

THE HARRY H. BEREN TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Beha'aloscha

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A Taste of Torah A Step Forward or Two Steps Backward

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

This week's parsha contains a very unique feature; according to one opinion of Chazal (our Sages), it comprises three distinct *sefarim* (books) of the Torah. The first part of the book of Bamidbar, according to this opinion, ends with Bamidbar 10:34. The next two verses (10:35-36) comprise the second book, and chapter eleven begins the third book of Bamidbar. The first book describes the miraculous existence the Jews experienced in the desert, and the third book begins the downward spiral that would culminate in the Sin of the Spies. (The second book is a complex subject which is beyond the scope of this article.) What was the cause that led to this dramatic shift between books one and three? While there are many approaches to this question, I'd like to focus on an idea quoted in the name of the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760).

Leading up to the ending of "book one," Moshe invites his father-in-law Yisro to join the Jews as they travel to their destination. The commentators point out that this indicates that the Jews were on the last leg of their journey to Eretz Yisrael. They were poised to transition from a completely supernatural existence in the desert to living off the land as an agricultural society. This would be a major adjustment for the Jews. While in the desert, they had no worldly concerns to distract them from their spiritual pursuits. With manna from heaven and miraculous water from a stone, a person lived each moment with a very close feeling of Hashem's presence. Soon, however, they would have to maintain their connection to Hashem

while they plowed, planted and harvested. They could only imagine that it was a very different spiritual reality that awaited them.

To prepare them for this shift, Hashem created a barrier of sorts, making it more difficult for the Jews to feel his presence. This is indicated in the second-to-last verse of "book one" (Bamidbar 10:33), "And the Ark of Hashem traveled ahead of them." They felt that Hashem was distant, "ahead of them," and not quite in their midst. The purpose of this (apparent) distance was to teach the Jews how to step forward and close the gap. This would be an essential component of their Divine service going forward. Living a more natural existence, the Jews would need to "find" Hashem as they plowed, and then relate to Him as they did when they sat and studied from Moshe. This distance provided the Jews with a tremendous opportunity to grow and prepare for the next stage of their development. However, the Jews were discouraged and began a period of decline.

This is analogous to a parent teaching a young child to walk. The parent slowly steps away, encouraging the child to take a step forward toward the parent. The child may be confused, feeling like the parent is abandoning him. In fact, the parent is giving the child the ability to draw closer to the parent on his own. If the parent would always stay with the child, there would never be an opportunity for the child to learn to walk. The same is true of our relationship with Hashem. Man's purpose is to build a connection with Hashem. The soul is a very lofty

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories for the Soul

Up to the Task

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837) was one of the great Torah luminaries of the early 1800s. Following his marriage, he was supported by his father-in-law for a number of years as he studied Torah day and night. Eventually, the time came and he needed to find a means to support himself and his family. Not wanting to seek a position in the rabbinate, he decided to apply for the vacant position of *shamash sheini* (assistant caretaker) in the main Vilna shul. This job involved tasks such as putting the *siddurim* and *sefarim* back on the shelves and keeping the shul clean. Rabbi Eiger sought a letter of recommendation from his friend Rabbi Yaakov Lorberbaum, the rabbi of Lisa, who was himself one of the great Torah scholars of that era.

Rabbi Lorberbaum realized that it was absurd for a Torah scholar of Rabbi Eiger's stature to be given such a position, but he nonetheless acceded to his friend's request, writing a letter describing Rabbi Eiger's outstanding Torah scholarship and piety. Upon receipt of the letter, the leaders of the Vilna shul faced a dilemma how to respond to Rabbi Eiger's application. Ultimately, they wrote back to Rabbi Lorberbaum explaining that they'd be happy to take Rabbi Eiger as the *shamash sheini*, but they were concerned that the main *shamash*, a simple man, would be uncomfortable giving orders to someone of Rabbi Eiger's stature. They wrote that if Rabbi Lorberbaum felt they should move forward, they would accept his

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Kollel Happenings

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention bachurim in Denver over the summer! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday. Night seder begins at 8 pm, with ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the sederim. For further details, info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at Edos, 198 S. Holly St. at 12:00 pm. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

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.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When was one allowed to learn *Nevi'im* (Prophets) but not *Kesuvim* (Writings)?

A: The Talmud tells us that on Shabbos after prayers, there would be a communal Shabbos lecture where halachos were taught. The Sages forbade individuals from reading *Kesuvim* out of concern that people would study that and miss the lecture. Although the Rambam cites this

halacha, some halachic authorities rule that this halacha no longer applies, as these communal lectures have ceased.

Sources: Shabbos 115a and 116b, Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 23:19, Minchas Elazar, 3:15.

This week's question: Which custom of ours is based on the Gemara's restriction of reading *Kesuvim* (Writings) on Shabbos?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Eliezer Silver Part VII

From that point on, Rabbi Silver took responsibility for the kashrus of the food and mikva'os of the state of Pennsylvania.

During his tenure as rabbi of Harrisburg, the U.S. State Department cooperated with Russia in not issuing a passport for a Jew who was planning on visiting Russia. Many Jewish organizations protested this policy, and a delegation

of Orthodox rabbis from the Agudas Harabbanim, an organization of Orthodox rabbis from across the United States, arranged to meet with President William Howard Taft to issue their own protest. In addition, the delegation wanted the United States to cancel a trade agreement with Russia until Russia stopped its highly anti-Semitic policies.

A Taste of Torah

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spiritual entity, and prior to the soul's descent into the human body, it enjoyed a tremendous closeness with its Creator. This is similar, in a sense, to the Jews in the desert. The purpose of life, however, is to elevate the physical world and serve Hashem of our own free will. This is made possible by the joining of the spiritual soul with the physical body to

form the human being.

As we travel through life and encounter the bumps along the road, we sometimes feel as if Hashem is distant. This week's parsha offers us some very powerful encouragement. There is no distance; Hashem is right by us, teaching and encouraging us to take our next step forward.

Stories for the Soul

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decision.

Rabbi Lorberbaum related the contents of the letter to Rabbi Eiger, and told him that he was leaving the decision to him. Rabbi Eiger, seeing that the job would cause another Jew discomfort, decided against taking the position. Later, Rabbi Eiger did take a position

in the rabbinate, and he eventually became one of the Torah leaders of his generation whose works are widely studied until this day.

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us that Moshe was the humblest man who ever lived. Humility is the hallmark of a great leader.