

The Book of *Bemidbar*, which we begin this week, introduces a new facet of our relationship with *Hashem*, writes R' Nosson Yehuda Leib Mintzberg z"l (1943-2018; rabbi and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yerushalayim and Bet Shemesh, Israel). In *Sefer Shmot*, we were commanded to build a *Mishkan* so that *Hashem* can dwell in our midst, and in *Sefer Vayikra*, we were told what to do in that *Mishkan*--specifically, to offer *Korbanot* as a means to become close--"Karov," from the same root as "*Korban*"--to *Hashem*.

Now, in *Sefer Bemidbar*, we are instructed how to camp around the *Mishkan* and how to travel surrounding the *Mishkan*, just as a king's honor guard camps and travels surrounding him. Whereas the laws of the *Kohanim* were presented in *Sefer Vayikra*, because the role of the *Kohanim* is to serve in the *Mishkan*, the laws of the *Levi'im* are found in this Book, because their primary role is to enhance and guard the honor of the *Mishkan*. Likewise, whereas most of the laws of the sacrificial offerings are presented in the Book of *Vayikra*, the wine libations that accompany the *Korbanot* are taught in the Book of *Bemidbar*, because the purpose of the wine libations is to elevate the honor of the sacrificial offering, just as a king's meal is enhanced by wine.

R' Mintzberg notes that the *Menorah* is discussed in all three Books: *Shmot*, *Vayikra*, and *Bemidbar*. In the first, the *Menorah* is discussed in the context of building the *Mishkan*; in the second, as part of the daily service in the *Mishkan*; and finally, in this Book, as a way of giving honor to *Hashem* and the *Mishkan*. (*Ben Melech, Vayikra* p.120)

## Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Shevuot* 20b) famously teaches: "'Zachor' / 'Remember' and 'Shamor' / 'Safeguard' were spoken simultaneously." This refers to the fact that the *Luchot* in *Parashat Yitro* (*Shmot* 20:8) state, "Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it," while the *Luchot* in *Parashat Va'etchanan* (*Devarim* 5:12) say, "Safeguard the Sabbath day to sanctify it." Since both verbs appear in the *Luchot*, *Hashem* must have uttered them simultaneously.

R' Aryeh Leib Horowitz z"l (1847-1909; rabbi of Stryi and Stanislav, Galicia) writes: The fact that these two commandments were given simultaneously alludes to the two different aspects of *Shabbat*. On the one hand, *Shabbat* reaffirms our belief in Creation, because it confirms that *Hashem* created the world for six days, and on the seventh day He refrained from creating new things. On the other hand, *Shabbat* reaffirms that *Hashem* is all powerful, as we read (*Devarim* 5:15), "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, took you out from there with a strong hand and an outstretched arm; therefore *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, has commanded you to make the Sabbath day."

Our Sages say that one who recites "*Vy'chulu*" on Friday night is considered to be a partner with *Hashem* in Creation. R' Horowitz explains: Just as *Shabbat* recalls *Hashem's* ability to suppress the laws of nature at will, as He did in connection with the Exodus, so one who keeps *Shabbat* properly and takes its message to heart is given the ability to make decrees and have nature obey. (Indeed, one who keeps *Shabbat* has already suppressed nature--namely, the nature of a human being to do whatever he pleases rather than to subjugate himself to the Torah.)

(*She'eilot U'teshuvot Harei Besamim: Rosh Ha'har*)

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## Shavuot

**“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Behold! *Anochi* / I come to you in the thickness of the cloud, so that the people will hear as I speak to you ...” (Shmot 19:9--from the Torah reading for the first day of *Shavuot*)**

R’ Ze’ev Wolfz”l (*Chassidic Rebbe* in of Zhytomyr, Ukraine; died 1798) writes: Our Sages teach that the Torah has *Shiv’im Panim* / seventy aspects. We also are taught that the Torah can be interpreted on multiple levels, known by the acronym “*Pardes*”: *Pshat* / the “plain” meaning, *Remez* / hints, *Drash* / allegories, and *Sod* / secrets. Thus we can understand that, while the Torah seems to include many mundane stories, those stories actually conceal deep lessons that are not suitable for the masses, R’ Ze’ev Wolf writes.

All of the Torah’s secrets were known to Moshe Rabbeinu, however, for his prophetic vision was absolutely clear. Thus *Hashem* says about Moshe (*Bemidbar* 12:7), “In My entire house he is the trusted one,” meaning that Moshe could be trusted not to reveal what he was not meant to reveal.

With this we can understand our verse, R’ Ze’ev Wolf continues. *Hashem* said to Moshe: When I come to say “*Anochi*,” to deliver the Ten Commandments, “I will come to you in the thickness of the cloud.” If I were speaking to you, Moshe, alone, I would not conceal my message. I will do so, however, “so that the people will hear (*i.e.*, understand) as I speak to you.” (*Ohr Ha’Meir: Drush Le’Shavuot*)

**“The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands in gold and silver.” (Tehilim 119:72)**

R’ Aharon z”l (*Maggid Meisharim* / preacher in Zhytomyr, Ukraine; died 1816) asks: After the verse has said that Torah is better than “thousands in gold,” what is added by mentioning “silver,” which is less valuable?

He explains: If a person has gold in his vault, but he has no usable coins with which to buy his needs--in modern terms, if a person is worth billions of dollars on paper, but he has no money to buy a cup of coffee--we would not say that he is well-off. Only if he has both “gold” to save and invest and “silver” to spend, is he truly wealthy.

Our Sages teach that *Hashem* created the world using the Torah as a blueprint. Everything, from the biggest to the minutest, is hinted to in the Torah--specifically, in the *Torah She’bichtav* / Written Torah. But merely knowing that fact has little practical value unless it inspires us to *Yir’at Shamayim* / awe of *Hashem*. Such *Yir’at Shamayim* that comes from recognizing the awesome power of the Written Torah is the “gold.” The “silver,” *i.e.*, what is practical in day-to-day life, is the “Torah of Your mouth”--the *Torah She’be’al Peh* / Oral Law--for it breaks down the Written Torah into usable lessons on how to live our lives. Without that, a person is “poor,” no matter how much *Yir’at Shamayim* he has.

Who then is wealthy? One who has the “Torah of Your mouth” on top of a solid foundation of Written Torah and *Yir’at Shamayim*. He is better off than a wealthy person who has both “gold”--paper wealth--and “silver”--usable wealth.

(*Toldot Aharon: Likkutim*)

**“Take a census of the entire assembly of *Bnei Yisrael* according to their families, according to their fathers’ household, by number of the names, every male according to their head count.” (1:2)**

R’ Aryeh Finkel z”l (1931-2016; *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Mir Yeshiva in Modi’in Ilit, Israel) asks: The way the census was taken, it seems to highlight the uniqueness of each individual. Yet, we are taught that *Bnei Yisrael* merited to receive the Torah because of their complete unity, as we read (*Shmot* 19:2), “And *Yisrael* camped there, opposite the mountain.” (Our Sages explain that the verb “camped” is in the singular form to indicate that *Bnei Yisrael* camped “as one person, with one heart.”)

R’ Finkel answers: Indeed, every person is unique and special, but what makes him so is his devotion to the common good. In contrast, if a person sees himself as being above everyone else, he loses his importance and his value in G-d’s eyes.

(*Har Yera’eh: Ma’amarei Mussar* #61)

## Megillat Ruth

**“Then all the people who were at the gate, and the elders, said, ‘We are witnesses! May *Hashem* make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the House of *Yisrael*. May you prosper in Efrat and be famous in Bet Lechem’.” (4:11)**

A few verses earlier, we read, “Boaz said to the elders, and to all the people, ‘You are witnesses this day ...’” Why, in our verse, when Boaz is answered, are the “people” mentioned before the “elders”?

R’ Yaakov Yisrael Halevi Stern z”l (*Maggid* / preacher in Kremenets, Volhynia, now Ukraine; died 1799) explains: The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 30b) cites two opinions about how *Bnei Yisrael* sang “*Az Yashir*” following the Splitting of the Sea. According to one opinion, Moshe recited each line and *Bnei Yisrael* repeated after him. According to the second opinion (as explained by *Rashi* z”l), all of *Bnei Yisrael* were Divinely inspired to speak the identical words in unison. The *Zohar* likewise says that all of *Bnei Yisrael* experienced *Ruach Hakodesh* / Divine inspiration at that time.

Here, too, writes R’ Stern, the verse is hinting that the assembled people experienced *Ruach Hakodesh* and answered Boaz in unison using the identical words. If our verse had mentioned the elders before the people, we would not have known this; we would have assumed that the elders spoke first, and the people repeated after them. By mentioning the people before the elders, our verse is telling us that that is not what happened. (In the earlier verse, the elders are mentioned first because Boaz, appropriately, addressed himself to the elders.)

(*Agudat Ezov: Tor Ha’ma’alah*)