see from here that when one is in a position of authority in the community (or even if one does not have such authority) whatever one does, people will have complaints. You are

holy? Then they will complain that you are not personable enough? You are personable? Then they will complain you are not holy enough.
The Steipler writes a very interesting parable: A man and his father were travelling on the road. The father was riding a donkey and the son was walking besides him. They came upon a person who saw them and told the father: "You are cruel. You ride on the donkey and you make your son walk! What kind of father are you?" The father then got o ff the donkey and put his son on the donkey in his place. They walk a little further and came across someone else who attacked them: "What kind of son are you raising? How can you let your child ride there like he is a prince while he makes you walk along on such a hot day? What kind of education are you giving him to allow him to do that?"
He then took his son off the donkey and they both walked alongside the donkey. They met a third person who attacked them: "What a bunch of fools you are! Why doesn't someone ride the donkey?" They both got on the donkey and went a little further until a fourth man saw them and said "How cruel you are, both of you riding this little donkey! Don't you have any concern for the welfare of animals?" They both got off the donkey and they both carried the donkey. They meet another person who shouted: "You fools!"
What is the point of the story? Whatever you do, people are not going to be happy. And if you try to react to what every body says and make everybody happy then you will wind up as two people carrying a donkey!
I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who said "You can fool all of the people some of the time and you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time." An extention of that is "You can never please all of the people EVER." Any person who has been a Rav, who has been a principal, who has been president, who has been a Gabbai, no matter what -- People have complaints. A person must take counsel from a respected confidant that what he is doing is right and keep on doing what he knows and what others have told him to be right. If anybody is not happy that is just too bad!

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.y adyechiel.org/ for further information.

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Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

The Street-Smart and the Secluded: Two Types of Leadership

Could FOMO[1] date back all the way to Aharon hacohen? Is it not hard to imagine that Aharon hacohen, whose very name conjures up singular sanctity and super human piety, would succumb to a modern day emotion? Yet at first blush Rashi explains that the description of the lighting of the menorah, which opens this week's parsha and is seemingly totally unanchored in the sequence of events of this parsha, tells the story of Aharon's moment of feeling left out.
In last week's parsha we read that every shevet bar Aharon's created, sponsored, and enacted the dedication ceremony of the mishkan. Thus Bahaloscha opens with Hashem once again charging Aharon and his children with the mitzvahof lighting the menorah as chizuk (words of comfort and strength) and reminding him that his share in the mishkan will endure long after the momentary gifts of the nesiim will be long over, only read and discussed.
I can well imagine Aharon, along with his children and every other Jew, watching each nassi create an entirely new venue of gifting to Hashem and expressing how it resonated with the history of their shevet, and he, Aharon, was not amongst them. He heard how Hashem, despite Moshe's hesitation, welcomed their gift and approved of their "chidush". Aharon was not one of the innovators. Then he watched how Hashem organized each shevet assigning them their days of service, but shevet Levi did not get a day. Day by day, another shevet presents and is celebrated, and the unwavering loyalty of Levi does gets absolutely no recognition. Finally the twelve days of festivities came to a close and in the final episode of parshas Naso the gifts are all tallied and the Jewish people proudly observe, and perhaps celebrate, the achievement of their unity and harmony. And yet, Aharon, the greatest peacemaker, is absent.
Disappointment is not at all a strong enough to capture Aharon's feelings; Rashi describes Aharon's feeling as being "chalishus hadaas" (lit. weakening of one's faculties), a crushing and debilitating distress. Many commentaries, most notably the Ramban, question and explore just how the job of tending to the menorah consoled Aharon and his family. But I am troubled by Aharon's reservations in getting involved to begin with - why was he not there? Why did he not join the other shevatim and bring his own gifts alongside their sacrifices? They had not initially been divinely ordained to bring the korban, so why could Aharon not join them and keep the party going for another day? Apparently Aharon knew that this was not his event and not his tribe's occasion. Why not? It seems to me that Aharon understood that Hashem's wisdom was to grant our people both the nesiim, the administrative leadership, and the Leviim, the spiritual guides, and that we will thrive with two distinct and distinguished forms of leadership. The kohein gadol and his family's lives were centered around the mishkan and tended to her day in and day out. Later they would circulate around Israel for their livelihood and teach as they travel, all the while their home would be their enclaves and Yerushalayim. The nesiim lived among the people and their teaching was of no less consequence. We can never forget that the nesiim held us together at our lowest moments in Mitzrayim and that their backs took the whips intended for their brethren. They stood side by side with Moshe counting every family and expressing Hashem's unusual love for His children. They include among their ranks none other than Nachshon ben Aminadav.
Aharon understood that we thrive when we have both teachers whose lives are defined by the purity and wholesomeness of the mishkan and reach out from that separated and distinctive space, as well as teachers who live among us and help us stretch well beyond our culture. Our people flourish when we travel through the Levite camp on our way to the mishkan impressing ourselves with the piety of their sacred station and come home to teachers who will instruct us to integrate what we have learned into our own quiet quarters.
This is what gave Aharon pause. For twelve days he and his family were left to ponder the relative value of the builders and the preservers; of the streetwise guides and the secluded saints; of those who facilitate transporting the mishkanfrom place to place and those who light up an established sanctuary; of those who help us in sacrifice and prayer and those who would embrace together with us the fullness of human endeavor.

While Hashem's words of chizuk gave Aharon strength and certainty, Aharon's doubts are of infinite value for us all as well.
[1]"fear of missing out"

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Moses' Challenge

by Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

It was the worst crisis in Moses' life. Incited by the 'mixed multitude', the Israelites complain about the food: 'If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost - also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna.'

It was an appalling show of ingratitude, but not the first time the Israelites had behaved this way. Three earlier episodes are recorded in the book of Exodus (chs. 15-17) immediately after the crossing of the Red Sea. First at Marah they complained that the water was bitter. Then, in more aggressive terms, they protested at the lack of food ('If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat round pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death'). Later, at Refidim, they grumbled at the absence of water, prompting Moses to say to God, 'What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me!'

The episode in this week's Torah portion - at the place that became known as Kivrot Hataavah - was not, then, the first such challenge Moses had faced, but the fourth. Yet Moses' reaction this time is nothing less than complete despair:

Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you, that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat'. I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now - if I have found favour in your eyes - and do not let me face my own ruin.

It is an extraordinary outburst. Moses prays to die. He is not the last prophet of Israel to do so. Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah did likewise - making us realise that even the greatest can have their moments of despair. Yet the case of Moses is particularly puzzling. He had faced, and overcome, such difficulties before. Each time, God had answered the people's requests. He had sent water, and manna, and quails. Moses knew this. Why then did the fourth outburst of the people ('If only we had meat to eat') induce in this, the strongest of men, what seems nothing less than a complete breakdown?

Equally strange is God's reaction:

Bring me 70 elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Make them come to the Tent of Meeting that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.

To be sure, this is a response to Moses' complaint, 'I cannot carry all these people by myself'. Yet both complaint and response are puzzling. In what way would the appointment of elders address the internal crisis Moses was undergoing? Did he need them to help him find meat? Clearly not. Either it would appear by a miracle or it would not appear at all. Did he need them to share the burdens of leadership? The answer is again, No. Already, not long before, on the advice of his father-in-law Yitro, he had created an infrastructure of delegation. Yitro had said this: 'What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you. You cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people - men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain - and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.'

Moses acted on the suggestion. He therefore already had assistants, deputies, a leadership team. In what way would this new appointment of seventy elders make a difference?

Besides which, why the emphasis in God's reply on spirit: 'I will take of the spirit that is on you and put the spirit on them'? In what way did the elders need to become prophets in order to help Moses? Being a prophet does not help someone in carrying out administrative or other burdens of leadership. It helps only in knowing what guidance to give the people - and for this, one prophet, Moses, is sufficient. To put it more precisely, either the seventy elders would deliver the same message as Moses or they would not. If they did, they would be superfluous. If they did not, they would undermine his authority -- precisely what Joshua [11: 28] feared.

Aware of the multiple difficulties in the text, Ramban offers the following interpretation: 'Moses thought that if they had many leaders, they would appease their wrath by speaking to their hearts when the people started complaining. Or it is possible that when the elders prophesied, and the spirit was on them, the people would know that the elders were established as prophets and would not all gather against Moses but would ask for their desires from them as well.'

Both suggestions are insightful, but neither is without difficulty. The first - that the elders would become peacemakers among the people - did not call for a new leadership cadre. Moses already had the heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. The second - that their presence would diffuse the people's anger by giving them many people, not one, to complain to - is equally hard to understand. We recall that when the people had one other person to turn to with their concerns (Aaron), this led to the making of the Golden Calf. Why did God not 'take of the spirit' that was on Moses and place it on Aaron at that time? It would have prevented the single greatest catastrophe in the wilderness years? Besides which, we do not find that the seventy elders actually did anything at Kivrot Hataavah. The text even says [11: 25] 'When the spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again' 8 [this is the plain sense according to most commentators, though the Targum reads it differently]. How then did this once-and-never-to-be-repeated flow of the prophetic spirit make a difference? The more we reflect on the passage, the more the difficulties multiply.

Yet something happened. Moses' despair disappeared. His attitude was transformed. Immediately thereafter, it is as if a new Moses stands before us, untroubled by even the most serious challenges to his leadership. When two of the elders, Eldad and Medad, prophesy not in the Tent of Meeting but in the camp, Joshua senses a threat to Moses' authority and says, 'Moses, my lord, stop them!' Moses replies, with surpassing generosity of spirit, 'Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them.' In the next chapter, when his own brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, start complaining about him, he does nothing - 'Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.' Indeed, when God became angry at Miriam he prayed on her behalf. The despair has gone. The crisis has passed. These two challenges were far more serious than the request of the people for meat,

yet Moses meets them with confidence and equanimity. Something has taken place between him and God and he has been transformed. What was it?

To understand the sequence of events we must first place them in their historical context. Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, in his insightful book on Moses' leadership, Tzir ve-tzon (Alon Shvut, 5762) notes that there is a marked change of tone between the book of Exodus and the book of Numbers. The complaints do not change, but God's and Moses' responses do. In Exodus, God does not get angry with the people, or if he does, Moses' prayers are able to turn away wrath. In Numbers, the response - sometimes God's, sometimes Moses - are more unforgiving. What has changed?

R. Lichtenstein, correctly in my view, suggests that the early volatility of the people is forgivable. To be sure, they should have had faith in God, but they had never been faced with the Red Sea, or the desert, or lack of food and water before. Their greatest offence - making the Golden Calf - leads to a long pause in the narrative, essentially from Exodus chapter 25 to Numbers chapter 11. During this period, in response to Moses' prayer for forgiveness, God instructs the people to build a tabernacle which will ensure his constant presence among them.

Much of the second half of Exodus, the entire book of Leviticus and the first ten chapters of Numbers are dedicated to the details of the sanctuary, the service that was to take place there, and the reconstitution of Israel as a holy nation camped, tribe by tribe, around it. The whole of this sequence of 53 chapters, all of which is set in the desert at Sinai, is a kind of meta-historical moment, a break in the journey of the Israelites from place to place. Time and space stand still. Between the twin events of the Giving of the Torah and the construction of the Tabernacle, the Israelites are turned from an undisciplined mass of fugitive slaves into a nation whose constitution is the Torah, whose sovereign is God alone, and at whose centre (physically and metaphysically) is the Mishkan or sanctuary, the visible sign of God's presence. They are no longer what they were before they came to Sinai. They are now 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

Hence Moses' despair when they murmured about the food. They had done so before. But they were different before. They had not yet gone through the transformative experiences that shaped them as a nation. What caused Moses' spirit to break was the fact that, no sooner had they left the Sinai desert to begin the journey again, they reverted to their old habits of complaint as if nothing had changed. If the revelation at Sinai, the experience of Divine anger at the Golden Calf, and the long labour of building the Tabernacle had not changed them, what would or could?

Moses' despair is all too intelligible. For the first time since his mission began he could see defeat staring him in the face. Nothing - or so it seemed -- not miracles, deliverances, revelations, or creative labour, could change this people from a nation that thought of food into one that grasped the significance of the unique ethical-spiritual destiny to which they had been called. Perhaps God, from the perspective of eternity, could see some ray of hope in the future. Moses, as a human being, could not. 'I would rather die,' he says, 'than spend the rest of my life labouring in vain.'

We now reach the point of speculation. I may be wrong (as Netziv puts it in his introduction to Haamek Davar, section 5) but I interpret the sequence of events as follows:

There can come a time in the life of any truly transformative leader when the sun of hope is eclipsed by the clouds of doubt - not about God, but about people, above all about oneself. Am I really making a difference? Am I deceiving myself when I think I can change the world? I have tried, I have given the very best of my energies and inspiration, yet nothing seems to alter the depressing reality of human frailty and lack of vision. I have given the people the word of God himself, yet they still complain, still they think only about the discomforts of today, not the vast possibilities of tomorrow. Such despair (lehavdil, Winston Churchill, who suffered from it, called it the 'black dog') can occur to the very greatest (to repeat: not only Moses but also Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah prayed to die). Moses was the very greatest. Therefore God gave him the greatest gift of all - one that no one else has ever been given.

God let Moses see the influence he had on others. For a brief moment God took 'the spirit that is on you and put it on them' so that Moses could see the difference he had made to one group, the seventy elders. Moses needed nothing more. He did not need their help. He did not need them to continue to prophesy. All he needed was a transparent glimpse of how his spirit had communicated itself to them. Then he knew he had made a difference. Little could he have known that he - who encountered almost nothing from the Israelites in his lifetime but complaints, challenges and rebellions - would have so decisive an influence that the people of Israel 3,300 years later would still be studying and living by the words he transmitted; that he had helped forge an identity that would prove more tenacious than any other in the history of mankind; that in the full perspective of hindsight he would prove to have been the greatest leader that ever lived. He did not know these things; he did not need to know these things. All he needed was to see that seventy elders had internalised his spirit and made his message their own. Then he knew that his life was not in vain. He had disciples. His vision was not his alone. He had planted it in others. Others, too, would continue his work after his lifetime. That was enough for him, as it must be for us. Once Moses knew this, he could face any challenge with equanimity (except, many years later, at Kadesh, but that is another story).

Understood thus there is a message in Moses' crisis for all of us (that, surely, is why it is recounted in the Torah). I remember when my late father z"l died and we - my mother and brothers - were sitting shiva. Time and again people would come and tell us of kindnesses he had done for them, in some cases more than 50 years before. I have since discovered that many people who have sat shiva, have had similar experiences.

How moving, I thought, and at the same time how sad, that my father z"l was not there to hear their words. What comfort it would have brought him to know that despite the many hardships he faced, the good he did was not forgotten. And how tragic that we so often keep our sense of gratitude to ourselves, saying it aloud only when the person to whom we feel indebted has left this life, and we are comforting his or her mourners.

Perhaps that just is the human condition. We never really know how much we have given others - how much the kind word, the thoughtful deed, the comforting gesture, changes lives and is never forgotten. In this respect, if in no other, we are like Moses. He too was human; he had no privileged access into other people's minds; without a miracle, he could not have known the influence he had on those closest to him. All the evidence seemed to suggest otherwise. The people, even after all God and he had done for them, were still ungrateful, querulous, quick to criticize and complain. But that was on the surface. For a moment God gave him a glimpse of what was beneath the surface. He showed him how Moses' spirit had entered others and lifted them, however briefly, to the level of prophetic vision.

God did this for no other person - not then, not now. But if it was enough for Moses, it is enough for us. The good we do lives after us. It is the greatest thing that does. We may leave a legacy of wealth, power, even fame, but these are questionable benefits and sometimes harm rather than help those we leave them to. What we leave to others is a trace of our influence for good. We may never see it, but it is there. That is the greatest blessing of leadership. It alone is the antidote to despair, the solid ground of hope.

This article can also be read at:
http://www.aish.com/tp/i/sacks/208052031.html

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from: genesis@torah.org to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Thu, May 23, 2013 at 8:48 PM subject: **Rabbi Wein - Parshas Behaaloscha**
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Rabbi Berel Wein

Parshas Behaaloscha

Light

The association of Aharon, and of all later High Priests of Israel, with the task of the daily lighting of the menorah/candelabra in the Temple is significant. In our current technologically advanced era, turning on the lights in a home or a room is hardly considered to be a difficult or especially meaningful event. The flick of a switch floods the area with light and illumination.

However, when light is sourced from candles, wicks and oil it is a more complicated matter. To produce this type of light requires a modicum of motor skills, patience and great attention to detail. Many problems, even fatalities, may be caused by improperly lighting the candelabra such as the one in the Temple, with its imposing size and dimension.

Because of the care and attention that was needed to light the candelabra in the Temple, and to emphasize the holy nature of the task and of the candelabra itself, caring for it and kindling it was assigned to the highest priest of Israel, Aharon. He and his successors symbolized light. They represented hope, optimism, holiness, purpose and peace. This physical representation of Aharon's general role in Jewish society served to remind all of the purpose of the Temple, its laws and rituals and infused the Godly spirit into Jewish society generally.

The Torah characterizes itself as light and radiance. The commandments are the candles and the kindling, and the Torah – its study and its observance – becomes the source of light itself for all generations of Jews. It became the personal task of each and every High Priest of Israel to see to it that this light was kept eternally burning and refreshed daily.

It is interesting to note that the light of the menorah was not seen generally by the public, as not everyone had access to the area of the Temple where the menorah stood. But, it was seen daily by the High Priest himself and the radiance emanating from the menorah inspired him to be the constant disseminator of light, Torah, social justice and tranquility within Jewish society.

This essential societal task naturally entailed the same type of precision, persistence and attention to detail, coupled with loving care and innate skills that was present when the High Priest serviced the physical lighting of the menorah in the Temple daily. The Talmud teaches us that the clothing of the High Priest was not to be soiled when he appeared in public view. Lighting the menorah can be a dirty job if one is not careful, as can any societal activity, no matter how well intentioned it may have been at the outset.

The process and commandment of lighting the menorah served as a constant reminder to the High Priest of the important role that he was to always play in the furtherance of Torah and holiness in Jewish society.

Shabat shalom

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from: genesis@torah.org to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Thu, May 23, 2013 at 8:48 PM subject: Rabbi Wein - Parshas Behaaloscha
5/24/13 FAILURES: **Rabbi Wein: Jewish Destiny**
www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-1479.html?

1/2 FAILURES History has recorded for us great powers, ideas, faiths and societies that though apparently successful for periods of time, even long centuries, have turned eventually into monumental failures. The twentieth century was witness to the immense failure of fascism and of communism as examples of promised social panaceas that eventually collapsed due to false ideals and dogmatic ineptitude. Even when failures are evident for all to see, the true believers never give up in their support of false gods. It is one of the perverse traits of human nature, never to admit error no matter how evident and apparent it may be. Here in Israel this is exemplified by the obvious and complete failure of the Oslo peace process, which over the past twenty years has brought only grief and death to all parties concerned. Yet, its adherents continue to defend and attempt to prolong it as though it really would be able to achieve peace and solve the difficult situation that Israel has always found itself enmeshed in. It is difficult to admit failure and our president is not likely to return his Nobel Prize and say that he was wrong – in many cases dead wrong. But failures eventually exact their toll and history does not allow them to be ignored forever. Just look at the economic problems that plague Europe directly and the world generally because of the incipient built-in disarray of the Euro zone currency arrangement. Cyprus and Greece are able to bring down France and even Germany. But no one is admitting failure as of yet. The dominant social and political force in nineteenth and early twentieth century Western society was nationalism and imperialism. Every nation had to prove its greatness and safeguard its place in the sun even at the expense of other nations and cultures. War was an acceptable means of achieving this. Nation building was all the rage and Bismarck's forced unification of Germany under Prussian domination would bring about the catastrophes of World War I and World War II. This failed god of nationalism brought, in post-World War II society, a new god of internationalism, selfdetermination and the mantra of human rights. Anti-colonialism reigned supreme, leaving many failed states scattered over the world's continents. Secular Zionism, which was the Jewish version of nineteenth and twentieth century European nationalism, also suffers from the failure of nationalism or of internationalism, to appreciably help the suffering millions of humankind. Hence the post-Zionist trend so popular today in many sections of the Jewish world. It is no longer fashionable to engage in nation building. And certainly patriotism and loyalty are not to be enshrined any longer as virtuous traits. A Zionism that excluded God and Jewish tradition and practice from its agenda was doomed to eventual failure from the outset. The revitalization of Torah study and practice in today's Israel is the guarantee that this failed nationalism will not bring the state to failure. Following secularism and internationalism at all costs will only prove the failure of those ideals when applied to Israel and the Jewish people. All of the above failures concerned themselves with societies and ideas that basically turned their backs on religious faith. However, the religious world certainly has its share of failures as well. The record of both Christianity and Islam in achieving a better world is pretty dismal. The steady decline of the Christian faith and its influence in much of the world – especially in Europe – is remarkable. Yet instead of really looking after its own house, Christianity still expends a great deal of wealth and energy in attempting to convert others to its faith. In our own neighborhood here

in Jerusalem a missionary center is being built in order to convert5/24/13 FAILURES: Rabbi Wein: JewishDestiny www.rabbiwein.com/blog/post-1479.html?print=1 2/2 Jews. One would have thought that by now, over two millennia, the failure of that effort would have convinced these Christian groups to concentrate their wealth and efforts on more noble and beneficial projects – as some Christian groups in fact have, over the past decades. And Islam today has been taken over by jihadists and terrorists and represents a very negative image to the world generally. Without the moderation of tolerance and universality that is represented in Torah Judaism, the failures of these two offsprings of Judaism are historically certain. But as we all know, admission of failure in matters of faith and religion are almost never proffered. Within our own religious world the dogmatic pursuit of failed policies – not halacha, but policies – is persistently pursued. Why should we think that policies that failed to rally Jews to Torah over the past centuries will somehow be successful now? Failure should beget humility and review. Let us hope that this will occur in all areas of life and societies. Shabat shalom Berel Wein

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from: Rabbi Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> reply-to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com date: Tue, May 21, 2013 at 5:08 PM subject: 20th of Sivan

The Twentieth of Sivan By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: "I noticed that the back of my siddur contains a large section devoted to selichos for the 20th of Sivan, yet I have never davened in a shul that observed this day. What does this date commemorate?"

Answer: The Twentieth of Sivan was established in Ashkenazi communities as a day of fasting and teshuvah to remember two major tragedies of Jewish history. First, let us discuss the halachic basis for the observance of commemorative fasts. Biblical Source When the two sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, died, the Torah says, "And Moshe said to Aharon and to Elazar and Isamar, his sons, 'You shall not allow your heads to remain unshorn, nor shall you rend your clothes -- so you shall not die and cause that He become angry with the entire community. Rather, your brethren, the household of Israel, will weep for the inferno that Hashem ignited'" (Vayikra 10:6). From this description, we see that the entire Jewish community bears the responsibility to mourn the loss of great tzadikim.

Communal Teshuvah Observances The Rambam (Hilchos Taanis 1:1-3) explains: "It is a positive mitzvah of the Torah to cry out and to blow the trumpets whenever any danger afflicts a Jewish community, as the Torah says, 'When someone creates troubles for you, you shall blow the trumpets (Bamidbar 10:9).' On any matter that afflicts you, such as food shortages, plague, locusts, or anything similar, you should cry out in prayer and blow the trumpets. This is part of the procedure of doing teshuvah, for when difficulties occur and people come to pray, they realize that these happenings befell them because of their misdeeds, and doing teshuvah will remove the troubles.

"However, if they do not pray, but instead attribute the difficulties to normal worldly cycles -- this is a cruel approach to life that causes people to maintain their evil ways."

In a future essay, I hope to discuss why we no longer blow trumpets on fast days.

The Creation of Fast Days To continue our quotation of the Rambam, "Furthermore, the Sages required a fast on every menace that afflicts the community until Heaven has mercy" (Rambam, Hilchos Taanis 1:4). "There are days on which calamities occurred that all Israel fasts in order to arouse people to teshuvah" (Rambam, Hilchos Taanis 5:1). The Rambam then proceeds to mention the fasts that are part of our regular calendar year: Tzom Gedalyah, Asarah beTeiveis, Shiva Asar BeTamuz, Tisha B'Av and Taanis Esther.

The History of the 20th of Sivan This date is associated with two major tragedies that befell European Jewry. The earlier catastrophe, which occurred in the 12th Century, was recorded in a contemporary chronicle entitled Emek Habacha, and also in a selicha entitled Emunei Shelumei Yisrael, from which I have drawn most of the information regarding this tragic event.

One night in the city of Blois, which is in central France, a Jew watering his horse happened upon a murder scene in which a gentile adult had drowned a gentile child. The murderer, not wanting to be executed for his crime, fled to the local ruler, telling him that he had just caught a Jew murdering a child!

The tyrant arrested 31 Jewish leaders, men and women, including some of the baalei Tosafos who were disciples of the Rashbam, Rashi's grandson. The tyrant accused his prisoners, several of whom are mentioned by name in Emunei Shelumei Yisroel, of killing the gentile child to obtain blood for producing matzah.

After locking his captives in a tower, the despot insisted that they be baptized, whereby he would forgive them, telling them that he would execute them in a painful way should they refuse baptism. None of them considered turning traitor to Hashem's Torah. On the 20th of Sivan, 4931 (1171), they were tied up and placed on a pyre to be burned alive. At the fateful moment, the Jews sang aleinu in unison: Aleinu leshabayach la'adon hakol, "It is incumbent upon us to praise the Lord of all."

The fires did not consume them! The undeterred tyrant commanded his troops to beat them to death and then burn their bodies. However, the fires were still unable to consume their bodies, which remained intact!

Banishment from France This libel was a major factor in the banishing of the Jews from France that occurred ten years later. (Although the King of France declared that they must be exiled from the country, he did not, in fact, have sufficient control to force them out completely. This transpired only a century later.)

As a commemoration for the sacrifice of these great Jews and as a day of teshuvah, Rabbeinu Tam and the other gedolei Baalei Tosafos of France declared the 20th of Sivan a fast day. Special selichos and piyutim were composed to memorialize the incident, and a seder selichos was compiled that included selichos written by earlier paytanim, most notably Rav Shlomoh (ben Yehudah) Habavli, Rabbeinu Gershom, and Rabbi Meir ben Rabbi Yitzchak, the author of the Akdamus poem that we recite on Shevuos. Each of these gedolim lived in Europe well before the time of Rashi. Since most people know little about the earliest of this trio, Rav Shlomoh Habavli, I will devote a paragraph to what is known about this talmid chacham who lived in Europe at the time of the Geonim.

Rav Shlomoh Habavli, who lived around the year 4750 (about 990), was descended from a family that originated in Bavel, today Iraq (hence he is called Habavli after his ancestral homeland, similar to the way people have the family name Ashkenazi or Pollack, although they themselves were born in Brooklyn). He lived in Italy, probably in Rome, and authored piyutim for the Yomim Tovim, particularly for Yom Kippur and Shevuos, and many selichos, about twenty of which have survived to this day. The rishonim refer to him and his writings with great veneration, and the Rosh (Yoma 8:19) quotes reverently from the piyut for the seder avodah in musaf of Yom Kippur written by "Rabbeinu Shlomoh Habavli." The Maharshal says that Rabbeinu Gershom, the teacher of Rashi's rabbei'im and the rebbe of all Ashkenazic Jewry, learned Torah and received his mesorah on Torah and Yiddishkeit from Rav Shlomoh Habavli (Shu't Maharshal #29). Rav Shlomoh Habavli's works are sometimes confused with a more famous Spanish talmid chacham and poet who was also "Shlomoh ben Yehudah," Rav Shlomoh ibn Gabirol, who lived shortly after Rav Shlomoh Habavli.

Instituting the Fast When Rabbeinu Tam instituted the fast of the 20th of Sivan, the selichos recited on that day included one that was written

specifically to commemorate the tragedy of Blois. The selicha that begins with the words Emunei Shelomei Yisroel actually mentions the date of the 20th of Sivan 4931 in the selicha and describes the tragedy.

The Crusades Since this tragedy took place during the general period of the Crusades, the 20th of Sivan was often viewed as the mourning day for the murders and other excesses that happened during that era, since each of the early Crusades resulted in the horrible destruction of hundreds of communities in central and western Europe and the killing of thousands of Jews. In actuality, the blood libel of Blois occurred between the Second Crusade, which occurred in 4907-9/1147-1149 and the Third Crusade, which was forty years later, in 4949/1189.

Gezeiros Tach veTat The fast of the 20th of Sivan also memorializes an additional Jewish calamity. Almost five hundred years later, most of the Jewish communities of eastern Europe suffered the horrible massacres that are referred to as the Gezeiros Tach veTat, which refer to the years of 5408 (Tach) and 5409 (Tat), corresponding to the secular years 1648 and 1649. Although this title implies that these excesses lasted for a period of at most two years, the calamities of this period actually raged on sporadically for the next twelve years.

First, the historical background: Bogdan Chmielnitzky was a charismatic, capable, and nefariously anti-Semitic Cossack leader in the Ukraine, which at the time was part of the Kingdom of Poland. Chmielnitzky led a rebellion of the Ukrainian population against their Polish overlords. Aside from nationalistic and economic reasons for the Ukrainians revolting against Polish rule, there were also religious reasons, since the Ukrainians were Greek Orthodox whereas the Poles were Roman Catholic. Chmielnitzky led the Ukrainians through a succession of alliances, first by creating an alliance with the Crimean Tatars against the Polish King. The Cossacks' stated goal was to wipe out the Polish aristocracy and the Jews.

When the Tatars turned against Chmielnitzky, he allied himself with the Swedes, and eventually with the Czar of Russia, which enabled the Ukrainians to revolt successfully against Polish rule.

The Cossack hordes swarmed throughout Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania in the course of a series of wars, wreaking havoc in their path and putting entire Jewish communities to the sword. Hundreds of Jewish communities in Poland and Ukraine were destroyed by the massacres. The Cossacks murdered unknown thousands of Jews, including instances in which they buried people alive, cut them to pieces, and perpetrated far more horrible cruelties. In sheer cruelty, many of their heinous deeds surpassed even those performed later by the Nazis. These events were chronicled in several Torah works, including the Shach's Megillas Eifa, and Rav Nosson Nota Hanover's Yevein Metzulah. The title, Yevein Metzulah, is a play on words. These are words quoted from Tehillim 69:3, where the passage reads, tavati biyevein metzulah, "I am drowning in the mire of the depths," which certainly conveys the emotion of living in such a turbulent era. In addition, the author was using these words to refer to Yavan, Greece, referring to the Greek Orthodox religion of the Cossack murderers.

Chmielnitzky, the National Hero By the way, although Chmielnitzky was a bloodthirsty murderer and as nefarious an anti-Semite as Adolf Hitler, to this day he is a national hero in the Ukraine, held with respect similar to that accorded George Washington in the United States. The Ukrainians revere him as the Father of Ukrainian nationalist aspirations, notwithstanding the fact that he was a mass murderer.

The cataclysmic effect on Jewish life caused by the gezeiros tach vetat was completely unparalleled in Jewish history. Before the Cossacks, Poland and its neighboring areas had become the citadel of Ashkenazic Jewish life. As a result of the Cossack excesses, not only were the Jewish communities destroyed, with the Jews fleeing en mass from place to place, but virtually all the gedolei Yisrael were on the run during this horrifying era of Jewish history. Such great Torah leaders as the Shach, the Taz, the Tosafos Yom Tov, the Kikayon Deyonah, the Magen Avraham, the Nachalas Shivah, and the Be'er Hagolah were all in almost constant flight to avoid the Cossack hordes.

Among the many gedolei Yisrael who were murdered during these excesses were two sons of the Taz, the father of the Magen Avraham, Rav Yechiel Michel of Nemirov and Rav Shimshon MeiOstropolia.

Rav Shimshon MeiOstropolia Rav Shimshon MeiOstropolia was a great talmid chacham, mekubal and writer of many seforim, whose Torah ideas are quoted by such respected thinkers as the Ramchal and the Bnei Yisasschar. It was said that he was so holy that he was regularly visited by an angel, a magid, who would study the deep ideas of kabbalah with him. (Whether one accepts this as having actually happened or not, it is definitely indicative of the level of holiness that his contemporaries attributed to him.)

Rav Nosson Nota Hanover writes in Yevein Metzulah that, during the bleak days of the Cossack uprising, the magid who studied with Rav Shimshon forewarned him of the impending disaster that was to befall klal Yisrael. When the Cossacks laid siege to the city, Rav Shimshon went with 300 chachamim, all of them dressed in tachrichim, burial shrouds, and their taleisim to the nearby shul to pray that Hashem save the Jewish people. While they were in the midst of their prayers, the Cossacks entered the city and slaughtered them all.

Rules of the Vaad Arba Ha'aratzos After this tragic period passed and the Jewish communities began the tremendous work of rebuilding, the Vaad Arba Ha'aratzos, which at the time was the halachic and legislative body of all Polish and Lithuanian Jewry, banned certain types of entertainment. Strict limits were set on the types of entertainment allowed at weddings, similar to the takanos that the Gemara reports were established after the churban of the Beis Hamikdash. Selichos were composed by the Tosafos Yom Tov, the Shach, and other gedolim to commemorate the tragedies.

The Vaad Arba Ha'aratzos further declared that the 20th of Sivan should be established forever as a fast day (Shaarei Teshuvah, 580:9). The fast was declared binding on all males over the age of 18 and females over the age of 15. (I have not seen any explanation for the disparity in age.)

Why the 20th of Sivan? Why was this date chosen to commemorate the atrocities of the era? On the 20th of Sivan, the Jewish community of Nemirov, Ukraine, which was populated by many thousands of Jews, was destroyed by the Cossacks. The rav of the city, Rav Yechiel Michel, passionately implored the people to keep their faith and die Al Kiddush Hashem. The Shach reports that, for three days, the Cossacks rampaged through the town, murdering thousands of Jews, including Rav Yechiel Michel. The shul was destroyed and all the Sifrei Torah were torn to pieces and trampled. Their parchment was used for shoes and clothing.

Merely five years before, the community of Nemirov had been proud to have as its rav the gadol hador of the time, the Tosafos Yom Tov, who had previously served as rav of Nikolsburg, Vienna and Prague. At the time of the Gezeiros Tach veTat, the Tosafos Yom Tov was the rav and rosh yeshivah of Cracow, having succeeded the Bach as rav and the Meginei Shlomoh as rosh yeshivah after they passed away.

An Additional Reason The Shaarei Teshuvah 580:9 quotes the Shach as citing an additional reason why the Vaad Arba Ha'aratzos established the day of commemoration for the gezeiros Tach veTat on the 20th of Sivan: this date never falls on Shabbos and therefore would be observed every year.

The Selichos The style of the selichos prayers recited on the 20th of Sivan resembles that of the selichos recited by Eastern European Jewry for the fasts of Tzom Gedalyah, Asarah beTeiveis, Shiva Asar BeTamuz (these three fasts are actually all mentioned in Tanach), Taanis Esther and Behab (the three days of selichos and fasting observed on Mondays and Thursdays during the months of Marcheshvan and Iyar). The selichos begin with the recital of selach lanu avinu, and the prayer Keil erech apayim leads into the first time that the thirteen midos of Hashem are recited. This sequence is the standard structure of our selichos.

However, the selichos for the 20th of Sivan are actually lengthier than those of the other fast days. Whereas on the other fast days (including behab) there are four selichos, each followed by a recitation of the thirteen midos of Hashem, the selichos for the 20th of Sivan consist of seven passages and seven recitations of the thirteen midos of Hashem, which is comparable to what we do at neilah on Yom Kippur. Thus, in some aspects, the 20th of Sivan was treated with more reverence than were the fast days that are mentioned in Tanach!

In addition, one of the selichos recited on the 20th of Sivan is of the style called akeidah, recalling the akeidah of Yitzchak. The inclusion of the akeidah is significant, since these selichos were included to commemorate the martyrdom of Jews who sacrificed their lives rather than agreeing to be baptized. To the best of my knowledge, these selichos are recited only on the 20th of Sivan, during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah and on Erev Rosh Hashanah.

The liturgy for the recreated 20th of Sivan used the original selichos procedure, created to commemorate the martyrs of Blois almost five hundred years previously (Siddur Otzar Ha'tefillos, Volume II, Section II, page 65).

The Prayers for 20th of Sivan During the repetition of shemoneh esrei at both shacharis and mincha, the aneinu prayer was recited, as is the practice on any public fast day. For Shacharis, selichos were recited, Avinu Malkeinu and tachanun were said, and then a sefer Torah was taken out and the passage of Vayechal Moshe that we read on fast days was read (Shaarei Teshuvah, 580:9). At mincha, a sefer Torah was taken out and Vayechal Moshe was read again. Each individual who was fasting recited aneinu in his quiet shemoneh esrei.

Bris on the 20th of Sivan The halachic authorities discuss how to celebrate a bris that falls on the 20th of Sivan. The Magen Avraham (568:10) concludes that the seudah should be held at night, after the fast is over, so that it does not conflict with the fast. Thus, we see how seriously this fast was viewed.

Why don't we observe this? "It is customary in the entire Kingdom of Poland to fast on the 20th of Sivan." These are the words of the Magen Avraham (580:9). I do not know when the custom to observe this fast ended, but the Mishnah Berurah quotes it as common practice in Poland in his day (580:16). Perhaps, it was assumed that the custom was required only as long as there were communities in Poland, but that their descendants, who moved elsewhere, were not required to observe it.

Most contemporary siddurim do not include the selichos for the 20th of Sivan, which implies that it is already some time since it was observed by most communities.

Notwithstanding this, I have been told that in some communities that no longer observe the 20th of Sivan as a day of selichos and fasting, still have a custom not to schedule weddings on this day.

Conclusion We now understand both the halachic basis for why and how we commemorate such sad events in Jewish history, and why we no longer observe the 20th day of Sivan. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu save us and all of klal Yisrael from all further difficulties!

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Parsha Potpourri

The Light of Shabbos Food

by Rabbi Ozer Alport

During their travels in the wilderness, a group of complainers began to protest the Manna that they were forced to eat day after day (Numbers 11:5). They wailed that they missed the fish that they used to eat in Egypt, and now they had nothing to look forward to except Manna.

Commenting on this complaint, the Midrash Pliah cryptically remarks "from here we may derive that it is obligatory to light candles for Shabbos," a mitzvah which has no apparent connection to their grievance.

The Chida explains by noting that we must first understand what they were complaining about. Rashi writes (11:5) that the Manna tasted like whatever the person eating it desired. If so, why were they mourning the fish they used to eat in Egypt when they were capable of making the Manna taste like fish with no effort whatsoever?

The Talmud (Yoma 74b) teaches that although a person could make the Manna taste like anything he desired, it nevertheless retained its original appearance. Even though the complainers were able to make the Manna taste like fish, they lacked the pleasure and satiety which comes from seeing the food that they wanted to taste. The Talmud adds that a blind person won't enjoy or become as full from a meal as a person with normal vision who consumes the same food.

In light of this complaint, the Midrash questioned how a person will be able to avoid the same dilemma on Shabbos since he won't be able to appreciate the Shabbos delicacies if he is forced to eat them in darkness. The Midrash concluded that from their protest, we may derive that a person is obligated to light candles so that he can see and enjoy his food on Shabbos!

* * *

THE IDEAL MARRIAGE

The Talmud (Shabbos 130a) teaches that any mitzvah which was accepted by the Jewish people with joy, such as circumcision, is still performed happily to the present day. Any mitzvah that was accepted with fighting, such as forbidden relationships, is still accompanied by tension, as the issues involved in the negotiation of every wedding cause struggles. Of all of the commandments, why did the Jewish people specifically complain about the prohibition against marrying family members? (Numbers 11:10 with Rashi)

Dayan Yisrael Yaakov Fisher suggests that when the Jews heard that they would be unable to marry their close relatives, they feared that they would be unable to enjoy successful marriages. They believed that the ideal candidate for marriage would be a person who was familiar since birth and who would be almost identical in terms of values and stylistic preferences. From the Torah's prohibition to marry those most similar to us, we may deduce that God's vision of an ideal marriage differs from our own.

Mas'as HaMelech derives a similar lesson from Y'fas Toar - a woman of beautiful form. The Torah permits a soldier who becomes infatuated with a non-Jewish woman during battle to marry her. This is difficult to understand, as only the most righteous individuals constituted the Jewish army. Rashi writes (Deut. 20:8) that somebody who had committed even the smallest sin was sent back from the war. How could such pious rabbis be tempted to marry a beautiful non-Jewish woman?

Rashi writes (Deut. 21:11) that a person who marries a Y'fas Toar will ultimately give birth to a Ben Sorer U'Moreh - wayward son. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 71a) rules that a child may only be punished as a rebellious son if his parents are identical in their voices, appearances, and height. Mas'as HaMelech explains that even the most righteous soldier will be taken aback upon encountering a woman who looks like him and whose voice is identical to his. All external signs seem to indicate that she is meant for him, and he may be convinced that God's will is for him to convert her and marry her.

However, from the fact that Rashi teaches that a wayward son will come out of such a union, we may conclude that the ideal marriage isn't one in which the husband and wife enter already identical to one another. A Torah marriage is one in which the two partners grow together over time to understand and respect one another, allowing them to overcome their differences and create a beautiful, harmonious blend of their unique perspectives and experiences.

* * *

DON'T INTERRUPT!

The Mishnah in Avos (5:7) lists seven characteristics of a wise person, one of which is that he doesn't interrupt another person who is still speaking. From where in Parshas Behaaloscha is this lesson derived?
Rabbi Ovadiah Bartenura explains that the reason for not interrupting somebody who is in the middle of speaking is so that he shouldn't become confused and distracted. He writes that the source for this teaching is God's request (Numbers 12:6) that Aharon and Miriam please listen to his words of rebuke for speaking negatively of Moshe. In introducing His comments in this manner, God was asking them to hear Him out and not to interrupt Him. If this concept applies to God, Who doesn't lose His focus, all the more so does it require us to hear out a human speaker in full before responding.
* * *
DENYING MOSES' PROPHECY?
Maimonides writes (Hilchos Tumas Tzara'as 16:10) that Miriam didn't intend to disparage Moshe with her comments to Aharon. Rather, she erred in equating the level of Moshe's prophecy to that of other prophets such as herself and Aharon. Maimonides lists 13 fundamental principles of Jewish belief and writes that a person who denies even one of them is considered a heretic. One of them is that the level of Moshe's prophecy is unparalleled among all other prophets. Does this mean, God forbid, that Miriam was a heretic?
Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (Kovetz Ma'amorim) answers that the very source for this fundamental principle of belief regarding the uniqueness of Moshe's level of prophecy is this incident involving Miriam. After Miriam spoke negatively to Aharon about Moshe, God rebuked them and explained (Numbers 12:7-8) that Moshe's prophecy is not on the same level of all other prophets. In other words, at the time that Miriam made her accusations against Moshe, this principle hadn't yet been clearly stated and established in the world. Even though a person today who repeated Miriam's argument would indeed be labeled a heretic, her position at that time wasn't considered heretical because it didn't contradict any known and established belief.
* * *
STEP UP TO THE MENORAH
Rashi writes (Numbers 8:2) that there was a step in front of the Menorah upon which the Kohen would stand when cleaning out and lighting it. As the Menorah was only 18 tefachim tall (approximately 5 feet), why was it necessary for the Kohen to stand on a step to light it?
Rabbi Leib Tzintz (Peninei Kedem) points out that Moshe was speaking to Aharon, who was a Kohen Gadol. The Talmud (Sotah 38a) rules that although Kohanim in the Temple recite the Priestly Blessing with their hands raised above their heads, the Kohen Gadol may not do so. Rashi explains that this is because God's name is written on the Tzitz (Head-Plate), and it is inappropriate to raise his hands above this level. Just as Aharon could not raise his hands above his head for the purpose of Birkas Kohanim, so too was he forbidden to do so to light the Menorah, and he had no choice but to stand on a step to light it.
* * *
YISRO'S GUIDANCE
Moshe asked Yisro to remain with them in the wilderness to serve as eyes for them (Numbers 10:31). Why did they need Yisro's advice or guidance when all of their travels were conducted based on Divine instruction (Deut. 9:17-18)?
Rabbeinu Bechaye answers that although the Jewish people traveled based on God's guidance, there were still many Jews who lacked proper faith and trust in God. Because they felt more secure with a human being upon whom they could rely, Moshe suggested that Yisro remain to reassure them.
Alternatively, he suggests that Moshe's intention was that Yisro should serve as eyes not for the Jews, but for the non-Jews. In other words, he would be a witness to all of the miracles that God performed for the Jews, which he could then relate to the non-Jews to inspire them to believe in God.
Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch explains that unlike tzaddikim such as Moshe and Aharon who were born righteous, Yisro was unique in that he was self-made and self-taught. Many Jews had difficulty looking to Moshe as a role model, as his greatness seemed so far removed from them. Moshe therefore asked Yisro to stay and serve as an example of what every person can become if he only recognizes and uses his latent potential.
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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, May 23, 2013 at 6:38 PM subject: Tornado Relief, The Jewish Michael Jordan, Summer Vacation - Parshat Beha'alotecha - Shabbat Shalom from the OU
Parshat Beha'alotcha: Second Chances Excerpted from **Rabbi Shmuel Goldin's 'Unlocking The Torah Text**: An In-Depth Journey Into The Weekly Parsha- Bamidbar'
As the first anniversary of the Exodus approaches, God commands Moshe to instruct the nation concerning the rituals of the Korban Pesach.
The people comply, offering the korban on the afternoon of the fourteenth day of Nissan.
A number of individuals, however, approach Moshe with a problem: "We are tamei, ritually impure [and are thus unable to offer the Korban Pesach]…lama nigara, why should we be diminished by not offering the Lord's korban in its appointed time in the midst of the children of Israel?"
When Moshe turns to God for direction, God responds by introducing the concept of Pesach Sheini, a second Pesach: "If any man becomes contaminated through contact with a human corpse or is on a distant road, he shall make a Korban Pesach for the Lord. In the second month, on the fourteenth day, in the afternoon, shall they make it; with matzot and bitter herbs shall they consume it." While the full observances of the festival of Pesach are not repeated on Pesach Sheini, the occasion provides a "second chance" for those who were unable to offer the Paschal Lamb on Pesach itself to do so a month later.
Questions
Why does God create a second chance in conjunction with – and only in conjunction with – the holiday of Pesach? The law does not provide, for example, a Yom Kippur Sheini for those unable to fast on Yom Kippur.
Nor is a Succot Sheini mandated for those who cannot sit in the succa on the holiday of Succot. What dimension unique to the festival of Pesach warrants the creation of an official makeup date?
Furthermore, if Pesach Sheini is warranted, why is it not included in the halachic code from the outset? Why doesn't God instruct the nation concerning the laws of Pesach Sheini when He first introduces the Korban Pesach on the eve of the Exodus? Why wait until those who cannot participate on Pesach object?
Finally, exactly who is allowed to participate in Pesach Sheini? While legitimate inability to offer the Korban Pesach at the appointed time is the apparent criteria, the Torah's definition of such inability is a puzzlingly restrictive. Why limit the observance of Pesach Sheini only to those who are ritually impure or who are at a distance from the Sanctuary at the time of the offering of the Korban Pesach? What of those individuals who are constrained from taking part in the Korban Pesach for other legitimate reasons? Is someone too ill to participate on Pesach, for example, included in the opportunities offered by Pesach Sheini? If not, why not? If so, why doesn't the Torah say so?
Approaches
A
Our analysis of Pesach Sheini begins with the most basic of the questions presented. What is the rationale behind this phenomenon? Why in the case of Pesach, and only in the case of Pesach, is a second chance for at least partial observance offered within the halachic code?

An answer to this question is potentially derived from an unexpected source that can help reframe and deepen our understanding of the Pesach festival itself.
Consider the approach mandated by Jewish law towards an individual who wishes to convert to Judaism. Hesitation, caution and discouragement are the order of the day. Armed with the belief that those outside our faith tradition are not required to be like us, we confront the candidate with a sobering truth and an obvious question:It is hard to be a Jew. Why, if you are under no obligation to do so, would you want to take this difficult step?
Not so well known, however, is the exact form that this initial caution is meant to take. Contrary to expectations, we do not plunge immediately into a discussion of the mitzvot; we do not emphasize the difficult responsibilities and monumental life changes that the potential convert proposes to accept.
Instead, the Talmud lays out a vastly different introductory path for the would-be Jew: The rabbis taught: [if a prospective] proselyte comes to convert in the present era, we say to him: "What did you perceive that prompted you to come? Do you not know that Israel [i.e., the Jewish people] is, in this day, afflicted, oppressed, downtrodden and harassed – and that hardships are frequently visited upon them?" If the individual responds: "I know, and I am not even worthy [to share in their hardships]," we accept him immediately [as a potential convert worthy of education].
Only after this interchange has taken place, continues the Talmud, do we begin to teach the candidate about the enormous responsibilities inherent in the halachic code.
Why must the potential convert's formal journey towards Judaism open with a discussion of the historical persecution of the Jewish nation? Why not strike to the core issue facing the candidate immediately: his central challenge of kabbalat ol mitzvoth, an understanding and acceptance of the yoke (the obligations carried by) the commandments?
Apparently the rabbis intuited a prerequisite to the acceptance of mitzvot. The first step towards Jewishness is the step of "belonging." Only someone who is willing to be part of the historical saga of the Jewish nation, who commits to share in that nation's challenges, to mourn its losses and celebrate its triumphs – only that person can begin to accept the Jewish faith as his or her own. In short, potential candidates must be willing to throw their lot in with the Jewish people, whatever trials that choice might produce, whatever difficulties might ensue.
B
What, however, is the basis of this rabbinic position? What source can Talmud scholars cite to support their confident claim that conversion to Judaism must begin with the choice to "belong"?
The answer, it would seem, is powerfully simple. The rabbis believe that the initial journey of an individual who wishes to join the Jewish nation must mirror the initial journey of the nation itself.
As we have noted before, the birth of the Jewish nation unfolds in two formative stages: the Exodus and Revelation.
Before our ancestors could arrive at Sinai, they had to be willing to leave Egypt, to throw their lot in with a fledgling people traveling towards an unknown future, under the guidance of a relative stranger. Only those willing to take a chance on the Jewish people are privileged to stand in God's presence at Sinai when the Jewish nation is born.
A potential convert to Judaism, apparently, must undergo the two-step transformative process that defined the birth of the nation he wishes to join. The rituals of the conversion process itself are derived from the experiences of the Israelites immediately prior to and during the Revelation at Sinai The first step towards those rituals, however, like the first step of our national journey, is rooted in the Exodus.
Before a potential convert can "arrive at Sinai," before he can begin to encounter God's law, he must first "leave Egypt." He must consciously separate himself from the world he has known and affiliate with the Jewish nation. This act of affiliation, mirroring the Israelites' Exodus experience, launches his journey towards Judaism.
C
We can now begin to understand the rationale for the creation of Pesach Sheini. So elemental is the Korban Pesach, so fundamental to our Jewish identity and experience, that God provides a second chance for those who are initially unable to participate. Pesach is, after all, where we begin as a people. No one should miss out on the yearly renewal of our shared affiliation. No one should be excluded as we re-create our first steps together.
The journey towards Jewishness opens with the step of belonging. Each year, as that journey is reaffirmed, every member of the community must be given the opportunity to join.
D
Our analysis of the basis for Pesach Sheini may well shed light on a series of perplexing laws concerning this festival of second chances.
As noted above, the Torah seems to limit participation in Pesach Sheini to those who are ritually impure or at a distance from the Sanctuary on Pesach. The rabbis, however, interpret the biblical mandate much more extensively. In two sentences in the Mishna, they increase the reach of this makeup festival:
An individual who is ritually impure or at a distance and did not perform the first [Korban Pesach] shall perform the second [on Pesach Sheini].
[An individual who otherwise] erred or was legitimately constrained from performing the first [Korban Pesach] shall perform the second [on Pesach Sheini].
The legal verdict of the Mishna is clear. The laws of Pesach Sheini apply not only to those who are impure or at a distance, but to all those who are legitimately constrained from participating in the Korban Pesach at its appointed time. This conclusion (and the Mishna's own construction), however, raises a much more difficult question. If Pesach Sheini applies to all those who are excluded from participation on Pesach, why does the Torah specify the categories of tuma and distance? Why not simply apply the laws of Pesach Sheini in broad strokes from the outset, to anyone who legitimately missed the Korban Pesach?
The Mishna itself answers this question with a terse response that is interpreted differently by different authorities. The Rambam's formulation of the law, accepted by many, can be summarized as follows: All individuals who are legitimately constrained for any reason from participating in the Korban Pesach in its appointed time are obligated to offer a korban on Pesach Sheini. The Torah, however, distinguishes in the area of punishment between those who cannot participate on Pesach because of impurity or distance and those whose inability stems from other sources:
1. An individual whose legitimate failure to participate in the Korban Pesach arises out of a reason other than impurity or distance is liable to the punishment of karet, excision from the community, if he deliberately chooses not to take advantage of the second chance offered to him by Pesach Sheini.
2. An individual, however, who fails to participate in the Korban Pesach because of impurity or distance is not liable for the punishment of karet even if he deliberately fails to offer a korban on Pesach Sheini. Such an individual, the Rambam notes, "has already been exempted from the punishment of karet on Pesach itself."
At face value, this halachic verdict seems totally counterintuitive. While Pesach Sheini applies to all who are unable to partake in the Korban Pesach at its appointed time, the law is most lenient concerning the two categories that are specifically mentioned in the Torah: ritual impurity and distance. Individuals who fall into these categories are exempt from punishment even if they deliberately ignore the opportunities presented by Pesach Sheini. All others, however, who legitimately miss participation on Pesach are liable for punishment if they deliberately fail to observe Pesach Sheini.
Wouldn't we expect the opposite to be true? Shouldn't the law show greatest severity towards those whose obligation in Pesach Sheini derives directly from the text?
So puzzling is the Rambam's codification of the law that the Ra'avad immediately objects: "Now [the Rambam] contradicts himself! What difference is there between impure or distant individuals who deliberately ignore the obligations of Pesach Sheini and others who deliberately ignore those same obligations?"
E
Our above-outlined discussion concerning the origins of Pesach Sheini, however, provides an approach towards the Rambam's halachic formulation based on the following assumptions:
1. The obligation to participate in the Korban Pesach derives from the root concept of affiliation with the community. All individuals "affiliated" with the Jewish community at the time of the Pesach Sacrifice automatically become fully obligated to share in the ritual.
2. An individual who, at the time of the first Korban Pesach, is fully affiliated with the community but who, for tangential reasons, cannot participate in the Korban Pesach at its appointed time (e.g., someone who is ill) nonetheless remains obligated in the ritual. This obligation derives from his connection to the community on Pesach itself. For such an individual, participation in Pesach Sheini becomes a full obligation, providing a second chance to fulfill a responsibility already incurred at the time of the first Korban Pesach.
3. In response to the objections of the group that approaches Moshe, however, God defines two categories of individuals who are essentially excluded from participation in the Korban Pesach. Their exclusion is not tangential but rises out of a fundamental separation from the community at the time of Pesach. These individuals – the ritually impure, who are spiritually separate, and the distant, who are geographically detached – never became obligated in the Pesach sacrifice in the first place and are thus completely exempt from potential punishment regarding the

Korban. Pesach Sheini emerges for these individuals, as a unique halachic construct: an obligatory opportunity.

As a result of the historic request outlined in the text, the law affords individuals who legitimately find themselves separated from the community on Pesach with the opportunity to affiliate at a later date. Once offered, this opportunity becomes obligatory as the Torah enjoins these individuals to take advantage of the second chance for affiliation that Pesach Sheini represents. There is, however, no punishment for failure. The exemption from punishment reflects the fact that Pesach Sheini initially originates as an opportunity rather than an obligation for these individuals.

F

Two other fascinating cases considered by the Talmud may well connect to our analysis of the Rambam's halachic codification. What is the law, the rabbis ask, concerning an individual who converts to Judaism or a child who reaches the age of halachic responsibility during the month between Pesach and Pesach Sheini? Are such individuals obligated to bring an offering on Pesach Sheini or are they exempt because they never incurred any obligation at all at the time of Pesach?

While differing opinions are offered in the Talmud, the Rambam is once again emphatic: both the convert and the young adult are obligated in the rituals of Pesach Sheini. Even individuals who were not practicing Jews at the time of Pesach are to be given the opportunity to affiliate with the community once such affiliation becomes possible.

If our analysis is correct, however, such individuals should be exempt from punishment if they fail, even deliberately, to observe Pesach Sheini. The festival should emerge for them, as it does for the impure and the distant, as an "obligatory opportunity." Unfortunately, however, the Rambam does not comment on the issue of punishment for the convert and the young adult. No proof can therefore be adduced either for or against our arguments.

G

Finally, we turn to our last remaining question concerning Pesach Sheini. Why aren't the laws of this festival of second chances included in the halachic code from the outset? Why does God delay the transmission of these edicts until objections are raised by those unable to participate on Pesach itself? A fascinating, well-known answer to this question is suggested in the Midrash and quoted by Rashi. God deliberately delays the transmission of the laws of Pesach Sheini in order to reward the individuals who approach Moshe concerning the Korban Pesach. So great is the merit of these individuals that God allows a section of the halachic code to develop as a result of their efforts. The Midrash, however, fails to define the rationale for such overwhelming reward. Why do these individuals deserve to have a section of Torah text recorded in their honor?

H

Compounding the mystery is the appearance, later in the book of Bamidbar, of a strangely similar event that seems to give rise to the very same issues.

After God prepares the nation for entry into the Land of Israel by delineating the rules that will govern the division of the land, four women, the daughters of Tzelafchad, approach Moshe with an objection: "Our father died in the wilderness…and he had no sons. Lama yigara, why should the name of our father be diminished among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers."

Once again, Moshe turns to God for guidance and, once again, God responds by outlining a new set of halachic guidelines:

If a man will die and he has no son, you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. If he has no daughter, you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. If he has no brothers you shall give his inheritance to the brothers of his father. If there are no brothers of his father, you shall give his inheritance to his relative who is closest to him of his family. Once again, the rabbis ask, why weren't these rules conveyed to the nation from the outset? Why wait until the daughters of Tzelafchad object?

And once again, Rashi quotes the rabbinic response: "The passages of inheritance should have been written through Moshe, our teacher, but [since] the daughters of Tzelafchad were meritorious, it was written through them."

And once again, we ask: Wherein lies the great merit of the protagonists in this episode? Why does God deliberately delay the transmission of a pivotal set of laws in order to pay tribute to the daughters of Tzelafchad?

I

As is often the case, the Torah embeds its answer in the text.

An uncanny linguistic parallel marks the seemingly disparate narratives of Pesach Sheini and the daughters of Tzelafchad. The heroes of both stories employ strikingly similar language as they raise their problems to Moshe:

Lama nigara, why should we be diminished by not offering the Lord's korban in its appointed time…

Lama yigara, why should the name of our father be diminished among his family…

In each of these episodes the petitioners perceive participation in a communal mitzva to be an opportunity, missed only at great cost. We will be personally diminished, they maintain, through our inability to take part.

Therein lies their greatness….

Legitimately excused from responsibility for the Pesach ritual, the petitioners who approach Moshe will not rest easy. Exemption, they argue, is not an option. Why should we be denied the gift of participation? Why should the enriching experience of the Korban Pesach be disallowed to us?

Facing their nuclear family's exclusion from inheritance in the Land of Israel, the daughters of Tzelafchad refuse to remain silent. Why should our family be denied a permanent legacy in the land of our people? Why should the name of our father be erased from the roster of his brothers?

In each of these cases, the divine legal verdict is clear: God provides those who mourn the loss of religious opportunity with new opportunity for fulfillment.

Even further, however, through a delicate interweaving of thought and law, in both the narrative of Pesach Sheini and in the narrative of inheritance, a more pervasive message emerges: when you perceive participation with your people to be a cherished gift worth fighting for; when you feel diminished by an inability to take part in Torah ritual; when you view a mitzva as an opportunity and not as an obligation, you are worthy of a portion of the Torah inscribed in your name.

Points to Ponder

Our age of immediacy – in which time is measured in milliseconds, easier is automatically viewed as better and goals must be instantly attained – inexorably shapes our religious attitudes. We find ourselves seeking quicker prayer services, devising shortcuts in holiday preparations and engaging in rote, undemanding ritual observance. We mark Pesach with mass exoduses to ever more exotic vacation spots, hire others to build our succot, buy prepackaged Purim mishloach manot…anything to make our lives a little easier as we balance multiple obligations and, at the same time, struggle to fulfill the letter, if not the spirit, of Jewish law. In the process, however, we miss the whole point.

For while these commandments are obligations, they are also opportunities: prayer an opportunity to talk to God, Shabbat an opportunity to regain perspective, the holidays opportunities for shared family experience. All mitzvot are opportunities to glimpse the world that lies beyond, to connect with God, to sanctify our existence.

With the investment of time and effort, the observance of the mitzvot can deeply enrich our personal and family lives.

When we learn to view mitzvot as opportunities and not as burdens, we too will merit inscription in the unfolding scroll of our nation's story.