Jewish Tribune – Nasso

**Above and Beyond**

Poor bar mitzva boy! If Parshas Nasso is your sedra, it’s the longest single sedra in the whole Torah. A whopping 176 pessukim. (The truth is the repetition of pesukim with the nesi’im bringing identical korbonos does make it easier!)

It is striking to note that the longest kappitel in the whole of Sefer Tehillim (and also the longest perek in all of Tanach) also has 176 pesukim.

Which masechta in Shas has the most dafim? Bava Basra. How many? Again, the masechta finishes on daf 176.

There must be an explanation to all this. What is special about the number 176 and why is this the magic number for the longest sedra in the Torah, the longest chapter in Nach and the longest masechta in Torah Shel Bal Peh?

Tehillim 119 follows the sequence of the Hebrew alphabet. The first 8 pesukim begin with the letter א, the next 8 with the letter ב and so on until the final 8 pesukim of the chapter which begin with the letter ת.

When a chapter follows the sequence of the Hebrew alphabet, it connotes a totality, an all-encompassing picture, from א to ת.

The number 7 represents this world, which was created in 7 days. Chazal say that the number 8 alludes to the World to Come. The number 8 represents something beyond this world; a dimension which transcends nature and physicality. This is of course Torah.

Perhaps the message is this. All of Torah transcends this world. תורה שבכתב and תורה שבעל פה are beyond the natural and are essentially spiritual. So are the soaring emotions, petitions and praises of Hashem that is Sefer Tehillim.

The Jew has always held his Sefer Tehillim close. It has been with him in times of sadness and joy, in moments of despair and hopelessness and gives comfort and expression to one’s innermost feelings throughout the myriad of moods and moments in life.

Tehillim are the oars that help the Jew sail through the vicissitudes of his journey through life. Is not saying Tehillim in a hospital waiting room when a loved one is having life threatening surgery an expression of transcendence that defies logic?

The message that all aspects of Torah and our relationship with Hashem transcends nature is best conveyed by following the sequence of the aleph beis eight times over.

The number 176 is 22 times 8. This number connotes the ultimate totality of the super-natural essence of Torah. Something which is totally over and above the physical, from א to ת.

But there is more. The number is also instructive. As Rabbi Feuer in his wonderful work on Sefer Tehillim notes in his introductory comments to chapter 119, following the sequence of the aleph beis embodies an orderly programme for achieving personal perfection. Like the Ramchal sets out in Mesilas Yeshorim, perfection is achieved by following the structure of an orderly programme.

The number 8 not only symbolises a transcendence of this world but a release from earthly desires and it is through a structured Torah programme this perfection can be achieved.

So, my dear bar mitzva boy, parshas Nasso may have many pesukim, but the message of 176 – the totality and super-natural nature of Torah and Yiddishkeit – is a message worth remembering.

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