

Reflections of Redemption

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

Reprinted for Parshat Nasso, 5781
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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** שתחיל
Shagalov

DEDICATED BY

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

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

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)

IN LOVING MEMORY OF OUR DEAR FATHER & FATHER-IN-LAW

Mr. Nathan ben Reb Lebel עי"ה Brody

Passed away on 16 Sivan, 5752

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