



GATES OF EMUNAH

לע"נ משה חיים בן יונה ז"ל
 לע"נ יצחק בן משה חיים ז"ל
 לע"נ ביילא בת שלמה גרשון ז"ל
 לע"נ ראסה בת משה יצחק ז"ל
 לע"נ מאיר ניסן בן אברהם הלוי ז"ל
 לע"נ פרידא לאה בת אריה דוד ז"ל
 לע"נ רפאל צבי בן אריה ז"ל

"Raise your Head and be counted"

Revised and translated from the lessons of Rabbi Nissan Dovid Kivak shlit"א

A person is searching for himself – this is perhaps how we can define the exploration that centers on the essence of our being which is many times left as the unidentifiable – "me". A person seeks to weave an identity around his being, to see himself defined as someone. A person has many descriptive titles. Here one is a father and there a friend, in one place a worker and in another, a manager. A job, more than it serves to save from the pangs of hunger, is intended to bestow upon a person some title, that he should not G-d forbid, remain lacking a definition.

A person is searching for himself, requesting of all those who pass by: "perhaps you know who I am?"

One lifts his eyes to his fellow men hoping that someone will place him somewhere.

One will not find a business today, large or small, which does not have at least as many positions as it does employees. If ten laborers are found working around the production line, it is reasonable to assume that there are twelve different job titles amongst them. Not to mention the managerial positions where one could discover three of four titles on the business card of one single person.

Indeed, the managers, investors and owners know well how to squeeze out the best performance from each

individual.

An old army saying tells that "a soldier without a uniform is not a soldier". In truth it is hard to understand what's so important about a unified outfit, a soldier seemingly is more in need of muscles, fitness and survival instincts. Clothing? What place do garments have with a fighter?

This policy does not end on the doorstep of prestigious professions. Today, even cleaners are defined within the pyramid of authority – Head of sanitation, second in charge, kitchen manager, department manager etc. Every task is accompanied by its label, each job has its name and each person carries his title, and sometimes more than one. This procedure does not only serve to ensure that the world functions in an orderly fashion but also brings order to a person himself, to define his place in it all. It is from this place that a person draws his strength and ability to function; if a person has a place, then he also possesses ability.

A person wonders about in Hashem's world, his spirit bewildered and his mind even more so. His thoughts are filled with the things that necessity demands to be completed and taken care of. He trudges along with droopy shoulders and his hands lagging at his sides – his entire being is screaming: "where am I in this world?" The opportunities pass right by him yet he doesn't bother to reach out for them, to catch a ride on one of them. He has neither the strength nor the sense; he doesn't know where to start.

In fact, perhaps it is worthwhile to start

from the very beginning...

As mentioned, the world in which we find ourselves is Hashem's world and He created it *lichvo'do* (for his glory/honor). This means that the purpose of the world is that Hashem's name be elevated, exalted and glorified through every part of mineral, vegetable, animal and human life forms. The entire universe throws itself at the feet of a Jew, beseeching and imploring that he bring it to its ultimate perfection. The Jew – is the only one out of infinite creations who is able to unify all that takes place here with the Creator, blessed be He. If his actions will cause the world to reveal Hashem's glory, at that moment the entire creation becomes a *Beis Hamikdash* – a place for Hashem.

This goal is tremendously vast; it spans the expanses of time, from the sin of Adam HaRishon until the summation of the six thousand years. All the creations and formations are active partners in this assignment. However, only Am Yisroel are able to cause all of these creations to effect something meaningful for the sake of this purpose.

Every Jew has a mission, even many of them. Sometimes he stands up to the task, and sometimes not entirely. Success and failure are measured in proportion. For example, yesterday a certain portion of what I did was for the ultimate purpose, the other parts

were spent sunken in my own selfness. Today I merited investing more of myself in the true goal, how wonderful!

If each Jew has his own personal mission, then Klal Yisroel as a whole are constantly fulfilling one long and complex mission. This mission we received at Mattan Torah (the giving of the Torah). At that awesome and monumental event, the mission descended in its entirety and was subdivided into fine details, each soul receiving its unique part.

The journeys of Am Yisroel in the desert were a synopsis of the thousands of journeys that they would endure in the future. Each Jew has his own journey and all of them are included in those forty two ancient journeys. This week we began the Chumash of Bamidbar, in it will unfold all that happened to us during those journeys, mainly the failures. In the next few weeks we will hear about Korach, the spies and the *mey merivah* (waters of strife); we will see time and again the mission slipping out from our fingers and the journey in the desert winding itself around in circles - as if the path we are traveling does not lead anywhere.

Sometimes our personal route also seems dizzying. A person walks along his life's path asking 'am I fulfilling any mission at all...' This mission is something frighteningly evasive, one moment you felt it clearly in your hands, and the next, it's gone. In general, the natural conclusion is – that's it, I'm out, maybe I'll wait for the next round...

Therefore, at the threshold to Chumash Bamidbar the Torah hands us something very important – a counting. Yes, before we enter the battle field we take a full census. That census, that took place in the desert, gathered all the souls into the realm of holiness. A number means that you are a part of a whole - you are not just a 'lone wolf', you are a piece in a gigantic puzzle. The whole brings completion to the part and the part brings completion to the whole. The counting bestows upon each person his

unique place - you have something that no one else has and with this you are constantly a part of something enormous that is continuously functioning, something that is conquering and succeeding. If you dozed off for a moment or slept for an entire year, you still have not been discharged from the system. Klal Yisroel is constantly functioning, the mission is not conditional, it is a reality and you are a part of it.

This mission, with all its compartments and sections, carved in the desert sand a meaningful picture. Am Yisroel took on the form of the heavenly legions. The banners (*degallim*) and the camps that were arranged with such precision were an expression of a divine form. So it is taught in the Holy Books, that the order of the *degallim* and the camps mirrored the order of the camps of the angels. When Klal Yisroel camp or walk in the desert in a G-dly formation then the glory of Hashem is openly revealed upon them.

Generally, when we walk through the deserts of life, the sands cover over the beauty of the mission; it is not always that we have the opportunity to see clearly the heavenly Chariot of which we are a part. This is what happens to us on a regular afternoon when suddenly the desert closes in on us, isolates us and leaves us behind. It is then that it seems as if nothing ever was and that nothing will ever be. I was never anything special and I never will be.

Specifically because of this, the Sefer of Bamidbar opens with Parshas Naso. The opening words of the Pasha: "Naso es rosh" literally mean "lift the head" – this is exactly what we need. In order to gasp a fresh breath of air we must lift our heads, become uplifted and see the journey from a bird's eye view. It is through being counted that we can take flight. The number makes us a part of the whole and nevertheless leaves us our uniqueness as a part. When the soul receives the title that is unique to it, its garment and its vessel for the light, then it is able to lift its head and see the vision

of The Chariot. It can then understand that truthfully it is a part of Hashem's legions. It is a vehicle for the revelation of Hashem in the world.

This is the power of the counting. It can infuse the power of the whole into the part. The uniforms, for example, bestow upon a single soldier the awesome strength of an entire army - with regular clothes he is just another person. The uniform transforms him into a piece of an army. For this reason everyone is so obsessed with titles. If someone asks you who you are, tell them with certainty what your task is. This is who I am, this is me.

We have come down from Har Sinai, from the sanctity of Shavu'os. Each person holds in his hands a Torah, signed and sealed. Small people look at the wrapped gift in their hands with confusion and bewilderment: 'what is inside this gift. Is it possible that something meaningful will take place with me?'

The scorching summer that follows the sixth of Sivan is the place. It is here that our mission will take place. In this arena the wrapped gift will materialize into a reality, our own personal and unique mission is intertwined with the unique part of the Torah that we received at Har Sinai. This mission is our place in the heavenly Chariot. Through this part Hashem will be revealed this coming year.

From here forth there is no room for confusion or despair. The Torah is already in our hands; our part in the perpetual system will not be changed no matter what. Whether we want or not, we are here, on the inside. Each one of us has an exact place and number. The wheels of the Chariot of the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) have begun to turn and we are already in the heat of the mission, at the very moment that we are reading these lines and right now we are wanted here. Onwards...

לרפואת אליהו חיה בת שרה פרידה	לרפואת יהודית בת שלמה ליאורה
לרפואת חסה פרידה בת רבקה	לרפואת ישעיה שולם בן מלכה ניסל
לרפואת חנה בת אפרת	לרפואת רבקה בת ראסה

Question:

I am worried that the upcoming holiday of Shavuos won't bring me any renewal in my Avodas Hashem.

Answer:

We have to fortify ourselves with a strong conviction that Hashem is certainly going to give each individual the Torah anew, no matter who he is.

Just as we all know and clearly understand the importance of trusting in Hashem when it comes to earning a livelihood etc., all the more so do we have to work on trusting Him in our Avodas Hashem and performance of Mitzvos. While performing Mitzvos we should put effort into concentrating on thoughts of 'Hashem is looking at me and for sure takes enjoyment from my Avodah, and certainly wants to give me from the holiness of this Mitzvah.'

The basic fundamental of our Yiddishkeit is that Hashem watches over every individual in the world with Divine Providence, even on the other nations, and always wants to give everyone only good. But Hashem for the most part looks out to see who's looking back at Him.

Of course, we are always being tested with doubts such as whether Hashem can really help me, if there is a way out of my situation, etc. But the more a person comes closer to Hashem, to concentrate on thinking only about Him and to believe that Hashem wants to help him, all the more does Divine Providence become revealed and Hashem's gifts come much quicker.

We have to reinforce ourselves with the same trust in Him when it comes to Torah and Mitzvos. Hashem is really looking at every Mitzvah and good action which we do. Every Mitzvah contains a special spiritual light which descends on the person performing the Mitzvah. But the Divine Providence is only truly revealed when a person does his part and looks back at Hashem, to see how Hashem is looking at his actions.

The more a person while performing

Mitzvos, concentrates his thoughts on his belief that Hashem is indeed looking at him now, and totally trusts that wonderful things are going on in Heaven as a result of his Mitzvah, as all the holy sefarim discuss regarding that Mitzvah, so too he will really receive a new flow of holiness which will descend through that Mitzvah.

This is the essence of keeping the Torah - to renew our faith and trust in Hashem through every Mitzvah which we perform. That being the case, all this applies even more when it comes to the Yom Tov of the giving of the Torah. Now is the time to narrow our mind's eye to think many thoughts about our trust and faith that "I'm for sure going to receive the Torah anew, Hashem is for sure looking out for me with unimaginable love, and is really hoping to give me the Torah."

You will probably feel doubtful about this, but be strong, at least as much as you need to be strong in your trust in Him when it comes to your livelihood.

This is why on Shavuos night we are careful with our speech. Now is the time to concentrate our thoughts on longing and desiring, joy and dancing, from a feeling of absolute security that we are for sure going to receive the Torah anew.

(Based on Likutei Moharan I 76, LKH Masa U'Matan 4)

Question:

I didn't concentrate so well by the counting of the Omer, and I don't feel that I'm prepared for receiving the Torah anew.

Answer:

It's actually very good to feel unfit to receive the Torah. That in itself is the best preparation - to approach *Kabbolas HaTorah* with humbleness, just like Mount Sinai who was sure that it wasn't fitting for the Torah to be revealed upon. But at the same time we should rely on Hashem's great mercy which is revealed especially on Shavuos. He for sure wants to give you the Torah. Not only is He giving you the Torah with His great compassion, but also He really wants you to agree to renew yourself and forget the past and to receive

the Torah.

This precisely is the preparation for Shavuos, to approach the Torah anew, with the same freshness as a gentile who comes to convert who forgets his entire past and makes a new start today.

We therefore stay awake Shavuos night and recite the *Tikkun* brought by the Ariza"l, that by reciting the 24 books of Tanach we beautify the Shechinah with the "24 decorations of the bride". The Shechinah is beautified primarily through *Baalei Teshuvah* and converts, meaning those people who shake off their past and start coming close to Hashem anew, just like *Baalei Teshuvah* and converts (*Likutei Moharan I 62*). This is why in the *Tikkun* we say only the first couple of verses of each book, to allude that we want to start again many times (*Likutei Halachos Kriyas HaTorah 6*).

Around a half an hour before daybreak we immerse ourselves for the sake of "conversion" and renewal in a Mikvah whose holiness is rooted in the fiftieth gate of holiness. Afterwards we go to daven a new prayer just like a convert who is praying for the first time in his life. It's not for nothing that it's such a battle not to doze off during this special and holy Tefilah, since all beginnings are difficult. We should at least rejoice in our prayers just like a convert who is happy just to be able to say the words.

Afterwards we read *Megilas Ruth*, who was at the head of all converts and from whom we learn all the Halachos of *Geirim*. We thereby find encouragement by seeing how through her new start came out Dovid and Moshiach. (*Likutei Halachos Geirim 3*)

With this in mind we approach the Kedushas "Kesser" recited by Mussaf on Shavuos. This is a time when we become totally unified with Hashem and accept upon ourselves the resolution that from now on we only want Hashem, and we will never leave Him, even if we fall afterwards we won't give up, we'll always start new.

[Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Chapter 120:11]

“On Shavuos we do not daven before the stars come out since the verse states that we shall have seven full weeks of counting.”

Reb Nosson, zt”l, writes that the seven weeks of sefira correspond to the seven main middos: *Chessed, Gevurah, Tiferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchus*. Each of these corresponds to a different day of the week: Sunday to Chessed, Monday to Gevurah, and so on. Hashem’s providence is drawn upon us through our observance of the Torah’s mitzvos. This special providence is renewed each year during the time of Matan Torah. We wait for the seven weeks to be absolutely complete, since Hashem’s *hashgachah pratit* must be drawn down onto the cycle of seven in its entirety on Shavuos. It is all the more important to be careful about this halachah when we consider how important it is that during the last week Malchus, which can only be rectified by drawing all the other middos into balanced action in this world, achieves completion (*Likutei Halachos, Shavuos 1:7*).



Only Dairy on Shavuos?

Chazal learned from the verse, “And you shall rejoice on your festival,” that one discharges his obligation of simchas Yom Tov by eating from the flesh of all sorts of offerings. Mar in Pesachim 109, states that there is no rejoicing without the enjoyment of meat, and that one can eat the meat of any dedicated offering for this.

Someone once asked Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt”l, “If one doesn’t eat meat on Yom Tov, has he neglected the mitzvah of ‘samachta b’chagecha?’”

The Gadol answered, “Nowadays, one who doesn’t eat meat on Yom Tov isn’t entirely neglecting the mitzvah of simchas Yom Tov since he anyway cannot eat from the meat of the shelamim with which the Jewish people used to discharge their obligation when the Beis HaMikdash still stood.

However, a person who abstains has not done the mitzvah b’hidur, in a really befitting fashion.”

Someone once asked a similar question to Rav Moshe Halberstam, zt”l. “Is it an absolute duty to eat meat on Yom Tov?”

The Posek responded, “Many halachic authorities like the Rambam, the Bach, and the Magen Avrohom, zt”l, hold that it is. But even those who disagree maintain that there is nevertheless a mitzvah to eat meat nowadays even in the absence of a chiyuv.”

Although the Shaagas Aryeh, zt”l, wrote that one can fulfill this mitzvah by eating anything that one enjoys, the Divrei Chaim of Tszanz, zt”l, rejected this out of hand. “His words are not necessarily true. One must eat meat!”

For this reason, the Darkei Teshuva, zt”l, held that one may not eat exclusively dairy on Shavuos. “We find that the Maharshal, zt”l, wrote that it is obvious that one must eat meat too since it is impossible to feel truly satisfied and content without eating meat at the meal. I saw by my teachers that on Shavuos by day they would eat dairy at Kiddush and then wash their mouths out and wait a while before they continued to eat the meat meal. This is the proper way to celebrate Shavuos!”

[Note: They are discussing a person who enjoys eating meat but prefers to eat only dairy or Pareve for whatever reason. If one would not enjoy eating the meat then doing so despite this is a violation of the mitzvah to enjoy Yom Tov.]



The Purifying Waters

Immersion in the Mikveh Shavuos night is perhaps the highest tevilah of the entire year. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, zt”l, writes that through this immersion one accesses the 50th gate of purity. Rav Nosson of Breslov, zt”l, explains that attaining the 50th gate of purity enables one to yearn for Hashem from any spiritual level, even the most distant.

When the Sha’arei Deah, zt”l, was passing through Frankfurt, he naturally met with the famous Rav Shimshon Rapael Hirsch, zt”l. During his visit, Rav Hirsch asked him a deep question which he recorded for posterity.

“When exactly does the mikveh confer taharah? Is it from when the one immersing is in the water, or when he leaves the water?”

When discussing this question, Rav Marzbach, zt”l, Rav of Darmstadt, recounted, “This surprised me very much. Anyone acquainted with Rav Hirsch’s approach towards Torah study knows that theoretical halachic investigations such as when tevilah actually takes effect were not his way. He immediately had a hunch that the purpose of Rav Hirsch’s inquiry was not to find out the answer for the sake of theory alone, but as part of his research for his monumental work on the meaning behind the mitzvos.”

Sure enough, after some checking, Rav Marzbach found that at the time that Rav Hirsch asked the question, he was working on the meaning behind the purifying powers of the mikveh for his epic Hovev. The Rav explained, “What Rav Hirsch wrote includes two ways to understand this phenomenon. We can understand that entering the mikveh represents removing oneself from all ties to impurity. The person enters the world of renewal and removes the impurity by rejoining his source. He is submerged in water that was not drawn by man and is thus reborn.

“There is another way to understand this, however. It is possible to say that his leaving the state of self-nullification experienced in the water to a new life is what purifies. The Rav concluded, “It is more than likely that Rav Hirsch’s language includes both of these considerations, because either can be true. This was his way in his writings. To work out the halachah and explain the significance of the subject in accordance with what man’s understanding can grasp.”