

Overview of Sefer Bamidbar

Sefer Bamidbar is the transition of the Jewish people from their supernatural lives in the desert to their lives of hashgacha working through nature in the land of Israel¹. As such, BaMidbar, is the transition between the first three books – the books of the roots, birth and commitment of the nation to the last book, Devarim, the book heralding the Jewish entry into the land of Israel².

There is a second name for Bamidbar, used by the Sages, Sefer HaPikudim (the book of counting)³, which is similar to the way this book is referred to in English, the Book of Numbers. The Jews are counted at the beginning of this week's Parsha and again in Parshas Pinchus. Counting is the idea of showing the uniqueness of each person in his context of family, tribe and nation. As the Jews are readying themselves to go into Eretz Yisrael with each one living on his own portion of land, it is necessary for each one to understand what his unique potential contribution to the nation can be⁴.

Sefer BaMidbar literally means 'The book in the desert', and since the name of the book reflects its essential content, Sefer Bamidbar begins by describing the Jews in their state of living above nature in the desert. This is why, the Ramban says, that many of the Mitzvos here are מצוות השעה that are not נהוג לדורות⁵, amongst them issues pertaining to Klal Yisrael's imminent entry to Eretz Yisroel⁶. The question is: What, then, are these Mitzvos doing in the תורה הקדושה? The Torah is for all time, relevant to every generation. Clearly, although the Mitzvos in Bamidbar are לשעה, their lessons are not.

The desert was a place where the Jewish people deeply imbibed G-d's Torah – and it was in the desert to show that the Torah reaches and is the life-blood of all this earth⁷. But there was a second, vital lesson as well: the lessons of HaSh-m's Hashgacha⁸; both His השגחה כללית over the whole nation, as well as His השגחה פרטית over each and every one of us⁹. In the desert, we produced nothing with our own hands. The Manna

¹העמק דבר, פתיחה לבמדבר

² ממעמקים, ריש הפרשה

³משנה יומא פ"ז, רבי חנינא בן גמליאל בסוטה דף לו בה"ג ועוד

⁴עיין ברמב"ן ובאור גדליהו, ועיין בהמשך

⁵והספר הזה כולו במצוות שעה שנצטוו בזה בעמדם במדבר סיני ... וצוה איך תחלק הארץ להם

⁶רבינו בחיי, דברים א': ואחר ספר ויקרא נתיחד ספר במדבר סיני שבו הסיפור בענין ארץ ישראל, ונסמכה זה לזה לבאר כי אין הקרבנות כי אם בארץ ישראל.

⁷ שפת אמת, במדבר, [תרל"ג]: במדרש צדקתך כו'. כי מה שניתן התורה במדבר דוקא הי' כדי להמשיך אור התורה אף למקום תהו. כי התורה הוא חיות הכל

⁸מהר"ל גבורות ד', פ' סט

⁹מהר"ל: ספר הרביעי שהשם יתברך מנהיג את הנמצאים בחכמתו ובהנהגה ראויה כמו שהיה מנהיג את ישראל במדבר בכל מסעיהם שהיו הולכים, זה נגד עושה משפט וגו' שכל זה הנהגת השם יתברך הנמצאים בהנהגה ראויה

and the Slav fell from the skies to feed us, our clothing never wore out, and there was no need for money or an economy. Here, there was a total dependence on G-d's leadership. In fact, the Sefas Emes tells us that the word Bamidbar comes from the word for lead¹⁰. The book begins how HaSh-m led Bnei Yisrael using the cloud, with this pattern going right through until the end of the Book¹¹.

Bamidbar is also Sefer HaPikudim, the book of counting¹². Somehow, the two times the Jewish people are counted in Sefer Bamidbar reflects the whole essence of the Book, and are not just two incidences amongst many¹³. The uniqueness of each Jew and yet the fact that it is because of this and not despite it that makes up the unity of the Jewish people, is a core principle of this book. All of the Mitzvos and stories of this book can be explained in the context of the dynamic between the individual, his autonomy, individuality and creativity on the one hand, and the unity of the Jewish people, with its centralized halachik authorities and Beis HaMikdash on the other.

Sefer Bamidbar ends with the laws of inheritance and the entry into Israel (wars and the spies). This leads onto Sefer Devarim which is the preparation for the Jews to go into Israel¹⁴. Sefer BaMidbar acts as the transition from the supernatural existence of the desert to a life of *hashgacha* through nature in the Holy Land¹⁵, a transition from one type of Hashgacha to another. The first type of Hashgacha was the open miraculous Providence led by Moshe, whose spiritual level was completely above nature. But then, towards the end of the Sefer, G-d begins to hide Himself in the cloak of nature¹⁶. The Sages compare this transition to the creation time when G-d divided between the light and the darkness. Here, too, was a transition, a dividing, of G-d's open and clear Hashgacha of the desert to His hidden Hashgacha of the land¹⁷.

¹⁰ שפת אמת, במדבר, [תרל"ג]: וגם מדבר מלשון דיבור והנהגה כמ"ש במ"א פי' עשרת הדיברות להיות נידבר הכל עפ"י מצות השי"ת. וכן האדם צריך להיות בטל לזה להיות נמשך אחר הנהגתו ית' כמ"ש בזוה"ק על ודברת בס. וכתוב ארץ יראה ושקטה כו' בתחילה יראה כו'. והוא הכנה לקבלת התורה היראה והפחד לידע שאין לו חיות. ומקוה רק לחיות התורה כנ"ל:

¹¹ מהר"ל שם: ולפיכך מתחיל הספר במדבר בסדר הדגלים ואיך היו נוסעים ומנהיג אותם על פי הענן עד סוף הספר שחננו בערבות מואב שהוא מסע האחרון. ...

¹² משנה יומא פ"ז, רבי חנינא בן גמליאל בסוטה דף לו בה"ג ועוד

¹³ העמק דבר, פתיחה לספר במדבר: ונרשם בדעת רבותינו ענין שני הפקודים שבזה הספר, יותר משארי דברים שמיוחדים בזה הספר אור גדליהו ריש הפרשה: נראה שענין הפקודים הוא עיקר תוכן הספר וחשיבותו ואין המנין לצורך חשבון בלבד.

¹⁴ ממעמקים, עמ' 10: ספר דברים ההכנה לירושת הארץ

¹⁵ משום דעיקר זה הספר הוא המחליף ומשנה הליכות עם ד' בחיי העולם מאז שהגיעו לארץ ישראל מן הדרך שהלכו במדבר שבמדבר ... הוא לגמרי למעלה מהליכות הטבע ובארץ ישראל הלכו בדרך הטבע

¹⁶ העמק דבר, פתיחה לבמדבר: שבמדבר היו מתנהגים במדת תפארת שהלך לימין מזה והוא לגמרי מהליכות הטבע. ובארץ ישראל הלכו בדרך הטבע בסתרי השגחת מלכות שמים ב"ה.

¹⁷ העמק דבר, פתיחה לספר במדבר: וע"ז השינוי המצוין בזה הספר אמרו חז"ל בבראשית רבה פ"ג ויבדל אלוקים בין האור ובין החושך זה הספר במדבר שהוא מבדיל בין יוצאי מצרים ובין יוצאי הארץ. דבהליכות יוצאי מצרים היה אור השגחת ה' מופיע לעין כל, שהוא כבוד ה' ותכלית הבריא. משא"כ בהליכות באי הארץ ה' השגחה מכוסה. ורק המביט בעין יפה ה' מרגיש בה כמו ההולך בחשכת לילה. או רק לפרקים ה' נרגש ההשגחה לעין כל. כמו אור הברק המאיר בחשכת לילה.

The transition to G-d's hidden Hashgacha through nature took place in the 40th year in the desert¹⁸, and reflected the transition from the generation of the parents, those who left Egypt, to the generation of the children, those who were to go into Israel¹⁹. The wars that were fought against the Canaanites were already conventional and Moshe's staff was now used more selectively²⁰.

The Sages tell us that the verse ויהי בנסוע הארון ויאמר משה וגוי constitutes a separate book all on its own, for it was immediately afterwards that the new reality of the Jewish people, now working through nature in the land of Israel, took place.

The Ramban²¹ tells us that ספר במדבר completes the issue of ספר ויקרא, i.e. of preserving the Kavod HaShechina in the Mishkan²². Accordingly, there are numerous Mitzvos related to looking after the Mikdash²³, the prohibition of the impure from entering and their tikun²⁴, the designated tasks of the Cohanim and the Leviim²⁵, the obligation to look after these guardians of the Mikdash²⁶, and the korban Tamid and Musaf²⁷. Rav Hirsch²⁸ takes this further. Sefer Vayikra, he says, deals with the laws of the Mishkan as an ideal. Bamidbar deals with the relationship between the nation as it actually is on the one hand and between the ideal nation on the other. All of this is a part

¹⁸העמק דבר, שם: זה השינוי התחיל עודם במדבר בשנת הארבעים כמו שביארנו בפרשת חוקת.

¹⁹העמק דבר, שם

²⁰העמק דבר, פתיחה לספר במדבר: על פי זה השינוי נעשו מלחמות ישראל עם הכנעני ועם סיחון בדרך הטבע. וגם המטה לא היה עוד ביד משה תמיד אלא לעת הצורך לפי ההכרח כמו שביארנו שם.

²¹הקדמתו לספר במדבר

²²ענה יגביל את המשכן בהיות הכבוד שם

²³ספר החינוך - מצוה שפח מצות שמירת המקדש:

²⁴ספר החינוך - מצוה שצח מצות טומאה של מת:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שסג שלא יכנס טמא בכל המקדש:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שסב מצות שלוח טמאים חוץ למחנה שכינה:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שצט מצות מי נדה שמתמאין אדם טהור ומטהרין אדם טמא מטומאת מת בלבד:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שצו מצות פרה אדומה:

²⁵ספר החינוך - מצוה שפט שלא יתעסקו הכהנים בעבודת הלויים ולא הלויים בעבודת הכהנים:

ספר החינוך - מצוה שצד מצות עבודת הלוי במקדש:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שצ שלא יעבוד זר במקדש:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שעח מצות ברכת כהנים בכל יום:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שעט מצות משא הארון בכתף:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שפד מצות תקיעת חצוצרות במקדש ובמלחמה:

²⁶ספר החינוך - מצוה שפה מצות חלה:
ספר החינוך - מצוה תח מצות ישראל לתת ערים ללויים לשבת בהן והן קולטות:
ספר החינוך - מצוה שצה מצות מעשר ראשון
ספר החינוך - מצוה שצו מצות הלויים לתת מעשר מן המעשר:

²⁷ספר החינוך - מצוה תא מצות תמידין בכל יום:

²⁸דשי במדבר

of the first section of Bamidbar, the part which deals with the supernatural Hashgacha of the nation.

That 'desert' Mishkan would transition, over 400 years later, into the Beis HaMikdash, the Mishkan of the Holy Land. Similarly, the Jews are now prepared for entering the world of nature by being told a series of Mitzvos that relate to remembering G-d and His Mitzvos at all times (tzitzis²⁹), to our yetzer hora (the prohibition of following the bad thoughts of one's heart and eyes³⁰), to the possibility of sin, (nezirus to prevent it and vidui if it happens³¹) and to resolving the effects of impurity (Parah Adumah³² and Pesach Sheni³³). In the land, there may be all kinds of problems that the Jewish people did not experience in the desert – women suspected of not being faithful to their husbands (Sotah), and deliberate and accidental murderers³⁴. As the life of the nation was being normalized it was also necessary to remind them that their chosenness meant belonging to G-d and doing his Will, hence the appearance of the Mitzvos of redeeming the Jewish first born³⁵ and not redeeming the first born of an impure animal³⁶.

Now that the Jews were going into Israel it became necessary to talk of models of leadership, good and bad. The old leadership, Miriam, Aharon and Moshe, die off,³⁷ or their death is announced³⁸. Bamidbar is full of great leaders such as Aharon, the Cohanim and the Leviim, their duties,³⁹ and our obligations to them⁴⁰. Some, like Pinchus, were great leaders for specific challenges. Others, like Korach and the spies, were failed leaders. Ones like Bilaam and Balak used their greatness to challenge the Jewish people from without.

²⁹ספר החינוך - מצוה שפז מצות ציצית:

³⁰ספר החינוך - מצוה שפז שלא לתור אחר מחשבת הלב וראיית העינים:

³¹ספר החינוך - מצוה שסד מצות וידוי על החטא:

³²ריש פרשת חוקת (פ' יט)

³³ספר החינוך - מצוה שפ מצות פסח שני בארבעה עשר באייר: (ועוד כמה מצוות)

³⁴ספר החינוך - מצוה ת מצות דיני נחלות:

ספר החינוך - מצוה תט שלא להרוג מחוייב קודם שיעמוד בדין:

ספר החינוך - מצוה תיב שלא ליקח כופר להציל ממות הרוצח:

ספר החינוך - מצוה תי מצוה על בית דין להשליך מכה נפש בשגגה מעירו לערי מקלט ועל הרוצח בעצמו ללכת שם:

ספר החינוך - מצוה תיג שלא ליקח כופר ממחוייב גלות לפוטרו מן הגלות:

³⁵ספר החינוך - מצוה שצב מצות פדיון בכור אדם:

³⁶ספר החינוך - מצוה שצג שלא לפדות בכור בהמה טהורה:

³⁷מיתת מרים בפרשת חוקת כ א-ו

³⁸פרשת חוקת כ יב-ג

³⁹לדוגמה בפ' יח א-ז מוסבר התפקיד של אהרון ובניו ושם כב – כד האחריות של הלויים וגם ספר זה מתאר את כל תפקידים של הלויים בנוגע לפריקת המשכן ונשיאתו ועיין לעיל שהבאנו כל המצוות המחוייבים בהם הכהנים והלויים לפי ספר החינוך

⁴⁰שם, פסוק ח-כא בנוגע למתנות כהונה ושם כא וכה – למעשר לויים

Finally, the two countings themselves reflect the differences between the desert and the land of Israel. The first counting, in Parshas Bamidbar, was according to the order of the flags. Arranged in four directions around the Mishkan, the numbering enhanced the glory of the Shechinah which was most intense in their epi-centre, in the Mishkan itself⁴¹. The whole first desert period of the people was one of an intense relationship of the Jewish people to the Mishkan. The history of the Jewish people can be described as a history of the Mishkan in the desert, for it is the Mishkan which gave the Jews continuity of experience from Sinai into Israel. The second counting was for the purpose of dividing the land⁴² (and therefore reflects numerous differences from the first counting⁴³).

Sefer Bereishis is the book of creation – the roots of the nation, ending with the Avos. Sefer Shemos is the book of the birth of the nation. Vayikra is the consolidation of that birth into an ongoing covenant, by completing and affirming the Sinai experience⁴⁴, ending with a Bris, with its blessings and curses⁴⁵. VaYikra ends with the covenant of the nation with G-d, and reflects the entire theme of the book. It might be said to be the consolidation of the giving of the Torah. Devarim is a preparation for the settlement of the land. Bamdibar, as we have shown, is the transition from the flow of the first three books into the fifth. The desert was the medium of transition. The immersion in the desert provided at first a total if artificial environment to prepare the Jewish people for their final settlement in the land. This was the world of the miraculous, where G-d put everything in a revealed and obvious manner. The last part of the book already provides an insight as to what a different environment might look like – maintaining a relationship with G-d when He is hidden in nature⁴⁶.

⁴¹ העמק דבר א ב ד"ה למשפחתם לבית אבותם: שנמנו לתכלית כבוד השכינה ההולכת בראשם.

⁴² העמק דבר, שם: דשם (פרשת פינחס) נמנו לתכלית חלוקת הארץ

⁴³ העמק דבר, שם ובפתיחה

⁴⁴ ממעמקים, ריש במדבר: ספר בראשית נקרא בפי הרמב"ן (בהקדמתו לספר שמות), ספר היצירה, ובו כלולים סיפורי האבות – השרשים שמהם התפתחה האומה הישראלית, ספר שמות מתאר את תהליך יציאת מצרים שתוכו – התהוות האומה הישראלית, שלב המקביל לשלב לידת העובר. עוד כלול בספר שמות, מעמד קבלת התורה – שלב הגדול של האומה הישראלית. ספר ויקרא משלים את הצוויים שצטוו בהר סיני ובו מבואר ענין ברית סיני – בחינת ברית נישואין. וגו'.

⁴⁵ ממעמקים, שם: מצטט לרמב"ן, ויקרא כה א
ובהארות: דבר זה מתבטא במיוחד בסיום ספר ויקרא ששם מובא הציווי על השמיטה שנאמרה בה

⁴⁶ עיין ממעמקים, מאמר הראשון

במדבר

Counting & Flags: The Individual & the Community

SUMMARY:

BaMidbar is always the Parsha before Kabalas HaTorah on Shavuot. This is because, in order to receive the Torah, one should make oneself הפקר like a Midbar.

The word ישראל stands for the words, יש שישים ריבוא אותיות לתורה - *There are 600 000 Jews who stood at Sinai.* Each individual נשמה has his own unique חלק in the תורה. The totality of the souls of the Jews equals the totality of the letters of the Torah. The Torah was given אחד ובלב אחד באיש אחד in total unity. Yet this unity had to be achieved through a deep recognition that we are all different and that we all have a different spiritual task. *They did not look into each other's faces to see what the other would answer, in order to do likewise. Each spoke with his own voice, and out of the truth of his own heart; nevertheless their hearts as well as their mouths were as one.*

The Jews are now counted, giving each Jew an insight into which letter in the Torah was his. The counting is defined as an elevating, a raising up of the person - שאר - because through it each man will find his place.

Since each one of us has our own chelek in Torah, the sum total of all of our Torah – the unification of all the unique dimensions of Torah - amounts to the קבלת התורה the bringing of the Torah into this world.

Each letter in the Torah has its own independent Kedusha. In addition, it has Kedusha as a part of the word, as a part of the verse and as a part of the parsha to which it belongs. Similarly, with each Jew. Each Jew has to fulfill his own unique potential. The word for counting is לפקוד, which really means that each person is designated a unique place. When a Jew gives his special understanding of the Torah, this produces a new revelation of profound significance, for only his unique interaction with the Torah could produce this.

His uniqueness, in turn, impacts on his family and, in a different way, on his tribe and again with his degel (of 3 tribes) and with the whole Jewish nation. That is a vital and special component of the Jewish nation. Each Jew is to express himself through broadening circles of association – families (בית אבותם) into tribes. Each tribe had a unique role; they in turn were arranged into four groups of three, each group of three with a distinct flag and a distinct purpose. G-d therefore counted several times, each with respect to a different relationship. (למשפחתם לבית אבתם במספר שמות כל זכר לגלגלתם). Each level of association brings out a different combination of our own uniqueness.

Our Parsha describes the arrangement of Klal Yisroel around the Mishkan. For it is not in the Mishkan in which the Shechina resides, it is in Klal Yisroel – ושכנתי בתוכם. The Mishkan is just the point of entry of the Shechina into the world. The Mishkan is in the center, but there is only a center if there are the surrounding parts, Machaneh Leviyah and Machaneh Yisroel. In fact, just as the Torah is comprised of the 600 000 souls of the Jewish people, so is the Mishkan.

Sefer BaMidbar is also called Sefer Pikudim, Numbers dehumanize, reducing people to a statistic. But G-d knows the total number of our nation. Here, He orders a

counting of each individual, and he relates each one to his broader communal context. Not a number but a person. Even then, we never count everyone, just men 20 to 60 – we never come up with an exact figure for this nation that has so long defied demography. We are a great nation not because we give up our individuality, but because we gain greater fulfillment by seeing how that individuality combines with all others into a greater whole.

This series of concentric relatedness, with the revealed Shechinah at the center, began at Sinai, continues in a slightly more hidden fashion in the Midbar, and carried right through to our settlement in the land.

When each Jew was counted, he handed his name to Moshe, who would get to meet him and to doven for him. Moshe would tell him his essence and his spiritual task in life. This is why the word תפקיד is used for the count. The noun from פקודים is תפקיד – a task. It means that each one is commanded to fulfill his unique potential. Similarly the word ראש means to raise each individual up to his spiritual essence. Each group of three tribes is gathered under a unique flag. According to many commentators, each tribe had an individual flag as well, comprising an elaborate pageantry, one with deep and profound significance, whose outer glory truly reflected the inner reality. The word for flag - דגל - means joining, everyone gathering together. The color of each flag was the same as the stones of each tribe on the Choshen. The stones on the Choshen made up, in turn, the Urim veTumim, which was one way in which G-d communicates with man. G-d is telling us that it is the combined spiritual elements of all the tribes which make up this Kli through which he can communicate. The idea of the solitary prophet is a myth. When the Jewish people lose the level that is worthy of prophecy in their midst, even a Moshe Rabbeinu cannot maintain his.

The tribes were connected with the degalim in specific combinations. Thus Yehuda – malchus is together with Yisachar – Torah and Zevulun – wealth: and these lead in the east, just as the sun rises in the east. Each degel also has a specific color and insignia (lion, mandrake, etc.) These in turn reflect the כסא הכבוד and the 4 animal images surrounding it. I.e. the camp of Klal Yisroel which received the Shechina down here is an exact parallel of the original manifestation of G-d outside of His essence. כלל ישראל הן הן המרכבה.

This idea of the vital contribution of each individual goes on to this day. One expression of this is in the Chidush. The Torah is far bigger than any Neshama could ever encompass. Therefore, there will never be a time when there will not be chidushei Torah, reflecting the unique Neshama relationship of that person to the Torah. And, although the concept of Batei Avos and Shevatim have broken down, we still have concentric circles of relatedness with which our uniqueness interacts, each level in a different way.

The need to identify the specialness of each Jew was required each time the Jews were about to enter a physical or a spiritual war. The first counting was when the Jews went into Egypt – a counting of 70 souls who were preparing to plunge into the most impure country in the world. (אלה שמות בני ישראל) Another counting takes place after Cheit HaEigel, and the Zuhama of the Cheit of Adam HaRishon returned and was threatening to continue spreading. And thus Bnei Yisroel were pressed to launch a spiritual war, a desert war for their future spiritual survival. Again, on entering Israel, facing war with the Canaanite nations, there was a counting.

The arrangement of the Degalim produced the symphony of the Jewish people and this, in turn, produced the Shechinah in the camp. The Degalim represented the words of the Torah at Sinai – all the letters in unison not only as words, but totally integrated into the people. G-d's name was now encoded into the Jewish people and the Jewish people were now living testimony to the one G-d.

נשא

The Sotah & the Nazir – Marriage & Withdrawal

SUMMARY:

The Sotah, the suspected adulteress, and the Nazir, the holy man of vows are juxtaposed, because one who sees a Sotah woman is so influenced as to need the Nazirite vows to balance himself out. Remarkable! Despite the woman's great disgrace, the very thought that someone may have done this act, makes it more doable by everyone else. The very fact that G-d caused this person to see the Sotah woman, is a sign that he has some weakness in this area. It is to counter this, and not because of any grand spiritual aspirations, that the Nazir makes his oath.

Sotah is the Tumah of a foolish madness – a תטוּשׁ. The emotions that can quickly be aroused in such situations are so powerful that a person – in this case the woman and her lover – may risk their entire lives for the sake of a moments pleasure. Only outside intervention can restore sanity here.

In the case of a Sotah, a woman disobeys her husband's explicit demand that she not be seen in seclusion with a particular man. The question is whether adultery was committed or not. The woman now undergoes a traumatic ordeal, one which underlies the midah keneged midah with which all the world is run. She brings a barley korban – animal food, without any of the normal light-producing oil or good smelling spice; her hair is undone, and according to opinion, her clothes are torn. All of this in front of crowds of women and possibly also men. She then says Amen to the Cohen's frightening oath that if she is indeed guilty of actual adultery, her belly will swell up with the mixture that is now made.

G-d's Name is dissolved in a mixture which the Sotah woman drinks. The mixture includes earth taken from the base of the alter. For it was from here that the First Man's body was made עפר מן האדמה, and therefore from which the purpose of the world emerged. This woman has possibly departed from the faithful connection to the alter which will now be her judge or her atonement.

The most remarkable lesson in hashgacha pratis unfolds. If she is guilty, she will die. She will return to the dust that she was originally made from. Simultaneously, her lover dies, in the same miraculous way. If she is not guilty, she is blessed and reunites with her husband, who was forbidden to her until now, and she is blessed with, amongst other things, easy childbirth. The earth that she drunk now becomes her strength, the עפר ואנכי עפר of Avraham Avinu. Though her seclusion is never exonerated, it now becomes clear that this woman overcame her enormous desire to ignore her husband's warnings and have illicit relations.

The Nazir could not be more different. He literally creates for himself new mitzvos - a new reality of holiness. The word Nazir comes from the word Nezer – a crown – compared to the holy prophets themselves.

The Nazir grows his hair long and unwieldy, ridding himself of his pretensions that physical beauty has any worth. He would separate himself from all material lusts,

including wine and, in fact, anything which would come out of a grape. He would be, in fact, a holy man, separated from any form of sensual passion or impurity.

The Tumah of the Sotah is the only mitzvah in the Torah dependent on a miracle, the operating of the water on her belly if she is guilty of adultery. It takes a miracle, i.e. G-d Himself, to put this relationship together again. So great is this idea of Shalom Bayis, that it permeates every level of halacha.

G-d now agrees, so to speak, to have His name dissolved for their sakes. Since its purpose is to reunite husband and wife, the dissolving of G-d's name actually strengthens the Shechina.

What emerges is that, rather than being a gruesome tale of the fate of an adulteress, Sotah is a deep lesson on the value of a Jewish home. As such, it only works when the Jewish people are at their highest and holiest of levels. Only then does this extra dimension of Divine Providence on Machaneh Yisroel become manifest.

Marriage is the basic unit of the Jewish nation, and indeed, of any civilization, which is why Rabbeinu Yonah requires every community to appoint pro-active marriage counselors, to ensure the ongoing Shalom of every marriage. It is the only halachakally sanctioned framework through which children can be conceived, and the only known framework in which children can be consistently brought up not only well adjusted but passionate about receiving the mantle of Torah and mitzvos. The home is called a Small Sanctuary, not as a beautiful turn of phrase, but because it really does operate in a similar way to bring down the Shechinah in a similar way. All of this is endangered by the suspicions of the Sotah woman's husband against her. If indeed she is guilty of no more than יחוד with a man whom she was already warned not to be with, than it is worth rubbing out G-d's name and having G-d Himself getting involved to save the day.

The Sotah message seems to be one of engagement. Judaism says no to celibacy and yes to marriage and children. The Sotah woman is in danger of having misappropriated her passions in the wrong direction. But the lesson is not withdrawal, rather it is one of appropriate channeling. Both she and her husband have to want to the Sotah procedure for it to take place – and the presumption is that, at some level, they are looking to get together again and continue their life of holiness.

The Nazir seems to be the opposite message – it seems to encourage withdrawal and separation as a model of holiness.

But the Nazir is sanctioned in the end. He has to bring a Korban Chatos, some say just because he removed himself from what G-d has said was permissible to him. Withdrawal as a tactical exercise to regain control, yes. However, Prishus (withdarwel) is but halfway to Kedusha.

And so really the Sotah woman sends us the stronger message. The Torah refers to her sin as *meila* - the same term as is used for misuse of things dedicated to the Temple. And the husbands response is referred to as an act of קנאה. קנאה comes from the word קנה and refers to the exclusivity which is meant to take place in a husband-wife relationship. Just because of the holiness of the relationship, she is not to share herself with anyone else. Her prohibition to him is consequently described as a state of impurity.

The same waters of chesed can be turned by her into a curse, or reveal their inherent blessing. Her strength is her weakness – her passion to attach herself to a man must be directed only at her husband. Perhaps this is why we learn that a married woman must cover her hair from the Sotah woman.

In the Torah, the Sotah woman is mentioned first, followed by the Nazir. Nazir-like. But the Talmud places the tractate of Nazir prior to that of Sotah. The Sages are telling us that if we aim for the holiness of the Nazir, we need never fall into the mess of the Sotah. It will be enough for us to read about the Sotah-woman once a year in the Torah reading of Parshas Naso!

A Woman's Hair Covering

SUMMARY:

The Sotah woman is brought in front of the Cohen at the entrance to the Temple. He uncovers her hair in order to embarrass her, and places an offering in her hands. From here we understand that a married woman should cover her hair.

When Korach led a rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu, one of his co-rebels was On ben Peles of Yehuda. His wife saved him by exposing her hair and sitting in the doorway of the tent. When On's co-rebels came and saw her hair exposed, they turned around and left. Amazing! Here was a group of people that would happily rebel against Moshe Rabbeinu but, so deeply ingrained was the idea that a woman should cover her hair that they would not draw near if a woman was present with her hair uncovered.

Many centuries later, in Talmudic times, it was considered so embarrassing for a woman to uncover her hair, that someone who did this to her was fined 400 zuz as reparations. Kimchis who never uncovered her hair, had seven sons and all of them became Kohanim Gedolim.

Michah tells us that צניעות is one of the big three fundamentals through which we access the whole of Judaism: *For what does G-d demand of you except that you engage in justice and loving-kindness and walking modestly with HaSh-m your G-d.* We see here modesty put ahead of mercy, strength of character, humility, passion, truth and dozens of other traits. It must surely apply to men as well as to women, and it must surely go way beyond dress alone.

The key to understanding this is the insight that spirituality is not obvious in this world; it is hidden below the surface. The name for "world" in Hebrew is עולם which is related to the word העלום (hidden) i.e. the world is that reality or place which hides קדושה. Therefore, someone without צניעות will not be able to tune into spirituality. Such a person will always only see the superficial reality of the world, and that is not where holiness lies. Only someone who can see below the surface of things will see a world of spirituality.

Before the transgression of *Adam* and *Chava*, it was possible for man to see a surface reality and see how it led directly to a deeper perception. Hence, the first man and woman wore no clothes. But after the *Chet*, this was no longer possible. Now, the ability to grow spiritually – i.e. that which distinguishes humans from animals – is a function of צניעות. צניעות is therefore a defining human characteristic: צניעות is the *Kavod* of the situation, for it reveals its true inner identity.

Tznius is a whole way of looking at the world. Take wisdom. Since Torah wisdom is a type of spirituality צניעות becomes key to revealing this wisdom. For wisdom itself is something hidden.

Therefore the Tznius for a woman to cover her hair is a very deep idea. Hair appears in our parsha a second time – with respect to the Nazir. Hair represents innate human desire, man's inner weaknesses and flaws. By abstaining from cutting his hair initially and then cutting it off entirely in order to consecrate it to G-d, the nazir expresses his longing to dedicate his innermost self to the One above.

When a woman covers her hair, she is increasing her own capacity to access spirituality. Specifically she covers the hair on her head because the head is that part of

the body encasing the mind, and, as such represents our exalted status as human beings. The hair per se does not seem to serve a protective purpose – rather it is there to radiate beauty – physical beauty if seen superficially and spiritual beauty if seen properly. Many cultures intuitively understand that a head-covering of some sort makes a statement about the specialness of that person. In Western societies, university graduates wear distinctive four cornered, tasseled caps, Indian chiefs wear special headdresses and, לכהבדיל בין קודש לחול, the High Priest in the Temple wore a distinctive hat called the *mitznefet*. So, at one level, a married woman covers her hair as a sign of the added dignity now accorded to her.

The physical shape of the body reflects its spiritual state. Our sensual organs or lower down, our emotional center higher up (the heart) and our brains on top. The fact that one's primary hair grows on the top of one's head, covering the brain, tells us something about its purpose. Women have an extra capacity to sort things out, to push the impure outwards, and therein lies the special power of their hair.

Women were also created with an extra capacity for *Tznius*. When G-d built up the woman, He covered each limb with this extra צניעות-dimension. This now combines with *Binah*. We say in the morning blessings: *He who give the rooster the Binah to distinguish between day and night*. The Rooster recognizes that dawn is coming before the dawn arrives. Therefore, בינה is a capacity to see beyond the obvious and *Tnius* allows one to use this Binah to see and distinguish real from pretentious spirituality.

A woman's job in this world is to engage the material, sanctify and elevate it. Because of this, a woman is always challenged by her environment, always having to sort out what is important and peripheral, what will elevate and drag down. צניעות and בינה יתירה combine the qualities of intuition, holistic thinking and natural insight into people (בינה יתירה) and the ability of a woman to focus on the inner essence of each household member (צניעות). She thereby conducts the highly interpersonal and personalized roles that a family needs from her.

The hair provides an aura of קדושה which surrounds the body. It is in order to express this idea that a man covers his head with a גדול טלית when he davens in the morning. A woman, who has an even greater sensitivity to צניעות expresses this idea by covering her head all of the time showing that she operates entirely below the surface, at the deepest of levels.

Only married women cover their hair because marriage allows a woman to express her feminine powers far more powerfully than she can as a single person. Until she marries, a woman has no consistent way of receiving, of being a *kli* to take things and create brocha from them. Marriage is the great enabler for a woman. She is now able to reach new spiritual heights. She gives recognition to this by covering her hair showing that her full power lies hidden below the surface.

A woman who gets married covers her hair to reflect “a deep and irreversible change ... in undergoing the transition from being single to being married, ... from sexual naivete to direct knowledge of intimacy. ... When a woman who is no longer sexually naive displays something sensual about herself, it is now likely to “radiate more energy.”

In the time of חז"ל, even non-Jews had this sensitivity of covering their hair when married. The state that we find ourselves in now, of married women not feeling the need for a particular modesty once married is completely unnatural.

“In this view, a woman covers her head upon marrying as a sign of the greater dignity now attributed her. ... Many women, in fact, regard their head covering as a queen does her crown.”

בהעלותך

The Menorah, the Oral Law, and the Mitzvos

SUMMARY:

The Menorah stood in the south of the Heichal, representing the spiritual light of the Torah. The Shulchan stood in the North. Its loaves of bread representing material well being.

When a person entered the Temple, the Shulchan was on his right, the Menorah on his left. Later, after the person had entered the Sanctuary, he would find the Menorah on his right and the Shulchan on his left. This showed that spirituality could begin even on the left, i.e. with impure motives, provided that he was merely using this as a way of getting towards a purer state and not as an end in and of itself. Material wealth, on the other hand, really needs its source on the purity of the right, for if one accumulates wealth with the wrong motives it quickly becomes a downward spiral further and further away from spirituality.

The Aaron also represented the Torah. The Aaron, with its tablets and Torah scroll, represented the written law. The Menorah represented the Torah sheBaal Peh. The Aaron, is a fixed, holy document – safely cloistered in the Holy of Holies, its message clear and unchanging.

G-d addresses only Moshe to build the Aaron, whereas with the Menorah Aharon, the symbol of the Oral Law, is also addressed.

The Written Torah has an independent reality from us – it is written with letters on parchment and exists on a very high plane. The Oral Law is that which connects us to the Torah in this world, since it is contained in our minds.

The Oral Law exists at different levels. Moshe's understanding was so profound that he could not understand how to translate this into a physical Menorah and had to be shown a picture by G-d. Betzalel, with a lower understanding built the Menorah, seemingly without difficulty. Moshe Rabbeinu's deep kavanah joined with Betzalel's actions to create the final product.

A truly great person can never do in deed at the level that he can think. There is a gap between the light of the Menorah – the Oral law understanding – and the action. But G-d completes our thoughts and provides the means for our thoughts to be contained in and to inform the right action.

The nations of the world attempted to steal the Written Torah and claim that they are the new chosen nation instead of the Jewish people. But they were never able to steal the Oral Law. To this day, the Oral Law speaks, as one sensitive non-Jew put it, "with a melody which only a Jewish ear can hear". How does this relate to the Menorah?

Aaron was unhappy that he and his tribe had been left out of the consecration of the Mishkan. G-d comforts him by telling him that the lighting of the Menorah is an even greater act of inauguration because it will be more permanent. There will be a time in the future (under the Hellenists) when the Hasmoneans, descendants of Aaron, will re-dedicate the Temple through the lighting of the Menorah. As a result, the Menorah is with us to this day in the form of the Menorah of Chanuka. Chanuka took place in the

time of the Second Temple, just after prophecy has stopped and the oral law became the central way through which Torah was received.

Jewish wisdom, the Oral Law, entered into a struggle with Greek, Hellenistic wisdom that was resolved in the victory of the Jews on Chanuka. The fact that the miracle of Chanuka took place in the oil of the Menorah is therefore completely consistent with the Menorah idea as representing the Oral Law.

The light of the Menorah shines from a physical Menorah, which takes physical oil and shines a light of fire. Here was a deep lesson for us in how spirituality really works. That fact that we can do physical actions down here (Mitzvos), and this really impacts on level after level of the spiritual worlds is hinted at in the light that shines from the Menorah.

Since each individual is unique and is constantly being exposed to unique situations, the process of the Oral Law is never complete. This is why the Menorah will always be with us – its light must always shine anew, providing us with a freshness of perspective each time we study another piece of Torah. Hence the term **בְּהַעֲלוֹתָךְ אֶת הַנֵּרוֹת** - the term for lighting the Menorah that is used is to raise them up, for each one of us takes that light of the Oral Law and raise it as far as we can go.

So the light of the Menorah, representing the Oral Law, is really the light of Torah that shines from within ourselves.

The Menorah is the only one of the utensils in the Beis HaMikdash which did not have a Zer, a crown around it. The Aaron, the Inner Mizbeach and the Shulchan all had such a Zer. A Zer is both a crown, but it is also a boundary, a framework. The Aaron - Torah she Bichtav, the Shulchan - material wealth, and therefore also Malchus, the Mizbeach – Kehuna; all of these are ultimately limited. Only the Menorah is a crown without borders.

Moshe Rabbeinu's Prophecy:

SUMMARY:

A great deal of this weeks Parsha deals with issues challenging Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership role, and, in particular, his unique level of prophecy. Yehoshua complains that Eldad and Meidad are prophesizing without authority and should be killed, Moshe complains to G-d that he cannot handle the nation on his own and would rather die than continue, and Miriam and Aharon criticize Moshe for separating from his wife as, according to them, an unnecessary step in his preparation for prophecy. It is interesting that Yehoshua requests that Moshe destroy Eldad and Meidad, using the word כלאים. Rashi tells us that this means that Moshe should place upon them the yoke of communal responsibility, a task sufficiently stressful that this would suffice to destroy them.

Moshe Rabbeinu's complaint that he cannot handle the nation alone is answered by G-d who instructs him to appoint 70 Elders. As for Yehoshua's complaint to Moshe about Eldad and Meidad, Moshe responds by stating that he would love nothing more than that the whole nation follow in their footsteps. He is delighted by the challenge because of his great humility on the one hand, and because, on the other hand he suffered no insecurities due to his great faith in G-d.

Miriam and Aharon criticize Moshe Rabbeinu for his separation from Yocheved. We are also prophets at the level of G-d speaking through us directly, they tell him, and we managed to have a normal family life. G-d responds by suddenly engaging all three in prophecy. Moshe's siblings, caught in a state of impurity, were thereby able to see what it is like to be constantly in a state of holiness, ready to receive prophecy at any time. This is the life that was thrust on Moshe Rabbeinu, and not because of any choice of his own. In fact, the verse testifies – וְהָאִישׁ מִשָּׁה עָנָה מֵאִד מְכַל אִישׁ עַל פְּנֵי הָאֲדָמָה. Moshe hears the claims of his siblings and feels no need to respond. He felt absolutely no better than anyone else in lieu of his leadership role.

G-d then tells Miriam and Aaron what exactly the difference is between the prophecy of Moshe and that of any other prophet. Miriam is left leprous, the whole camp is delayed, and the lesson in the authority and accuracy of Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy as a bedrock of Judaism is well learned. Without believing this, we have no way of knowing that the Torah is true, no way of verifying future prophecies, no reliable way of G-d revealing the purpose for which man was created to begin with.

G-d therefore declares that Moshe's prophecy was qualitatively different from other prophets. Moshe Rabbeinu prophesized in the day, (never as a dream or at night), never in a riddle or with images; always with the utmost clarity. This the Torah calls 'face to face' prophecy with G-d. Anything less could have left lingering doubts. And to ensure that the Jews understood Moshe just as clearly, we too had to reach such a level, at least for the Sinai experience.

Moshe Rabbeinu had complete harmony of his body with his soul. There were no biases, no agendas, no sensual drives pulling him in different directions. Others, the Avos for example, had reached some kind of Shleimus. But even then, it was achieved through a specific midah. Moshe could receive the universal Torah because his cleaving to G-d

was not through the portal of any aspect of his character. All of him was equally connected to G-d.

Such prophecy, wide awake and in complete control of one's senses, is a phenomenal achievement. Normal prophecy completely takes over the body as well as the senses. Such prophecy is usually filtered through many layers before the prophet can understand it. He receives it as a kind of riddle or imagery, each according to his level, and he would then speak out the prophecy in his own words, however exalted and inspiring. Unlike Moshe, he cannot request a prophecy, ask G-d a question and receive the answer on the spot. And when another prophet does finally get his prophecy, it is about a specific issue, lacking Moshe's deep vision of how the whole creation is put together.

Moshe did not reach this level overnight. There was a long hard growth process for Moshe to become whom he became. Moshe was not perfect – he made errors. But never in his prophecy.

Commensurate with this growth was the increasing belief of the Jewish nation in his prophecy. Miriam and Aaron's challenge was neither the first nor the last. Later in BaMidbar we will find Korach's aggressive and frontal attack on Moshe. Seemingly, this was not about his prophecy, only about the wisdom of his leadership and delegation of roles. But the Sages assure us that this would come to the same thing.

With the crossing of the Red Sea we are told: שְׁמוֹת יֵד טו': וַיֵּאמְרוּ בְּד' וּבַמִּשָּׁה עַבְדּוֹ. This implies that until then such belief, at least at that level, was lacking. The Jews have always been a questioning, sharp bunch and, as they saw it, they weren't about to be fooled by Moshe Rabbeinu. G-d, in His Wisdom wanted it to be that way. He wanted the nation to spend 40 years in the desert, undistracted by the need to produce food, clothing or any physical need, totally focused on understanding the Torah, and the authenticity of its source. The more they would satisfy their skepticism, the greater the strength of belief of all future generations.

Because it was so vital that his authority be absolutely validated, a much higher standard was set. Although normal validation of prophecy comprises an objective level of behavior and wisdom plus predictions of the future, this was not good enough in the case of מִשָּׁה רַבִּינוּ. We do not believe Moshe Rabbeinu because of the miracles he wrought. These were all for a specific need which arose at that time.

At Sinai, the whole nation had a prophetic experience פְּנִיִּים בְּפָנִים דְּבַר ה' עִנְחֶכֶם, to be able to confirm the veracity of Moshe's prophecy. Prior to this, מִשָּׁה רַבִּינוּ was not fully accepted by the nation. The אֲזוּתוֹת given to מִשָּׁה at the burning bush were only temporary validations. Things improved at קָרִיעַת יַם סוּף. The פִּסּוּק , וַיֵּאמְרוּ בְּד' וּבַמִּשָּׁה עַבְדּוֹ , implied that there was some intermediate stage of verification at קָרִיעַת יַם סוּף , with the final stage at Har Sinai. Our parsha comes after Har Sinai. It seems incredible that after everything there could still be any doubts left about that greatest of all men, Moses. Yet, the nature of the doubts had changed. Moses' prophecy is no longer questioned. Miriam and Aaron question the extreme steps he took to get there. Eldad Emeidad do not challenge Moshe's prophecy as much as they attempt to duplicate it. For this, Moshe is not only delighted, but he demands it. He is reached a new level of leadership, one which causes him to request help. The idea of the Sanhedrin is born in our Parsha, and its contextual fit is perfect.

By sharing his leadership, Moshe hoped to maintain unity in the Jewish people. Moshe's prophecy represented the Written Law – but, to reach the people, it required an Oral Transmission to translate into a Torah for everyone. This was done by the 70 Sages. 70 is a number of unity – for it represents all the facets of an issue. In fact the verse says שבעים איש – in the singular. The decisions of the Sanhedrin therefore incorporated all that we could ever imagine about any issue. This had to be an Oral Law. Moshe's prophecy could not do for the Jewish people what 70 great men would do with their minds connecting to the Oral Law.

שלח

The Spies and the Land

SUMMARY:

The spies faced an extraordinary challenge. Had they succeeded in entering the land, Moshe Rabbeinu would have entered with and they would have been there permanently. Just like יציאת מצרים was permanent, so כניסה לארץ would have been. The land would have been restored to the level of Gan Eiden and Moshe Rabbeinu would have been Mashiach.

At a time like this, the Sitra Achra gives it its all. After all, the Yetzer Hora is a created being like all others. Like all other beings, it has programmed into it an instinct for survival. And now, its very existence was being threatened by the imminent arrival of the Messianic Era.

The core challenge to the Jewish people was bitachon and out of this failure of Bitachon ultimately arose a failure to believe in themselves. Dor HaDeah had been living a completely artificial existence in the desert. They had no bathroom needs; their clothes did not wear out; there was no cooking and no need to earn a living. Theirs was a life totally dedicated to spirituality. This was both a marvelous and yet extremely intense existence. Any Jew of that generation woke up in the morning knowing exactly where he stood spiritually. If he had had any negative thoughts or done the slightest thing wrong, he would find that his portion of the מן fell just that much further from his tent. He knew, and the whole Jewish people knew. There was immediate and visible feedback to each and every act. Weaken for a moment, and you are straight away attacked by Amalek. Put a foot wrong, and the holy Moshe is right there to rebuke you. A pretty scary way to live.

Klal Yisrael found it hard to live this way, but they knew that this was just until they got to the land. Did not G-d Himself want the Jews to live as an example to all nations, living on the land as all nations do? There things would be a little more normal, or so they thought until the spies came back with their report. The very request to send spies displayed the Jew's desire to do things in a more 'normal' fashion.

The spies were right - the mighty Canaanites could not be conquered by the Jews on purely physical grounds. If the Jews did not fight a spiritual battle first, all was lost. The job of the spies was to somehow access the spiritual energy of the Canaanites and subdue that. They had to insert Torah spirituality into the stones and ground – into every material aspect of the land. Of course, to do this the spies had to be totally in control of their own spirituality, something they, in their own greatness, could have achieved by being Moshe's emissaries - לך אנשים - and drawing just from his spirituality. Therefore, G-d tells Moshe that he should be the sender, to ensure the spiritual purity of the mission, and Moshe is right in thinking that this was the way to go.

It is perfectly legitimate to spy out the terrain before sending in one's army - even Moshe Rabbeinu saw the logic of this. But he did not recognize the hidden agenda of the Jewish people - to check whether this was a normal land that would ease their daily pressures of their current lifestyle. The spies, in the end, went as appointees of the Jewish people and not Moshe Rabbeinu. Had they not heard from Eldad Umeidad that

Moshe was not going to make it into the land. They would therefore need the spiritual energies of the Jewish people and not Moshe, or so they thought. No longer drawing on Moshe Rabbeinu's spiritual perfection, they were no longer able to conquer the spirituality of the Canaanites with their own.

What the spies reported was that here was a land of intense hashgacha, similar to the desert. The giants, the dead people, the huge fruit – all pointed to a continuation of the same pattern they had experienced in the desert. ארץ אוכלת יושביה – 'it is a land whose spirituality will chew up people like ourselves'. There was to be no rest for the weary. Israel was the palace of the King and they were but a slave people. G-d's promise to deliver the land would go awry under such circumstances, given the higher standards to which they were being held accountable. This was especially so since they knew from Eldad and Meidad that Moshe would no longer be with them.

And things got worse. For at least in the desert, the gain was that they were free to pursue a life of pure Torah, removed from this world almost entirely. But in the land, they would have to plough and reap, just like other people, yet like the מן, the rain would fall and the crops would grow in direct correlation to their actions. G-d wanted them to take the world with them in their spiritual greatness, to be מורגלים, which means, says the Chasam Sofer, people who raise the body. But they saw an ארץ אוכלת יושביה, a land that would eat their spirituality and leave them horribly exposed. Calev's and Yehoshua's appeal, עלה נעלה – lets us have a double עליה, not only in spirituality, but also through elevating the physical, fell on deaf ears.

So when the Jewish people cried, from the Sanhedrin down, they cried because they were too close to G-d and would continue to be so. They would rather go back to suffer under the Egyptians. G-d's response was that they would get what they wanted – distance from Him. But, He assured them, cry they would, for generations. And their future cries would be because of that distance. Because of that distance, they would see their Temples destroyed – and they would cry. Because of that distance, they would see their land taken over by others – and they would cry in their exile. But that crying would already be the right type of crying – it would be the cry of wanting to get closer, not further away, and it would lead to where the original crying led away from – return to the land and the ushering in of the messianic era.

Later, Yeshoshua sent in Calev and Pinchus to repeat the attempt, ensuring that they were his emissaries and not those of the Jewish people as a whole. Calev and Pinchus made a beeline for Rachav, the harlot of princes and nobles and therefore at the core of Canaanite impurity. The moment they heard from her that the Canaanites had melted from fear, they knew their mission was complete. They packed up and returned to the Jewish people.

Tzitzis

SUMMARY:

G-d gives us Mitzvos in every area of our lives. We go out to plough - we are commanded not to plough with the ox and the donkey together; we go to sow - we are told not to sow Kelaim; to reap – we are told to leave the corners of our field open. When we come to knead the dough, we are told to take Challah. So too when we build a house we have Maakeh & Mezuzah, and when we get dressed we have the Tzitzis of our parsha. Someone who has Tzitzis on his body, Tefilin on his head and his arm (opposite his heart) and a Mezuzah on his doorpost will not come to sin, for he will be surrounded by reminders to serve his G-d.

Tzitzis appears in the third of the paragraphs of the Shema. This paragraph contains two Mitzvos: To wear Tzitzis on the corners of one's garment and not to go after one's heart and one's mind in the pursuit of evil (ולא תתורו). The two are related. Tzitzis get connected to garments and man only began to wear garments as a result of the sin. The essential purpose of a garment is the covering up of the animal element in man's body. When we see the Tzitzis we are reminded not to sin. In fact the very word for Tzitzis may mean to peak or to look. Tzitzis are thus the affirmation of man's G-d given mission.

The word ציצית has the numerical value of 600. When we add the 8 strings on each of the 4 Tzitzis and the five knots on each, we get to 613, the total number of Mitzvos. Tzitzis is therefore capable of providing us with the type of spiritual-life energy to all limbs and sinews of our body, amounting to 613.

The white color of the Tzitzis refers to the body, while the special blue die (Techeles) refers to the soul. Techeles itself means end or limit, because it stretches our limits into the invisible areas of the soul. Hence, Tzitzis teaches us about the spiritual balance of man – the relationship of the body and the soul.

The techeles is the color of the sea. The sea, in turn, is similar to the heavens (הרקיע), and they in turn are similar to the holy throne. It is under this throne that the soul of man rests. Thus, when we see the Tzitzis, we begin to understand how everything works its way back to the source. וראיתם אותו – we will see G-d hidden beneath the surface of everything we look at. Therefore the Techeles represents a 'midah koleles', a total perspective. For this reason, Tzitzis applies even to a holy generation (לדרתם), one that does not need the more basic reminder of Tzitzis not to sin.

The blue, which represents the soul, is therefore wound over the white, just as the soul is higher than the body. It is wound either 7 or 13 times, according to differing opinions, to reflect the 7 Heavens and 6 spaces between them.

We only make one thread blue and not the entire garment – for a whole garment would imply the total mastery by the soul of the body, something unattainable in the world as we know it now.

The Talis Gadol, worn only for prayer, surrounds the person, a surrounding light (אור מקיף) as one would enter and be protected by a house. After the sin of the Golden Calf, when Moshe Rabbeinu prayed to G-d to save the Jewish people, G-d Himself showed Moshe how to wrap himself in a Talis and pray. The Talis Gadol is therefore

traditionally white, a sign of forgiveness and atonement. By wearing the Tallis, we are reminded of G-d who dresses all man, as He did with Adam and Chava. We stand dressed in this holy garment just as the resurrected will be in the future.

A woman is exempt from Tzitzis, both because it is a time-based מצוה and because it is not an obligatory מצוה even for men. Therefore a woman would be highly imbalanced in her עבודת השם were she to consider this מצוה ahead of preferring to complete herself in areas in which she is commanded (and even ahead of other time based מצוות which do not have the second exemption such as שופר and ספירת העמר). Nevertheless, A woman may fulfill this מצוה provided that she wears a four cornered garment that is different in form from a man's and provided she is doing it because of genuine desire to fulfill even מצוות in which she is not commanded and not in order to make a statement or to show her disagreement with the תורה view of women.

קרח

The Dynamics of Dispute

SUMMARY:

Korach achieved enormous spiritual height. Yet he failed to use his spirituality in the right direction. Korach appears in the Torah only for us to be told not to be like him – לא תהיה כקרח ועדתו - a prohibition of creating strife and dissent under all but the most extenuating of circumstances. Korach himself lost everything, including his portion in the World to Come. His legacy was to give us a deeper understanding of how Machlokes develops and unfolds. In this case, Moshe Rabbeinu's patient diplomacy, approaching each party with an outstretched hand, was a failure.

Korach is the story of the first full scale rebellion against the leadership of the Jewish people. The rebellion was by a great man, charismatic and determined who attracted to his cause others of his ilk. Korach realized that different people would join him for different reasons. Here was Dasan and Aviram who had an old gripe with Moshe. Here were 259 people who, in their great holiness, made a classical mistake, thinking that they had found a higher way to holiness, even if it had not been authorized.

The dispute showed the role of spouses and other hidden figures who stoked their sense of righteous indignation and, by contrast, the role of *On Ben Peles's* wife whose radical ingenuity yanked her husband out of the dispute.

Korach claimed that he was the champion of the masses. He accused Moshe and Aaron of setting themselves up as a power elite which provided both honor and wealth. He stated that the Jewish people must resist at all costs this trend to set up intermediaries between themselves and G-d, making it more difficult to have a direct relationship with HaSh-m at best, and tantamount to a kind of idolatry at worst. Powerful logic indeed!

In fact Korach had it right. The ideal situation of each receiving Torah directly from HaSh-m will indeed be achieved in the Messianic era, when we finally achieve the right level. Finally, during Techiyas HaMesim when there will no longer be any hierarchies. But, coming at the wrong time, Korach's democratic claim was potentially the seeds destruction of an entire nation. Mix up all hierarchies and level them, and we are not left with democracy, but anarchy.

Korach challenged the order of creation, a therefore, implicit in his challenge was the desire to change G-d's midos, His way of relating to the world. Therefore, he suffered death by a new creation – midah keneged midah.

Ultimately, Korach did not stand for anything so much as he stood against. He was the anti-Moshe. Moshe brought us out of Egypt. Let us go back. Moshe divided up the Leverite honors. We are opposed. And ultimately – Moshe claims to have brought down the Torah. We negate that too.

But the argument, dressed up as it was as being for democracy and the empowerment of the people of Israel attracted greats of the nation. And they in turn made it seem true for others. He had every detail of his argument down to a fine detail. But this was just a justificatory ideology. The initial position, his personal

hurt at the fact that Moshe and Aaron seemed to have claimed all the honors and not he, came first. And then he proceeded to build his case and his coalition.

ויקח קרח – has no object. It means here that he separated himself, *with Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliyav and on Ben Peles, of the tribe of Reuven*. Moshe summonsed Dasan and Aviran to negotiate with them but it was too late - ויאמרו לא נעלה.

The moment you are not looking for a solution, escalation sets in. Korach starts out feeling hurt about not getting certain positions in the community, and he ends up questioning the authenticity of the Moses' entire prophecy. Along the way, some of the personal dirt thrown at Moses sticks, and husbands started warning their wives to stay away from Moshe 'the womanizer'. Escalation also spread laterally – those who lived near Korach caught the bug, the excitement and fulfillment of fighting for a new cause.

In such situations, at first, you look to score points. Korach and his crowd produced some clever, twisted sophistry – arguments they themselves probably did not believe – and reveled in their little victories over 'the enemy'. Korach starts out feeling hurt about not getting certain positions in the community, and he ends up questioning the authenticity of the Moses' entire prophecy. Why should an all blue Talis have Techeiles, and why should a room full of seforim have a mezuzah, and on and on. G-d would never demand such a thing. Moshe must have made these things up!

The next phase of machlokes is to combine every dissatisfaction one has and to combine it all into one big claim. The beloved Moses is quickly becoming a monster, whose blithe promises turn out to be fatal traps.

Korach was now locked in a dynamic of controversy where the battle itself, the exchange of words or tactics, had become the focus. Peace at this stage is certainly not an option. Shaming or insulting the person is now more important than communicating anything of substance. Korach reached this stage early on, not because he was such a low-life – but, ironically, because he saw his message as so important.

If someone like Korach, who was from the generation of Maamad har Sinai, could challenge the Revelation, then the entire Mesorah for all generations was at stake. Something was needed, a type of new revelation, that would reconfirm the revelation and put it beyond dispute. Hence, Korach suffered a most unusual punishment.

חֻקַּת

Parah Adumah

SUMMARY:

Our parsha starts off saying **זאת חוקת התורה**. It does not say **זאת חוקת הפרה** as we might have expected, for the Mitzvah of purification is not merely another one of the 613 Mitzvos – rather the **פרה אדומה** teaches us fundamental lessons underlying the whole of Judaism.

Parah Adumah is the archetype Chok, a law which even Shlomo HaMelech could not understand. As with all Chukim, it is a call to action. Only by acting can one taste the holiness and profundity of a Chok. An intellectual pursuit, on its own, will simply show the limits of human comprehension.

Despite its mysteriousness, there is a great deal about this Mitzvah which we do understand. It makes sense, for example, that the Parah has to be pure red. For red is the color of sin, the source of **חַטָּאת**. It is only the fact that it is **מַטְהַר טְמֵאִים** and yet **מְטַמֵּא טְהוֹרִים** which is unprecedented in Jewish law and therefore defies explanation.

Even this is explained by the Chinuch who says that it is like [herbal] medicine. The medicine is good for those who have a certain illness. A healthy person who takes this medicine however, is likely to get ill. So too, the Parah is good for a Tameh person but not good for a Tahor one.

Perhaps the mystery of the Parah Adumah is the fact that it is done outside of the Beis HaMikdash. Or perhaps, it is the fact that the Parah Adumah is able to purify from **חַטָּאת** in the first place. After all, the source of **חַטָּאת** is the **חַטָּאת הָרִאשׁוֹן**. That is what introduced death into the world, and the **חַטָּאת** which goes with it. That is what needs to be corrected to get rid of the **חַטָּאת**. So how, before a **תְּקוּן** of the **חַטָּאת** do we get to a purification from the **חַטָּאת** whose source is still with us?

It is only the Cohanim who are involved in the preparatory stages of preparing the Parah, who are rendered impure. It is only later that **חַטָּאת** is purified. But those Cohanim who are involved in the actual purification process do not become impure. This is a great principle of Judaism: If you are involved with others far away from Judaism, then you are in great danger of being influenced by them. If however, you are involved with bringing them closer to Judaism, then you will influence them and not the other way around. **כִּי־יִרְאוּ אֶת־אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּלֵעָלְמָא דְּהַיְיָ**.

The laws of Parah Adumah require that the Parah be burnt, that its ashes be mixed with water from a flowing source, and that two trees, a hyssop and a cedar be dipped into this before it is sprinkled on the person requiring purification. Now the hyssop and the cedar are the very opposites of the spectrum – the hyssop is a small bush while the cedar is a large, tall tree. Ideally, the living waters of the Torah create a balance between these two – they direct us to use all our qualities in such a way that we are neither too harsh nor a total walkover, that we are giving, but not the point of our own impoverishment, that we are strong but in order to rule over ourselves, not others.

What the Torah emphasizes here is balance. Being normal is not a Jewish concept. We are the most abnormal nation on earth. The Jewish nation defies all sociological and historical laws just by being here.

But being balanced is a Jewish concept. Living according to a golden mean is just the effect of practicing all of the mitzvos as we should. That is the idea of the living Torah, and any loss of that is a death of some sort. The Torah gives us an ability to become a spiritually, intellectually and emotionally balanced human being. It allows us to develop at not only some of ourselves, but all of ourselves.

Anyone who becomes imbalanced, who stressed one side of himself more than the other, and thereby is really only expressing part of his essential humanity, has in essence killed some of his potential. G-d will cause such a person to become *מתאמת*, in order to reflect the need for recreating the balance. The Parah represents a type of spiritual homeopathy, restoring our equilibrium and spiritual purity. The hyssop and the cedar get dipped together into the living waters of the Torah to create the type of pure balance contained in the profound wisdom of Judaism.

Someone who gets out of balance, however, cannot restore himself by simply going back to the middle. For he is already weighted to the one side. He is going to need to stretch his other side for a while, in order to restore the balance. Someone who has been selfish his whole life, cannot become a balanced giver unless he becomes a supergiver for a period. Such is the constitution of man.

It is this which the Parah Adumah comes to teach us. The Midrash tells us that the Parah purifies 7 x 7 (*מזוקק שבבעתים*), i.e. all 49 levels of the Torah. If it is a chok it is not because we do not know what it does, a restoration of the vital, living balance of man, but because it is so deep we cannot get to the bottom of it.

The Nature of a Chok

SUMMARY:

Parah Adumah is a חוק: חוקת התורה. Unlike, Mishpatim – rational Mitzvos, Chukim – Mitzvos like the Korbanos, the prohibition on pork and laws of purity – are one's whose reasons we cannot understand. The Yetzer Hara tells us that Chukim do not make sense, and which we therefore should not do them. The non-Jews pick up on this and challenge as well and we find ourselves in an ever deepening crisis of faith.

G-d therefore comes to reassure us – this is a Chukah. I am telling you in advance that this is beyond your understanding. Your failure to understand is a function of human limitations. I am ordering you to do this mitzvah nevertheless, for it is truly beneficial for you.

Parah Adumah is the Chok par excellence. Even Shlomo Hamelech did not understand its reasons. This does not mean that nothing of the Mitzvah is comprehensible. But there comes a point where you will get stuck, where you will no longer be able to explain this Mitzvah.

It is humbling for us to now that we don't know, but it is also our great saving. For one who thinks he understands all is more liable to use his own logic to slip up in the end, adding or subtracting just a wee bit as he sees the situation demands. But G-d did not want us to abandon all understanding. For by so doing, we are denying ourselves an appreciation of the depths of Torah wisdom which can cause us so much awe and wonderment, and give us a much more profound attachment to the Torah. On the Day of Judgment, we are asked: Did you look into the wisdom called the Merkavah? And so, we are left with no choice, to look deeply, but to know that there is still more, a lot more. This tension, between trying to know more and knowing that we don't know was beautifully expressed by Klal Yisroel with their famous words, ונעשה ונשמע, at Sinai. ונעשה – we will do. We will do whatever we are commanded without understanding. Only afterwards will we endeavor to understand – ונשמע, not as a condition or qualification of our doing, but as an additional, richer dimension.

The truth is that we cannot fully understand the full depth and purpose of any Mitzvah. We cannot, for example, know why this particular action is called a Mitzvah and why another action, which may look perfectly good and worthy of doing, is not. The Torah is G-d's creation as is nature. We can study a tree and understand something of how it works – the 'what' of creation. We might even gain a glimpse into the purpose of that tree on earth – the 'why' of creation. But we could never understand why G-d created a tree and not a '*garryboldio*' (to make up a word), or why a tree needs specifically a seed to grow. G-d's wisdom is simply too deep for us to fully comprehend all that is behind His creation. However deep we will go, and there is every expectation that science will go ever deeper, what is left beyond our horizons will be far greater than that which we grasp. Whatever reasons we know, there are always other reasons we do not know about; and even those reasons we know about may go much deeper than we can access. The Torah itself did not reveal the reasons for most of the Mitzvos, in part because the implications of doing any single mitzvah is so vast.

Hence, someone who prays that G-d's mercies should rest on the nest of the bird, we silence him. For by this he pretends to know that G-d's reason for decreeing this law

is rooted in mercy. But the truth is, by so declaring, we are arrogantly reducing G-d's wisdom to the level of our own understanding. Mercy might appeal to us as a reason, but it cannot contain all of G-d's ongoing Providential input into the world. We will never fully grasp all of the wisdom which any Mitzvah contains, nor all of its effects on our soul; and therefore, for us all Mitzvos are ultimately a Chok and a Gezeirah.

Why is this word Chok chosen to reflect this idea? Chok means borders and limitations, and is used for the laws of nature as well. The Chukim are defined for us – we are told to respect their boundaries even if we cannot understand them.

Chok comes from the word Mechokek – to be engraved. The 10 commandments were engraved in the Luchos, not written on them. Something which is written in ink is superimposed upon the surface on which it is written. A chakika, on the other hand, is an engraving into the body of the substance, becoming a part of the substance and transforming it. The Luchos did not have the 10 commandments written on them – the 10 commandments and the Luchos became a new, unified reality. Similarly, the Chukim are engraved into our neshamos at the deepest levels. Part of the difficulty of understanding a chok is that it cannot be separated from our own spiritual realities – it is a chakika.

The Torah contains that hidden wisdom which G-d used as His blueprint for creating the whole world. When we do a mitzvah, we are attaching ourselves to this blueprint. This places us on a different plane of reality. But to gain the full benefit of this we have to do all the Mitzvos, not just because of the benefit of each individual mitzvah, but because the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This is because all the mitzvos ultimately form one composite whole. Even if we stood a chance of understanding the reason for a single mitzvah, we could never fathom how it impacts on other mitzvahs and how others impact on it.

There is a further reason why טעמים are limited. The real טעם of the מצוה is the taste and understanding one gains from doing the מצוה. It is impossible to explain to anyone what Shabbos is about unless they actually keep it. Trying to explain the מצוות in a purely intellectual way is like trying to explain to someone who has never tasted ice-cream what the ingredients are and then expecting him to understand how they all combine to make the taste. If I have tasted ice cream, I know what it tastes like, but I can never explain that to you. The living reality of the Mitzvos are such that our understanding is bound up in our doing.

In a sense, then, all Mitzvos are really Chukim, since we cannot get to the bottom of them. Nevertheless, once we understand the limitations of our understanding, we are encouraged to give Taamim. Our starting point in accepting any *mitzvah* is then to accept it first as a חוק and only then give a טעם. This is why often Chazal, when giving a טעם, first state that the Mitzvah is a גזירת הכתוב. The reasons for Chukim are deeper than other Mitzvos – it is just a question of degree - and one cannot understand them until one accepts them as being a chok without a reason.

Rebbe Nachman of Breslav once stated: Thank G-d that there are things about G-d's behavior that I do not understand. For, if I understood everything that G-d did, His mind would be no greater than mine. I am delighted to learn that His Wisdom extends way beyond the human capacity to understand.

Chukim are our comforting confirmation that G-d is infinitely greater than ourselves. "I am G-d and therefore obey Me, for I am here to look after you" (ושמרתם את) (חוקותי ואת משפטי אשר ישעה האדם וחי בהם) is a much deeper reason to do anything than

simply through the limits of our own understanding. Our failure to understand everything about the Parah is not a source of nervousness or a crisis of faith. It is a source of great joy.

The Waters of Meriva – Hitting the Rock

SUMMARY:

Mei Meriva results in Moshe and Aaron being denied entry into the Land of Israel, a decree which even Tefila could not change. Pharaoh had seen that Moshe Rabbeinu was destined to fail at Mei Merivah. But, he misinterpreted what he saw and thought that he had an opening to kill the savior of Israel (Moshe) through water.

The story begins with the death of his sister Miriam. Miriam, who had watched over her brother Moshe when he was a baby on the water, had become the pipeline of blessing through which the Jewish people receive their water. And now she was gone. The nation should have understood that her death would be a Kaparah for them, and it is just for this reason that Miriam's death is juxtaposed to Parah Aduma. Instead, the nation focused on the drying up of the well and attacked Moshe and Aaron. They respond inappropriately, though the Torah never tells us what the problem is, and an opportunity to sanctify G-d's name is lost. The Tikun is that G-d was ultimately sanctified through the waters (Ramban, Seforno) or the Jewish people (Ohr HaChaim) or, as most commentators say, through the decree suffered by Moshe and Aaron.

Rashi explains that Moshe Rabbeinu hit the rock when he should have spoken to it. Clearly, Moshe Rabbeinu had not misunderstood what he was being asked by G-d to do. Unlike the first time, he knew that he should speak and not hit the rock. This would have led people to say, "If a mindless rock does the Will of G-d, how much more should we do His Will?" That opportunity was lost and Moshe was therefore punished.

Many commentators ask why, if Moshe was supposed to speak to the rock, G-d nevertheless wanted Moshe to take the Match? Furthermore, what difference does it make to the rock whether it is spoken to or hit?

To understand this a little deeper we need to understand the role of the Match, the staff. The Match was the medium through which the miracles were done even where it was not used directly. From the very beginning of his Shlichus by G-d, Moshe is told to carry the staff on his missions - (שמות ד') ואת המטה הזה תקח בידך וגו'. For the plagues of the hail and the locusts, it is enough that he should wave his staff in the air and here it is enough that it should be in his hand.

The Match-idea is seen again after Korach challenges Aaron's right to the Kehunah. Korach's challenge threatened the entire legitimacy of the Torah. Now, to restore the nation's faith in the Torah, in its leaders, Moshe and Aaron, the Nasi of each one of the tribes is requested to put out a match with their names on it, with Aaron's name written on Match Levi. G-d announces that he will choose one of the matos by causing it to sprout blossoms and indeed it is just Aaron's match which does this. This then becomes the way that G-d proves to the nation that not only does Aaron deserve the position he has come to occupy but that Moshe's Nevuah truly represents Toras Emes.

Moshe's Match is even more powerful. It is, in fact a creation of G-d and is known as the מטה אלוקים. We see from all of this that the Match was a very powerful thing, that, in some mysterious way, it was a conduit for certain forces from Heaven to Earth, the anti-Keshafim force that destroyed the Egyptians. Just as a Jewish king carries a match – a staff – to show his *malchus*, so too Moshe carried a match which showed the

Malchus of HaSh-m. It was HaSh-m's sign to the world that, starting with the plagues, He would operate in this world with a new *Hanhaga* of open miracles.

The word *מטה* comes from the word *הטייה* – to turn or to incline. The *מטה* came to turn the *כשפים* of the *מצרים* on their head and reveal that what the Egyptians had been using the impure side of the *מט* Gates of Binah and these very same conduits would now be used for holiness. The word *מטה* can be divided up into *מט* – for the 49 Gates of Binah, and the *ה*, which represents G-d's name. This reflects the idea that these 49 levels were linked, through the *Mateh*, to the 50th hidden level, the source of its ability to reveal G-d's *Malchus* in this world.

With such a powerful instrument, there is a vast difference between holding it as opposed to using it to hit the rock. The *Mateh* was an extraordinarily sensitive instrument and had to be used in an exact way on each occasion. For example, when Moshe threw it to the ground in front of Pharaoh to turn it into a snake, he had to pick it up specifically from the tail to turn it back to a *Mateh*. Speaking with the *Mateh* and hitting the rock would therefore each reveal a different dimension of G-d's *Malchus*.

On this occasion, the rock did not need to be hit, because it was the same rock as before. The *Kedusha* that had entered the rock the first time was still there so that now it only required speaking to. But, Moshe found that he could not recognize the rock amongst the others. The nation now became very impatient, yelling at Moshe what did it matter which rock it was. As far as they were concerned, Moshe knew the hidden laws of rocks well enough to be able to bring water out of any one of them any time he wanted, without having to resort to an unusual miracle.

Things went downhill from there, for Moshe got angry with the people. *התן הסלע* *הים* *הים* *הים* – “Can we (not G-d) bring water from this rock?” This made him more vulnerable to his error.

Feeling the pressure, Moshe felt forced to bring water from any rock, but to do this he would have to hit the rock, just like the first time. Lo and behold, it turned out to be the original rock after all.

The net result of all of this was that the nation now had a reduced sense of HaSh-m's *Hashgacha*. It is an established fact that G-d causes nature to yield for the *Tzadik*. Did not the *Arod* bite *Rebe Chanina bar Doisa* and die? Did not that same *Tzadik* use vinegar to light his candle with, when oil was lacking, saying that He who said that oil should burn will say that vinegar should burn?

Even if the nation was now convinced that the hitting of the rock constituted a miracle, it was of a lower sort, the type that happens to any *Tzadik*. Had Moshe and Aaron spoken to the rock, however, the miracle would have been the sort of event that nature simply cannot produce. The very rock would have become water, and the nation would have deepened their faith in G-d as all-powerful and all-kind.

Moshe and Aaron are not punished for doing something objectively sinful. Rather, they are held accountable on a qualitative measure; provoked by the Jewish people, they inadvertently failed to call on their full potential and the potential of the situation to sanctify G-d's Name. The lesson is provocative if not frightening – each of us must look into the mirror and see not just whether we are being good people, but whether we are being good at our level.

בלק

Bilam: The Choice – Providence Interface

SUMMARY:

One of the great principles which the Bilam story elucidates is freedom of choice, a fundamental principle in Judaism. The interface between our freedom of choice and G-d's Providence is a complex one. Can our choices change the course of history? Can they frustrate G-d's plan for the world? Does G-d allow us to choose, not only evil, but to choose against the very fundamental purposes for which the world was created? How far does G-d allow evil to go, before stopping it in its tracks? How far does G-d grant us something we really want, even if it is not in our own best interests?

Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the story of an evil person is recorded in such detail in our holy Torah. So important is the story of Bilam that Chazal wished to make it a part of the daily תפילות. Jews will learn truth from whatever source it comes – even if it comes out of the mouth of a non-Jew with evil intent, or, for that matter, out of the mouth of a donkey.

Bilam's prophecy was as great as Moshe Rabeinu's. With all other prophets, G-d first prophesizes to them, and they then communicate, in their own words, what it is that they had heard. But in the case of both Moshe and Bilam, G-d talks through them, using their voices as instruments to communicate His message. Their role was to just move their lips.

As an instrument of G-d's prophetic message, Bilam's freedom of choice is limited. He is, in this respect, no different to a donkey, who, although it did not have prophecy, was also used to produce G-d's message. Bilam, like all the arrogant tyrants before and after him, is unclothed and forced to admit to others just how limited he is, especially when his choices came in conflict with G-d's plan for the world.

Bilam thought to separate the spiritual from the physical domains, the former going to the Jewish people, the latter going to the nations of the world. The Jews would then stay in the desert, leading a life of pure spirituality. Under such circumstances, he thought, the Jews could not possibly inherit the land, which would require them to engage in the physical. Therefore, Bilam did not feel that he was cursing the Jews so much as he was accurately identifying their essence and matching that with a loss of the land and a life in the desert.

Bilam knew that there were limitations to his ability to achieve this, but he somehow thought that there must be a way out, a way to use the system of spiritual laws which G-d has set up, and use them against G-d himself. He somehow thinks that through his sacrifices, he could manipulate the very Kedusha G-d uses to elevate the Jewish people to his own nefarious purposes.

Bilam hopes to catch that nano-second when G-d is, so to speak, angry, and G-d is forced not to have such a moment throughout this period. Had G-d not done this, Bilam would indeed have succeeded in destroying the Jewish people.

Still, G-d had told Bilam not to curse the Jews. How could he have defied G-d's Will in this way? Here we learn another great principle of choice, that the way in which a person really wishes to go is the way Providence will lead him.

Bilam at first is told by G-d that he may not accompany Balak's emissaries, but later G-d seemingly relents and tells him he can go. We see from this that G-d allows man to do evil, though He does not help him to do so. G-d will only actively help someone searching to do good - **הבא לטהר מסעין אותו** - **הבא לטמא פותחין לו**. But if he is coming to do bad, G-d will neither stop him nor help him - **הבא לטמא פותחין לו**.

In the Bilam story, G-d first tells Bilam that he may not accompany Balak's shlichim. But Bilam persists and G-d relents. Bilam is seemingly given Divine sanction to proceed with his plan to curse the Jewish people! How can that be? But here the Parsha comes to tell us that there are indeed limitations to one's freedom of choice. G-d tells Bilam that he may go, but that he will be forced to bless the Jewish people rather than curse them. (G-d later expresses anger at Bilam because Bilam does not reveal this to Balak's emissaries, making it seem that G-d had changed His mind, and that it was now possible to curse G-d's Chosen People. Both of these errors would be a Chillul HaSh-m.)

It emerges that G-d allows us choice only within the parameters in which He has set up. For example, if we are meant to lose a certain amount of money, then we can either give it to charity, or we will lose it as taxes or our car will need repairs, etc. One way or another, money which is not meant to be ours will not stay within our possession. We can turn this into a mitzvah – a strength – or unwillingly subject ourselves to G-d's Will in other ways.

Perhaps this is why the Sages considered placing the story of Bilam in the story of the Shema. The Shema declares G-d's Oneness in this world. Things may seem unconnected at times, each one seemingly going its own way, but the hidden reality is that G-d is guiding the whole process all along. Bilam thought that maybe, once G-d had set up the world so that man had freedom of choice, he could use the principle with which the world operates to undermine G-d's own Will. The Shema teaches us that this is impossible – that ultimately all the fragmented aspects of reality are really been driven, under the surface, by G-d's Divine Providence.

At one stage, G-d asks Bilam, "who are these people with you?" Bilam begins to think that maybe G-d is not omniscient. Certainly, HaKadush Boruch Hu was not coming to fool Bilam. **לא בא הקב"ה בטרוניא עם בריותיו**. On the contrary, he was trying to create an opening for Bilam to do Teshuva. The dialogue with G-d is in itself a great opportunity to reconnect to one's spiritual epi-centre, and to find the way back. G-d was giving Bilam a chance to admit that not everything was revealed to him – to get him to come clean on the limitations of what he really could deliver, and thereby help him to repent. But that same opportunity which will allow Bilam to repent, is the very same thing which will allow Bilam to sin. Up we go, or down into the abyss we plunge – all from the same circumstances.

