

Parashas
Bamidbar

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י"ז ע"י
קהילת שבתי בבית ד'
בנשיאות מורנו ורבנו הרה"צ
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רבינוביץ שליט"א

טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

במעלת ההליכה בדרך האבות

The virtue of going in the ways of the fathers

טיב המערכת

תכלית קבלת התורה

The purpose of receiving the Torah

It is told of a certain chassid who traveled to his Rebbe. When he returned home, his friends asked him: "What did you learn from your Rebbe?" He answered them: "Before I was with my Rebbe, I thought that due to the extent of my *avodah* and Torah study, and the reward I deserved, Hashem did not have enough World to Come to give me. But now, having discovered how far I am from fulfilling my obligation to Him, I now give thanks that the ceiling doesn't fall on me."

It is written in the holy *seforim* that the ultimate purpose of receiving the Torah is fear of Heaven. If a person lacks fear of Heaven, then he misses the goal. And in order to understand what fear of Heaven is, we will bring a story about the Rav of Krakow, Rebbe Shimon Sofer, the son of the Chasam Sofer. Once he participated in a welcoming ceremony for the king on behalf of the community. The Rav was honored with reading a letter of blessing to the king from the members of the community. When he took the letter to read it, a great fear fell upon him and the letter slipped from his hands. The king noticed this and said that he is a man of G-d, and through him the name of Heaven was sanctified. When he returned home, he wept greatly and fasted. His family members thought, *chas v'shalom*, that some mishap had occurred and the meeting had not succeeded. But he reassured them that the meeting had achieved its purpose. However, he made a personal accounting: If I was so afraid of a flesh-and-blood king, who is here today and in the grave tomorrow, to the point that the paper fell from my hands, then what about the fact that three times every day I stand before the King of kings, HaKadosh Baruch Hu—and never has the siddur fallen from my hands out of fear. For this, I weep.

We are now standing to receive the Torah, as it is brought in the holy *seforim* that every year, on the festival of Shavuos, HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives us the Torah anew. And we must contemplate the goal. For example, when a person buys a car, he knows the purpose is to be able to travel from place to place. So what is the goal of receiving the Torah? After all, a person could study his entire life and still not know the purpose of his learning. And the Tanna already said in Pirkei Avos (3:9): "Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom endures." Therefore, we must engage with *seforim* of awe and study more and more—and above all, to contemplate the greatness of the Creator Yisbarach, as the Rema wrote: "I place Hashem before me always—this is a great principle of the Torah and among the virtues of the righteous who walk before G-d."

- Tiv HaMoadim - Shavuos

נשא אֶת ראשׁ בְּנֵי קֵהָת מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי לֵוִי לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם: ד, ב
Take a census of the sons of Kehas from among the sons of Levi, according to their families, according to their fathers' house. (4:2)

Behold, a person must know that, for the most part, the *yetzer* does not incite a person to sin outright. It knows well that even if a person greatly desires a transgression, he will not sin, *chalilah*, brazenly and with contempt, for every Jew believes that HaKadosh Baruch Hu watches and observes his deeds, and he fears to rebel against Him. Therefore, the *yetzer's* strategy is to cloak the sin in shades of permissibility, and even in appearances of mitzvah. In such a case, it becomes very difficult for a person to distinguish between good and evil, for he greatly desires that which is forbidden, and according to his *yetzer*, by refraining from it he is actually forgoing a mitzvah... It is only through this tactic that the *yetzer* succeeds in trapping a person in its snare.

And what is the advice against this? Adhere to all the customs of one's forefathers and in their ways of conduct—even if these customs are not obligatory according to the letter of the law, and even if he finds it difficult to understand their purpose and meaning.

For anyone who holds fast to this principle—that he does not veer from the ways of his ancestors—will have the strength to stand against the temptations of the *yetzer* and say to it: even if you are right, I have received a tradition not to do things I did not see practiced by my forefathers. And since I did not see my forefathers engage in this "mitzvah," I too see fit to refuse it.

However, at times, the *yetzer* finds a solution even for this. It entices a person from the outset not to adopt this principle for himself, and not to be so meticulous in following the ways of his ancestors—especially when it comes only to customs that are not obligatory. If a person allows himself to be persuaded in this, he will no longer have an answer when the *yetzer* later presents him with "justifications" for sins.

With this tactic, the *yetzer* appears especially to people of spirit—wise individuals who are attached to the Torah and delve deeply into understanding all the details of the laws and their reasons. And this is for two reasons. The first reason is that it knows it can find an opening with them. They differ from the simple folk, whose minds are not so expansive and who rely with closed eyes on the ways of their forefathers. Not so the *chachmei HaTorah*, who are capable of understanding the reason behind every single law, and who in practice also immerse themselves in understanding every matter. Therefore, it is easier to tempt them into thinking there is no reason to uphold all practices that are not obligatory, so long as their reasons are unclear. Why should a person do something when he does not know why he is doing it? And the mere fact that his ancestors practiced it is, in his view, not a sufficient reason to uphold it. He argues that perhaps they practiced it only due to some specific circumstance that compelled them at the time.

The second reason the *yetzer* desires that these individuals belittle the customs of their ancestors is that the gain from their downfall is many times greater. For once *talmudei chachamim* belittle the customs of their forefathers, they serve as

an example for others to follow in their ways, and they too will no longer see any value in observing ancestral customs. And not only will they come to belittle customs, but even obligatory mitzvos, for as stated, guarding the customs serves as a safeguard for observing all the mitzvos. In the absence of this safeguard, the *yetzer* will invent justifications for every sin and wrongdoing.

Now, even the wise man will initially respond to his *yetzer* that it is not worthwhile to belittle customs, for he wishes to act with simplicity in following the customs of his ancestors, so that these will serve as a safeguard for the rest of the Torah's laws. [As mentioned, through this, they will not succeed in distorting his judgment even regarding the fundamentals of Torah.] However, the *yetzer* will respond that he has no need for such a safeguard, for he is a great thinker and deeply knowledgeable in all the fine details of the Torah, and no one will succeed in swaying or distorting his understanding.

But the truth of the matter is there is no truth in the *yetzer's* claim, for at the moment of trial, it will certainly produce many solutions and justifications—even for those precise halachic details the *Talmid chacham* knows thoroughly...

What emerges from all of this is that *talmidei chachamim* require even greater assistance from Heaven not to be swayed by the *yetzer* from the path of their forefathers, through the temptation that they have no need for it.

This matter is hinted at by the Torah in the *posukim* that speak of Sheivet Levi. For when counting each tribe, the Torah found it necessary to emphasize that their count was “by their families, according to their fathers’ houses.”

And this hints to the fact that the entire tribe was included in the count because they all served their Creator in the same way they had received from their ancestors. For every tribe had its own unique path in *avodas Hashem*, as taught by the Ari HaKadosh, and since all members of the tribe agreed to uphold the traditional path received by them, they were therefore worthy of being counted as a distinct group, to declare: this number of souls are united in serving Hashem according to their path.

For this reason, the Torah needed to say “by their families according to their fathers’ houses” only once per tribe, as we indeed see with all the other tribes. However, when it comes to the census of the tribe of Levi—the most sanctified tribe in Israel—we find that the Torah repeats these words for each individual family within the tribe. In the verse before us, regarding the sons of Kehas, the *posuk* says: “Take a census of the sons of Kehas... by their families, according to

their fathers’ houses.” And at the beginning of Parashas *Naso* (4:22), when speaking of the census of the Gershonite family, it again says, “according to their fathers’ houses, by their families.” Later in the same chapter (4:29), when it speaks of the sons of Merari, it once again states, “by their families, according to their fathers’ houses,” etc.

This is nothing other than the Torah wishing to speak in praise of the tribe of Levi. For although they were *bonei Torah* (people of Torah), and the *yetzer* that entices toward belittling the traditions of one’s forefathers is most present among them, nonetheless they overcame this and forced themselves to uphold the ways of their ancestors. The Torah also intended that every *talmid chacham*, who is like the “tribe of Levi,” should learn from them how to nullify his own opinion in favor of the opinion of his forebears and believe that his understanding is not broad enough to fully grasp the reason behind every custom. He must rely on the wisdom of his earlier ancestors, who perceived and understood that this was the will of the Creator, Baruch Hu.

And since this parasha is usually read on the Shabbos before the *chag* of Shavuos, let us say something connected both to the *chag* and to the matter of preserving our customs.

It is fitting to pay attention to a wondrous fact: all the *chagim* obligate us in specific mitzvos. On *Pesach*, we are commanded regarding the eating of matzah and the prohibition of chametz, as well as all the mitzvos of the

Seder night. On *Sukkos*, we are commanded in the mitzvos of the sukkah and the four species [*arbah minim*]. On *Rosh Hashanah*, the mitzvah is the sounding of the shofar. On *Yom Kippur*, we are commanded with five forms of affliction. Even on *Chanukah* and *Purim*, which are only of rabbinic origin, Chazal instituted commandments: lighting the Chanukah candles, and the four mitzvos of Purim.

But *Shavuos* and *Shemini Atzeres* are different. Besides the general commandment of refraining from labor, which applies to all *chagim*, there is no specific commandment unique to those days.

On the other hand, these two holidays are distinguished by the many customs associated with them. On *Shavuos*, we stay awake the entire night and recite *Tikkun Leil Shavuos*. We read *Sefer Rus* [the Book of Ruth], eat dairy foods, and spread greenery in shuls and homes. Likewise, *Shemini Atzeres* is filled with many customs: we do the *hakafos* (dancing with the Torah), we rejoice with the Torah, we honor each member of the congregation with an aliyah to the Torah, even the children are called up. There is the special *aliyah* of “Kol HaNe’arim” (All the Children), and the reading of *Bereishis* under a *chuppah* of *tallisos*. Each of these customs has its reasons, but they are customs only—not halachic obligations. And although some are mentioned in the *poskim*, they are only mentioned in the framework of custom, for they are ancient traditions from

previous generations. Therefore, they are brought in their writings, but they are not even on the level of binding law from the Talmud.

And this is puzzling. Why should these holidays, in which we celebrate the giving and completion of the Torah, be precisely the ones that do not include any Torah-mandated obligation?

It occurred to me to suggest a beautiful reason for this: it is to teach us that the customs of Israel [*minhagei Yisrael*] are actual Torah. Therefore, specifically on these holidays in which we rejoice with the holy Torah, we were given only customs—so that we may understand that these too are like fundamental elements of Torah.

The "Essence" of Our Lives

by the tzaddik and mekubal Hagaon Harav
Gamliel Hakohen Rabinovitch, shlita

'The salvation of Hashem'

My son was hospitalized until the 11th of Nissan, and when we were discharged, I was in a state where I did not have even half a prutah in honor of the Yom Tov of Pesach, and I had no idea how I would begin the holiday. If I were to stretch out my hand in synagogues, it would take me two weeks to reach the amount required for the holiday expenses.

I hitched a ride from Beit Shemesh to my hometown, Beitar Illit. The vehicle was luxurious and comfortable, with a gracious and pleasant-mannered driver. Toward the end of the ride, the driver turned to me and said: "You look very troubled. Do you have what you need for Pesach?" I told him that I had just been discharged from the hospital with my son and wife, and I had not yet begun, and I had no idea where to even start...

"How much do you need for the holiday?" "Six thousand would be enough for me!" The driver stopped at the place where I had asked to be dropped off, pulled out an envelope from under the seat, counted out fifteen hundred dollars, and handed it to me with a smile and a warm blessing of "A kosher and happy Pesach!" [*Chag kasher v'sameach!*]

I did not know whether I was daydreaming or if the miracle was truly happening to me. With that money, I had a *chag kasher v'sameach*, and to this day—many years have passed since then—I remember this story and say to myself every time I am in need: "He who performed a miracle for you then will bring you salvations today as well!" It was as if Eliyahu HaNavi himself had come!

ה.ה.

'כהרף עין'

'Like the blink of an eye'

During the lunch break, I ran home to pick something up and hurried to return to the yeshiva. The bus was slightly delayed, and by the time it arrived, it was packed with girls who had finished their studies, to the point that from both the front and the back I had no way to board without becoming entangled among the girls. I understood that despite the delay, I would not be able to push myself into such a bus.

I was disappointed, but a moment later I saw another bus arriving at the station. This bus had more space. I came to board it, but then a wave of girls from the first, crowded bus got off and flowed into the second bus. Once again, I could not board, and then I thought: if the first bus has emptied, I will run back to it.

As soon as I got back to the first bus, the driver closed the doors and refused to let me on. He drove off, and the second one followed, and so I remained standing at the station, anxious and with no solution for how to return to the yeshiva in time for the *shiur*. I lifted my eyes to Hashem and said: "I understand that everything is for the good, but please arrange a way for me to reach the yeshiva on time."

A few moments passed, and an empty bus appeared at the station. It drove straight to the yeshiva, because at the other stations the first two buses had already picked up the passengers, and I merited to arrive on time, Baruch Hashem!!!

ב.ה.

***In the Wilderness of Sinai –
Through the Middah of Humility!***

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד (א:א)

And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting (1:1).

The Midrash at the opening of our parashah (Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7) expounds:

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. Why in the wilderness of Sinai? From here, Chazal taught: The Torah was given with three things—fire, water, and wilderness. How do we know about the wilderness? And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. Anyone who does not make themselves like a wilderness, open to all and unclaimed, cannot acquire wisdom and Torah. Therefore, it is said, in the wilderness of Sinai."

As we approach the festival of Shavuot, our holy Torah teaches us the *middah* of humility, an essential condition for receiving the Torah. Anyone who does not make themselves "like an unclaimed wilderness" cannot acquire Torah or wisdom at all.

Those who delve into the hints in the Torah discussed the names of the leaders mentioned in our portion. One is called (*Bamidbar* 1:12) אַחִיעֶזֶר - אַחִיעֶזֶר בֶּן עֲמִישַׁדַּי - *Achiezer, son of Ammishaddai*, and the other (1:15) אַחִירַע בֶּן עֵינָן - *Achirah son of Enan*.

This hints at the following: If one is an *Achiezer* (אַחִיעֶזֶר)—a brother (אָח) who offers help and support to his fellow Jews—then the result (בֶּן) will be *Ammishaddai*, the *Shechinah* will dwell among the people of Yisrael.

However, if one is an *Achira*—a wicked (רַע) brother who is arrogant and does not assist his fellow Jews—the result (בֶּן) will be *Enan*, a cloud (עֲנַן) that separates Yisrael from their Father in Heaven, bringing darkness to the world.

Let us, therefore, strengthen ourselves in the proper and upright *middah* of humility—a humility that brings glory to its practitioners and earns them respect from others. This humility fosters good and refined character traits and love for Yisrael, Amen.

I have a vivid childhood memory of Rav David's humility and dedication. One day, a question arose in our home regarding the *kashrus* of a chicken. In those days, before the advent of modern abattoirs, all aspects of poultry preparation—from slaughtering and inspection to salting and koshering—had to be done personally. My father, a great *talmid chacham*, sent me with the chicken to Rav David to seek his ruling.

When I arrived, Rav David carefully examined the chicken from all angles. Then, turning to me warmly, he said:

"My dear child, I myself cannot rule on this question. Let us go together to the great Rav Yisrael Yitzchak Reisman, *zt"l*, a *dayan* in the Edah Hachareidis and rav of the Batei Warsaw neighborhood, to hear what he has to say."

Before leaving, Rav David paused and said, "Perhaps the Shulchan Aruch

is stored on a high shelf in the *dayan's* house, and since he is elderly, it would not be proper to trouble him to climb for it." He took the Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah, volume 1 from his own home, held it in one hand, took my hand with the other while I carried the chicken, and set off together.

We walked through Yerushalayim's ancient, sacred streets until we arrived at Rav Reisman's home. There, the two Torah giants deliberated over the halachic intricacies with mutual love and profound respect.

At one point, a question arose, requiring clarification from the *shochet*. I heard Rav David say to Rav Reisman: "It would not be proper to send the child alone to the *shochet's* house—he is still just a boy. I will inquire and return promptly with the answer so we can issue a ruling."

Rav Dovid spared no effort, making every sacrifice with devotion and care, even for the halachic question of a young child. He did not consider his honor or convenience, nor did it occur to him to delegate the task to someone else or to summon the *shochet* to his home. Instead, he personally undertook every effort without hesitation or pretense.

Such was the humility and greatness of Rav David Jungreis, the embodiment of embodied devotion, *chesed*, and unparalleled self-effacement.

I stood on the side, embarrassed and full of shame. How much longer could we trouble the Rav over our chicken? But, by great fortune, just as Rav David was about to leave for the *shochet's* house, my father *zt"l*, appeared. Concerned about how long I had been gone and why I had not yet returned with the chicken, he had come to look for me at Rav David's home. Upon arriving, the *rebbeztin* informed him that the Rav had left with the child to go to the Batei Warsaw neighborhood to Rav Yisrael Yitzchak's home. Thus, guided by Heaven, my father arrived just as Rav David stood ready to accompany me to the *shochet's* house.

Naturally, my father immediately grasped the situation and resolved everything in the most proper way, sparing the esteemed *rabbanim* further inconvenience.

Imagine this scene: an important

rav of the kehillah, an outstanding and extraordinary gaon, personally dedicating two full hours of his time to address the question of a young child—and also refusing to rely solely on his own vast and holy knowledge to render a decision.

This is the greatness of humility! As the holy Zohar (*Shelach*; 3:168) testifies: "Blessed is the one who makes themselves small in this world, for they will be great and exalted in the World to Come. Thus the head of the *mesivta* opened the discussion: He who is small (in his own eyes) is truly great, and he who is great (in his own eyes) is truly small."

Rav Eliyahu Rotte *zt"l*, the devoted *talmid* of the holy Rav Shlomo of Zvhil *zt"l*, shared numerous stories illustrating the unparalleled humility and self-negation of his revered teacher. Rav Shlomo regarded himself as utterly insignificant, like a barren wilderness open to all, nullified in his own eyes to the point of absolute nothingness—a degree of humility almost unimaginable.

One Friday afternoon, Rav Eliyahu accompanied Rav Shlomo to the mikveh. The Rav found a modest corner to place his belongings. Meanwhile, another man entered the mikveh, visibly agitated, angry, and bitter, muttering complaints. Noticing Rav Shlomo, the man decided to vent his frustrations directly at the Rav. He began shouting at Rav Shlomo, accusing him of various matters entirely unrelated to him. Rav Shlomo, true to his nature, remained silent and composed, not responding in the slightest.

When the man saw that his yelling had no effect, he raised his voice even further, hurling insults and harsh accusations at Rav Shlomo in front of all present. He berated him relentlessly for a long time, publicly humiliating him with ridicule and vulgar names.

Rav Shlomo stood quietly, his profound humility preventing him from reacting. It seemed he regarded the harsh words as directed at someone else entirely, feeling no personal insult or pain.

After leaving, Rav Shlomo turned to Rav Eliyahu with a request: "Would you please go to the home of so and so—a wealthy and capable man—and ask him

for a substantial loan? I urgently need funds before Shabbos."

Rav Eliyahu quickly fulfilled the Rav's request, approaching the man who, knowing Rav Shlomo's character, immediately provided the full sum. Returning with the money, Rav Eliyahu was astonished when Rav Shlomo instructed: "Now, take the entire amount and give it as a gift to the man who insulted me earlier at the mikveh."

Rav Eliyahu stood in disbelief, questioning the Rav with great wonder: "How far can one go in breaking their character traits? Is it possible that because he insulted and berated you, he deserves such a generous gift? And besides, the Rav doesn't even have the means to repay this loan!"

Rav Shlomo, smiling, explained: "You must understand. When a Jew comes to the mikveh on a Friday and behaves this way, pouring out such bitterness and anger, it's clear that he doesn't have what he needs for Shabbos. If his Shabbos preparations were complete, he wouldn't have acted like this."

Reflect upon the depth of Rav Shlomo's humility and how far he delved into the soul of another Jew to understand their struggles. Not once did he consider the insult directed at him. Instead, he sought to uncover what this person was lacking and sought to rectify it.

I heard of the Rebbe, Rav Yankele of Pshevorsk–Antwerp, *zt"l*, that when he was appointed as Rav and leader of the community after the passing of his holy father-in-law, Rav Itzikel, *zt"l*, it was the night of *Rosh Chodesh*. After concluding *Maariv*, he approached the *bimah*, knocked on it, and announced:

"The new Rav forgot to say Yaaleh Veyavo in the Shemoneh Esrei! Whoever knows the halachah and how I should proceed, please come forward and teach me devar Hashem—the halachah."

He was renowned for his great humility. During his father-in-law's lifetime, he conducted himself with utmost lowliness, serving as the *gabbai* and *shamash* of the *shul*. Due to his profound humility, he continued in this role even after being appointed as rav.

Possibly, his holy intention was also to demonstrate and teach that even a great rav and leader in Yisrael can make mistakes and must consult on matters of halachah—and that there is no shame in asking for guidance in *daas Torah*.