

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Bamidbar

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A Taste of Torah

Capture The Flag

by Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

Every country has its own flag. No two flags are the same, each with its own design, related to and symbolizing its specific country.

One would assume that, in a spiritual sense, the idea of a flag or banner is a trivial matter, necessitated by practicality and pride. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

In this week's Torah portion, Hashem speaks to Moshe and Aharon, commanding that the Bnai Yisrael should encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignia of his father's household.

Apparently, the Torah considers a banner an important feature. Furthermore, the Medrash relates the background of this commandment. When Hashem revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai, many thousands of angels descended with Him, all arranged by flags and banners. When the Jews saw this, they had an intense desire to have their own banners, like the angels. Hashem commanded Moshe that the Jewish People fulfill their desire.

Obviously this needs explanation. What is the meaning that the angels had flags, and what is the secret of this great desire and longing of the Jewish nation to have their own flags?

The Shem Mishmuel (Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain; 1855 -1926) explains that the most important time for a flag is in times of war. If anyone from the camp strays away from his group, he can find his way back if he sees his banner. A flag has the ability to keep a person connected to his group even when he is far away.

The same is true in spiritual matters. When the Medrash says that the angels had flags, the implication is that they are constantly connected to Hashem wherever they were. Even when sent on a mission, they didn't move one iota away from Hashem.

When the Jews saw this, they, too, had an intense desire to have a flag, that they, too, should be able to remain constantly connected to Hashem, even when they would be involved in physical matters. The banner that they wanted was that even when not in shul or the *bais medrash*, they should still belong to their Camp. Even when at work or involved in mundane things, they would be connected to G-d.

And Hashem granted them their request. The tribes were each given banners, to ensure and enable that there is no time when a Jew will have to be separated from his roots. Even if one has strayed, one can always find his way home.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (1892-1953) related a slightly humorous but revealing story about Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (1809-1883). When Rabbi Salanter got married, he told his wife that all matters were to be arranged on the following basis: His was to be the decisive voice in anything that had to do with "heavenly (spiritual) matters," but they would go follow her decision in anything that had to do with "worldly matters." His wife later noted with a smile that for her husband, everything without exception belonged to the category of heavenly matters, for all his worldly affairs were spiritual opportunities!

Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories for the Soul

In Your Face

A patient once called renowned psychiatrist and author Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski at two o'clock in the morning. She was beside herself after her emotionally abusive husband had berated her for being a terrible mother and wife.

Dr. Twerski cut her off. "Excuse me, but I need you to know that the scar you have running the length of your face is terribly ugly and offensive to me."

There was silence, followed by, "Dr. Twerski, I don't know what you're talking about. I don't have any scars on my face." Dr. Twerski asked, "That being the case, did my comment hurt your feelings?"

"I didn't have my feelings hurt because your comment wasn't true."

"So too," observed Dr. Twerski, "your husband's comments are as false as my comment. His words hurt you because you allow yourself to believe them."

"When working at a recovery center for alcoholics, I tell my clients, 'At first you were beat up by others, from them you learned to beat up yourself. Now stop beating yourself up; you don't deserve it. You're a good person and G-d loves you.'"

In this week's parsha, Hashem tells Moshe to count the Jewish People. Every Jew is counted because every Jew is a world unto himself and is precious in the eyes of G-d.

Kollel Happenings

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS MEMORIAL DAY

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver: At the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash and Aish Denver, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning. The study session will focus on Take the High Road: The Origins and Laws of Tefilas Haderech (Traveler's Prayer).

SFAS EMES: A PIERCING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

It is one of the most widely-studied works of our time. Sfas Emes gives us a glimpse into the infinite depths of Torah and Jewish thought. Kollel Scholar Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky is an expert in this great work, and a master in bringing its timeless lessons into daily life. Join Rabbi Karnowsky on Thursdays, 8:15-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

THE LETTERS OF THE LAW: THE MELACHOS OF SHABBOS

Rabbi Shmuel Halpern received *semicha* (ordination) from Beth Medrash Govoha in 2016 and has spent the past four years receiving *shimush* (training in practical halacha) from Rabbi Micha Cohn of Lakewood. Rabbi Halpern now shares his halachic expertise in this weekly class that will help familiarize you with the laws of Shabbos. Monday evenings 8-9 pm at the Southeast Kollel Torah Center, 4902 S. Xenia St.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What is prohibited throughout the year, but may be permissible on the holiday of Shavuot?

A: There is a custom to eat dairy products on Shavuot. Some halachic authorities throughout the ages permitted consuming the dairy even though the minimal meat-to-milk waiting period has not yet passed, as long as one is sure that no meat

remnants remain in his mouth. (See Chok Yaakov 494:11 and Mishna Berura 494:17.)

This week's question: There is a halachic concept of *bitul*, nullification of a forbidden item when it is mixed with permissible item(s). When do we not apply *bitul* and the entire mixture remains forbidden?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Noda BiYehuda, Rabbi Yechezkel Landau - Part VII

Rabbi Landau's involvement and connection with the highest levels of government manifested themselves in unique ways. Rabbi Landau composed a prayer for the recovery of Empress Maria Theresa in 1767, and eulogized her after her death in 1780. A master orator, the eulogy was so well-received that it was published in both German and Hebrew. He also composed a prayer for Emperor Leopold's coronation in 1791. During Rabbi Landau's tenure in Prague, the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment) began. This movement sought to bring Jews into the modern secular world through embracing the cultural and scientific advancements of the age. Moses Mendelssohn, often regarded as the founder of the *Haskalah*, published a translation of the Torah into High German. The work, as well as his views, were vigorously opposed by Rabbi Landau; he referred to it as "the culture that came from Berlin."

The general enlightenment of Europe posed other challenges. In 1781, Emperor Joseph II abolished the Jewish communal autonomy. He issued a number of decrees aimed at assimilating the Jews into non-Jewish society. Among these decrees was one that required

secular education to be introduced into the Jewish educational system. An enlightened Jew by the name of Naftali Hertz Wessely wrote a work titled *Divrei Shalom Ve'emes*, which encouraged the Jews to accept these reforms. Wessely advocated abandoning the traditional Jewish educational systems and creating a new one which had much greater focus on secular education. Rabbi Landau vehemently opposed Wessely's views on the matter, insisting on retaining the traditional approach to Jewish education. Nonetheless, he did not entirely ignore the laws promulgated by the government. In 1782, Rabbi Landau helped create a government-supervised Jewish school. In 1788, Emperor Joseph II became the first European ruler to enlist Jewish soldiers; it appears that Rabbi Landau lent his support to the move. The government often consulted with Rabbi Landau on matters of Jewish law that were relevant to governmental policy such as marriage and divorce and burial. Rabbi Landau's knowledge, wisdom and diplomatic skill allowed him to mollify the government in its new policies while ensuring Jewish law and traditions were upheld.