

SIDRA OF THE WEEK : בהעלותך

1. *All the happenings recorded in the Torah concerning our time in the Wilderness, either occurred in the first year after our Deliverance from Egypt or during the fortieth year, just before we came into Eretz Yisroel, and some of these happenings are reported in this week's Sidra. The intervening 38 years passed without incident: that is, nothing of special significance happened that the Torah considers important enough to teach a lesson for future generations. The everyday life of the Jewish Nation consisted in the main of learning what HaShem wants from us as His People when we come to Eretz Yisroel, and thus our primary occupation was learning His Torah. The usual worries about earning a livelihood did not exist, for all our needs were attended to by HaShem Himself. He provided the Manna, the Well and the quails; our clothes did not wear out and our Camp was protected by HaShem's Clouds of Glory. In addition, we had enough gold and silver (given to us by the Egyptians) to buy from passing caravans and traders whatever we wanted in the way of furniture, tapestries or household utensils, for our new homes in Eretz Yisroel. It was a unique existence: an entire Nation preoccupied with learning Torah — with Mosheh our Teacher as the Rosh Yeshiva.*
2. This week's Sidra begins with the instructions to Aharon, as the representative of the Kohanim, concerning the kindling of the Golden Menorah in the Mishkan. HaShem commands that the seven lights of the Menorah are to be kindled in such a way that the six outer lights (symbolizing the various branches of human knowledge, "the six sciences") are turned towards the centre light, which symbolizes the light of the Torah, thus intimating how Torah is central to all knowledge and wisdom and that all wisdom is contained in the Torah and flows from it and how all knowledge is secondary to the Torah of HaShem. The Menorah itself is to be fashioned out of one single piece of gold, intimating the indivisibility of the Wisdom of the Torah of HaShem.
3. HaShem commands Mosheh concerning the induction of the Levi'im as the assistants of the Kohanim. This was done in the presence of the entire gathered People of Israel, whose representatives the Levi'im are, and each individual Levi was physically raised by Aharon at this dedication, symbolically presenting the Levi'im to the Service of the Mishkan of HaShem. The Levi'im, thus inducted, served in the Mishkan instead of the firstborn males of the Children of Israel, who are thenceforth forbidden to serve in this capacity in the Mishkan.
4. In the first month (Nissan) of the second year after our Deliverance from Egypt, HaShem commands the celebration of the Korban Pessach. The laws of the Korban Pessach are given and explained, and the Korban Pessach is duly celebrated by the whole Jewish Nation — with the exception, however, of those who were Tommei and could not take part in the holy Korbanos.
5. In reply to these people's request that they should not be excluded from the Mitzvah, Mosheh appeals to HaShem for guidance, and HaShem commands the law of the

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Pessach Shayni — the Second Korban Pessach — to be brought one month later by those who are unable to celebrate the Korban Pessach in its proper time.

6. The Sidra continues with a description of the Camp of the Jewish People in the Wilderness, and their travels. The whole Camp (in reality more a moving town, being, as it was, approximately nine miles across — see plan in the **SIDRA OF THE WEEK : במדבר**) was protected from the harsh wilderness by the surrounding Clouds of Glory, with a special Pillar of Cloud positioned upon the Mishkan at day and the Pillar of Fire at night. When HaShem desired that the people should travel, the Pillar of Cloud would rise high above the Mishkan. Then, when Mosheh received word from all the Princes of the Tribes that the people had broken camp and were packed and ready to travel, the two silver trumpets, which HaShem had commanded Mosheh to make, would be sounded and the Pillar of Cloud would move off and position itself above the leading Tribes, Yehuda, with Yissochor and Zevullun. (At the same time, HaShem commands other occasions when trumpets are to be used, too.) Then, when Mosheh's trumpets were sounded again, he would beseech HaShem to travel together with His People. Then he would give the order to travel, and the Pillar of Cloud would move off to lead the whole Camp — with the Holy Ark far in front — in the direction that HaShem desired. When it came to a halt, Mosheh would again beseech HaShem that His Presence return to dwell amongst His People, and the Pillar of Cloud would then spread itself over the Camp of Yehuda, later re-positioning itself over the Mishkan when it was set up by the Levi'im. Mosheh would then order the people to set up their tents again, delegating various duties to the Princes of the Tribes who ensured that everything proceeded in order. Thus, the entire Camp — sometimes stopping in one place for a day or two, or for a few days, a few months or indeed (later) for a few years — travelled and encamped by the command of HaShem — on the orders of Mosheh our Teacher. Never before or since has the Presence of HaShem amongst us been so clearly evident to all.
7. Assuming that we were about to enter Eretz Yisroel shortly, Mosheh invites Yisro, his father-in-law, to join the Jewish People in their Land, so to benefit them of his sage advice and wisdom. But Yisro declines this great honour, explaining that his task is to return to his native country to spread the knowledge of HaShem amongst the people there.
8. Despite the wondrous existence that the Jewish people experienced in the Wilderness, there were lapses in their trust in HaShem's ability to provide their every need. Indeed, it might have been just because of their miraculous experiences that they were unnerved, as it were, by their total reliance upon such a supernatural existence. Two such episodes are reported in this week's Sidra. The first was when some of the baser elements of the people complained about travelling so quickly to Eretz Yisroel, deliberately ignoring the fact that HaShem was doing this to hasten our settling in the Holy Land. The punishment was swift in coming: a terrible Fire from HaShem raged in the Camp, killing many. Mosheh our Teacher begged HaShem for mercy, and immediately the Fire sank into the ground. But unfortunately they had not learned their lesson, for shortly afterwards the Jewish People, urged on by the mixed multitude of aliens that had come up with us from

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Egypt and who had little faith in HaShem, complained about the Manna, the miraculous “bread from heaven”, that HaShem provided for us each day. They demanded the more natural food to which they were accustomed in Egypt. When Mosheh heard of their complaint — and the underlying sinister reasons for it — he was greatly upset and apprehensive of the deserved anger of HaShem at this ingratitude. Feeling that the fault lay with him for not training the people to place their trust in HaShem, he begs HaShem to relieve him of his duties as their Leader. But HaShem tells him that the fault is not his, and He assures Mosheh that firstly he is to share the burdens of leadership with seventy newly-appointed Elders, and secondly that HaShem will provide the meat the people have demanded, however unreasonably and complainingly.

9. Then Mosheh tells the people HaShem’s instructions: The men who have proved worthy of the greatness to be bestowed upon them are assembled in front of the Mishkan, six from each Tribe, and immediately there comes upon the Seventy Elders chosen by HaShem a Spirit of Prophecy. (There were two men, Eldod and Maydod, who were worthy of being included, but out of modesty they did not join the assembled Elders at the Mishkan. They, too, were granted the Spirit of Prophecy. When Yehoshua bin Nune heard what they were prophesying in their tents, he was alarmed and, faithful minister to Mosheh that he was, he ran and told Mosheh, imploring him to make them cease. But Mosheh in all humility replied to the contrary: he wished that all the People of HaShem should be worthy to be granted the Spirit of HaShem.) Mosheh then warns the people that HaShem is about to grant their demand for meat, and HaShem causes a great wind to blow, bearing vast flocks of quails which settle upon and around the Camp. But because their demand had been disrespectful and insulting, although HaShem grants their demand, it brought with it the displeasure of HaShem: a terrible plague breaks out among the people, and many die. In this way did the Jewish People learn for all time that HaShem can indeed provide anything at all, however unreasonable the demand, but that it is dangerous to test Him.
10. The Sidra ends with the sad episode of the punishment of Miriam, the sister of Mosheh, for her lack of respect for Mosheh our Teacher. Immediately that she made her disparaging remark about him, she was afflicted with Tsoraas, the penalty for Loshon HoRa, and even though Mosheh straightaway begs HaShem to heal her — for she intended no malice — HaShem insists that she shall serve as an example to everyone of the consequences of the slightest disrespect to HaShem’s faithful servant. And so, for seven days Miriam is banished. But just as Miriam, so long before, had so lovingly watched over her baby brother when he was placed in the River Nile, to see that no harm befall him, so too does the entire Camp wait for her recovery from her Tsoraas. For no good deed goes unrewarded.

For the explanation of the Haftorah of Sidra בהעלותך please go to HAFTORAHS.