



# קובץ שארית ישראל

*Collected Dibre Torah  
from  
Shearith Israel's Communal Torah Study*

Shabuot, 5780 - May, 2020







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## CONTENTS

Introduction by Louis M. Solomon.....	3
Our Participants .....	4

### GENESIS

Lekh Lekha and Vayyetse by Adina Marmelstein .....	5
Mikets by Marc Wiznia .....	6
Vayhee by Faith Fogelman .....	8

### EXODUS

Bo by Harris Bulow .....	9
Yithro by Hayyim Obadyah.....	10
Mishpatim by Jackie & Andrew Klaber .....	11

### LEVITICUS

Vayiqra by Lia Solomon .....	12
Tazriah and Metzorah by Lilliane Marks .....	13

### NUMBERS

Naso by Harlan Reiss.....	14
Beha'alotecha by Gustave Rieu.....	17
Shelah Lecha by Annette F. Gourgey .....	18
Pinhas by Francine Alfandary .....	20
Mas'ei by Malka Strasberg Edinger .....	21

### DEUTERONOMY

Debarim by James Kahn .....	22
Vaethanan by Yosef Solomon .....	23
Reeh by Z. Edinger .....	25



# INTRODUCTION

By Louis M. Solomon

Reverend Edinger kindly asked me to say a few words at the ceremony held last evening via video conference to celebrate our Congregation's completion of the Torah. What a marvelous undertaking. What an inspiring accomplishment.

As I mentioned then, and as I have written to the entire Congregation, events like this cannot but make us think about what is most important in our Congregation. This Shabbat will mark 12 weeks being isolated from our beloved Sanctuary. Tonight is Shabuot, and we will miss being in our Sanctuary to welcome the holiday and each other with among the happiest singing we have during the year. We are apt to think of the Torah study we have done to complete the entire Torah as a pale substitute for "the real thing" of being in our space.

I suggest that there is another way to look at this. As beloved and sacred as our current Sanctuary is – and it truly is – what defines us is not our space but our unity, our community within our space. Our West 70th Sanctuary is our Congregation's fifth since 1654. On the one hand, five Sanctuaries over 300+/- years isn't so many, so each is of great moment in our history, as attested to by our Consecration Shabbatot remembering with song, prayer, and reverence each prior (and our current) space. At the same time, our Congregation has not been defined by any particular edifice or physical structure. In the past,

when we moved, our then-Sanctuary didn't work for us, whether because the size of the Congregation outgrew the space, or because the neighborhood changed, or because "civilization" moved north from the Battery. As special and important to us as our space has been, what we remember is not the walls but what was within, the community, the Congregation that populated it. What defined and continues to define us is our community, our friends and neighbors, the spiritual strength we ourselves gain and give each other.

There cannot be any stronger manifestation of our unity as a Congregation than the communal reading and learning of the Torah that this volume celebrates. As Rabbi Soloveichik and Reverend Edinger said last night, like the letters comprising the words that comprise the Torah itself, the siyyum we are celebrating could only have been accomplished by all of us, working together as one. There can be no greater inspiration for us as we move into Shabuot.

Moadim L'simcha, and congratulations to everyone who contributed to the siyyum and to this volume.



## OUR PARTICIPANTS

### GENESIS

Bereshit  
Noah  
Lekh Lekha  
Vayyera  
Hayye Sarah  
Toledot  
Vayyetse  
Vayyishlah  
Vayyesheb  
Mikkets  
Vayyiggash  
Vayhee

Daar Family  
Frieber Family  
Adina Marmelstein  
Lia Solomon  
Lia Solomon  
Sherizen Family  
Adina Marmelstein  
Leah Albek  
Jacob & Jannah Neumark  
Wiznia Family  
Friedman Family  
Faith Fogelman

### EXODUS

Shemot  
Va'era  
Bo  
Beshallah  
Yithro  
Mishpatim  
Terumah  
Tetsavveh  
Ki Tissa  
Vayyakhel  
Pekude

The Schlusselfbergs  
Bonnie Barest & Gary Miller  
Harris Bulow  
Juan Mesa-Freydell  
Hayyim Obadyah & Bentsi Cohen  
Jackie & Andrew Klaber  
Zuckerberg Family  
Rose Edinger  
Joshua Mendes  
Rabbi Rohde  
Rabbi Rohde

### LEVITICUS

Vayikra  
Tsav  
Shemini  
Tazria  
Metsora  
Ahare Mot  
Kedoshim  
Emor  
Behar  
Behukkothai

Soloveichik family  
Malka Edinger  
Mrs. Lisa Rohde  
Solomon Family & Lillian Marks  
Solomon Family  
Solomon Family  
Morris Shamah  
Jerry Duci  
Victoria Bengualid  
Solomon Family

### NUMBERS

Bemidbar  
Naso  
Beha'alotekha  
Shelah Lekha  
Korah  
Hukkat  
Balak  
Pinehas  
Mattot  
Mas'e

Raanan Agus  
Sam & Isaac Neumark  
Gustave Rieu  
Annette Gourgey  
Henry Edinger  
Estelle Freilich  
Feder family  
Alfandary-Nahon Family  
Neumark Family  
Neumark Family & Malka Edinger

### DEUTERONOMY

Debarim  
Va'ethannan  
Ekeb  
Re'eh  
Shofetim  
Ki Tetse  
Ki Tabo  
Nitsabim  
Vayyelekh  
Ha'azinu  
VeZot Habberakha

Kahn/Orringer Family  
Wiznia Family; Anonymous (NYC)  
Rafe Sasson  
Z. Edinger  
Jennifer Ash  
Steve Gottlib  
Alfandary-Nahon Family  
Akiva Haberman  
Ernest Grunebaum  
Reiss Family  
Nathan Family



# GENESIS

## Lekh Lekha and Vayyetse

By Adina Marmelstein

Go for yourself.            Go into yourself (your soul).  
Go your own way.        Isolate yourself.  
Isolation that the whole world is now experiencing under the coronavirus.

Abraham, the first Jew and leader of the Jewish people, understood that to be a Jew is to be isolated. Our nation is alone, a small minority. Abraham, the “Ivri”, Rashi explains the word to mean “set apart”, to stand on the opposite side of the rest of Humanity. For Avraham had come to know that God created the World and all of us. And despite this, he understood that there are those that deny this and don’t want any connection to God. Those who don’t feel within their consciousness, the human soul with all its frailties, strengths and the breath of life that we are created in the image of God. Abraham living among the Chaldeans of Ur stood alone and declared God in the World.

Samson Raphael Hirsh comments that when the generation of Noah declared, “Let us make ourselves a Name.” They were emphasizing the “glorification of Man, and not the recognition” of “personal worth” or the significance of the individual. They “Debased” man as mere bricks - in their effort to glorify the power of their nation - but who were they to be representative of the community”? Was the generation of Noah a majority that decided for everything & everyone, and worshipped itself. These failings sound familiar. They built the tower of Babel, the tallest tower reaching the highest. In doing so, individual freedoms were violated. But God commanded when coming out of the Ark, “be fruitful and multiply, diversify upon the earth.

So- Lech lecha - Go for yourself - “go home” to me, to the land that is your inner home, your inner self. Leave your homeland, give up your identity- that of your Native Country, Nationality, and birth family. Go Teach the Jewish people that our true identity lies in the tools provided by God. Hirsch: “Go for yourself, go your own way - isolate yourself from your land, and from your previous connections” and from false attachments. In Lech Lecha Abraham goes away from his home to start a People.

In Vayetze, Jacob experiences God in a dream as Angels going up and down a Ladder while he lay sleeping on a bed of stones. As Rashi and Rabbi Hirsch point out - We are not called the people of Abraham, but, of Israel. Jacob also left his land, but in contrast to Abraham, on his own, forced by circumstances, running from Esau, and becomes isolated from his birth family. He has no one & no possessions with him. Jacob leaves his home and is isolated from his family. He struggles for truth, and looks for God’s presence. His dream shows that God comes from the top of the ladder, and in this “Place” in a world of deceit by Laban. Jacob builds a family. Knowing that establishing a home means God is in the center. He builds his future and future for the existence of the Jewish people. Israel establishing and standing up for God was conquering his own isolation. By including God and building a family, Jacob turned away from the isolation he experienced and sought out a road to freedom.





# GENESIS

## Mikets

By Marc Wiznia

My family studied Parasha Mikets, which in many ways embodies the entire book of Bereshit, and frankly the entire Torah, because of how much is packed in. There is so much here. Today, I want to focus on just a single object from the parasha that in many ways embodies our whole mission here.

I am sure everyone remembers the goblet that is so central to Mikets. When all of Yaakov's sons come to Egypt a second time, and Yosef sends them home, this time he sends them back with food, with their money, and also a goblet hidden in Binyamin's baggage.

I always have wondered – why a goblet? Aside from striking a chord with my daughter who is a huge Harry Potter fan, Yosef could have snuck anything in. But he chose a goblet.

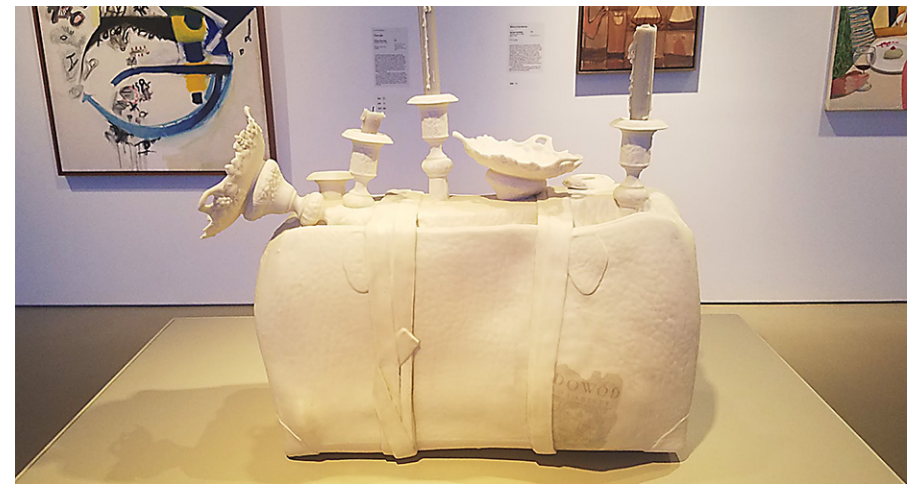
Our leaders throughout the ages have commented on the goblet.

- The Torah emphasizes it was something of value – a “silver goblet”.
- Rashi refers to it as “Kos Aroch” – a long cup. Keep that in the back of your minds – we will come back to it.
- Ramban refers to it as a “royal” cup.
- I understand there are midrashim suggesting the goblet in fact was a kiddush cup. It sure is difficult not to view the goblet as some type of important heirloom like a kiddush cup.

There are a number of perspectives.

Just a few months ago, in late January, our synagogue's youth department took a trip to the Jewish Museum for a tour of key exhibits. And it was during that field trip that my children and I developed a deeper connection with this goblet in Mikets.

The first photo is a picture that I took of the first exhibit that the children saw at the Jewish Museum that day: it was a suitcase stuffed with Jewish ritual objects, notably things like candle sticks and kiddush cups.



(continued)

The exhibit symbolizes how over the years, when Jews have been forced to travel from land to land, and they only could take a few things with them, and had to pack whatever they could very quickly, our ancestors made sure to take their heirlooms with them. They made sure to bring their Judaism with them. Against all odds, they found a way to keep the traditions.

I am sure many of us have old kiddush cups or candle sticks or menorahs or other heirlooms that our ancestors did everything they could to bring to their new lands.

The second photo is from that same synagogue field trip in January of some children from the congregation sitting on the floor next to the exhibit taking notes. Keeping the traditions.



While learning Mikets with my own children, when we got to the goblet, we again discussed that wonderful exhibit at the Jewish Museum – how we must do our part always to keep our bags packed with our faith and our tradition.

So when Yosef asks that his goblet be hidden in Benjamin's baggage, he is not just putting in a valuable silver object, not just putting in a royal goblet, not just putting in any old thing. By using a goblet, Yosef is packing a symbol of a Jewish heirloom. He is signaling to his brothers that he has not forgotten how to be Jewish. It is a visceral link to their heritage. And as we continue through Mikets and into the next parasha, it is perfectly fitting that it is the goblet itself that facilitates all the brothers developing a stronger family Jewish identity together. Just like all those ritual objects that our own ancestors did everything they could to preserve.

In this way, Yosef's choice of a goblet seems to be saying something not only to his brothers but to all Jews for all time, namely, that the family line – and, therefore, the Jewish people – only can continue to exist through the next generation's desire to possess the cup.

Now let's come back to Rashi's description of this goblet as "Kos Aroch". Normally, we would call a large cup a "tall cup" or "Kos Gavoha" (as any Starbucks drinkers know well). Calling it a "long" cup may symbolize how the goblet's impact stretches a long way across generations.

That is something of course we all understand well by the sustainability of our own congregation for over 365 years, as recognized by our Year of Years campaign. And so to conclude, in this age of the pandemic, when we all are at home with our loved ones thinking about what matters the most to us, thinking about our personal values that are closest to us, while learning Mikets with my family, and now with all of you, and in many ways emblematic of the entire book of Bereshit and the entire Torah, it is through communal events such as our siyyum today that may we merit for future generations to continue to grab hold of the cup, keep it filled, and keep passing it along.

# GENESIS

## Vayhee

By Faith Fogelman

### Like Father, Unlike Son

Isaac and his son, Jacob, lived most of their adult lives as sighted men, but both lost vision in old age. It is said of Isaac that his eyes were too dim to see...(Genesis 27:1) and of Jacob, his eyes had become heavy with age (to the extent that) he could not see... (Genesis 48:10). In Parsha Toledot, Isaac accepted Jacob's pretense of being Esau and gave him (Jacob) the blessing, thereby triggering Esau's hurt and anger to which Isaac replied.. Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing;...(Genesis 27:35); ...what can I do my son?...(Genesis 27:37). Isaac was passive, attributing his confusion to Jacob's cleverness. Despite pleas from son to father, Isaac said that there was nothing he could do to reverse course. The blessing went to the second born son.

Contrast this disability model with Jacob's determination in Vayhee to bless Joseph's second born son. He placed his right hand on Ephraim and his left on the first born, Manasseh. This displeased Joseph, but Jacob was firm and blessed the second born with his right hand. He recognized, without vision and probably with prophecy, that Manasseh will be great, but Ephraim will be even greater (Genesis 48:19). Despite pleas from son to father, Jacob would not reverse course. The blessing went to the second born son.

There are character traits which remain throughout the lifetime. Some, like Isaac, have a history of submission (The Akadeh, Genesis 22). Others are strong willed and determined. Blindness or any disability, congenital or adventitious, does not have to thwart ambition. [This was not even Jacob's first disability. To wit, his dislocated hip socket as a result of wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32:25-26)].

Vayhee teaches that Jacob's model is preferred over that of Isaac. Jacob's visual disability did not render excuses or confusion for the accurate characterizations and attributes of each son nor did any family member minimize what Jacob said due to their father's disability. As imperfect as they were, they revered Jacob, who commanded respect on his death bed and got it. When Vayhee concludes, so does Genesis.

The last word is B'Mitzrayim, in Egypt. As we leave all the personalities in Genesis and embark on a new journey through Exodus, starting B'Mitzrayim, we should use the strength of Jacob (Yisrael) to fortify us. Differences or disabilities do not have to contribute to diminished self-presentations. After all, aren't we the children of Yisrael?





# EXODUS

**Bo**

By Harris Bulow

Bo is where the Jewish people really become a people. Hashem “strengthens” Pharaoh’s heart and sends Locusts (Plague #8) , and Darkness (Plague #9) and prior to Makat Bechorot (Plague #10), the first command is given to the entire Jewish people, Pesach, is issued, so that the Jewish people will be protected. It is also where the new month recognition comes from.

The Midrash teaches that the “strengthening of Pharaoh’s heart” manifest itself by Pharaoh’s attaching unacceptable terms to his offer for the men to leave after the Locusts, but that that women and children must stay. While I must say that I get why things happened the way they did, so Hashem could show that there is no power beyond His. I wonder had He allowed Moses to negotiate directly, whether Moses would have said, something like, “These locusts aren’t going to go anywhere until I have the decree in my hand that we are ALL allowed to leave” with food and gold, of course.



## The Revelation at Sinai and Intentional Complexity

In memory of my teacher Aryeh Toeg, martyred on Yom ha-Qippurim 1973.

# EXODUS

## Yithro

By Hayyim Obadyah

In parashath Yithro, Chapters 19 and 20 in Exodus have a lot of coming and going and of going up and going down. There's one time when Moses goes up the mountain and God immediately tells him to go back down, and Moses is clearly confused.

There is also a good bit of speaking and a good bit of saying. In Biblical Hebrew, if we read, for example, waydabbēr So-and-so lēmōr, “and So-and-so spoke, saying”, we know that what follows is a direct quotation.

If we're not told what So-and-so actually said, the text will say waydabbēr So-and-so, “and So-and-so spoke”. For instance in 19:19 it says, מִשָּׁה יָדַבֵּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל מִשָּׁה Moshe would speak and God would answer him aloud. It is referring generally to speaking - not an actual quote, so it uses yədabbēr not yōmar.

But if it reads simply wayyōmer So-and-so, what follows is what So-and-so actually said. In Ruth, for example, וַיֹּאמֶר סוּרָהּ שְׁבֵה־פֶּה פְּלִנִי אֶלְמוֹנִי And he said, “Turn aside, sit here, Peloní Almoní”.

So Moses is going up and down and the mountain, and God says to go down, and Moshe goes down  
וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָעָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם - Moshe went down to the people and he said to them – and then the verse breaks off. It doesn't tell us what Moshe said, so it very much sounds like he was interrupted.

What was he interrupted by?

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה לְאֹמֶר - God spoke all these things, saying ... and God continues with the 10 commandments.

So, the overall picture of what is being quoted and what is more generally paraphrased, is very confusing. But I think that that is intentional.

One piece of this is that it's really not clear where Moshe is and what he's doing when the 'āšeret haddibbērot are given. Remembering back to Pesah, and why the haggada totally leaves out Moshe's name, that should not be too surprising. But more profoundly, the Torah intends that this section be confusing, or perhaps it would be better to say complex and disjointed.

When we think about the experience of those who were there, we understand that it must have been wildly bewildering. Is that thunder or is that a voice? Is that smoke or cloud or fog? Or all three? By presenting the scene in such a confusing – I'm tempted to say psychedelic – way, Torah presents a more meaningful and more realistic picture of the experience.

And so, perhaps we should not be surprised when we find it difficult to talk about God, when our connection to God isn't easily explained, when our understanding of how we relate to God and the revelation can't be conveyed in simple straightforward sentences.

Instead of logical narrative, what we are left with is:

וְכִי יִגִּיד תְּהִלָּתְךָ

Instead of rational discourse, my mouth is helpless to express anything other than my praise of God.



# EXODUS

## Mishpatim

By Jackie & Andrew Klaber

“Distance yourself from a false word; do not execute the innocent or the righteous, for I shall not exonerate the wicked... Three pilgrimage festivals shall you celebrate for Me during the year... And the Festival of Harvest of the first fruits of your labor that you sow in the field.”

— Parashat Mishpatim

During this time of social distancing, Parashat Mishpatim implores us to distance ourselves spiritually and ethically from untruthful behavior. We should not utter falsehoods and we should eschew those who deal in lies. Instead, we should draw near to the righteous and protect the innocent. G-d promises that justice will be done to the wicked—a key theme that we see time and time again throughout Rabbi Soloveichik’s “Biblical Tours of the World’s Greatest Sites: A Journey Through Jewish History.” Whether Ramses II in Egypt or Hadrian in Jerusalem—these

demagogues sought to squelch Jewish life, but the Children of Israel—to this very day—persevere and thrive, while wicked oppressors and those who gave them power are reduced to the ashes of history. And so it is fitting that Parashat Mishpatim also calls us to celebrate joyously the great holidays of our freedom, one of which, Shabu’ot (Festival of Harvest), is now upon us.

Even in this time of precaution, a time in which our spiritual Shearith Israel family cannot be together physically, we must be grateful for the bountiful harvest that fills our life with richness, texture, meaning, family, friends, and the purposeful calling that has grown within us since the time of Abraham: To provide us and our children and our children’s children with the resources, memory, and tools for a strong Jewish future.



# LEVITICUS

## Vayiqra

By Lia Solomon

This Book deals mainly with the sacrifices and priestly laws. It is not well studied in Jewish Schools. Many people question its relevance to today. Why should we have korbanot at all? But we know and are taught that all of the torah is relevant to us, it is not a mere historical document of bygone practices.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi compares Korbanot to food. Just like the intellect or the soul needs a physical body to house it and that body needs nourishment in the form of food and water, so too God's presence needs a "house" (the Mishkan or the Beit Hamikdash) and "food" (the korbanot) to manifest in this world.

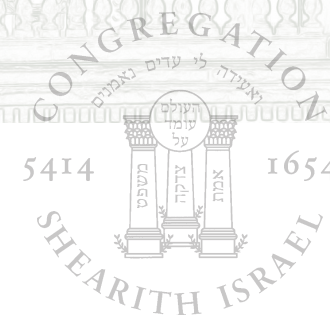
Fire is often indicative of a meeting between man and God as we see with the burning bush, the fire on the top of Har Sinai in the giving of the Torah that we celebrate tomorrow night. Fire is somehow the meeting place between the infinite and the finite. It makes sense that only fire can be this meeting place because it is consuming, something not comprehensible, that doesn't seem to follow the regular laws of nature.

So now we can understand why there is a spiritual need for sacrifices. But this leads to a second question- what about now? The Torah is not a historical document - but what do we do today? Now that we don't have this physical meeting place in which to offer sacrifices?

The answer is that we must make this meeting place for ourselves, in our shuls, in our homes, and in our lives. Malbim on the verse veasu li mikdash (Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them (Exodus 25:8) states that:

שכל אחד יבנה לו מקדש בחדרי לבבו - that everyone should make a sanctuary in the rooms of their heart- with tefilla, good deeds, and torah. We know that torah is compared to fire.

- אמר ר' יוחנן כל מי שרוצה לעסוק בתורה יראה בעצמו כאילו עומד באש - everyone who wants to engage in the Torah should see themselves as though they are standing in the fire. It is my bracha for all of us that this Shavuot we can experience the fire of Torah from the Mikdash that is our own homes and hearts and allow that fire to be the revelation of God in our lives. Chag sameach and congratulations to all those who learned.





# LEVITICUS

## Tazriah and Metzorah

By Lilliane Marks

In response to your invitation re the “study of the Torah”, I took this as a privilege and honor to take a part in this despite my level of Jewish education, which essentially is non-existent. Sephardic girls when I was growing up in North Africa did not receive a Jewish Education. I am attempting below to give you my thoughts about my selected chapters of the Torah.

The concerns we are facing at the present time during this time of confinement were already extant during biblical times. These two parashot tell us about the laws for purification - for our bodies and our residences. We also have an obligation to help each other and to support each other. The Parasha also tells us how we are supposed to “disinfect” after illness!! AMAZING!! This sounds so familiar to what we have been going through today!

Through centuries plagues have hit the world. In the 16th century, Paris and Venice were affected for over a year. And more recently, when I was young I witnessed the plague hit my country, Algeria. In 1947, the plague in Algeria, was made famous by the novelist, Albert Camus, in his book La Peste. Camus describes his characters as ultimately powerless in face of the plague.

Are we learning from our Torah? Yes!! I certainly am. Thank you for the opportunity!

Moadim le simha



# NUMBERS

Naso

By Harlan Reiss

## A Cut Above the Rest: Judaism's View of Quarantine Haircuts

I don't know about you, but during this period of quarantine, I'm missing my sports. Olympics, cancelled; march madness, cancelled; NBA season, who knows what will happen? And the world's most popular sport soccer - or football - is cancelled just about everywhere except thankfully now Germany, which means I can stop desperately watching highlights of the Belarussian Premier League.

All this cancellation has got me thinking: how will the world look when we resurface on the other side of the pandemic? Will our time under lockdown stunt our long-term productivity as everyone gets used to their couches or will we emerge with renewed motivation and energy? Of course, I am in no position to offer cogent arguments for or against any particular one of these outcomes; nor am I equipped to even offer a vision for the future. However, as I was daydreaming about the return of sports earlier today, a picture posted recently by Instagram's most followed person Cristiano Ronaldo got me thinking about all these issues, and yes, a Torah related presentation for tonight's event. Allow me to explain.

Ronaldo, like the rest of us, has been confined to our homes for the time being. While, yes, for him being stuck at home means being "stuck" in a Mediterranean compound, that does not mean that he has been immune to a problem that I can very much relate to: no haircuts!

In this week's parsha, we read about the Nazir, a complicated but holy character who is prohibited from cutting his hair. No, unfortunately Ronaldo has not become a Nazir who will return to the soccer with super-strength, but I think that, although Nezirut is no longer practiced today, and according to the Ra'avah, it is even prohibited to take an oath of Nezirut today in the absence of the Beit Hamikdash, some of the underlying themes and messages of Nezirut - in particularly regarding haircuts - are still highly relevant to all of us.

While Nezirut may seem like a relatively small and even esoteric subject, the fact that Rambam counts 10 of the 613 mitzvot as relating to Nezirut itself reflects its importance and centrality.

Let's start by briefly reviewing to the institution of נזירות. First and foremost נזירות belongs to the broader category in the Torah of oaths and vows. The Torah introduces the concept of נזירות with the pasuk, "אִישׁ כִּי יִפְלֵא לַנָּדָו דָּר נָזִיר לַה' לֵה' , a man who takes a vow to become a Nazir to Hashem. The Rambam places the 10 laws of נזירות , as I alluded to earlier, in ספר הפלאה (Sefer Hafla'ah), which is entirely devoted to laws of oaths and vows of all different types. Rambam also notes that when one fulfills his vow of נזירות, one automatically accomplishes the mitzvah of keeping one's neder, ככל היוצא מפיו יעשה, and, conversely, when one fails to keep his vow of נזירות, one not only





(continued)

violates the specific prohibition against violating the terms of נזירות, but one is also liable for violating the general prohibition against failing to complete one's vow, לא יחל דברו.

The נזיר which the נזיר takes consists of three basic components (which I'm sure many of us are familiar with); first, not drinking wine or consuming any grape products; second, not coming in contact with the dead; third, not cutting his hair. His obligation doesn't end there, however. Upon successful completion of his term of נזירות, he must bring 3 קורבנות – an עולה, שלמים, and most intriguingly, a קורבן חטאת – a sin offering, a point to which we will return.

While the facts of נזירות are explicit in the Torah, the more intriguing question regarding why someone might become a נזיר is not mentioned explicitly in the text. In fact, it is the subject of some controversy between the classical interpreters of the Torah.

According to רש"י, drawing on the thinking of חז"ל, a person takes a vow of נזירות out of a sense of fear. רש"י comes to this conclusion by looking at the context of the פרשה. He notes that the section about the נזיר comes right after the section about the סוטה – the unfaithful wife. He thinks that a person would want to become a נזיר because they were a witness of the horrific demise of the Sotah woman, and would like to make sure that they do not commit that same sin. By becoming a נזיר you must refrain from many indulgences which surely makes it much less likely for someone to commit a terrible sin like the sin of the סוטה. So, according to Rashi, Nazir is fundamentally a reactive institution, taken as a result of a tragic event in someone else's life.

ספורנו, on the other hand, has a radically different approach. He believes that one's motivation for becoming a נזיר is simply to become קדוש לה'. For the Sforno, the vow of נזירות is by no means reactive, it is highly proactive – a conscious decision on the part of an individual to draw closer to ה' by abstaining from certain worldly pleasures. For the Sforno, the fact that the

Nazir is described by the Torah in a manner which is also used to describe the כהן גדול captures this very point – only the נזיר and כהן גדול are prohibited from being ritually impure for their closest relatives. Even the root of the word נזיר is used to describe the Kohen Gadol – נזיר-גדול. What emerges for the Sforno is that the נזיר is a non-hereditary version of the כהן גדול – someone who, out of a sense of spiritual ambition and desire for closeness with ה', chooses a distinct path in life.

This interpretation of the Sforno is what I would like to focus on for now, as I find it quite inspiring, at least of face value. A person, aspiring to achieve a higher level of spirituality in his life, is willing to separate himself from common pleasures of the world. However, what I failed to mention earlier is the Sforno's explanation for the קורבן חטאת that one must bring upon concluding his term as a Nazir. He says that the reason you must bring the קורבן חטאת is because you are ending your נזירות. He thinks that being a נזיר is great and that the termination of your נזירות diminishes your קדושה. Ideally, according to Sforno, one should really be a Nazir indefinitely, as it represents an elevated and exalted state of living.

However, in this instance, I side with Rashi. He thinks that the reason that you must bring the קורבן חטאת is because becoming a נזיר to start with is at least partially sinful. He believes that one should not be completely separated from the pleasures of life that Hashem gave us to enjoy, such as drinking wine because by abstaining in this manner you are taking away from the appropriate method for experiencing the world God created. After all, when Hashem created this beautiful world in which we are privileged to live, he said ונהנה טוב מאד, it is exceedingly good – if it is good enough for Hashem, surely it should be good for us too. Not only that, but the Talmud Yerushalmi tells us that we will have to give judgment in the Heavenly court one day not only for the pleasures which we had in this world which were actually prohibited to us, but, also on the pleasures that we should have partaken of but failed to. As Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch was often quoted as having said, Hashem will ask us one day in the Heavenly Court, have you seen my beautiful Alps? And, if not, why not!?

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Right now, we are unable to enjoy Rav Hirsch's proverbial alps. We are advised to stay home, keep our distance from the rest of the world and bide our time until it is safe to emerge. We, without having ever opted in or taken a נדר, have become pseudo Nazirim for a little while. And it would be easy and natural for us to become sad and even lose hope during these difficult times. After all, the other instances in which, like the Nazir, we are prohibited from cutting our hair are during mourning periods -- either periods of personal avelut or like for all of us since Pesach, during the omer. However, the beauty in these periods is that, although they are sad, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. During mourning we look forward to returning to our communities and returning to normality. And how do we mark this transitional period? By allowing ourselves to cut our hair again. This symbolic transition is so powerful that, for those who have the custom of Upsherin, we mark the beginning of our childhood by cutting our hair for the first time. Based on the pasuk in Vayikra, וְכִי-תֵבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, וְנִטְעַתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ מֵאֲכָל--וַעֲרַלְתֶּם עֲרֻלְתּוֹ, אֶת-, which explains that one may

not consume from newly planted trees in their first three years, many, especially Chasidim, explain that we do not cut a child's hair until he is three years old to compare his to a tree. Just as we hope for our trees, we hope that our children should blossom, bear fruit, and grow tall.

We are now approaching Shavuot, the end of the omer, and a transitional time for all of us. And while we may still not have access to barbers or salons, I hope we can mark the end of the omer with a haircut, at least in spirit. As Sforno taught us, what makes the Nazir so unique is that he does NOT simply accept his previous status as final--rather, he reaches for much more when it comes to spirituality. For us, whether with regard to our status during the omer or with regard to our status in lockdown, this is a crucial lesson: our goal is not to simply let this time of certainty control us, but much like the Nazir in Sforno's thinking, to seize the time -- carpe quarantinum, if you will -- to seize the spiritual initiative, to take our own proverbial Neder for a life of maximal sanctity and meaning.



# NUMBERS

## Beha'alotecha

By Gustave Rieu

New York City has swallowed me up like a carnivorous plant swallowing a fly. I have been confined in my apartment for more than 12 weeks. I obey the law, I stay indoors, stay healthy, and preserve life. Despite the hardships, we have good news, the numbers of infections, hospitalizations and deaths are way down. Therefore, I'm learning that I have to be realistic. Life will be different, and I have no idea when things will begin to feel familiar again. I try therefore to educate myself as much as possible about the virus, and everything connected to it and to continue on my journey into Jewish Learning which does not come easy for me. I'm using different sources like sefaria.org, studying Daf Yomi and my Artscroll Humash. But this debar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand.

Parashat Behaalotecha contains the verse "The people complained, speaking evil in the ears of HaShem, and HaShem heard and His wrath flared, and a fire of HaShem burned against them, and it consumed at the edge of the camp." (Bemidbar 11:1). This is the beginning of the unfortunate decline of the Jewish people during the sojourn in the wilderness.

Rashi describes the "disconnect" between the people and the Almighty. They complained: "How much we have struggled on this journey! it has been three days that we have not rested from the suffering of the way!" God was angry at them: "I had intended it for your benefit, so that you would enter the Land immediately."

Rambam takes note of a peculiar expression in the pasuk describing the complaints: "And the nation was 'k-mitonenim' (they were LIKE complainers)". Strangely, the Torah does not state that the people complained. It states that they were "like complainers." Why? What does that mean?

Rambam explains that the people spoke out from their hurt and pain. In other words, there was a certain degree of legitimacy to their whining. When people are in pain, it is natural to complain. If someone is in the hospital, he is laid up, he is in pain, and he sometimes utters things that he really should not be saying: "Why is G-d doing this to me? I do not deserve this suffering!" People get upset when they are in pain, and it is natural to complain. This is a mitigating factor. They are only "LIKE" complainers. We cannot really throw the book at them. They were doing what comes naturally for those who are in pain.

If that's the case why does HaShem get upset with them? Rambam answers that they should have followed Him with a good spirit and attitude based on all the multitude of goodness and kindness He provided them. When have so much it is good, but when things are not 100% right, we complain.

Rambam is saying that this is not right. We should be looking at the "bigger picture" before complaining. The big picture is that there is a bounty of blessing we are enjoying despite all the bumps in the road or the pot holes, or even the ditch, that we occasionally get stuck in. We still should not complain because the sum total of our life is still overwhelmingly tilted towards the side of joy, gladness, and abundance of that which is good.

Shalom to All!



# NUMBERS

## Shelah Lecha

By Annette F. Gourgey

### Doubt and Faith

Of all the parshiot, Shelah Lecha is the saddest. The Israelites begin on a high note: after a life of slavery and two years of wandering in the desert, they are fresh from a victory at Hormah and they feel energized to plan their entry into the Promised Land. They select twelve spies, the finest representatives of each tribe, to scout the land and assess the prospects for conquest. But what begins as excitement and anticipation disintegrates into despair.

The spies return after 40 days with the goodly fruits of the land and words of its beauty, but with a report not of confidence but of fear and demoralization. The land, they say, is rich, but it consumes its inhabitants. Its people are like the legendary giants. Against them, the Israelites feel like grasshoppers. Only Caleb and Joshua have faith in God and in the people's ability to succeed, but when they are unable to convince them, they rend their clothes, as if something has died.

And it does seem as if the dream of a free nation has died. Doubting themselves and God's promise, the people revert to their slave mentality. Return to the familiar evil of Egypt is preferable to being murdered in a strange place. No encouragement or reminders of God's deliverance can reassure them. Moses and Aaron fall on their faces, fearing that everything they have worked for and accomplished will come to nothing.

God threatens to destroy the people and redeem only Moses. As before, Moses intercedes, reminding God of His promise of forgiveness in the Thirteen Attributes. Perhaps Moses, in his own discouragement, also needs to remind himself of God's love and forgiveness as he heard it after the Golden Calf, another moment of profound despair over whether a people raised in slavery and idolatry could really be led to freedom and faith.

God pardons the people "according to thy word"—actually according to His own word to Moses on Mt. Sinai. However, this generation will have to die in the desert. Because they turned away from God, the Promised Land will go to their children. Ironically, after hearing God's judgment, the people repent and decide to forge ahead after all, without God, only to be beaten back to Hormah, a place appropriately named "utter destruction." It would seem that their dream has indeed been destroyed.

God's reaction seems harsh. Anyone who has seen the film "Twelve Years a Slave" will appreciate how slavery's brutality can break even the strongest spirit. Surely this calls for understanding and compassion. Has God now abandoned His people?

We have seen this from the beginning of human existence, but it is not what it appears. In Bereshit, God initially appears to abandon Adam and



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Eve. An alternative interpretation is that God is not punishing them, but acknowledging the painful consequences of human ignorance and our own abandonment of faith. Likewise, God does not punish the Israelites so much as acknowledge that a generation born in slavery can never fully understand freedom. The Promise must go to their children whose spirit is still whole. Indeed, God immediately reaffirms His promise: "When you come into the land which I give to you..." He has not abandoned His people. Just as He continued to clothe and take care of Adam and Eve, and to rescue the Israelites from Egypt and at the Red Sea, He continues to take care of His people even when their dream seems unreachable.

There is no denying the tragedy of our ancestors, who suffered so greatly and did not experience full redemption in their lifetime. The inescapable reality is that sometimes we pay a heavy price for our ignorance. The

journey can be long, and much of it traveled in darkness. That we don't see deliverance now doesn't mean that it will never come or that God has abandoned us or our children. We can remember this even in our darkest moments, when faith seems remote.

A rabbinic tradition holds that the spies' report occurred on Tish'a B'Ab, the anniversary of our people's deepest despair. The first haftarah of the Three Weeks includes Jeremiah 2:2: "I remembered the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride; how you followed Me in the desert, in a land not sown." Like Abraham, the Israelites left all they knew to follow God in faith, without knowing where their home would be or when they would find it. But even in their lowest moments, their wanderings were an act of faith; and God does not forget our devotion, even when accompanied by the doubt that is an inevitable part of the journey.

# NUMBERS

## Pinhas

By Francine Alfandary

Parashat Pinhas includes the tale of the five daughters of Zelophehad. Their father has died without sons, and the sisters do not wish their father's name to be forgotten. The Almighty grants their appeal. The women inherit their father's possession.

This resonated with me for several reasons. First, my two sisters and I did not change our names at marriage. Indeed, one of my sisters agreed with her husband to give their children our family's name. Keeping alive the Alfandary name not only honors our father, but also the generations of Alfandary men and women who have preceded us.

Second, I have recently been in touch with a long-lost branch of our family. My great-grandfather was a physician who left Istanbul for Paris in the early 1900's. I was aware that my great-grandfather had a brother named Salomon. Thanks to records now available on-line, I determined that this brother, Salomon Passy, was on the last train to leave France

for Auschwitz, just 3 weeks before the Liberation. My sadness at this discovery was tempered by a happier discovery. Salomon's grandson, Victor Perahia, was also deported, but did not perish in the camps. Now 87, he began speaking publicly about his childhood just a few years ago.

Since connecting these dots, I have been in frequent touch with Victor's daughter Sarah Perahia. The Perahia family had thought they were the only survivors of the Shoah in the family. Thanks to our discovery, the Perahia family is meeting cousins on four continents – and even down the street in Paris.

Like the daughters of Zelophehad, my sisters, my cousins and I will not let our fathers be forgotten. We are the daughters of the Jews who were expelled from Spain, who left the Ottoman Empire for France, who survived the Shoah. By continuing to tell our story, we keep our inheritance alive.





# NUMBERS

## Mas'ei

By Malka Strasberg Edinger

In the final parasha of sefer Bemidbar, parashat Mas'ei, the Israelites' travels through the wilderness are recounted. The Torah recounts their trek in an interesting way: rather than telling us that the Israelites traveled from Raamses to Sukkot to Etam to Pi-hahiroth to Marah, etc., the Torah tells us that they traveled from Raamses to Sukkot, from Sukkot to Etam, from Etam to Pi-hahiroth, from Pi-hahiroth to Marah, and so on and so forth. Why does the Torah list each place twice, once as the destination and once as the point of departure?

Perhaps one reason can be to teach us not to become overwhelmed by a daunting task or journey; we can achieve our goals in smaller, more manageable steps.

Another reason can be to teach us that we should never stop growing. Every goal that we attain is a major accomplishment, but we should never be complacent or lazy; there is always room to grow more and move on further, even if incrementally.

Yet another reason can be to teach us that whenever we experience a journey of some kind, we should always remember where we came from. Da me'ayin bata (Pirkei Avot 3:1). We should always be humble and we should always be true to ourselves.



# DEUTERONOMY

## Debarim

By James Kahn

Debarim marks the beginning of Moshe's valedictory address to the Jewish people, in preparation for the new generation's entry into the land of Israel. Much of the portion is devoted to a listing of the various peoples and kingdoms that have come and gone, either annihilated by other invaders, or by the Jewish people themselves in battle.

Even though the Jews also sinned—by their lack of faith in the episode of the spies, and more generally by their myriad complaints along the journey—and even Moshe himself will not be allowed to enter the land of Israel, the Jewish people have been allowed to survive and continue their journey. The message is that while all these tribes and kingdoms come and go, their land and possessions pass from one to another and they disappear, the Jewish people have and will continue to endure.

Just as they have prevailed in battles during their journey and have arrived at this moment, the new generation will enter the land of Israel and be able to continue the mission of the Jewish people.



# DEUTERONOMY

## Vaethanan

By Yosef Solomon

The Torah describes in Parashat Va'etchanan the supreme importance of remembering Maamad Har Sinai (the experience of the acceptance of the Torah which took place at Mount Sinai). We are told "רַק הִשְׁמַר לְךָ וְשִׁמְרָה" [Take utmost care and watch yourselves scrupulously, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes]. The Torah's emphatic insistence is striking and nearly unique in the proscription of "מַאֲד". Indeed, Ramban (Nachmadies), both in his commentary on the Torah on this verse, and in his list of the commandments, writes that this constitutes a biblical obligation to constantly remember "the glorious experience (of Sinai) and to transmit to all generations both what we witnessed and what we heard."

Rambam (Maimonides,) in one of his letters, also describes the importance of telling in vivid detail the experience of Mount Sinai to one's children. Why is this viewed as a matter of the utmost importance? Ramban explains that the point of the Sinai experience was not only a revelation of Torah law but for the Jewish people to witness the veracity of God's Torah with their own eyes and learn to fear Hashem. The experience was meant to show the people that Torah is absolute truth and that they must be in a constant state of awe of its Giver.

Rashi (4:10 s.v Yom Asher Amadta) includes in this obligation to remember Sinai, the thunder and fire detailed in Parashat Yitro (Shemot 20:15). There the Torah describes the people as seeing - or "witnessing"- the thunder at Har Sinai. Rashi (ad. loc s.v Ro'im Et HaKolot) explains this

event as a miracle in that they were able to visually witness a sound. Surely this is a striking miracle, but why is this singled out as one of the main aspects to remember of the receiving of the Torah? In his Nefesh Hachaim, Rav Chaim Volozhin explains that the witnessing of thunderous sound was meant to impress upon the Jewish people that true reality is that of Torah. Our physical world is merely ephemeral while Torah is absolute. In bending the laws of nature while giving the Torah, the Jewish people were shown the façade of the physical world. Given our susceptibility to overlook this central principle, the Torah mandated remembrance of that magnificent event.

The centrality the Torah places on remembering the Revelation at Sinai can be gleaned from the myriad Mitzvot which stem from, and are meant to cultivate, this remembrance. Hakhel, the public reading of the Torah which took place in the times of the Beit Hamikdash every eighth year, is a prime example. The public reading, which was performed by the King for the entire nation (men, women and children), was meant to recreate the experience of Har Sinai. In fact, the Torah explains the reason for Hakhel as "לִמְעַן יִלְמְדוּ וִירְאוּ אֶת ה'..." [...that you should learn to revere Hashem...], linking it to Ma'amad Har Sinai. More pertinent to us today, Shavuot is a Yom Tov whose entire nature is to recall Ma'amad Har Sinai. Indeed, the practice in most communities is to stand for the reading of the Aseret Hadibrot on Shavuot in a literal reenactment of the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai.





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In truth, though, we need not look far for remembrances of Ma'amad Har Sinai. In essence, every day for a Torah Jew is a recreation of that sacred moment. The Gemara (Brachot 22a) interprets verses in Parshat Va'etchanan as a mandate that every act of learning Torah be with fear. Just as the Torah was given with "Reverence, fear, quacking, and trembling" so too it must be studied in all generations in that same fashion. Moreover, the Tur (O.C 47) in describing the blessings on the Torah that we make every morning explains that one should focus on the act of Maamad Har Sinai and of the giving of the Torah through fire. In other words, these Berachot, which serve as the act preceding Torah study, are meant to focus a person's attention on what they should accomplish through the study.

When a person's studies Torah, his mind is filled with Hashem's wisdom and is in His presence. In a celebrated Gemara in Brachot (6a), the Talmud informs us that when even one person sits and toils in Torah there is a divine presence there. This means that a person is not merely studying

wisdom, such as exists in many different areas of study, but rather is studying Hashem's word and law in His company. If someone would approach study with this concept etched in their mind, it is no wonder that the endeavor would be with an intense fear of Heaven. Indeed, each and every time a person learns, he would be re-experiencing the moment of the Sinai experience through his study. In this vein, it is no wonder that the Mishna in Avot (3, 8) records that there is a prohibition to forget one's learning.

The proof text the Mishna quotes is the verse we saw above, "רַק הַשְׁמֵר לָךְ, וְהַשְׁמֹר נִפְשְׁךָ מֵאֵד פֶּרֶת־שֹׁכֵחַ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים." On the surface the two seem to have nothing to do with one another. The verse is referring to remembering Sinai, not one's individual learning. It appears that the Mishna is telling us that if one really viewed his Torah learning through the lens of Har Sinai and the experience there, he would surely not forget his learning. May Shavuot in this unique time allow us to contemplate Maamad Har Sinai and its indelible impact that it has had on us and our lives everyday.

# DEUTERONOMY

## Reeh

By Z. Edinger

Parashat Reeh was my bar mitzvah parashah. Reading it over these past few weeks I was reminded of many happy memories. Memories of my grandfather who taught me my portion so patiently. Memories of my grandmother, who always made sure that I received a quarter every time I came to their apartment to study. Memories of Bram Cardozo who stood next to me when I read torah for the first time, and made hand motions to indicate the trope to me - hand motions which I had never learned and had absolutely no meaning for me - I quietly told him to stop distracting me. I also think of this sometimes when I see Lou quietly giving hand motions to the hazan during the reading of the torah.

At the end of the Parasha in a section connected to the laws of tithes the Torah talks about the pilgrim festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. As we are about to celebrate Shabu'ot I thought I would focus the verses connected to this holiday.

(9) You shall count for yourselves seven weeks: from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain you shall begin to number seven weeks. (10) You shall keep the feast of weeks to Hashem your God with a tribute of a freewill offering of your hand, which you shall give, according as Hashem your God blesses you: (11) and you shall rejoice before Hashem your God, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your male servant, and your female servant, and the Levite who is within your gates, and the foreigner, and the fatherless, and the widow, who are in the midst of you, in the place which Hashem your God shall choose, to cause his name to dwell there. (12)

You shall remember that you were a bondservant in Egypt: and you shall observe and do these statutes.

Verse 10 tells us that one of the main observances of the holiday is to give a freewill offering to God according to what God has given us. It includes an unusual word - מִסַּת MISAT - this word is actually a hapax legomenon meaning it only appears once in the entire torah. There are different opinions on what the root and etymology of this word is, Ibn Ezra, Menachem ibn Saruq and Dunash ibn Labrat each give variant readings. But in context the meaning is generally understood as having to do with a sufficiency. On Shabu'ot we are obligated to bring a freewill offering - there is no fixed quantity for this offering. It will be sufficient to bring an amount based on whatever God has blessed us with this particular harvest season. This is after all an agricultural holiday - celebrating the barley harvest. Now that we have completed the harvest we want to celebrate the bounty God has given us.

But Verse 11 then tells us something a little strange in the context of a holiday celebrating the harvest. Everyone must participate and be happy over this holiday. Everyone must enjoy the holiday. The list includes people who have nothing or next to nothing, no land or property to speak of. Sons and daughters who don't own any property in their own names; servants who survive on whatever their master gives them; Levites who own no property and survive on the payment of tithes, foreigners who do not have any ancestral inheritance in the



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land; orphans and widows who struggle to survive - like Naomi in the book of Ruth. All of these are commanded to celebrate and be joyful on this Agricultural holiday. No matter that these categories of people had no harvest of their own to bring in.

Why? The next verse tells us - because we were all slaves and God took us out of Egypt and gave us His ordinances and statutes of the Torah to observe. Everyone of us was a part of this revelation. And we all continue to be a part of this ongoing revelation. Whether or not we had a good harvest this year; Or whether or not the market is up or down; whether we can gather together with our families and eat cheesecake or whether we are isolated and home alone this year. We all must recognize that God has brought us out of Egypt to make us

one people with one mission - to follow his ways and statutes given in this torah.

That is why this communal study of torah has been so amazing. All of us of extremely diverse backgrounds and abilities have come together to study the entire torah. This is something that would be difficult to do on our own. But this giant task becomes easier when done together as part of a team, as part of a community. Therefore let us all now enter the holiday of Shabu'ot with joy and pride. Our communal study is a real accomplishment and cause to celebrate. And even if our individual circumstances this give us pause, just think how despite this, we came together as a community to study the entire Torah. This I hope will be something for us all to rejoice about this Shabu'ot - Moadim leSimha!

