

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman

Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765

Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg

Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766

Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה

Ekman (Santiago, Chile)

Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769

ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.

AND IN HONOR OF

Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY

Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Naso

DOMESTICATING THE DESERT

The Jewish people journeyed throughout the desert with the Tabernacle in order to subdue the force that nourishes the negative, the evil in the world. The physical desert is a metaphor for a spiritual desert – a life, environment or society devoid of Torah and G-dliness, which are compared to water. The Levites carried the Tabernacle throughout the desert and the Divine Presence resided in the Tabernacle. The Levites, each family performing its assigned task, enabled the revelation of the Divine Presence in the desert. We must all be Levites, transforming the desert in which we find ourselves into a dwelling place for G-dliness.

There is a general principle that “the Torah is eternal.” Its lessons are timeless and relevant, always and everywhere. It is the source of Truth. Events of a historical nature don’t lose their inner meaning. That which does not exist on a physical level in our time, nevertheless still exists spiritually. This is the higher and truer level of existence. In fact, the spiritual, which endures, is the source of the physical, which merely gives it a particular shape for the moment. The form, the physical expression, of the spiritual truth can vary according to circumstances and conditions.

Our task at this time, on the threshold of Redemption, is to discover the internal, eternal truth of a Torah passage as it applies to the days of Moshiach. For example, in this week’s portion, *Naso*, the Torah records the census of the tribe of Levi, by families. Historically, this was a one-time event, occurring in the second year after the Exodus. But the counting of the families of Merari, Gershon and Kehos must be conducted spiritually in every generation. Even those of us not from the tribe of Levi must be numbered spiritually.

The tribe of Levi was numbered separately. The rest of the Jewish people were counted from the age of twenty; the Levites were counted from one month. Understanding the spiritual reason for counting the tribe of Levi separately, by families, requires an introduction. First, we have to understand why the Jewish people had to remain in a desert for forty years. Because of the sin of the spies, they were forbidden to enter the land of Israel. This punishment was measure for measure, one year for each day the spies were on their mission. Since the Jewish people, led astray by the spies, did **not want** to go up, they were **not allowed** to go up. But they could have spent the forty years in a civilized place, not the desert. Why did they have to wander in an area described by the Torah as “a great and fearsome desert, with snakes, serpents and scorpions, a place of thirst without water”?

Chassidus explains that they journeyed throughout the desert, with the Tabernacle, in order to subdue the force that nourishes the external elements, for their nourishment comes specifically from the desert. The physical desert is a metaphor for a spiritual desert – a life, environment or society devoid of Torah and G-dliness, which are compared to water. The “external elements” are the distractions and temptations, the self-serving feelings and self-aggrandizing actions. These feed and nurture the negative, the evil in the world.

We must bear in mind that it was the Levites who carried the Tabernacle throughout the desert. The Divine Presence resided in the Tabernacle. When the Jewish people traveled, the Clouds of Glory preceded them, killing the snakes and scorpions and transforming the desert into a civilized dwelling place. Thus, the Levites, each family performing its assigned task, enabled the revelation of the Divine Presence in the desert. The Divine service of the Levites led to the transformation, the domestication of the desert. This in turn led the Jewish people as a whole into the land of Israel.

In general, a desert differs from a civilized place in two aspects. First, no one lives in a desert. When the six hundred thousand Jewish men, with their wives and children, arrived at an encampment, it suddenly became settled. Second, fruits, grains and vegetables don't grow in a desert. When the Jewish people encamped, thanks to the well of Miriam, the desert became a garden and an orchard.

Enumerating the Levites from the age of thirty onward (as is done at the end of parsha *Bamidbar* and here in parsha *Naso*), gave them a special distinction. This distinction prevented the desert from affecting them, because that which is numbered remains special and retains its identity. Through their service of carrying the Tabernacle and its vessels the desert was transformed into a fit and appropriate dwelling place.

Each generation must transform this world, a desert and a wasteland, into a dwelling place for G-dliness. This is the prelude and precondition to entering the land of Israel. The forty years in the desert represents our time in exile; the subsequent entrance into Israel represents the era of Moshiach and the time of Redemption. In between, we must transform the world.

There's a practical lesson for today. Evaluating our current situation, one might conclude that we are indeed in a spiritual desert, a wasteland uninhabited by man. The Supernal Man (*Adam HaElyon*), the highest level of G-dliness within creation, may seem absent. Most people appear oblivious to G-dliness. Even those that are aware and those that strive to conduct themselves according to the laws of the Torah have faults, defects and shortcomings. It seems something is missing in the Divine service of even the greatest *tzaddik* today. Where is the Divine Presence? Where is G-d's dwelling place? Such questions may lead to depression and despair, G-d forbid, to abandoning our task, forsaking those poor in mitzvos and spiritually destitute.

This week's portion teaches us to travel through the desert and transform it. Just as the Jewish people journeyed according to G-d's command, making the desert habitable, so each Jew must transform the desert in which he finds himself. For where we find ourselves is not accidental; we arrive at a locale as G-d's emissaries. Indeed, Maimonides explains that every Jew can carry the Tabernacle and its vessels, so to speak. Like the Levites, every Jew who dedicates himself can stand before G-d, teaching His ways and righteous laws to the multitude.

Further, a thorough self-examination may lead to a pessimistic self-assessment. Recognizing that one's own behavior has been a "desert" or "wilderness," the individual might despair. How can I change my behavior, especially after so many years have passed and I've made a habit out of it?

Again, this week's portion counters such a negative evaluation. The Levites performed no service in the Tabernacle until they were thirty years old. Yet at that age they were given the strength to carry the Tabernacle and transform the wilderness. Similarly, an individual should not consider what his situation or behavior has been until now. Rather, he should view himself as a Levite reaching the age of thirty, resolving to perform the Divine service of making the wasteland flourish. Then, like a Levite, he will be given the strength to purify the undesirable and to cleanse the "wilderness." He will make of himself, and thus his environment, a Tabernacle, a dwelling place for G-dliness; the Divine Presence will reside within him and his surroundings. This leads automatically to entering the land, to Moshiach and Redemption.

To make ourselves and our environment a dwelling place for G-dliness, to transform the desert or wilderness into habitable land, requires a Divine service in two directions. These pathways to Moshiach are also alluded to in this week's portion.

The first pathway is “turn from evil.” When an earthly king desires to have a palace prepared, the first step is to remove the dirt and mire. The Levitical family of Gershon represents turning from evil. Gershon, whose name implies divorcing one’s self from evil, carried the curtains and the external structure of the Tabernacle. A curtain’s purpose is to protect what’s inside from the external, negative influences.

Afterwards, the household furnishings and beautiful vessels are brought in. This completes the process, making the palace fit and proper. Furnishing and beautifying the home is the pathway of “do good.” The family of Kehos represents doing good. Kehos, whose name means gathering together, carried the inner vessels, the altar, the menorah, etc.

G-d’s dwelling place – this world – also requires both “turn from evil” and “do good.” By analogy, when our Divine service resembles that of the Levites, we transform the desert and wasteland around us into a dwelling place for G-dliness – and bring the revelation of Moshiach and the Redemption.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 13, pp. 16-19)

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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We have already mentioned many times that according to all the signs of our Sages regarding the end of days (in addition to the general statement in the times of the Gemara that "all the appointed times have passed"¹), this generation is the last of exile and the first generation of Redemption. My sainted father-in-law, the Rebbe, the leader of our generation, testified accordingly - in connection with his well-known announcement "immediate Teshuvah, immediate Redemption"² - that in his days, (decades ago) all the aspects of service were completed, the only requirement being to "polish the buttons"³ and to stand ready to greet our righteous Moshiach.⁴ How much more must this be the case after the increased efforts to spread Torah and Judaism and the wellsprings of Chassidus outward from then until now; especially since after forty years (from his elevation⁵) "a person reaches the level of understanding of his teacher,"⁶ "A heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear."⁷ Thus it is absolutely certain that the service of "polishing the buttons" has also been concluded, and we are standing ready to

1. *Sanhedrin* 97:2

2. "Kol Koray" in the *HaKriah VeHaKedusha* [Reading and Holiness] of the years 5701-03 [1940-1943] (his *Igros Kodesh* volume 5, page 361 and following, 377 and following, 408 and following, Volume 6, page 430 and following). And elsewhere. [*The phrase literally means, "Immediately to Return (or Repentance), immediately to Redemption. Translator's note.*]

3. See the talks of Simchas Torah 5689 [1929].

4. See *HaYom Yom* 15 Teves, And in several places.

5. [*The Rebbe is writing in the fortieth year after the passing of the Previous Rebbe. Traditionally, the departure of a tzadik from this world is referred to as an "elevation," meaning that he has reached a higher level of spirituality and inferring that his physical life in this world was also essentially spiritual. Translator's note.*]

6. *Avodah Zarah* 5, beginning of side b.

7. *Tavo* 29:3.

greet our righteous Moshiach.

This matter receives the utmost emphasis in this year - 5751, whose mnemonic⁸ is hinted at in the verse⁹ "his kingship **will be exalted**" (referring to Dovid and Shlomo,¹⁰ since King Moshiach will be from their offspring¹¹) over the entire world. The importance of this year is also alluded to in the year's acronym, "It will be a year in which **I will show him wonders**,"¹² as in the verse "as in the days of your going forth from the land of Egypt I will show him wonders."¹³ The year began with the "wonders" which were actually seen (in addition to those which will be seen in the future, "I will show you") and revealed to the eyes of the whole world. These wonders **fulfilled** the words of the *Yalkut Shimoni*:¹⁴ "In the year the King Moshiach will be revealed, the kings of all the nations of the world will struggle with each other... the king of Persia etc., the Arabian king, etc.; And (G-d) will say to them (Israel), "My children, do not be afraid, all that I have done I have done only for your sake... The time for your Redemption has arrived!" From that time on (particularly in the month of Nissan,

8. *[As every Hebrew letter has a numerical equivalent, the alphabetic designation of a year may yield abbreviations or words that have special significance. The process of discovering these numerical meanings and correspondences between words is called "gematria." Here, for instance, the Hebrew letters א, ש, ג, ת numerically equal 5751 (א = 1, ש = 300, ג = 50, ת = 400; 5000, sometimes designated with a preceding ה, is often omitted, it being understood we are in the sixth millennia (5000-5999) of Creation). The word תנשא, formed from the letters means "will be exalted." Translator's note.]*

9. Balak 24:7.

10. The explanation of Rashi on the verse.

11. *Sefer HaMitzvos* of the Rambam, negative commandment 362. *Perush HaMishnayos*, beginning of chapter Chelek, principle 12. *Igeres Teiman*.

12. *[See 6a. תנשא שנת אראנו נפלאות is the translated phrase in Hebrew. Translator's note.]*

13. Micah 7:15.

14. Yeshayahu, remez 499.

the month of Redemption) we are already standing at the time "When the King Moshiach comes ("behold he comes")... and will proclaim to Israel, 'Humble ones, the time for your Redemption has arrived!'"

...But action is the main thing:¹⁵

Since this is the Shabbos after the giving of the Torah, Parshas Naso, in the year of I will show him wonders, it is a time particularly ready and appropriate for the revelation of "a new Torah will proceed from me."¹⁶ This means that the practical lesson is that this is the set time **to prepare** (a sample and example of) the new dimensions of Torah to be revealed that will ultimately lead to the actual fulfillment of the promise "a new Torah will proceed from me."

Simply put, there should be a renewal and increase in learning Torah with vigor and delight, until one originates new insights, whether for one's self or to have an effect on others, "Raise up many disciples."¹⁷ For it is known that "Every one of Israel is able to reveal secrets of wisdom and to discover a new insight in Torah, whether in homiletics or in the revealed or in the esoteric parts of Torah, according to the level of his soul's root. **Indeed, one is obligated to do so.**"¹⁸ This includes particularly a renewal and intensification in learning and spreading the inner teachings of the Torah that are revealed in Toras Chassidus, a sample, example and

15. Avos, Chapter 1, Mishneh 17 (in gematria, "good") - that is learned on this Shabbos. [The number 17 in Hebrew can be formed from the letters of the word "good." See also note 6a. Translator's note.]

16. See Yeshayahu 51:4: "For Torah will proceed from me." And in Vayikra Rabba 13:3: "A new Torah will proceed from me, a renewal of Torah from me will proceed." This is explained at length in the talk of the second day of Shavuot (Sefer HaSichos 5751, p. 566 and following).

17. Avos Chapter 1, Mishneh 1.

18. *Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh*, section 26 (p. 145a).

"taste" of the Torah of Moshiach ("those who taste it shall merit life"¹⁹). Through this we will quicken, hasten and achieve the coming of Dovid, the King Moshiach.²⁰

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Naso, 12 Sivan 5751)

19. See *Likkutei Sichos*, volume 20, page 173. And see there for cross references.

20. *Igeres HaKodesh of the Baal Shem Tov* - section 309 at the beginning.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FRIEND

Horav Avrohom Aharon ben Reb Yitzchok ע"ה Plotkin

Passed away on Shabbat Parshat Nasso, 14 Sivan, 5780

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