

The Torah Any Times

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Rabbi Eytan Feiner

What is First?

The Chiddushei HaRim writes that the lengthiest Parsha in the Torah (176 verses), along with the longest running Midrash and Zohar, is that of Parshas Naso. As it falls immediately after Shavuot, the time when we received the Torah, we fill ourselves with the most Torah that we can during this Shabbos.

Occupying center stage are the topics of the Sotah, followed by that of the Nazir. Why is there this juxtaposition? The Gemara (2a) tells us that it is because someone who sees a Sotah in her degradation ought to remove himself from wine and become a Nazir. This famously addresses why the order of the discussion of Sotah precedes that of a Nazir in the Torah.

Rav Tzadok HaKohen (Pri Tzadik, Naso, #13) asks why, in contrast, we find in Torah She'baal Peh (Oral Law) that the order of the tractates in Seder Nashim reverse this order, placing Sotah after Nazir: Yevamos, Kesuvos, Nedarim, Nazir, Sotah, Gittin, Kiddushin.

R' Reuven Margolis observes that when R' Yehudah HaNasi compiled the Mishna, he ordered the tractates with those containing the greatest number of chapters to those with the least number of chapters. However, this pattern would not help to address this question in this situation as both Nazir and Sotah contain the same number of chapters. In particular, in Seder Nashim, Yevamos has 16 chapters,

Kesuvos has 13 chapters, Nedarim has 11, Nazir, Sotah and Gittin each have 9, and Kiddushin has 4. In line with this, our question remains: why not include the Tractate of Sotah before that of a Nazir, aligned with the way it is ordered in the Torah?

Rav Tzadok explains that Hashem is always sending us messages in this world. When Moshe Rabbeinu saw the bush burning, the Torah tells us that he turned to look. But who wouldn't turn to take a look? The answer, as underscored by the Midrash, is that Moshe didn't simply look, but he turned his entire body to look. He was mindful, acting in the moment, and did not take a mere, cursory glance. Messages in our life, R' Berel Wein remarked, require that we entirely shift our focus to look at what lessons and takeaways we can gain.

The Bnei Yissasschar, in fact, notes that the Torah's use of Moshe "turning" (sar) to look at the Burning Bush equals 260 in gematria, which is the equivalent of the gematria of "ayin" (eye), which when doubled and referring to both eyes, is 130 and 130, or 260. Rav Zusha of Anipoli, as well, would also remark when anything happened in his life which was clearly a sign from Hashem, "We must always open our eyes and ears, because Hashem is always sending us messages in the world."

For this reason, when it comes to the world in which we live (olam ha'maaseh), the Torah places the discussion of Sotah before that of Nazir. If Hashem orchestrated that a

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person would observe the process of a Sotah, there must have been a reason. Hashem must have been speaking to the person and sending them a message. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l commented that if a person sees someone else desecrate Shabbos, it must be sending the person the message that there is something they can improve in their own observance of Shabbos. Otherwise, they wouldn't have seen such an incident. Everything which we see and experience in our life is there for us to derive a message and lesson from.

When the Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon Rokeach, miraculously escaped Europe to Israel, he spent his first year in Tel Aviv. One Shabbos, as he was walking out of shul on Shabbos, his gabbai called out to him, "Rebbe, cover your eyes so you don't see the truck driving by and desecrating Shabbos!" In response, the Belzer Rebbe said, "It can't be that I'd be exposed to someone violating Shabbos. It must be that that truck is taking someone to the hospital." The gabbai could understand that the Rebbe would want to give someone the benefit of the doubt, but to be so sure that the one random truck in Tel Aviv that they saw would not be someone randomly driving but an emergency call would be unlikely.

In researching the matter, it turned out that the truck was actually just randomly driving by, until on the next block, a woman and her husband were waving down cars as she was about to go into labor. The Belzer Rebbe had been right. And how could he? He was confident that if he was observing Shabbos as he needed, it wouldn't be possible that he would be sent the message about Shabbos desecration.

If someone therefore witnessed the process of a Sotah in the Beis Hamikdash, it must have been for a reason. The person must have needed to take

to heart the message, from which he would become a Nazir afterwards. This is why, in Torah She'bichtav (the Written Law) which outlines in concrete, observable terms and conditions how we are to live life, the discussion of Sotah comes before that of Nazir.

However, when it comes to Torah She'baal Peh, which represents the world of thought (olam ha'machshavah) as the Oral Law was originally never intended to be written down (Gittin 60b), the opposite is true. In this regard, a wise person is one who foresees the future (Tamid 32a). The Gemara (Bava Basra 12a) similarly emphasizes that a wise person is greater than a prophet. A wise person is greater than a prophet, explains Rav Tzadok, because a prophet can only pick up on the signs, cues and hints that Hashem shows him in this world. A wise person, however, through the prowess of his Torah learning and Divine inspiration in the form of ruach ha'kodesh (Ramban, *ibid.*), can identify invisible and imperceptible things that even a prophet cannot see.

In the world of wisdom and the Oral Law, the Nazir takes precedence, as a Nazir is looking toward the future of bettering himself before ever needing to see a Sotah (akin to the tractate of Nazir coming before Sotah). The Nazir, in the realm of the Oral Law, doesn't need to see a Sotah in order to place his life on a higher plane of holiness and purity. Even without ever needing to see a Sotah, such an individual exercises wise judgment (represented by the Oral Law) to embark on a process of a Nazir.

The Torah, in Parshas Shelach (15:24), refers to such wise individuals as "Einei ha'eidah," the eyes of the nation. The Gemara (Bava Basra 4a) similarly refers to such wise indi-

viduals as the "eyes of the world," which the Maharal elaborates to mean that the enlighten us and guide us. R' Akiva Eiger (Parshas Ki Savo) also writes that before we recite the Shema, we ask Hashem to "enlighten our eyes in His Torah," which is a reference to our Torah leaders. In this prayer, we ask that Hashem grant our leaders the wisdom and perception to guide us in the right direction in our lives. Shlomo Hamelech in Koheles (2:14) echoes the same when he writes that a "wise person has his eyes in his head."

The Ben Ish Chai (Parshas Lech Lecha) interprets the words spoken to Avraham by Hashem that he should travel to "the land which I will show you," as referring to the Land of Israel, which is saturated with the power of sight. The Gemara (Bava Basra 158b) refers to the Land of Israel as a land whose air infuses its inhabitants with wisdom. The Land of Israel is a land of clarity, of wisdom, of transparent sight. Where did this capacity come from?

Rav Tzadok explains that before his passing, Moshe Rabbeinu gazed with his eyes upon all the Land of Israel. By doing so, he infused into every part and particle of Israel the holiness and wisdom of Torah. The Sifri (Parshas Eikev) highlights this by emphasizing that "there is nothing like the Torah of the Land of Israel."

This is moreover why, explains the Ben Ish Chai (Parshas Lech Lecha), the Babylonian Talmud utilizes the terminology when introducing a discussion, "Ta Sh'ma — Come and hear," whereas the Jerusalem Talmud (and similarly the Zohar) employs the phrase "Ta Chazi — Come and see." This is because in the Land of Israel, the

capacity of sight, of lucidity is at its best.

This captures, explains Rav Tzadok, why such a distinction exists between the Written Law and the

Oral Law between the placement of Sotah before Nazir (the former) and Nazir before Sotah (the latter).

Rabbi Yisroel Rokeach

Until the End

This past Tuesday, the Jewish world lost the great Ponevezh Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Gershon Edelstein zt”l. Amongst many, there is one lesson in particular which we can all learn from his life, and in particular, the final days of his life.

During his last few days, in which he was in the hospital, Rav Edelstein never wavered from remaining settled. One of the 48 ways in which Torah is acquired is b’yishuv, with a settled mind, and Rav Edelstein demonstrated that incredibly. He remembered that Torah is the source of our life, and even when in the hospital, he called over his stu-

dents and gave them a shiur (class) on Sunday and Monday. His priorities were focused on that which was most important even at such a time when otherwise people would be too burdened to think, let alone teach others with a lucid mind.

One of the other ways to acquire Torah is “mis’yashev libo b’talmudo,” that Torah becomes a part of a person. Torah is not superficial or studied with a quick, hurried mind. It is part and parcel of who we are and fills our life. Even the day in which Rav Edelstein zt”l passed away at age 100, he had prepared a list of mareh mekomos (sources) which he intended to discuss during the shi-

ur. The list was not simply, though, a few scribbles here and there. It was a thorough and extensive list of sources. For Rav Edelstein zt”l, Torah was who he was.

When we learn Torah and disconnect from everything else, the Torah becomes a part of who we are and paves the way for our success in it.

Rabbi David Ashear

From Anxiety to Emuna

There is an article about a man named Dr. David Rosmarin. He describes the following:

As a college sophomore in 1999, he began to feel very anxious. His anxiety over his academic performance and social life were fairly typical of the anxiety experienced by college students, but eventually he was having so much anxiety, he was unable to fall asleep. The anxiety was overtaking his life,

making him consider consulting with the campus psychologist.

At the same time, David was attending a weekly Torah class. After one class, he said to the rabbi, “I think I need professional help. I’m just so worried and nervous about my future. I don’t know what will be with my job and future.” The rabbi told David to wait for a minute. In the meantime, the rabbi photocopied a 61-page document and handed it to David. “This is called

the ‘Shaar HaBitachon,’ the Gate of Trust,” the rabbi said. “It’s a section in the book called Chovot HaLevavot. I don’t know if you need a mental health professional, but I do know that these pages will help you. Learn these pages 10-15 minutes each night before you go to sleep. Contemplate what you read and internalize it.”

David followed the rabbi’s prescription, and later gave a recount of the results.

To his surprise, within eight

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weeks, not only was he able to fall asleep without difficulty, but his anxiety almost completely vanished. Even more remarkable, the improvement in his psychological condition had occurred despite the fact that the anxiety producing factors had only gotten worse. He was faced with a grueling exam schedule, worse social woes than ever before, and he remained completely uncertain about his future. But what had changed was his attitude toward his difficulties and toward life in general. He had increased his level of trust in Hashem and he realized that the events in life were ultimately only controlled by Hashem, and there-

fore, he had little to worry about.

David went on to become a psychologist. I went to visit him a few years ago, and he does wonders for people. But most significantly, his main centerpiece and focal point which he uses in his practice is the book Chovot HaLevavot. More than medication are these words from the Chovot HaLevavot. It is akin to the 'Gemara on trust in Hashem.' The sefer Menucha U'Kedusha comments that if you have not studied this chapter in your life, you have never seen the light in your days.

If you want to have the life that Hashem meant for you to have—not filled with worry, anxiety, or

following what seems to be right in our eyes, being beholden to others, and instead attributing life events to Hashem—you must study this chapter in your life.

Rabbi Yaakov Rahimi

Scream Emuna

David Hamelech writes in Tehillim (92:3), "Proclaim Hashem's kindness during the day, and Your faith in the nights." Why does Dovid Hamelech state that the time to speak of our faith in Hashem is specifically at night?

Nighttime is when there is a lack of clarity. When darkness prevails, confusion exists and you do not know how things will turn out. When does Hashem want us to proclaim our faith in Him? When we don't see Him. When we don't know what our fate will be and how our

life will turn out. Precisely then, Hashem asks that we place our faith in Him. Specifically then, when life is dark and difficult, we scream out to Hashem, "I believe in You, and You will take care of me." We daven, learn and fulfill Hashem's will even when everything is unclear. We know that there is a bigger picture and a bigger plan. And on that faith in Hashem, we lean everything that we have and everything that we are onto.

Rabbi Daniel Coren

Hidden Messages

I was once at the Kotel on a Shabbos morning, and as I approached the shtender and sidur, I noticed that it was dirtied with bird droppings. Upon seeing this, I cleaned it up and went to wash my hands. But when I returned, it wasn't over. Again, the bird droppings dirtied the shtender. This happened three times.

Reflecting on this, I wondered

what the message was. I then reminded myself of something I had heard from R' Baruch Mordechai Eizrachi shlita. The Gemara (Succah 28a) says that when Yonasan ben Uziel would learn Torah, any bird that flew above would be singed by fire. We do not merit to have the birds be burned up in a fire, said R' Eizrachi. But at the very least, we get them to tremble and shake. And when that

happens, the result is bird droppings.

Anytime there are so-called droppings in our life, it's Hashem telling us that He loves us. One day we will merit having fire emanating from our davening and learning. So many times in life we think that the difficulties and messiness in life are so bad, but embedded in it, is a hidden message of love from Hashem.

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