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ON **BAMIDBAR** 5777

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

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Chumash Mesoras HaRav – Parashas Bamidbar

Excerpted from **Chumash Mesoras HaRav** – Sefer Bamidbar, The **Neuwirth Edition, featuring the commentary of the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**, compiled by **Dr. Arnold Lustiger**

ישׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדוּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – Take a census of the entire assembly of Israel.

What was the purpose of this census? Nachmanides (verse 45) offers two explanations. The first is that the Torah wishes to emphasize God's kindness in transforming seventy souls into a nation as numerous as the sand of the sea. The second reason for the census was so that each Jew would pass before Moses and Aaron and be known to them by name.

Nachmanides' two explanations reflect two types of counting. The purpose of the first type is simply to gain knowledge of the total number of an item. For example, one counts his money because he wishes to know how much he has. It is the total that interests him; the individual coins or bills have no intrinsic significance.

The second type of counting has a different objective. The ultimate goal is to recognize and appreciate each individual and is not necessarily concerned with the total number. Nachmanides indicates that each person would pass before Moses and Aaron. They counted the people by going from house to house, in the process learning about each family and how they lived.

The transmission of the second Tablets initiated a new phase in the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. With the giving of the second Tablets, the covenant of Torah Sheb'al Peh began. Moses thus became the rebbe of the entire Jewish people, and a rebbe must know all his students.

Therefore, God commanded Moses: Take a census of the entire assembly of Israel... by number of the names; every male according to their head count. It was not enough for Moses to know the total number of the Jewish people. Moses now had an added obligation, as the rebbe of the entire Jewish nation, to know every Jew by name. The words בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת suggest an intimate relationship with every individual. God commanded Moses to call each man by name, because each individual possesses something unique. To be an effective rebbe, Moses had to know each person as an individual with his own background and life experience.

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman – Parshas Bamidbar 5775

A thought on Parshas Bamidbar. Parshas Bamidbar is called Numbers because after all, Parshas Bamidbar has the fewest new Mitzvos and Parshas Bamidbar is as the Ramban says in his introduction rules of things that took place under Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership in the Midbar. In the beginning of Bamidbar Moshe Rabbeinu is commanded to count Klal Yisrael. A thinking person will notice immediately that it is very strange. As is found in 1:3 (וְאֶתְכֶם יִהְיֶה, אִישׁ אִישׁ לְמִטָּה--אִישׁ רֹאשׁ) and then 1:4 (אֶתְהוּ וְאֶתְהוּ) and then 1:4 (אֶתְהוּ וְאֶתְהוּ). I would have thought that Moshe Rabbeinu is commanded to take a census so he organized workers and sent them out to each section, to each place to count. When the United States has a census, the president doesn't go out to count anybody. Everything is delegated. Not so with Moshe and Aaron here. This is because the Posuk says (וְאֶתְכֶם יִהְיֶה, אִישׁ אִישׁ לְמִטָּה) and (אֶתְהוּ וְאֶתְהוּ). It is clear that they are limited to getting the help of 12 people, the head of every Sheivet. So too it says at the end of the counting in Posuk 44 (אֵלֶּה הַמְּקֻדָּשִׁים אֲשֶׁר קָדַד מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, וְנִשְׂאִי יִשְׂרָאֵל). They counted and they didn't delegate it to others. Halo Davar Hu! Why should they have to go through the Tircha of counting so many people, it was an incredibly big job?

Later when Sheivet Levi is counted twice, once Miben Chodesh and once Miben Shloshim there it says as is found in 3:16 (עַל-פִּי יִרְרָה,) וַיִּקְדוּ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה, עַל-פִּי יִרְרָה,) וַיִּקְדוּ אֹתָם מֹשֶׁה, עַל-פִּי יִרְרָה,) Moshe Rabbeinu personally counted Klal Yisrael. There it sounds like even Aaron and the Nesiim were not included. Halo Davar Hu! Incredible!

When the Bechorim are counted they are counted by Moshe Rabbeinu alone. Why? In Shmuel II when Dovid decides to count Klal Yisrael he doesn't do it personally he sends out members of the army to do the counting. It needs an explanation.

The answer lies in the first Vort that was mentioned this week. Moshe Rabbeinu's Koach as a Rebbe, as a Manhig was a Tovas Ayin. Was to look at Klal Yisrael with an Ahava and connect to them, to have an influence on them. HKB"Y said Moshe Rabbeinu you Aaron and the Nesiim, you who have this power as teachers of Klal Yisrael go to every home and knock on every door, see to it that there is this personal connection, this Tovas Ayin. The Tovas Ayin which brings Beracha, the Tovas Ayin which opens up a heart to the learning of Torah. It is the connection of a Rebbe to a Talmid which is very often the motivating factor, that which gets it going. What a beautiful idea. If at Mattan Torah we are taught that Moshe Rabbeinu's Tovas Ayin is what allowed the Torah to be taught successfully, then in Parshas Bamidbar we understand that Moshe had to go himself to the Leviim and to the Bechorim, those who would teach Klal Yisrael, and to the rest of Klal Yisrael Moshe with Aaron and the Nesiim to do it personally, to have that sense that feeling of Tovas Ayin. What a beautiful thought.

Let me end with a question that I had in reviewing Parshas Bamidbar this week something I don't recall ever noticing before although I may have noticed it but forgotten. As far as I recall at the moment this is a new Kasha. We know that at the beginning of the Parsha after Shlishi there is a division of the Degalim. The different groups. 3 Shevatim on the west, 3 on the east, 3 on the south, 3 on the north of the Machane Levi'a, the Machaneh Shechina and they were put in order. Degel Machaneh Dan the final one as the first was Degel Machaneh Yehuda of course and the Degel Machaneh

Reuvein which are basically the children of Leah, the 5 natural children of Leah, Levi is not included. Plus the Bechor from Leah's Shifcha. Then Degel Machaneh Ephraim which is Rochel's children and then Degel Machaneh Dan which are the Bnei Hashifcha and Dan, Asher, and Naftali. They travel the last. There is a problem. As far as I understand Klal Yisrael was traveling from Egypt to Israel. Last time I looked at the map that is traveling from south to north. It is true that they traveled a bit to the east because they came on the other side of the Yardein. So say they were travelling north east. When the Posuk says Degel Machaneh Dan it says Tzofona that they were in the north. In the north and they were last? They should have been south! They were north.

There is a Man D'amar in the Gemara that when they traveled they didn't travel as they were encamped but there is also a Man D'amar that they traveled in the same formation as they were encamped. If so, Halo Davar Hu! How was Dan last? Dan wasn't last unless they were traveling in a southerly direction. Why was Degel Machaneh Dan to the north? What a Kasha! I am hoping Shevuos night to have a possible Teretz.

Talking about Shavuos night, there are many people who find as they get older that they are too tired. Maisim Mochichim Zeh Es Zeh. Is it because you are too tired or is it because Torah is no longer so important to you. It is hard to know. In a regular year where Erev Shavuos you are at work from 9 – 5 or 9 – 6 and you come running home, it is hard to know. Maisim Mochichim Zeh Es Zeh. This year we will see. This year Shavuos night is Motzoei Shabbos. Shabbos is a day on which we rest. Motzoei Shabbos is a night on which many people stay up very late. This year we will see if when you don't stay up you are tired or if it is because you lost the Chashivus for the Torah Hakedosha. This is a year in which extra effort should be put in not only being up but being up and learning with a Geshmak, with a Hatzlacha. That you should do.

In our neighborhoods there are Shiurim, there are Chavrusos, you can mix and match. You can go to a Shiur for an hour, go learn with a Chavrusa for an hour. There are many opportunities to stay up and have a meaningful Shavuos. It is sad that we live in a society where Shavuos is cheesecake. Open up a Chareidi newspaper, count the picture of cheesecakes, the pictures of blintzes, and the pictures of Har Sinai in the Shevuos edition. It is not even a contest. Not at all! The contest might be between the blintzes and the cheesecake. Oy! How sad.

Let's make it a meaningful Shevuos, a meaningful Shevuos for one and all. B'ezras Hashem I hope to be giving my annual Leil Shevuos Shiur at 12:15 AM. In our Shul on Avenue S and east 22nd street. I give the Shiur downstairs in the basement. People learn B'chavrusa in the Shul and come downstairs then go back up. Whatever you do make it a meaningful Leil Shavuos to one and all. A Good Shabbos and a Good Yom Tov to all.

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date: Fri, May 10, 2013 at 9:48 AM

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Bamidbar

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #858, Ms. Cohen for a Pidyon Habein. Good Shabbos!

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What's In A Name?

In this week's parsha, The Torah lists [Chapter 2] the names of the various princes of the Tribes of Israel. There are two names in the list that are rather

curious. "The prince of the children of Asher is Pagiel son of Ochron" [2:27] The word "ocher" implies one who perverts, who makes trouble. Ochron is a strange name to give a child. Then we find "and the prince of the tribe of Naphtali is Achira the son of Enan" [2:28]. Achi-ra means the bad brother. Again here we can ask why such a name was given to an eight day old child at his bris. What is the meaning of these names?

Rabbeinu Ephraim, who was one of the Baalei haTosfos, offers a very interesting idea. The camp of Israel was arranged such that there was a "Degel" [banner] consisting of 3 Tribes in each of the four directions. Asher and Naftali were under the banner of the Tribe of Dan. When they left Metzraim, the Tribe of Dan took out an idol with them. This idol accompanied them through the wilderness. It crossed the Jordan with them. When they came into the Land of Israel, the Tribe of Dan had an active House of Idolatry in their midst in which this idol was worshipped! This idol, which is known in the Book of Judges as "Pesel Michah", was a cause of trouble.

The Tribes of Asher and Naftali were upset that they were stuck traveling with the wicked people from the Tribe of Dan who were idol worshippers. Rabbeinu Ephraim writes that Pagiel ben Ochron was not his given name at birth. It was a name he created for himself later in life. It meant "Pagah be Kel". (The Almighty has given me a punishment.) What was the punishment? He stuck me with the Tribe of Dan. His assumed name Ochron [sinner] did not allude to his father, it referred to his travel companions – the Tribe of Dan. Similarly, Naftali's prince assumed the name Achira. Now the name fits beautifully: My brother is evil – it refers to the brother of Naftali – Dan and his clan. The name Enan is also not the actual father of the prince of Naftali, but it is an assumed name to allude to the fact that the Cloud (anan) pushed aside the Tribe of Dan, since they traveled together with an idol.

Why did they do this? Why did they take such names? They did it for a very good reason. A person is invariably influenced by his society, by those around him. Asher and Naftali knew that they had a very hard road to hoe. Their first reaction when they found out they would have to be travelling with Dan was "Oy this is going to be terrible! What are we going to do! What are we going to do?" But what happens to people -- and this is both the biggest blessing and the biggest curse at the same time -- is that we get used to everything. In the beginning, they were appalled. They knew that with the passage of time they would get used to it. Avodah Zarah? Yeah, that's just the way it is.

When Jews first came to America from Europe at the turn of the last century, there were some Jews who fainted when they saw the rampant Sabbath desecration that took place here within the Jewish community. We no longer faint when we see Jews driving down the street on Shabbos. We take it in stride – "There are observant Jews and there are non-observant Jews. That's the way it is."

These princes asked themselves: How are we going to ensure that we do not make peace with the idols in our midst? How are we going to make sure that we don't get used to it? The plan was to change their name, to give themselves names that described the revulsion they originally felt when they realized that this was their lot (to be travel companions of idolaters). Just as a person's name remains with them forever, they wanted this feeling of revulsion towards idolatry to remain with them forever.

This can be a valuable lesson to us. Sometimes we find ourselves in environments that are not to our standards and not to our liking and we have no choice in the matter. We need to try to quantify our original feelings and make sure that those feelings do not dissipate.

Silence Is Golden

The name of the Prince from the Tribe of Gad is originally referred to in the Parsha as Elyasaf ben De-uel [Bamidbar 1:14]. Later when this same prince is listed, his name is given as Elyasaf ben Re-uel [Bamidbar 2:14]. What happened? Why the change of name?

The Chida says something very interesting. Moshe Rabbeinu was buried in the portion of Gad. Why did this happen? According to the Chida, this was a reward to the Tribe of Gad for not complaining when Moshe Rabbeinu made Dan a Tribe which would have one of the 4 banners (representing the 4 directions in which the tribes were encamped) and passed over the Tribe of Gad. Both Dan and Gad were "first born" from their respective mothers. Only one of them could have the honor of leading a "banner". The honor went to Dan, not to Gad. Since Gad kept quiet about this and did not complain, their tribe was given the honor of hosting the burial spot of Moshe Rabbeinu – the "friend of G-d" (Reah shel kEl). For this reason, the prince of their tribe, which was really Elyasaf ben De-uel, was called Elyasaf ben Reuel – indicating that in their portion lay the REah of kEl.

This was the reward for keeping quiet. Even when someone has a valid claim "I have never found anything better for the body than silence."

I would like to relate a famous story from which we can see the reward for silence.

There is a 10 volume set of Sefarim called the Sedai Chemed. It is literally an encyclopedia which contains virtually every topic in halacha. Usually, when someone publishes an encyclopedia, it is not one person writing it, but a whole team of scholars. The Sedai Chemed was authored by a single individual [Chaim Hezekiah Medini (1833-1904)]. This was well before computers. He must have been a genius!

Nevertheless, the Sedai Chemed writes that when he began learning, he did not have a phenomenal memory. His intelligence was nothing out of the ordinary. However, a certain incident occurred that changed his whole life and enabled him to become a walking encyclopedia. He was learning in a Kollel. Someone else in that Kollel, who was supposedly his friend, was jealous of him. This "friend" did a disgusting thing. There was an Arab girl who was hired to come in regularly to clean the Beis Medrash [study hall]. This "friend" went to the Arab girl and offered her a lot of money to start a rumor that the Sedei Chemed was acting inappropriately with her. This was a poor girl who was making meager wages sweeping the Beis Medrash. She went ahead and started the rumor.

The rumor spread and it started a whole tumult in the community. People said the Sedei Chemed is a faker, he pretends to be pious, but he fools around with Arab girls behind the scenes. The Sedei Chemed was so embarrassed by this libel that he had to run away.

A couple of months later, the money that was given to the Arab cleaning lady ran out. The "friend" stopped paying her and she had lost her job sweeping the study hall. She was destitute. She went to the Sedei Chemed and told him of her desperate situation. She wanted to make a deal with him: "I will announce publicly that I made up the whole story and that I was bribed to speak falsely, as long as you go to the administration of the Kolel and help get me my job back as the cleaning lady of the Yeshiva."

At first, the Sedei Chemed thought to himself, "This is my opportunity. I have a way of clearing my name." But then he had second thoughts. He told the Arab woman: "I will go to the employer and tell him that he should re-hire you. But I cannot tell him the whole circumstances of what happened." The Sedei Chemed reasoned: There has already been one terrible Desecration of G-d's Name as a result of the original slander which claimed that I acted inappropriately with you. "So what should I do," he thought, "let the word out that there is a scoundrel in the Yeshiva who out of jealousy and malice would hire you to slander me with a total fabrication? – That is a greater Chilul Hashem! One Chilul Hashem is enough." He told her he would try to get her the job back, but he would not elaborate on the circumstances of her slander.

The Sedei Chemed writes that after this incident, his mind opened up and he became a different person. He became so gifted with Siyata D'Shmaya [Help from Heaven] that he was able to write the Sedei Chemed.

This is the story behind the Sedei Chemed. The lesson is: "I have never found anything superior for the body than silence." Sometimes keeping quiet is the best advice

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HaMedrash V'HaMaaseh

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Small Is Big

Count the sons of Levi[2]

Know that the place of shevet Levi among the rest of Klal Yisrael is similar to that of the Jewish people amongst the nations. Levi was a small tribe, charged with the important job of carrying the Ark of Hashem through a wilderness. In a broader sense, Klal Yisrael is a larger shevet Levi. It carries Hashem's message into the world, spreading awareness of Him to all people. The story of Jewish survival through the millennia is a conundrum. It can be understood only by hearing the Voice of Hashem, as He commands history itself, similar to His words about Levi, "Do not let the tribe... be cut off!"[3] Chazal[4] note a tension between two phrases in a single verse[5] in our Haftorah. "The number of the Bnei Yisrael will be like the sand of the sea." Sand is finite. Its grains may be difficult to count, but they can be. "Which cannot be measured nor counted." This phrase implies impossibility, i.e. their numbers will be infinite. The gemara resolves the tension by assuming two different situations – the former, when Klal Yisrael does not follow Hashem's Will; the latter when it does. We should not understand this as two, disjoint periods. Rather, the pasuk speaks of a single process, the way in which a small group of people will gain in influence until its message meets universal embrace.

In the earlier period – one in which the Jewish people as a whole do not live lives fully congruent with Hashem's Will – we will still be blessed with many stellar individuals. The navi urges them not to despair. From their number, while initially limited, will develop an unstoppable momentum, that will in time envelop the entire world. The initial contribution is limited. But the navi assures us that this is temporary. At some point, the influence of G-d's Word spreads explosively. Ultimately, the sense of this pasuk is not quantity, but quality. In time, the power of the Torah, spread by the Jewish people, becomes infinite.

We have certainly not arrived there yet. Yirmiyahu[6] famously wrote, "We became as orphans, without a father." Mothers, apparently we have. The general difference between rachamei ha-av, the compassion of a father, and that of a mother, is clear. A mother fusses and dotes over her child, providing him or her with physical needs. She feeds and clothes and hugs. The compassion of a father looks more towards the future. He directs the child to where he should be ten years forward, to determining where he can most fully utilize his strengths. This requires vision. We have leaders today who can and do respond to the exigencies of the moment. They concern themselves with needs as they arise. But there are very few who address the lasting continuity of our Torah, and the fulfillment of the Jewish mission to the world.

There are other differences as well. In this world, in that moment of exalted insight as they finally left Egypt, they said, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him." In the future, however, Chazal[7] point out a changed expression. "They will say on that day, 'Behold, this is our G-d.'"[8] This is further illuminated by a passage in the gemara.[9] "In the future, HKBH will make a

circle for the righteous. He will sit among them in Gan Eden. Each one will point with his finger towards Him, as it says, 'Behold, this is our G-d.'" Here Chazal place our current situation in sharp contrast to a brighter future. At the moment, the best that a small number of people can do is say, "This is my G-d." They speak only as individuals, and only after being touched by as small aspect of Hashem's fullness, like an encounter with the Shechinah. The future will change that. People will say, "This is our G-d!" They will be conscious of being no longer isolated exceptions and individuals, but part of a much larger, dynamic group. They will be part of a circle, which will stand out from a much broader community – a universal recognition of Hashem without exception. The circle represents the idea of a harmonious gathering of all the different groups and factions that existed within our people until that day

On that day, all in that circle will point to a much fuller conception of Elokus, of Who Hashem is. All the questions and uncertainties about Who He is will disappear. So will all the mysteries, the unsolved questions about creation and the purpose of life.

This is the intent of Chazal elsewhere[10] as well, in looking at our parshah. "Why did He count them [Levi]? Because they are His royal order, and a King delights in His royal order. See, that they are the smallest of the shevatim. Why? Because they observe the face of the Shechinah ... In the future, however, Hashem will reveal His Honor to all of Yisrael. On that day, people will say, "This is our G-d."

At the moment, only special individuals can observe – at times – the Shechinah. Even this is overpowering to many; many do not survive. The number of these special people is small. All will change in the future, when Hashem's promise of a fuller revelation of Himself will be fulfilled.

1. Based on HaMedrash V'HaMaaseh, Bamidbar, by R. Yechezkel Libshitz zt"l 2. Bamidbar 3:15 3. Bamidbar 4:18 4. Yoma 22B 5. Hoshea 2:1 6. Eichah 5:3 7. Mechilta d'Rashbi 19:9 8. Yeshaya 25:9 9. Taanis 31A 9. Tanchuma Bamidbar 17

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

The necessity to continually count the Jewish people, evidenced in this week's Torah reading and, in fact, in the balance of the text of the remainder of this book of the Torah, remains a perplexing issue. The rabbis of the Talmud and the later commentators to the Torah saw this continual counting of the Jewish people as a sign of God's love for Israel. A person who has rare valuables or a refined collection of art or another type of memorabilia views the collection often, and with personal satisfaction and even on exhibit for others to admire. People count their change when purchasing items from a store and review their bank statements on a regular basis. Things of value require counting and cataloging. That is human nature. The Lord, so to speak, shows His respect and His hopeful investment in the Jewish people by counting and cataloging them on a regular basis. The rabbis recognized this human characteristic of counting things that we deem to be of worth and value by stating that when one recites prayers one should do so as though counting money or valuable coins. There apparently is no better metaphor for care, respect and even love of the object – in this case, prayer – than comparing it to actually counting money. The rabbis again reinforced this idea by stating that items that are sold by the count are not subject to the usual laws of cancellation and nullification. Each item, if it is counted, has a unique value that is not subject to comparisons and absorption by other items. All countries and organizations take a regular accounting of their

inhabitants, members and affiliates. There are many practical reasons for so doing but again, ultimately, it is an expression of worth, respect and even affection. Throughout the books of the prophets we find that regular counts of the Jewish people took place in biblical times. Because of the essence of human beings, every one being different and unique, the Jewish tradition has always been to conduct such counts in an indirect fashion. In our current society where government supervision of individuals is omnipresent, we always have a current and quite accurate count of the population of the country at any given moment. This would be an exaggeration for me to state that the government does so as an expression of its love for its citizens and inhabitants. Nevertheless, it is a measure of importance and the count tells us a great deal about the progress and direction of our society. One of the great miracles that the State of Israel represents to us is the enormous growth of the Jewish population living in this country over the past century. The early Zionist leaders had a wild dream that eventually there would be five million Jews living here. We have lived to see that number greatly surpassed in the span of this last century. This also is an example of the love that Heaven has for the land and people of Israel. Shabbat Shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

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The Ever-Repeated Story (Bamidbar 5777) Covenant & Conversation – Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Bamidbar takes up the story as we left it toward the end of Shemot. The people had journeyed from Egypt to Mount Sinai. There they received the Torah. There they made the Golden Calf. There they were forgiven after Moses' passionate plea, and there they made the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, inaugurated on the first of Nissan, almost a year after the exodus. Now, one month later, on the first day of the second month, they are ready to move on to the second part of the journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

Yet there is a curious delay in the narrative. Ten chapters pass until the Israelites actually begin to travel (Num. 10:33). First there is a census. Then there is an account of the arrangement of the tribes around the Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting. There is a long account of the Levites, their families and respective roles. Then there are laws about the purity of the camp, restitution, the sotah, the woman suspected of adultery, and the nazirite. A lengthy series of passages describe the final preparations for the journey. Only then do they set out. Why this long series of seeming digressions?

It is easy to think of the Torah as simply telling events as they occurred, interspersed with various commandments. On this view the Torah is history plus law. This is what happened, these are the rules we must obey, and there is a connection between them, sometimes clear (as in the case of laws accompanied by reminder that "you were slaves in Egypt"), sometimes less so.

But the Torah is not mere history as a sequence of events. The Torah is about the truths that emerge through time. That is one of the great differences between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. Ancient Greece sought truth by contemplating nature and reason. The first gave rise to science, the second to philosophy. Ancient Israel found truth in history, in events and what God told us to learn from them. Science is about nature, Judaism is about human nature, and there is a great difference between them. Nature knows nothing about freewill. Scientists often deny that it exists at all. But humanity is constituted by its freedom. We are what we choose to be. No planet chooses to be hospitable to life. No fish chooses to be a hero. No peacock chooses to be vain. Humans do choose. And in that fact is born the drama to which the whole Torah is a commentary: how can freedom coexist with order? The drama is set on the stage of history, and it plays itself out through five acts, each with multiple scenes.

The basic shape of the narrative is roughly the same in all five cases. First God creates order. Then humanity creates chaos. Terrible consequences

follow. Then God begins again, deeply grieved but never losing His faith in the one life-form on which He set His image and to which He gave the singular gift that made humanity godlike, namely freedom itself.

Act 1 is told in Genesis 1-11. God creates an ordered universe and fashions humanity from the dust of the earth into which He breathes His own breath. But humans sin: first Adam and Eve, then Cain, then the generation of the Flood. The earth is filled with violence. God brings a flood and begins again, making a covenant with Noah. Humanity sin again by making the Tower of Babel (the first act of imperialism, as I argued in an earlier study). So God begins again, seeking a role model who will show the world what it is to live in faithful response to the word of God. He finds it in Abraham and Sarah.

Act 2 is told in Genesis 12-50. The new order is based on family and fidelity, love and trust. But this too begins to unravel. There is tension between Esau and Jacob, between Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel, and between their children. Ten of Jacob's children sell the eleventh, Joseph, into slavery. This is an offence against freedom, and catastrophe follows – not a Flood but a famine, as a result of which Jacob's family goes into exile in Egypt where the whole people become enslaved. God is about to begin again, not with a family this time but with a nation, which is what Abraham's children have now become.

Act 3 is the subject of the book of Shemot. God rescues the Israelites from Egypt as He once rescued Noah from the Flood. As with Noah (and Abraham), God makes a covenant, this time at Sinai, and it is far more extensive than its precursors. It is a blueprint for social order, for an entire society based on law and justice. Yet again, however, humans create chaos, by making a Golden Calf a mere forty days after the great revelation. God threatens catastrophe, destroying the whole nation and beginning again with Moses, as He had done with Noah and Abraham (Ex. 32:10). Only Moses' passionate plea prevents this from happening. God then institutes a new order.

Act 4 begins with an account of this order, which is unprecedentedly long, extending from Exodus 35, through the whole of the book of Vayikra and the first ten chapters of Bamidbar. The nature of this new order is that God becomes not merely the director of history and the giver of laws. He becomes a permanent Presence in the midst of the camp. Hence the building of the Mishkan, which takes up the last third of Shemot, and the laws of purity and holiness, as well as those of love and justice, that constitute virtually the whole of Vayikra. Purity and holiness are demanded by the fact that God has become suddenly close. In the Tabernacle, the Divine Presence has a home on earth, and whoever comes close to God must be holy and pure. Now the Israelites are ready to begin the next stage of the journey, but only after a long introduction.

That long introduction, at the beginning of Bamidbar, is all about creating a sense of order within the camp. Hence the census, and the detailed disposition of the tribes, and the lengthy account of the Levites, the tribe that mediated between the people and the Divine Presence. Hence also, in next week's parsha, the three laws – restitution, the sotah and the nazir – directed at the three forces that always endanger social order: theft, adultery and alcohol. It is as if God were saying to the Israelites, this is what order looks like. Each person has his or her place within the family, the tribe and the nation. Everyone has been counted and each person counts. Preserve and protect this order, for without it you cannot enter the land, fight its battles and create a just society.

Tragically, as Bamidbar unfolds, we see that the Israelites turn out to be their own worst enemy. They complain about the food. Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses. Then comes the catastrophe, the episode of the spies, in which the people, demoralised, show that they are not yet ready for freedom. Again, as in the case of the Golden Calf, there is chaos in the camp. Again God threatens to destroy the nation and begin again with Moses (Num. 14:12). Again only Moses' powerful plea saves the day. God decides once more to begin again, this time with the next generation and a new

leader. The book of Devarim is Moses' prelude to Act 5, which takes place in the days of his successor Joshua.

The Jewish story is a strange one. Time and again the Jewish people has split apart, in the days of the First Temple when the kingdom divided into two, in the late Second Temple period when it was driven into rival groups and sects, and in the modern age, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it fragmented into religious and secular in Eastern Europe, orthodox and others in the West. Those divisions have still not healed.

And so the Jewish people keeps repeating the story told five times in the Torah. God creates order. Humans create chaos. Bad things happen, then God and Israel begin again. Will the story never end? One way or another it is no coincidence that Bamidbar usually precedes Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. God never tires of reminding us that the central human challenge in every age is whether freedom can coexist with order. It can, when humans freely choose to follow God's laws, given in one way to humanity after the Flood and in another to Israel after the exodus.

The alternative, ancient and modern, is the rule of power, in which, as Thucydides said, the strong do as they will and the weak suffer as they must. That is not freedom as the Torah understands it, nor is it a recipe for love and justice. Each year as we prepare for Shavuot by reading parshat Bamidbar, we hear God's call: here in the Torah and its mitzvot is the way to create a freedom that honours order, and a social order that honours human freedom. There is no other way.

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Parshat Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20) Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel –“And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they left the Land of Egypt.” [Num. 1:1]

How can we transform a no man's land into a domain of sanctity? The Book of Numbers, which we begin reading this Sabbath, provides an answer to this question. In doing so, it addresses the uncertainties and complexities of transitions: from Egyptian servitude to desert freedom and from abject slavery to the possibility of redemption. Perhaps most importantly, this fourth book of the Bible offers a glimpse into the complexities assailing the greatest leader in world history, Moses, and the challenges he faced in leading this transformation. A fierce advocate for his people and passionate lover of God, Moshe Rabbeinu is a towering persona who reminded a nation about its mission in the world and inspired humanity with his clarion call about the human right to freedom. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding his stunningly remarkable achievements, Moses left the world frustrated and disappointed, having been denied his dream of joining his people in the Promised Land.

Fortunately, God's greatest prophet has been resoundingly vindicated by Jewish history. The Jewish People's dramatic and historic return to the Land of Israel continues to draw inspiration from his teachings and longings, as well as from his legacy. The book that bears his name, “Torat Moshe,” is humanity's blueprint for redemption.

It is with this context in mind that we approach the book of “Bemidbar” [“In the Desert”], an apt name for a work that documents the Jewish People's 40-years of transition between Egypt and the Land of Canaan. Indeed, this desert period serves as the precursor of – as well as a most poignant metaphor for – the nearly two thousand years of homeless wandering that characterized much of Jewish history from the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

The Hebrew word for desert midbar contains meanings and allusions that in many ways have served as a beacon for our exile. An example of this is the word for leader, which, though most commonly referred to in Hebrew as *manhig*, our Sages also referred to as *dabar*, fully cognizant of its shared Hebrew letter root d-b-r with *midbar*. [Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 8a]

In the Bible, the paradigmatic position of leadership—as exemplified by Abraham, Moses, and David—is the shepherd. And the desert is, of course, the most natural place for a shepherd to lead his flock: the sheep can comfortably wander in a virtual no-man's land and graze on the vegetation of the various oases or their outskirts without the problem of stealing from private property or harming the ecology of settled habitations.

And perhaps the letter-root d-b-r means leader-shepherd because it also means “word” (dibur). Just as the shepherd directs the flock using sounds and words, the leader of people must also inspire and lead with the verbal message he communicates. Indeed, the Aseret Ha-Dibrot [literally “Ten Utterances,” but better known as the “Ten Commandments”] were revealed in the Sinai desert [midbar], and they govern the Jewish People—as well as a good part of the whole world—to this very day.

Moreover, it is important to note that wherever the Jewish People wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert sanctuary [mishkan], which is derived from the word Shekhina [Divine Presence]. However, God was not in the Sanctuary, for even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, as King Solomon declared when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:27). It was rather God's word [dibur], which was in the sanctuary, in the form of the Ten Utterances [Aseret Ha-Dibrot] on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing Word of God that He would speak from between the cherubs on above the Holy Ark [Ex. 25:16-22].

It was by means of these Divine words [dibrot] that even the desert [midbar]—a metaphor for an inhospitable and alien exile environment: boiling hot by day, freezing cold by night, and deficient in water, the elixir of life—can be transformed into sacred space, the place of the Divine word (dibur). Indeed, the words from the desert of Sinai succeeded in sanctifying the many Marrakeshes and Vilnas and New Yorks of our wanderings. The world is a desert [midbar] waiting to become a sanctuary [d'vir] by means of God's word [dibur], communicated by inspiring leaders [dabarim]. Shabbat Shalom

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Weekly Insights - Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig Parshas Bamidbar - Sivan 5777

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Dovid Ben Yosef. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Making it Count And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai [...] saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of Bnei Yisroel..." (1:1-2)

The fourth book of the Chumash, known as Sefer Bamidbar (literally, book of being "in the desert"), opens with Hashem asking Moshe to undertake a comprehensive counting of the Jewish people. Our sages, therefore, refer to it as "The Book of Counting" (see Mishna Yoma 68b and Rashi ad loc). In fact, even in English we don't translate it literally (i.e. "In the Desert"), rather the fourth book of the Torah has come to be known as "Numbers." This is odd for a number of reasons; first, what is so significant about this counting that this event has come to define the entire sefer? In other words, Chumash Bamidbar spans a period of forty years, how is it that an event that took place at the beginning of the forty years comes to define the entire volume? Second, the whole concept of a census seems problematic. We have a steadfast rule regarding quantifying objects: Rabbi Yitzchak said, "We only find blessings by things that are concealed from the eye" (See Baba Metzia 42a and Rashi ad loc). Once objects become quantified they are no longer subject to specific blessings from Hashem (this is very different from the secular philosophy of "count your blessings"). Yet if this is true, asks the Zohar (Bamidbar 117b), then why does Hashem want us to take a census? Furthermore, why are things which have been counted no longer subject to blessings from above? We find a very interesting

principle of Jewish law: If someone loses money, the rule is "finders keepers." This is not true by other possessions - only by money. The Talmud (Baba Metzia 21b) explains the reason for this as "a person is always checking his pocket (and making sure that his money is there)." Therefore, if someone finds money, one can assume that the person who lost the money is aware of his loss and has given up hope of ever getting it back, thereby relinquishing his ownership. However, what is behind the psychology of a person always checking on his money? Most assets that a person owns have already been actualized to some kind of use (jewelry, cars, art, etc.); they have intrinsic value and therefore add some measure of pleasure to the owner. By their very nature, a person has a sense of ownership over these objects; they are his to enjoy. On the other hand, money and monetary instruments (e.g. stocks, etc.) are merely tools to acquire what he wants. Money has no intrinsic value as an object; its only value lies in its potential. This makes it hard to feel like you have anything. The reason a person is constantly checking on his wallet (or stock portfolio for that matter) is to feel connected and a sense of ownership. The very act of quantifying something is to count what you have. Once a person has done that, the object leaves the domain of G-d's blessing and enters the domain of the owner; it is therefore no longer subject to a blessing from Hashem. The only exception to this universal rule is when Hashem Himself wants to make an accounting. Rashi (1:1) explains that Hashem counts the Jewish people as an expression of His deep love for us. By counting us, Hashem is showing His desire to be connected to us. It is fascinating to note that the word that Rashi uses for love is "chiba" which is derived from the word "chav - responsibility." In other words, true love is taking responsibility for the object of your affection. A true love relationship requires you to be a giver. This means making sure your beloved is well taken care of (obviously, the other party has to respond in kind for it to be a relationship and not some kind of self-sacrificing martyrdom). This is why our sages chose the name the "Book of Counting" for the desert experience. This fourth volume of the Torah is replete with story after story of Hashem's steadfast love and support for the Jewish people throughout the sometimes tumultuous experience of forty years in the desert. By counting us at the beginning of this experience, Hashem is telling us that he will take care of us - because he loves us. *In tribute to the tenth Yahrzeit of Binyamin (Barry) Ross OBM, and as continuing Zechus for R' Binyomin Yitzchak Ben Meir Z'L, the Ross family is sponsoring a free class every week for the entire year.*

Patrilineal Descent? These are the children of Aharon and Moshe [...] And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadav the firstborn, and Avihu, Eleazar, and Itamar (3:1-2). Rashi (as loc) points out a rather glaring inconsistency in the verses; although the Torah explicitly mentioned that it was about to list the children of both Aharon and Moshe, the Torah only records the names of Aharon's children. Rashi goes on to explain that from here the Talmud derives the axiom; "whoever teaches Torah to his friend's child, it is considered as if he gave birth to them" (Sanhedrin 19b). This principle needs clarification. What does it mean that if you teach someone Torah it is as if you gave birth to him? Chazal don't exaggerate or take poetic license; perhaps you taught them some information or gave them some life skills, but how is this akin to giving birth to someone? Additionally, Moshe taught Torah to all of Bnei Yisroel; why are the children of Aharon singled out? This principle should apply to anyone who was at Mount Sinai. The next Rashi on the verse provides us with a clue: On the day Hashem spoke to Moshe (3:1), this teaches us that "they became his children because he taught them what he had heard from the mouth of the Almighty" (Rashi ad loc). Why does Rashi essentially repeat what he already told us in his previous comment? Rashi is bothered by the words "on that day." What specific day is being referred to? If we look at the last verse in next week's parsha we find a very interesting concept; Hashem communicated to Moshe by talking to himself and Moshe merely listened. This seems a little odd; throughout the Torah we find that Hashem spoke directly to Moshe. What is being added here? The answer is that Moshe

heard Hashem studying Torah aloud. Hashem wasn't giving a speech for Moshe to listen to. Hashem was teaching Moshe how to analyze the Torah through His studying it aloud. This is what Moshe taught the children of Aharon. He didn't merely give them information on what they should and should not do. Moshe taught them the skills in the analysis of Torah. These skills allow one to have insights into the Torah that are wholly their own. In other words, this skill allows one to create one's own Torah. This transforms the Torah from merely being information to being a tool from which one is able to transform one's self through the study of Torah. What happens when a person is born? A person achieves a separate identity from his parents. While inside the mother, there is a shared identity. Once born a person has an independence and separate life mission. This is what Moshe achieved by giving the sons of Aharon the skills of Torah analysis. They now had their own individual portion within the Torah - their own identity and that it is why Moshe is credited in giving birth to them.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bamidbar **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** - www.seasonsofthemoon.com For the week ending 27 May 2017 / 2 Sivan 5777 Insights A Yiddishe Kop "The sons of Naftali, their offspring according to their families..." (1:42) In a certain country, being caught gambling was a serious offense. It so happened that one day a certain priest was playing poker with his friends the rabbi and the imam. Suddenly the door flew open and a policeman rushed in. The policeman rushed over to the priest and said, "Gotcha! You were playing poker!" "No I wasn't" protested the priest. "Would you swear that you weren't playing poker?" "Absolutely," said the priest. "So swear!" And he did. Next, the inspector turned to the imam: "You were playing poker!" "No I wasn't" protested the imam. "Would you swear that you weren't playing poker?" "Absolutely," said the priest. "So swear!" And he did. Next the policeman turned to the rabbi, "You were playing poker!" "No I wasn't" protested the rabbi. "Would you swear that you weren't playing poker?" "Listen", said the rabbi, "If this fellow swears that he wasn't playing poker, and this fellow swears that he wasn't playing poker, who was I supposed to be playing poker with?" With this old and not particularly funny joke, we can understand the following anomaly in this week's Torah portion. "The sons of Naftali, their offspring according to their families..." When enumerating all the other tribes, the Torah employs the prefix "For...". As in: "For the sons of Asher... forty-one thousand, five hundred." (1:41). Only with the tribe of Naftali does the Torah omit the "For". Why? The present counting of the tribes of Yisrael was designed to establish the number of each tribe by itself, for, as Rashi points out, the grand total of all the Jewish People was already established that year, and that number was unchanged. Thus, once the other tribes had been counted and only the tribe of Naftali remained, their number was already known by a simple sum of deduction. Therefore, it was not necessary to use the prefix "For". That's what you call a "Yiddishe Kop". Sources: Panim Yafot in Mayana shel Torah © 2017 Ohr Somayach International

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Rabbi Mordechai Willig
Yerushalayim

I Avraham called the name of that place "Hashem will see (yireh)" (Breishis 22:14.) The Medrash Rabba (56:10) states, "Avraham called it Yireh. Shem called it Shalem, as it says (14:18), 'Malkitzedek (i.e. Shem, Rashi) king of Shalem.' Hashem said, 'if I call it Yireh, Shem will complain. If I call it Shalem, Avraham will complain. I will call it Yerushalayim - Yireh Shalem.'" The Meshech Chochma (22:14) explains that Shem lived in the generation of the flood, when the earth became filled with robbery (6:11), and all flesh (even animals, Rashi) perverted its way on the earth (6:12). His

life's work was to correct the evil traits and actions. He called his city Shalem, complete, to emphasize that all of mankind is one complete whole. Each person needs the other, influences and is influenced by him. Thus, Shalem represents interpersonal propriety and wholesome character. Avraham taught monotheism and Divine Providence. He called his city Yireh, (He) will see, to emphasize that Hashem sees and controls world and personal events. He added "Hashem will be seen" when all will recognize that Hashem exists and sustains. This was his life's work (See Rashi 21:33). Hashem combined both names, because both our character and our intellect are purified in Yerushalayim. Yireh means that Hashem sees, and we respond by observing His precepts, bein adam la-Makom. Shalem means that we perfect our character traits, bein adam le-chaveiro. If either of these components is lacking, Yerushalayim is imperiled. The first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed primarily because of Avoda Zara and arayos (Sanhedrin 63b, 64a), which are aveiros bein adam la-Makom. The second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of baseless hatred (Yoma 9b), an aveira bein adam le-chaveiro. The resultant fast days will become holidays only when we will love both truth, bein adam la-Makom, and peace, bein adam le-chaveiro (Zecharya 9:19, see Radak). The Beis Hamikdash was rebuilt shortly after the first destruction. The second state of destruction is nearly two thousand years old. This indicates that interpersonal sins are more severe (Yoma 9b). Hashem spreads peace, "upon us, upon all of His nation Yisrael, and upon Yerushalayim" (ma'ariv on Shabbos). Apparently Yerushalayim requires an additional blessing of peace (Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld). Unfortunately, we have not yet merited this blessing. Yerushalayim is the center of the ongoing conflict between Jews and Arabs. Sadly, it suffers from serious conflicts and even occasional ugly clashes between Jews and Jews, over religious and other issues.

II Fifty years ago, after two days of intense warfare in and around the city, Yerushalayim was reunified with the liberation of the Old City. When the cities of Yehuda were conquered, the obligation to tear one's garment when seeing them in a state of destruction ceased (Magen Avraham 561:1). In Jewish hands they are considered built. This may apply to Yerushalayim as well (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim vol. 4, 70:11). "The built Yerushalayim is like a city that is connected together (chubra la yachdav)" (Tehilim 122:3). The Yerushalmi (Bava Kama 7:7) interprets this to mean that Yerushalayim is a city that connects (shemchaberes) Yisrael one to the other. Technically, this refers to laws of ritual impurity which are relaxed on holidays. When the tribes go up [for aliyah l'regel] (122:4), all of Yisrael are chaveirim (Yerushalmi Chagiga 3:6). Homiletically, the literal translation teaches that Yerushalayim connects Jews to one another. The theme of this year's jubilee commemoration, Yerushalayim Hame'uchedes V'hami'achedes, the unified and that unifies, reflects this idea. Yerushalayim was reunified on the twenty eighth of Iyar fifty years ago. Exactly one week after Yom Yerushalayim, at dawn on Shavuot, the public was allowed to enter the Old City and daven at the Kosel Hama'aravi. I was privileged to attend that unforgettable event. After the traditional mishmar and shacharis k'vasikin, the talmidim of Kerem B'Yavne joined the early morning crowd. We sang and danced to the words of Tehilim 122 as we entered the Old City. The words of Musaf at the Kosel, "Bring us to Tziyon Your city with joy" were recited with great emotion and exultation. Among the most remarkable and unforgettable highlights of that march was the fulfillment of "Yerushalayim the built, a city that connects Jews to one another." Chasidim in their holiday shtreimels, Yeshiva students wearing knitted kipot, and bare-headed Jews with cameras slung over their shoulders danced together on that day. It was a taste of the unity of Messianic times, and was followed by the ba'al teshuva movement. Many tribulations and conflicts have come upon Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael since those heady days of 1967. As we commemorate Yom Yerushalayim and prepare for Shavuot fifty years later, we aspire for the unity of the first Shavuot, as one man with one heart (Rashi, Shemos 19:2), as we pray for the ultimate rebuilding of Yerushalayim, speedily in our days.

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blogs.timesofisrael.com/author/ben-tzion-spitz/

The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz Bamidbar: Nation of individuals May 25, 2017 Iyyar 29, 5777

Never be afraid to tread the path alone. Know which is your path and follow it wherever it may lead you; do not feel you have to follow in someone else's footsteps. – Gita Bellin

At the beginning of the Book of Numbers, God commands Moses to count the army-age men of Israel. They number around 600,000 men above the age of twenty. However, the Torah goes into much more detail than just the final tally of the census. It breaks down the count according to each tribe. It provides the name of each tribe prince. It goes as far as naming the different family clans within each tribe. Rabbi Hirsch on Numbers 1:1-2 explains that the fact that the Torah describes that level of organizational detail demonstrates that it wasn't merely an unorganized assembly. Each tribe, each family and each individual counted. Each individual had a unique contribution to the nation that only he could contribute as part of his sub-unit and as part of the whole. In Rabbi Hirsch's words: "The community cannot exist as an abstract idea but can have true being only in terms of the totality of its components. At the same time, each member of the community is made aware that he personally "counts" as an important constituent of this totality, and that the task to be performed by the nation as a whole requires every one of its members to remain true to his duty and purposefully devoted to the vocation he shares with all the others." Indeed, it is easy to let the burden of the community's needs be carried by others. There are many who have organizational strengths, passion, time and resources to invest. However, don't doubt that there is a special and unique purpose that is the domain and prerogative of every single individual. There is a strength, a capacity, a contribution that if we do not make, will be lacking and no one else can ever make it up. The whole will be incomplete. That voice, that hand, that smile will be missing. May we understand what our individual mission and purpose are and bring our gifts, our talents and our unique capabilities to bear within the totality of the community of Israel. *Shabbat Shalom & Chag Shavuot Sameach Dedication - To the Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst and their outstanding Rabbinic and communal leadership*

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/>

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites

The Jerusalem Post Parashat Bamidbar: Free for anyone in the world Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Last week, we finished reading the Book of Leviticus – the third of the five books of the Bible, whose main focus is laws pertaining to the Temple and the kohanim, laws of purity and impurity. This week, we begin the fourth book – Numbers. It is interesting to discern the chronological division of the five books of the Torah. The Book of Genesis encompasses thousands of years of history, up to Jacob's descent to Egypt with his family. Exodus and Leviticus span about 200 years, from the time Genesis ends until the end of the first year following the exodus from Egypt. Numbers describes various events that occurred over the next 39 years of the Israelites' wanderings in the desert, until they reached the entrance of the Land of Israel. The last book, Deuteronomy, describes the last few months in the desert and the parting of the great leader, Moses, from his people. The Book of Numbers (its Hebrew name, Bamidbar, means "in the desert") tells us about the long stay in the desert en route from Egypt to the Promised Land. The most significant event to occur in the desert was the revelation at Mount Sinai, when the entire nation heard the Ten Commandments, received the Torah, and entered into an eternal covenant with God, with a purpose and role that have accompanied the Jewish nation in the thousands of years since then. The sages of the Midrash focused on this unique event when the Torah was given and asked, "Why was the Torah given in the desert?" This is not a naive question. It stems from a deep theological-religious perspective that sees the desert as a place that does not mesh with the Torah's orientation. If

we thought that Judaism wished to encourage solitude and isolation and to focus on whatever is beyond reality, then the desert would be the appropriate place for giving the Torah. But the sages who asked this question understood that the desert conflicts with the Torah's orientation, which is to create an active society that is motivated by morals and sacred values. Seemingly, the Torah should have been given in a city, a place where people live active lives. The answer given by our sages reveals basic values that could change the perception of Judaism: "Just as the desert is free for anyone in the world, so the words of the Torah are free for anyone in the world" (Midrash Numbers Raba 1:7). The phrase "free for anyone in the world" raises two points. First, the Torah, like the desert, is free. The desert is a place that does not demand specific traits or skills from man. In the desert, you are who you are, without additions and with nothing to hide. So, too, with the Torah. Judaism does not turn to people with specific skills, a certain level of education, or particular personality traits. It is not a spiritual method suitable only for a few. Judaism presents a wide and encompassing vision and lifestyle that do not have preconditions. They appeal to and are suitable for any person, wherever he is, however he is. The second interesting point is the comparison between the desert and the Torah in the phrase "for anyone in the world." The desert is a place devoid of a specific culture, disconnected from civilizations with their perspectives and norms. The desert is a place where man can create his own culture and act of his own free will. Historical experience shows that Judaism survived the influences of a great many and varied cultures, in a great many places. This shows us that the Torah does not shape itself to fit in with any particular culture or generation. Judaism offers a human, existential framework that can be applied to any generation or culture. In this regard, Judaism – like the desert – is "for anyone in the world." *The writer is the rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites. Copyright © 2016 Jpost Inc.*

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Rav Kook Torah Jerusalem Day: Windows to World Peace

Over the millennia, Jews have faced the holy city of Jerusalem when praying. The Talmud in Berachot 34b derives this practice from how Daniel would pray in Babylon: "One should only pray in a house which has windows, as it says, 'And Daniel would enter his house, where there were open windows in his upper chamber facing Jerusalem; three times a day he would kneel and pray' (Daniel 6:11)." Why are windows needed for prayer? Is not prayer a private exercise of the soul, where one concentrates inward? And why did Daniel have his windows facing Jerusalem? Engaged Prayer Prayer is an intensely introspective activity, but it should not lead us to belittle the value of being part of the world around us. If meditation and private prayer lead us to withdraw from the outside world, then we have missed prayer's ultimate goal. The full import of prayer cannot be properly realized by those secluded in a monastery, cut off from the world. Prayer should inspire us to take action for just and worthy causes. For this reason, the Sages taught that we should pray in a room with windows, thus indicating our ties and moral obligations to the greater world. As we affirm our connection to the world, it is important that we turn toward the city of Jerusalem. Our aspirations for perfecting the world should be channeled through the goal of universal peace. This is the significance of directing our prayers toward Jerusalem, whose name means "the city of peace." Jerusalem is the focal point from which God's prophetic message emanates to the world — "For the Torah shall come forth from Zion, and God's word from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3). (*Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I on Berachot 34b (5:124)*) Copyright © 2010 by Chanan Morrison
