

# THE Chabad WEEKLY

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As this week's Torah portion, Bamidbar (literally "in the desert") suggests, the Torah was given to the Jewish people in an uninhabited wilderness. A desert is a vast expanse of land to which all people have the same claim. A desert is not considered private property in the same way a house or a tract of habitable land can be bought and owned by individuals.

Likewise, the Torah does not belong to any one Jew, but is the eternal inheritance and possession of all. Thus each and every Jew is able (and obligated) to study the Torah and apply it to his daily life.

The desert is a place of dust, earth and shifting sands. Vegetation cannot grow there and it is devoid of inhabitants. We, too, must strive to be as humble as the dust, as the Torah is incompatible with haughtiness and pride. Indeed, our Sages stated, "Who is he who upholds the Torah? One who makes himself as the desert."

In the desert, the most important necessities for sustaining life - water, food and clothes - are absent. There is no rainfall, and no edible plants or fruit-bearing trees. Obviously, there is no place to buy or make clothing either.

Throughout the 40 years of the Jewish people's sojourn through the desert they relied on the merit of tzadikim, righteous people, for these necessities. In the merit of Moses, G-d caused the manna to fall. In the merit of Miriam the Prophetess, Moses' sister, a well provided the Jews with drinking water. In the merit of Aaron the High Priest, Moses' brother, G-d protected the Jews from harm with the Clouds of Glory. These clouds also laundered their clothes, which grew along with them and always fit perfectly.

We learn from this that when it comes to learning Torah, all other concerns fall by the wayside. Our job is to study Torah and observe its mitzvot, while relying on G-d to provide us with our needs.

Lastly, the desert is a place of great danger. Wild animals roam about freely, and snakes and scorpions lurk under rocks and in crevices. Yet it was precisely there that G-d chose to reveal His holy Torah. Until Moshiach comes and ushers in the Final Redemption (may it happen immediately), the Jew is likewise in a dangerous environment - exile. The "snake," the evil inclination, is constantly trying to entrap him and cause him to sin. Thus it is precisely during the exile that the Jew must strive to connect himself to the Torah, and to perform its commandments to the best of his ability. (From: L'Chaim 5759, #568. Adapted from Likutei Sichot, Vol. 2, and Hitva'duyot 5745)

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**Raise the head of all the congregation of the children of Israel... by the number of names (1:2)** A census expresses two paradoxical truths. On the one hand, it implies that each individual is significant. On the other hand, a head-count is the ultimate equalizer: each member of the community, from the greatest to the lowliest, counts for no less and no more than "one." G-d repeatedly commands to count the Jewish people to emphasize both their individual worth--the fact that no single person's contribution is dispensable--as well as their inherent equality. (The Chassidic Masters)

**From the age of twenty and upward, all who are fit to serve in the army of Israel, you shall count them (1:3)** Moses' census of the Jewish people, defined as a count of "all who are fit to serve in the army of Israel," included only those who were "from the age of twenty and upwards." What is the significance of this requirement?

The fifth chapter of Ethics of the Fathers includes an outline of the phases of a person's education and life: "At five years of age, the study of Scripture; at ten, the study of mishnah; at thirteen, the obligation to observe the mitzvot; at fifteen, the study of Talmud; at eighteen, marriage; at twenty, begins the pursuit [of a livelihood]; at thirty, one attains strength; at forty, understanding; at fifty, one can give counsel..."

In other words, the first twenty years of a person's life represent those periods and areas of his life in which he focuses almost exclusively on his individual growth: the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom and his moral and spiritual development. "Twenty" represents the point at which he ventures out to the world and begins to concern himself with the material involvements of life. Therein lies the deeper significance of G-d's instruction to Moses that only "from the age of twenty and upwards" shall a person be counted as one "fit to serve in the army of Israel."

A period of intense self-development and spiritual self-enrichment is a necessary preparation to life, but it must not be seen as an end in itself. The purpose of the "pre-twenty" times and aspects of a person's life is for the sake of the "pursuit" which must follow: that he or she go out into the world and apply his personal attainments to the development and sanctification of the material reality. One who does not graduate to the "post-twenty" phase of life, cannot count himself as a member of the "army of Israel."

**And these are the generations of Aaron and Moses... Nadav, Avihu, Elazar and Itamar (3:1-2)** Why did Moses' sons not merit [to be in the leadership of Israel]? Because they did not experience the Exodus from Egypt and did not traverse the sea with the people of Israel, as they were [in Midian] with Jethro (Moses' father in-law--see Exodus 18:1-6). (Midrash HeChafetz)

**And when the camp journeys on, Aaron and his sons shall come and take down the dividing curtain [of the Sanctuary] and cover the Ark of Testimony with it. They shall place upon it a covering of tachash hide, and spread over it a garment wholly of blue-wool (4:5-6)** Like the Ark, the soul of man is encased within three coverings: 1) it is overlaid with a selfish and materialistic character (what Chassidism calls "the animal soul"); 2) it is imbedded within a physical body; 3) it is placed in a physical world which obscures and distorts the Divine reality.

As long as the ark stood in its place in the Holy of Holies, it had no need for coverings. But when the time came for it to journey on, G-d commanded that it be "swallowed up" by its three-fold vestment. The same applies to the soul. A "spark of G-dliness," the soul is perfect and complete unto itself. But to journey on--to advance further in the infinite journey toward union with its Infinite Source--it must undergo on a "descent for the sake of ascent." It must be subjected to the three-fold concealment of human nature, physicality and worldliness, to discover, in the lowliest reaches of creation, the key for even greater connection with G-d.(The Chassidic Masters) chabadonline.com

SHAVUOT IS AN OPPORTUNE TIME TO ACHIEVE EVERYTHING IN IMPROVING TORAH-STUDY AND AVODA MARKED BY FEAR (AWE) OF G-D, AND ALSO TO STRIVE IN TESHUVA CONCERNING TORAH-STUDY, WITHOUT INTERFERENCE BY THE ACCUSING SATAN - JUST LIKE THE TIME OF SHOFAR-SOUNDING ON ROSH HASHANA AND THE HOLY DAY OF THE FAST OF YOM KIPPUR.(FROM THE REBBE'S HAYOM YOM - SIVAN 4)

*Every theory, every human idea, will have its limitations. No intellect can explain that which is illogical. But even within the realm of logic, each idea is limited to its particular realm. And within that realm itself, there will always be false resolutions and/or some sort of incompleteness.*

*Every thought in Torah, on the other hand, is complete in itself and infinite in all its applications. A thought of Torah is as endless as the One who gave it.*

Be Within, Stay Above from the wisdom of the Rebbe