



LOUGHTON SHUL
MORE THAN A SHUL

INSPIRE

BAMIDBAR

28 IYAR - 23 MAY 2020

WISDOM FROM THE WILDERNESS

“Numbers” may be the name by which the fourth of the Five Books of Moses is commonly called, but in the Hebrew original it is known as Bamidbar, or “In the Wilderness.” It is interesting to note that this Parshah is always read immediately before the festival of Shavuot, “the season of the giving of the Torah.” What is the connection? The Sages teach that it is not enough for G-d to give us the Torah; we have to be ready to receive the Torah. What makes us worthy recipients of this most precious and infinite gift from G-d? This is where the “wilderness” idea comes in. A wilderness is a no-man’s land. It is ownerless and barren. Just as a desert is empty and desolate, so does a student of Torah need to know that he is but an “empty vessel.” Humility is a vital prerequisite if we are to successfully absorb divine wisdom. As long as we are full of ourselves and our preconceived notions, we will not be able to assimilate and integrate Torah into our being. Even if we are already somewhat accomplished in our Torah studies, we still need to remember—as the Kotzker Rebbe put it—that “as much as you know, you are still an undeveloped wilderness.” Then there is the idea that an ownerless wilderness is there for anyone to stake his claim. No person or group of people has a monopoly on Torah. It belongs to each and every single Jew, not just the rabbis or the yeshivah students, or the religiously observant. “The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the entire Congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4). While we acknowledge that there is much hard work ahead of us if we are to acquire the Torah and make it ours, we also know that with diligence and effort we can succeed. Indeed, some of our finest Torah scholars throughout the generations have hailed from the simple, ordinary folk—tailors, cobblers and the like. Maimonides, in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Torah Study 3:1), states: “With three crowns was Israel adorned—the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of royalty. The priesthood was the privilege of Aaron . . . royalty was the privilege of King David . . . the crown of Torah is there ready and waiting for all of Israel . . . and it is the greatest crown of all.” However, while Torah may be “free for all” as a desert wilderness, we must surrender ourselves to it, emptying ourselves of our ego and our preconceptions, rather than attempting to adjust it to our own circumstances and lifestyles. And then, like the empty and uninhabited wilderness, the Torah personality may well find himself alone and isolated. We might express our strongly held values and beliefs, only to discover that we stand alone. We might display the courage of our convictions and find ourselves, like Abraham, “on the other side” of the whole world. Our principles may well prove unpopular, especially should they step on toes or upset apple carts. No matter. Being true to G-d and His Torah means standing by it, under any and every

What is so special about Israel? Why couldn't God make everything happen in America or some other country? If you say the answer is that "the history of the Jews happens there," then why couldn't it all have happened in some other place?

The Aish Rabbi Replies: Theodore Herzl entertained a plan for the Jews to live in Uganda, and a 19th century American diplomat named Mordechai Manuel Noah launched a "Jewish Homeland" on a small island near Niagara Falls. Yet God chose the Land of Israel as the chosen land, and Jerusalem as its spiritual focus. Why? Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan writes in "Eye of the Universe": "If you look at a map you will see the geographical location of the Land of Israel virtually guaranteed that it would play a key role in the tides of civilisation. The Old World consisted of two great landmasses, Eurasia (Europe and Asia) and Africa. It was impossible to travel from Eurasia to Africa without passing through the Holy Land. Therefore, every conqueror, every civilisation that passed from one continent to the other had to pass through the Holy Land and come in contact with the Jew. The Land of Israel thus interacted with virtually every great civilisation, and all of them were, to some degree, influenced by the teachings of the Torah. Besides being a gateway between north and south, the Holy Land is part of the keystone link between east and west. There are mountains in Israel where a cup of water spilled on the western slope will eventually flow in the Atlantic Ocean, while one spilled on the eastern slope will flow into the Pacific. In the past, most caravan routes linking the Atlantic and Pacific passed directly through the Holy Land. The Land of Israel was therefore literally the crossroads of civilization." On a much deeper level, however, we see Jerusalem not only as a center of civilization, but also as the very center of the world. The Talmud says that creation began in Jerusalem, and the world radiated outward from this place. Medieval maps show Jerusalem at the epicenter of Asia, Europe, and Africa. The world flows into this spot, and all life's forces resonate here. From this place, the whole world is cast into perspective. The centrality of Jerusalem – and particularly Mount Moriah – has continued throughout history. Cain and Abel – and later Noah – brought offerings to God at this place. Abraham came to Mount Moriah and bound his son Isaac upon an altar; this is also where Jacob dreamed of the ladder. (Maimonides – Beit HaBechira 2:2) King David purchased this very plot of land to be the site of the first Holy Temple, which was built by King Solomon in 825 BCE. Although 400 years later enemies of the Jews destroyed the Holy Temple and drove the Jews from their land, the Jews returned 70 years later to rebuild the second Holy Temple on the very same spot. Although the Romans destroyed this Temple in 70 CE, they left the remains of the retaining walls standing. The holiness of this spot flourishes today, as millions of visitors come to pray at the famous Western Wall. The name Jerusalem has two parts: Yira, which means "to see," and shalem, which means "peace." This is the place of peace where God is seen. Elsewhere, God is a theory, but in Israel, God is seen and felt as a tangible presence. Elsewhere we grope for insight. In Israel we achieve clarity.

SHUL TIMES

Shabbat Times

Candle Lighting 8:41 pm

Shabbat Ends 10:04 pm

Friday, 22 May

6:30 pm Mizrahi

Shabbaton With Chief

Rabbi & Mark Regev

7:15 pm Kabbalat

Shabbat on zoom

with Rafi Sandford &

Rabbi Abrams

Sunday, 24 May

10:00 am Cheder &

Young Family

Cheesecake bake.

8:00 pm Comedy

Evening with Ashley

Blaker.

Wednesday, 27 May

8:00 pm Q&A with Rabbi

Yanky, Rabbi Yehudah &

Rabbi Zvi.

Please submit your

questions via email

Thursday, 28 May

7:30 pm Shavout Prayers

with Yizkor.

Reminder to count the

omer.

PARSHA SUMMARY

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary. They replace the firstborn, whose number they approximated, since they were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to redeem themselves. When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the Ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary's entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons. Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

Today's haftarah is read on a Shabbat that is immediately followed by Rosh Chodesh. Indeed, the reading opens with the words, "Jonathan said, 'Tomorrow is the [first of the] new month.'" The story is one of loyalty and devotion. David and Jonathan are dear friends. Jonathan's father, King Saul, despises David, fearing that he will depose him from the throne. Sensing danger, Jonathan told David to hide in the field rather than attend Saul's Rosh Chodesh feast. Jonathan then attended the feast and gauged the king's mood. Realizing that Saul was determined to kill David, Jonathan went out to the field, shot three arrows and called to his assistant, "The arrow is beyond you," a predetermined signal to his friend that it was not safe to return to the king's palace. Before parting, the two friends kissed and wept, and swore to maintain their mutual affection for generations to come.

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Father of Yochevet Davis - Dovid Ben Yacov - 4 Sivan
Sister of Avril Trainis - Miriam bas Avraham - 6 Sivan
Father of Shirley Lane - Zvi Hersh ben Eliezer HaCohen - 6 Sivan

JEWISH HUMOR

Solomon and his wife Miriam join their shul's Hebrew Reading course. At the end of their first week, their teacher, Rabbi Bloom, goes over to Solomon and asks, "So tell me Solomon, what do you think of my Hebrew class?" "It's not as bad as I thought it would be, rabbi," replies Solomon. "What do you mean by that?" asks Rabbi Bloom. "If I'm honest, rabbi, I must admit that I really only have to learn the first part of every Hebrew sentence." "Why do you say that?" asks Rabbi Bloom. "Because, as she always does, Miriam finishes all my sentences for me."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

With pointed fangs I sit and wait; with
piercing force I crunch out fate;
grabbing victims, proclaiming might;
physically joining with a single bite.
What am I?

Answer to last week's Riddle.

Onion

STORY TIME

Many years ago in Dubrovno there was a boy named Feivish Henech, who was a G-d-fearing lad. Although he was not a great student, he nevertheless devoted practically all his time to reciting Psalms, and this he did in the sweetest voice imaginable. Feivish Henech was a beautiful-looking boy and his voice was a pleasure to listen to. When he sang the Psalms of praise, his voice rang with joy, so that everyone listening to him felt their beings permeated with gladness. But when Feivish recited the Psalms which were outpourings of the soul to the Alm-ghty, beseeching Him to help His troubled people, Feivish Henech's voice assumed such depths of melancholy and distress, that everyone felt full of sorrow and sadness. When he reached the age of 16, he suddenly took it into his head to live differently from everyone. He spent literally every moment of his life reciting the Psalms. And in order that no one should deter him from his purpose, he stopped up his ears so that no sound of the outside world should reach him. He covered up his eyes so that no sight should disturb him, as he could recite the Psalms and prayers by heart. He ate hardly anything, fasting all day and only partaking of a crust of bread and drink of water at night. On Shabbat or holidays he ate white bread, instead of the darker bread, and in addition drank a glass of wine. One may have expected to see him become a physical wreck under the circumstances, but to everyone's surprise he became, if anything, even stronger and more handsome. Naturally, he could not go unnoticed, and he was talked about all around the area of Dubrovno. When word of this strange Jewish hermit reached the ears of a certain anti-Semitic Polish squire, he decided he would have some sport with the Jew. He sent one of his servants to Dubrovno to bring Feivish back, but when the man heard that Feivish was a holy man whom it was impossible to approach, he fled in terror. When his master heard his story, he flew into a deadly rage and ordered the poor fellow to be publicly flogged. The usual penalty was 15 lashes, after which the unfortunate victim had to crawl on all fours and kiss the feet of his tormentor, begging forgiveness. But when the lashes were administered to the back of the servant, nothing happened; there was no pain and no blood. Everyone wondered what would happen now. It was known that the squire had sent other servants to fetch Feivish Henech the Hermit. The servants returned, but without Feivish. They related their story: "When we found the hermit, he was standing and praying. We called out to him, but he made no sign of having heard. I stepped up quite close to him and struck him with my whip, but it was as if it hadn't even touched him. Then I waited and tried to convince him to accompany us, but he refused to react and we had no choice, but to come without him." The squire was in a rage. "Saddle a horse, and I myself will fetch this crazy Jew! Get the priest and he will accompany us." In the squire's heart was a creeping fear that the hermit might after all be a supernatural being. When the priest heard that the squire planned to use force against Feivish Henech, he begged him, "Please, Your Honour, do not do anything against Feivish Henech the Hermit. He is a holy man and you will be wiser to leave him alone. I, myself, will have nothing to do with this foolishness." "Aren't you ashamed? I will show you that he is merely mentally unhinged!" exclaimed the squire. When the squire entered the study hall he greeted the rabbi and the other community notables in a friendly manner, but he let them know that he was there to prove that this particular hermit who refused to see, hear, or eat was just crazy, and had nothing supernatural about him. "You are playing with fire," they warned him, but he refused to listen. "I have driven sense into many obstinate persons with this whip and shall now drive the nonsense out of this individual also!" With that he walked up to Feivish Henech and struck him with his whip. The whip fell out of his grasp and his hand dropped helplessly to his side as excruciating pains shot through his arm. There was a feeling of panic in the air. The Jews feared the squire's retaliation against the entire community, while the squire's men were terrified of the hermit. They bundled up their master and ran for their carriage. Feivish the Hermit took no notice of the entire proceeding and continue to fill the hall with his exquisite singing. The squire's pain became unbearable. He wanted to return to the hermit and beg forgiveness, but he was told that no one could approach the holy man. The doctors said there was no hope, other than to remove the arm before it poisoned the entire body. From this time on, people in trouble tried to do something for the hermit, so that they might be helped, as a result. So it was that all the childless wives of the town gathered together and raised funds to build a study hall with special accommodations for Feivish Henech the Hermit to be called by his name. It is an interesting fact that after this, all the childless women bore children.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

Unbound by the confines of space and time, your soul sees a reality your mind cannot fathom. From that vision seeps down the power to face the challenges of a dark, confusing world. But a higher vision still means that there are two and not one: There is you and there is the vision you perceive. And if there are two, two can be separated. That is why, when the darkness and confusion swells and storms, a higher vision is not enough. That is when you need to reach to the very core of our souls. Not to see a vision, but to be that vision. That this is my G-d, I am His, and we are one. That there is nothing else. And if so, nothing can stand between us.