

## שבועות ופ' נשא תשפ"ג

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### **SHAVUOS**

On *Erev Shavuos* it is forbidden to let blood since it is a time of danger. The *Machatzis Hashekel* explains that this is because the three days prior to *Shavuos* contain great potential for growth in Torah and coming closer to Hashem, and if we do not prepare ourselves as much as we should, Hashem becomes upset with us. This shows how important this period of the year is for us.

Rav Sternbuch recalls how his Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Schneider, would sometimes come into the *Beis Hamedrash* in the middle of the *sheloshes yemei hagbolo*. He would bang his fists on the *bimah* and shout that there was no enough *chizuk* in learning yet, and that during this period more intense learning was required.

It is worthwhile investing all our efforts into Torah learning during the period leading up to *Shavuos* and on *Shavuos* itself, even if the evil inclination tries to convince us that we are tired and so on, because those who are successful in this endeavor will enjoy success in their Torah learning throughout the year.

*Bikurim* were brought from the first fruit. Similarly, Hashem checks us to see what a person looks like after his preparations during the *sheloshes yemei hagbolo*, whether these preparations have borne any fruit.

Although we actually received the Torah on the 7<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan*, because Moshe Rabbenu added a day on his own accord, since the original plan was for us to receive it on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan*, and that was the day on which Hashem agreed to give us the Torah, that day can appropriately be termed “*zman matan Toraseinu*” (“the day on which our Torah was given”), as opposed to *zman kabolat Toraseinu*” (“the day on which our Torah was received”). Every year Hashem gives the Torah anew on the 6<sup>th</sup> of *Sivan* to each person, based on the extent to which he has prepared himself for this event and is deserving of it.

Why did we have to be forced into accepting the Torah by having the mountain held over us like a barrel if we had already said *na'ase venishma*? Thunder and lightning lead to fear of Heaven, and Hashem wanted us to keep the Torah with *yiras shomayim*.

Moreover, the barrel held over us symbolizes the fact that although we voluntarily accepted the Torah, Hashem did not want our acceptance to make this arrangement resemble a voluntary contract between two parties, but rather wanted us to be subjected to the “yoke of Torah,” so that we would feel obligated to observe it.

It is very important to set aside a fixed time for learning every day. This time should be sacrosanct and should not be violated even if one can earn a lot of money during that time (*Orach Chaim* 155:1). That way the person demonstrates that he has accepted the yoke of Torah upon himself. This is the preferred and genuine way to learn Torah, and the Torah quality of someone who is successful in keeping to this regimen cannot be compared to that of someone who learns only after he has nothing else to do, or only after he has finished all his other activities.

*Chazal* tell us that the nations were offered the Torah, but declined, feeling unable to observe even basic commandments, such as the prohibitions against murder and stealing. However, were they not already liable to observe these commandments as part of the *sheva*

*mitzvos bnei Noach*? The nations did not want to be forced to keep even fundamental universal laws, but only voluntarily, since they believed in democracy. Only we agreed to be bound by the Torah and keep it mandatorily, without any conditions.

*Tosfos* say in *Masseches Taanis* that the Torah was given on *Har Hamoria*. This is not meant literally, but means that the *Shechino*, which usually dwells on *Har Hamoria* was temporarily transferred to *Har Sinai* for the duration of *matan Torah*. Also, *Har Hamoria*, on which the *akeido* took place, symbolizes complete *mesirus nefesh*, and Torah too calls for self-sacrifice. We stay up all night learning Torah, to show that we are ready to learn even with self-dedication and difficulty.

*Kabbolas Hatorah* requires much preparation. A person must be aware of the significance of every moment of Torah, during which he performs the most important *mitzvah*. If a person realizes that he is in the Army of Hashem he will not be tempted to leave it, despite any inducements dangled before his eyes.

After *matan Torah* we were able for the first time to sanctify every day of the week by performing *mitzvos*. Before *matan Torah* only Shabbos could be sanctified properly. The name *Shavuos* (literally "weeks") reminds us of our current ability to elevate even our weekdays through *mitzvos* and good deeds.

Fruit is distributed on *Shavuos*, because it is a time when the judgment takes place regarding fruit, and the Torah compares man to a fruit tree. The *Shlo* brings in the name of "Tola'as Yaakov" that on *Shavuos* every person is judged to determine what portion he will have in Torah for the coming year. The righteous are compared to a palm tree, which produces fruit. If someone dedicates himself to producing "fruit" by teaching others, he will receive divine assistance.

Milk and honey are ready to be consumed without any additives or improvements. We have milk and honey on *Shavuos* to remind us that the Torah too is complete and perfect just as it is, without any additions or changes.

The Torah commands us to be happy on all the *regolim*, but this commandment is mentioned explicitly only with regard to *Sukkos* and *Shavuos* and not with regard to Pesach, because we had not yet received the Torah then. On *Shavuos* we have a special commandment to be happy, because we demonstrate to the Gentiles and to our erring brethren who pity us because of all the restrictions imposed by the Torah that we accept the yoke of Torah happily, since the Torah is the only real source of happiness. In addition, *Shavuos* itself is a day pregnant with much potential, and fortunate are those who make the effort to tap it.

Rav Sternbuch recalls seeing Rav Elchonon Wasserman in London on the second day of the last *Shavuos* before World War II. Rav Elchonon was in such a joyous state of mind that he started singing and dancing uninterruptedly for maybe one and a half hours. They say that Rav Boruch Ber Leibovitz was seen acting likewise on *Shavuos*.

However, as we said, *Shavuos* is also the day on which we are judged to determine what our portion in Torah will be. The entire period of *sefiras ha'omer* constitutes a preparation for receiving the Torah, the climax being the *shloshes yemei hagbolo*.

The Torah instructs us to count the *omer* for 50 days, but in practice we do so for only 49 days. This is because the *Seder* night, which instills us with complete *emunah*, is actually the beginning of the period in which we prepare ourselves for *kabbolas Hatorah*. The commentators explain why it is not in fact included halachically within the Omer period, but, be that as it may, it is the 50th day which the Torah has in mind conceptually speaking.

## פ' נשא

### **SPECIFIC POTENTIAL**

*Take a census (Noso) of the sons of Gershon, of them too, following their fathers' houses, according to their families (4:22)*

The members of the tribe of Gershon were more numerous than those of Kehos. The descendants of Kehos, who carried the *oron*, were holier, and their greatness did not depend on numerical superiority. One righteous person can sometimes be superior to many others put together, and, in fact, Moshe Rabbenu was as important as the entire nation. Gershon's preeminence, on the other hand, consisted in the amount of his descendants, and that is why he is mentioned here first.

Alternatively, precisely because the members of the tribe of Kehos, who carried the *oron*, were superior to those of Gershon, since the latter only carried the *kelim* of the *mishkon* - which had less sanctity than the *oron* - the *possuk* tells us “*Noso*” “Elevate” (an alternative meaning of “*Noso*”) the sons of Gershon too, even though they are not on the same level as the members of Kehos, who support the Torah. Do not denigrate them, because everyone has been designated a specific purpose by Hashem, which he has to fulfil and utilize to the utmost. When he reaches the Afterlife a person will be shown the greatness of his *neshomo* and his capabilities, and his status and situation in the World to Come depends on the extent to which he has fulfilled his own specific potential in this world.

### **AVODO**

*From the age of thirty years and upward until the age of fifty years, who are fit to perform the service for the service (laavod es avodas avodo) (4:47)*

How are we to understand the phrase *avodas avodo*? Superficially, someone who carries the poles of the *oron* does not seem to be performing a divine service of obvious importance. However, in reality, this act is suffused with major *kedusho*, because any act enabling an *avoda* to be performed is itself an act of *avodo*.

In the same vein, we see with the *poro adumo* that atonement is achieved even by means of something as seemingly insignificant as the ashes of the cow, because any object used to perform the will of Hashem *per se* acquires fundamental significance.

### **UNINTENTIONAL SINS**

*When a man or woman commits any of the sins against man to act treacherously against Hashem (5:6)*

Even sins committed inadvertently are considered to be treacherous acts which stain the soul and require atonement. The Vilna Gaon explains that this is because Hashem arranges events in such a manner that a person will commit an inadvertent act because his soul has already been damaged due to an *intentional* sin committed previously, even in a different area. Had he not committed the previous sin, Hashem would have saved him from the current unintentional pitfall.

## ETERNAL ASSETS

*Whatever any man gives to the Kohen, it shall be his (5:10)*

People in Western society tend to relate to their assets almost as if they were part of their very being, and a person's sense of worth may often be tied to his financial status. In reality, we know that we do not take our material possessions with us after we die, and the money bestowed on a wealthy person is merely given to him on trust to be used for charitable and other *mitzvah* purposes. If he does so, his imaginary wealth becomes genuinely and eternally his.

This is what the *possuk* is hinting at: whatever a person gives to the real owner of his worldly goods, be it the kohen, or the poor person, that, and only that, shall become his - the donor's - for all time. If the donor internalizes this message properly, the person knocking on the door asking for a donation will not have to feel ashamed or embarrassed, since he will be given the feeling that he is the rightful owner of that money, and not merely begging for a share of the donor's capital. Only by giving charity in this manner can a donor fulfill the *mitzvah* of *tzedoko* properly.

## PRIORITIES

*If any man's (ish ish) wife goes aside. (5:12)*

The Medrash says: "If your wine or your oil spills or if your garment tears, be lenient, but if you have heard something about your wife (this is how Rav Dovid Luria on *Bamidbar Rabbah* 9:2 reads it), stand up like a man". Even when something is not to the husband's liking, and even if his wife damages his belongings, he must behave like an *ish*, a *mentsh*. When it comes to material matters, a person must always maintain his composure, and never treat his wife like a maidservant. However, if there is even the slightest breach in the rules of modesty, if his wife's or daughter's clothes, hairstyle, *sheitel* etc. are not up to standard, or if she is considering working in an unsuitable environment or bringing home inappropriate literature, he must be an *ish ish* — he must behave like a man, and be totally unambiguous about the standards that must be met.

This principle does not only apply in the context of *tznius*. It is said about Rav Chaim Brisker that when one of his children broke an object in the house, he was not perturbed, but whenever a child committed an *aveirah* either *bein adam laMakom* or *bein adam lachaveiro*, he would make his displeasure very clear, and explain to the child why he was so upset. The educational value of a parent behaving consistently in such a manner cannot be overestimated.

## ASPIRATIONS

*Then the man shall bring his wife to the kohen and bring her offering for her, one tenth of an ephah of barley flour. He shall neither pour oil over it nor put frankincense on it (5:15). Rashi: "Barley": But not wheat. Since she acted like an animal, her offering is composed of animal feed. "Nor put frankincense on it": For the matriarchs are known as frankincense... yet she deviated from their ways.*

Even though she acted in an animalistic manner, she is still held responsible for not having acted according to the standards of the matriarchs. This sounds like a strange statement,

but it conveys the lesson that the root cause of her base conduct lies in the fact that she did not aspire to emulate the qualities of the *imohos*. Had she done so, she would not have reached such low levels, because that aspiration in and of itself protects a person from stooping to such low conduct.

Similarly, every *ben Torah* should strive to become one of the *gedolei hador*. Even if he does not end up reaching that goal, his aspiration will at least have been effective in causing him to grow. As Rav Boruch Ber Leibowitz said: “In my youth I yearned to become like Rav Akiva Eger, but I remained Rav Boruch Ber. However, had I not yearned to become like Rav Akiva Eger, I would not have become Rav Boruch Ber either”. The Chofetz Chaim too said that many yeshiva *bochurim* are not so successful in their studies because they do not have aspirations for greatness. If they would aspire to become real *gedolei Torah*, they would grow more.

In a similar vein, the Tchebiner Rov complained to Rav Sternbuch that in his youth in Galicia every boy was educated to become conversant in *Shas*, and some indeed became *beki'im* in *Shas*, and even those who do not achieve this goal completely, at least acquired concepts of greatness and a desire to know *Shas*. Nowadays, concluded the Tchebiner Rov, the boys are not educated in the first place to have such aspirations, but rather learn just a few *daf* during a whole *zman*. Moreover, they leave Yeshiva for *bein hazmanim* three times a year, and also on Fridays and *Shabbos* there are no fixed learning schedules. As a result, there are not enough genuine *gedolei Torah* to be found amongst yeshiva students.

The late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon, once told Rav Sternbuch to tell Yeshiva *bochurim* to finish the *masechta* which they learn each *zman*, because each time a person finishes a *masechta* in this world, he constructs a corresponding edifice in the World of Truth, and if he learns a *masechta* without finishing it, that edifice will be deficient.

## **EMPTY PIETY**

*Besides that for which his means suffices. (6:21)*

A *nozir* may be tempted to think that he has achieved great heights with his abstinence from the vanities of this world, and that he need not do anything more to attain spiritual perfection. The *possuk* therefore tells us that all the *halochos* of the *nozir* and all his *korbonos* are aside from whatever charity he can manage to give according to his means. Piety and abstinence unaccompanied by good deeds are valueless, and cannot lead a person to perfection.

## **BLESSING THE KOHANIM**

*This is how you shall bless the bnei yisroel, saying to them (6:23)*

From “saying to them” Chazal derive the obligation to say “*kohanim*” before they start to bless the *tzibur*. The reason for this seems to be that in order for their blessing to take effect there has to be an awakening and preparation on the part of the recipients of the *brocho*. Only after they request the *brocho* and believe in its power will they merit it.

The *mekubolim* explain that the recitation by the *chazan* of each word of *birkas kohanim* (to which they respond with the same word) constitutes a blessing of the *kohanim* by the *tzibur*. A *brocho* primarily takes effect when the person making the blessing owes a favor to the recipient of the *brocho*. That is why Yitzchok, for example, asked Eisov to prepare him tasty food before blessing him, and also why a poor person has a special power to bless someone who has given back his pawn to him at night (*Devorim* 24:13). Therefore, the *kohanim* are themselves blessed first by the *tzibbur*, so that they will feel indebted to the *tzibbur*, and bless them wholeheartedly, thereby increasing the effect of their *brocho*.

In his Yeshiva, Rav Sternbuch instructs the *chazan* to call out “*yevorechecho*” etc. in a loud voice, because he, as representative of the *tzibbur* is giving a *brocho* to the *kohanim* on behalf of the *tzibbur*.

## **BLESSING WITH LOVE**

*Chazal* say that even a *Kohen* who has transgressed blesses the nation, because it is not the *Kohanim* who are the source of the blessings, but it is rather a Divine decree that they should function as a “conduit” to shower us with Hashem’s blessings.

Accordingly, the *Kohanim* bless us “with love” to emphasize that they should not attribute to themselves an independent power to bless the congregants due to their own righteousness, since they are merely fulfilling a Divine decree out of love for their fellow Jews.

The *Mogen Avrohom* (128:18) quotes the *Zohar* that if a *Kohen* does not love the people he is blessing, or if they do not love him, he should not bless them at all, and the *Ateres Zekeinim* adds in the name of the *Zohar* that if a *Kohen* nevertheless blesses in such circumstances, this can be very dangerous. Rav Sternbuch was once in a *shul* in Yerushalayim where one of the *Kohanim* said that he could not tolerate one of the people in the community whom he was supposed to be blessing. People begged him not to recite *Birkas Kohanim* on the basis of the above *halocho*, but he refused to listen. He was in good health and not old, but unfortunately, that very same night he passed away for no known medical reason, and this naturally caused quite a stir.

It is customary to say *yasher koach* to the *kohanim* after they have blessed the congregation. This is not in order to thank them for the actual blessing, which they are obligated to do, but rather for blessing us with love and concentration, so that their blessings can be effective.

## **INDIVIDUAL BLESSING**

Rav Chaim Brisker would ask Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, author of the *Ohr Same’ach*, who was a *Kohen* to have him in mind when *duchening*. We see from this that when *duchening*, a *Kohen* has the ability to make a blessing for a specific person and thereby shower him with blessings. Therefore, those in *chutz lo’oretz* who do not have *birkas kohanim* every day have a wonderful opportunity to ask *kohanim* in *Eretz Yisroel* to have them in mind when they *duchen*. It is preferable for them to pay needy *kohanim* who toil in Torah to have their donors in mind, so that they will bless them wholeheartedly. When Rav Sternbuch was living in South Africa he paid two *kohanim* in *Eretz Yisroel* to have him in mind when they were *duchening*.

## **SIGNPOSTS**

*A man or woman who sets himself apart by making a nazirite vow to abstain for the sake of Hashem* (6:2) Rashi: *Why is the section dealing with the nozir juxtaposed to the section of the adulterous woman? To tell us that whoever sees an adulteress in her disgrace should vow to abstain from wine.*

Even the act of seeing a transgressor desensitizes a person to the severity of sin. Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk points out that it is specifically those who witnessed a crime who must be the ones to execute the death penalty on the transgressor, because just witnessing someone committing a sin desensitizes a person to the enormity of the transgression. Hence, “the hand of the witnesses shall be the first upon him to put him to death” in order to reinforce the witness’s fear of and aversion to the sin that he has witnessed.

Rav Aharon Kotler contrasted the signposts showing the way to Cities of Refuge (see *Makkos* 10b) with the absence of signposts for the *olei regolim* showing the way to Yerushalayim. If signposts had to be put up for murderers who were relatively few and far between, surely they should have been put up for the benefit of the many thousands of *olei regolim*.

He explained that the signposts for the Cities of Refuge were necessary to prevent the person guilty of manslaughter from asking passers-by the way to the City of Refuge, because they would then ask him why he needed to get there, and he would respond that he had accidentally killed someone. This very conversation and the experience of having come face-to-face with a “Jewish murderer” would lessen their fear of heaven. In order to hide such concepts from people’s minds the *halocho* mandates putting up signposts to prevent people from being exposed to such an experience. In the case of *olei regolim*, by way of contrast, the absence of signposts meant more people asking the way to Yerushalayim. That way more people would be encouraged to join them, resulting in a great *kiddush Hashem*.

## SETBACKS

*And it was on the day that Moshe finished setting up the Mishkon (7:1). Rashi: This teaches us that throughout the seven days of investitures, Moshe set up and dismantled it, but on that day he set it up but did not dismantle it. Therefore, it says, “Moshe finished setting up” - that day marked the end of his setting up.*

The *Medrash Tanchumo* (*Pekudei* sec. 11) adds that Moshe told Hashem that he did not know how to set up the *Mishkan* and Hashem told him to do what he could, and it would be set up on its own, and Hashem would write in the Torah that Moshe had set up the *Mishkan*.

What was the point of Moshe’s setting up the *Mishkan* during the *sheva yemei miluim* each day only to have it dismantled again?

The *ba’alei musar* say that this teaches us that we should not become dejected by setbacks and continue our *avodas Hashem* undaunted without thinking about results. We should do what we can, and eventually we will witness the fruits of our efforts, so that there will no more “dismantling” activity.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner complained about biographies of *gedolim* containing descriptions of their greatness as if they were born perfect, instead of relating the trials and setbacks they had to endure and which they overcame with much *mesirus nefesh*.

## UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS

*One nosi each day, one nosi each day, shall present his offering for the dedication of the mizbeach (7:11)*

The Torah is usually very sparse with its words. Numerous details of *halocho* such as *hilchos Shabbos* are encapsulated in a few words. Why, then, in the *parashas hanesi'im* are the *korbonos* of each *nosi* repeated in such great detail?

If we picture a *minyán* davening *shmone eisre*, everyone appears to be performing the same act. Everyone is saying the same words. However, in *shomayim* each person's prayer bears no resemblance whatsoever to his neighbor's. One person may be praying with total concentration following years of *avoda* dedicated to controlling his thoughts, whereas the next

person may still be struggling unsuccessfully with his level of concentration. A third person may not even be struggling, but merely mouthing the words.

The *nesi'im* were obviously all men of immense stature, but even they were not clones of each other. Each one had a unique personality and contribution to make to the *avoda* of the *korbonos*. By describing their *korbonos* at such great length, the Torah is teaching us that it is each person's input into the external act of a *mitzvah* which constitutes its main component. The joy and dedication accompanying *mitzvos* are the elements which elevate them to superior levels in the upper worlds, and completely change their effect, and how they are viewed in *shomayim*.