

## Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar 5774

יום ירושלים

**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
*It Is Always Our Fault*

Part of the fallout from the ill-starred negotiations that recently ended in failure is that somehow blame for this failure cannot be laid at the door of the facilitator, the American State Department and its Secretary of State, but rather it must be assigned to the participants themselves. Originally, President Obama seemed to be even-handed in blaming both participants for the failure of this fool's errand, but as the recent interviews with "senior" American officials have indicated, it is now clear that Israel is to be held to be at fault for the failed negotiations.

This follows the pattern of the past decades when, since Oslo and Wye, Israel has been unable to fulfill the escalating expectations and demands of the Palestinian Authority. It is easy to see why Israel was blamed for the failure of the talks. Placing the blame on the Palestinian side would have been a tacit admission that, from the onset, the talks had no chance of success – a fact that certainly would again emphasize the ineptness of American foreign policy in this past decade.

So it was the refusal of Israel to release the last batch of terrorist murderers and the announcement that it was going to continue building new housing mainly in the "occupied" Jerusalem area – Gilo, Ramat Shlomo, Ramat Eshkol, Maaleh Adumin, Gush Etzion, etc. – that was the root cause of the failure of the talks. This is another one of the many fairy tales that completely becloud the truths of the Middle East in today's wonder world.

Everyone knows what will remain Jewish property no matter if and when a "final" agreement is reached and that is where Israel is building. But someone must be blamed for the failure of the talks so it might as well be Israel.

A long time ago – forty years ago to be exact – I was the head of the OU Kashrut Division and I was flying from New York to Los Angeles on "business" matters but not in business class. Next to me – I was naturally in the middle seat – was an apparently very high-powered business woman who was working furiously on the spread sheets she laid out before her on the seat tray. This was the period of time in world affairs after the Yom Kippur War when the Arab oil boycott had greatly inconvenienced ordinary Americans and was inhibiting their ability to drive their automobiles.

After a period of time, without any further introduction or preparatory remarks, she turned to me and said curtly "You know that all of this is your fault!" I was naturally somewhat taken aback by this outburst and by the tone of voice employed by this woman, but somehow I gathered myself and I calmly responded to her: "No, madam, it may be because of me. But it is not my fault!" There is no doubt that the Lord has riled up the whole Middle East because of us. But it is not our fault. We are not to be arbitrarily blamed for the mistakes and stubbornness of others.

What the consequences of the failure of the recent talks will be is certainly not known now. The new shotgun marriage of Hamas and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority has yet to pass the test of time and problems. Will the Palestinians declare a state at the UN? And if so, so what? Will there be an attempt to mount a new wave of violence against Jews living in Israel, God forbid? Will Israel continue to be labeled as an apartheid state while no Jew is allowed into Saudi Arabia or even Ramallah? Again, if so, so what?

This is the unknown future that faces us. We can only admit that the future is certainly inscrutable. But the future has always been one of mystery and unexpected events and unimaginable results. And, only the past can help us understand the present and prepare us to face the unknown future. If after a century of Arab violence against Jews in the Land of Israel we still don't understand their intentions towards us, then we are truly dense.

What we can hope for, and in fact what we should insist upon, is a change in the mindset of our neighbors, a willingness to recognize that Israel is

here to stay and will engage in legitimate negotiations that will have a chance to succeed and produce a viable settlement. That agreement will not only satisfy each side but will be one that both sides will be able to live with. Until then we can only wait and keep on building.  
Shabat shalom

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**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
*Bamidbar*

The count of the Jewish people as it appears in this week's parsha is always a difficult issue to appreciate and understand. What are we to learn from all of the detailed descriptions and seemingly exact numbers? The general lesson that every Jew counts – and is to be counted, is most apparent. But that lesson can be learned from a much more concise précis of the population of the Jews than the long description that appears in the parsha.

I think that the messenger here is itself the message. By that I mean that the Torah wishes to express its relationship to the Jewish people simply by dwelling on an "unnecessary" lengthy detailed counting of its numbers. For those with whom we have a loving relationship, there are no unnecessary or superfluous acts or gestures. The rabbis compare this type of relationship, in a wry way, to one counting one's money.

For instance, the criterion for the speed and intensity of reciting the words of prayer is the rate of speed that one would use in counting valuable coins. The care in counting is itself the expression of the underlying attachment to what is being counted. I always note that people leaving the ATM cash dispenser invariably check the bills that they have received. This is not only an act of prudence; it is an act of affection and importance. So the count of the Jews in the parsha, even in its detail and length, is logical and makes perfect sense.

Another understanding of this issue can be found in the description of the counters themselves and not only in the description of the counted ones. Moshe, Aharon, Elazar and Itamar are the leaders of the Jewish people. They are responsible for the physical and spiritual welfare of the Jewish people in its totality. Part of their task is to somehow know all of their millions of constituents – to have some sort of relationship and affinity to each individual Jew.

The leaders of Israel always saw themselves as being parents of all Jews. Some Jews crave affection and others need very tough love. The enormous diversity – twelve different tribes that are counted separately before being united in one total number of the whole people – of the Jewish people, is emphasized by the sheer individual counting of them.

The responsibility for the fate of the Jewish people is a heavy burden for leaders to bear. But it is an unavoidable one that automatically comes with the posts of leadership. And the counters of the Jewish people are themselves the leaders of the people, aware at all times that the people rely upon their leadership and wisdom. And they must also be aware that each of those counted are somehow to be accommodated in their needs and development.

So counting the Jewish people are not empty numbers to the leaders of Israel, but rather the list of challenges and opportunities presented before them. May both the counters and the counted of Israel in our day be great in numbers, spirit and accomplishments.

Shabat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bamidbar**  
*For the week ending 24 May 2014 / 24 Iyyar 5774*  
**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**  
**Insights**  
***Only By Being One Can We Reveal The One Being***

***"The children of Israel shall camp, every man at his camp and every man at his banner..." (1:52)***

The Jewish People can only reach their ultimate purpose through unity. Only through being One can G-d's Presence be revealed in the world, as it says in the liturgy of the Shabbat Afternoon prayer: "You are One and Your Name is One, and who is like Your People, Yisrael, One Nation in the Land?"

When Yisrael is one, then G-d's Name is One – meaning that the world perceives that there is only One Power in existence.

Why then did G-d form the Jewish People into twelve shevatim (tribes)? Why didn't He create the Jewish People as a single entity? The very word "tribe" in English implies sectarianism; turf wars, intolerance – the very opposite of unity.

It's a common misconception that Judaism requires slavish uniformity. Nothing could be further from the truth. If G-d wanted us to be all the same, then why did he create us so different?

Klal Yisrael, the union of the Jewish People as an entity, can only be achieved by each one of us fulfilling our individual potential as human beings and Jews.

When the media show helicopter shots of a sea of several hundred thousand black hats, there is an impression that being religious means being an automaton, being just another faceless face in the crowd.

In fact, the only way we can be One is to be like the tribes in the desert: separate, individual but united by the Holy Ark – the Torah - that sat in the midst of the camp.

In the Future World, our Sages teach us, the righteous will dance in a circle and G-d will sit in the middle. Each one will be 180 degrees from each other – diametrically opposed - but they will all be equidistant from G-d.

Sources: Based on Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch, zatzal, and Rabbi Zev Leff, shlita

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### **Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Bamidbari**

***Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael, according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by number of the names. (1:2)***

What is the significance of the counting of the people by their names? Ramban explains this practically. It was a great honor to be presented before Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen and state one's name as a form of introduction. In his commentary to Sefer Shemos 1:1, Sforno explains the delineation of the individual names of each of the sons of Yaakov Avinu, while the names of the rest of the seventy members of the family which descended to Egypt are not detailed. Those who are mentioned were worthy to be named, for each one was worthy of his name, which reflects the stature and character of the individual. These men, the Shivtei Kah, Tribes of Hashem, were a beacon of light throughout their lifetime, assuring that their generation did not become degraded. After their demise, however, even those among their children who were righteous were not equally as important and worthy in the eyes of G-d and man.

Sforno underscores the significance of a man's name, as the indicator of his stature, an index to his very essence and character. This is reflected in the fact that the Torah considers him worthy of honorable mention in the Torah. Only certain names were carried by Aharon or recorded on his vestments. Those who were elevated above their brethren were considered worthy to have their names recorded for posterity. At this point in history, a person's name was Divinely inspired to indicate his personal virtues. Thirty-nine years later, when the nation crossed the Jordan River on their way into the Promised Land, their names were not recorded. The situation had changed. The Divine component in each name was no longer significant.

Perhaps we can take this idea a bit further. When Yaakov descended to Egypt with his family of seventy souls, the Torah listed their names. Now,

as Sefer Shemos begins, these seventy souls are no longer the same distinguished family that had come to the land. The Patriarchal family of yesterday has been transformed into the Jewish slaves of today. If one were to search for the descendants of this noble family, he would be hard put to locate them amidst the hierarchy of Egyptian nobility. Today they were menial slaves, subject to cruel persecution and brutal affliction. Only one thing had not changed: their names. They still considered themselves the Shivtei Kah. Perhaps in the eyes of the Egyptian masses they might have been viewed as downtrodden slaves. In their eyes, they retained the "names" of nobility. A person is not made into a slave. He does it to himself. A master can refer to his worker as his slave, but, if in the mind of the worker, he is not a slave - then he is not a slave.

A prisoner becomes a prisoner when his mind becomes incarcerated. They can lock up one's body, but his mind can soar in the heavens. What has maintained our people throughout thousands of years of degradation, suffering and persecution has been our ability to maintain our names. We are Yehudim, a term which represents our aspirations. We are Bnei Yisrael, a name which denotes strength. We are Bnei Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, names which conjure up images of spiritual commitment to the point of self-sacrifice. The world out there might call us by other names. The only name which really matters is the name by which we call ourselves.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, was a Torah scholar, teacher and tzaddik, a wholly righteous person. Yet, he distinguished himself in his lifetime as "the father of the prisoners," as well as the primary address for the downtrodden and the needy. He did not have to do this. He could have easily devoted his life to teaching Torah and earning himself a reputation as a distinguished Torah scholar. He chose this "name" for himself, because he was a man filled with exceptional humility and extraordinary love for all Jews. His *raison d'etre* was to alleviate the pain and suffering of a fellow Jew. He had the uncanny ability to relate to the entire spectrum of the social and religious gamut of the Jewish people, regardless of religious orientation. A Jew felt comfortable with Rav Aryeh. He knew how to penetrate the inner chambers of their hearts, and he was able to reach beneath the many levels of dross which covered their souls. He took an interest in their lives and, by doing this, gave them the courage to overcome their challenges.

A man chooses his own name. The goals and objectives he sets for himself in life determine how he will be identified. Will it be Mr., Rabbi, Rav, Horav, HaGaon, Hatzaddik? All of these titles depend on the course that he chooses for himself. These are the names by which he perceives himself. They are important, but not nearly as significant as the name/title by which people perceive him.

In a Tzaddik in our Time, the biography of Rav Aryeh Levin, the author makes what I feel is a profound and telling statement. He writes: "This was 'Reb Aryeh.' No other titles were necessary. In Yerushalayim, when you mentioned 'Reb Aryeh,' everyone knew you meant the man of kindly piety, Rav Aryeh Levin." I feel this is the greatest accolade one can earn: to be recognized by his own name.

Let us look back in history at our greatest gedolim, Torah giants. It was not necessary to preface their names with a long list of honorary titles. When the name Rav Aharon was mentioned, one immediately knew this was the Rosh Yeshiva par excellence; Rav Moshe was the posek hador, the generation's halachic decisor; Rav Yaakov was the chacham, wise man, of the generation; and the list goes on. Great people are acknowledged by their accomplishments, which, in turn, becomes the essence of their names. How fortunate is one to be known simply by his name.

As in all good things, there is always a flipside. A name symbolizes an aspiration - the parent's hope that his child will vaks ois, grow up, into something special. For some people, this can be a heavy yoke, a weight around their neck, whose demands are too hard to meet. I say this as a result of a poignant episode I recently read. It was part of an exceptionally moving, beautifully crafted tribute which was written by Horav Aharon Lopiansky, Shlita, to his father. Amongst the many vignettes and insights into his father's exceptional character, the author relates an incident which took place when he was a young boy, and his father's reaction to the incident.

Rav Lopiansky's father was a talmid, student, of the famous Slabodka Yeshivah, a yeshivah which aside from focusing on academic excellence, underscored gadlus ha'adam, the greatness of man. His father was more than a student. He reflected Slabodka in his every demeanor. Slabodka coursed through his veins, as we shall see from the following episode.

They were a lively group of ten year old boys, who attended shul with their fathers. Davening was very long, so the children searched for "other" things to do. One of their favorite pastimes was chasing a wretched, homeless man who used the shul's furnace room as his "apartment." Like many others like him, his clothing smelled, he was slightly unhinged and he survived on the handouts that kind people gave him. The children would delight in rousing his ire and running away as he hurled epithets after them.

One day, Rav Lopiansky's father noticed this, and he called his son over. No angry yelling, no loud rebuke - just soft and gentle words. "You see that man?" his father asked. "He was born a cute little baby whose mother stroked him lovingly. She cooed to him and delighted when he cooed back and smiled at her. His father secretly hoped that he would achieve a position and stature in life which he himself, regrettably did not. He himself began dreaming and fantasizing about what he would be one day. He had brothers and sisters who played and fought with him as all siblings do.

"And now look at what has become of him. Is it not a tragedy? Should not one be moved to tears at what happened to him? And you are compounding the tragedy by taking a tzelem Elokim, a person who was created in Hashem's Image, and making 'dirt' out of him." With these words his father softly concluded his rebuke.

I do not know how anyone can read this account and not be moved by this new perspective on perceiving people. Parents give a name filled with aspirations. It does not always work out. We have met all the "glitches" in the system. Every community is graced with them. Perhaps now, for a change, we will view them in a different light.

***And they established their genealogy according to their families, according to the household of their fathers. (1:18)***

The count was carried out according to tribe. Thus, it was required for everyone to establish his tribal lineage, either by written documentation or by the testimony of witnesses. Lineage was important in order to determine exactly where each individual belonged. Pedigree, however, should not become the barometer for judging people, for promoting success, for determining an individual's potential or position. Success is earned; it is an achievement for which one toils, for which one must be personally worthy. "Surprisingly," there are people who do not have yichus, exceptional pedigree. They are simple, regular, common people, who do what is required of them and serve Hashem with temimus, wholesomeness, perfection. They do not warrant articles in the paper; when their children become engaged, they do not have pages of advertisements congratulating the heralded event. They live and die, and no one reports about them. They are as valuable to Hashem Yisborach, however, as the most "decorated" Jews. Mi k'amacha Yisrael? "Who is like Your nation, Yisrael?" These are the amcha, the common Jew, who is so much more significant than the false accolades received by the "others."

I write this on Parashas Bamidbar, because I just read a beautifully crafted vignette by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg, who writes a poignant appreciation of Count Valentin Potocki, or - as we know him - the Ger Tzedek, righteous convert, of Vilna, Avraham ben Avraham. I was, of course, moved by his masterful rendering and beautifully worded tribute to this enormously, spiritually inspiring human being. There is something that he adds which inspired me to include it in Peninim for Parashas Bamidbar, the Shabbos which usually precedes Shavuus.

Rav Avraham ben Avraham, zl, was burned at the stake, in a brutally horrific death, on the second day of Shavuus. It was 1749. His death took place on the day that we recite Yizkor, the memorial prayer for our loved ones who are no longer with us. Consequently, on every Shavuus, a separate Yizkor was recited in the main shul in Vilna for this kadosh, holy neshamah.

You see, Rav Avraham ben Avraham was a ger who had not married. Thus, he had no parents, no wife, no children. He was all alone in the world - like so many people that we know and tend to ignore. There was no one to recite Yizkor for him, so the residents of Vilna did - until the Nazis put an end to Yizkor and Vilna in 1941.

One would assume that like so many other sacred traditions that have fallen into oblivion, remembering Rav Avraham ben Avraham would follow suit. Rabbi Goldberg informs his readers that, in Congregation Ahavas Yisrael in Passaic, NJ, Rabbi Ron Eisenman reinstated the tradition. Now that the memory of the righteous convert has been taken care of, we should address the many other "faceless" and "nameless" people all around us, whom we forget about, simply because they have no pedigree to impose upon our consciences.

***Bnei Yisrael shall encamp, every man at his camp and every man at his banner. (1:52)***

The Torah goes into a lengthy discourse concerning the significance and specific order of the degalim, flags/banners, under which each tribe encamped. The people are admonished concerning their adherence towards honoring the protocols and parameters of the degalim. Each tribe was to remain within the boundary of his area of encampment as signified by his banner. Indeed, we find earlier, in Parashas Emor (Vayikra 24:10), that the blasphemer's original complaint was based upon the fact that he was not permitted to pitch his tent within the area designated for the Tribe of Dan. Likewise, we find specific protocols within the Bais Hamikdash, whereby a Levi, whose designated function was to sing, was not permitted to trade jobs and take care of opening and closing the doors. Is it so terrible? After all, are they not both members of Shevet Levi, each with the same inherent kedushah, sanctity? Is it so bad if one Levi helps the other one to perform his function? Is it the end of the world if the Levi who sings helps his cousin close the doors?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, explains that, when the Torah demands a specific seder, order, it must be adhered to, because seder is the foundation of discipline. Without organization and order, peace cannot reign. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, would note that order is the basis of shalom, peace, because true peace means that everyone is in his place, performing his designated function, thus not encroaching upon his fellow - an action which creates havoc.

Order applies to all of man's actions - not only in one's involvement with others, but even in one's personal life. He must not permit his tasks to impinge upon each other. When one actively overlaps onto another activity - neither one is done well. All of one's belongings must have their proper place. When one's seder is jumbled, his thought process will ultimately follow. One whose thoughts are disorganized does not function well as a ben Torah. Sloppy and careless action reflects a lack of constancy of thought and unremitting attention. Ultimately, they all mesh together: calm, organized, orderly, disciplined - a well-oiled, perfectly working, harmoni

zed person. To break a seder is to impede growth and development and succeed in producing a mediocre, chaotic and even disturbed product. Rav Yeruchem reflects on his years in Kelm, studying under the individual who exemplified seder, the Alter, zl, Horav Simcha Zissel Broide. Every chair was required to be in its place. To leave a chair lying around was a grave infraction, because it reflected a deeper and often serious pathology. The Mashgiach writes that he inherited a garment that appeared to be brand new from his revered Rebbe. It was, in fact, thirty years old. The creases were impeccable, the cloth clean and not worn out.

Rav Simcha Zissel never looked sideways because it was unnecessary. Indeed, in Kelm, if a person looked sideways, it was shameful. Every movement was controlled; no movement was wasted. If the Alter found a compelling reason for turning his head, he would turn his entire body - never just his eyes. We are used to adjusting our hat on our heads constantly. The Alter put on his hat, and it stayed in place all day.

Rav Simcha Zissel compared seder to a chain to which a diamond was attached. Clearly, the chain's value is insignificant in relation to the diamond. If, however, the chain breaks, the diamond is lost. Seder guards

over every good middah, character trait, over every good action. It preserves and enhances it. One begins his daily seder at the designated time and concludes it the same way. When seder is completed, the appointed hour for seder's end has struck; seder is over - even if one is in the midst of a sentence. The Alter related that Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, was as demanding about the end of the seder as he was concerning its commencement. If seder ended between the words amar - and Rava (referring to the Amora Rava's statement: Amar Rava - Rava says), one should stop and continue with the next word (Rava) when the next seder starts. No excuse would suffice for missing a seder. Unlike our sedarim, the Alter's seder was eight hours long - without any stop! He was not a well person; yet, he permitted himself only three hours of sleep at night and one-half hour during the day.

Nature runs on a disciplined order. If anything is out of sync, it can cause turmoil and destruction. The sun's distance from earth may not change; it would either be freezing or we will suffocate from the heat. If the sun were to rise a few minutes early or late, it would be a recipe for disaster. We now understand why the Torah is so demanding concerning each tribe's placement under his designated banner, and why the Levi who is supposed to sing is culpable of the death penalty if he is out of place.

***Count the sons of Levi according to their father's household... every male from one month of age and up shall you count them. Moshe counted them according to the word of Hashem. (3:15,16)***

Perhaps the infants of Shevet Levi were precocious, but they certainly did not perform the service in the Sanctuary at the age of thirty-days old. Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains that the members of other tribes were occupied with guarding and working the land. Thus, they were unable to devote as much time to their children's education as were the Leviim. Therefore, they were counted when they reached the age of twenty years. When they were still young, it was difficult to know if they would achieve the spiritual level required to represent the nation. At age twenty, the way in which they leaned was discernible. Shevet Levi grew up in homes that were replete with kedushah, sanctity. From day one, the suckling babies were imbued with a proclivity towards serving Hashem with all of their hearts and souls. Thus, they were counted as soon as they became viable human beings.

Rav Moshe concludes that, if the parents are bnei Torah, observant Jews devoted wholly to Torah ascendancy, who strive to grow from strength to strength in Hashem's service; if Torah is their life, then it is possible to say that from birth the child will follow in their ways. Children gravitate towards the values they perceive in their home. When children grow up in a home in which duplicity is acceptable, in which spiritual hypocrisy is not frowned upon - it will be reflected in the children. Conversely, when children sense their parents' commitment, devotion and sacrifice for Torah observance - it, too, will be reflected and, quite possibly, enhanced.

Chazal point out the difficulty for Moshe Rabbeinu in executing this census. It is not as if the infants could stand outside of their parents' tent and convey their pedigree and other vital information. For Moshe to enter the Levite tents to count the suckling babies would have been inappropriate. Chazal note Moshe's dialogue with Hashem. "How can I enter the tents to count the infants?" Moshe asked. Hashem replied, "You do yours, and I will do Mine." Moshe went to the tent and presented himself outside of it. Hashem preceded him, and a Heavenly Voice proclaimed the number of babies in the tent. Why was it necessary to do it this way? Why did Moshe have to stand outside while Hashem gave him the count? Since it was Hashem Who was doing the counting, Moshe could have sat in his "office" and received the total from Hashem.

Hashem was teaching Moshe an important principle in Jewish service: "You do yours, and I will do Mine." We must not refrain from performing a mitzvah because it appears difficult or because the conditions surrounding it seem precarious. Our function is to do, to make the attempt. If we fall flat on our face - at least we have made the attempt. When we refuse to make the attempt, we are indicating that we really do not want to do it.

It is all about attitude. One either wants to perform the mitzvah, or he does not. If he wants to, he will do it, and if Hashem wants him to succeed, he will. Otherwise, he will sit back and conjure up all kinds of excuses for his failure to carry out the mitzvah. In the end result, it all amounts to one reason: he did not really want to do it.

When Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, came to America, he was told by many that, in a land where materialism and physicality dominated the mindset of people, he had absolutely no chance of establishing a Lithuanian type yeshivah where Torah was studied lishmah, for its sake, with no other ulterior motives, off the ground - let alone have it succeed and impact the country. Rav Aharon paid no heed to the doomsayers and established Beth Medrash Govoha, the yeshivah, which, amongst a few others, transformed the spiritual landscape of America.

The Alter, zl, m'Novorodok was wont to say, "The notion of whether I can achieve the goal never enters my mind; the only question I ever have is whether it is necessary." If something is required, if it has to be done, it is done. Nothing stands in the way of one's will and determination. The Toldos Yaakov Yosef says, "One who claims that he is unable to do something, it is because he does not want to do it. Had he wanted to, he would have been able." If one believes in Hashem, he will ultimately also believe in himself. Our faith in the Almighty carries us through the most difficult times, the most compelling challenges. Horav Ezriel Tauber writes about his parents' faith, a faith which sustained them throughout the war years. Prior to World War II, the family resided in Pressburg, Hungary. The Germans entered Hungary in 1940, and his family moved to Czechoslovakia until 1942, when they returned to Hungary, hoping that the situation had become more bearable. In 1944, it all came to an end, as the Germans overran the country and sent the survivors to the death camps. During the war years, Rav Tauber's mother gave birth to three sons. Indeed, on the Friday night in 1944 when the family was transported to Auschwitz, his mother was pregnant with his sister!

Understandably, people thought that she had lost her mind. The ghetto was neither conducive to pregnancy, nor was it a healthy place to raise infants and children. Yet, this saintly woman did what was necessary to protect her family. As they hid in bombed out buildings and scrounged for morsels of food, she would say, "We are Jews. And, as such, we must do what is demanded of us. We will do ours - Hashem will do His." This was her maxim, a belief which guided her through the war, as she gave birth and raised four more children. While his sister did not survive the war, his mother and brothers did. Rav Tauber once asked his mother about her thoughts during the war: "Did you really think that we would survive the war? Why were you determined to increase your family at a time when you were acutely aware that people were dying, and that the chance that an infant would sur-

vive was a dream? Where did you conjure up the strength of faith to have children, when everyone else worried about locating the next morsel of food?" His mother replied, "We are Yehudim; we believe in Techiyaas HaMeiseim, the Resurrection of the Dead. A child that is born is not only here for olam hazeh, this world. He remains a child la'netzach, for eternity! I have done what is expected of me. It is up to Hashem to do as He sees fit."

Horav Moshe Shapiro, Shlita, employs a similar concept in explaining the mitzvah of Sefiras HaOmer, counting of the Omer. The Torah says, Tisperu chamishim yom, "You shall count fifty days" (Vayikra 23:16). Veritably, we count forty-nine days/seven weeks. Where does the fiftieth day come into the picture? The Rosh Yeshivah explains that the fifty levels of purity coincide with an equal number of levels of impurity. Klal Yisrael was rushed out of Egypt because they were becoming perilously close to that fiftieth level of tumah, spiritual impurity, from which there is no return. It was necessary that they be expelled immediately from the spiritually corrupt, morally decadent land of Egypt. They were that close to spiritual extinction. Likewise, fifty levels of knowledge correspond to fifty levels of ignorance. We work our way up, rung by rung, until we reach the maximum that man alone can achieve - forty-nine levels - forty-nine days. Hashem tells us to count forty nine days - forty nine levels, because that is all we can attain. We prepare ourselves, however, for that which is

humanely impossible - the fiftieth level. When we make it through the forty-ninth level, Hashem gives us a taste of the fiftieth. We are to do ours; He will do His and take us over the top. וְאַחַלְתָּ וְשָׂבַתָּ - You will eat and be satisfied. One would assume that, if one eats, he will be satiated. What is the blessing? Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, explains that we all have animal desires, the most powerful of which is to satisfy our hunger. Rashi explains that the brachah, blessing, is not concerning how much we eat, but rather, concerning the specific food that we eat. It will not take much food to satisfy our hunger. Our food is so richly endowed with Hashem's blessing that even eating a little will leave us satisfied. We have nutritional needs, and we have basic desires. The blessing is that once one has filled his body's nutritional requirements, he will no longer be hungry. He will have satiated his desire to eat more. This is alluded to in the pasuk in Tehillim 34:10, Yiru es Hashem kedoshav ki ein machsor liyireiav, "Fear G-d you, His holy ones, because those who fear Him lack nothing." Kedoshav refers to those who sanctify themselves by abstaining even from those activities/actions/behaviors which are permissible. They limit their indulgence even in areas where permission has been granted to indulge. These holy ones control themselves. Thus, one who curbs his appetite as an exercise in self-control is called a kadosh. This attitude generates a deeper sense of yiraas Shomayim, Heavenly fear. In turn, the individual will lack nothing, because Hashem will bless his food.

Sponsored in memory of Mrs. Seliga Ahuva (Schur) Mandelbaum Seliga Ahuva bas Harav Daniel a"h 26 Iyar 5751 - by her family HoRav Doniel æ"i & Shoshana Schur

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**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)  
Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column**

***Parshat Bamidbar :: My Teacher, My Father***

It was November, 1938. Dark clouds were gathering over all of Europe, and particularly over the Jewish communities in countries like Poland and Lithuania. Although few foresaw the horrific extent of the Holocaust that lay ahead, everyone knew that those communities were in very grave danger.

One man, a teacher and leader of those communities, found himself in the United States at that auspicious moment. He was preparing to return to his responsibilities back home in Eastern Europe, particularly to return to his students at the yeshiva he led there.

His friends and supporters in the United States pleaded with him not to return. I personally was privileged to know one of those friends, Mr. Charles Fogel, who implored this leader to remain in the safety of the United States. He steadfastly refused. "I belong with my talmidim, with my disciples in the yeshiva," he insisted.

This leader's name was Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, himself the foremost disciple of the Chofetz Chaim, the great sage of pre-World War II Europe, with whom you, dear reader, may be familiar from previous editions of Person in the Parsha. Rav Elchonon, as he was known to his many followers, already had many accomplishments to his credit, including several major published works and commentaries on the Talmud.

But Rav Elchonon's core pride and joy was the yeshiva he created for early teenage youngsters, preparatory to their going on to higher institutes of Jewish learning. The yeshiva was known by the name of the town in which it was located, Baranovitch.

Rav Elchonon insisted upon leaving the safe haven in which he then found himself in order to return to that yeshiva and to those youngsters. He said, "I am their father, and they are my children. A father does not abandon his children."

What was the source of Rav Elchonon's strong feelings? He had children of his own, some of whom were lost in the Holocaust, and some of whom survived to become teachers and leaders of a future generation. Why was he convinced that the students of his yeshiva were no less children of his than the ones who were his real offspring?

The answer to these questions is to be found in this week's Torah portion, Bamidbar. I note, parenthetically, that with this week's column I begin my third year of writing Person in the Parsha. I began submitting these weekly

essays exactly two years ago this week, and I thank all of you for following this column, for your constructive feedback, and for sharing my ideas with others, especially with your own families around the Shabbos table.

"These are the offspring of Aaron and Moses at the time that the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai..." (Numbers 3:1). A simple verse indeed; so much so that you, my careful reader, might wonder what homiletic spin can be given to so straightforward a verse.

It is here where the words of an even more vigilant reader are so insightful. That "reader," of course, is none other than Rashi, who notes that although our verse promises to list the offspring of both Aaron and Moses, only Aaron's offspring are enumerated. Peruse the rest of the chapter as scrupulously as you wish, and you will find no mention of the descendants of Moses.

Rashi's answer is deep and powerful: Moses taught Torah to the descendants of Aaron. That made them his descendants, no less than the descendants of their biological ancestor, Aaron. In Rashi's own words, "He who teaches Torah to his friend's child is considered by Scripture to be a parent of that child."

Rav Elchonon took those words to heart, and he felt for his distant students, threatened by Hitler's clutches, what a father would feel for his children. Remaining behind in a secure sanctuary while his children were in mortal danger was inconceivable to him and completely out of the question. And so, he returned to Europe and met his ultimate fate in the Kovno ghetto at the hands of the Nazi murderers.

As powerful as this story is, there is a footnote which I was personally privileged to hear from one of those students, my own special teacher, my Rebbe, who survived the Holocaust and eventually did make his way to the United States. His name was Rav Shmuel Dovid Warshavshik, of blessed memory.

When the story of Rav Elchonon's heroism was told, my Rebbe would tell us that as magnificent as that heroism was, it was only part of the story. The rest of the story, Rav Shmuel Dovid would say, was that "we, teenage boys who were stuck alone in Baranovitch, knew that he would return. We were absolutely certain that he would not abandon us and that he would risk his life to rejoin us. We knew he considered himself a father, and we felt that way toward him. We were his children."

This is the secret of a great teacher. This is the root of all authentic pedagogy. The ability to instill in one's students the sense that they are cared for by the teacher no less than children are cared for by their parents. Students who are confident in their teacher's concern for their well-being are capable of the kind of learning that typified the students of those yeshivot of old.

It is a rare teacher that has that gift. Rav Elchonon was one of them. But Rashi assures us that, at least to some extent, "all who teach another person's child Torah" have the gift of becoming a teacher-parent.

I close this story, and this teaching from today's Torah portion, with a reflection on what might seem to be a different topic entirely, the topic of resilience. There is much being written in the contemporary psychological literature about what makes for resilience in people. Why is it that some individuals can endure great trauma, while others fall apart under less severe stress?

One of the surprising findings is that individuals who grow up to be resilient persons were childhood beneficiaries of people in their lives who were not necessarily their parents or close relatives, but rather, mentors or random acquaintances who, even for brief periods, showed them sincere concern and gave them well-intentioned encouragement.

The students of men like Rav Elchonon, and I speak of those who survived the Holocaust, were men of great resilience. The ones who I have been able to interview attribute that resilience to their master and to the sense of his making them feel special.

Few of us, perhaps none of us, are capable of the heroism and sensitivity of Rav Elchonon. But all of us are capable of occasionally approaching a young person in our synagogue or community and giving him or her words of sincere encouragement. You never know. You may be contributing to that young person's eventual resilience to the challenges of his or her future.

Parents must be teachers. Teachers can be parents. We all can be teachers.

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**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)  
Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

### *Leading a Nation of Individuals*

The book of Bamidbar begins with a census of the Israelites. That is why it is known in English as Numbers. What is the significance of this act of counting? And why here at the beginning of the book? Besides which, there have already been two previous censuses of the people and this is the third within the space of a single year. Surely one would have been sufficient. And does counting have anything to do with leadership?

The place to begin is to note what looks like a contradiction. On the one hand Rashi says that the acts of counting in the Torah are gestures of love on the part of God:

Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, G-d counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the sanctuary), He counted them again. (Rashi to Bamidbar 1:1)

When God initiates a census of the Israelites it is to show that He loves them.

On the other hand the Torah is explicit in saying that taking a census of the nation is fraught with risk:

Then G-d said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to G-d a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. (Ex. 30: 11-12).

When, centuries later, King David counted the people, there was Divine anger and 70,000 people died.[1] How can this be if counting is an expression of love?

The answer lies in the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: *se'u et rosh*, literally, "lift the head." This is a strange, circumlocutory expression. Biblical Hebrew contains many verbs meaning "to count": *limnot*, *lifkod*, *lispor*, *lachshov*. Why does the Torah not use these simple words, choosing instead the roundabout expression, "lift the heads" of the people?

The short answer is this. In any census, count or roll-call there is a tendency to focus on the total: the crowd, the multitude, the mass. Here is a nation of 60 million people, or a company with 100,000 employees or a sports crowd of 60,000. Any total tends to value the group or nation as a whole. The larger the total, the stronger is the army, the more popular the team, and the more successful the company.

Counting devalues the individual, and tends to make him or her replaceable. If one soldier dies in battle, another will take his place. If one person leaves the organisation, someone else can be hired to do his or her job.

Notoriously, too, crowds have the effect of tending to make the individual lose his or her independent judgment and follow what others are doing. We call this "herd behaviour," and it sometimes leads to collective madness. In 1841 Charles Mackay published his classic study, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions And The Madness Of Crowds*, which tells of the South Sea Bubble that cost thousands their money in the 1720s, and the tulip mania in Holland when fortunes were spent on single tulip bulbs. The Great Crashes of 1929 and 2008 had the same crowd psychology.

Another great work, Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) showed how crowds exercise a "magnetic influence" that transmutes the behaviour of individuals into a collective "group mind." As he put it, "An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will." People in a crowd become anonymous. Their conscience is silenced. They lose a sense of personal responsibility. Crowds are peculiarly prone to regressive behaviour, primitive reactions and instinctual behaviour. They are easily led by figures who are demagogues, playing on people's fears and sense of victimhood. Such leaders, he said, are "especially recruited from the ranks

of those morbidly nervous excitable half-deranged persons who are bordering on madness,"[2] a remarkable anticipation of Hitler. It is no accident that Le Bon's work was published in France at a time of rising antisemitism and the Dreyfus trial.

Hence the significance of one remarkable feature of Judaism: its principled insistence – like no other civilization before – on the dignity and integrity of the individual. We believe that every human being is in the image and likeness of God. The sages said that every life is like an entire universe.[3] Maimonides says that each of us should see ourselves as if our next act could change the fate of the world.[4] Every dissenting view is carefully recorded in the Mishnah, even if the law is otherwise. Every verse of the Torah is capable, said the sages, of seventy interpretations. No voice, no view, is silenced. Judaism never allows us to lose our individuality in the mass.

There is a wonderful blessing mentioned in the Talmud to be said on seeing 600,000 Israelites together in one place. It is: "Blessed are You, Lord ... who discerns secrets." [5] The Talmud explains that every person is different. We each have different attributes. We all think our own thoughts. Only God can enter the minds of each of us and know what we are thinking, and this is what the blessing refers to. In other words, even in a massive crowd where, to human eyes, faces blur into a mass, God still relates to us as individuals, not as members of a crowd.

That is the meaning of the phrase, "lift the head," used in the context of a census. God tells Moses that there is a danger, when counting a nation, that each individual will feel insignificant. "What am I? What difference can I make? I am only one of millions, a mere wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea-shore, dust on the surface of infinity."

Against that, God tells Moses to lift people's heads by showing that they each count; they matter as individuals. Indeed in Jewish law a *davar she-be-minyan*, something that is counted, sold individually rather than by weight, is never nullified even in a mixture of a thousand or a million others.[6] In Judaism taking a census must always be done in such a way as to signal that we are valued as individuals. We each have unique gifts. There is a contribution only I can bring. To lift someone's head means to show them favour, to recognise them. It is a gesture of love.

There is, however, all the difference in the world between individuality and individualism. Individuality means that I am a unique and valued member of a team. Individualism means that I am not a team player at all. I am interested in myself alone, not the group. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam gave this a famous name, noting that more people than ever in the United States are going ten-pin bowling but fewer than ever are joining teams. He called it "Bowling alone." [7] MIT professor Sherry Turkle calls our age of Twitter, Facebook, and electronic rather than face-to-face friendships, "Alone together." [8] Judaism values individuality, not individualism. As Hillel said, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" [9]

All this has implications for Jewish leadership. We are not in the business of counting numbers. The Jewish people always was small and yet achieved great things. Judaism has a profound mistrust of demagogic leaders who manipulate the emotions of crowds. Moses at the burning bush spoke of his inability to be eloquent. "I am not a man of words." He thought this was a failing in a leader. In fact it was the opposite. Moses did not sway people by his oratory. Rather, he lifted them by his teaching.

A Jewish leader has to respect individuals. He or she must "lift their heads." However large the group you lead, you must always communicate the value you place on everyone, including those others exclude: the widow, the orphan and the stranger. You must never attempt to sway a crowd by appealing to the primitive emotions of fear or hate. You must never ride roughshod over the opinions of others.

It is hard to lead a nation of individuals, but this is the most challenging, empowering, inspiring leadership of all.

[1] 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21.

[2] Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd*, London, Fisher Unwin 1896, 134.

[3] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4: 4.

[4] Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3: 4.

[5] Berakhot 58a.

[6] Betsah 3b.

[7] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[8] Sherry Turkle, *Alone together : why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, New York, Basic Books, 2011.

[9] Mishnah Avot 1: 14.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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## Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Bamidbar

### *The Almighty Employs A Different Set Of "Cause and Effect" Relationships*

The Book of Bamidbar is referred to by the Sages as the "Book of the Counts" [Chomesh haPekudim]. In English it is referred to as the Book of Numbers. This week's parsha contains the first of the two censuses which appear in Sefer Bamidbar. (The second count takes place in Parshas Pinchas.)

I saw an interesting observation cited in the name of Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, zt"l (1895-1974): We are given the breakdown of the population of each Tribe that was part of this census. The population of the Tribe of Dan was 62,700 while the population of the Tribe of Binyomin was 35,400. This means that Dan was almost twice as numerous as Binyomin. In fact the Tribe of Dan was the second most populous of the Tribes. Only the Tribe of Yehudah was larger.

It was perhaps for this reason that the Tribe of Dan acted as the "caboose" – the last tribe at the end of the entire encampment (in travel formation). They were called "the gatherer for all the encampments". When one has a population – including men, women, and children – of over 2 million people that are travelling as part of the Jewish encampment, inevitably there are bound to be many lost objects. The Tribe of Dan picked up all lost objects and served as the Lost and Found department for the rest of the Jewish people.

It is curious that when we look back to Parshas Vayigash which lists the "second generation" of the various Tribes of Israel, Binyomin provided 10 grandsons to Yaakov Avinu and Dan provided only one. Dan's single son, as it so happened, was disabled. Chushim, son of Dan, was deaf.

Every actuarial table and demographic projection would have predicted – at the time the Jews went down to Egypt – that the Tribe of Binyomin would be far larger than the Tribe of Dan by the time of the Exodus. The opposite occurred.

There is a lesson in this. The lesson is that "Many are the thoughts in the heart of man; but G-d's plan is what will occur." [Mishlei 19:21] All these predictions concerning how many children someone will have or how healthy they will be or how wealthy they will be must be taken with a strong grain of salt. These matters are not up to us. They are in the Hand of G-d. If Hashem wants something to happen, He will make it happen; if He doesn't, it won't happen.

The Torah is sending us a message here. Look at what happened with the Tribe of Dan. Look at the great size of this family in Israel that started out with a single disabled child.

The Ramban expresses a similar thought regarding the Tribe of Levi. He writes that Levites were counted from 30 days old, unlike the other tribes who were counted from 20 years of age and above. Based on this change of guidelines for their census, we would have expected that the Tribe of Levi would have the largest number of people. That was not the case. In actuality, they numbered only 22,000. Even more striking is the fact that from the age 30 and above there were only 8,000 Levites! Why is it, asks the Ramban, that the Tribe of Levi – the Army of Hashem – had so few people? It does not make any sense! We would have expected that this tribe be the most populous and blessed of all the families of Israel.

The Ramban answers that this discrepancy substantiates the teaching of the Medrash Tanchuma that the Tribe of Levi was not included in the Egyptian enslavement and the back breaking labor about which it is written [Shmos 1:12] "the more the Egyptians tortured them, the more they multiplied". Although from a scientific, demographic, perspective the tribe that did not

suffer and was not persecuted in Egypt should have become more populous than the other tribes, it was the Will of G-d that just the reverse occurred. Those segments of the nation that were persecuted were specifically those tribes that were blessed with extraordinary birthrates.

This counter-intuitive result based on Divine Plan and Divine Will is an idea that we encounter throughout the Torah and throughout Jewish history. This is, for example, the lesson of the Sabbatical year. The Torah teaches us to let the land lie fallow during the seventh year of the Shmittah cycle.

What happens if one does not work for a year? He will not have a livelihood! The Master of the Universe commands: "Do not work on the seventh year and you will have more." The Almighty's set of "cause and effect" relationships is not that of the rest of the world.

In Europe, there was a custom that before davening Maariv at the conclusion of Shabbos, people would recite Tehillim. A Jew once walked into shul on a Motzai Shabbos before Maariv and saw one Jew in particular crying his heart out. After Maariv, he went over to this Jew and asked him "Why are you so distressed? Why are you so distraught?" He responded, "The whole week, I work away from home. I come home only on Shabbos. I have a daughter who can't find a shidduch (appropriate marriage partner) because I have no money for her dowry. I get so upset on Shabbos to see the plight of my daughter, when we say Tehillim at the end of Shabbos, I just break down and all my emotions start to flow. The whole week, I am removed from the family and I don't see her anguish, but when I spend the entire Shabbos with her, it hurts me so much that by Motzai Shabbos I have to let it all pour out in the Tehillim."

The second Jew told him: Listen, we have something in common. We both have no money. You have a daughter. I have a son. Let's make a shidduch between our children. So there it was. The two paupers in town made a match between their children. What could we expect would come out from such a couple?

In fact, that couple had four sons, all of whom became illustrious Torah scholars. One of them became the Ketzos haChoshen. A second wrote the work known as the Kuntres haSefeikos. This was from a desperation shidduch because they were too poor to marry anyone else. One never knows "from whence my Help will come" [Tehillim 121:1].

### *The Book of Psalms Reflects the Strength of Its Author's Great-Grandfather*

The Talmud teaches [Bava Basra 91a] that Boaz – the great grandfather of Dovid HaMelech [King David] – made 120 celebrations for his various children. We are taught he had 30 sons and 30 daughters. He married off all 60 children and not only did he make a celebration for the wedding, he made a big celebration for the engagement party as well.

He invited everyone in town to each of these 120 parties – everyone that is except an undistinguished, childless, Jew named Manoach. Manoach eventually became the father of a son who grew up to be the great Shimshon haGibor, leader of the Jewish people.

According to the Gemara, Boaz figured that since Manoach was childless, he would never make any weddings and would not be able to reciprocate. That was why he did not invite him. The Talmud relates that, as apparent punishment, all of Boaz's 60 children predeceased him.

This Gemara is amazingly difficult. Boaz was a righteous person. He was the great grandfather of King David. What does the Talmud mean that he did not invite Manoach because he did not expect to be invited back to the weddings of Manoach's children? Was Boaz, chas v'Shalom, too cheap to add one more couple to his guest list?

The Maharsha provides us with an insight. He writes that in those days, people were so loath to accepting any type of gift from their friends and neighbors that one did not even go to someone's wedding celebration unless he could reciprocate at a later date. Only then would one avoid the stigma of being a "freeloader". Boaz, knowing that Manoach had no children and could not reciprocate, did not invite him. It was not a matter of Boaz being cheap, but rather he wanted to spare Manoach the awkwardness of being invited to a wedding he could not attend without appearing to be a freeloader!

Apparently, Manoach did feel pain that he was not invited and because of the pain that Boaz unintentionally caused Manoach, he buried his own 60 children.

After Boaz lost his 60 children, he also lost his wife. The commentaries tell us that the "commotion in the city" on the day that Naomi and Rus returned to Bais-Lechem [Ruth 1:19] was because the funeral of Boaz's wife was taking place that very day.

Boaz lost his sixty children and then became a widower. What is such a person supposed to do? Conventional wisdom is that he is supposed to roll over and die. What is there to live for? Imagine it! Heaven Forbid!

Boaz did not do that. What did he do? He remarried. He tried to rebuild. He had a child (Oved), who had a child (Yishai), who had a child (Dovid), who became the founder of the Davidic Dynasty.

That ability to not give up in despair, in the face of overwhelming tragedy, is the strength of the book of Tehillim. When Jews are desperate, what do we grab? We grab the book of Psalms, written by this very Dovid HaMelech, the great-grandson of Boaz. Where does the inner strength of Sefer Tehillim come from? It comes from Boaz. Boaz had the ability to cling to hope in the face of tremendous tragedy.

We pick up a Tehillim and read a chapter. We have an affinity for this special volume even when all hope seems lost because we intuitively know who wrote it and we know the story of where he came from. It is the power and the never-give-up-hope attitude of Boaz that infuses the book of Tehillim with the inner dynamism that even when times are desperate, we turn to it as a source of comfort and a source of strength.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD  
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### **Parshat Bamidbar: Nuptial love**

**By Shmuel Rabinowitz**

22/05/2014

Last week, we completed the Book of Leviticus, also called "Torat Hakohanim" (the Torah of the Priests), due to its many commandments dealing with kohanim and their roles. This week, we begin reading the Book of Numbers (Bamidbar), and return to the story of Am Yisrael after its exodus from Egypt on its way to the Land of Israel.

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Bamidbar, opens this way: "And the Lord spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert...." (Numbers 1, 1) The Book of Numbers deals in its entirety with the 40-year period in which Am Yisrael was in the Sinai Desert. In examining this book, we learn about the complex situation that Am Yisrael faced at that time. On the one hand, we read about the preparations made for the long stay in the desert: general census, organization of the desert camps according to division into tribes, and more; as well as the preparations for entering the Land of Israel: another census, the appointment of Joshua as Moshe Rabbeinu's replacement, etc. But on the other hand, we read about several less pleasant incidents that took place in the desert, such as the nation's complaints, the sin of the spies, the dispute with Korach and his cohorts, the "waters of dispute" affair, and more.

And thus, the reader gets a negative impression making it possible to think that this era was one of the worst in the relationship between Am Yisrael and G-d.

Centuries later, we read of the prophecy of Jeremiah the Prophet that begins with the following words: "Go and call out in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, 'So said the Lord: I remember to you the lovingkindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown.'" (Jeremiah 2,2) Jeremiah's words describe Am Yisrael's time in the desert as a time comparable to a couple falling in love. "Lovingkindness of your youth" and "the love of your nuptials" are terms that cannot be misunderstood.

The nation's desert journey is described as one of devotedly following G-d without consideration of the difficulties – walking in a "land not sown." The first period when a couple lives together is a complicated time. On the one hand, it is the "honeymoon" stage when the members of the couple

disconnect from their previous lives and adjust to their common one. But on the other hand, it is a time when patience and tolerance are needed. The couple reveals their true personalities to one another and faces the challenges inherent in beginning their lives together.

That is the answer to the following question: How could Bnei Yisrael sin in the desert after they witnessed with their own eyes the miracles of the Exodus from Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai? The answer is that they did indeed experience lofty experiences, but after a good experience, when real-life begins, difficulties arise that must be solved, difficulties that can cause unpleasant complications.

When the prophet describes the period in the desert as nuptial love, he means that this was the period containing the complexities that characterize the beginning of life together. Love and friendship, but also difficulties of adjustment and other less pleasant situations. Devotion and loyalty, but also failures and intricacies.

But despite this, summarizes the prophet, Am Yisrael followed G-d. In summarizing the first period of time, after the couple overcomes the difficulties and remains together, their love increases and develops and becomes more stable and stronger.

Am Yisrael, despite the difficulties and sins that occurred in the desert, remained faithful to the covenant with G-d and therefore it is always worthy of G-d's grace and love.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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### **Rav Kook List**

#### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

#### ***Bamidbar: Flags of Love in the Desert***

Throughout their travels in the desert, the Israelites were commanded to set up their tents around tribal flags:

*"The Israelites shall encamp with each person near the banner carrying his paternal family's insignia. They shall encamp at a distance around the Communion Tent." (Num. 2:2)*

What is the significance of these banners?

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:3) says that the inspiration for the banners came from Mount Sinai. Twenty-two thousand chariots of angels, each one decked out with flags, attended the Revelation of the Torah. The Israelites immediately desired to have flags just like the angels, and God agreed. This request for flags, the Midrash teaches, is described in the Song of Songs (2:4): "He brought me to the wine-house, and His banner over me is love."

From the Midrash we understand that banners relate to some inherent characteristic of angels, though not of people. But we are left with many questions. Why do angels bear flags? Why does the verse refer to Sinai as a "wine-house"? And what is the connection between banners and love?

#### **The Specialized Service of Angels**

According to the Zohar, the banners of the four major encampments (in each direction: north, south, east and west) corresponded to the four sides or "faces" of the supernal merkavah (chariot) in Ezekiel's mystical vision. Since these four "faces" represent fundamental divine attributes, each encampment related to a particular divine quality.

Before we can explain the meaning of the flags and their connection to angels, we must first understand what an angel is. The Hebrew word mal'ach literally means "messenger." An angel is essentially a divine messenger meant to fulfill a specific mission. An angel cannot perform a task, important though it may be, other than the specific mission for which it was designated.

Now we can better understand the function of the angels' flags. A banner proclaims a distinctive function or trait. Each angel, limited to a very specific area of divine service, carries its own distinguishing flag. These flags may be compared to military uniforms, where the dress and insignia indicate a soldier's unit and assignment.

Human beings, on the other hand, are not limited to serving God in one particular manner. Our divine image encompasses all spiritual spheres (see Nefesh Hachaim 1:10). For us, a banner is too restricting; it does not reflect our true spiritual essence.

Nonetheless, the Jewish people saw in the angelic banners of Sinai an inspiring sight that appealed to them, albeit in a non-obligatory way. Every person has special talents and interests, based on individual character traits and his soul's inner root. We are not limited in serving God in this particular way, but we are certainly more inclined towards those activities for which we have a natural proclivity. For example, a kindhearted person may concentrate on serving God with acts of compassion and chesed; a strong-willed individual, with acts of courage and self-sacrifice; and so on. The Jewish people desired flags like those the angels bore at Sinai. They wanted every individual to be able to choose an aspect of divine service that suits his personality, just as each angel executes a specific function, as defined by his flag.

#### The Wine-House

It is now clear why the verse refers to Mount Sinai as a "wine-house." Drinking wine releases our inhibitions, revealing our inner character. In the words of the Talmud (Eiruvin 65a), "Wine enters, secrets emerge." The Israelites envied the beauty and joy they witnessed in divine service of the angels. The root of this pleasantness lies in the innate affinity the angels feel towards their service. Each angel naturally identifies with its particular mission. The Jewish people sought to uncover and emphasize every individual's personal strengths, in the same way that wine liberates and highlights one's inner characteristics.

This individualized worship, however, only applies to the service of the heart and the character traits. The banners reflect our feelings of love and joy when serving God - "His banner over me is love" - but the banners are not directly connected to the service itself. Within the framework of Torah study and practical mitzvot, there is no need for distinctive forms of service. Therefore, no banners flew over the central Communion Tent where the luchot (the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments) were stored, since the Torah and its mitzvot relate equally to all souls.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 227-229. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 24-25)

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#### Parshas Bamidbar

R' Netanel Gertner

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#### *The individual's role in a national event*

Sefer Bamidbar opens with a Jewish national census.

Rashi explores the function and timing of a census, and explains that Hashem counted the Jews three times over a year and two weeks, because they were dear to Him; particularly after the Golden Calf, לידע מנין הנוותרים – to know the number of the survivors. 0.5 percent of the Jews perished after the sin of the eigel, which means that 99.5 percent 'survived'.

Why does Rashi use the word 'survivors' if the vast majority of the Jews did not perish?

Are people who don't die on the way to work considered "survivors" when they get home?

It's not the same; because all Jews are connected – like a puzzle. A puzzle is never complete unless all the pieces are in place, forming a picture. The Jews are incomplete unless all the Jews are included. Every Jew matters.

The Jews were not counted at Matan Torah – most critically important day in history. G-d revealed His reality to us, all of us – all the past, present and future generations of Jews are considered to have been at Sinai. Yet on the most significant day, on the day the relationship between God and his people was at its absolute peak, we were not counted. Why? The Torah records that the Jews assembled at Sinai כאיש אחד בלב אחד – like one man with one heart.

There is a very logical principle that אין מנין באחד – that you don't count to one. Things that are clearly unique don't lend themselves to numerical speculation. The question "Where do you live?" implicitly assumes that

you have one address. Whilst our souls may have been there, did we ever have the option of saying no? Why should we be obligated a commitment the first generation of Jews made?

When a family converts to Judaism, the children are asked at their bar/bas mitzva if they want to continue being Jews. If they say no, which they can, then they are no longer Jewish and not bound to Judaism. Why aren't born Jews offered a similar choice?

The reason it sounds like a good question is that we are all influenced by western culture, where the individual is the epicentre of existence. But this is a mistake. Hitler's policy did not discriminate between religious or secular. Hitler also used the concept of collective responsibility. If one Jew stepped out of line, be it stealing, practising Judaism, escaping, or disrespecting a Nazi, all the Jews in that camp, city, or ghetto were punished. That concept comes straight from the Torah.

Collective acceptance obligates everyone. Our primary identity is our Judaism. We are Jews who speak English, and not English speakers who happen to be Jews. You, and every single Jew you meet, are worthwhile. No matter the background, mistakes, ability, age, or anything. No one can ever take that away from you, nor you from anyone else. If you ever meet a Jew in a strange place, make sure to start a conversation!

#### *Silence is golden*

The princes of each tribe are identified in the census of the nation. But the lists are not identical, when they probably ought to be:

לְגַד אֱלִיָּאֵף בֶּן דְּעוּאֵל – For Gad, Elyasaf, son of De'uel. (1:14)

וּמִטָּה גַּד וְנָשִׂיא לְבָנֵי גַּד אֱלִיָּאֵף בֶּן רְעוּאֵל – The prince of the children of Gad was Elyasaf, son of Re'uel. (2:14)

His fathers name has changed. Why?

It is important to note that the names of the Nesi'im are not listed for historicity – all are written for deep rooted reasons – what follows is just one.

The Chida explains that the tribe of Gad merited Moshe Rabeinu being buried in their portion, as they kept silent in the face of Reuven's instructions. Reuven and Gad were encamped next to each other, and Reuven was "Rosh HaDegel" – leader of their formation, in charge of all camp movements. Reuven was a firstborn of Leah, as was Dan of Bilhah, and both tribes were "Rosh HaDegel", whereas Gad, a firstborn Zilpah was overlooked. The tribe of Gad did not protest to Moshe that they weren't given this privilege, and as such merited for Moshe buried in their portion.

This trait is characterised in the saying of R' Shimon Ben Gamliel in Pirkei Avos לא מצאתי לגוף טוב אלא שתיקה – I've not found anything better for the body than silence. Self sacrifice in the interest of the greater good was prevalent in Moshe's personality too. Moshe is occasionally referred to as רֵיעַ א-ל – friend of G-d – the name of the ancestor of the Nasi of Gad – רְעוּאֵל.

There is a story told about the Sdei Chemed, who was already known for his diligence and sharpness as a young man. There were two young men who attempted to get into the yeshiva he studied in, but were rejected. Feeling bitter, one of them hatched a plot to get back at the institution, by disgracing its star student, the Sdei Chemed. The Beis Midrash was prepared every morning by a local village lady. Knowing that the Sdei Chemed was there by sunrise every morning, the plotter offered her money to falsely accuse the Sdei Chemed of molesting her one morning. She flatly refused, insisting that she would lose her job and income. The plotter assured he'd hire her if she lost her job, to which she agreed. Word got out that the Sdei Chemed had "molested" this woman, and the whole town was in outrage and uproar.

Knowing the Sdei Chemed's character, the Rosh Yeshiva was adamant and refused to believe her, and she lost her job, and would hear no more of the matter. Not days after the incident, the plotter who had paid off the woman passed away. She saw the young man had gotten his come-uppance, and he had died without getting her anew job. Tearful and contrite, she approached the Sdei Chemed on his way home and begged forgiveness, and told him the truth of what had happened, and asked that he go to the Rosh Yeshiva and try to get her old job back. The Sdei Chemed accepted her apology on the spot; "I have no problem helping you get your old job

back, I'll sort that out. But I forbid you from disgracing the memory of the deceased by mentioning his involvement!"  
Chazal say מעביר על מדותיו, מעבירם לו כל פשעיו. Overlooking personal inconvenience to preserve what's right is a phenomenally difficult thing to achieve, but its worth it.

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**May I Participate in the Census?  
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

*In honor of this week's Haftarah, I present the following halachic 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 people from 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 this week's Haftarah: 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 this source in Hoshea, when the prohibition is mentioned in the Torah in the beginning of Parshas Ki Sissa?

Answer: Analyzing the Sources in Chazal

The Mishnah teaches that to determine which kohen would be awarded the mitzvah of removing ashes from the mizbei'ach, a lottery procedure was used, whereby the kohanim interested in performing the mitzvah 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 that 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, and answers that it is prohibited to count Jews (Yoma 22b) -- counting fingers is permitted, counting people is not (Rambam, Hilchos Temidim Umusafim 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'lim #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 cites 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 (Shmuel I 11:8). According to one opinion in the Gemara, Shaul counted the members of his army by having each soldier throw a piece of broken pottery into a pile. Thus, even to fulfill a mitzvah, one may count Jews only in an indirect manner.
2. Before attacking Amalek, 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 pasuk in the Torah as a source for the prohibition?

When you will take the headcount of the children of Israel to determine their numbers, each man should give atonement for his life to Hashem when being counted. Thereby, no plague will result from the counting. This is what whoever is counted should give: a half shekel (Shemos 30:12-13).

This pasuk implies that the only permitted way to count Jews is indirectly, by having each one donate a half-shekel and then counting the coins. This seems to be the source of Shaul's knowing to count the Jews indirectly. It is indeed odd that the Gemara quotes Shaul's practice as the source for the prohibition, rather than Shaul's own 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 being counted. Thereby, no plague will result from 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 apply such an expression in this case?

Rabbeinu Bachya (ad loc.) explains that when we count an individual separately, 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. Abarbanel, for example, explains that counting people by head causes ill to enter through their eyes and mouth into their body, whereas counting fingers does not cause the ayin hora to enter them. I leave to the reader to decide whether he is referring to physical or metaphysical harm.

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 its comments on the deeds and words 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.). The practices of Shaul and the verse in Hoshea make 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, afterwards, they all provide a half-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 give 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 then having them all donate a half-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 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 and the verse in Hoshea prove that one may not count Jews, even when they have not violated serious prohibitions.

Thus, we see several possible ways to interpret 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 counting 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

Creative advertising campaigns aimed at generating tzedakah funds did not originate with modern organizations, such as 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 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 fundraising approach =did not violate the prohibition of counting Jews, since counting names on a list is an indirect way of counting people, and, furthermore, it was for the sake of fulfilling a mitzvah. He held that this is similar to Shaul's method of counting his soldiers.

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, counting from a list is considered counting the person and is therefore halachically different from counting fingers, legs, half-shekels, lambs or pottery shards (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 working as a census taker or by providing the census takers with 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. Those who permitted the census provided a variety of reasons to justify it, the primary one was that servicing the medical, educational, economic, and safety needs of 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, census takers will be counting the Jewish people. One should be careful not to answer them at all, to inform them that it is forbidden to take a census, and that it is possible that this is 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, unless one is accomplishing a mitzvah. It is explained in Kesav Sofer... that it is prohibited to do so 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, and reiterated that they had banned this ten years before at the previous census.

Subsequent to his publishing a responsum in which he prohibited participating in the census, the Tzitz Eliezer (7:3) was asked whether someone wishing to determine 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 dated Elul 24, 5755 (September 19, '95), Rav Vozner (Shu't Shevet Halevi 9:35) writes that the heter of taking a census because of divrei mitzvah applies only when the statistics are used solely for divrei mitzvah. However, he permits the census for a different reason -- because the census counts the entire population of Israel and 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 and the data does not correlate at all to the number of Jews, he does have any halachic objection to participating in the census.

On the basis of Rav Vozner's responsum, there certainly should be no difficulty in participating in the United States census, since this also counts people and not Jews.

#### Conclusion

As Rav Hirsch points out, the census conducted in this week's parsha is performed in the desert, demonstrating that its purpose was not for economic or political reasons. Rather, just as last week's parsha closed with the counting of the flocks by their shepherds, so too, this week's parsha begins with counting G-d's flock by its Shepherd. Every individual is counted as an independent member of that flock to demonstrate the importance of his individual commitment and contribution. nations!

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#### Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Rosh Hashana 16 - 22

For the week ending 24 May 2014 / 24 Iyyar 5774

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

***“Four things tear up a negative (Heavenly) verdict against a person. They are: giving charity, crying out in prayer, changing one's name, and changing one's deeds from negative to positive.” Rosh Hashana 16b***

Rabbi Yitzchak instructs us with this statement on our daf how to avoid harsh punishment for transgressions, and derives them from verses as taught in the gemara. An additional method is also mentioned in the name of “Others”: changing one's location. The gemara learns this additional way of tearing up the decree from what G-d said to Avraham: “Go for yourself... to the land that I will show you... and I will make you there into a great nation.” However, Rabbi Yitzchak did not initially quote this reason, since it is possible that it was the special and unique merit of going up the Land of Israel that helped the change for the better, which would not apply to other changes in location.

***“A person is obligated to visit one's rabbi during the Festival.” Rosh Hashana 16b***

This is another teaching from Rabbi Yitzchak on our daf, and he derives it from a verse in the Book of Kings. Although this teaching is found in the Mishneh Torah of the Rambam, it does not appear in the Shulchan Aruch of laws that apply in our time. Rather, explain the authorities, it applies only in the time of the Beit Hamikdash, when there is also a mitzvah “to see and be seen” in the Beit Hamikdash on Festivals. However, in our time when we can no longer fulfill this mitzvah associated with the Beit Hamikdash, it would be inappropriate to give special honor to another person – a rabbi – by means of a visit, at a time when it is not possible to display this honor to G-d by visiting in the Beit Hamikdash which is not currently standing. May it be rebuilt speedily in our days.

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#### Bamidbar and Jerusalem Day: Impossible Scenarios

***Binyamin and Dan and impossible scenarios that come to pass.***

**From Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

Four times in the Book of Bamidbar, Numbers, where tribal matters are discussed, the verses which deal with Binyamin and Dan are written consecutively. In the Book of Yechezkel, Binyamin and Dan appear in the

same verse. The two closing chapters in the Book of Shoftim (Judges) deal with episodes involving the tribes of Binyamin and Dan.

Why this affinity between these two tribes who were born from different mothers - Dan from Bilhah and Binyamin from Rachel?

I suggest:

Binyamin had 10 sons (BeraiSheet 46:21-23). Dan had one handicapped son, Chushim.

Imagine this scene on a seder night in the house of Yaakov. The patriarch is surrounded by his four wives, his 12 sons and daughters and grandchildren. Binyamin looks around with great satisfaction, thinking that since he has 10 sons - the most children of any of Yaakov's other sons - his descendants will eventually comprise the largest and most influential tribe of Yisrael.

Dan looks around in envy. He has this one son, Chushim. What kind of a future is in store for his tribe?

Dan indeed had reason for pessimism.

But no! Not in God's world where no mission is impossible.

When the Jews left Egypt, Mitzrayim, the tribe of Dan had already outnumbered the tribe of Binyamin by 27,300.

The Book of Shoftim relates that at the end of the civil war between the tribe of Binyamin and the Jewish nation at large, the tribe of Binyamin was reduced to 600 men. In contrast, the tribe of Dan was so numerous that a part of the tribe was forced to leave the tribal area in the center of the country to conquer additional area in the far north to accommodate the overflow of Dannites.

The lesson arising out of the dry numbers of the parsha and the Book of Shoftim is the most fundamental in Judaism - that the most improbable scenario is possible in God's world!

More Impossible Scenarios

Some impossible scenarios:

Gideon, the Judge, defeated the entire Midianite army with only 300 soldiers (Judges Chapter 7).

Yehonatan, son of King Shaul, with only his shield bearer with him, vanquished the entire Philistine army (Shmuel I chapter 14).

David, the young shepherd, vanquished Goliath the Philistine human war machine, with one well-placed stone from his slingshot.

The Maccabees drove out the Greeks from Eretz Yisrael, despite the enemy's awesome numbers and military might.

As impressive as these episodes are, they possess a common denominator which weakens their influence on future generations. No one alive today witnessed them, so they remain in the domain of belief.

However, miracles have occurred in our own time which rank among the most impressive that Hashem has ever wrought for His people, to name just two - the War of Independence and the Six Day War.

If you were there, the memories will never be forgotten. If you were not there, you will never know!

In 1967, the Medina (state) was a mere shadow of what we are today. The army was small, the economy stagnant, and the population unprepared for war.

Tensions began to rise three weeks before the beginning of armed conflict, when President Nasser of Egypt ordered the UN peace-keeping troops to evacuate the Sinai Peninsula. Nasser blocked the Straits of Tiran, Israel's gateway from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean, which is considered in International Law to be *casus belli* (justification for war).

Nasser led a coalition of four Arab States: Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq.

Here are the statistics as they were at the opening of the 1967 hostilities:

Resources

	Israel	Arabs
Soldiers	275,000	456,000
Tanks	1093	2750
Cannons	681	2084
Warships	15	118
Fighter planes	228	488
Bombers	19	80
Helicopters	45	101

The situation at the time of the War of Independence was even more desperate:

Resources

	Israel	Arabs
Soldiers	30,573	40,000
Tanks	1	200
Cannon	5	140
Warships	3	12
Fighter planes	0	60
Bombers	0	14
Helicopters	0	0

In both wars, the world waited impatiently to see the demise of the impossible Jewish state.

However, our Father in Heaven had other plans. Our enemies were defeated in shame and dishonor, and the fledgling Jewish State was catapulted to a higher quantum level within the community of nations.

I was a ten-year-old living in New York in 1948. Hashem granted me the gift to live at the time the Star of David flag was hoisted in Yerushalayim. I was 29 in 1967, living in Eretz Yisrael and was granted the gift to see the flag hoisted above the Temple Mount.

No one can explain these victories rationally. It was like Gideon, Yehonatan, David and the Macabim coming together to assist the Jewish nation in returning home to continue our historic religious mission to the world. A mission which might appear to be an impossible one: the task of raising up humanity from the quagmire of idolatry and paganism to stand before Hashem in consciousness of His glory.

As great as the miracles were, let us not forget for a moment the human sacrifices which were offered upon the altar of the Jewish nation's return home. Each son and daughter who fell in battle is "kedosh" and the pain lingers on. But let us also not forget that our losses did not equal the number of Jews who died in one day in Auschwitz-Berkeau. The naked fact which rises from this is that there were, and always are, two alternatives for the Jewish nation - life in Eretz Yisrael under Hashem's protective hand vs. the spiritual and physical death camps of the galut, Diaspora.

Let no man or woman say, "My situation makes it impossible for me to come on aliya."

There are difficulties in life; however, when a Jew wants with all his heart to perform a mitzva, Hashem will open the path for him.

Remember Chushim the handicapped son of Dan, who begot the largest tribe in Yisrael.

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**The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash**  
**"Again There Shall Be Heard ... in the Streets of Jerusalem"**  
**Based on a *sicha* by Harav Yehuda Amital ז"ל**  
**Translated by Kaeren Fish**

Thus says the Lord: Again there shall be heard in this place, which you say is ruined, without man or beast – in the cities of Judea and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without men, without inhabitants and without beasts – the sound of joy and the sound of happiness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those saying, "Praise the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever," as they bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the House of God. For I shall bring back the captivity of the land as in the past, says the Lord. (*Yirmiyahu* 33:10-11)

Throughout the Bible, Jerusalem is portrayed as the city of God, the city in which the Temple resides. In the above-quoted prophecy of consolation, too, Yirmiyahu prophesies that the bridegroom and the bride will approach

the Temple with sacrifices of thanksgiving in their hands: “the voice of those saying, ‘Praise the Lord of Hosts...’ as they bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the House of God.”

However, the Men of the Great Assembly, who included the rest of the verse in their formulation of the blessings recited at a wedding, chose to omit this concluding phrase in the verse. Instead, they replaced it with an alternate phrase:

...the joyous sounds of bridegrooms from their wedding canopies and young men from their music-filled festivities.

Beyond the problem of the change in wording, *Chazal* thereby also changed the meaning. Instead of the sound of worship, a sound full of elevated holiness – “the voice of those saying, ‘Praise the Lord’” – we seem to have the sound of frivolous and physical enjoyment: the sound of celebration and music. Why did the Men of the Great Assembly make this change?

The Men of the Great Assembly felt that the prophecy, as originally written, could give rise to despair in the future. First, the prophet describes the most forlorn of circumstances – a place that is completely desolate, with no human or animal inhabitants; then he prophesies a far-off ideal: the Temple rebuilt, and the sound of throngs bringing their sacrifices to the House of God. Will the sound of joy and happiness be heard once more in Jerusalem only when the Temple is rebuilt? Is there no intermediate situation between the two extremes of absolute destruction and the full rebuilding?

The Men of the Great Assembly therefore changed the formulation of the blessing in order to arouse hope and to make people realize the significance of such an in-between situation: “The joyous sound of bridegrooms from their wedding canopy and young men from their music-filled festivities.” Sounds of joy and celebration will indeed be heard in the holy city even before the Temple is rebuilt.

In the interpretation of the Men of the Great Assembly there is a great and important message. The expression they inserted, “The joyous sounds of bridegrooms from their wedding canopy and young men from their music-filled festivities,” does not appear in the prophecies of redemption. Rather, its source is to be found in the prophecies of destruction:

Old men have ceased to sit at the gate; young men have ceased from their music. (*Eikha* 5:14)

The normal situation – somewhere between absolute destruction and complete redemption – is that the elders sit at the city gates and function as judges, while young men play music and are happy. This situation, which will be realized prior to the complete redemption, itself represents a hopeful picture, and this is what the Men of the Great Assembly wished to convey in formulating the blessing as they did.

A similar message arises from a teaching of Rav Huna:

Anyone who partakes of the feast of a bridegroom without making an effort to make him happy transgresses five “sounds” – as it is written, “The

*sound* of joy and the *sound* of happiness, the *sound* of the bridegroom and the *sound* of the bride, the *sound* of those saying, ‘Praise the Lord of Hosts.’” (*Berakhot* 6b)

Rav Huna is not talking about a bridegroom who brings a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the House of God. He rules that someone who witnesses a bridegroom at his wedding – even before the complete redemption – is obligated to make an effort to gladden him, *inter alia* because of “the sound of those saying, ‘Praise the Lord.’” Joy and happiness have their own independent existence and status even before the House of God is rebuilt.

Today we celebrate our return to Jerusalem. If someone who participates in a wedding celebration and fails to make the bridegroom happy transgresses five commands related to “sounds,” then this must certainly be true of someone who fails to celebrate the liberation of our holy city.

In 5727, the I.D.F. unified the Old City of Jerusalem and the modern Jerusalem, and this unification is symbolic of our astonishing victory in the Six-Day War. This miraculous war was preceded by days of fear and anxiety that we tend to forget: there were people who sent their children to the United States, pessimistic forecasts predicted tens of thousands of casualties, Foreign Minister Abba Eban ran from country to country, finding no one who would help us, the President of Egypt threatened to throw all the Jews into the sea and banished the U.N. from his country, and in a live radio broadcast Prime Minister Levi Eshkol could only stammer lamely; the atmosphere was one of terrible despair. The victory with the liberation of the Temple Mount was so great that we forget the despair and fear that preceded it. Today we have merited to see the realization of our ancient prayer, and the happy sounds of brides and bridegrooms, of young people, are heard again in the capital of the State of Israel.

There are people – including some who are religious, and even Religious Zionists – who remove the Holy One from our historical reality. It is as if God has handed the reigns of power to the politicians, who destroy and build as they wish, leaving Jerusalem bereft of God’s guiding hand. We know that the enormous change that has taken place in Jerusalem and its transformation from a tiny settlement into the biggest city in the country, was not achieved solely by the government of Israel, or by Teddy Kollek and Ehud Olmert. The Holy One has never ceased to watch over and guide us, and for this reason we have merited to hear once again the sounds of joy and celebration in the city that was desolate. It is God who has stood by us to this day, and who we pray will realize the original prophecy very soon:

... the voice of those saying, “Praise the Lord of Hosts, for the Lord is good, for His mercy endures forever,” as they bring sacrifices of thanksgiving to the House of God.

(This *sicha* was delivered on Yom Yerushalayim 5760 [2000].)

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