



The Schechter Institutes
שוחרי עמותות שבטר



Amidst the Clouds: Addressing the Crisis in Ukraine

Exodus 40:38

For over the Tabernacle a cloud of יי rested by day, and fire would appear in it by night, in the view of all the house of Israel throughout their journeys.

שמות מ':ל"ח

כִּי עָנָן יִי עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וְאֵשׁ תִּהְיֶה
לְיָלֵה בּוֹ לְעֵינֵי כָל־בֵּית־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל־
מִסְעֵיהֶם:

1. What purpose does the Tabernacle/Mishkan serve for the People? What purpose does it serve for God?
2. Where (literally and figuratively) are the Israelites in their journey? What challenges do they now face?

Sforno on Numbers 33:2:2

The reason why we find sometimes the objective mentioned first and other times the place of departure, is due to the fact that sometimes the people were glad to get away from a certain place where unpleasantness had occurred, whereas other times they were merely glad to arrive at a new destination hoping for a pleasant stay in their new encampment. One of the most vexing aspects of all these journeys was that the new objective had never been announced beforehand, so that the people were always in the dark about what the next day would bring. In spite of all these uncertainties they never refused to follow the cloud and break camp at a moment's notice when required. The reason that both the breaking of camp and the making of camp are mentioned separately is because both entailed a considerable amount of discomfort.

ספורנו על במדבר ל"ג:ב'ב'

ואלה מסעיהם למוצאיהם ולפעמים קרה
הפך זה. וכתב גם כן ענין המסע שהיה
לצאת ממקום אל מקום בלי הקדמת
ידיעה שהיה זה קשה מאד ובכל זה לא
נמנעו ובכן נכתב בכל אחד מהם ויסעו
ממקום פלוני ויחנו במקום פלוני כי המסע
והחניה היה כל אחד מהם קשה:

1. What challenges is Sforno suggesting the Israelites are facing?
2. How might we apply this text and description of challenges to Jews today?

רבנו בחיי, שמות מ':ל"ח:א'

Rabbeinu Bahya, Shemot 40:38:1

כי ענן יי על המשכן יומם ואש תהיה לילה בו "for the cloud of the Lord would be over the Tabernacle by day, whereas by night fire would be above it." We would have expected the Torah to write: ענן יי ביום ואש (ה'). Why did the Torah mention the word "fire" in front of the word "night" when describing the presence of heavenly attributes as manifest in connection with the Tabernacle? The reason is that the Torah wanted to use both "day" and "night" as divine attributes, respectively. (The word "day" is an alternate name for the attribute of Mercy, whereas the word "night" is an alternate name for the attribute of Justice).

It is well known that the name of the attribute of Mercy often appears with the letter מ being repeated, such as in the word יומם, [usually translated as "by day." Ed.] The basic letters in the word לילה are ליל, the letter ה at the end being the allusion to the attribute of Justice which is most active at night.

כי ענן יי על המשכן יומם ואש תהיה לילה בו. היה ראוי שיאמר הכתוב ענן ביום ואש תהיה בלילה, אלא שבא לרמוז על מדת יום ומדת לילה. וידוע כי עצם המלה יום אבל נכפלה המ' כי כן שם מדת רחמים מלה כפולה, ומלת לילה, עצם המלה ליל והה"א האחרונה רמז למדת הדין שעקר ממשלחה בלילה.

1. What are the mechanics of traveling while being led by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire?
2. Is attributing Mercy to day and Justice to night an appropriate metaphor? Why or why not?
3. What is the place of Justice and Mercy in the current situation of Ukrainian Jewry? For the Ukrainian people generally?

Alshich on Torah, Deuteronomy 29:9:4

It can further be explained along these lines that when the Torah says, "Kol Ish Yisrael", "Kol" refers to all of the component parts that make "Ish Yisrael", the "person of Israel" which functions when all of the component parts are righteous. Thus Israel is referred to as "one nation" and "one soul", and the seventy souls who come down to Egypt are the root of the holiness which is the complete unity of the whole nation. Therefore all of Israel is intertwined with

אלשיך על התורה, דברים כ"ט:ט:ד'

(ד) עוד יתכן על פי דרך זה באומר כל איש ישראל פירש ענין היות כלם צדיקים והוא כי ישראל נקרא גוי אחד ונפש אחד כמה דאת אמר שבעים נפש שהוא להיותם משורש הקדושה שהיא אחדות שלימה ועל כן ישראל ערבים זה לזה יחשבו כל איש ואיש מישראל כאשר אחד מגוף שלם וכל הכללות כגוף מקובץ מאברים רבים ונפשותם כנפש א' המחיה

each other, and each person is considered like one piece of the complete body, and all of the groups are like systems within the body, and all of their souls are like one soul which brings them all to life together. And furthermore, because of the unity of heart of the nation, the soul placed within it will be holy because it rests within a united organism. This is the ultimate desire: that this body will serve as the sanctuary of God, that the people themselves will be the Mikdash and the sanctuary, rather than the city and the building.

את כלם יחד. ...
ועוד שע"י האחדות בלב ונפש בקרבך
קדוש כי הוא יתב' שורה על נפש בעל
אחדות בקרבו וזה אני חפץ שיהיו היכל יי
המה שהאנשי' עצמם יהיו המקדש
וההיכל ולא העיר והבית

1. How is Alshich explaining Kol Ish Yisrael? What are the different stages of the Israelites' development he describes?
2. Given that Jews are scattered all over the world do we have anything that stands in for the Tabernacle and/or Sanctuary? Does unity among Jews matter?

Derekh HaShem, Part Two, On Divine Providence in General 23

The Talmud (Shevuot 39a), in discussing the domino effect of sin, concludes with the Aramaic phrase, Kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh, meaning all of Israel are responsible for each other. This phrase is the basis of the notion of communal responsibility in Jewish law. If one Jew sees another Jew at the verge of sinning, he has an obligation to step in and help. **Even more so, it implies an obligation on all Jews to ensure that other Jews have their basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter taken care of. Simply by virtue of being a Jew one is responsible for the well-being of other Jews, and vice versa.**

דרך ה', חלק שני, בענין השגחתו יתברך
בכלל כ"ג

והוא עניין "כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה"
(שבועות לט) שזכרו חז"ל, כי הנה על
ידי זה נמצאים מתקשרים קצתם בקצתם
ולא נפרדים איש לעצמו. והנה מידה
טובה תמיד מרובה, ואם נתפסים זה על
זה בחטא, כלשכן שיועילו זה על זה
בזכות

1. Alshich explains the meaning of 'Kol ish Yisrael,' while Derekh Hashem brings in the classic phrase of Kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh. What are the differences and similarities between the two phrases?
2. What is communal responsibility? What are our obligations to care for the basic needs of all Jews?

1472

Lisbon, Portugal, 1472

Pisa -

Pisa, Italy

The King -

Alfonso V, King
of Portugal

Arzila -

a city in
Morocco

**Rabbi Don Yitzhak
Ben Yehuda Abarbanel
(1437 - 1508)**

Statesman who served in the
court of the King of Portugal
and one of the great
Torah commentators.

Dear Yechiel of Pisa,

I would like to tell you about events that have taken place among the Jews of our region.

The King, long may he live, gathered some ships and sailors to travel to Africa, where he conquered territories and fought in the city of Arzila. Thank God, no Jews died, but two hundred and fifty were captured – men, women and children – and they are hungry, thirsty, naked and much in need.

When we saw the children of Zion sold as slaves and servants, we, the leaders of the Jewish community of Portugal, decided to call for their freedom and pay the ransom for their release.

Like the twelve tribes of Israel, we sent twelve emissaries, myself included, from city to city and country to country to take the children of Israel out of “Egypt” and collect money to pay for their ransom.

Thus far, we have ransomed two hundred and twenty of the captives for a large sum of money – ten thousand gold coins. As all their property has been stolen and they lack clothing and food, we must provide for all their needs.

We have thirty prisoners yet to ransom, who have fallen into the hands of very harsh masters.

This is a brief account of the events that we have been struggling with day and night.

On hearing this, all Jews will be outraged and profoundly moved.

Yitzhak Ben Yehuda Abarbanel

(Based on a letter from Rabbi Don Yitzhak Ben Yehuda Abarbanel to Yechiel of Pisa)

Excerpted from *Friends across the Sea: A textbook about Jewish Peoplehood*, TALI Education Fund, Curriculum Department, 2012.

1. What events is Abarbanel describing in his letter?
2. Does the assistance effort he describes parallel other major events in Jewish history?

English got against those poor devils? They mind their own business and just want to be left in peace to work the earth" — Shmulik immediately ups and defends England and proves that the English are the most cultured people on earth.

"Pipe down, you bastard," someone yells. "I don't give a hoot about culture if they chop people up like cabbages."

"And I don't give a hoot about you, you big fat dope."

"And you're an imbecile, but you're built like a jackass." To make a long story short—a few punches, witnesses, documents, depositions, a justice of the peace, and the comitant plagues. At first glance you might wonder why these poor beggars, these poverty-stricken creatures, these penniless, down-at-the-heel paupers, should care about a land stuck away the deuce-knows-where in Africa?

Moreover, please tell me, my dear Kasrilevites, why you have to break your heads over Serbia, where in the middle of one fine night some officers killed the Czar and his wife and chucked them out the window? I know you'll counter by asking if it's fair to attack a man while he's asleep and do him in. That's what you'd expect of wild savages. In turn, I'll ask you another question. Why should all these things worry you more than anyone else? Don't you have anything else to worry about? Have you already married off and provided for all your children? What sort of habit is it, I ask you, to stick your nose into every pot? Believe me, the world will get along very nicely without you, and everyone will undoubtedly manage to take care of himself.

The author begs his reader's pardon for addressing such cutting remarks to his fellow Kasrilevites. But please understand, dear friends, that I myself am a Kasrilevite. Born and bred in Kasrilevke, I was educated in its Talmud Torahs and schools and was even married there. But then I set my little ship adrift in the great and tempestuous sea of life whose waves are high as houses. And despite the fact that one is perpetually in a tumult and on the go, I have never ever forgotten either my beloved home town Kasrilevke, may it thrive and prosper to ripe old age, or my dear brethren, the Kasrilevke Jews, may they be fruitful and multiply. Whenever we experience violence, disaster or calamity *here*, far

THE GREAT PANIC OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE

(A Poema)

I Sholem Aleichem

[Wherein the Author Confides in His Readers]

Heaven has apparently decreed that Kasrilevke's Jews are destined to have more woes than anyone else in the world. Wheresoever there was calamity, misfortune, troubles and misery, trials and tribulations, they sought to sympathize, taking each affliction to heart more than anyone the world over. Of course, Kasrilevke's anguish over the Dreyfus affair should surprise no one. After all, Dreyfus was one of their own, a member of the family, so to speak. Like they say: Blood is thicker than water.

But by what stretch of the imagination could you reasonably account for the Kasrilevites' involvement with the Boers, whom the English conquered and wiped out? In Kasrilevke that war, too, caused a hullabaloo. Oh my, plenty of blood was spilled over that Boer War in the Kasrilevke synagogue. But wait a minute! Don't be alarmed! Do you really think *blood* was actually shed? God forbid! Far be it from a Kasrilevite to shed blood. Just point out a nicked finger in the distance and he falls into a dead faint. So when I say "blood" I mean something entirely different. I mean pain, heartache, and humiliation. Then why all the fuss? Simply because people have different opinions. If Srulik says one thing, Shmulik says just the reverse.

For instance, if Srulik sides with the Boers and takes up their grievances by saying: "It isn't fair! What have the

away from Kasrilevke, I immediately ask myself: What's happening *there*, in my home town?

For your information, no matter how small, forlorn, and castaway Kasrilevke may be, it is connected to the rest of the world by a sort of wire which if tapped at one end delivers a message at the other. Let me put it another way. Kasrilevke can be compared to an unborn child, tied to its mother's umbilical cord, that feels everything the mother feels. The mother's pain is the child's pain and vice versa. The only thing that puzzles me is why Kasrilevke feels the troubles and woes of the entire world, while absolutely no one cares about Kasrilevke, or sympathizes with its afflictions. Kasrilevke is a kind of stepchild of the world. The first to react to a misfortune, Kasrilevke scurries about more than anyone else and goes without sleep till it practically knocks at death's door.

Yet—oh blast those anti-Semites!—should this stepchild itself fall ill and collapse in a corner, burning feverishly like an oven, wasting away for lack of food, and thirsting for lack of water, you may be sure that not a soul would even cast a glance in its direction.

Excerpted from "The Great Panic of the Little People" in Old Country Tales [by] Sholom Aleichem: Selected and Translated, with an Introd. by Curt Leviant; Putnam, 1965.

Sholem Aleichem (1859-1916) grew up in the shtetl of Voronkiv and lived in Kyiv.

1. What tone does Aleichem take in the story? What sense does it give you of the community he depicts?
2. Is Kasrilevke comparable to a community with which you are familiar? Does it describe the broader Jewish community today? Why or why not?