

**Potomac Torah Study Center**  
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**NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.**

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**Bill Landau has sponsored the Devrei Torah this Shabbas to observe the 36th Yahrzeit of his wife, Sheila Endler Landau, z"l, 28 Iyar, May 22nd.**

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I am writing on 28 Iyar, Yom Yerushalayim, the 53<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, as a result of the Six Day War. I remember the fear in our hearts in Los Angeles that week, when the combined forces of the Arab countries united to surround Israel. I remember a friend at UCLA who decided to quit college and enlist in the Israeli army. I do not recall his name, but I remember admiring his decision – and many times since wondering what became of him. Early in our marriage, Hannah and I visited Israel with an emphasis on archeology. Our trip coincided with the Bar Mitzvah anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem, and our cousins hosted us for an amazing sound and light show on Yom Yerushalayim bouncing around on the walls of the Old City. Forty years later, that experience remains a highlight of our adult lives.

We begin reading Sefer Bamidbar each year shortly before Shavuot. This sefer was to be the story of the triumphal march of B'Nai Yisrael into the land that God had promised to our Patriarchs. We open the sefer with God telling Moshe to count the Jewish people, first eleven of the tribes and finally, separately, the tribe of Levi. God gave Moshe very precise directions of how to set up the camp and how to move the various sections so Levi would always surround the Mishkan and the other tribes would surround Levi. The camp would remain both at rest and moving with the focus on the center, the Mishkan and Levi. Everything went as planned until the people started their journey. Suddenly, with a whisper, everything started falling apart. What started with great promise ended with the death of the generation of the Exodus. The sefer ends with a new census, this time of the generation of the children, as they successfully prepare to enter the land that their parents were ultimately unable to possess.

While preparing my remarks for this Shabbas, my mind kept returning to a recent message from the OU to all member shuls in the United States. The OU asked each shul to work on a plan to re-open the shuls once the governors in each state permitted more freedom of movement, consistent with social distancing. We read about our ancestors' preparations to make new lives in Israel while our leaders work on plans to return to synagogue life. The generation of the Exodus feared for their future, and many of us fear the consequences of leaving social isolation. The Meraglim also consisted of two camps – the majority, who feared entering the land, and Caleb and Yehoshua, who were anxious to move forward immediately. (I abstract here from any consideration of whose position was correct.) Similarly, I see two categories in our community (again without attributing right or wrong to either). We have many relatively young and healthy people who would be likely to have mild cases should they catch covid-19. These people want to and should be able to return to work and synagogue. Many of us, however, are older and have medical conditions (respiratory or cardiac conditions, or diabetes) that place us at high risk of deadly complications from this disease. Those at high risk, or individuals who live with or will be in contact with high risk people, should avoid social interaction until the medical community has better treatment and preventive methods to save lives in case of this disease.

At various times in history, the prevailing sentiment was for "happy endings." Baroque operas virtually always had happy endings. Tragic Greek or Shakespeare plays, with a few changes, also had happy endings (even if only because of *deus*

*ex machina*). Each year, when we start Bamidbar, I wish for a *deus ex machina* to shake our ancestors out of their timidity so the generation of the Exodus could have made it to the land. As Jews, we believe that we have the power to work with God to make a difference in the world – but not to have absolute control. Sometimes, as with the Six Day War, things work out for the best for us, even against incredible odds. Other times, such as when a rogue virus changed our world half a year ago, events put us at great risk. When medical risk required that our shuls close, we had to learn a new way to connect as Jews. We have the power to make this experience a way to learn and move forward – or the ability to let things slide and make matters worse.

My late Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z”l, was a master at finding ways to turn adversity into learning opportunities. In Rabbinic school, an assignment to take charge of the seminary bookstore gave him an opportunity to search bookstores and Judaic stores in New York and Israel for treasures to bring exciting new merchandise to others – always at excellent prices. He continued this venture for decades as a rabbi, running an outstanding Judaic store during the years before the Internet took over this niche. Any anti-Semitic incident, such as high school kids throwing eggs and tomatoes at him on Kol Nidre, became a sermon and a lesson for the instigators once they were caught. As we live through the enforced lockdown to save lives, we too should follow Rabbi Cahan’s examples. May we emulate Rabbi Cahan and find ways to use the difficult experience of the past months to improve our world.

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Chaya Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.**

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Hannah & Alan

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### **Drasha: Bamidbar: Counted Out** by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

The Book of Numbers begins just that way – with many numbers. It counts the Jews who were in the desert and assigns unique divisions for each of the tribes. Every tribe has its own flag and position among the great camp of Israel. They are strategically placed around the Mishkan, and grouped accordingly. This division is somewhat troubling. Why isn’t there a concept of a great melting pot under one flag? Moreover, the singling out of the tribe of Levi raises more questions. “Bring the tribe of Levi close and have them stand before Ahron and they shall serve him (Leviticus 3:6). The Torah relates the specific tasks of the descendants of Levi and also warns the stranger, the ordinary Israelite, against attempting to join in those tasks. Why is there further division in the ranks of Jews? Why can’t the Israelite do the task of the Kohen, and the Kohen the task of the Levi, and the Levi the task of the Israelite?

**The great Arturo Toscanini was conducting Beethoven’s Symphony #3 back in the late 1930s with the NBC Symphony orchestra. The outdoor concert was held at City University’s Lewisson Stadium and was well attended. The famed trumpeter, Harry Glanz, was going to play the offstage trumpet, an integral part of the production of this piece.**

**People had flocked to hear the great trumpeter under the baton of the even more accomplished Toscanini. Glanz positioned himself in a corner about 50 feet behind the stage ready to blast his notes upon cue. As the recital led up to that moment Toscanini held his baton high, waiting to hear the sharp blasts of Glanz’s horn. They never came. All he saw was a burly security guard wrestling with the hapless musician on the grass behind the stage.**

**The guard was pointing to the stage. “You fool!” he was shouting, “what do you think you’re doing blowing that horn back here? Don’t you see there’s a concert going on up there?”**

Not everybody who wants to can be up on the stage. In the concert of the Almighty, every player has his designated position that makes the symphony much more beautiful. I have a friend who travels the United States and stops for minyanim all across the country. "Often," he exclaims, "when they ask, 'Is there a Kohen in the house?' I have the urge to go up there and pretend that I am a Kohen. I always wanted to know what it's like being called up first!"

Fortunately, he, like most of us, understands that every person in the nation of Israel, whether man or woman has a unique role to play. Sometimes roles are played from the inside, sometimes from the outside, nevertheless, the offstage trumpeters are just as vital as the onstage ones. And if we rush the stage to perform out of sync, we can ruin the beautiful harmony of a carefully orchestrated concert.

The Israelite has the mitzvot that the Kohen cannot perform. He may visit the dying and assist in the burial of any deceased. It is the Israelite who gives the tithes and supports the poor. The Kohen and Levi inherit no land from which they could perform myriad commandments. True, the Israelite cannot serve in the Temple, but his trumpeting may resound as loud as his brother's. As long as he plays it in the right position.

Good Shabbos!

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## **Bamidbar – Was the Mishkan Wheelchair Accessible?**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2020

In Parashat Bamidbar, the Torah tells us how to construct a community that has God and Torah at its center. God's command, "They shall make for Me a Sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst" (Shemot 25:8), is now given true shape as the Children of Israel depart from Mount Sinai and begin to move as a community and settle as a camp. The Sanctuary, the place of God's presence, is in the center of the camp, and the tribes, each with its individual banner and distinct position, are arranged around it.

First, we learn that after we have departed from Mount Sinai, when we are engaged in the activities of encountering the world, we must remain oriented towards God and God's presence in our midst. Whether we are encamped or marching, whether our lives are stable or in transition, we must always strive to direct our actions towards serving God. We must realize that to describe where we are in life, where we are encamped, is to describe where we are in relation to the goals of kedusha and to God. But we also learn that we need never enter the Temple to have God in our midst. Some people will seek to enter the Temple on a regular basis, others may only enter once a year or even never, but all of these people can have God in his or her midst.

Further, we learn that to be a people is not to be a homogenous mass; unity is not to be confused with uniformity. True unity, a cohesive community, comes from respecting differences: "each person on his banner," each tribe with its distinctive qualities preserved. Some are on the left, some on the right, some north, and some south. What holds them together is a shared commitment to respect each other's boundaries, to value their distinctive banners, their diversity, and to exist together as one people with a shared orientation towards God's presence in their midst.

The final lesson is one of accessibility. True, a small number of impure people were temporarily excluded from the Sanctuary during their period of impurity, and the Levites comprised the innermost ring around the Sanctuary. Nevertheless, any person had the ability to enter the Levite camp and even the Sanctuary itself. All the people participated in making the Sanctuary, and all the people had access to it and a part in it.

Just as the Sanctuary was accessible, so was the leadership. Moses' tent was no longer outside the camp; it was in the very center of it, open to all who would come. Only in a camp where every individual understood that he or she counted and had a right to engage and be heard could those who were impure say to Moshe, "Why should we be excluded from bringing God's sacrifice in its appointed time?" (Bamidbar 9:7). Only in such a camp could the daughters of Tzelafchad approach Moshe and say, "Why should our father's name be excluded from his family, because he has no son? Give us a portion together with the brothers of our father!" (Bamidbar 27:4). Only in such a camp could inclusion be assumed and exclusion be seen as a profound affront. And only in a camp led by a leader such as Moshe would the response not be condemnation and silencing, but a humble bringing of these just concerns before God.

This is the model of a camp with God at its center, and it must be our model for a Jewish community. To build such a community we need a laity that embraces these values and leaders who embody them. A leadership that embodies these values is accessible. It is a leadership that believes in unity through diversity, not through sameness. It is a leadership committed to ensuring that all are included, that no one is rejected or left outside the camp. Sadly, there are those in positions of rabbinic leadership who do not share this vision, who believe that the only Jews who count are those who fit a narrow definition, one that is getting narrower each day. Such is a leadership is fearful of diversity, believing that unity can come only if all Jews act and believe exactly the same way—their way.

The leadership that should be our standard is of a different sort. It is a leadership that spreads God's Torah in a way that teaches respect for all Jews. It is a leadership that teaches that Jews who never enter the Sanctuary can still have God in their midst if they orient their lives towards God in ways that are less obvious or ritualistic. It is a leadership that values and respects difference and diversity and believes that we are enriched by it. In a world where small-mindedness and intolerance are rife, where Jewish identity and shared values are elusive concepts, it is no small matter for a community to embrace this alternate vision, and asking a leader, a rabbi,

to help shape such a community may seem like asking the impossible. But in striving to achieve this vision, we will do much to transform the Jewish community and our respect for one another.

Building on the foundation of diversity and respect, we can create a welcoming and accessible community that builds bridges rather than walls, that reaches out to those who are marginalized or who have been excluded. It will be a community that believes that any Jew—regardless of denomination, background, observance, sexual orientation, skin color, ability of sight, mobility, or neurotypical status—has a fundamental right to be included, to find his or her place in our camp. It will be a community that is exquisitely attuned to the cry of “why should I be excluded?!” verbalized or non-verbalized, and that will remove any obstacle and create any accommodation to ensure that everyone is present and valued.

And it will be a community whose leadership is accessible, humble, and responsive. At a time when rabbinic leadership as a whole is becoming more authoritarian and unbending, the leadership that we most desperately need has pride for the Torah and the tradition that it represents, but with humility, it also seeks participation and collaboration. The community needs leaders who can admit their mistakes and learn from them. Such leaders, in the end, are loved and respected all the more.

This type of camp, this type of community, along with the leadership required to create it, will truly fulfill God’s command: “They shall make for Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.”

Shabbat Shalom!

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### **Bamidbar -- Streets Paved with Gold** by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2020 Teach 613

When the Jewish People were counted in the desert, we find that the numbers of the different tribes ranged from the thirty thousands to the seventy thousands, with one exception. The tribe of Levi had noticeably fewer people than the other tribes. That tribe is listed at twenty two thousand.

The fact that the tribe of Levi had less population growth would not be remarkable, except for the fact that it had an edge over the other tribes. The people of the other tribes were counted from the age of twenty, while people from the special tribe of Levi were counted from the age of one month. One would expect that counting children would boost their numbers considerably. Still, their numbers are less than the other tribes, a phenomenon that requires explanation.

The commentaries explain that much of the population growth of the tribes was due to the phenomenal blessing that was granted to them during the oppression in Egypt. The verse states, “As the Egyptians oppressed them, so did they multiply.” This blessing applied most greatly to the tribes who were directly enslaved. The tribe of Levi, however, was largely excluded from the oppression. As such, it did not receive the miraculous blessing that resulted from the enslavement. Their numbers were less than the other tribes, even when their children were included in the count.

The lesson here is twofold. Firstly, adversity breeds greatness. Through challenge, people become greater. This is highlighted by the stark contrast of numbers between the enslaved tribes and the tribe of Levi.

But, there is a second lesson as well.

Although the tribe of Levi did not have the blessing associated with the challenges of slavery, its members did apparently achieve greatness in other ways. The tribe of Levi was the one tribe that, in its entirety, did not participate in the golden calf. The tribe of Levi was known as “The Legion of the King,” and was chosen to serve in the Sanctuary and, later, in the Beis Hamikdash. Although they did not experience the growth that results from dramatic challenge, they did achieve greatness through slow but steady growth.

There are many people who do not grow unless they are forced to. Only when challenge strikes do they begin to discover their potential. When illness strikes a family member, G-d protect us, then they begin to discover the ability to communicate with G-d through prayer. Also, only when in crisis, do they reach out to friends and family.

There is, however, a different approach, the approach of the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi did not benefit from crisis as the other tribes, but its members did strive constantly to grow in greatness. Although they were not blessed in numbers, they were recognized for their achievements, which resulted from using and creating opportunities for growth.

The era that we are living through, that of the coronavirus/ COVID-19, is a time of both adversity and opportunity. The challenges that so many face regarding health, financial stability, education, and just overall concern, are quite significant. Even those not so directly affected, are certainly engaged in reaching out and trying to help. But, it is also a time of opportunity. During the many weeks that we have been separated, we have had so many opportunities to choose between stagnation and growth. We have the opportunity to daven better without any distractions, if we choose. We have the opportunity to learn Torah without our regular shul routine, if we choose to.

And, we have the option to give Tzedaka daily, even if we are not solicited by the clanging of the Pushke in shul, if we make the effort to do so. These are examples of seeing opportunities for greatness, even if adversity doesn't force it upon us.

It is said that during World War One there was some dangerous fighting that took place right in front of the house in which Rabbi Ahron Kotler was staying. People in the house knew that a single stray bullet could hit them at any moment. During the heavy fighting the people who were hiding remained quiet, each one lost in his own thoughts and prayers. During those tense moments, the person sitting next to Rabbi Kotler heard him repeating softly again and again, yearningly, as if in meditational prayer, "So much to accomplish; so much to accomplish."

Knowing how much Rabbi Kotler accomplished in the remaining decades of his lifetime, one is awed by the impact of his fervent prayer. Rabbi Kotler is an example of someone who was intent on continued growth through opportunity.

There are people who will only achieve greatness when pushed into, and stressed out, with crisis. But, there are others who live life self-compelled to do good. Their slogan is, "So much to accomplish; so much to accomplish."

In the early 1900's, it was said among European potential immigrants to the United States that the U.S. was a "Golden Country," and that "the streets are paved with gold." Although in a literal sense the poor immigrants did not find this to be true, and many struggled miserably to set their lives in order, in a figurative sense the streets of our communities are paved with gold- They are paved with golden mitzvah opportunities. There is much help that can be offered, if we just pay attention. There is much Torah that can be studied and taught, if we would only believe that it is within our power to make our world a better place.

Torah Judaism urges us to grow daily, to emulate the way of the tribe of Levi. We pray that we should not have to endure crisis, even though we know that crisis will make us greater. Instead we pray for daily success, to participate in the many mitzvah opportunities that are presented before us. The prayer of a Jew- as King David expressed it- is "Cast upon G-d that which you wish to give..." Tell Him all that you would like to accomplish. And then, as the verse concludes, "...He will support you," and enable you to succeed.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

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## **Jerusalem Undivided: Thoughts for Yom Yerushalayim**

by Rabbi Marc Angel  
Jewishideas.org

On December 6, 2017, President Donald Trump made it official that the United States recognizes Jerusalem as the Capital of the State of Israel. On May 14, 2018, the American embassy in Jerusalem was officially opened.

That Jerusalem is Israel's capital should be obvious to everyone...and many thoughtful people rejoice at this acknowledgment of truth. Yet, many voices express outrage and encourage violence against Israel. In the "politically correct" community, it is assumed that Israel has no right to its own capital city. People raise the concerns of Palestinians, of the Arab world, of Muslims, of the sanctity of Christian holy sites. They worry about everyone's rights--except the rights of Jews. Some people don't remember the pre-1967 years when Jerusalem was divided; when Jews had no access to our holy sites in the Old City;

During the Six Day War in 1967, Israel regained control of East Jerusalem. This was a historic event that returned the ancient holy sites of the Old City to Israeli sovereignty. Yom Yerushalayim has become a day of religious and national commemoration.

While pundits comment on the status of Jerusalem, it is important to put things into historic context.

The Muslim Ottoman Empire controlled the land of Israel for hundreds of years. Relatively few Jews lived in the holy land during those centuries. The Ottoman Empire could very easily have established a Muslim country in the land of Israel with Jerusalem as its capital city. The thought never occurred to them! "Palestine" was a poor backwater of little significance; Jerusalem was an old, decrepit city that no one (except Jews) cared very much about. There was no call for a "Palestinian State", and no claim that Jerusalem should be a capitol of a Muslim country.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan controlled the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. Egypt controlled Gaza. Neither Jordan nor Egypt ceded one inch of territory to Palestinian Arab rule. Neither suggested the need for a Palestinian country, nor took any steps in the direction of creating a Palestinian State. Jordan did not declare Jerusalem as a capital city of Palestinians.

In June 1967, Israel defeated its implacable Arab enemies in the remarkable Six Days War. In the process, Israel took control of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem. In making peace with Egypt, Israel ceded the Sinai to Egypt. In attempting to create conciliatory gestures to Palestinian Arabs, Israel ceded much of the West Bank and Gaza to the Palestinian Authority. Israel is the only country in the world to have given territory to the Palestinian Arabs. Israel has a legitimate claim to much of this territory, but for the sake of peace decided to forego pressing its claims.

Although no Muslim or Arab nation, when having control of Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza, created (or even suggested creating) a Palestinian State with a capital of Jerusalem--the current propaganda in the "politically correct" world is: the Palestinian Arabs have a right to their own State with Jerusalem as capital.

Why did this "politically correct" position gain so much credence? Why is the "international community" so concerned--even enraged--that President Trump has recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel? Don't they all know that Israel's claim to Jerusalem goes back 3000 years, and that Jews have prayed facing Jerusalem from time immemorial? Don't both Christianity and Islam recognize the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible--a Bible that highlights the centrality of Jerusalem in so many texts?

When the land of Israel was a desolate, poor backwater, no one cared much about it. But once Jews came and revitalized the land--suddenly people started to take notice. Jews planted farms, developed progressive agricultural techniques, built cities, roads, schools, universities. Suddenly, this desolate backwater became desirable due to the labor and ingenuity of Jews. Before the Six Day War, no one cared much about the desolate West Bank or the poverty-stricken Gaza Strip or the poorly maintained Old City of Jerusalem. But once Israel took control and started to turn these places into beautiful, modern areas--then these places became desirable. Once the Jews had made so many improvements, now claims were made on behalf of Palestinian Arabs that they should have all these things themselves.

The world has not been too bothered by the Arab economic boycott of Israel; by constant threats of war; by a steady flow of rockets shot into Israel; by ongoing terrorism against Israel and Israeli targets. But when Israel defends itself against these attacks, it is more likely that Israel will be condemned by the nations of the world than that the perpetrators of crimes and murder against Israel will be condemned.

Certainly, Israel is not a perfect country; and there is no doubt that it has made errors in its policies--as has every other country on the face of the earth. But Israel has a right to flourish and to enjoy the fruits of its labors and creativity and idealistic endeavors. Israel does not ask to be judged more kindly than any other nation--only that it should not be judged less kindly than any other nation.

The current "politically correct" propaganda ignores hundreds of years of history of the holy land; ignores the rights of the people of Israel; ignores truth.

If we are to have peace between Israel and the Palestinians (and the rest of the Arab world), it would be most helpful if people understood the historic context of the unrest, if both sides strove to establish a spirit of mutual respect, if both sides focused on how much benefit all would have if a just and fair peace were to be in place. Misguided individuals and countries who forget history, who ignore or deny Israel's rights, who look the other way when Israel is maligned and attacked--such people are part of the problem, not the solution.

As we read in Psalm 122: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may they prosper who love thee.

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### **Parshas Bamidbar** by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\*

This coming week, we join with Jews around the world in celebrating Shavuot, the anniversary of our union with G-d. As with all Jewish holidays, we are not only celebrating the past. We are reliving the memories to reinforce their lessons and messages and to incorporate them into our lives and into our psyche. We are reinforcing our pact with G-d - the gift and mission of Torah, our identity as G-d's children and servants.

In our current situation, it can be hard to find the joy of the holiday. As we prepare to spend another Yom tov separated from our friends and family, we feel that whatever joy we may be able to find will be pale and insignificant. The Eitz Yosef, however, commenting on the Medrash in Bamidbar, teaches us that what little joy we muster may be far more life-altering than we can appreciate.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, the generation which had left Egypt was no longer truly worthy of going into the land of Israel. G-d decided to wait and give them a chance to repent and improve. When they were preparing to leave the Sinai Desert, G-d commanded Moshe to count them using the words "Lift up the heads". This phase was intended as a warning. If they would maintain their connection with G-d and live by the Torah, they would be "lifted up" for greatness. However, should they again choose to leave their identity as G-d's children, as they had by the Golden Calf, G-d would "lift" off their heads, meaning they would die in the desert.

This warning, however, was not intended for the Levi'im, who uniquely had stood their ground and stayed true to G-d during the sin of the Golden Calf. When Moshe destroyed the Golden Calf and cried out "He who is for Hashem, come to me!" the tribe of Levi came in its entirety, displaying a depth of devotion and commitment to G-d at the very moment that others were failing. They were indeed worthy of entering the land of Israel. (See Bamidbar Rabbah 1:11, 3:7 and Eitz Yosef commentary)

Against this backdrop, the Medrash tells us an astounding message. G-d foresaw that the warning was not enough, and the nation – including the Levi'im – was destined to fail again with the sin of the spies. It would be decreed that for not heeding the warning of "Lift the heads" following the Golden Calf, for not staying true to G-d a second time, they would perish in the desert and not enter the land of Israel. G-d, therefore, did not want to count the Levi'im with the other tribes, because doing so would include them in the warning inherent in the wording of the command to count "Lift up the heads." G-d wanted to underscore to the Levi'im their unique identity as the tribe that had maintained their commitment to G-d. This way, although, the Levi'im would participate in the sin of the spies, they would not do so with the same level of rebellion against G-d. Therefore, while the rest of that generation perished in the desert, all of the Levi'im survived.

The message of this Medrash speaks directly to our present situation. The Levi'im joined the rest of the nation in the sin of the spies. Yet, somehow their sin was slightly different and did not contain the same level of rebellion. They gained an added measure of identity as G-d's servants, by not being included in the warning. The clarity they gained from that distinction stayed with them even as they sinned. This clarity saved their lives and ensured that they would all merit the bounty and blessing of entering the land of Israel.

We live in a world with endless choices, surrounded by many nations and communities which live lives so antithetical to Torah and mitzvos. As we celebrate our union with G-d and the gift of Torah, we reinforce our identity as G-d's people and our commitment to G-d. Every measure of joy we can find this Shavuot, is another measure of identity and commitment. Every measure of identity and commitment will stay with us, even when we slip. Every measure can make us worthy of G-d's bounty and blessing.

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD (and a close friend who has helped me with my Devrei Torah on numerous occasions in recent years).

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Bamidbar: Jerusalem Day: The Kotel Affair**

[Note: May 22, 28 Iyar, is Yom Yerushaliyam, or Jerusalem Day, honoring Jewish ownership of the Kotel during the 1967 War]

Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook recalled the tremendous pressure placed upon his father, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, that evening in 1930 in the Kiryat Moshe neighborhood of Jerusalem.

"How intense, how grave, how dire were the warnings and intimidations at that time, with all of their menacing threats. Two nations [the Arabs and the British] were goading us with lies and murderous traps, to sign an agreement and relinquish [Jewish] ownership over the Kotel, the remaining wall of our Holy Temple..." (LeNetivot Yisrael vol. I, p. 65)

## **The Mufti's Ambitions**

Already in the time of the first British High Commissioner, Hajj Amin al-Husseini was appointed Mufti of Jerusalem, spiritual and national leader of the Arabs. One of the many devices that the infamous mufti employed in his fight against the Jewish national return to Eretz Yisrael was to repudiate all Jewish rights to the Kotel HaMa'aravi, the Western Wall.

The Arabs gained a partial victory in 1922, when the British Mandatory Government issued a ban against placing benches near the Kotel. In 1928, British officers interrupted the Yom Kippur service and forcibly dismantled the mechitzah separating men and women during prayer.

A few months later, the Mufti and his cohorts devised a new provocation. They began holding Muslim religious ceremonies opposite the Kotel, precisely when the Jews were praying. To make matters worse, the British authorities granted the Arabs permission to transform the building adjacent to the Kotel into a mosque, complete with a tower for the muezzin, the crier calling Moslems to prayer five times a day. The muezzin's vociferous trills were certain to disturb the Jewish prayers.

Active Arab turbulence reached its peak during the bloody riots of 1929. On the 10th of Av, some 2,000 Arabs swarmed the Kotel, chasing away the Jews praying there and burning several Torah scrolls. The following week, rioting broke out in Jerusalem and spread throughout the country. Nearly a hundred Jews were slaughtered in the riots, mainly in Hebron and Jerusalem.

## **Rav Kook and the Kotel Commission**

In the summer of 1930, the League of Nations dispatched a committee to Eretz Yisrael to clarify the ownership of the Western Wall. The Arabs claimed to be the rightful owners, not only of the Temple Mount but of the Kotel as well. They rejected any agreement that permitted Jews to pray at the Kotel. It is solely a Muslim site, the Mufti claimed; the Jews may pray at the Kotel only by the good grace of the Arabs.

When Rav Kook appeared before the Commission, he turned to the chairman with deep emotion:

"What do you mean when you say, 'The Commission will decide to whom the Wall belongs'? Does this commission or the League of Nations own the Wall? Who gave you permission to decide to whom it belongs? The entire world belongs to the Creator, blessed be He; and He transferred ownership of the entire Land of Israel — including the Kotel — to the Jewish people [Rashi on Gen. 1:1]. No power in the world, not the League of Nations, nor this commission, can take this God-given right away from us."

The chairman retorted that the Jews have not been in control of the Land of Israel or the Wall for close to two thousand years. At this point, Rav Kook decided the members of the commission needed to learn a lesson in Jewish law. Calmly and respectfully, he explained:

"In Jewish law, the concept of yei'ush be'alim ['owner's despair'] applies also to real estate. [That is, the owner of a stolen tract of land forfeits his ownership if he gives up hope of ever retrieving it.] However, if a person's land is stolen and he continuously protests the theft, the owner retains his ownership for all time." <sup>1</sup>

Rav Kook's proud appearance before the commission made a powerful impact on the Jewish community. The Hator newspaper commented:

"We cannot refrain from mentioning once again the Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael, who sanctified God and Israel with his testimony. The witnesses who preceded him stood meekly, with tottering knees. After the Chief Rabbi's appearance, we felt a bit relieved, as if a weight had been lifted from our hearts. He raised our heads, straightened our backbones, and restored dignity to the Torah and our nation."

## **The Proposal of the Va'ad Leumi**

The British Mandatory government suggested a compromise according to which the Jews would recognize Arab ownership of the Kotel, and the Arabs in return would permit Jews to approach the Wall. (The right for Jews to pray at the Kotel was not explicitly mentioned.)

Due to the tense political situation — particularly in light of the murderous Arab rioting the previous year — the Va'ad Leumi (the executive committee of the Jewish National Assembly in pre-state Israel) was prepared to recognize Arab ownership of the Kotel. However, the Va'ad Leumi stipulated that the Arabs must explicitly recognize the right of Jews to pray there.

Because this was a religious matter, the Mandatory government required that the Va'ad Leumi's proposal be approved by the religious authority of the Jews, namely, the rabbinate. In order to apply greater pressure on the rabbis, the Va'ad Leumi sent delegations simultaneously to the two chief rabbis, Rav Kook and Rabbi Yaakov Meir, as well as to Rabbi Zonnenfeld, representing Agudat Israel.



A delegation from the Va'ad, headed by Yitzchak Ben-Zvi, visited Rav Kook and tried to persuade him to approve the plan. It is a matter of life and death, they argued; only by renouncing Jewish ownership will we assuage the Arabs and bring peace to Israel.

### **Rav Kook's Response**

Despite intense pressure from the Va'ad Leumi, Rav Kook refused to authorize the proposal.

"We have no authority to do such a thing. The Jewish people did not empower us to surrender the Western Wall on its behalf. Our ownership over the Kotel is Divine in nature, and it is by virtue of this ownership that we come to pray at the Kotel.

I cannot relinquish that which God gave to the Jewish people. If, Heaven forbid, we surrender the Kotel, God will not wish to return it to us!"

As it turned out, the Arabs refused even to consider granting the right of Jewish prayer at the Kotel, and the proposal died. Indeed, after the War of Independence, although the cease-fire agreement provided for the right of Jews to approach the Kotel, the Arabs ignored this provision. Only nineteen years later, when God restored the Kotel to its rightful owners in the Six-Day War, did the Jewish people merit once again to pray unhindered at the Western Wall.

## **Addendum**

R. Menachem Porush, chairman of Agudat Israel, contributed the following detail of this incident:

Rav Kook, upon receiving the proposal, stated that he would not agree to relinquish the Jewish claim to the Kotel under any circumstances. He also dispatched a personal messenger to Rabbi Zonnenfeld to inform him of his refusal, and to beg him not to show the British any lack of determination in the matter.

Rabbi Zonnenfeld, when he received notice of the proposal, also refused to agree. Afraid that Rav Kook might not be firm enough in refusing the proposal, Rabbi Zonnenfeld dispatched his own messenger to Rav Kook to inform him of his policy and to request that he not show any willingness to compromise on the matter.

The two messengers, who happened to be personal friends, met in the street and discussed their missions and messages. Both were relieved when they realized that there was no need to deliver their respective messages. Thus, the plan, which would have compromised Jewish rights to the Kotel for generations, died aborning.

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Celebration of the Soul, p. 244; An Angel Among Men, pp. 206-207, 215-217, 219; R. Porush's letter, quoted by Rabbi Berel Wein.)

### **FOOTNOTE:**

1 Whether land can be stolen is a subject of disagreement between Maimonides and Rabbeinu Asher. The Shulchan Aruch (Choshen Mishpat 371:1) rules like Maimonides, that land can never be stolen. Later authorities qualify this ruling and write that there are situations when land can be stolen, such as when the owner fears for his life if he does not relinquish his land (see Aruch HaShulchan ad loc).

With regard to the Land of Israel, however, there was never yei'ush be'alim, as the Jewish people continually protested the theft of their homeland in their daily prayers for the return of Jerusalem and Zion.

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## **Be Small, but Stand Tall: A Jewish Paradox**

By Hanna Perlberger\* © 2020

### **The Desert**

The Torah portion, Bamidbar, which means "in the wilderness" or "in the desert," is read before the holiday of Shavuot, which is when we received the Torah on Mount Sinai. The classic commentary on this is that the best state in which to receive Torah is when we make of ourselves a desert, meaning that we nullify our egos and enter into a state of total humility.

This makes a lot of sense. After all, the desert is an appropriate place for encounters with the Divine (think Burning Bush), as well as the setting for many spiritual journeys. In the desert, there are no material distractions, no cultural noise and no exits from its stark reality.

The opening line of the Torah portion is: "And God spoke to Moses in the desert." The word midbar ("desert") and dibur ("speech") share the same root, and so the relationship between the desert and speech—Divine speech—is beautifully correlated. For starters,

speech represents freedom. The First Amendment, which guarantees free speech, is considered fundamental and integral to a free society. Slaves, on the other hand, have no voice. They are silenced. Their opinion is irrelevant, as they are not seen as people but as property.

On Passover, which is the holiday commemorating the exodus from slavery into freedom, we read from the Haggadah. The word "Haggadah" derives from lehagid, which means, "to tell"; integral to that transition is the telling of a story we retell every year. In her TED talk on vulnerability, Brené Brown, defines courage as the ability to tell the story of who you are with your whole heart.

But speech only works when one is able and willing to both talk and listen. And to listen deeply and truly hear what the other is trying to say requires patience, focus and humility. Therefore, the desert is the ideal location for the Jewish people to be open to this Divine speech for there is no distraction.

We don't have to be physically in a desert to consciously strip away the layers of egocentricity that distort our clarity. By shutting out the noise that distracts us, we can transform ourselves into an appropriate desert of open receptivity.

### **The Jewish Paradox**

The first line ends with G d's command to Moses to take a census. Rashi, the medieval commentator, teaches us to understand this to mean the following: that G d loves us and counts us, just like we like to count our prized possessions. We are not counted by ability, wealth or status, but by identity—signaling that we are unique, precious and beloved. No two people are alike. No one can contribute to the world in the same way, and so, we are singularly purposeful.

On the one hand, we are elevated—each soul, a precious and unique possession. And yet, on the other hand, we should be lowly, like a barren desert, indistinguishable and insignificant as shifting sand. So, which is right? The Jewish answer, of course, is that both are. It's a Jewish paradox.

In fascinating research done at the Stanford Business School, Jim Collins was able to provide answers as to why some companies are visionary and successful, and others are not. It seems to depend on the companies' ability to choose between seemingly contradictory concepts and the ability to embrace both sides of the coin, adopting a strategy known as the "genius of the and" and rejecting thinking characterized as "the tyranny of the or." Being limited by either/or thinking isn't good for corporations; it certainly isn't good for people either.

When it comes to receiving the Torah, we must humble ourselves, create the space to take it in and learn, at times, to focus on our collective identity rather than our individual identity. But when it comes to living the Torah, we must stand tall and be counted, and know who we are. We are created and yearn to reach our highest possibilities. Being a light unto nations and repairing the world is simply not a job for wimps.

The paradox is that we must always be simultaneously embracing both sides of the coin if we are to understand either side—and that is a lesson not just in preparation for Shavuot, but for any time of the year.

### **Internalize & Actualize:**

1. Write down five things that take up the majority of your time on a daily basis. Now, write down five things that you would do and focus on if you had the time. This week, cut out 10 minutes of each day to focus on one of those five. By the end of the week, you will have spent more than an hour on something you find meaningful that you had previously not made time for.
2. Think about someone or a situation that silences you—where you feel you had no say or that no one would listen to your opinion. How does that make you feel? Now write down what you want to say to that person or in that situation. Can you think of some practical ways you can begin to get that message across and reclaim your voice?
3. We all struggle with our ego at times. And more often than not, it leads to avoidable problems. Where in your life could you use more humility? What do you think would change if you could lessen your ego?

\* Author, attorney, spiritual leader, and coach who writes often for Chabad on line. This column is an excerpt from [A Year of Sacred Moments: The Soul Seeker's Guide to Inspired Living](#).

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## **Bamidbar: Take a Census** by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky

**Take a census of all the adult males of the congregation of the Israelites by families...Thus you will have an exact head count of every male.** (Bamidbar 1:2)

Counting something is a way of showing that we value it. By counting how much of something we possess, we express how much each unit of the aggregate whole adds to the value of the whole and how indispensable each unit is to the whole.

In this census, the fact that each Jew counted for one -- neither more nor less -- indicates that every Jew is equally dear to G-d, as an individual.

Every Jew possesses this invaluable worth by virtue of his or her unique soul-essence. By virtue of this essence, which the simplest Jew possesses no less than did Moses, all Jews are all equally G-d's children.

When we recognize this, we, too, will cherish and never dismiss or overlook any Jew.

From Kehot's **Chumash,**  
**Synagogue Edition**

\* An insight from the Rebbe.

With heartfelt wishes for a healthy Shabbos,

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

### Egalitarian Society, Jewish-Style

The parsha of Bamidbar is generally read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, z'man matan torateinu, "the time of the giving of our law," the revelation at Sinai. So the Sages, believing that nothing is coincidental, searched for some connection between the two.

To find one is not easy. There is nothing in the parsha about the giving of the Torah. Instead it is about a census of the Israelites. Nor is its setting helpful. We are told at the beginning that the events about to be described took place in "the wilderness of Sinai," whereas when the Torah speaks about the great revelation, it talks about "Mount Sinai." One is a general region, the other a specific mountain within that region. Nor are the Israelites at this stage walking towards Mount Sinai. To the contrary, they are preparing to leave. They are about to begin the second part of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

The Sages did, nonetheless, make a connection, and it is a surprising one:

"And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness" (Numbers 1:1). Why the Sinai Wilderness? From here the Sages taught that the Torah was given through three things: fire, water, and wilderness. How do we know it was given through fire? From Exodus 19:18: "And Mount Sinai was all in smoke as God had come down upon it in fire." How do we know it was given through water? As it says in Judges 5:4, "The heavens dripped and the clouds dripped water [at Sinai]." How do we know it was given through wilderness? [As it says above,] "And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness." And why was the Torah given through these three things? Just as [fire, water, and wilderness] are free to all the inhabitants of the world, so too are the words of Torah free to them, as it says in Isaiah 55:1, "Oh, all who are thirsty, come for water... even if you have no money." [1]

The Midrash takes three words associated with Sinai – fire (that was blazing on the mountain just before the revelation), water (based on a phrase in the Song of Deborah) and wilderness (as at the beginning of our parsha, and also in Exodus 19:1, 2), and it connects them by saying that "they are free to all the inhabitants of the world."

This is not the association most of us would make. Fire is associated with heat, warmth,

energy. Water is associated with quenching thirst and making things grow. Wilderness is the space between: neither starting point nor destination, the place where you need signposts and a sense of direction. All three would therefore make good metaphors for the Torah. It warms. It energises. It satisfies spiritual thirst. It gives direction. Yet that is not the approach taken by the Sages. What mattered to them is that all three are free.

Staying for a moment with the comparison of Torah and the wilderness, there were surely other significant analogies that might have been made. The wilderness is a place of silence where you can hear the voice of God. The wilderness is a place away from the distractions of towns and cities, fields and farms, where you can focus on the presence of God. The wilderness is a place where you realise how vulnerable you are: you feel like sheep in need of a shepherd. The wilderness is a place where it is easy to get lost, and you need some equivalent of a Google-maps-of-the-soul. The wilderness is a place where you feel your isolation and you reach out to a force beyond you. Even the Hebrew name for wilderness, midbar, comes from the same root as "word" (davar) and "to speak" (d-b-r). Yet these were not the connections the Sages of the Midrash made. Why not?

The Sages understood that something profound was born at Mount Sinai, and this has distinguished Jewish life ever since. It was the democratisation of knowledge. Literacy and knowledge of the law was no longer to be confined to a priestly elite. For the first time in history everyone was to have access to knowledge, education and literacy. "The law that Moses gave us is the possession of the assembly of Jacob" (Deut. 33:4) – the whole assembly, not a privileged group within it.

The symbol of this was the revelation at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when God revealed Himself not only to a Prophet but to an entire people, who three times signalled their consent to the commands and the covenant. In the penultimate command that Moses gave to the people, known as Hakhel, he gave the following instruction:

"At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow

carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess." (Deut. 31:10-13)

Again, the whole people, not an elite or subset within it. This is echoed in the famous verse from Isaiah 54:13, "And all your children shall be learned of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children." This was and remains the unique feature of the Torah as the written constitution of the Jewish people as a nation under the sovereignty of God. Everyone is expected not merely to keep the law but to know it. Jews became a nation of constitutional lawyers.

There were two further key moments in the history of this development. The first was when Ezra and Nehemiah gathered the people, after the Babylonian exile, to the Water Gate in Jerusalem, on Rosh Hashanah, and read the Torah to them, placing Levites throughout the crowd to explain to people what was being said and what it meant, a defining moment in Jewish history that took the form not of a battle but of a massive adult education programme (Neh. 8). Ezra and Nehemiah realised that the most significant battles in ensuring the Jewish future were cultural, not military. This was one of the most transformative insights in history.

The second was the extraordinary creation, in the first century, of the world's first system of universal compulsory education. Here is how the Talmud describes the process, culminating in the work of Joshua ben Gamla, a High Priest in the last days of the Second Temple:

Truly the name of that man is to be blessed, namely Joshua ben Gamla, for but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all... They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] but if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Joshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town, and that children should enter school at the age of six or seven. [2]

Universal compulsory education did not exist in England – at that time the world's leading

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imperial power – until 1870, a difference of 18 centuries. At roughly the same time as Joshua ben Gamla, in the first century C.E., Josephus could write:

Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.[3]

We now understand the connection the Sages made between the wilderness and the giving of the Torah: it was open to everyone, and it was free. Neither lack of money nor of aristocratic birth could stop you from learning Torah and acquiring distinction in a community in which scholarship was considered the highest achievement.

With three crowns was Israel crowned: the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood and the crown of Kingship. The crown of Priesthood was conferred on Aaron ... The crown of kingship was conferred on David ... But the crown of Torah is for all Israel ... Whoever desires it, let them come and take it. [4]

I believe that this is one of Judaism's most profound ideas: whatever you seek to create in the world, start with education. If you want to create a just and compassionate society, start with education. If you want to create a society of equal dignity, ensure that education is free and equal to all. That is the message the Sages took from the fact that we read Bamidbar before Shavuot, the festival that recalls that when God gave our ancestors the Torah, He gave it to all of them equally.

[1] Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7.

[2] Baba Batra, 21a.

[3] Contra Apionem, ii, 177-78.

[4] Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 3:1.

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### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

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'And God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they came out of the Land of Egypt' (Numbers 1:1)

Bamidbar, or "In the desert," is the name by which this fourth of the Five Books of Moses is most popularly known—an apt description of the 40 years of the Israelite desert wanderings which the book records.

Indeed, this desert period serves as the precursor of—as well as a most appropriate metaphor for—the almost 2,000 years of homeless wandering from place to place which characterized much of Jewish history before the emergence of our Jewish State in 1948.

The Hebrew word for desert, midbar, is also pregnant with meanings and allusions which in many ways have served as a beacon for our Jewish exile. The root noun from which midbar is built is D-B-R, which means leader or shepherd. After all, the most ancient occupation known to humanity and

specifically to the descendants of Abraham is shepherding, and the desert is the most natural place for the shepherd to lead his flock: the sheep can comfortably wander in a virtual no-man's-land and graze on the vegetation of the various oases or their outskirts without the problem of stealing from private property or harming the ecology of settled habitations. And perhaps D-B-R means leader or shepherd because it also means "word": The shepherd directs the flock using meaningful sounds and words, and so the leaders of Israel, most notably Moses, inspired and educated with the verbal message which came from God, initially in the form of "Ten Words" (or "Ten Commandments," Aseret Hadibrot). They were revealed in the Sinai desert, have been greatly expanded upon throughout the generations, and they are the most fundamental teachings which govern Israel—as well as a good part of the world—to this very day.

Moreover, wherever the Israelites wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert Mishkan, or Sanctuary, a word which is derived from Shechina, Divine Presence. However, God was not in the Sanctuary; even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, declared King Solomon when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:27). It was rather God's word, dibur, which was in the Sanctuary, in the form of the "Ten Words" on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing word of God which He would speak (vedibarti, Ex. 25:22) from between the cherubs on the ends of the Kapporet above the Holy Ark. It was by means of these divine words that even the desert, the midbar—a metaphor for an inhospitable and even alien exile environment which is boiling hot by day, freezing cold by night, and deficient in water that is the very elixir of life—can become transformed into sacred space, the place of the divine word (dibur). Indeed, another name for our Holy Temple or Sanctuary is D'vir, the place of the word. And those words from the desert of Mount Sinai (diburim) succeeded in sanctifying the many Babylons, Marrakeshes, Vilnas, and New Yorks of our wanderings! God's word can transform a desert—any place and every place—into a veritable Sanctuary; indeed the world is a midbar waiting to become a dvir (sanctuary) by means of God's dibur, communicated by inspired leaders, dabarim.

I believe that this understanding will serve to answer another question which is asked by our sages, the answer to which is especially relevant on the week of BaMidbar leading into Shavuot. The Midrash di Rabbi Yishmael Commentary on Parshat Yitro queries why God's Revelation was given in a par'osia—a desert, a no-man's-land, an open space—rather than at Mount Moriah, the place of Abraham's sacrifice later to become the Temple Mount. Is it not strange that the most important message—a kerygma to use the Greek—given to Israel

## Likutei Divrei Torah

emanated from a mountaintop in a desert outside Israel rather than from the sacred land which God Himself bequeathed to His chosen people? The response given by the Midrash has many ramifications for us today. The midrash maintains that had the Torah been given on the Temple Mount, the Israelites would have assumed that it was only for them. God specifically chose a par'osia in order to demonstrate that the Torah was ultimately meant for the entire world; in the very words of the Mechilta, "Let any human being who wishes to accept the Torah take it upon himself."

This will help us understand the midrash in the beginning of V'zot habrachah which pictures God as first offering the Torah to the Edomites of Mount Seir and then to the Ishmaelites of Mount Paran (BT Avoda Zara 2b, see also Rashi to Deut. 33:2). Unfortunately, they were not ready to accept it at that time; only Israel was willing to say, "We shall perform [the commandments] and we shall internalize them." It then became our task as a "Kingdom of Priest-Teachers and a Holy Nation" to expose and eventually teach the Torah as "a light unto the nations of the world." At that time there will be a second revelation in which "God will inform us a second time before the eyes of every living being that He is to be their God," a prayer which we repeat every Sabbath in the Kedusha of the Musaf Amida prayer. The desert then becomes a symbol of a no-man's-land which will eventually become an every-person's-land.

If the word can sanctify even a desert it can certainly sanctify every other place on our planet.

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### The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

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#### The Wilderness First

My first exposure to the study of the Bible was in the Yiddish language. We spoke only English at home, but almost all the teachers we had in the yeshiva I attended were Holocaust survivors who had escaped to the safety of these shores only a few years prior.

I must admit that we learned to translate into Yiddish by rote and had little conception about what the words meant in English. Thus, we translated the very first verse of the Torah as "In der anfang hatte der Oibeshter bashaffen", not having a clue that "In der anfang" meant "in the beginning," that the "Oibeshter" was "the One Above," and that "bashaffen" meant "created."

When we reached the Book of Numbers, Sefer Bamidbar, we finally had a teacher who, although he continued to provide the Yiddish translation, told us, in his broken English, what the words meant in the language we understood. And he would even provide visual aids, photographs and drawings, which would help us truly grasp the meaning of what we were studying.

I'll never forget his opening lesson. He told us that we were beginning a new book of the Torah, and a new weekly Torah portion, that both went by the name "Bamidbar". "In Yiddish", he said, "the word means 'in der veesternisht.'" We were all about nine years old and the word "veesternisht" triggered a giggle which soon morphed into hilarious laughter. There is something about the sound of the word that is comical to me to this very day.

He waited for our laughter to subside, and then said that "veesternisht" in English meant "a desert." And he showed us a picture of the Saharan desert. "The Jewish people were wandering through such a desert," he explained, "and the entire book that we are beginning to study took place there."

He then asked us if we remembered coming across the word "veesternisht" earlier in our studies, in a slightly abbreviated form.

It was my dear friend Michael, who passed away some years ago now, who remembered that first verse in Genesis, which contains the phrase "tohu va'vohu", which is generally translated as "unformed and void". In Yiddish, the phrase is rendered as "poost und veest, empty and desolate."

Bamidbar is the Torah portion which we read this week, and which is always read on the Shabbat before Shavuot. I researched about a dozen biblical translations, including some non-Jewish ones, and found that only a few translated "Bamidbar" as "in the desert". The vast majority preferred the word "wilderness" to "desert," so that the key phrase in the first verse of our parshareads "...The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai ..."

Although the dictionaries I consulted did not distinguish sharply between "desert" and "wilderness," it is the latter that rings true as the English equivalent of the Yiddish "veesternisht." An empty, confusing, and frightening wasteland.

It was in that wasteland that our ancestors wandered for forty years, and it is that wasteland where we received the Torah.

Why? Why was the Torah given in this wild and chaotic terrain?

Like most questions of this sort, numerous answers have been given over the ages. I would like to share with you an answer which makes great sense to me.

If one reads further than just the first verse of this week's parsha (Numbers 1:1-4:20), he discovers that although the image we have of the wilderness is one of disorder and confusion, the narrative theme of these several opening chapters is one of order and systematic organization. The tribes are divided

into 12 distinct units, each one is assigned its own unique flag or banner, and its place in the procession through the wilderness is precisely specified. The entire parsha can be summarized as "making order in the midst of chaos."

It strikes me that the ability to organize one's environment in a beneficial and orderly manner is a basic human skill that every society must first possess before it can proceed toward greater cultural achievement. Having said that, we can appreciate that before the Torah could be given to the Jewish people there was a necessary prerequisite: the establishment of a functional society in which people could get along with each other in a peaceful and productive manner. Only in such a context could the Torah be properly absorbed.

There is an ancient saying which states this idea unequivocally: "Derech erez kadma leTorah." Literally translated as, "The way of the world precedes Torah." (Midrash Vayikra Rabbah, 9:3). More generally, it means first one must have an ethical, just and humane society. Only then can one proceed to Torah.

We can classify this week's Torah portion as the parsha of derech erez, because in it a nation successfully copes with the trials and tribulations of its environment. It tamed a wilderness by creating a civilization. It dealt with a wasteland by establishing a functioning and equitable society.

That is why it is precisely this parsha that precedes Shavuot. Shavuot is the anniversary of Matan Torah, of the Divine revelation, the giving of the Torah. The Almighty does not reveal Himself to a people who cannot get along with each other in an orderly and civilized manner. He does not express His will to individuals, communities, or nations who, in today's jargon, "can't get their act together."

He does not give His Torah in a wilderness, in a wasteland, in a "veesternisht." He expects us to first act toward each other with derech erez, respectfully and courteously. He demands that we first tame that wilderness and cultivate that wasteland. Only then are we deserving of His great gift.

Derech erez kadma leTorah. Humane behavior first, and only afterwards the Torah. That's how it was that very first time in the wilderness of Sinai, and that's how it must be this weekend, when the Shabbat of Bamidbar immediately precedes the festival of Matan Torah.

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#### **Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

##### **Reward for Keeping Quiet**

When we read Parshas Bamidbar, we find something peculiar. Sometimes the Prince of the Tribe of Gad is referred to as Elyasaf son of Reu'el and sometimes he is referred to as Elyasaf son of Deu'el. The Chidah (Rav

## **Likutei Divrei Torah**

Chaim Yosef Dovid Azulai) [1724-1806] the prolific Sephardic posek who authored sixty or seventy volumes, writes in one of his sefarim (Chomas Anoch), the following explanation in the name of a Sefer Imrei Noam:

The reason the Tribe of Gad merited that Moshe Rabbeinu was buried on Har Nevo, in their portion of Eretz Yisrael (i.e. – Transjordan), was that Gad could have advanced a claim to Moshe Rabbeinu: Listen, I am the Bechor [firstborn] of Zilpah and Dan is the Bechor of Bilhah. Dan was made the leader of a whole three-Tribe configuration in the Wilderness travels ("Machane Dan") while I am just an add-on to some other Tribe's "Machane". What am I – a second-class citizen? Yet, Gad did not make such a protest. Because of that, says the Chidah, Gad merited two privileges: First, his Prince (who real name was Elyasaf ben Deu'el) was called Elyasaf ben Reu'el, which means the friend (Reya) of G-d (E-l) (i.e. – friend of Hashem or of Moshe Rabbeinu for not complaining to him with a valid complaint). Secondly, for the same reason, he merited that Moshe Rabbeinu was buried in his portion of Eretz Yisrael. Those are the words of the Chidah.

I saw an interesting observation in a sefer, Otzros HaTorah. What would have happened if the Tribe of Gad would have spoken up and advanced a claim against Moshe Rabbeinu: How is it fair that Dan leads a whole three-Tribe configuration and we are just followers?

We do not know if such a claim would have been accepted or not. However, one thing is certain – today it does not really make a difference if there had been a Degel Machane Gad (A Leadership Role in the Wilderness Camp Configuration for the Tribe of Gad) or not. However, the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu is buried in his portion and the fact that he is called Reu'el – "the friend of G-d" – is something that is eternal. Why did he merit that? It is because he kept his mouth shut when it came to a matter that was very transitory in nature.

"I have found nothing better in life than silence." [Avos 1:17]. Because he had the ability to silently accept a situation that could have been seen as unfair to him, and be quiet – which we all know is sometimes very difficult – for that he merited having the greatest leader in the history of the Nation of Israel buried in his portion.

The Sdei Chemed is an encyclopedia of Halacha which comprises 9 volumes, and it covers from "Alef" through "Taf" in Halacha. The author lived before computers and before Encyclopedia Talmudis, before any of these super indexes of halachic literature. He wrote this all on his own. To say the author had a photographic memory is a gross understatement. He knew the entire Torah.

The Sdei Chemed once told his family that as a young man he had no special memory and no special intellectual talents. However, he did something in his life, and after that incident, he felt that he became elevated and developed somehow superhuman powers of intellect. What happened?

He was learning in a Kollel and another member of the Kollel was jealous of him and wanted to do him in. There was an Arab woman who came to clean up the Beis Medrash and the other Kollel member bribed this woman to say that the Sdei Chemed engaged in inappropriate behavior with her. She accepted the bribe and made the claim. Everybody believed her, and the Sdei Chemed suffered such shame and abuse that he had to leave the Kollel and run away. The truth of the matter is that the head of the Kollel did not believe the woman and fired her, but that did not help the Sdei Chemed because his reputation was already ruined, and his name was mud.

A short time later, the bribe money ran out, and this housekeeper had no more money, so she came back to the Sdei Chemed and said, “Chatasi, Aveesi, Pa’shati l’fanecha...” I did this terrible thing; please forgive me and I will go and publicly say that the whole thing was a sham and it was not true. I will go back to the Kollel and tell everyone the truth that the story was a fabrication, and I will restore your reputation. I only ask that you go back to the Rosh Yeshiva and get my job back for me, because I literally have nothing to eat.”

The Sdei Chemed said he was tempted to take her up on this offer and reclaim his reputation. However, he then realized that if he goes back to the Kollel now, and this woman confesses the full story, then not only will there have been one Chillul Hashem, there would be two Chillul Hashems. The first Chillul Hashem was that he was accused of having an illicit affair with the housekeeper. But now people would also say: “Do you know how bad this was? There was another member of the Kollel that was so low that he paid money to slander a fellow Torah student with a total fabrication!” That would be a double Chilul Hashem.

So, he told his family, he decided to do nothing. He would merely return and go to the Rosh Kollel and quietly try to get the Arab woman her job back, but on the condition that she not confess anything and not let the story get out about the bribe and the Chilul Hashem involved in that side of the incident.

That is what happened. The Sdei Chemed wrote that after that incident, he became a different person. From that day forward, he merited super intellectual prowess. He indeed had such intellectual prowess. Imagine one person, sitting down – l’havdil – and single-handedly writing the entire Encyclopedia Britannica! That is the equivalent of what the Sdei Chemed did. He wrote an encyclopedia!

Why did he merit this gift? It is because he kept his mouth shut.

This is the attribute that Elyasaf ben Deu’el / ben Reu’el had as well. He kept his mouth shut and he merited eternal reward: The name “Friend of G-d” (Reyah shel Kel) and having Moshe Rabbeinu buried in his portion of Eretz Yisrael.

### **What Makes a Teacher into a Parent Is Not What He Does From 9 to 5**

I would like to share another Torah insight, again together with a beautiful story. The Torah states: “These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe on the day Hashem spoke with Moshe at Mount Sinai: These are the names of the sons of Aharon, the firstborn was Nadav, and Avihu, Elazar, and Ithamar.” [Bamidbar 3:1-2] This is very peculiar. The Torah begins by introducing the fact that it will be listing the children of both Aharon and Moshe and then proceeds to only list the names of the sons of Aharon!

Rashi points out this oddity and answers that since Moshe taught the sons of Aharon Torah, they were also considered his children. This teaches, Rashi states [based on Sanhedrin 19b], that whoever teaches his friend’s son Torah, Scripture considers it as if he gave birth to him.

The super-commentaries on Rashi all discuss this Rashi. We will only cite the Maharal because of constraints of time. The Maharal in his Gur Aryeh asks a simple question: Did Moshe only teach Torah to his nephews? He taught Torah to all of Yisroel, so why not call all the Children of Israel Moshe’s offspring? The Maharal provides an interesting answer: The Children of Israel are different because G-d commanded Moshe to teach them Torah! There was no special commandment to give extra lessons to Aharon’s children.

In other words, indeed, he taught Torah to all of Israel but that was his job. If you are only “doing your job” than you do not gain the status of “Scripture considers it as if you have given birth to them.” However, the fact that he learned extra with the sons of Aharon, something he did not need to do – that is what earned him the title of “it’s as if he was their father.” A parent knows no boundaries; there is no such thing as “overtime” or “I have fulfilled my contract already” when parents interact with their children. A parent is there all the time for his children. That is what makes Moshe’s extra learning with Bnei Aharon “as if he gave birth to them.”

That which makes a teacher into a parent is not what he does from nine to five. Rather, what makes a teacher into a parent is when he acts over and beyond the call of duty (lifnim m’shuras ha’din).

The statement “Whoever teaches his friend’s son is considered by the Torah as if he fathered

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him” is an oft-quoted teaching of Chazal. I want to share with you a “story” and then “the rest of the story” about someone for whom this was more than just a teaching of Chazal—it was an actual reality.

Rabbi Heschy Weinreb, who needs no introduction to the people in Baltimore, tells over a famous incident, but he adds a not-so-famous addition to the well-known story.

Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, zt”l, was in the United States of America at the end of the 1930s. In fact, he was (among other places) in Baltimore, Maryland. While in Baltimore, he stayed in the house of Rabbi Shimon Schwab. As the storm clouds were gathering over Europe and many people realized that the future in Europe was bleak, Rav Elchonon had the opportunity to stay in America.

Rabbi Weinreb writes that someone named Charles Fogel begged Rav Elchonon not to go back to Europe. Rav Elchonon’s response was, “I belong with my students and I cannot abandon them.” He told Mr. Fogel, “Just like a father does not abandon his child, a Rebbe does not abandon his disciples.”

This response goes a lot further than merely, “Whoever teaches his friend’s son Torah, it is as if he is his child.” Pardon the crassness of this expression, but this is “putting one’s money where his mouth is.” Rav Elchonon went back to Europe and was killed a martyr’s death by the Nazis in the Kovno ghetto together with his students from the Yeshiva in Baronovitch.

Rav Elchonon had the opportunity to stay in America. He was considered the premier disciple of the Chofetz Chaim. It is said that the Chofetz Chaim wanted Rav Elchonon to succeed him as spiritual leader of Klal Yisrael. However, he could not abandon his disciples because “a father does not leave a child.”

This is the famous story that many of us have heard. Rabbi Weinreb adds that when he was learning in Rabbi Yakov Yosef Yeshiva (“RJJ”), he had a Rebbe named Rav Shmuel Dovid Warshavchik. Rav Shmuel Dovid was a charismatic Rebbe and Torah luminary in RJJ who exuded scintillating warmth. He had learned in the Baranovich Yeshiva, and Rav Elchonon had been his Rebbe. Rav Shmuel Dovid Warshavchik told his own students that when Rav Elchonon was in America and these students were left back in Europe in Baranovich, they did not know what was going to be. However, they all knew clearly that Rav Elchonon would come back to them. They knew he would not leave them. And that is what happened.

Rav Shmuel Dovid was fortunate that he himself did make it to America and he was a Marbitz Torah (disseminator of Torah knowledge) and was a Rebbe in RJJ. Most of his classmates in Baranovich were not that

fortunate, and did not make it. Rav Shmuel Dovid would say, "We teenage boys who were stuck in Baranovitch knew that he would return. We were absolutely certain that he would not abandon us. He risked his life to rejoin us. We knew that he considered himself a father, and we felt that way towards him. We were his children.

This is a poignant example of "Anyone who teaches his friend's child Torah, it is as if he is his own child." Anyone who is in the teaching profession always aspires to such a level of connection with his students, but Rav Elchonon literally believed it and gave his life for it!

Baranovich was not like Slabodka. It was a "Yeshiva Ketana." It was for teenagers, younger kids. However, Rav Elchonon felt that these were his children and he gave up his life for them. This is a concrete example of the Rabbinic equation between disciples and children (ha'Banim – elu ha'Talmidim).

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#### **Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

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It is our responsibility to act as if we are teachers to the world... Our comments on social media can make or break people. A reflection on the impact that we have on others is given by our sages based on a passage on parashat Bamidbar. At the beginning of chapter three the headline states "These are the generations of Aharon and Moshe", and then the Torah goes on to say 'v'eileh shemot b'nei Aharon', and these are the children of Aharon, and then their names are given. Where are the names of the generations of Moshe? They don't appear in this passage. So then why does the opening statement say 'these are the generations of Aharon and Moshe'?

Therefore the Gemara in masechet Sanhedrin tells us 'kol ha'melamed ben chevero torah ma'alah eilav hakatuv k'eilu yelado', 'if you teach the children of somebody else Torah it is attributed to you as if you gave birth to them' – because the children of Aharon are presented to us here as being part of the generations of Moshe. In the event that you have educated somebody, you have fashioned their lives – you have made them into what they are, it is as if you have given birth to that child.

The Gemara, later on, in Masechet Sanhedrin actually goes further, and says "kol ha'melamed ben chavero torah m'alah eilav hakatuv k'eilu asa'o", 'If you teach somebody else's children Torah it is attributed to you as if you made that person, as if you fashioned that person, created that person – meaning it is as if you are God! The scriptural source for that comes from Sefer Bereishit, where we are taught about the impact that Avraham and Sara had on their environment 'et ha'nefesh asher asu b'Charan' 'all their followers are called the souls that they made in Charan' – they made those people into the people they became. Therefore, it is as if they are like Almighty

God Himself.

Now of course, an influence of this magnitude, has the potential to not only be used positively but also God forbid, negatively. If you have inspired a person to direct his or her life in an inappropriate direction, you too are responsible for their deeds. You have given birth to that person and to those deeds, you have made that individual who he or she is! This does not only refer to somebody who stands up in a classroom to teach in a formal capacity – actually, just about everybody is a teacher in some way because you are interacting with people, you are conveying messages to them.

On social media you are publishing something for the world to read, and those who internalise what they have read that message, who take notice of it and then who act upon it – one is responsible for that action.

There is therefore no limit to the extent of the impact we have on others. God forbid, it is possible through our words to break someone, but thankfully we can be just like God, to make someone into the great person that he or she can be.

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#### **Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

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##### **Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger: Limited Access**

For three days we do not say tachanun, and three days can easily include a Monday or a Thursday. Because some find it so convenient, they don't bother to ask what is being celebrated that warranted skipping tachanun. Perhaps that is why there is very little discussion of the "three days of haghola", the three last days of the sefira leading into the holiday of shavuus. For those of us for whom lag baomer was but a one-day reprieve and find ourselves once again ungroomed and missing the uplift of a recorded nigun, the days are consequential far beyond the omission of tachanun.

Undoubtedly the name given to these days recalls the instructions received from on High just a few days before matan Torah. These directives included two days of separation from intimacy which Moshe expanded to three, and the prohibition issued to refrain from ascending the mountain once the Shechina rested upon it. For man and animal alike, all but Moshe Rabbeinu, the mountain at some elevation would become a Kodshei Kodshim with all of its distance and reverence. Thus the "three days of haghola" are the three days during which we were aware that the appearance of Hashem that would forever shake and shape our planet would be both close and out of reach in equal measure.

This paradox comes alive through a remarkable insight of the Sochatchever Rebbe as developed by my mechutan, Rabbi Moshe Schwerd, in his recently published collection of his popular and widely acclaimed public shiurim, Oz Yashir Moshe. The Rebbe argued that the "haghola", the restriction against

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ascending Har Sinai, is the response to the cynical argument that arises from the medrash that records Hashem's encounter with our neighboring nations. They all rejected Torah upon discovering that it prohibits activities that were central to their lives, be it theft, incest, or worse. Were the Jews ever subjected to a test of that order? The Rebbe answers in the affirmative, as we were told that achieving ultimate intimacy with the Almighty would be limited as long as we live in this world.

Indeed, the Ohr Hachayim (Yisro 19:12) suggests that during the three days of haghola, Jews would practice skirting around the mountain, to be sure that they would not be drawn to ascend the mountain once the Shechina came to rest upon it. The similarity of that description to the exposure therapy offered to the phobic must teach us of the enormous magnetic pull that they feared they would experience. They understood so very well that they would find it close to impossible to overcome the impulse to see whatever they could, with their own eyes, unless they trained themselves and engrained the contrary behaviors within themselves that would keep them clear of getting too close. Let the discipline of routine overcome the imagined impulse to feel the closeness of Shechina.

My imagination, informed by the practices of mesmerized crowds, pictures Jews of all ages coming to the bottom of the mountain and staking out their space. Not unlike those who would wait on long lines for the first opportunity to purchase a soon to be released item of enormous popularity and limited availability, Jews would spend these days scouting out "best spots" on all sides of the mountain. Who knows what they would bring with to lay claim to a comfortable boulder or to refresh themselves as they spend long hours waiting in anticipation?

If my mind's portrayal is in any way accurate, then this three day outpouring of anticipation is well worth remembering and well worth celebrating. To be sure it is that eagerness that we try to recapture for ourselves as we push ourselves throughout the night. May Hashem grant us success as we try to evoke that excitement that should be part of our preparation for and participation in our celebration of matan Torah.

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#### **OTS Dvar Torah: Rabbi Aviad Sanders**

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##### **Body Divided; Soul United**

The fourth of the Five Books of Moses begins with a new census of the Jewish people and a description of the Jewish people's encampments during their desert journey. The Torah tells us where each tribe was situated, the precise way each tribe traveled, the specific role of the Levites, and more.

Commentators offered various reasons for Hashem's decision to count the Jewish people at the beginning of the book of Numbers (Bamidbar), and in general, for the censuses



recorded in different parts of the Torah. The best-known reason appears in Rashi's commentaries, based on Midrash Rabbah. Rashi states that they were counted "because of His love for them". In other words, since Hashem loved the Jewish people so much, He counted them.

I'd like to try to suggest another reason for the census of the Jewish people that is recorded in the beginning of the Book of Numbers, one that is tied to the place it occurred – the desert. I'd also like to explain why the census is described in such detail, and in so doing, to shed new light on Rashi's commentary.

We know that in principle, it isn't so simple to count the Jewish people. The discussion of this census is juxtaposed with the issue of *kofer nefesh*, "the price of a life" – a payment of a half a shekel. The Book of Chronicles describes how Satan had incited King David to number Israel, and as a result, the people of Israel became afflicted with pestilence, which kills 70,000 people.

Under certain circumstances, if necessary, performing a census of the Jewish people is sanctioned, but it's clear that it is inadvisable for the census to be performed by people.

Today, too, there is no count of the Jewish people. We have no way of knowing exactly how many Jews there are in the world. It's a bit easier in the State of Israel: every time a child is born to a Jewish mother, the child is recorded in the Interior Ministry's computer systems, and through a simple function, we can obtain a printout with the number of Jews in the State of Israel. However, this isn't the case outside of Israel and most importantly, in the largest Jewish community in the diaspora – namely, the American Jewish community. For obvious historical reasons, Jews do not want to have their religion registered by the authorities. We learned from history that when the central government has records of who is and who isn't Jewish, it doesn't necessarily end well for us. Beyond that, however, in the United States, there is separation of church and state, so there are no legal records of who is and who isn't Jewish.

The very definition of Jewishness is heavily debated among the various Jewish movements in the United States, and, apparently, among the Jews of Israel as well. Is a Jew a person who self-identifies as Jewish, or someone who was born to a Jewish mother? This question drives a wedge between various Jewish movements. It is well known that the Law of Return, which is an index of Jewish immigration to Israel, stipulates that anyone with a Jewish grandparent is Jewish. On the other hand, the Chief Rabbinate, in accordance with Jewish law, only accepts the Jewishness of those whose mothers are Jewish.

Jean Améry, a French-Jewish philosopher who survived the Holocaust, defined as Jewish all

those whom the Nazis had been prepared to tattoo with a number. The Nazis didn't follow Jewish Orthodox tenets in determining who is Jewish. In many ways, the Law of Return defines eligibility for the Law of Return based on how the Nazis would have defined a person as a Jewish extraction.

In light of this, how are we to count the Jews of the world? How can we even agree over who is Jewish? This question is further compounded when we review Judaism itself from the time of the Mishna until the modern day. There is a well-known joke suggesting that wherever there are two Jews, there are three opinions and four synagogues. This joke has rung true from the time of the Exodus until the present day. These aren't mere squabbles. These are debates on fundamental issues that could create rifts within the Jewish people over the question of what Judaism is. Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai are praised in the Oral Torah because although they had disagreed on a swath of issues, including the very definition of Judaism, they never objected to marriages between their communities, though we can deduce from this that this wasn't always the case, and that sometimes, disputes led to excommunication and deep divides.

So, who would be bold enough to run a census and count the Jewish people? During the morning classes of Midreshet Lindenbaum's summer session, we study the tractate of Megillah. The first topic the tractate covers is the question of who is obligated to observe the commandment of making pilgrimage during the *shloshet regalim* – the three holidays of pilgrimage (Sukkot, Shavuot, and Pesach) – and who is obligated to see and be seen in the Holy Temple. One of the categories the Gemara discusses is people who are half-slaves, that is, those who are half-subjugated to a master, and "half masters to themselves". This is a very rare case. The sages of the Mishna had agreed that if such a condition comes into being, we must immediately free the slave.

The commentators of the Gemara thrashed out the definition of the half-slave status to try to understand it. One of the most fascinating comments is made by Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky (the Steipler Gaon) in his book, *Hakehillot Yaakov*:

Ostensibly, we should explain the idea of a half-slave and half-freeman in the simplest sense, namely, that that half of his body is a slave, and the other half is emancipated, or that every part of his body is half enslaved, and half-free. All of this, however, is only true for the person's body. However, his *nefesh* and his *neschama*, which are spiritual, are obviously indivisible, and with regard to his soul, because his master owns half of his body, he is called a slave, but because he is half independent, he is called an Israelite, and the laws pertaining to slaves as well as those pertaining to Israelites apply here.

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According to the author of *Hakehillot Yaakov*, we could speak about a body that is half-free and half-slave, but we can't speak about a halved soul, where half of the soul is free and the other is enslaved, since souls can't be divided, and the soul of this individual is both free and enslaved, all at once.

We learn from this that there may be different organs in the body, which have different roles to play, but ultimately, the soul is indivisible.

The people of Israel are a nation divided into tribes. Each tribe had its own prince, court, traditions, inherited land, accent, profession, and more. When there are different traditions, dialects and professions, when we are encamped in different places, when we live in different countries, or when our religious horizons and customs differ, we can easily get confused and make the mistake of saying that we aren't truly one nation, but rather, a number of nations.

The beginning of the Book of Numbers marks the beginning of Israel's lengthy stay in the Sinai desert. Until now, everything had happened in a flash: the exodus from Egypt, the bitter waters, the giving of the Torah, the Sin of the Golden Calf, and the construction of the tabernacle. However, once we begin the book of Numbers, all of that is behind us. The people of Israel are now learning how to live together as one people, and this is precisely the moment when the divisions between the tribes begin to surface. It is precisely at this moment that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, stops everything and numbers the Children of Israel tribe by tribe, role by role. The counting of the tribes is so succinct and so highly emphasized in these verses, to impress upon us that the nation of Israel is a complex people and is anything but monolithic. This census echoes the great interest Hashem has in us. It demonstrates to the people of Israel that Hashem loves them, with all their diversity and tribalism, and that He counted them out of love. Hashem teaches us that although the people of Israel may have the semblance of being divided, and even if they truly are divided, precisely because they are a diverse people, made up of different tribes – inside, our souls are one and undivided.

I hope that the profound message Hashem's census conveys will pervade and teach us something about our nation and ourselves.

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### **Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam**

**"THE SIXTH DAY"** - And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good, and it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day. Now the heavens and the earth were completed and all their host. And G-d completed on the seventh day His work that He did, and He abstained on the seventh day from all His work that He did.

YOM HaShishi... The sixth day... That's how

we begin saying Kiddush every Friday Night, hearkening back to the original Shabbos of creation.

The Sixth day; Rashi is troubled by the prefix "HEY" which means "THE". Why is that day of creation worthy more than other days of the title "THE"? Rashi offers two explanations which can really be merged into one.

The letter "HEY" has the numerical value of 5. Also there is another day in history worthy of that appellation "THE SIXTH DAY". It's "THE SIXTH DAY OF SIVAN, the day of the giving of the Torah, when the Jewish People stood like one person with one heart by the Mt of Sinai and received HASHEM's Torah, 3331 years ago and 2448 years from the beginning of creation. At that cosmic event The Five Books of Moshe were born into the world and received by the Nation of Israel, hence the letter "HEY" which equals five, signifying The Five Books of Moshe.

Now we understand that "THE SIXTH DAY" mentioned there is actually referring to THE SIXTH DAY of SIVAN when the Jewish Nation received the Five Books of Moshe.

Everything is clear now, except one thing and that one thing will invite more information from Rashi to join and complete the picture. Why is this point the correct address for referring to THE SIXTH DAY of SIVAN? This is right at the end of the creation and just before the first Shabbos, and an event 2448 years later is being referenced! Why here? Why now?

Today is a very important day in my life. It's THE SIXTH DAY! No it's not Shevuos yet. It's the 6th day of June. Why is that so important? Does it have something to do with D-Day? No! It is related to an event closer in history without which I would not be here today. No it's not my birthday, but it is almost my birthday. Here's a hint. Why would I have had to come into this world if HASHEM had not prepared for me a proper match?! Although the 6th of June date to which I refer actually

happened more than 6 years after my arrival in this world, even still, there's no doubt a plan was being hatched so that one day this pot would find its matching lid, and become one. It's my wife's birthday!

Rashi explains that HASHEM put a condition in the world right from the beginning of creation that he would endorse and support a world that would promise that there would be a nation ready and willing in time to arrive at that date on THE SIXTH DAY of SIVAN in the year 2448. Had there been no individual as Avraham and his progeny who seek out and discover HASHEM and then wish to do His will, the world would not have been worthy of being created. HASHEM would have unplugged His will, aborting the creation, and returning the universe to less than void and nothingness. There is no need for a world without direction and without those willing to receive directives. THE SIXTH DAY of SIVAN is when the Jewish Nation received the Torah and when the world received its reason for being.

Now how can HASHEM know in advance that there would be a nation that would arrive in time for that date with destiny? Isn't freewill the main rule of this game of life?! HASHEM's fore-knowledge doesn't interfere with man's ability to choose. Immediately before declaring completion of a sixth day the Torah states, "G-d saw all that He had made and it was very good." Perhaps HASHEM peered deeply into the future here in happy anticipation of "THE SIXTH DAY".

### Bar Ilan University: Dvar Torah

#### The Poles of the Ark

Raanan Eichler\*

This week's reading describes the procedure for transporting the Tabernacle and its furnishings. The sons of Kehath were to carry the sacred furnishings, but Aaron and his sons were commanded to cover these furnishings before the sons of Kohath approached. The process for covering the Ark of the Pact is described thus:

At the breaking of camp, Aaron and his sons

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shall go in and take down the screening curtain and cover the Ark of the Pact with it. They shall lay a covering of dolphin skin over it and spread a cloth of pure blue on top; and they shall put its poles in place (Num. 4:5-6).

The poles of the ark were the rods by means of which the ark was carried.<sup>1</sup> The poles were slid into golden rings situated on the four sides of the ark, that is, its feet (Ex. 25:12-14; 37:3-5). The last words here, "they shall put its poles in place," seem to imply that usually, before preparing for transport, the poles of the ark were not connected to it. This appears to contradict another directive found in Exodus: "The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark: they shall not be removed from it" (Ex. 25:15).

The directive in Exodus is consonant with another tradition, according to which the poles of the ark remained on it even after it was placed in the House of the Lord in Jerusalem: "The poles projected so that the ends of the poles were visible in the sanctuary in front of the Shrine, but they could not be seen outside; and there they remain to this day" (I Kings 8:8, II Chron. 5:9). But if the poles of the ark were always on it, how could they have been "put in place," as directed in this week's reading?

This contradiction greatly troubled Medieval Jewish commentators, who proposed a wide variety of solutions.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Rashi** explained that the ark had two long poles, each of them slipped through two rings and protruding on both sides of the ark. Since "their ends were thick" the poles could not come out of the rings, but they could slide back and forth within the rings. The meaning of "putting the poles in place" was that they were situated so that the poles protruded the same amount at either end and then fixed in place in this position.<sup>3</sup> Similar explanations were put forth by **R. Elyakim bar Meshulam**<sup>4</sup> and **Nahmanides**,<sup>5</sup> however it is difficult to understand precisely what they had in mind.<sup>6</sup>

2. **Rabbi Abraham son of Maimonides** suggested that when at rest, each of the poles of the ark was dislodged from one of the rings, but remained inserted through the other ring; when being transported, the poles were

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<sup>1</sup> For greater detail, see R. Eichler, "The Poles of the Ark: On the Ins and Outs of a Textual Contradiction," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135/4 (2016):733-741.

<sup>2</sup> This contradiction does not appear to have been directly contended with by the Talmud, although the discussion of the poles of the ark in the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Yoma* 72a, which raises allied issues, had an impact on the discussions of this matter by Medieval commentators.

<sup>3</sup> In a note by his disciple, Rabbi Shemaiah, on his interpretation of Numbers 4:6, preserved in Leipzig manuscript 1. This note is printed in the Keter edition of *Mikraot Gedolot*, Numbers, and is also quoted in the website <https://alhatorah.org/>. This explanation appears to have been influenced by the words, "the poles projected," in I Kings 8:8 and II Chron. 5:9.

<sup>4</sup> In his commentary on *Yoma* 72a.

<sup>5</sup> In his commentary on Num. 4:6.

<sup>6</sup> For a variety of elaborations on Rashi's suggestion, see: R. Yitzhak ben Yehudah ha-Levy, citing "Maharar Moshe," in Y. Gelis, *Sefer Tosafot ha-Shalem: Otzar Perushei Ba'alei ha-Tosafot*, Jerusalem 1993, p. 41, par. 5 (as well as par. 3); an anonymous Tosafist there, pp. 43-44, par. 10; Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg ("*stam tosafo*") on *Yoma* 72a, s.v. "*ketiv*"; Rabbi Menahem ha-Meiri on *Yoma* 72a.

reinserted through both rings.<sup>7</sup>

3. Hizkuni (**Rabbi Hizkiah bar Manoah**) suggested that the instruction to "put its poles in place" meant that the rings be inserted in slits in the poles so that the ark not slide along the poles when going up or down an incline.<sup>8</sup>

4. **Rabbi Meyahas ben Eliyahu** suggested that the directive meant that the poles of the ark were to **be laid bare**, after having been covered as stipulated in Numbers 5:5-6, so that the ark bearers could grab hold of them.<sup>9</sup>

5. According to another suggestion, attributed to **Rabbi Jacob of Orleans**, "putting in place" meant that the poles were to be **placed on the shoulders** of the bearers of the ark.<sup>10</sup>

6. According to an **anonymous explanation**, mentioned by Ibn Ezra, the ark had two sets of four rings, eight rings in all; and the directive in Numbers meant that the poles were to be transferred from one set of rings to the other. Thus, aside from the moment of transferring, the poles would always be in the rings, in accordance with Exodus 25:15.<sup>11</sup>

7. **Rabbi Joseph Caro** suggested that the poles were actually removed when the ark was at rest, and that the instruction that "they shall not be removed from it" meant the poles should be affixed so that they not **accidentally** slip out when the ark was being transported.<sup>12</sup>

8. **Rabbi Joseph Bechor-Shor** explained that the poles of the ark were never removed from it, and the instruction that the poles be put in place applied only to that one time.<sup>13</sup>

9. **Ibn Ezra** suggested that the poles of the ark **generally** were not removed from it, but that the moment of disassembling the Tabernacle was an exception.<sup>14</sup>

10. **Rabbi Yeshaya di Trani** went so far as to suggest that the ark not only had two sets of rings, but also two pairs of poles. One pair was never removed from the ark, in fulfillment of Exodus 25:15, and the other was removed when the ark came to rest, in fulfillment of Numbers 4:6.<sup>15</sup>

Here I would like to suggest a new way of reconciling these verses, based on what we know of the ancient Near East. First, a more fundamental issue must be clarified: How many poles did the ark have? Nowhere does the Torah tell us, but it is clear that the Medieval commentators and most Torah

scholars in our day are of the opinion that the ark had two long poles, each one protruding at both ends. However, from the Torah itself one gets the impression that the ark had four poles; for the golden altar, which had only two rings, had "poles" in the plural (Ex. 30:4-5, 37:27-28). In other words, each ring itself held one pole. If so, the ark, which had four rings, would have to have had four poles. This conclusion is supported by the only extant chest from the ancient Near East which is equipped with rings holding carrying poles. This is a chest of reddish colored wood from the tomb of Tutankhamun, king of Egypt in the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. The chest had four short poles, each protruding on one side, one pole per corner.<sup>16</sup>

Taking a close look at the semantics and grammar of the Hebrew instruction, *ve-samu badav* (= they shall put its poles in place), we see that in all other instances where the verb *la-sim*, "to put," appears without an indirect object, in the chapters dealing with the Tabernacle, it does not mean "to insert," but rather has the broader sense of putting in place. All these instances are to be found in Exodus, chapter 40. In verse 8, the verb refers to the courtyard of the Tabernacle, and the verb "*va-yakem*" ("set up") parallels it in verse 33. In verse 18 this verb pertains to the planks, and in verse 21 to the curtain for screening. It follows from this analysis that the meaning of "*ve-samu badav*," is not that the poles were inserted, but rather, that they were arranged, or put in place, as indeed Rashi and others interpreted.

But what exactly was the nature of this "putting in place"? Let us return to the chest from Tutankhamun's tomb. The rods for carrying this chest were connected to it in an interesting fashion: they could be extended or retracted. In other words, when the box was at rest the rods could be slid in towards the space between the underside of the box and the bottom of its feet, with the rods still being held by the rings, so that the rods would not be in the way of passersby. When preparing the box to be carried, the rods could be pulled outwards, still through the rings, so that the bearers could grab hold of them.

If that was the customary way of building chests of this sort, then there is no contradiction between Exodus 25:15 and Numbers 4:6. In accordance with the directive

## Likutei Divrei Torah

in the first verse, the poles of the ark indeed remained through the rings on the ark and were never removed. The instruction to "put its poles in place" in the second verse meant that the poles were to be extended, while still being held by the rings, so that it would be possible to carry the ark. This also explains why when it comes to the table and altars no similar requirement was made, stipulating that the poles remain in place as on the ark. Such an arrangement was feasible only with chests, because they were built in a manner that made it possible for the poles for carrying to be concealed and remain connected, since the feet formed a narrow, low space between the underside and the ground. Therefore, only in the case of the ark would such a requirement suit the general goal of an aesthetic Tabernacle, while the poles of the table and the altars, so it seems, had to be dismantled and stored elsewhere.

This brief investigation illustrates how familiarity with the material culture of the ancient Near East can help solve difficulties in interpretation of the Bible. *Translated by Rachel Rowen*

<sup>7</sup> Commentary on Ex. 25:15.

<sup>8</sup> Commentary on Ex. 25:15; Num. 4:6.

<sup>9</sup> Commentary on Num. 4:6.

<sup>10</sup> In *Tosafot* on *Yoma*, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Commentary on Num. 4:6.

<sup>12</sup> H. Mack, "*Keta'im hadashim mi-perush R. Y. Kra la-Torah mi-tokh k"y 118.1 she-ba-osef ha-sheni shel Pirkovitz she-be-sifriyat Sanct Peterburg (Leningrad)*," *Tarbiz* 63 (1994), pp. 533-553.

<sup>13</sup> Commentary on Ex. 25:15.

<sup>14</sup> Short Commentary on Exodus 25:15, commentary on Num. 4:6.

<sup>15</sup> Commentary on Ex. 15:15, in Gelis, *Tosafot*, p. 43, par. 7.

<sup>16</sup> For photos, sketches, and verbal descriptions of this object, see <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/032.html>. In addition, there are several extant pictures of similar chests, all far more ancient, also from Egypt. These pictures resemble the chest mentioned herein, in every relevant aspect, and substantiate what has been said here.



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to: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org)

date: May 21, 2020, 6:24 PM

subject: Rav Frand - Why So Few Leviim?

The Torah records that after Moshe counted Bnei Yisrael, he counted the Tribe of Levi separately. The Leviim were counted from the age of one month and above, and they numbered 22,000. The Ramban asks a basic demographic question: The male population of the Tribe of Levi, which was counted from thirty days and up, numbered less than half of the next smallest Tribe, despite the fact that all the rest of the tribes were counted only from the age of twenty years and above! The Ramban asks: Why were there so few Leviim?

The Ramban suggests an answer to this question. He says this corroborates Chazal's teaching on the pasuk "As they (the Egyptians) persecuted them (the Jews), so did they multiply and so did they expand..." [Shemos 1:12]. The more the Egyptians tried to minimize us through their bondage and persecution, the more Hashem blessed us and allowed the Jewish women to have multiple births, creating a population explosion amongst the Children of Israel. Chazal teach that the Tribe of Levi was not subjected to the bondage of slavery. They were free from the work and the persecution suffered by the other tribes. Therefore, since they were not part of the persecution, they also were not part of the blessing of the population explosion, and consequently their total population at the end of the period of Egyptian slavery was much smaller than that of the other tribes.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh quotes this Ramban and is not happy with his suggestion. He offers his own unique—and in a sense, startling—answer: The Gemara says that Amram divorced his wife (after having only two children—Miriam and Aharon). His rationale for doing so was that given the grim situation of the Jews in Egypt (Jewish male children being thrown at birth into the Nile, at that time), he did not want to bring any more children into the world. Amram was the gadol ha'dor (the leader of the generation). He was also the head of the Tribe of Levi. When the rest of his tribesmen saw that Amram divorced his wife, they all got up and divorced their wives as well. Even though the Gemara says that Amram had second thoughts about the matter and remarried his wife Yocheved, the Ohr HaChaim suggests (this is speculation on his part) that the other Leviites did not follow his lead in that action, and they remained separated from their wives. The Ohr HaChaim supplies a rationale for their motivation: The Tribe of Levi had it relatively good in Egypt. They were not subject to the same horrors and unspeakable suffering that the rest of the Jews had to bear. Consequently, they appreciated the lives they led and they appreciated life in general. They simply could not bear the thought of bringing children into the world only to have them thrown into the Nile to be drowned or abandoned (as was the case with Amram's third child, Moshe). Ironically, because the other Jews suffered so much, they appreciated life less and they somehow came to terms with the thought that their children may be taken away from them. Their lives were so oppressed and they were so depressed that they felt that life was almost worthless. Consequently, the thought of having their children taken away from them seemed almost "par for the course" and therefore it did not stop them from bringing more Jewish souls into the world! They valued life so little, that they did not recoil in horror from the thought of what might happen to their to-be-born children as did the Leviim.

The only analogy I can think of is that in some countries in the world, life is not as valuable as it is in the United States. In America (and all the more so this is true in Eretz Yisrael), much of the general perception of the populace is that every life is of infinite value. The Leviim did not want to bring children into the world. We should father children who will suffer? We should bear children who will be murdered? We are not going to have such children!

The rest of the Israelites, who themselves lived unbearable lives, were not as frightened by the idea of bringing children into the world, who themselves would have a miserable lot in life. This is a startling idea, but if we think about it, I believe we can understand it.

As a result of this phenomenon, the Ohr HaChaim writes, the Tribe of Levi had significantly fewer children than the enslaved tribes.

A Cryptic Comment of the Baal HaTurim Explained by the Bach  
The Talmud [Sotah 12a] sheds further light on the above-mentioned incident. When Amram divorced his wife (not wishing to bring more Jewish children into the world under such dire circumstances), his young daughter Miriam told him, "Father, your decree is worse than Pharaoh's decree. Pharaoh's decree only affects the boys; your decree affects both male and female children!" The Talmud states that Amram accepted his daughter's critique, and this is the background to the pasuk "A man went (va'yelech ish) from the House of Levi and married the daughter of Levi" [Shemos 2:1] The Rabbis ask, "From where did he go?" And they answer, "He went from the counsel of his daughter (to remarry Yocheved)."

The Baal HaTurim points out that there are only two places in all of Tanach where we find the expression "va'yelech ish". One is the aforementioned pasuk "va'yelech ish m'Beis Levi va'yikach es bas Levi," and the other is in the Book of Rus; "va'yelech ish m'Beis Lechem Yehudah..." (And a man went from Bethlehem in Judea to dwell in the fields of Moab) [Rus 1:1]. The Baal HaTurim (who did not have a computer) is certainly not merely sharing an interesting word anomaly. He means something when he provides these insights. Unfortunately, the Baal HaTurim does not do us the favor of explaining the significance of the linkage between these two pesukim. But in a sense, he did do us a favor, because this gives all darshanim in every

generation the opportunity to suggest their own insights explaining the connection between “va’yelech ish m’Beis Levi...” (which was a pious action—Amram took back his wife and wanted to bring children into the world) and “va’yelech ish m’Beis Lechem Yehudah...” (where Elimelech, the leader of his generation, abandoned his people by leaving Eretz Yisrael in a time of famine and fled to Moav, which apparently was a sinful action). The Bach (Rav Yoel Sirkis [1561-1640]), in a sefer called Meishiv Nefesh, shares an interesting idea. He says that Elimelech did not perform a wicked act in the Book of Rus. He did not abandon his people. He acted for the Sake of Heaven (l’Shem Shamayim). Elimelech knew prophetically (B’Ruach HaKodesh) that the Moshiach must trace his lineage back to the daughters of Moav. Since he was aware, however, that there was a halacha that “Neither an Ammonite nor a Moabite shall enter into the Congregation of Hashem...” [Devorim 23:4] (and at this point it was not known that this halacha only restricted male Moavites from marrying into Jewish families) and people therefore distanced themselves from any potential marriage with someone of Moavite lineage, Elimelech was perturbed that the Moshiach would never come into existence. Therefore, he took it upon himself to go with his family to the fields of Moav, because he sensed that over there, somehow, he would wind up with a woman in his family who would become the matriarch of the Messianic King.

This is the similarity the Baal HaTurim is pointing out between these two pesukim. “Va’yelech ish m’Beis Levi va’yikach es bas Levi” produced Moshe Rabbeinu, the Redeemer from Egypt, the first redeemer in Jewish history. And “va’yelech ish m’Beis Lechem Yehudah...” ultimately produced the final redeemer. Just as Amram’s intent was to bring forth women (as Miriam pointed out to him, Pharaoh only decreed death on the Jewish males, but Amram’s separation from his wife ruled out the possibility of women coming into the world as well), so too, Elimelech’s intent in going to the fields of Moav was to bring forth women (i.e., Rus, the matriarch of the Davidic monarchy).

#### All Is Well That Ends Well

The last pasuk in Parshas Bamidbar is, “But they shall not come and look as the holy is inserted, lest they die.” [Bamidbar 4:20] When the Leviim were carrying the Aron HaKodesh, they needed to make sure it was covered, so as not to see it while it was uncovered. It was not an easy job being a Levi. It was a dangerous profession. If they looked at the Aron uncovered, they would die!

The problem is that we have a principle learned from a pasuk in Koheles [8:3] “...Lo sa’amod al davar rah...” (literally —“Do not stand on a bad thing”), which teaches that it is inappropriate to end a parsha (or even an Aliyah) on a bad note. Baal Korehs and Gabbaim know that when you need to insert an additional aliyah (“hosafa”) in the leining, there are certain places where it is forbidden to stop. One of the rules is that you cannot stop on a pasuk with a “bad message.”

And yet, Parshas Bamidbar ends with “V’lo Yiroo k’valah es haKodesh, va’meyu.” And this is not the only occurrence of this phenomenon. Parshas Kedoshim ends with the pasuk “...they shall be put to death; they shall pelt them with stones, their blood shall be within them (d’meyhem bam).” [Vayikra 20:27]. This is a “beautiful ending?” “Their blood shall be within them!” How do we explain this? Koheles says not to pause on a “davar rah”. So how do we end on such frightening and somber notes as those at the end of Parshas Bamidbar and Parshas Kedoshim?

Rav Isaac Bernstein shared an interesting idea from the Teshuvos Rav Pe’alim. In Talmudic times, every person who received an aliyah did not make two brachos (one prior to his aliyah and one following it) as is the custom today. Rather, the first olah recited the beginning bracha (asher bachar banu...) and the final (usually the seventh) olah made the final bracha (asher nasan lanu Toras emes...). The Rav Pe’alim says that the result of this is that the last thing the congregation hears is not the final words of the last pasuk, but rather the last words of the final bracha “Who gave us the True Torah and Eternal Life He has implanted in our midst, Blessed Art Thou

Who Gives Us the Torah!” That is not a bad note. We are not stopping at the words “They will die” or “their blood is within them.” We are stopping at “Who Gives Us the Torah.”

Now, in truth, this is the case, not only in Talmudic times, but in our day as well. So, I believe that the Rav Pe’alim is saying that the rule of not stopping on a “bad note” (davar rah) only applies to the intermediate aliyahs—namely all the section endings except the final one—which are not followed by the ending bracha. However, the rule of not ending on a “bad note” does not apply to the very end of a Parsha, because the last aliyah never ended with the Torah pasuk itself, but with the final Torah blessing.

What a better way could there be to end my final shiur before Shavuot than with the words “Baruch Ata Hashem, Nosen HaTorah”.

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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**from: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks <[info@rabbisacks.org](mailto:info@rabbisacks.org)>**

**subject: Covenant and Conversation**

**Egalitarian Society, Jewish-Style (Bamidbar 5780)**

The parsha of Bamidbar is generally read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, z’man matan torateinu, “the time of the giving of our law,” the revelation at Sinai. So the Sages, believing that nothing is coincidental, searched for some connection between the two.

To find one is not easy. There is nothing in the parsha about the giving of the Torah. Instead it is about a census of the Israelites. Nor is its setting helpful. We are told at the beginning that the events about to be described took place in “the wilderness of Sinai,” whereas when the Torah speaks about the great revelation, it talks about “Mount Sinai.” One is a general region, the other a specific mountain within that region. Nor are the Israelites at this stage walking towards Mount Sinai. To the contrary, they are preparing to leave. They are about to begin the second part of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

The Sages did, nonetheless, make a connection, and it is a surprising one: “And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness” (Numbers 1:1). Why the Sinai Wilderness? From here the Sages taught that the Torah was given through three things: fire, water, and wilderness. How do we know it was given through fire? From Exodus 19:18: “And Mount Sinai was all in smoke as God had come down upon it in fire.” How do we know it was given through water? As it says in Judges 5:4, “The heavens dripped and the clouds dripped water [at Sinai].” How do we know it was given through wilderness? [As it says above,] “And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness.” And why was the Torah given through these three things? Just as [fire, water, and wilderness] are free to all the inhabitants of the world, so too are the words of Torah free to them, as it says in Isaiah 55:1, “Oh, all who are thirsty, come for water... even if you have no money.”[1]

The Midrash takes three words associated with Sinai – fire (that was blazing on the mountain just before the revelation), water (based on a phrase in the Song of Deborah) and wilderness (as at the beginning of our parsha, and also in Exodus 19:1, 2), and it connects them by saying that “they are free to all the inhabitants of the world.”



This is not the association most of us would make. Fire is associated with heat, warmth, energy. Water is associated with quenching thirst and making things grow. Wilderness is the space between: neither starting point nor destination, the place where you need signposts and a sense of direction. All three would therefore make good metaphors for the Torah. It warms. It energises. It satisfies spiritual thirst. It gives direction. Yet that is not the approach taken by the Sages. What mattered to them is that all three are free. Staying for a moment with the comparison of Torah and the wilderness, there were surely other significant analogies that might have been made. The wilderness is a place of silence where you can hear the voice of God. The wilderness is a place away from the distractions of towns and cities, fields and farms, where you can focus on the presence of God. The wilderness is a place where you realise how vulnerable you are: you feel like sheep in need of a shepherd. The wilderness is a place where it is easy to get lost, and you need some equivalent of a Google-maps-of-the-soul. The wilderness is a place where you feel your isolation and you reach out to a force beyond you. Even the Hebrew name for wilderness, midbar, comes from the same root as “word” (davar) and “to speak” (d-b-r). Yet these were not the connections the Sages of the Midrash made. Why not?

The Sages understood that something profound was born at Mount Sinai, and this has distinguished Jewish life ever since. It was the democratisation of knowledge. Literacy and knowledge of the law was no longer to be confined to a priestly elite. For the first time in history everyone was to have access to knowledge, education and literacy. “The law that Moses gave us is the possession of the assembly of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4) – the whole assembly, not a privileged group within it.

The symbol of this was the revelation at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when God revealed Himself not only to a Prophet but to an entire people, who three times signalled their consent to the commands and the covenant. In the penultimate command that Moses gave to the people, known as Hakhel, he gave the following instruction:

“At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deut. 31:10-13)

Again, the whole people, not an elite or subset within it. This is echoed in the famous verse from Isaiah 54:13, “And all your children shall be learned of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children.” This was and remains the unique feature of the Torah as the written constitution of the Jewish people as a nation under the sovereignty of God. Everyone is expected not merely to keep the law but to know it. Jews became a nation of constitutional lawyers.

There were two further key moments in the history of this development. The first was when Ezra and Nehemiah gathered the people, after the Babylonian exile, to the Water Gate in Jerusalem, on Rosh Hashanah, and read the Torah to them, placing Levites throughout the crowd to explain to people what was being said and what it meant, a defining moment in Jewish history that took the form not of a battle but of a massive adult education programme (Neh. 8). Ezra and Nehemiah realised that the most significant battles in ensuring the Jewish future were cultural, not military. This was one of the most transformative insights in history.

The second was the extraordinary creation, in the first century, of the world’s first system of universal compulsory education. Here is how the Talmud describes the process, culminating in the work of Joshua ben Gamla, a High Priest in the last days of the Second Temple:

Truly the name of that man is to be blessed, namely Joshua ben Gamla, for but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all . . . They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in

each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] but if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Joshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town, and that children should enter school at the age of six or seven.[2] Universal compulsory education did not exist in England – at that time the world’s leading imperial power – until 1870, a difference of 18 centuries. At roughly the same time as Joshua ben Gamla, in the first century C.E., Josephus could write:

Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.[3]

We now understand the connection the Sages made between the wilderness and the giving of the Torah: it was open to everyone, and it was free. Neither lack of money nor of aristocratic birth could stop you from learning Torah and acquiring distinction in a community in which scholarship was considered the highest achievement.

With three crowns was Israel crowned: the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood and the crown of Kingship. The crown of Priesthood was conferred on Aaron . . . The crown of kingship was conferred on David . . . But the crown of Torah is for all Israel . . . Whoever desires it, let them come and take it.[4]

I believe that this is one of Judaism’s most profound ideas: whatever you seek to create in the world, start with education. If you want to create a just and compassionate society, start with education. If you want to create a society of equal dignity, ensure that education is free and equal to all. That is the message the Sages took from the fact that we read Bamidbar before Shavuot, the festival that recalls that when God gave our ancestors the Torah, He gave it to all of them equally.

[1] Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7. [2] Baba Batra, 21a. [3] Contra Apionem, ii, 177-78. [4] Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 3:1.

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Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

**Home Weekly Parsha Bamidbar**

**Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog**

This section of the Torah is entitled, Bamidbar, in the desert. It is hard for us to imagine, though it may be less hard in our current situation than it was before we were put into quarantine, how the Jewish people lived in the desert for four decades. Since they had no gainful occupations and they had no struggle to feed themselves for the miraculous bread from heaven fell and the well of Miriam and of Moshe provided them with water and sustenance. What did they do with their time? The apparent answer is that they absorbed themselves in understanding, studying, and assessing the laws and values of the Torah. In any event, they had to raise a new generation of people, a generation that would pursue the goal of entering the land of Israel and settling it and creating a more normal, so to speak, Jewish society. Our rabbis have characterized the generation of the desert as being one of great intelligence, knowledge and understanding. Yet it was a generation of seemingly no purpose because it was doomed to die in the desert and not accomplish the goal that was entrusted to it when it left Egypt. It was told that it would accept the Torah and then march into the land of Israel. Moshe was successful in having them accept the Torah, but he was unsuccessful in attempting to have them move to the land of Israel. In fact, an element of the people would say that not only would they not go forward to the land of

Israel, but they would be willing to retreat and go backwards into the land of Egypt, the land of affliction and of plagues.

It is hard for us to imagine such a generation, with its sole task only to mark time until it passed away and made room for the next generation, which would perform enter the land of Israel and build there a society. The desert had however positive aspects to it as well. The Talmud teaches us that the Torah was given to a generation that could live in the desert. If one can relieve oneself of desires and of outside pressures and live as though one is in a desert, then the Torah can find a real home and purpose in the life of that person.

The generation of the desert represents to us a two-faced and double-edged society. On the one hand, negative because of its refusal to progress towards its ultimate goal, the land of Israel and, on the other, a society of blessedness, free from daily wants and pressures with the ability to intellectualize Torah into its very being.

In Jewish tradition, the generation of the desert is always represented not so much as a transitional generation but as a wasted generation. One who has opportunity and ability and does not employ that ability to fulfill the opportunity presented, is seen, in the eyes of the Torah, as wasting one's existence. And the Torah has a prohibition against wasting anything, certainly time and opportunities.

Because of this, we are always troubled when reading these portions of the Torah that will follow for the next few weeks and this section of the Torah which bears the name of the desert as its title. We are struck with a feeling of pity and sadness that the generation that had the possibility of being the greatest ended up being a wasted generation, dying in the desert, having no home, and little or no opportunity, after its great start when freed from Egypt.

Every generation must be on the watch, that it should not be a generation of the desert. We can learn to take advantage of situations which allow us to study and to employ intellectual realism, but we have to also beware that a generation of the desert that does not build for the future and does not take hold of its opportunities will not be remembered as a positive and great generation amongst the story of the people of Israel. We are faced with great challenges, but with great opportunities. And our generation certainly will not be remembered as a generation of the desert, but rather as a generation of Jews who helped build the land of Israel and who have rebuilt the Jewish world, wherever Jews exist.

#### *In My Opinion Shavuot – The Book of Ruth*

Every biblical narrative has at its heart a main character, a hero or heroine. Even though the book and the scroll of Ruth is named for her, the true main character and heroine of the story is Naomi. This is confirmed in the book itself when the prophet Samuel, the author of the book, relates that when Ruth gave birth to Oved, the women of Bethlehem declared; "A male child has been born to Naomi."

It is obvious that they did not mean this literally, for Naomi was widowed and no longer of child-bearing age. Nevertheless, the wise women of the town recognized that if it were not for Naomi, Ruth would never have met Boaz in a matrimonial relationship. It was Naomi who planned the entire series of events that would lead to the birth of this child and the beginning of the dynastic monarchy of the Jewish people.

The book instructs us not to view things in a superficial manner but rather to analyze and understand the causes and circumstances that eventually lead to the details of the narrative. The whole linchpin of the story is the steadfast commitment of Naomi, and her determination not to be crushed by the tragedies that engulfed her. Because of her, there can be a Ruth, a Boaz and eventually, a King David.

Life is oftentimes very difficult, and its burdens can be crushing. For many of us, we are passing through such a time currently. Everything that was familiar, and in fact taken for granted, has been struck from our daily lives. Our future is certainly murky and mysterious. Because of this, strength of character and an iron will to persevere and overcome is vitally necessary.

Naomi is the symbol of these strengths that we desire for ourselves and our community. It is her resourcefulness and true understanding of human nature that will stand us in good stead in our hour of difficulty and adjustment that is upon us. The challenge is how to summon up these characteristics and apply them to our own lives.

In this we can also be instructed by Ruth herself. Her selfless devotion to Naomi even though it meant the forsaking of everything she had known, and of her worldly positions, became her strongest asset. Her commitment was complete and boundless. Her determination not to abandon Naomi, and the faith and tradition of Naomi, became the turning point in her life and brought her to unimagined glory and success. Sometimes in life, forsaking everything becomes the key to acquiring greater things. Judaism teaches that we are measured not by what we take and acquire but by what we give, donate, and forsake.

This is a difficult lesson to put into practice since it runs counter to much of our innate nature, but both Naomi and Ruth rise to greatness on the basis of what they were willing to give up for a higher and nobler goal in life. One has to be willing to humble oneself and to sit amongst the gleaners of fallen grain in order to become, eventually, the matriarch of Jewish eternal monarchy.

Shabbat Shalom

Berel Wein

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#### **Jerusalem Day: The Two Messengers**

##### **Rav Kook Torah**

The prophet Isaiah used a metaphor of two messengers, the Herald of Zion and the Herald of Jerusalem, who together proclaim the imminent redemption of Israel:

"Herald of Zion, ascend a lofty mountain! Herald of Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength, be not afraid!" (Isaiah 40:9)

Who are these two messengers? Why was one commanded to scale the mountain, while the second messenger was instructed to raise her voice?

Zion and Jerusalem

We must first analyze the difference between the names "Zion" and "Jerusalem."

"Zion" represents our national aspirations for autonomy and independence, while "Jerusalem" symbolizes our lofty visions for holiness and spiritual greatness. The Herald of Zion is none other than the Zionist movement, demanding the restoration of independence and sovereignty for the Jewish people in their own land. This call is heard clearly around the world; there is no need to further raise its voice.

However, secular Zionism is only concerned with our legitimate rights to self-rule. Its aspirations are the same as those of every other nation.

The Herald of Jerusalem, on the other hand, speaks of our return to holiness, so that we may fulfill our national destiny as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). This messenger of redemption calls for the restoration of Jerusalem, our holy city, and the holy Temple. Unlike the Herald of Zion, she stands on "a high mountain" - her vision comes from a high and lofty standpoint. But her voice is faint and her demand is not heard clearly. The Herald of Jerusalem seems to fear raising her voice too loudly. The prophet found fault with both messengers. He reproved the Herald of Zion: Why are you standing down below, together with all the other nations? Why do you only speak of the commonplace goals of the gentile nations? "Ascend a lofty mountain!" Speak in the Name of God, in the name of Israel's holy mission, in the name of the prophetic visions of redemption for the Jewish people and all of humanity.

The prophet then turned to the Herald of Jerusalem: You who call for the return to the city of holiness, you are speaking from the right place,

demanding our lofty ideals. But your voice is not heard. You need to learn from the Herald of Zion and "Lift up your voice in strength, be not afraid!"

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bamidbar**

**For the week ending 23 May 2020 / 29 Iyyar 5780**

**Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

**Parsha Insights**

**The Biggest Shul in the World**

**"And the voice of the shofar grew stronger and stronger..." (Shemot 19:19)**

An early memory of mine is standing in shul right at the end of Yom Kippur and having the following fantasy: The person blowing the shofar takes a deep breath and starts to sound the tekia gedola, the "great tekia." Stretching his lungs and the length of the shofar blast to the limit, the sound grows louder and louder. Ten seconds pass. Then twenty. Then thirty. The shofar gets louder and louder. A full minute passes. The sound of the shofar is almost deafening. After two full minutes, everyone in the shul realizes that the person playing the shofar is no longer playing the shofar. The shofar is playing him. Louder and louder and louder. The shul starts to vibrate. The dust of ages falls on the bima from the chandelier swaying above. The shofar is now playing the shul. The sound has spread outside and cars start to vibrate. The pavement starts to vibrate. The houses, the trees, the earth, the sky, everything is vibrating in sympathy. Everything is sounding this one long tekia gedola. Everything in creation is sounding, "Hashem Echad." G-d is One.

The Rambam (Maimonides) says that one should not speculate about the coming of the Mashiach, for no one knows exactly how it will be, until it will be. But if one is allowed a little daydream, this is mine. I had a similar moment of reverie at the Seder this year. Even though the only person who was allowed out onto the streets during the lockdown was Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet), we all went out onto our balconies or stood by our open windows and sung together: "Ma Nishtanah...Why is this night different?" Well, this year the answer to that question was a bit of a no-brainer. But, for those few moments I felt, and I'm sure many people felt the same, that the Seder united us all as the Family of Yisrael in a way that no other Seder had ever done. And it didn't stop there. Even during the worst times in the Warsaw ghetto, the shuls and the synagogues never closed. Here we were, with the almost unthinkable situation of no communal prayer. But, in a way, the streets and the courtyards of Jerusalem became the Batei Knesset; they became the synagogues. As I stood on my porch, I could hear Kaddish coming from this direction, birkat Kohanim — the Priestly Blessing — from the other direction, and Kedusha — the praise of Hashem that angels utter — coming from a third direction. The shuls hadn't closed. They had just gotten bigger.

"And the voice of the shofar grew stronger and stronger..." (Shemot 19:19). There has been much talk that this Corona pandemic presages the coming of Mashiach. I think there may be a mistake here. One of the thirteen principles of a believing Jew is that "Every day I will await him (the Mashiach)." But maybe, if one is allowed to dream a little, on this Shavuot we will hear the great shofar proclaiming from every rooftop and every street and every heart: "Hashem Echad!" "G-d is One!"

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**Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

**Transitions and Destinations**

I've been thinking a lot lately about transitions and destinations. Perhaps this is because of my childhood memories. Back then, at precisely this time of year, my friends and I relished the approach of the end of the school year and the beginning of summer vacation. For us, school was merely a seemingly endless passage toward our longed-for destination, the "lazy, hazy" days of summer.

Or, there might be a much more recent basis to my current preoccupation with transitions and destinations. Since this past Pesach, when we celebrated our freedom from slavery, we have counted the days until Matan Torah, the "giving of the Torah," on Shavuot. Counting aloud each day, day by day and week by week, instilled in me a sense of going through a transition, a passage of seven weeks, leading to an ultimate destination.

That transitions and destinations are part of life is obvious. What is less obvious, but more fascinating, is that one person's destination is often another person's transition, and vice versa. How well do I remember my first days of employment after my years of graduate school. I experienced those years of toil as a necessary transition to the beginning of my career as a psychologist. My first day at work was the beginning of my destination. It was on that day that I met a gentleman who was to become a close colleague over the ensuing several years. His name was George Jones, and while I was to be in charge of a small group of school psychologists, he headed a similarly small group of school social workers.

Soon after we first met, we discovered that we had much in common and so no longer confined our conversations to our professional tasks. We discussed our different religions, our family backgrounds, and our hopes and dreams. We learned much from each other during those conversations. But most of all, we learned just how different our hopes and dreams were. For me, at that time in my life, my role as a trained mental health professional was my destination. It was what I had worked for and what I then anticipated would be my life's work.

For George, on the other hand, his profession was but a transitional role towards his ultimate destination. Although both of us were exactly 30 years old at the time, his dream was retirement. Yes, he knew that his destination was 20 or 25 years away, but he spoke about it almost daily, describing the property he bought on the Chesapeake Bay and the boat he would soon be able to afford. The job that was my destination was, for him, but a passage to a different destination entirely.

With this week's Torah portion, Parshat Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20), we begin a new Chumash, the fourth volume of the Pentateuch. Each of the five volumes of the Chumash is unique. My contention is that this fourth volume is unique in the following manner: It begins as a description of a transition, a passage, from the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation at Sinai through a desert wilderness but towards the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. But it soon becomes apparent that this desert wilderness will become a destination and, for many, a tragically final destination.

This book, which begins as a parade, a joyous and relatively brief journey to the Promised Land, is soon transformed into a book portraying an era of strife, rebellion, war, betrayal, and disillusionment, enduring for nearly forty years!

My private thoughts of transitions and destinations are painfully relevant this year, 5780/2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the past several months, our lives, indeed the lives of the entire human race, have changed drastically.

The question that plagues us, and I deliberately use the word "plagues," is this: are we in a transition that will last for but a relatively brief time, after which we will come to a destination, a "return to normal"? Or have we reached some new destination, a "new normal," that will persist well into the future and that will radically alter every aspect of our existence? Transition, or destination?



Was it Yogi Berra who said that it is hard to make predictions, especially about the future? Truth to tell, and we must face the truth, it is difficult to think of a moment in history at which there was greater uncertainty than at this moment.

In a certain sense, the distinction between transitions and destinations is an existential one. That is, the question can be asked, "Is our life in this world our final destination, or is it a transition, a prelude, into another world, another mode of existence?"

The answer to this question was proclaimed long ago by the Rabbis of the Mishnah: "Rabbi Jacob said: this world is like an antechamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the antechamber so that you may enter the banquet hall." (Pirkei Avot, 4:21)

Our very lives, according to Rabbi Jacob, are but transitions into another destination, the World to Come. A very sobering teaching, indeed!

But our Rabbis inform us of something even more shocking. Even the World to Come is not a final destination. Even for the righteous, that celestial world is but a passage to a loftier destination.

"Said Rabbi Chiya bar Ashi in the name of Rav: Talmidei Chachamim [pious wise men] have no rest, neither in this world nor in the World to Come, as it is written, 'They will go from strength to strength, and appear before the Almighty in Zion (Psalms 84:80).'" (Berakhot 64a).

One is tempted to assume that it is only the righteous who progress ever upward and know no final destination. But surely the wicked, whose destination is Gehenna, have reached "the end of the line."

The Rabbis are quick to assure us, however, that even Gehenna is not the end of the line: "The sentence of the wicked to Gehenna is for but 12 months." (Eduyot 2:10)

Even Gehenna itself is but a transition, hopefully to a higher and nobler destination.

In conclusion, permit me to turn my attention to a happier topic. With this week's Person in the Parasha column, I celebrate the first publication of this weekly series of columns, for Parashat Bamidbar, 2009, exactly 11 years ago. At that time, I had just concluded my tenure as Executive Vice President of the Orthodox Union, which, until then, had been my "destination."

I began a new transition in my life which has thankfully continued until now. I already have some tentative notions as to the theme of "transitions and destinations" as it is to be found in this fascinating new book of the Chumash that I hope to share with you, with the help of the Almighty, in the weeks to come.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Shavuot Sameach.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

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**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

**Dvar Torah: Bamidbar**

Will people be proud to be connected to you?

This Shabbat, we commence the reading of the book of Bamidbar. Right at the beginning of the book the Torah provides us with details of the heads of tribes, it says ראש לְבֵית־אֲבֹתָיו הָיָה – 'each one of them was the head of a household'. Rav Moshe Chofetz tells us in his book Melech Machshevet that there is a message here for each and every one of us. That's because every one of us is an 'איש' – a person, and we should likewise strive to be ראש לְבֵית־אֲבֹתָיו – 'the head of a household'. This means, he explains, that people will be proud to be connected to us and in future generations, people will be proud to be descended from us.

The Maggid of Mezerich, Rav Dov Ber ben Avraham, was the primary disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, one of the great founders of Chassidism. When he was five years old he came home to find his mother distraught. There had been a fire in their home, it had caused damage but they had

managed to put it out. So he said "Mummy, all of us are okay! Nobody died, isn't that what's important?" She replied, "that's not why I'm crying. You see, we had a document, a piece of paper that was our family tree and we can show everyone how we are descended directly from King David. That document has now gone up in flames." So the little Dov Ber said to his mother 'don't worry Mummy, I will always try to be a good person and please God one day, people will be proud to be descended from me'. That is the message of ראש לְבֵית־אֲבֹתָיו – that we should strive to be outstanding role models, whom people are proud to be connected to.

I believe that this is always a lesson of importance but particularly right now during The COVID-19 pandemic. Ever since 1945, we have been living in the post-war era, from 2020, we'll be living in the post virus era. People will be looking to us, the people who endured this very trying and challenging period. We have an opportunity now to set an example, a tone, to show how despite great difficulty, we are acting responsibly, for ourselves and our societies, so that in the future, people will look back and be proud of the role models we have been.

אִישׁ ראש לְבֵית־אֲבֹתָיו – this is the time for us to be the heads of households, to be responsible for ourselves, our families and our communities and indeed for the entire world.

*Shabbat Shalom*

*Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.*

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**Bamidbar: Biblical Military Organization**

**Ben-Tzion Spitz**

Order is the sanity of the mind, the health of the body, the peace of the city, the security of the state. Like beams in a house or bones to a body, so is order to all things. — Robert Southey

God knows how to count. Moses knows how to count. We have numerous examples in the Torah. The Torah gives specific numbers as to the children of Jacob that each of his wives gave birth to. It gives us specific years that the descendants of Adam lived. It tells us at what age they gave birth to their children. Moses himself gives a precise count of the number of firstborns.

The Torah seems to understand numbers in the same way that we do.

Nonetheless, some numbers might appear unusual to our modern minds based on our understanding of statistics, probability, and randomness. For example, the Torah has a love affair with the number seven, which plays a central role in a multiplicity of narratives. Ten is also a fairly important number. Others have investigated the primacy of these numbers and it makes for fascinating insights.

The numerological issue that I've had for a long time is in this week's Torah reading and it has to do with the count of the troops of the newborn nation of Israel. Men over the age of 20 (and probably until the age of 60) were divided and counted according to each of the 12 tribes (the tribe of Levi was excluded, being tasked with the service of the Tabernacle, were exempt from direct military duty – they were the chaplains if you will).

The issue with the count of the troops is that the total of every single tribe results in a beautiful round number. Below are the census numbers:

Reuven: 46,500

Judah: 74,600

Ephraim: 40,500

Dan: 62,700

Shimon: 59,300

Issachar: 54,400

Menashe: 32,200

Asher: 41,500

Gad: 45,650

Zebulun: 57,400

Benjamin: 35,400

Naphtali: 53,400

Total 603,550

What are the odds that in the count of over 600,000 individuals, that the results of each tribe would come out exactly to a multiple of 50 and in almost all cases 100? The odds are extremely unlikely. There must be some other explanation.

The Meshech Chochma on Numbers 3:16 explains that it's not that Moses or the Torah don't know how to count. The issue is what was the methodology and purpose of the count.

The purpose of the count was to know relative strength and numbers — they didn't require an exact count. The methodology was that each tribal leader polled their officers. The lowest degree officer was a "captain of ten." The level above them were the "captains of fifty." Any grouping of less than ten did not have an officer. So in essence, they counted the officers, calculated the number of soldiers based on that, and hence we get the rounded numbers. May we indeed remember the strength we have in numbers.

*Dedication - To our children going back to school.*

*Shabbat Shalom,*

*Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.*

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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**Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz**

***Bamidbar - The Book of the Holy Nation***

After completing the book of Leviticus last week, we move on to the fourth of the five books of the Torah: the book of Numbers. The book of Genesis describes Creation up to the stories of the Jewish nation's forefathers; Exodus deals with the exodus from Egypt, the Revelation at Mount Sinai, and the building of the Tabernacle; Leviticus focused on Jewish laws pertaining to the priesthood, holiness, and purity. And now we reach the book of Numbers and ask: Where are we headed now? What will be this book's focus?

Actually, when we examine the connection between Numbers and the books that precede it, we discover that it is not actually a continuation of Leviticus, but of Exodus. The book of Exodus ends with the description of the cloud that hangs over the Tabernacle and with the regulations regarding travel and camping for the Children of Israel during their desert journey. From here, there is a split in the narrative: one goes on to the book of Leviticus and deals with the Tabernacle and related issues; the other continues on to Numbers that describes the journey in the desert and the internal and external hardships this entailed.

However, there are several parallels between Leviticus and Numbers that teach us something about the content of both books. One deals with the holiness of the Tabernacle and the priesthood, while the other deals with the holiness of the camp, the nation, and the family.

Thus, for example, if in the book of Leviticus we read about priests sacrificing offerings, in the book of Numbers there is a focus on the sacrifices brought by the leaders of the tribes who dedicated the Tabernacle with their offerings. If in Leviticus we read about stealing as an offense against G-d demanding atonement, in Numbers we learn about stealing from a "ger" (stranger) as an offense against someone without rights. Leviticus provides an in-depth description of the holiness of priests and the restrictions incumbent upon them, while Numbers tells us about the "sotah" that deals with the holiness of the Jewish family. We can also compare the High Priest and his work which is described in detail in Leviticus with the monastic "nazir" described in Numbers, who can come from any tribe and any part of the nation and is compared in many ways to the High Priest. In Numbers, we take on a different outlook from the one we had in Leviticus.

Until now we read and learned about the Tabernacle and the priests — a restricted space and specific people whose spiritual level and role served as a beacon for the entire nation. But from here on we speak about the nation

itself and aspire that the holiness will be expressed within the family, not just in the temple; in interpersonal relationships, not only in worship of G-d; in the army and not just in the synagogues. Judaism aspires not only to elevate a limited number of places and people and make them holy, but for those sacred places and people to spread that holiness to the entire nation.

We find this idea expressed in the commandment of tzitzit (fringed garment) that also appears in Numbers. In all cultures, clothing is first and foremost a way to cover the body, protect it from the cold and the heat, and a mode of decoration. It also categorizes. So, for example, there is special clothing for soldiers, doctors, judges, etc. In the previous books we read about the special clothing worn by the priests during their work in the Temple, clothing that expressed their special status.

But the commandment of tzitzit is for every Jew, and it teaches us that every Jew is part of a framework of identity and belonging that carries a purpose and a role. A plain item of clothing becomes characteristic of Jews, carrying cultural and spiritual significance. This Jewish item of clothing does not belong to any specific level of society. It teaches us that the entire nation is holy, carries a spiritual message, has a unique culture that aspires to transcend, and strives to elevate all of humanity toward holiness and purity, toward a life of G-d worship and moral spirituality.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

***Shema Yisrael Torah Network***

***Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Bamidbar***

***פרשת במדבר תש"פ***

***ידבר ד' אל משה במדבר סיני***

***Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)***

The *Midrash* teaches, "The Torah was given through three media: fire, water and wilderness." The defining characteristic of *Klal Yisrael* throughout the ages has been their extraordinary ability to be *moser nefesh*, to self-sacrifice, for the Torah and their faith. Our People went to the executioner's scaffold, the fires of the *auto de fe*, and the gas chambers with their faith and commitment intact. Whenever the tyrants gave them the choice of their religion or their life, the decision was always their religion. This unique power of commitment was highlighted during these — and other — challenging incidents in the history of our people.

Avraham *Avinu* was flung into a fiery furnace, due to the threat that he presented to the prevailing pagan belief. By his very action of self-sacrifice, our Patriarch infused our nation with the DNA of *mesiras nefesh*. To dispel the notion that *mesiras nefesh* was an individual proclivity, with only a select few that were committed enough to act — our nation demonstrated its commitment by the waters of the Red Sea. We now have fire and water. What about enduring commitment? Veritably, we have proven our readiness during the singular demand on our lives. Are we ready, however, to live a life of self-sacrifice — day in and day out? The answer to this question came during our forty-year trek in the wilderness, in a desert fraught with danger. Fire, water and wilderness demonstrated our spiritual mettle. *Zocharti lach chesed ne'urayich*, "I remembered for you the kindness of your youth... following after Me, in the wilderness, in an unsown/unchartered land" (*Yirmiyahu* 2:2). *Horav Meir Shapiro*, *zl*, posits that these three *nisyonos* — trials of fire, water and wilderness — each representing its own unique form of *mesiras nefesh*, served as the catalysts for *Klal Yisrael* to receive the Torah as a *kinyan olam*, eternal acquisition, whereby the Torah is ours forever.

Yet, not all of us are prepared to accept challenge — especially when it involves our children. The *Chidushei Ha'Rim*, *zl*, was wont to say, "I see a *olam hafuch*, upside down world. The *Talmud* (*Niddah* 16b) teaches that prior to one's birth, it has already been Heavenly decreed whether he will be wealthy or poor. Concerning his spiritual proclivity — whether he will be

righteous or wicked – it is not decreed, since *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is not Heavenly mandated. Yet, parents seem to worry regarding their son's *parnassah*, livelihood (which is Heavenly-designated), and ignore their son's spiritual advancement (expressing little to no concern regarding his spiritual direction in life)."

A good school makes a difference; a great *rebbe* can change a child's spiritual trajectory. At the end of the day, however, success or failure often harks back to parental input, care, love and spiritual indoctrination. Parents can love their child, but, if they themselves are clueless concerning the appropriate spiritual direction he should take, then we have a serious problem. The following story demonstrates how a young couple, from the onset of their marriage, committed themselves to the idea that the spiritual ascendance of their family would be primary in their lives.

*Rav Uri Zohar, Shlita*, visited a *Talmud Torah* in Beer Sheva. It was in a neighborhood not known for its strong affiliation with Torah and *mitzvos*. This is why he was there: to encourage the community to support the *Talmud Torah*, so that their children would grow into *bnei Torah* and eventually alter the direction of their community, which was seriously gravitating toward a completely secular lifestyle. *Rav Zohar* noticed a retired gentleman who clearly looked out of place. He was attired in clothing that suited a resident of Bnei Brak. Furthermore, the parents who might be enrolling their children in school were young enough to be his grandchildren. The man explained that his son was the principal of the *Talmud Torah*, and he (the father) was here to lend his support with the parents.

Clearly, *Rav Zohar* was taken aback by the man and his son. The look on his face begged some form of explanation from this man. The man was only too happy to tell his story: "My livelihood came from the earnings I had from a kiosk that was situated in the center of town. My wife and I worked day and night to support our four sons and four daughters, all of whom are scholars (or married to scholars) who have assumed positions in various areas of Jewish educational endeavors throughout the Holy Land. We have incredible Torah *nachas* from our children – all because of my wife.

"It was the day after our wedding, and I walked into the kitchen of our tiny apartment to find my wife weeping bitterly. I asked her what was wrong. She replied, 'My mind is aflame with a question: We pray – for what? For a livelihood? Everyone knows that what a person earns is determined by Hashem. One can work day and night, but he will still earn only that which he is destined to earn. Pray for health? While it is true that we must hope that we will not become victim to a terrible illness, but this, too, is Hashem's decision. I think that the area in which we should place all of our hopes and prayer is for our future children's educational development – that they grow up to become *bnei Torah*.'

"When I heard my wife's emotional words rendered the day following our wedding, I immediately agreed. This has become the primary focus of our own lives: our children's education. If you visit my house during the lighting of the *Shabbos* candles, you will see my wife crying copious tears for her children – even today, after they are all married and successful!"

*Rav Zohar* concluded his story. A simple couple – who were far from simple – unless one considers sincerity to be simple. Our prayers should not commence suddenly when something goes wrong, but, from the moment of marriage, this should be the goal upon which we place our initial and principal focus.

**כל יצאי צבא בישראל תפקדו אתם לצבאתם**

**Everyone who goes out to the legion in *Yisrael* – you shall count them according to their legions. (1:3)**

The men appeared to have been counted as soldiers. The minimum age to serve as a soldier in the army (Jewish) – the legion – was twenty years old, since people achieve their physical maturity by then. Men older than sixty were no longer counted; they were past the age of military service. The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* teaches that (miraculously) every Jew between the ages of twenty to sixty was physically able to serve as a soldier. The *Kli Yakar* says that each Jew was not only physically fit for Army service, but he was also spiritually fit to serve in the Heavenly *tzavah*, *tzavah marom*, the group of

ministering angels who serve Hashem. Indeed, we find the terms commonly associated with military service used freely concerning *Am Yisrael*: *tzavah*; *machane*, camp; *pikudim*; each and every Jew without physical or spiritual flaw prepared to serve Hashem as a soldier, in both the physical and spiritual realms.

Anyone acquainted with the military understands that in every one of its six branches (American), teamwork is critical to any successful operation. Teamwork is based upon leadership and mutual respect for each member of a team. At times, an operation requires the services and input of members of varied branches all working in harmony for the greater good. The United States Army recognizes seven values that all soldiers must internalize: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. While all of the above are critical for the success of a military unit, I would like to focus on the third value – respect – and how it affects the Jewish People who have been inducted into the *ligyono shel Melech*, the legion of the King – *Hashem Yisborach*.

"The Army values reinforce that all people have dignity and worth and must be treated with respect. The Nation (United States) was founded on the ideal that all are created equal. In the Army, each is judged by the content of their character. Army leaders should consistently foster a climate that treats everyone with dignity and respect..." These words are not taken from a *mussar sefer*, but from the Army's manual – a book written by non-Jews, by and large for a non-Jewish audience. Everyone recognizes that for a group to function as one unit, it is crucial that all members of that group treat everyone with dignity and respect. The reason for this is simple: We are all human beings; we are all in this together; why should one person hold sway over another?

Furthermore, in an Army unit, everyone makes his own unique contribution to the success and welfare of all involved in an operation. It could be an operation involving infantry that suddenly goes bad. Paratroopers come to the rescue, backed up by Air Force, etc. Likewise, all Jews work together *b'achdus*, in harmony and unity, each one occupied in his personal or communal act of service. Some learn Torah; others perform *chesed*, acts of lovingkindness; still others are engaged in prayer, etc. One thing is for certain: Every Jew is invaluable. To denigrate a Jew is tantamount to casting aspersion on Heavenly angels.

The following story of Hershel the Shoemaker (related by *Horav Lazar Brodie*) should give us all reason to pause and ask ourselves if we are ever guilty of treating people who appear to be "different" inappropriately. In a small village in Poland (circa mid to end of eighteenth century), there lived a (seemingly) simple Jew – unerudite, could not read or write, poverty-stricken, physically misshapen (facial countenance). For all public intent and purposes, he seemed (and was considered to be) mentally challenged. He spoke to no one (people thought he was unable to speak), mumbling incoherently to himself all day. He would sit on the outside steps leading into the *shul* all day repairing shoes. He had his little box with a shoe form on it, a hammer and nails, and would earn his meager living by repairing whatever shoes people gave him. His name was Tzvi Hirsch, and the members of the community had nicknamed him, "Hershel the Shoemaker." Sadly, he was the brunt of everyone's jokes, from scholar to children. A day did not pass that someone who entered the *shul* did not in some manner denigrate him. Hershel never responded – always accepting the ridicule with grace, as he continued mumbling to himself and banging his hammer onto the shoes.

No one lives forever, and Hershel, too, was called to his eternal rest. The community's *rav* ran to the shack which Hershel called home to search for any form of identification that might align Hershel with a member of the community to whom he might be related. While he might not have had anyone who cared for him during his lifetime, but, in death, who knows – someone might care. Perhaps he might locate Hershel's will. He searched all over, and all he found were an old broken bed, one chair and a makeshift table. In the corner of the room he discovered an old wooden box filled with written papers. Upon careful perusal, he realized that these were Hershel's

*divrei Torah*, original thoughts that he had written, covering all areas of the Torah.

Hershel was far from a simple shoemaker. He was an outstanding *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, who had concealed his identity beneath the façade of derangement. In a second container (within the box), he found a *Tallis* and *Tefillin* together with a *Siddur* whose pages were tear-drenched from years of fervent prayer. From within the pages of the *Siddur* there fell out an envelope containing a note that clearly was penned years earlier: “To my dear friend, the righteous, pious, *Rav Tzvi Hersh, Shlita*... wishing you much success and good fortune... Yisrael Besht (acronym for the holy *Baal Shem Tov, zl*). Apparently, Hershel the nondescript shoemaker, was actually a holy rabbi, close confidante of the *Baal Shem Tov*, who was on a mission. He was most certainly one of the *lamed vav*, 36 righteous Jews, upon whose merit the world was maintained.

The people were clueless as to Hershel’s true identity. He did such an amazing job of covering it up. It was difficult to even gather a *minyan*, quorum of ten men, for his funeral. “Why should I close my store for the funeral of a bumbling shoemaker?” was a common response. “That is why we have a *Chevra Kaddisha*, Sacred Burial Society (to attend to the needs of the deceased).” The *rav* arranged for a *minyan* and saw to it that Hershel was buried in the portion of the cemetery reserved for the most righteous Jews. He recited *Kaddish*, since no one else did.

At the conclusion of the *shivah*, seven-day mourning period, (which was “observed” even though no one sat *shivah*), Hershel (his soul) appeared to the *rav* in a dream and said, “A terrible decree has been declared against the Jewish community. I warn you to inform everyone to escape immediately before it is too late.” The *rav* immediately convened everyone in the *shul* and informed them of his Heavenly message. Those who did not outright laugh – smiled. Others simply ignored the *rav*, claiming that he had become personally involved with Hershel, thus, his cognitive abilities, which were usually quite lucid, had become impaired.

The *rav* left town that morning – together with his family. He pleaded with the members of the community to listen. They did not. That afternoon, the maniacal Cossacks entered the village and brutally slaughtered all of its Jewish citizens. It now became clear to the *rav* that *Rav Hershel* had been the *z’chus*, merit, for the Jewish community’s survival these past years.

We can derive a powerful lesson from this story, which I preface with a thought from *Horav Sholom Arush, Shlita*, “G-d alone knows what a soul must accomplish in this world, and thereby places each soul in a circumstance which is conducive to performing its mission on earth.” Some people appear to be “different” – standing out in a crowd; just do not seem to “fit in.” It might be their personality, their countenance, mannerisms, physical hygiene, clothes they wear. They could be, for various reasons, victims of economic hardship. So many variables blend together to create a person whom we just wonder about. Yet, Hashem certainly has a mission for this person. Who knows? One day we might benefit from him/her. We are all soldiers on a mission designed by Heaven. We need one another.

ואלה תולדות אהרן ומשה... נדב ואביהו אלעזר ואיתמר

**These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe... Nadav and Avihu, Elazar and Isamar. (3:1,2)**

*Rashi* notes that the *pasuk* begins by informing us who the offspring of Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen* were, but, in the end, only states the names of Aharon’s sons. What happened to Moshe’s sons? *Rashi* quotes the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 19a, asserting that the Torah is teaching us that Aharon’s sons were considered Moshe’s sons, because Moshe was their *Rebbe*: “Whoever teaches his friend’s son Torah, it is considered as if he caused his birth.” In other words, the individual who catalyzes a person’s spiritual development is likewise a partner in his physical life. Simply, we might say that a life without the spirit, a life that is totally physical, devoid of spirituality, is no life. It is mere existence.

In his *Gur Aryeh* commentary, the *Maharal* wonders why the Torah emphasizes Aharon’s sons more so than any other Jew. After all, Moshe was the *Rabban shel kol Yisrael* – every Jew’s *Rebbe*. He explains that while

Moshe certainly taught all Jews, he spent extra time and expended greater devotion to teaching Aharon’s sons. This teaches us that the *rebbe* who is *massur b’lev v’nefesh*, devoted heart and soul to the student, to the point that he spends his own time, going beyond the “clock,” he is the one who can view his *talmidim*, students, as sons.

*Horav Ben Tzion Abba Shaul, zl*, was the consummate *mechanech*, educator. A *gaon*, brilliant scholar, to whom Torah study was life itself, he viewed his whole purpose in living for *harbotzas Torah*, the dissemination of Torah knowledge. His students meant everything to him. In 1968, his students arranged a seven-day trip to Netanya. It was not termed a vacation; rather, it was a rejuvenation period, during which they would of course learn, but in a more relaxed venue. *Rav Ben Tzion* asked them, “Is everyone going on the trip?” (If they were all going to leave, he could maintain a relaxed schedule and have more time for personal Torah study.) One student raised his hand, “I must remain behind for personal reasons.” (Apparently, his mother would be home alone, which made the student uncomfortable.) “If this is the case,” *Rav Ben Tzion* declared, “then I will give my regular daily (three-hour) *shiur*, lecture. If one student remains, then I will teach!” During the next seven-days, when the *Rosh Yeshivah* could have spent time at home learning, he instead maintained his regular schedule to study with one student. This is what is meant by devotion to one’s students. He saw every one of his *talmidim* as *banim*, sons.

כל פקודי הלויים ... כל זכר מבן חדש ומעלה שנים ועשרים אלה

**All the countings of the *Leviim*... every male from one month of age and up, were twenty-two thousand. (3:39)**

The *Ramban* asks why *Shevet Levi*, the tribe most dedicated to serving Hashem in the *Mishkan* and later in the *Bais HaMikdash*, the tribe synonymous with Torah study and consummate devotion to the spiritual realm of Judaism, numbered far fewer in the census than any of the other tribes. Why should not Hashem’s devotees be as equally blessed as the rest of the nation?

*Ramban* explains that *Shevet Levi* had not been enslaved. In Egypt, they were permitted to study Torah unabated. During this time, while *Shevet Levi* was sitting in the *bais hamedrash*, their brothers were out in the field, being beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters, as they forced them to perform back-breaking labor. The Egyptians sought to break the Jews’ will, to destroy their enthusiasm for life. By embittering them, the Egyptians hoped that their members would commensurately decrease. Hashem said, “No”. For every bit of suffering – their numbers would increase exponentially. Hashem pays us all back relative to our “input” – suffering.

Indeed – whether collectively as a nation or individually, we Jews suffer, but we ultimately gain from it. In the secular world, this is a well-known cliché: “no pain – no gain”. It is no different in the spiritual world. Hashem tests us, because He knows that we are able to pass. If we pass or fail is up to us. If we fail, we should not give up. We just did not perform according to our capacity. *Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl*, teaches, “Serving the Almighty properly involves constant challenges, which demands consistency and persistence to achieve success... Only fools give up hope.” Why do we often give up? Because we do not have faith in ourselves to succeed. The *Sifrei Chassidus* teach that just as one must believe in Hashem, he must also believe in himself. Obviously, Hashem believes in him – otherwise, he would not have tested him. We all have the capacity to overcome evil, to rise above challenge, to make ourselves great again!

*Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 5:22) teach: *Le’fum tzaara agra*, “According to the effort/pain is the reward.” We expend great effort to achieve a goal – and we succeed beyond our dreams. Our greatest source of enjoyment (and conversation) is to recount our early struggles, the toil, the pain, the sleepless nights, etc. We realize now how crucial to our success was every bit of the pain that went into realizing our dream. Indeed, when one is in the “race,” the “climb,” he does not even think about the pain – so focused is he on his goal. The one who feels pain, who kvetches about the “time,” “effort,” “troubles,” is not focused on his goal, and he will probably fall short of achieving anything of enduring value.

We live in envy of those who “made it,” but we refuse to take the same path they took toward realizing their goal. *Horav Noach Weinberg, zl*, teaches that one of our greatest fears – indeed, a fear that we must overcome in order to succeed – is the fear of confronting life’s challenges and conflicts. We would rather live in denial than wake up to reality. The reason for this is quite simple. We refuse to entertain the notion that change is necessary if we are to succeed. Change often means conceding that we were wrong, that what we contended was correct was not, that there might be a flaw in our reasoning, that our children are not perfect – or worse – we are not perfect. In order to succeed, we must be open to suggestion, to sincere advice, to trust people: parents, true friends, spouses; to acknowledge that there is a problem that we are refusing to confront. Regardless of how much accepting the critique will hurt, the pain of not listening and falling flat on our face will be much worse.

*Rav* Weinberg suggests that changing focus – from taking our mind off the challenge and instead focusing on the pleasure and satisfaction of success – will ultimately eliminate the pain. One has pain only when he thinks about it. If his mind is elsewhere, he forgets about the pain. *Rav* Weinberg offers a meaningful analogy. Imagine the members of a basketball team running around the court, exerting themselves to the limit of their endurance for one purpose: to score a shot, to put that ball through the hoop. They must be in extreme pain; yet, they do not seem to notice. Why? Because the excitement and pleasure of scoring that basket supersedes all discomfort. It is all about the game. A great game makes up for all the pain.

Now, take that same group of players, same scenario, but with one item missing: the ball. No ball, no basket, no score, no fun. They will play for a few minutes, and then they will stop, spent, exhausted. Why? There is no ball, no game, no goal, to distract them from the pain.

The same idea applies to life. We must keep our eye on the goal, the satisfaction, the success. When we focus on the positive we forget about the pain. People who tune themselves in only to the negative will feel the pain. Those who focus on the positive will not notice the pain along the way. I guess it all depends on whether we look forward – or backward.

#### ***Va’ani Tefillah***

**מודים אנחנו לך שאתה הוא אלקינו – *Modim anachnu Lach she’ata Hu Elokeinu*. We gratefully thank You. For it is You. Who are Hashem, our G-d.**

The *Bircas Hodaah*, Thanksgiving blessing, begins with our acknowledgement of Hashem’s greatness and our relationship to Him. We then continue with specifics – the particulars for which we are thankful to Him. The actual meaning of *modim/nodeh* is to confess or acknowledge a fact. We “confess” our indebtedness to Hashem, as we recount the many reasons for which we are grateful. But, as *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, observes, is it possible to even begin to encapsulate the immense gratitude that we have to Hashem? Furthermore, is it possible to repay Him? Thus, while we are unable to properly offer our gratitude, we begin by praising Him. The *Rav* adds that since we owe Him so much for which we are unable to ever express ourselves appropriately, we offer praise to Him whenever the opportunity presents itself. This is the source/reason for the custom of responding to inquiries concerning one’s health with “*Baruch Hashem*, Thank G-d, I am well.” We must never forget that whatever condition we are in, it is always, *Baruch Hashem*. This is one of the fundamentals of *chinuch ha’banim*, educating our children: to inculcate them with the notion that everything comes from Hashem. We must constantly reiterate this verity to them.

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#### **Shabbat Shalom: Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20)**

##### **By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – ‘And God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they came out of the Land of Egypt’ (Numbers 1:1)

Bamidbar, or “In the desert,” is the name by which this fourth of the Five Books of Moses is most popularly known— an apt description of the 40 years of the Israelite desert wanderings which the book records.

Indeed, this desert period serves as the precursor of—as well as a most appropriate metaphor for—the almost 2,000 years of homeless wandering from place to place which characterized much of Jewish history before the emergence of our Jewish State in 1948.

The Hebrew word for desert, *midbar*, is also pregnant with meanings and allusions which in many ways have served as a beacon for our Jewish exile. The root noun from which *midbar* is built is D-B-R, which means leader or shepherd. After all, the most ancient occupation known to humanity and specifically to the descendants of Abraham is shepherding, and the desert is the most natural place for the shepherd to lead his flock: the sheep can comfortably wander in a virtual no-man’s-land and graze on the vegetation of the various oases or their outskirts without the problem of stealing from private property or harming the ecology of settled habitations. And perhaps D-B-R means leader or shepherd because it also means “word”: The shepherd directs the flock using meaningful sounds and words, and so the leaders of Israel, most notably Moses, inspired and educated with the verbal message which came from God, initially in the form of “Ten Words” (or “Ten Commandments,” *Aseret Hadibrot*). They were revealed in the Sinai desert, have been greatly expanded upon throughout the generations, and they are the most fundamental teachings which govern Israel—as well as a good part of the world—to this very day.

Moreover, wherever the Israelites wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert *Mishkan*, or Sanctuary, a word which is derived from *Shechina*, Divine Presence. However, God was not in the Sanctuary; even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, declared King Solomon when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:27). It was rather God’s word, *dibur*, which was in the Sanctuary, in the form of the “Ten Words” on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing word of God which He would speak (*vedibarti*, Ex. 25:22) from between the cherubs on the ends of the *Kapporet* above the Holy Ark. It was by means of these divine words that even the desert, the *midbar*—a metaphor for an inhospitable and even alien exile environment which is boiling hot by day, freezing cold by night, and deficient in water that is the very elixir of life—can become transformed into sacred space, the place of the divine word (*dibur*). Indeed, another name for our Holy Temple or Sanctuary is *D’vir*, the place of the word. And those words from the desert of Mount Sinai (*diburim*) succeeded in sanctifying the many Babylons, Marrakeshes, Vilnas, and New Yorks of our wanderings! God’s word can transform a desert—any place and every place—into a veritable Sanctuary; indeed the world is a *midbar* waiting to become a *dvir* (sanctuary) by means of God’s *dibur*, communicated by inspired leaders, *dabarim*.

I believe that this understanding will serve to answer another question which is asked by our sages, the answer to which is especially relevant on the week of *Bamidbar* leading into *Shavuot*. The *Midrash di Rabbi Yishmael* Commentary on *Parshat Yitro* queries why God’s Revelation was given in a *par’osia*—a desert, a no-man’s-land, an open space—rather than at Mount Moriah, the place of Abraham’s sacrifice later to become the Temple Mount. Is it not strange that the most important message—a *kerygma* to use the Greek—given to Israel emanated from a mountaintop in a desert outside Israel rather than from the sacred land which God Himself bequeathed to His chosen people? The response given by the *Midrash* has many ramifications for us today. The *midrash* maintains that had the Torah been given on the Temple Mount, the Israelites would have assumed that it was only for them. God specifically chose a *par’osia* in order to demonstrate that the Torah was

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ultimately meant for the entire world; in the very words of the Mechilta, "Let any human being who wishes to accept the Torah take it upon himself." This will help us understand the midrash in the beginning of V'zot habrachah which pictures God as first offering the Torah to the Edomites of Mount Seir and then to the Ishmaelites of Mount Paran (BT Avoda Zara 2b, see also Rashi to Deut. 33:2). Unfortunately, they were not ready to accept it at that time; only Israel was willing to say, "We shall perform [the commandments] and we shall internalize them." It then became our task as a "Kingdom of Priest-Teachers and a Holy Nation" to expose and eventually teach the Torah as "a light unto the nations of the world." At that time there will be a second revelation in which "God will inform us a second time before the eyes of every living being that He is to be their God," a prayer which we repeat every Sabbath in the Kedusha of the Musaf Amida prayer. The desert then becomes a symbol of a no-man's-land which will eventually become an every-person's-land. If the word can sanctify even a desert it can certainly sanctify every other place on our planet. Shabbat Shalom!

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**May I Participate in the Census?**

**Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

This year, Rosh Chodesh Sivan falls on Sunday, and therefore the haftarah for Shabbos parshas Bamidbar is mochor chodesh. However, the usual haftarah for parshas Bamidbar begins with the pasuk that serves as the basis for the prohibition to count Jews. Since the United States is attempting to conduct a census this year, as required in the Constitution, I present the following halacha discussion:

**Question #1: Counting Sheep**

Why would someone count sheep when he is trying to stay awake?

**Question #2: Counting from a List**

Is it permitted to count Jews by counting their names on a list?

**Question #3: Ki Sissa or Hoshea?**

The Gemara bases the prohibition to count the Jewish people from the opening words of the "official" haftarah for parshas Bamidbar: And the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea that cannot be measured and cannot be counted (Hoshea 2:1). Why does the Gemara attribute the prohibition to a less obvious source in Hoshea, when there appears to be an obvious Torah source for this prohibition, in the beginning of Parshas Ki Sissa?

Answer: Analyzing the Sources in Chazal:

The Mishnah (Yoma 22a) describes that in order to determine which kohen would be awarded the mitzvah of removing ashes from the mizbei'ach, the kohanim extended their fingers, which were then counted. The person in charge picked a number much greater than the assembled kohanim, and then counted fingers until they reached the number. The kohen on whom the number landed performed the mitzvah (Rashi ad loc.).

The Gemara asks why they didn't simply count the kohanim themselves, to which it answers that it is prohibited to count Jews (Yoma 22b). Counting fingers is permitted; counting people is not (Rambam, Hilchos Temidim 4:4). We are aware of one common application of this mitzvah: when counting people for a minyan, one counts words of a ten-word pasuk, rather than counting the people directly (Sefer Ha'itim #174; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 15:3).

Here is another application: to determine how many places one needs to set at a table, one should not count heads, but one may count sets of legs (Shu't Torah Lishmah #386).

The Gemara quotes three Biblical sources for this prohibition:

1. When the nation of Ammon threatened the Jewish community of Yaveish-Gilad, Shaul gathered a large Jewish army and counted them in an indirect manner (Shmuel I 11:8). According to one opinion in the Gemara, Shaul counted the members of his army by having each throw a piece of broken

pottery into a pile. Thus, we see that even to fulfill a mitzvah, one may count Jews only in an indirect manner.

2. Before attacking Ameleik, Shaul gathered the Jewish people and had each person take a sheep from Shaul's herds. By counting the sheep, he knew how many soldiers he had (Shmuel I 15:4, see Rashi). Again, we see that he used an indirect method to count them.

3. And the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea that cannot be measured and cannot be counted (Hoshea 2:1). Taking the verse not only as a blessing, but as a commandment, the Gemara derives a prohibition against counting the Jewish people.

Isn't the Torah a Clearer Source?

The obvious question is -- why does the Gemara not quote the following pasuk in the Torah as a source for the prohibition?

When you will take the headcount of the children of Israel according to their numbers, each man should give atonement for his life to Hashem when counting them so that there is no plague as a result of the counting. This is what whoever is counted should give: a half shekel (Shemos 30:12-13). This pasuk certainly implies that the only way one may count Jews is indirectly, by having each one donate half a shekel and then counting the coins. This seems to be the source of how Shaul knew that he should count the Jews the way he did. It is indeed odd that the Gemara quotes the incidents of Shaul as the source for the prohibition, rather than Shaul's source -- the Torah itself!

Before answering this question, I want to analyze a different point that we see in the pasuk. The Torah says: each man should give atonement for his life to Hashem when counting them, so that there is no plague as a result of the counting. In the discussion of no other mitzvah does the Torah say, "fulfill this commandment so that no plague results." Why suddenly does the Torah say this in regard to this mitzvah?

Rabbeinu Bachya (ad locum) explains that when we count individuals, it causes the heavenly tribunal to note all his deeds, and this may result in his being punished for his sins, which otherwise would not be punished now. Others explain the concern in terms of ayin hora. The Abarbanel, for example, explains that when counting people by head, the counting causes ayin hora and therefore illness enters their bodies through their eyes and mouths, whereas counting fingers does not cause the ayin hora to enter them. I leave to the reader to decide whether he means in a physical way or a metaphysical one.

Why the Prophets?

So, indeed, if we see from the Torah, itself, that counting Jews is prohibited and potentially very harmful, why did the Gemara base itself on verses of the Prophets?

The commentaries present several approaches to answer this question. Here is a sample of some answers:

(1) The Gemara is proving that one may not count Jews even for the purpose of performing a mitzvah, something that the Torah did not expressly say (Sfas Emes to Yoma ad loc.). However, from the incidents of Shaul and the verse in Hoshea, it is clear that one may not count Jews directly, even for the sake of a mitzvah.

(2) The Gemara needs to prove that we may not count even a small group of Jews, whereas the pasuk in Ki Sissa may be prohibiting only counting the entire people (Mizrachi; Sfas Emes).

(3) The verse in Ki Sissa could mean that one may count the Jews in a normal census, but that afterward, they all must provide half a shekel as an atonement, to make sure that no one suffers (Makom Shmuel, quoted by Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 7:3). This last approach suggests that the verse When you will take the headcount of the children of Israel according to their numbers be explained in the following manner: When you take a regular census of the children of Israel, each man should give atonement for his life to Hashem when counting them -- after you conduct your census, each person should provide a half-shekel to make sure no harm results. Indeed, the census could cause harm, but that does not necessarily mean that the Torah prohibited it. However, the stories of Shaul and the verse in Hoshea prove that the Torah

prohibited counting Jews directly, since Shaul counted the people by counting sheep, rather than conducting a census and having them all donate half a shekel as atonement.

(4) One can interpret the verse in Ki Sissa to mean that the generation of the Desert, who had worshipped the eigel hazahav, the Golden Calf, was at risk and that therefore counting them might cause a plague (Maharsha to Yoma ad loc.; see also Ohr Hachayim to Shemos 30:2). However, one cannot prove from Ki Sissa that there is an inherent prohibition or risk in counting Jews when they have not violated such a grievous sin. However, the stories of Shaul or the verse in Hoshea prove that one may not count Jews even when they did not violate serious prohibitions.

Thus, we find several answers to explain why the Gemara did not consider the Torah source as adequate proof to prohibit counting the kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash, but, instead, rallied proof from later sources. As we will see shortly, there are actual distinctions in practical halacha that result from these diverse explanations. But first, a different question:

#### Counting from a List

For the purposes of fulfilling a mitzvah, may one count Jews by listing their names, and then count their names? Is this considered counting people indirectly, since one is counting names and not people, or is this considered counting the people themselves?

#### Advertising Campaigns to Help the Needy

The idea of having creative advertising campaigns in order to generate tzedakah funds did not originate with Oorah or Kupat Ha'ir. About 200 years ago, Rav Yisrael of Shklov, a major disciple of the Vilna Gaon and an author of several scholarly Torah works (including Taklin Chadtin on Yerushalmi Shekalim and Pe'as Hashulchan on the agricultural mitzvos), was organizing a fundraising campaign for the Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael in which he wanted to link donors to individual beneficiaries by listing the needy of Eretz Yisrael by name. Rav Yisrael held that this did not violate the prohibition of counting Jews, since it involved an indirect count by counting names on a list, for the sake of fulfilling a mitzvah. However, the Chasam Sofer disagreed, contending that counting names on a list is considered counting people directly. Even though one is not looking at their faces when counting them, counting people from a list is considered counting the person, and not counting their finger, leg, half-shekel, lamb or pottery shard (see Koveitz Teshuvos Chasam Sofer #8; Shu't Kesav Sofer, Yoreh Deah #106). We will see shortly that this dispute exists to this day.

#### The Census

Is the State of Israel permitted to conduct a census of its population? Does an individual violate the mitzvah by being a census taker, or by providing the census takers with his information?

This question was hotly debated by halachic authorities, even when the pre-state Zionist organizations began counting the Jewish population, and continued with the censuses of the State of Israel. Several reasons are provided by those who permitted taking a census, the primary one being that determining how to provide proper medical, educational, economic and safety servicing for a large population requires knowing how many people there are. These authorities accepted that this qualifies as a dvar mitzvah, and that counting by list, or via computer and machine calculation is considered indirect counting (Shu't Mishpatei Uziel 4:2; Noam XV).

On the other hand, several prominent poskim prohibited taking the census or participating in it (Shu't Tzitz Eliezer 7:3). On the 27th of Iyar, 5732 (May 11, '72), the Steipler Gaon released a letter stating the following:

In the coming days, there will be census takers counting the Jewish people. One should be careful not to answer them at all, to tell them that it is forbidden to take a census, and that there is the possibility of a Torah violation, as explained in the Gemara, Yoma 22, the Rambam in the fourth chapter of Temidim and Musafim, and the Ramban in Parshas Bamidbar. Furthermore, the Tosafos Rid in Yoma writes that it is prohibited to do so even indirectly when no mitzvah is accomplished. The Kesav Sofer explains... that it is prohibited even through writing. Furthermore, taking a census involves the possibility of danger."

At the same time, the Beis Din of the Eidah Hachareidis also issued a letter prohibiting participating in the census or answering any questions from the census takers, reiterating that they had banned this practice ten years earlier. After publishing a responsum in which he prohibited participating in the census, the

Tzitz Eliezer (7:3) was asked whether someone calculating the numbers of people who made aliyah may count how many people there are. He answered that for the purposes of a mitzvah, one may count indirectly. However, we should note that such figures are often counted simply for curiosity or publicity, which the Tzitz Eliezer prohibits (22:13).

In a more recent responsum from Rav Vozner (Shu't Shevet Halevi 9:35), dated Elul 24 5755 (September 19, '95), he writes that the heter of taking a census because of divrei mitzvah applies only if the statistics are used exclusively for divrei mitzvah, something that is not followed. However, he permits the census for a different reason -- because they count the entire population of Israel, not specifically Jews. Furthermore, even though the census in Israel includes a breakdown into religious groups, since thousands of those who are listed by the government as Jewish are not, Rav Vozner does not consider this as counting Jews. He adds that since no one is counted by name or family, but there is simply raw data collected, and the data does not correlate at all to the number of Jews, he has no halachic objection to participating in the census.

On the basis of Rav Vozner's responsum, there certainly should be no objection to participating in the United States census, since this involves counting people and does not count Jews.

#### Conclusion

Parshas Ki Sissa, which should appear to be the Torah source for this mitzvah, begins with the words "Ki sissa es rosh bnei Yisrael." Although the explanation of this pasuk is "When you count the members of Bnei Yisrael," literally, the words can be translated as "When you lift up the heads of Bnei Yisrael." The question is why did the Torah use this expression rather than say more clearly that it is defining how to count the Jewish People.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe, Ki Sissa) explains as follows: When someone realizes that he did something wrong, that individual may justify what he did by saying, "I am not important. What difference does it make if I do not do what is expected of me?" Unfortunately, this type of mistaken humility can become a person's undoing.

"Ki Sissa" -- "When you lift up" counteracts this way of thinking. Every Jew is as important as the greatest of all Jews: The biggest tzaddik and the seemingly unimportant Jew both give the same half-shekel. This "lifts up" every individual -- you do count, and what you do is important!

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Six for Six : How the World Changed in Six Days

May 21, 2020, by Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The actual state of Israel was established 72 years ago in 1948. However, the modern state of Israel as we know it, was launched in 1967. The six-day war was so revolutionary and so transformative, that in many ways, it was more groundbreaking than 1948. Thousands of years ago, G-d created our natural world in six days. Fifty-three years ago He reshaped history in six quick days. Here is a list of the six major revolutions which occurred during those 6 days in June: Six for Six!

#### 1. The Return to the Biblical "Corridor"

In 1948, Jews were graciously "permitted" to return to a carved-up parcel of Israel. This immigration soothed the world's conscience after the horrors of the Holocaust and, additionally, solved the ugly issue of unwanted Jewish refugees. By contrast, in 1967, we returned to the Biblical corridor -- a passage of land which cuts through the heart of Israel and the heart of Jewish history. This territory stretches from Shechem in the north, snakes its way through Jerusalem, bends toward Beit Lechem and Chevron finally levels off

in Be'er Sheva in the south. Jewish history, narrated in the book of Breishit, emerged in these lands and our return to this Biblical passageway signaled the resurgence of the History. Jews actually living in the provinces of original Jewish history signals the acceleration of history in a way that the important but indefinite events of 1948 did not.

## 2) A Emergent Superpower

Life in Israel between 1948 and 1967 was harsh and unforgiving- riddled by food rationing, numerous wars of attrition and by stifling diplomatic isolation. Indeed, our beloved state provided a respite from the tumultuous and tragic years of the Holocaust and certainly fulfilled a centuries-long dream of resettling our homeland. However, life continued to be difficult and conditions were austere. The miracles of 1967, the courage of our soldiers, and, of course, the palpable Divine intervention created a swell of national pride or "komemiyut" which transformed the fabric of Israeli society. Israel's successful handling of the corona virus (so far, and with G-d's help it will continue) has confirmed the strong feelings of pride which Israelis sense in their country. Societies with pride and national unity will navigate this medical and financial crisis more successfully than countries which are either disunited or disillusioned. The restoration of our national pride began in 1967. Ironically, the War of Independence in 1948 is sometimes referred to as komemiyut because, for the first time in thousands of years, Jews defended themselves from military aggression. In truth, the miraculous events of 1967 established far greater komemiyut than the ambiguous victory of 1948.

## 3. Jews Flocking Home

The return to Yerushalayim and the surrounding environs beckoned international Jewish interest in their homeland. Prior to 1967, much of the emigration to Israel consisted of aliyah of distress- Jews fleeing persecution in Arab countries. Between

1948 and 1967 the financial hardships in Israel were so severe that more people emigrated from Israel than to Israel. That all changed in 1967- the magnetizing effect of Yerushalayim as well as the slow but steady economic improvement in Israel drew the interest of Jews from across the globe. Many made aliyah and still more became more embedded in Israeli life- whether through purchasing real estate or increasing their frequency of visits. The worldwide Jewish stake in Israel spiked after 1967.

## 4. Gradual Diplomatic Acceptance

Prior to 1967, Israel was a diplomatic pariah. Despite the broad support afforded Israel during the UN votes of the '40s, Israel was soon plunged into diplomatic isolation. Much of the third world was aligned with Arab interests and the large Communist bloc which dominated Europe, China and parts of Latin America routinely exhibited diplomatic hostility toward our country. The US arming of Israel began in earnest only after the military victory in 1967. In 1967, we literally, stood "alone" on one side of the river, facing off against an entire world; we had assumed the role of our ancient grandfather, Avraham, who had also opposed an entire world of idolatry. If our mission in Israel is to inspire an entire world toward utopia, then international acceptance of Israel is a crucial element of that vision. Though full embrace of the Jews in their homeland will only be achieved when history ends, the slow but steady diplomatic progress witnessed over the past twenty years is part of our redemptive advance. Over the past few weeks, as the enduring tensions between the USA and China flared, it was interesting to witness each country reinforcing its relationship with our state of Israel. Israel's standing among nations transformed after 1967.

## 5. Religious Revival

The legendary scenes of Israeli soldiers sounding the shofar while standing at the newly liberated Kotel galvanized an entire people. Witnessing G-d's explicit intervention in the historical process prompted a revival of religious sentiment. Over the past 50 years Israel has rightly established itself as the epicenter of worldwide Torah study. The euphoric aftermath of 1967 launched the national religious world of yeshivot and Torah institutions, which, alongside the Charedi Torah world, has dramatically augmented the spread of Torah study. Beyond the advances in Torah and halachik

observance, our country has also witnessed a revival of 'traditionalism' amongst a majority of Israeli Jews who identify as "Masorati". They may not may not adhere to strict halachik regulations but they believe deeply in G-d and in His historical mission for His people. 1967 altered the religious landscape of Israel!

## 6) The Confidence Index of Worldwide Jewry

Over the past fifty years, Jews across the world have become more engaged in local governance, culture and society. Previously, Jews envisioned themselves as living along the margins of society- barred from prestigious schools, law firms and country clubs. Modern Jewish communities generally display far more confidence and participate more extensively in their local societies far more than Jewish communities of the past. Much of this confidence stems from the komemiyut achieved in Israel during the 1967 war. Knowing that we have constructed a strong and successful Jewish state feeds Jewish confidence across the globe.

Six days and six seismic shifts in Jewish history !

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חדשות ערוך 7

Return to the gates of Zion - 1967

Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Hirsch

This Yom Yerushalayim, 2020, Israelis are joyfully returning to their synagogues, after two months of Corona-virus closure of synagogues and yeshivot.

Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook did not tear Kriah (the sign of mourning, tearing one's shirt) on seeing the Kotel, the Western Wall, or viewing the Temple Mount, after the Six Day War.

There is a connection between these two statements:

Rav Mordechai Shternberg (in Ayin B'ayin Yir'u, pages 235-245) say that this is based on a disagreement between the Mishna in Talmud Bavli (Ketuvot 110b) and a statement in the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Babylonian Talmud says a husband can force his wife to move to Yerushalayim, but the wife cannot force her husband. The Jerusalem Talmud says that the wife CAN force her husband to move there.

The Rosh and Hagahot Oshri resolve the dispute by saying that the Bavli, written during the Babylonian exile, is for the time of exile- the wife cannot force her husband. But the Jerusalem Talmud is for the future, for the end of Exile, and then the wife can force her husband.

Many assumed this latter opinion is for some far-flung future time, after the end of Adam's and Eve's curse: "And he will rule of her"(Genesis 3; 16). At that time, Man and Woman will share (a word that denotes ultimate Malchut) truly equal status, in Messianic Utopia.

But not Rav Tzvi Yehudah: to him, that time is NOW. Since the founding of the State of Israel, being a "Medinah Elokit"(a G-dly nation), we have entered the period of the final Redemption.

Rav Shternberg has said: It is now not "The Lord will be King" (Exodus 15; 18)", but now "the Lord is King" (Psalms 10;16). G-d's Kingdom is found in all this universe now, constantly, uninterruptedly- now and forever (l'olam va'ed).

Rav Chaim Drukman once said: "Ki Ayin B'ayin Yir'u b'shuv Hashem Tzion"(Isaiah 52; 8) - the guards in all city watchtowers will raise their voices in happy song, when they see eye to eye the return of the Lord to Zion. "Eye to eye" means that mankind will see objective truth, having learned how to align human sight and judgement with that of G-d. No longer will the world deny the truth of G-d and Israel, as the King of Kings returns to Jerusalem. There will be no more CNN spin, New York Times obfuscations, or Time magazine distortions.

This process began in 1948, and continued on Wednesday, June 9, 1967, when the Israel Defense Forces, under commander Motta Gur, received a Divine gift and routed the foreign occupiers, the Jordanian army, and returned Zion to the people of Israel. Yisrael Ariel was one of the paratroopers that day. He was then a student of Rav Tzvi Yehudah's at



Yeshivat Mercaz Harav. He never left those watchtowers of Zion, and he has for decades been the director of Machon Hamikdash, the Temple Institute. The Institute studies the laws of the Temple, has been preparing people and vessels to use in our future Temple, and gives guided tours in Jerusalem's Old City.

Rav Ariel describes his experience of the Six Day War (Mashmia Yeshua, by Simcha Raz, pages 333-335):

"We were stationed for weeks in the orange groves surrounding Lod (now Ben Gurion) airport, expecting to parachute into war in the Sinai. But early on Wednesday, June 9, the soldiers under Motta Gur's command were trucked up to Jerusalem, where by the Grace of G-d we freed the Old City and the Temple Mount. As the day progressed, a rumor went thru the ranks: two old, gray-bearded men had appeared on the Mount. I reacted with great emotion and spiritual elevation, certain that they could be none other than Elijah the Prophet accompanying the King Moshiach (Messiah) himself.

"When I came down from fighting that was still proceeding on the Mount against Jordanians, I was elated to see that the two elders were Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook and Rav David Cohen, the Nazir (a main disciple of Rav A. Y. Hachohen Kook, and the father-in-law of Rav Shlomo Goren, the brilliant, charismatic Chief Rabbi of the IDF). We hugged, cried, danced and sang- for as Isaiah had said, we had indeed merited to see eye to eye as the Lord returned to Zion!

"Rav Tzvi Yehudah told me that an officer had knocked on his door at about 11am, and brought an invitation for him and the Nazir to come immediately to the Kotel. As they sped thru the city in a half-track, with the Nazir's long white hair blowing in the wind, they were spotted by Chanan Porat and other Mercaz Harav Yeshiva student-soldiers. As the drove, the officer (Rav Menachem Cohen) related that earlier that day, Rav Goren had inspired veteran soldiers as he ignored enemy sniper fire, and arrived on the Mount with a Torah in one hand and a shofar in the other.

Battle-hardened soldiers were moved to tears by the bravery of Rav Goren, and by Rav Goren's blowing of the shofar in the midst of battle. When another Mercaz Harav student, Yoram Zamush, succeeded in planting the Israeli flag on the top of the Kotel, Commander Motta Gur had called up to him that he deserved a prize for his efforts, and he should name whatever he wanted.

Zamush's request: "Bring Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook here to the Kotel, that he be with us in our tremendous happiness."

"I requested from Cmdr. Motta Gur that we be allowed to pray Mincha, the afternoon prayer. We received permission for the first prayer by any Jew at the Kotel in 19 years, and the first Jewish prayer with the Temple Mount in Jewish hands in 1900 years! "

As we in Israel, for Yom Yerushalayim 2020, are about to return to our Shuls, our mikdashei me'at (little Temples), after a somewhat shorter interruption (due to Corona), the words of Rav Shternberg describing that 28th of Iyar, 1967, are apropos:

"What brings us to this yearning for Jerusalem? It is the Jewish soul that seeks to return to Yerushalayim, the source of the Jew's existence, both his body and his soul. It is the Almighty who gave each of us a soul, "V'chayei olam nata b'tocheinu", as He implanted in us eternal Life. "He is the builder of Yerushalayim" (Psalms 147; 2), building the city physically; and He builds and implants in our souls a "tzupiya l'Yerushalayim", a longing for Yerushalayim. "My soul thirsts for the Almighty, the living G-d" (Psalms 42; 3) just as "My soul yearns, indeed it pines for the courtyards of Jerusalem" (Psalms 84; 3).

This is why now, after that first flowerings of Redemption on May 15, 1948 and on June 9, 1967, a Jewish wife, with the heart and soul of a lover of Zion, can force her spouse to move to Yerushalayim. This is why Rav Tzvi Yehuda did not tear Kriah at the sight of the Kotel, after that day in 1967. And this is what brought the Chazan (cantor) of that first Mincha in 1900 years at a Jewish-owned Kotel to say the prayer that he did; Rav Yisrael Ariel finishes his story:

As soldiers bowed in thanks to the Almighty, prostrating themselves on the

plaza in front of the Kotel, others caressed the stones of the Holy Temple, and others began singing Psalm 126: "A song of ascents, when the Lord will return the captivity of Zion, we will be as dreamers".

The Chazan, IDF Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, ascended to the front of the mass of soldiers, and started the Mincha prayers. When he reached the Shema Koleinu of the Silent Prayer, Shmoneh Esrei, he added the paragraph for Tisha B'Av, the day of the destruction of the Temple , 1900 years ago- but with changes.

Instead of : "Oh Lord Almighty, console the mourners of Zion and of Jerusalem, and the city that is mournful, ruined, scorned and desolate without her children, ruined without her abodes...therefore Zion weeps bitterly", Rav Goren, knowing that a new period of Redemption was underway, one with no more Kriah (garment rending as a sign of mourning) , sang out:

"Oh Lord Almighty, comfort the mourners of Zion and the mourners of Jerusalem, the happy city that is no longer scorned, that is no longer desolate- rather, she is honored, happy that her children have come to redeem her, have evicted the Jordanian Legions and again gained her as an inheritance for Your Nation of Israel. Therefore, Zion with happy voice will pray, and Jerusalem will raise her voice in thanks and song".

On this Yom Yerushalayim, may all in Israel happily return to their synagogues, and may we soon, again be able to joyfully parade through Yerushalayim's streets in her honor.

Rabbi Dr. Hirsch is a physician residing in Beit El who works at Hadassah Hospital. He recently completed Rabbinical ordination of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel through a study program at Yeshivat Merkaz Harav

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***PARSHAT NASO - Intro to Sefer Bamidbar***

Parshat Naso contains what appears to be a very strange progression of topics. After all, what logical connection exists between:

- \* the duties of the Leviim in chapter 4
- \* laws concerning "korban asham" in chapter 5
- \* the laws concerning a "sotah" in chapter 5
- \* the laws of a "nazir" in chapter 6
- \* "birkat kohanim" in chapter 6
- & \* the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan in chapter 7?

Certainly, if we use our imagination, we could suggest some tangential connections; but the fact remains - at first glance, all of these various 'parshiot' appear to very unrelated.

So why does the Torah record them together?

To your surprise, this week's shiur will NOT explain why they are indeed connected. Instead, we will do exactly the opposite - we will suggest a reason for why these parshiot do NOT follow in logical progression!

To explain why, we will study the overall structure of Sefer Bamidbar - in search of its unifying theme. While doing so, we will uncover a rather fascinating pattern - that will explain why it becomes so difficult to find a unifying theme for Sefer Bamidbar.

**INTRODUCTION**

In our Parsha series thus far, our approach to the study of Chumash has been based on the assumption that each "sefer" carries a unique theme. To uncover those themes, we have studied the progression of 'parshiot' of each Sefer.

[For a quick review, we could 'oversimplify' and summarize as follows: Breishit focused on BECHIRA, Shmot on GEULAH, and Vayikra on KEDUSHA.]

Following this methodology, we would expect that a unifying theme for Sefer Bamidbar could be found as well. However, as we will see, finding such a theme for Sefer Bamidbar will be much more difficult, for the progression of many of its 'parshiot' appears to be rather arbitrary.

To demonstrate this difficulty, we have already cited (in our opening paragraph) an example from Parshat Naso. Let's take another example from Parshat Shlach, where the story of the 'spies' (see chapters 13->14) is followed by several totally unrelated mitzvot (see chapter 15):

- \* the laws of "nesachim" for korbanot
- \* the laws of separating "challah" from dough
- \* laws concerning korbanot "chatat" of the nation
- \* the story of one who publicly defiled the sabbath
- \* the mitzvah of tzitzit

[A similar phenomenon occurs in chapters 28 & 29 in Parshat Pinchas as well re: the laws of the "musafim".]

To complicate matters, we also find that some of the laws that are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar had already been mentioned in Sefer Vayikra! [e.g. 5:5-7 compare w/Vayikra 5:20-25]

So what's going on in Sefer Bamidbar?

To answer this question, we must undertake a comprehensive analysis of the book.

**DIVIDE & CONQUER**

To begin our analysis, we must differentiate between the two basic types of 'parshiot' that we encounter when we study Chumash in general, and in Sefer Bamidbar in particular:

1) **NARRATIVE** - i.e. the ongoing STORY of Chumash

2) **COMMANDMENTS** - i.e. the MITZVOT that God commands Bnei Yisrael to keep for all generations.

In our series thus far, we have shown how each "sefer" of Chumash has been (primarily) either one type, or the other. For example:

\* Sefer Breishit was primarily NARRATIVE - i.e. the STORY of the Creation and God's covenant with the Avot.

\* Sefer Shmot was also primarily NARRATIVE (the story of the Exodus, etc.), even though it included numerous mitzvot that were presented as an integral part of that narrative. [For example, the Ten Commandments are recorded as an integral part of the story of Ma'amad Har Sinai.]

\* Sefer Vayikra was primarily MITZVOT - presented in thematic order (even though it did include two very short narratives).

How about Sefer Bamidbar?

As we will see, it definitely contains BOTH narrative and mitzvot. However, the relationship between its narrative and those mitzvot is rather confusing.

To complicate matters, Sefer Bamidbar also contains two types of mitzvot:

"**mitzvot l'sha'ah**" – commandments that applied only to the generation of the desert (but not to future generations)

"**mitzvot l'dorot**" - commandments that apply to future generations as wekk

To clarify this distinction, here are a few examples:

**- MITZVOT L'SHA'AH:**

- \* Organizing the camp around the Mishkan (chapters 1->4)
- \* sanctifying the Leviim (chapter 8)
- \* Taking the census in chapter in chapter 26.

**- MITZVOT L'DOROT:**

- \* the laws of "sotah" (chapter 5)
- \* the laws of "nazir" (chapter 6)
- \* the laws of "korbanot tmidim u'musafim" (chaps. 28->29).]

As the "mitzvot l'sha'a" are essentially an integral part of the ongoing narrative, in our analysis we will simply treat them as part of the ongoing narrative of the Sefer.

In contrast, most of the "mitzvot l'dorot" in Sefer Bamidbar don't appear to have anything to do with the ongoing narrative! In fact, it seems more like they 'interfere'.

To explain how, the following outline charts the progression of topics Sefer Bamidbar, highlighting this contrast by recording the MITZVOT L'DOROT in CAPS.

As you study this outline, note the logical flow of topic within its narrative, in contrast to the 'random' progression of its mitzvot.



CHAPTER =====	TOPIC =====
1->4	Organizing the camp
5	KORBAN ASHAM
LAWS OF 'SOTAH'	
6	LAWS OF 'NAZIR'
BIRKAT KOHANIM	
7	Dedication of Mishkan
8	The appointment of the Leviim
9	Offering Korban Pesach in the desert /
Travelling following the "anan"	
10	Gathering camp by trumpet / "chatzotrot"
Leaving Har Sinai (on 20th of Iyar)	
11	Complaints during the journey
("mitoninim", "mitavim", etc.)	
12	Complaints against Moshe
(sin of Miriam)	
13	Sin of the 'spies' ("chet ha'meraglim")
14	The punishment: 40 years' wandering
15	LAWS OF THE 'NESACHIM' (wine & flour
offering)	
LAWS RE: 'CHALA'	
15	LAWS RE: KORBAN OF THE 'EYDA'
LAWS RE: DESECRATING SHABBAT	
LAWS OF TZIZIT	
16-17	Korach's rebellion
18	LAWS RE: KOHEN'S COMPENSATION
19	LAWS RE: TUMAH CAUSED BY A DEAD
BODY	
20-21	Events of the 40th year:
death of Miriam;	
the "mei mriva" incident; (Moshe's sin)	
death of Aharon;	
conquest of Transjordan, etc.	
21-24	Story of Bilam & Balak
25	Sin of Baal P'or and the act of Pinchas
26	The census for inheriting the Land
27	Transfer of leadership from Moshe->Yehoshua
28-29	LAWS OF THE KORBAN TAMID & MUSAF
30	LAWS RE: 'NEDARIM' [VOWS]
31	War against Midyan
32	Inheritance of Reuven & Gad, & half of
Menashe	
33	Summary of the journey through the desert
34	Guidelines for upcoming conquest of the Land
35	Cities of the Levites, and cities of Refuge
36	Inheritance issues re: to daughters of
Tzlofchad	

Before you continue, review this table once again, but this time ignoring all of the topics in CAPS - while noting how the narratives (that remain) comprise a congruent story; i.e. of Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai (through the desert) until they reach Arvot Moav (some forty years later).

Hence, if we simply 'filter out' the "mitzvot l'dorot" from Sefer Bamidbar, that story (of what transpired as they traveled for forty years through the desert) emerges as its primary topic.

#### ALMOST LIKE SEFER SHMOT

As such, the style of Sefer Bamidbar appears to be most similar to Sefer Shmot. Just as Sefer Shmot describes Bnei Yisrael's journey from Egypt to Har Sinai - plus various MITZVOT; so too

Sefer Bamidbar describes Bnei Yisrael's journey **from** Har Sinai towards Eretz Canaan - plus various MITZVOT.

However, there still exists a major difference in style between these two books, in regard to the relationship between the MITZVOT and the STORY in each book. Whereas the "mitzvot l'dorot" in Sefer Shmot form an integral part of its narrative, most of the "mitzvot l'dorot" in Sefer Bamidbar appear to be totally unrelated (or at best tangentially related) to its ongoing narrative.

In other words, the mitzvot in Sefer Shmot 'fit' - while the mitzvot in Sefer Bamidbar don't!

Furthermore, when you take a careful look at the various mitzvot l'dorot in Sefer Bamidbar (see outline above), you'll notice how most of them would have fit very nicely in Sefer Vayikra!

#### INTENTIONAL 'INTERRUPTIONS'

To appreciate these observations, review the above outline once again, this time noting how the ongoing story in Sefer Bamidbar is periodically INTERRUPTED by certain MITZVOT, while the topic of those mitzvot is usually totally unrelated to that ongoing narrative.

To illustrate how this style is unique to Sefer Bamidbar, let's compare it to the respective structures of Sefer Shmot and Sefer Vayikra.

Sefer Shmot records the story of Bnei Yisrael's redemption from Egypt (chapters 1->13), their subsequent journey to Har Sinai (chapters 14->17), and the events that took place at Har Sinai (chapters 18->40 / Matan Torah, chet ha'egel, and building the Mishkan). As an integral part of that story, Sefer Shmot also records certain mitzvot that were given at that time. For example, as Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, they are commanded to keep the mitzvot of Pesach and Chag Ha'matzot (that commemorate that event). At Ma'amad Har Sinai, the Torah records the Ten Commandments and the laws of Parshat Mishpatim, for they are part of that covenant (see 24:3-7). In reaction to "chet ha'egel" (or to perpetuate Ma'amad Har Sinai), Bnei Yisrael are given the laws of the Mishkan.

Hence we conclude that the MITZVOT in Sefer Shmot form an integral part of its ongoing narrative!

Sefer Vayikra is quite the opposite for it contains primarily "mitzvot l'dorot" organized by topic. In fact, the lone narrative that we do find in Sefer Vayikra - the dedication of the Mishkan (8:1-10:10) - relates specifically to the topic of the mitzvah under discussion (i.e. the various korbanot).

In contrast to those two books, Sefer Bamidbar contains an ongoing narrative, which is periodically 'interrupted' by "mitzvot l'dorot" that appear to have very little thematic connection.

#### RAMBAN'S INTRODUCTION

This analysis can help us understand the strange statement made by Ramban in his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar:

"... and this book deals entirely with "MITZVOT SHA'AH" that applied only during Bnei Yisrael's stay in the desert...";

Then, only three lines later, Ramban makes a very bold, yet puzzling, statement:

"This book does NOT CONTAIN any MITZVOT L'DOROT (commandments for all generations) EXCEPT for a FEW MITZVOT DEALING WITH KORBANOT that the Torah began discussing in SEFER VAYIKRA, but did not finish their explanation there, and they are finished here instead." [see Ramban 1:1]

Note how Ramban differentiates between two types of mitzvot that are found in Sefer Bamidbar, one type - "mitzvot l'sha'ah" that DO belong in the sefer, while the other type - "mitzvot l'dorot" that DON'T belong!

This distinction between 'parshiot' that DO belong and DON'T belong - implies that Sefer Bamidbar indeed carries one primary theme, i.e. the story of Bnei Yisrael's forty year journey from Har Sinai to [Note that even though the Ramban did not preface his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar with 'questions for preparation and self study', he clearly expected that the reader was aware of this overall structure!]

[Note as well that Ramban never explicitly defines the primary topic of Sefer Bamidbar, however he does mention that: This book contains:... the miracles that were performed for Bnei Yisrael and how He began to deliver their enemies before them... and He commanded them how the Land should be divided among the tribes...]

To clarify the thematic connection between the various narratives in Sefer Bamidbar, it is helpful to divide the book into three distinct sections:

**Chapters 1->10**

How Bnei Yisrael prepare for their journey to Canaan;

**Chapters 11->25**

Why they don't make it to Canaan (i.e. their sins); &

**Chapters 26->35**

How the new generation prepares to enter the Land.

Basically, the book should have been the story of how Bnei Yisrael traveled from Har Sinai to Israel. Instead, it becomes a book that explains how and why they didn't make it.

How about the MITZVOT L'DOROT of Sefer Bamidbar?

Are they simply random, or do they share a common theme?

At first glance, most of these mitzvot appear to be totally unrelated to Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert.

**WHERE DO THEY ALL BELONG?**

Before we suggest an answer to this question, let's review this list of mitzvot in Sefer Bamidbar, and attempt to determine where they DO BELONG.

Take for example:

\* **Parshat "sotah" (5:11-31) and Parshat "nazir"**

**(6:1-21):**

Both of these 'parshiot' contain a set of laws that Chumash refers to as "torot" (ritual 'procedures' /see 5:29 & 6:21), and focus on what korbanot need to be offered. Hence, it would seem that these parshiot belong with the other "torot" found in the first half of Sefer Vayikra.

\* **Parshat "parah adumah" (chapter 19):**

These laws clearly 'belong' in Parshat Tazria/Metzora, together with all of the other laws of how one becomes "tamey" and the necessary procedures to become "tahor".

\* **The laws of "korbanot tmidim u'musafim" (chap. 28->29):**

These laws also clearly belong in Sefer Vayikra, together with the laws of the holidays in Parshat Emor (see Vayikra 23 / note that on each holiday mentioned in Emor we must bring an "ishe rayach nichoach l'hashem", while Bamidbar chapters 28 & 29 details the specific "ishe" (korban) which must be brought for each holiday. (see Vayikra 23:37)

Thus, it appears as though Chumash has deliberately taken numerous parshiot of mitzvot, which could have been recorded in Sefer Vayikra, and randomly 'inserted' them throughout the narrative of Sefer Bamidbar! But - why would the Torah take a mitzvah which 'belongs' in one sefer and move it to another?

One could maintain that these 'unrelated parshiot' are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar simply for the 'technical' reason that they just happened to have been given to Moshe Rabeinu at this time (i.e. during this journey from Har Sinai through the desert). For example, the

Arvot Moav. The stories and the "mitzvot sha'ah" that relate to that topic - 'belong' in the sefer, while those mitzvot that are unrelated (to that topic) do not! mitzvah of "shiluach tmayim" (5:1-4) - sending unclean persons outside the camp - most likely was commanded only after the camp was organized (see chaps. 1->4).

However, that approach would explain only a few of these parshiot, for most of the "mitzvot l'dorot" that are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar seem to have been given at an earlier time (most likely on Har Sinai or after "hakamat ha'Mishkan"). For example, the laws of "tumat meyt" (in chapter 19) must have been given before the Mishkan was erected, otherwise it would have been impossible for the Kohanim to perform the "avodah". Furthermore, certain mitzvot recorded in Bamidbar had already been mentioned earlier in Chumash (e.g. see 5:5-8 / compare with Vayikra 5:20-26).

Hence it would seem that this 'commercial break' type pattern in Sefer Bamidbar is deliberate! And thus, our question must be re-worded to: why does the Torah employ this unique structure in Sefer Bamidbar?

**THE 'PSHAT' OF 'DRASH'!**

If this special structure of Bamidbar is deliberate, then the obvious temptation is to find a connection, even if only tangential, between these 'unrelated mitzvot' and the juxtaposed narrative in Sefer Bamidbar.

In other words, it appears that the Torah deliberately juxtaposes certain sets of laws to the ongoing narrative, EVEN THOUGH they are unrelated - in order that we search for a thematic connection between them! Thus, through this special structure the Torah in essence is telling us to make up "drash" to explain the reason for this juxtaposition. [We could refer to this as the "pshtat" of "drash".]

In this manner, the unique style of Sefer Bamidbar challenges us to find a THEMATIC connection between these "mitzvot l'dorot" and the ongoing story. And that is exactly what Chazal do in their various Midrashim.

[This also explains why so often the commentaries ask the famous question: "lama nis'm'cha..." (why are certain parshiot juxtaposed...?)]

Therefore, when we study Sefer Bamidbar, we should not be surprised to find certain parshiot of mitzvot that don't seem to belong. Nonetheless, we are 'obligated' to attempt to uncover a more subtle message that the Torah may be transmitting through the intentional juxtaposition of these mitzvot to its narrative.

With this background, we will now suggest some possible reasons for the inclusion of these specific parshiot of mitzvot in Parshat Naso, even though they could have been recorded in Sefer Vayikra as well.

**SHCHINA IN THE CAMP**

The first topic of Sefer Bamidbar is the organization of the camp ("sidur ha'machanot") surrounding the Mishkan (chapters one thru four). As we explained last week, this re-organization of the camp stresses the importance of the interdependent relationship between the camp ["machine"] and the Mishkan, i.e. between the nation and the kohanim & Leviim.

This may explain the reason why Sefer Bamidbar chose to include the parshiot which follow:

**A) "shiluach tmayim" (5:1-4)**

As the camp was organized with the "shchinah" dwelling at its center, the first mitzvah is to remove anyone who is "tamey" from the camp.

**B) "gezel ha'ger". (5:5-10)**

Here we find laws that reflect the special relationship between the nation and the kohanim.

This mitzvah begins with the standard law of the "korban asham" as explained in Parshat Vayikra (5:20-26). The halacha requires that prior to bringing the Korban, the transgressor must first repay the person ("keren v'chomesh"). This 'parshia' also relates to the case when the payment is given to the kohen, when the person who is owed the money has passed away and left no inheritors (see Here again we find a special relationship between the Mishkan and the nation, as the Kohen is instrumental in solving problems in a marital relationship. Even though this is a "korban mincha", its nature is quite different from those korbanot mentioned in Sefer Vayikra (see Ramban 5:9) - for it is only offered as part of this special circumstance, where the kohen attempts to solve a marital problem within the camp.

#### **D) Parshat Nazir (6:1-21)**

Here we find a case where a member of the nation takes upon himself laws similar to those of a Kohen (see 6:6-8), as well as the 'kedusha' of a Kohen. Note also the similarity between the Korban which the "nazir" must bring (6:13-21) and the special Korbanot brought by the Kohanim during the 7 day "miluim" ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1-30).

#### **E) Birkat Kohanim (6:22-27)**

The blessing which the kohanim bestow on the nation is yet another example of the connection between the kohanim and the camp. The kohanim serve as vehicle through which God can bless His people.

#### **TRAVELLING WITH THE "SHCHINA"**

So why are specifically parshiot from Sefer Vayikra woven into Sefer Bamidbar? One could suggest an answer that relates to the underlying theme of each book.

Recall our explanation of how the laws of Sefer Vayikra reflect the fact that God's "shechina" now dwells in the Mishkan. Hence, we found numerous laws that relate to the special level of kedusha in the Mishkan itself in the first half of Vayikra (e.g. korbanot, tumah & tahara, etc.) as well as laws that relate to the consequential "kedusha" on the entire camp in the second half of the book (e.g. the laws of "kedoshim t'hiyu" [adam], holidays [zman], shmitta [makom], etc.).

Sefer Bamidbar, on the other hand, discusses how Bnei Yisrael travel through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. Considering that Bnei Yisrael will now travel with the Mishkan at the center of their camp (as discussed in the opening four chapters), it becomes thematically significant that the Torah periodically interrupts the details of that journey with mitzvot from Sefer Vayikra, especially those that deal with the special connection between the Kohanim and the nation.

As Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai, they must now deal with mundane tasks such as preparation for the conquest and settlement of the Land. While doing so, they must constantly remind themselves of their spiritual goals, symbolized by the Mishkan at the center of the camp - and applied in the various laws that relate to the "kedusha" of Am Yisrael - because they are God's nation.

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

#### **FOR FURTHER IYUN:**

=====

#### **A. CHANUKAT HA'MIZBAYACH (7:1-8:26)**

This parsha, discussing the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan, appears to be out of place. The story of the dedication of the Mishkan was already detailed in Parshat Pkudei (Shmot 40) and Parshat Shmini (Vayikra 9). Furthermore, this dedication ceremony took place on the first of Nisan, while the narrative of Sefer Bamidbar began a month LATER, on the first day of Iyar

Rashi 5:8). The 'parshia' continues with a general statement regarding the legal ownership of tithes which the nation must give to the kohanim (see 5:9-10).

#### **C) Parshat Sotah (5:11-31)**

(1:1)! Why then is it included in Bamidbar, and why specifically here?

The primary topic of this perek is the 'korban' which the tribal leaders brought on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan. Their offering included a joint presentation of six wagons and twelve oxen as well as an offering for the mizbayach presented by each "nasi" individually.

Those wagons are given to the Leviim to help them while transporting the Mishkan. Therefore, this detail of the dedication ceremony is recorded in Bamidbar for it relates to the organization of the camp ("sidur ha'machaneh") and the duties of the Leviim in preparation for the journey from Har Sinai. Even though the wagons were presented a month earlier, Sefer Bamidbar begins with the census of the army in anticipation of the journey from Har Sinai.

Once the detail of how the camp will travel is completed, Sefer Bamidbar recalls the story of how "nsiim" presented the Leviim with the wagons. The remaining details of that joint presentation of the nsiim are detailed in the parsha that follows (see 7:12-89).

B. Considering that chapters 7->8 discuss the dedication of the Mishkan that took place on the first of Nisan (see 7:1) including the appointment of the Leviim to work in the Mishkan in place of the first born (see 8:5-15), one could also conclude that the counting of the Leviim described in chapters 3->4 took place earlier - i.e. before the Mishkan's dedication and definitely BEFORE the MIFKAD of the twelve tribes as described in chapters 1->2 [note Ramban on 8:5 that would seem to imply this, even though this seems to contradict Ramban on 1:45].

If so, then chapters 3-4 as well as 7-8 took place on (or close to) the first of Nisan. Hence, one could conclude that these parshiot of mitzvot detailed in chapters 5->6 were given to Moshe Rabeinu from the Ohel Moed on the first of Nisan as well.

# Parshot Bamidbar and Naso: Introduction to Sefer Bamidbar

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

## PART I

This week, we will introduce the 4th book of the Torah. What is the name of this new sefer? Or, more properly, what are its names?

- 1) Hebrew: "Sefer BeMidbar."
- 2) Latin: "Numeri."
- 3) English: "Numbers."
- 4) Hazal: "Humash ha-Pekkudim."

Which of these names does not belong? Clearly, "BeMidbar": this name says nothing about the content of the sefer. The origin of this name is the fact that it is the first significant word in the book (like the word "bereshit" in the first book of the Torah, the word "shemot" in the second book, the word "va-yikra" in the third book, and the word "devarim" in the fifth book). On the other hand, the other names here all seem to fit into a category: numbers, or "pekkudim," which means "counting." These names tell us there will be counting and listing in this book, and indeed, there is plenty of that. But "pekkudim" is more than just "numbers." What does the root "P-K-D" mean in the context of the Humash Ha-Pekkudim?

### MEANINGS OF P-K-D IN THIS SEFER:

P-K-D means to remember something and pay special attention to it. This basic meaning of P-K-D is what ties together the three specific ways in which P-K-D is used in our sefer:

- 1) P-K-D = to count or list. Counting or listing is a process which recalls each individual and focuses attention on every individual in the list or count.
- 2) P-K-D = to appoint to a task / position. Appointment to a task, or the appointment of an institution, is a process which involves considering a person's (or an institution's) capabilities and record and then focusing special attention on that individual as a person capable of a particular task.
- 3) P-K-D = to punish. Punishment takes place when Hashem decides to "remember" what a person has done and that the time has come to pay special attention (in this case, special negative attention) to that person.

[Reward, of course, is the opposite of punishment: Hashem decides to "remember" a good deed or a promise He has made to someone, and pays special attention to that person by fulfilling the promise. In Tanakh, we often find P-K-D used in this positive sense, like when Hashem 'recalls' His promise to give Sara a son -- "va-Hashem pakad et Sara." But this sense of P-K-D does not appear in the Humash Ha-Pekkudim.]

### P-K-D AS COUNTING OR LISTING:

What counting takes place in this sefer, or what lists do we find in the sefer?

- 1) Nesi'im (chiefs or leaders of tribes) are listed many times in the Humash ha-Pekkudim:

- a) When they are selected to help take a census of the nation.
- b) As commanders of the fighting force of each shevet (tribe).
- c) When they donate large gifts to the Mishkan (portable Temple) to celebrate its grand opening.
- d) When scouts are sent to Eretz Yisrael to check out the land and the strength of its inhabitants.

2) Counting of all males of fighting age:

- a) Each shevet's fighting-age males are counted and their number is reported to us.
- b) The total of all the shevatim is also reported.
- c) Toward the end of the sefer, all fighting-age males are counted again; the Torah again reports the number of each shevet and total of all shevatim.

3) Listing of the degalim:

- a) The Torah describes how the shevatim were split into four degalim (military wings, or "flags"). Several times, the Torah lists the degalim and each of their member shevatim, as well as listing the number of fighting men in each degel and listing the commander of each degel.

4) Counting of the Leviyyim: The Leviyyim are not counted with the fighting men of the nation because their job is to be the "army of Hashem." But they are counted separately:

- a) First, their total number is counted.
- b) In a second count, the number of Leviyyim old enough to be part of the "army of Hashem" is also counted and reported.

5) Counting of bekhorim: One of the major events of the Humash Ha-Pekkudim is that the bekhorim (first-born), who are considered holy, are replaced by the members of Shevet Levi. The bekhorim and Leviyyim are both counted, then the bekhorim transfer their holiness to the Leviyyim.

6) Gifts of the Nesi'im: The leaders of each of the twelve shevatim help celebrate the 'grand opening' of the Mishkan with large donations. Even though all of the Nesi'im donate exactly the same thing to the Mishkan, the Torah still takes the trouble to present a complete list of the gifts, repeating exactly the same lengthy description of the gift twelve times.

7) Travels: Toward the end of the sefer, the Torah reviews for us the long list of all the places where the nation stops to camp in its 40-year journey through the desert.

8) Korbanot of Succot: The Torah reports the korbanot (sacrifices) of each day of Succot, which follow a very regular and systematic pattern. On the first day, they are to bring 13 bulls; on every successive day, one less bull. But instead of telling us what pattern to follow, the Torah spells out exactly what korbanot we are to bring on each day, spelling it out: on the first day, 13. On the second day, 12. On the third day, 11 . . . .

[An example of contrast: the Talmud does not spell out how many candles to light on each night of Hanukka; it simply tells us to start with one and to add one each night.]

#### **P-K-D AS APPOINTING:**

To be "poked" means "to appoint"; in modern Hebrew, for example, "pakid" means "an official" or "clerk," someone "appointed." Sefer



BeMidbar is the Humash ha-Pekkudim in the sense of "Book of Appointment" because it describes how the nation is to be organized: each group and individual is appointed a specific task; a national infrastructure is created.

1) Nesi'im are appointed to help with the count of their people.

2) Fighting-age men are assigned to the task of being the nation's military force.

3) First-born sons of the nation are removed from their designation as servants for the Mishkan. The Leviyim are appointed in place of these bekhורים. Shevet Levi is assigned the task of being the nation's "religious force," paralleling the appointment of the rest of the adult males as the "military force." The Leviyim are assigned to the Mishkan as guards, transporters, and builders/dismantlers. The three family groups within the Leviyim are each assigned responsibility for a specific part of the Mishkan:

a) Kehat family: the kelei ha-kodesh (holy vessels: Aron, Shulhan, Menora, Mizbehot)

b) Gershon family: the curtains which cover the Mishkan and surround it.

c) Merari family: the structure of the Mishkan itself.

4) The Kohanim are assigned the task of supervising the Leviyim and protecting them from overstepping their bounds and being injured by Hashem; for instance, the Leviyim are not to touch the kelim or look at them, so the Kohanim must wrap the kelim before the Leviyim enter to take the kelim in order to transport them.

5) The camp itself: everyone is assigned a place to camp and a position in which to move with the camp as it travels. The nation is divided into four degalim, each with three shevatim. Each degel is led by one shevet, and the Nasi of that shevet is appointed supreme military commander of that degel. The Kohanim and Leviyim travel with the Mishkan in the center of the camp; each of the four degalim has an assigned position around the Mishkan.

6) The trumpets: besides the setting up of the camp, the Torah also sets up an intra-camp communication system: two silver trumpets. One kind of blast on the trumpet gathers the Nesi'im together. Another type gathers the whole nation. Another type is the signal to decamp and begin travel. Another type is the signal of war. And another type is blown over korbanot on festive occasions.

7) The Mishkan: in Sefer VaYikra, we saw that the grand opening of the Mishkan was celebrated with an elaborate series of korbanot. This was an appropriate angle to take on the grand opening when we were in the middle of VaYikra, which is all about korbanot. In Sefer BeMidbar, the Torah focuses on a different aspect of the "appointment" of the Mishkan in its official capacity as the Center of Worship: it focuses on the 12-day celebration of the grand opening of the Mishkan by presenting us with a grand list, the list of the identical gifts of the Nesi'im. The list is as typical of BeMidbar as the korbanot are of VaYikra.

8) The Zekenim: later on in the sefer, Moshe becomes frustrated with the burden of leading this uncooperative people through the desert and refuses to go on as leader alone. In response, Hashem commands him to assemble 70 elders and takes some of the spiritual power which is concentrated in Moshe and bestows this power on the elders.

9) Elazar succeeds Aharon: also later on in the sefer, Aharon transfers his authority as the Kohen Gadol to his son, Elazar, by giving him the special clothing worn only by the Kohen Gadol.

10) Yehoshua succeeds Moshe: also later on in the sefer, Moshe transfers his authority as leader to Yehoshua by giving him semikha.

## P-K-D AS PUNISHMENT:

One of the darker meanings of "P-K-D" is "punishment." Misdeeds and punishment for misdeeds are one of the major themes of Sefer BeMidbar. The opening sections of Sefer BeMidbar paint a picture of beautiful order and organization as the nation prepares for its journey from Sinai to Eretz Yisrael. The structure of the physical camp is set up, the military structure is created, and different groups are assigned to different tasks. But once we get past the first part of the sefer, we encounter a series of stories in which, time after time, an individual or the whole nation does something wrong and is punished, and the beautiful structure which was designed to bring the people successfully to their land becomes ineffectual and irrelevant:

- 1) Tav'era: people complain against Hashem and are punished by Him. This is the first hint of trouble in the sefer.
- 2) Kivrot Ha-Ta'ava: the people complain that they are tired of the "man" (i.e., manna from heaven) and want meat. For the first time, we hear rumblings of enormous ingratitude: the people look back nostalgically at Egypt (!) and wish they had never left that lap of luxury and culinary delicacies. Hashem becomes angry, and although He provides them with meat, He sends a plague to punish them.
- 3) Moshe becomes frustrated with the people: they just don't seem to get it. They receive the Torah straight from Hashem, and 40 days later they're worshipping an idol; they are taken out of slavery with miracles, and before long they are wishing to be back in good old Egypt and furious with Moshe for taking them out. Moshe, demoralized and frustrated, refuses to go on alone as leader, so Hashem removes some of the burden of leadership from him and places it on the 70 elders Moshe selects.
- 4) Miryam: Miryam and Aharon, Moshe's siblings, join with the chorus of voices challenging Moshe's leadership. Moshe, ever humble, does not react, but Hashem does, angrily putting Miryam and Aharon in their place and striking Miryam with tzara'at (\*not\* leprosy; if you want more details, see the shiur on Parashat Tazria). It is Moshe who magnanimously prays for her recovery.
- 5) The Meraglim: Hashem commands that the nation send scouts to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. When they return, they describe the beauty of the land but convince the people that they do not have the strength to conquer the powerful nations of the land. The people accept this evaluation even though they have been promised Hashem's help, and they again raise the cry for a return to Egypt. Hashem, furious, decrees that no one of this generation will see the land. For the next 40 years, they will wander the desert, until they are all dead; then the new generation will enter the land.
- 6) Aftermath of Meraglim: once Hashem has decreed their punishment, the people realize they have made an enormous mistake. They try to regain the opportunity they have lost: they try to enter Eretz Yisrael. But Moshe warns them that they will fail, as indeed they do. The nation of Amalek meets them in battle, and without Hashem's help, they flee the field and fall before Amalek.
- 7) The Korah rebellion: Korah, a Levi, challenges the status of Aharon as a Kohen (Aharon is also the Leviyyim's chief supervisor), while Datan and Aviram challenge Moshe's leadership as chief of the people. Moshe becomes angry and arranges a test to show who has truly been selected by Hashem, and the result of the test is the deaths of Korah, Datan, Aviram, and all of their followers in an angry Divine confirmation of the selection of Moshe as leader and Aharon and his sons as Kohanim.
- 8) Aftermath of Korah rebellion: the people blame Moshe and Aharon for the deaths of the rebels. Hashem, furious again, responds by sending a plague against the people, which Moshe and Aharon halt -- showing the people that, if anything, they are the people's defenders. But then the people simply transfer blame for the deaths to Hashem, and whine that everyone who approaches Hashem seems to meet with a terrible fate.

9) Mei Meriva: Moshe and Aharon lose their chance to enter Eretz Yisrael when they hit the rock and disobey Hashem's instructions to speak to it to tell it to release its water. This is a disaster of tremendous proportions for Moshe personally, as he himself will tell us when we get to Sefer Devarim and he describes how he begged Hashem to allow him to enter the land.

10) Ba'al Pe'or: Toward the end of the sefer, as the people are moving closer to Eretz Yisrael, they encounter the nation of Midyan. The people of the two nations mix, and Bnei Yisrael quickly become involved in the worship of the god of the Midyanites, Ba'al Pe'or, and also in sexual immorality with the Midyanites. Ironically, this takes place just after Hashem has protected Bnei Yisrael from the curses of Bil'am the prophet; instead of cursing Bnei Yisrael, Bil'am is forced to sing praises of their faithfulness to Hashem, but before you can turn around, the people are behaving unfaithfully.

In all of these incidents, individuals or the entire nation makes terrible mistakes which lead to "pekida" -- punishment. These incidents are so frequent that they become part of the theme of the sefer.

## **PART II:**

In Part I of this shiur, we traced many of the events of Sefer BeMidbar. We split these events into three different categories of "pekida," since Sefer BeMidbar is the Humash Ha-Pekudim. In this sefer, "pekida" has three primary meanings: counting/listing, appointing, and punishment.

In this part of the shiur, we will first present a number of examples of how the word P-K-D is used in the sefer in these three different ways, and then we will discuss how the three themes of pekida interact with one another to produce the coherent literary unit we call a "sefer."

### **P-K-D: SOME EXAMPLES:**

The word P-K-D appears in various forms in Sefer BeMidbar 96 times (Shemot runs a distant second place, with fewer than 20 "P-K-D"'s. Many of these instances (the great majority) are in contexts in which counting or listing takes place. In order to demonstrate the use of P-K-D in this "counting" sense but not to belabor the point, I will cite just one example:

BeMidbar 1:19 -- . . . Just as Hashem commanded Moshe, he counted (P-K-D) them in the Sinai Desert.

Somewhat less frequently, we find P-K-D used to describe the appointment of an individual or group to a particular position or function. Some examples:

BeMidbar 1:50 -- "Appoint (P-K-D) the Leviyim over the Tabernacle of Testimony and over all its utensils and all that belongs to it . . . ."

BeMidbar 3:32 -- The head of the princes of Levi was Elazar, son of Aharon, the kohen, appointed over (P-K-D) the guards of the watch of the holy.

BeMidbar 3:36 -- The appointed task (P-K-D) of the children of Merari was the boards of the Tabernacle, its bars, pillars, and sockets, all of its utensils....

BeMidbar 27:16 -- "Let Hashem, God of the spirit of all flesh, appoint (P-K-D) a leader over the congregation."

Finally, our last P-K-D category is that of punishment. Certainly, not every punishment in the sefer is described as a pekida, but I have found it useful to organize the themes of the sefer around this root because the word is used in these ways in the sefer and because, as we will see, the intimate interactions of these three themes, all traceable to this one root, produce the unique character of the sefer. Some examples of this last category:

BeMidbar 14:18 -- Hashem, slow to anger and great in kindness, forgiving sin and transgression, but who will not simply forgive, who visits (P-K-D) the sins of the fathers on the children . . . .

BeMidbar 14:29 -- "In this desert will your carcasses fall, all of your countings (P-K-D) according to all of your numbers, from age twenty and up . . . ." [This example will be explained further.]

BeMidbar 16:29 -- "If like the deaths of all men do these men perish, and if the visitation (P-K-D) of all men is visited (P-K-D) upon them, then [you will know that] Hashem did not send me."

#### **THE THEMES OF THE HUMASH HA-PEKKUDIM:**

Why is it important for the Torah to tell us all of these details about the various countings, listings, and appointments? Since our assumption in reading Tanakh is that it is written for its meaning to all generations, why do we care how many soldiers there were in the shevet of Naftali over 3,000 years ago in the desert? Why is it important for the Torah to painstakingly repeat -- 12 times! -- the gifts of the Nesi'im? Do we really need to know how many male Leviyim there were from one month old and up, and also how many Leviyim there were from 25 years old and up? Why does the Torah tell us -- more than once -- all the details of how the degalim were set up, who were the military commanders, and how many soldiers they each commanded? How many times, after all, does the Torah need to repeat to us the list of the Nesi'im?

Second, whatever the significance of these numbers and lists, what do they have to do with all of the disasters and punishments with which the sefer is so occupied?

It seems to me that two of the aspects of P-K-D are in tension with the third aspect: the P-K-D of counting and the P-K-D of appointing stand together in contrast with the P-K-D of punishment. More fundamentally, the former two represent a vision which conflicts with the vision represented by the latter.

The Humash Ha-Pekudim presents Hashem's grand plan for the entrance of Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael. These former slaves -- miraculously rescued from the death and despair of Egypt, presented with the Torah amid flashes of lightning and peals of thunder -- are now ready to march triumphantly on to their land, trumpets blaring, ready to scatter their enemies with the help of Hashem's sure hand. Soldiers are numbered and formed into battle units, military leaders appointed, each shevet assigned a specific place in the symmetrical formation of the nation surrounding its crown jewel, the Mishkan. Within the army's protective circle nestles the Levite circle, again with each family assigned to a particular task and position in the traveling camp. With the Kohanim directing, the Leviyim dismantle the Mishkan, shoulder the Aron and other Kelim, and prepare to transport the movable Temple. The silver trumpets blast a signal, the nation breaks camp, and incredibly, two million people move in unison through the desert in ponderous synchronicity.

The lists and numbers of Sefer BeMidbar seem repetitive only when we expect them to communicate discrete bits of information rather than painting a picture. When we put the entire Sefer into perspective, what appears is a dynamic representation of organization, regimentation, assignation, preparation, and finally transportation. The telos of this vision is clear as well: confident, with roles defined and well understood, this group is on the road home. No obstacle can deter them. This is the vision of Hashem and the vision of Moshe.

But it is not the vision of the people. The people do not see the drama or share the excitement; for them, tomorrow is not filled with promise, but with insecurity. At the time of the enslavement, Egypt had been unbearable, a daily genocide. But in rosy hindsight, Egypt was not only the lap of culinary luxury but also, strangely, a place of security. The people made no choices and bore no responsibility to make decisions; their tasks were thrust upon them, their government provided for them from without. In the desert, they must organize themselves, create their own institutions -- their own judiciary, their own army, their own political structure, their own religious representatives. Hashem guides them in all of these tasks, but ultimately the people are responsible for themselves. As if this were not unfamiliar enough after over 200 years of slavery, their daily bread comes falling down from the heavens; instead of the predictable fish, fruits, and vegetables of Egypt, the people are provided with supernatural food directly from Hashem.

Despite incontrovertible evidence of Hashem's presence among them and of His intention to help them reach their goal (after all, He did split the sea and drown their enemies in it), the people cannot muster the courage to undertake the conquest of the Land and its powerful inhabitants; their insecurity deafens them to assurances that Hashem will help them and amplifies the claims of those who insist that the nation cannot match the power of the Canaanites.

The creation of institutions and the appointment of individuals and groups to various responsibilities becomes for many of the people an opportunity to pursue power struggles and bicker over who deserves honor; those who are blind to the Divine vision behind the counting and appointing impute to those in power -- to Moshe especially -- the same motives which energize them. Throughout the Sefer, Moshe's leadership is challenged by those who want more power than they have; for his part, Moshe is bewildered and eventually angered by these attacks, as he sees his leadership function in the context of the Divine process and not as part of the dynamic of ego-driven self-promotion and political jockeying. A reluctant leader from the first moment of his career, Moshe can hardly believe that others accuse him of promoting himself to a position he tried so hard to decline.

In this sense, Sefer BeMidbar is a tragic story of the clash of two visions. The clash between the grand, orderly beauty of P-K-D/counting/appointing and the petty, chaotic P-K-D/punishment produce a Sefer which opens with energy, momentum, and promise, but ultimately delivers death and disappointment. As Hashem says when the people accept the spies' evaluation that they cannot conquer the land, "In this desert will your carcasses fall, all of your countings (P-K-D) according to all of your numbers, from age twenty and up . . . ." All of the pekudim, all of the countings and appointments which have been such a focus of this Sefer, all of that will crumble in the desert and come to nothing. All of the planning, all of the assignations of leaders and tasks, all of it is ultimately meaningless and wasted; all of these pekudim are trampled by the pekida of punishment. In this sense, the vision of the people wins out over the vision of Hashem. They refuse (or are unable) to abandon their position, and eventually Hashem gives up on them and pins His 'hopes' on their children, the next generation. For this reason, there is another great counting at the end of the sefer, where the Torah pointedly notes that no one included in the second counting had been counted in the first counting. That entire generation dies; their count amounts to zero. The new generation, unbound by the limitations of their parents, is counted again, undergoing the same process of the setting up of institutions and structures so that they, this time successfully, can enter the land.

Besides being a tragic Sefer, the Humash Ha-Pekudim is also an ironic Sefer: we accompany emancipated slaves whose most plaintive refrain is, "Too bad we left slavery"; we learn of mitzvot introduced by the phrase, "When you get to the Land I am giving to you," when the recipients of these mitzvot already know they will die in this desert and will never see the Land at all; the Leviyim enjoy the status of

being raised to holiness above the rest of the nation in an elaborate public ceremony and are assigned to the caretaking of the Mishkan, but they are the same people who, led by Korah, challenge Moshe and Aharon: "Why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?"; the Nesi'im, constantly in the spotlight in our Sefer, appointed to positions of responsibility and leadership, are the very same people who participate in the greatest catastrophes of the Sefer: the Torah notes that Korah's supporters are "nesi'im," as are the meraglim (spies), as is Zimri ben Salu, the man who publicly fornicates with a woman from the nation of Midyan; Moshe's leadership, attacked by Korah and his supporters, by the entire nation's frequent angry complaints ("Why did you take us out of Egypt?"), and even by Miryam and Aharon, is something Moshe never wanted at all. He tried unsuccessfully in Sefer Shemot to resist Hashem's command that he lead the people, and in our Sefer, Moshe repeatedly demonstrates great willingness to share his power with others: he wistfully wishes that all of the people could be prophets (not just himself), he willingly grants a portion of his authority to the seventy elders, he is described as an "exceedingly humble" man who did not bother to respond to Miryam's carping at him and indeed seems unperturbed by it (it is Hashem who is furious with Miryam; Moshe intercedes and asks Hashem to heal her of her tzara'at); Bil'am, the sorcerer hired to curse Bnei Yisrael, is forced by Hashem to sing their praises: "[Hashem] sees no evil in Ya'akov, no bad in Israel . . .," but the very next perek reports that the God-beloved nation has become entrenched in the worship of the idol Ba'al Pe'or and in sexual immorality with the Midyanites.

Above all, the greatest irony of the Sefer is the clash of visions: Hashem and Moshe attempt to build a grand, beautiful organization to accomplish transcendent goals, but the people remain interested in water, tasty and varied food (not just manna every day!), and power politics.

Sefer BeMidbar is a Sefer of missed opportunities. It sets the stage for Sefer Devarim, where Moshe reviews these failures for the benefit of the second generation, attempting to inoculate them against these mistakes, and exhorts them to learn from the limitations of their parents.

Shabbat Shalom