



**ALEPH
INSTITUTE**
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

TORAH WEEKLY

T"01

21 - 27 May, 2017
25 Iyar - 2 Sivan, 5777
Numbers 1:1 -4:20
Omer: 40 - 46
Haftarah: Hosea 2:1 - 22

■ GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

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ANSWER YES TO ALL

There is a lengthy discussion in the Talmud regarding the giving of the Torah, which is celebrated this week, and the details of that interaction between God and the Jewish People. There is one opinion that states that when the Jews were commanded each of the 613 Mitzvot, positive and negative, they responded in kind – “Yes” to the positive and “No” to the negative. There is a second opinion, however, which maintains that the Jews responded equally to both the positive and negative commandments. They answered “Yes” to all.

What is the meaning of responding in the positive to both positive and negative, and what is the significance of the details of their whole exchange to begin with?

Perhaps the following story can shed some light on this matter:

During WWII there was a young widow who lived in Russia with her five year old son. Her husband had been sent off to fight on the front lines for the Russians and never returned, and she was having a very hard time providing for herself and her young son. She decided to travel to the big city to meet with a distant relative whom she thought might be able to help them.

The trip was long and dange-

rous, and she opted to leave her little boy with a gentile neighbor for the week or so that she would be away. She reviewed the basic dos and don'ts of Shabbat and Kashrut with her son, hugged him tightly for what could have been the last time and headed off on her journey.

Her trip took longer than expected and after more than two weeks had gone by and she had not returned, the neighbor assumed the worst and placed the boy in the local orphanage. There he was subjected to all sorts of harassment and criticism by the other children as well as from the staff for his Kosher stringencies and Shabbat restrictions. His emotional strength was being tested to the max and, on top of everything, he missed his mother terribly.

Once, after almost a month at the orphanage, the boys were out hiking in the hills outside town. They stopped at the home of a farmer and their leader asked if he would give them all something cold to drink. The farmer happily invited them in and poured each boy a cup of fresh milk. Our little Jewish boy was relieved that it was just milk, and not something he would have to refuse and subject himself to more humiliation. Just as he was about to say the blessing and drink, he overheard the farmer say to the group leader, “It’s a good thing you came here, there’s nothing healthier than horse’s

milk...”

The boy was torn. He knew he couldn't drink the milk of a horse, but he just couldn't bring himself to make a scene yet again, knowing the consequences. After several long minutes of inner turmoil, he stood up and, pretending to trip over another child's feet, spilled the milk on the floor. Then it was time for them to leave.

Feeling very proud and relieved at the same time, he walked with the group back down the hills towards the orphanage.

As they approached, the boy noticed someone pacing frantically back and forth in front of the orphanage. It was his mother! Bursting with excitement, he broke away from the group and ran with all his might, calling out for his mother. “Mommy! Mommy!” he cried, as he ran into her outstretched arms, “I’m still yours! I didn’t drink the milk!”

What is clear is that this precious little boy, who underwent bitter torment from everyone around him, wasn't standing his ground for religious reasons. His thinking was simply and purely, “This is what my mother wants. If I want to continue to identify with my mother, to feel that I am ‘my mother’s child,’ I must do it.”

When the Jews stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, and were

presented with the opportunity to become God's People, they weren't concerned with the specifics of each commandment. Their primary concern was, "Do we identify with God?" And the answer to that was, unequivocally, "Yes!"

Regardless of what exactly it was they were being instructed then and for all times, their response to it all was, "Yes, we will be Your people. Yes, no matter what you ask of us, we are Yours."

By Rabbi Moishe Mayir Vogel

A WHOLE, NOT MORE NOT LESS

This week we begin to read from the book of "Bamidbar," otherwise known as the book of "Numbers."

The name is derived from the first topic addressed in this book, which is the census which God took of the Jewish people. A census is an understandable thing, especially when transporting hundreds of thousands of people through the wilderness. But wouldn't the omnipotent God always know exactly how many people there were? Why does God need a census? Not to mention that this is only one of nine times that God counts the Jews in the Torah.

A census is more than just a way of knowing quantity, it is a way of showing endearment. Just like one might count and recount a collection of precious gems, vintage cars or even baseball cards. If you really and truly love something and hold it close to your heart, you may find yourself constantly reviewing its contents, even if it never changes.

But God's census-taking of the Jews means even more. When counting the people, every individual counted as one, regardless of his/her social status or political standings. The greatest scholars and the simplest members of society are on the same scale when it comes to essence.

Indeed, the name "Yisrael" is an acronym for the Hebrew words meaning "There are 600,000 letters in Torah," signifying that each and every one of the 600,000 souls of the Jewish people is like a letter of the Torah. If even one single letter of a Torah scroll is missing or even damaged, it invalidates the entire scroll and it must be tended to before that scroll can be utilized again.

This concept also relates to the Giving of the Torah which will be commemorated this week. Our Sages tell us that if even one person had been lacking at Sinai, even the most simple folk, the Torah would not have been given. Not even to Moses himself.

Additionally, God says regarding the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate redemption, "And I will gather you in, one by one, O children of Israel." God will not simply bring salvation to the world en bloc, but will seek out each and every person in exile, one by one. Each person is a precious and

absolutely necessary part of God's world. Everyone counts as one whole, not more and certainly not less.

By Rabbi Moishe Mayir Vogel

In Jewish History

Monday, 26 Iyar, 5777 - May 22, 2017

R. Saadia Gaon (942)

Iyar 26 is the yahrtzeit (anniversary of the passing) of Rabbi Saadia Gaon (892?-942), author of *Emunot V'deot*, one of the earliest works of Jewish philosophy. ("Gaon" was the title given to the leading Sages of Babylonia in the post-Talmudic period).

Ramchal (1747)

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto (known by the acronym "Ramchal"), philosopher, kabbalist and ethicist, was born in Padua, Italy, in 1707. At a very early age, he began to study Kabbalah under the tutelage of Rabbi Moshe Zacuto, one of the foremost Kabbalists of his generation. While still in his twenties, he authored numerous works of Torah scholarship, including *Derech Hashem* ("The way of G-d"), a systematic exposition of the fundamentals of Judaism. In 1735, Luzzatto left his native Italy and, avoiding public life, set up shop as a gem cutter in Amsterdam. His fame nevertheless caught up with him, and in 1740, (at the turn of the Jewish century 5500), he published his most famous work, *Mesilat Yesharim* ("Path of the Just"). Like many other great men of his age, Luzzatto longed for the Holy Land, and in 1743 he settled in Acco. He was not to enjoy a long stay there, however, and on Iyar 26, 5507 (1747), at the age of 39, he and his entire family died in a plague. According to most traditions, he was buried in Tiberias, next to the tomb of Rabbi Akiva.

R. Eizik of Homel (1857)

Rabbi Yitzchak Eizik Epstein (1770-1857), who served as the rabbi of the town of Homel in White Russia for 58 years, was a leading figure in the first three generations of Chabad Chassidism. As a young man, he became attracted to the teachings of the first Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, and remained a devoted follower of the 2nd and 3rd Rebbes, Rabbi DovBer and Rabbi Menachem Mendel. He authored a number of Chassidic works, including *Sh'tei HaMeorot* and *Chanah Ariel*.

Six-Day War (1967)

In the spring of 1967, the Arab capitals paraded their arms and openly spoke of overrunning the Land of Israel and casting its inhabitants into the sea. The international media was almost unanimous in its belief that the small Jewish state, outflanked and outgunned by its enemies, stood little chance of survival. It seemed that, for the second time in a generation, the world was going to stand by and allow the enemies of the Jewish people to slaughter them in the millions.

On Iyar 26 (June 5, 1967), Israel launched preemptive strikes on its southern and northern frontiers. In just six days, the Jewish army defeated five Arab armies on three fronts and liberated territories of its promised homeland amounting to an area greater than its own size, including the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

The openly miraculous nature of Israel's victory spawned a global awakening of the Jewish soul, fueling the already present and growing teshuvah movement of return to G-d and Jewish traditions. The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, called it a moment of biblical proportions, an "opportunity the likes of which has not been granted for thousands of years." Many thousands of Jews flocked to put on tefillin and pray at the newly liberated Western Wall of the Temple Mount.