

# LOOK BOTH WAYS

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshas Bamidbar

## Look Both Ways

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Our parashah opens: "Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai . . ." The Gemara (Shabbat 89a) records that "Sinai" is one of the five names of Chorev; the others are Tzin, Kadesh, Kedemot and Paran. R' Reuven Margaliot z"l (1889-1971; prolific author of works in all areas of Torah study) quotes an earlier work Darchei Moshe, which comments:

The entire world is a wilderness, a dry / charev place, and only the light of the Torah can bring it to its fulfillment. Torah unifies competing forces--on the one hand, hitztaninut (from "tzin") / being frozen in time, set in the traditional ways of our Patriarchs and ancestors but, on the other hand, kedemot / forward-looking, able to introduce holiness ("kodesh") into innovations. Torah demands that man be paran / fruitful (from "pru u'rvu"), unlike the beliefs of some religions that holiness can only be found in a monastic lifestyle.

R' Margaliot continues: The two signs of kosher animals reinforce these ideas. On the one hand, it must chew its cud, which alludes to reviewing and reliving history. On the other hand, it must have split hooves on its feet, the tools of moving forward. The enemies of a Torah lifestyle do not understand how these traits can be consistent with each other; therefore, they see Torah-true Jews as hypocrites and hate them. In reality, however, there is no contradiction between being rooted in tradition and being forward-looking. (Devarim B'itam)

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*"The number of every male from one month of age and up . . . the keepers of the holy charge."  
(3:28)*

Rashi z"l (on verse 15) comments: As soon as the infant reached the age of one month, he could be counted as a "keeper of the holy charge."

R' Shimon Schwab z"l (1908-1995; rabbi of the "Breuer's" community in Washington Heights, N.Y.) asks: How can we be so certain that young Levi'im would grow up to be "keepers of the holy charge"? He answers:

The Levi'im of that generation knew the secret of successful Torah education. Specifically, we read about the tribe of Levi (Devarim 33:9), "The one who said of his father and mother, 'I have not favored him'; to his brothers he did not give recognition and his children he did not know; for they [the Levi'im] have observed Your word, and Your covenant they preserved." This means that parents told their children, "I love you more than everyone in the world except Hashem. Never forget that I love Hashem more than I love you." This, writes R' Schwab, was the secret of successful Jewish parenting, as demonstrated by the Levi'im. [R' Schwab related that his own father expressed this sentiment to his sons when the Four Sons were mentioned at the Pesach Seder.] (Selected Speeches p.100)

A related thought:

R' Shalom Mantzura z"l (Yemen; 1800-1884) writes that his father once came to a Jewish town where people cried when a child was born and rejoiced when a person died. The elder R' Mantzura wondered at this custom, and the townsfolk explained: When a child is born, we cry in prayer that he not go off the straight path when he grows up. In contrast, when a person dies righteous, we rejoice that he succeeded in living his life properly. Regarding this, King Shlomo wrote (Kohelet 12:13),

*"The sum of the matter, when all has been considered--fear God and keep His commandments, for that is man's whole [duty]."*

I, too, continues the younger R' Mantzura, heard of a grandmother who prayed upon hearing of the birth of her grandson: "Master of the universe! If this child who was born to my son will live an eternal life in Your service and with awe of You, then protect him and strengthen him. But, if the opposite, G-d forbid, then please take him from us now." R' Mantzura records that that grandmother's prayer was answered, and the newborn grew up to be R' Yichiyeh ben Yosef Tzalach z"l [known as "Maharitz," one of the great sages of early 19th century Yemen, and the teacher of R' Mantzura's teachers].

Fortunate was that grandmother's lot, adds R' Mantzura. Similarly, he concludes, every parent should pray that his children will be dedicated to the service of His Name. (Ha'pedut V'ha'yeshuah p.40)

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*"These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe on the day Hashem spoke with Moshe at Har Sinai.*

*These are the names of the sons of Aharon: the firstborn was Nadav, and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar." (3:1-2)*

Rashi z"l comments: It mentions only the sons of Aharon, but they also are called the sons of Moshe because he taught them Torah. This teaches that whoever teaches Torah to the son of his fellow man is regarded as though he had fathered him.

R' Mordechai Banet z"l (1753-1829; rabbi of Nikolsburg, Moravia--today, Mikoluv, Czech Republic) asks: Didn't Moshe teach Torah to all of the Jewish people; why aren't they all called his children? Furthermore, what is added by "on the day Hashem spoke with Moshe at Har Sinai"? He explains:

We read (Devarim 9:20), "Hashem became very angry with Aharon to destroy him, so I prayed also for Aharon at that time." "That time" was when Aharon made the Golden Calf, "on the day Hashem spoke with Moshe at Har Sinai." Hashem intended to kill Aharon's sons at that time, but Moshe prayed for them and saved two of them (Elazar and Itamar). (Nadav and Avihu could not be saved because they added their own sin, as verse 4 explains.) Thus, Moshe had a special bond with Aharon's sons, more so than with his other students. (Machshevet Mordechai)

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*"When the camp is to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come and take down the Parochet / partition-curtain and cover the Aron Ha'edut / Ark of the Testimony with it . . . Thus you shall do for them [the Levi'im] so that they shall live and not die--when they approach the Holy of Holies, Aharon and his sons shall come and assign them, every man to his work and his burden. But they [the Levi'im] shall not come and look as the 'holy' is covered, lest they die." (4:5, 19-20)*

R' Moshe David Walle z"l (Italy; 1697-1777) explains: The Levi'im should not approach to carry the Aron before it is covered so that they will not touch it or even see it. The reason for this is that different souls are capable of tolerating different spiritual "lights." The soul of a Kohen can tolerate the "light" of the Aron, while the soul of a Levi cannot. Wherever the soul does not belong, it is called a "zar" / "stranger," and this state is abhorrent to kedushah / holiness. As a result, death may follow, as it did when Nadav and Avihu offered a "strange fire" (Parashat Shemini--Vayikra ch.10) and when Uza touched the Aron (Haftarah for Parashat Shemini--Shmuel II 6:7-8).

R' Walle continues: The One Who Shines Light from Above has established boundaries for all types of kedushah, and every person must know his place and be happy with his lot. One who breaks through these boundaries only harms himself, as we find regarding the otherwise righteous King Azaryah / Uziyahu [who attempted to serve as a Kohen]. He was struck with tzara'at, which is equated with death, and he was forced to live out his days in a cemetery (see Melachim II ch. 15 & Divrei Ha'yamim II ch.26). (Shivtei Kah p.30)

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## Pirkei Avot

*"There are four types of donor to charity: (1) One who desires to give himself but want others not to give--he begrudges others; (2) one who desires that others should give but that he should not give--he begrudges himself; (3) one who desires that he should give and that others should give--he is pious; and (4) one who desires that he should not give and that others should not give--he is wicked." (Ch.5)*

"He begrudges others"--Rashi z"l explains: He wishes to deprive others of the financial success that is the reward of those who give tzedakah.

"He is pious . . . he is wicked"--R' Raphael Moshe Luria z"l (rosh yeshiva in several chassidic yeshivot in Israel; died 2009) asks: The Mishnah is not speaking of people who actually gave tzedakah, on the one hand, or actively prevented others from giving, on the other hand; rather, it is speaking of "One who desires . . ." Why, based on one's desires alone, do we call him "pious" ("chassid ") or "wicked" ("rasha")?

R' Luria answers that the mitzvah of tzedakah is different from nearly all other mitzvot. He explains, based on two introductory points:

First, Hashem's creation of the world was the ultimate act of pure chessed / kindness. He is perfect and has no need for this world. He created it only so that He could bestow kindness on us.

Second, the ultimate purpose of all mitzvot is to cause man to emulate G-d's traits. Our Sages say: "Just as He is merciful, so you should be merciful; just as He is compassionate, so you should be compassionate."

When one performs a mitzvah, he fulfills G-d's Will and [somehow, which is not necessarily apparent to us] brings himself closer to emulating G-d. A person who thinks of performing or not performing a mitzvah--for example, he thinks of wearing tzitzit or taking a lulav--does not have the same effect. The "soul" of the mitzvah is in the deed, not the thought, R' Luria writes.

Not so one who thinks about performing kindness. Even if he never performs the act, he has already emulated G-d, who "thought" about creating the world as an act of kindness. One who merely thinks about giving tzedakah is already pious, while one who merely desires that people not give is already wicked.

On the other hand, R' Luria adds, the act of tzedakah without the thought also emulates G-d to a degree. Thus, the Tosafot (Chullin 7b) write that one who takes in a guest only because he was shamed into doing so is nevertheless called "holy." Since he is, in fact, emulating G-d by performing an act of kindness, he is holy. (Beit Genazi: Avot p.281)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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