



To: parsha@groups.io
From: cshulman@gmail.com

BS"D

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BAMIDBAR - 5780

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 25th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to <http://www.parsha.net> and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io. Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com. A complete archive of previous issues is now available at <http://www.parsha.net>. It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of
Chaim Yissachar z"l ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

Sponsored by
Yossie and Tzivia Rubin
Lizecher Nishmas
Asher Zelig Ben Tzvi Shlomo z"l

Dedicated for a refuah shleimah to **Yisrael Yaakov ben Rut**

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@parsha.net
(proceeds to tzedaka)

Omer: Count 44 Friday night after dark

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

to: ravfrand@torah.org

date: May 21, 2020, 6:24 PM

subject: Rav Frand - Why So Few Leviim?

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Cryptic Comment of the Baal HaTurim Explained by the Bach

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

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

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

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

All Is Well That Ends Well

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

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

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

Rav Isaac Bernstein shared an interesting idea from the Teshuvos Rav Pe’alim. In Talmudic times, every person who received an aliyah did not make two brachos (one prior to his aliyah and one following it) as is the custom today. Rather, the first olah recited the beginning bracha (asher bachar banu...) and the final (usually the seventh) olah made the final bracha (asher nasan lanu Toras emes...). The Rav Pe’alim says that the result of this is that the last thing the congregation hears is not the final words of the last

pasuk, but rather the last words of the final bracha “Who gave us the True Torah and Eternal Life He has implanted in our midst, Blessed Art Thou Who Gives Us the Torah!” That is not a bad note. We are not stopping at the words “They will die” or “their blood is within them.” We are stopping at “Who Gives Us the Torah.”

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

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

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD
dhoffman@torah.org

This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information. Rav Frand © 2020 by Torah.org. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Torah.org. Both the author and Torah.org reserve certain rights. Email copyrights@torah.org for full information. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 225 Baltimore, MD 21209
http://www.torah.org/ learn@torah.org

from: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation

Egalitarian Society, Jewish-Style (Bamidbar 5780)

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

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

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

The Midrash takes three words associated with Sinai – fire (that was blazing on the mountain just before the revelation), water (based on a phrase in the Song of Deborah) and wilderness (as at the beginning of our parsha, and also

in Exodus 19:1, 2), and it connects them by saying that “they are free to all the inhabitants of the world.”

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

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

The symbol of this was the revelation at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when God revealed Himself not only to a Prophet but to an entire people, who three times signalled their consent to the commands and the covenant. In the penultimate command that Moses gave to the people, known as *Hakhel*, he gave the following instruction: “At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deut. 31:10-13)

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

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

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

Truly the name of that man is to be blessed, namely Joshua ben Gamla, for but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all . . . They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] but if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Joshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town, and that children should enter school at the age of six or seven.[2] Universal compulsory education did not exist in England – at that time the world’s leading imperial power – until 1870, a difference of 18 centuries. At roughly the same time as Joshua ben Gamla, in the first century C.E., Josephus could write:

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

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

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

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

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

Office of Rabbi Sacks PO Box 72007 London NW6 6RW Tel: +44(0)20 7286 6391 info@rabbisacks.org

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Home Weekly Parsha Bamidbar

Rabbi Wein’s Weekly Blog

This section of the Torah is entitled, *Bamidbar*, in the desert. It is hard for us to imagine, though it may be less hard in our current situation than it was before we were put into quarantine, how the Jewish people lived in the desert for four decades. Since they had no gainful occupations and they had no struggle to feed themselves for the miraculous bread from heaven fell and the well of Miriam and of Moshe provided them with water and sustenance.

What did they do with their time? The apparent answer is that they absorbed themselves in understanding, studying, and assessing the laws and values of the Torah. In any event, they had to raise a new generation of people, a generation that would pursue the goal of entering the land of Israel and settling it and creating a more normal, so to speak, Jewish society.

Our rabbis have characterized the generation of the desert as being one of great intelligence, knowledge and understanding. Yet it was a generation of seemingly no purpose because it was doomed to die in the desert and not accomplish the goal that was entrusted to it when it left Egypt. It was told

that it would accept the Torah and then march into the land of Israel. Moshe was successful in having them accept the Torah, but he was unsuccessful in attempting to have them move to the land of Israel. In fact, an element of the people would say that not only would they not go forward to the land of Israel, but they would be willing to retreat and go backwards into the land of Egypt, the land of affliction and of plagues.

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

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

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

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

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

In My Opinion Shavuot – The Book of Ruth

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

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

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

Life is oftentimes very difficult, and its burdens can be crushing. For many of us, we are passing through such a time currently. Everything that was familiar, and in fact taken for granted, has been struck from our daily lives. Our future is certainly murky and mysterious. Because of this, strength of character and an iron will to persevere and overcome is vitally necessary. Naomi is the symbol of these strengths that we desire for ourselves and our community. It is her resourcefulness and true understanding of human nature that will stand us in good stead in our hour of difficulty and adjustment that is upon us. The challenge is how to summon up these characteristics and apply them to our own lives.

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

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

Shabbat Shalom
Berel Wein

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com
subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Jerusalem Day: The Two Messengers Rav Kook Torah

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Herald of Jerusalem, on the other hand, speaks of our return to holiness, so that we may fulfill our national destiny as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). This messenger of redemption calls for the restoration of Jerusalem, our holy city, and the holy Temple. Unlike the Herald of Zion, she stands on “a high mountain” - her vision comes from a high and lofty standpoint. But her voice is faint and her demand is not heard clearly. The Herald of Jerusalem seems to fear raising her voice too loudly. The prophet found fault with both messengers. He reproved the Herald of Zion: Why are you standing down below, together with all the other nations?

Why do you only speak of the commonplace goals of the gentile nations? "Ascend a lofty mountain!" Speak in the Name of God, in the name of Israel's holy mission, in the name of the prophetic visions of redemption for the Jewish people and all of humanity.

The prophet then turned to the Herald of Jerusalem: You who call for the return to the city of holiness, you are speaking from the right place, demanding our lofty ideals. But your voice is not heard. You need to learn from the Herald of Zion and "Lift up your voice in strength, be not afraid!"

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
to: weekly@ohr.edu
subject: Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Bamidbar

For the week ending 23 May 2020 / 29 Iyyar 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parsha Insights

The Biggest Shul in the World

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

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

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

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

© 2020 Ohr Somayach International

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com
http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb
from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>
reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
www.ou.org

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Transitions and Destinations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My private thoughts of transitions and destinations are painfully relevant this year, 5780/2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the past several

months, our lives, indeed the lives of the entire human race, have changed drastically.

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

Transition, or destination?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Shavuot Sameach.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Author.aspx/1199>

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

chiefrabbi.org

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Bamidbar

Will people be proud to be connected to you?

This Shabbat, we commence the reading of the book of Bamidbar. Right at the beginning of the book the Torah provides us with details of the heads of tribes, it says ראש לְבֵית־אָבְתָיו הָיָה – 'each one of them was the head of a household'. Rav Moshe Chofetz tells us in his book Melech Machshevet

that there is a message here for each and every one of us. That's because every one of us is an 'אִישׁ' – a person, and we should likewise strive to be ראש לְבֵית־אָבְתָיו – 'the head of a household'. This means, he explains, that people will be proud to be connected to us and in future generations, people will be proud to be descended from us.

The Maggid of Mezerich, Rav Dov Ber ben Avraham, was the primary disciple of the Ba'al Shem Tov, one of the great founders of Chassidism. When he was five years old he came home to find his mother distraught. There had been a fire in their home, it had caused damage but they had managed to put it out. So he said "Mummy, all of us are okay! Nobody died, isn't that what's important?" She replied, "that's not why I'm crying. You see, we had a document, a piece of paper that was our family tree and we can show everyone how we are descended directly from King David. That document has now gone up in flames." So the little Dov Ber said to his mother 'don't worry Mummy, I will always try to be a good person and please God one day, people will be proud to be descended from me'. That is the message of ראש לְבֵית־אָבְתָיו – that we should strive to be outstanding role models, whom people are proud to be connected to.

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

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

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

blogs.timesofisrael.com

Bamidbar: Biblical Military Organization

Ben-Tzion Spitz

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

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

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

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

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

Reuven: 46,500

Judah: 74,600
Ephraim: 40,500
Dan: 62,700
Shimon: 59,300
Issachar: 54,400
Menashe: 32,200
Asher: 41,500
Gad: 45,650
Zebulun: 57,400
Benjamin: 35,400
Naphtali: 53,400
Total: 603,550

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

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

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

Dedication - To our children going back to school.

Shabbat Shalom,

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

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

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

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Bamidbar - The Book of the Holy Nation

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

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

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

Thus, for example, if in the book of Leviticus we read about priests sacrificing offerings, in the book of Numbers there is a focus on the sacrifices brought by the leaders of the tribes who dedicated the Tabernacle with their offerings. If in Leviticus we read about stealing as an offense

against G-d demanding atonement, in Numbers we learn about stealing from a "ger" (stranger) as an offense against someone without rights. Leviticus provides an in-depth description of the holiness of priests and the restrictions incumbent upon them, while Numbers tells us about the "sotah" that deals with the holiness of the Jewish family. We can also compare the High Priest and his work which is described in detail in Leviticus with the monastic "nazir" described in Numbers, who can come from any tribe and any part of the nation and is compared in many ways to the High Priest.

In Numbers, we take on a different outlook from the one we had in Leviticus.

Until now we read and learned about the Tabernacle and the priests – a restricted space and specific people whose spiritual level and role served as a beacon for the entire nation. But from here on we speak about the nation itself and aspire that the holiness will be expressed within the family, not just in the temple; in interpersonal relationships, not only in worship of G-d; in the army and not just in the synagogues. Judaism aspires not only to elevate a limited number of places and people and make them holy, but for those sacred places and people to spread that holiness to the entire nation.

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

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

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

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Torah in Action /Shema Yisrael <parsha@torahinaction.com>

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Bamidbar

פרשת במדבר תשפ

וידבר ד' אל משה במדבר סיני

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

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

Avraham *Avinu* was flung into a fiery furnace, due to the threat that he presented to the prevailing pagan belief. By his very action of self-sacrifice, our Patriarch infused our nation with the DNA of *mesiras nefesh*. To dispel the notion that *mesiras nefesh* was an individual proclivity, with only a select few that were committed enough to act – our nation demonstrated its commitment by the waters of the Red Sea. We now have fire and water.

What about enduring commitment? Veritably, we have proven our readiness during the singular demand on our lives. Are we ready, however, to live a life of self-sacrifice – day in and day out? The answer to this question came during our forty-year trek in the wilderness, in a desert fraught with danger.

Fire, water and wilderness demonstrated our spiritual mettle. *Zocharti lach chesed ne'urayich*, "I remembered for you the kindness of your youth... following after Me, in the wilderness, in an unsown/unchartered land" (*Yirmiyahu 2:2*). *Horav Meir Shapiro, zl*, posits that these three *nisyonos* – trials of fire, water and wilderness – each representing its own unique form of *mesiras nefesh*, served as the catalysts for *Klal Yisrael* to receive the Torah as a *kinyan olam*, eternal acquisition, whereby the Torah is ours forever.

Yet, not all of us are prepared to accept challenge – especially when it involves our children. The *Chidushei Ha'Rim, zl*, was wont to say, "I see a *olam hafuch*, upside down world. The *Talmud (Niddah 16b)* teaches that prior to one's birth, it has already been Heavenly decreed whether he will be wealthy or poor. Concerning his spiritual proclivity – whether he will be righteous or wicked – it is not decreed, since *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, is not Heavenly mandated. Yet, parents seem to worry regarding their son's *parnassah*, livelihood (which is Heavenly-designated), and ignore their son's spiritual advancement (expressing little to no concern regarding his spiritual direction in life)."

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

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

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

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

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

Rav Zohar concluded his story. A simple couple – who were far from simple – unless one considers sincerity to be simple. Our prayers should not

commence suddenly when something goes wrong, but, from the moment of marriage, this should be the goal upon which we place our initial and principal focus.

כל יצאי צבא בישראל תפקדו אתם לצבאתם

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

The men appeared to have been counted as soldiers. The minimum age to serve as a soldier in the army (Jewish) – the legion – was twenty years old, since people achieve their physical maturity by then. Men older than sixty were no longer counted; they were past the age of military service. The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* teaches that (miraculously) every Jew between the ages of twenty to sixty was physically able to serve as a soldier. The *Kli Yakar* says that each Jew was not only physically fit for Army service, but he was also spiritually fit to serve in the Heavenly *tzavah, tzvah marom*, the group of ministering angels who serve Hashem. Indeed, we find the terms commonly associated with military service used freely concerning *Am Yisrael: tzvah; machane*, camp; *pikudim*; each and every Jew without physical or spiritual flaw prepared to serve Hashem as a soldier, in both the physical and spiritual realms.

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

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

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

The following story of Hershel the Shoemaker (related by *Horav Lazar Brodie*) should give us all reason to pause and ask ourselves if we are ever guilty of treating people who appear to be "different" inappropriately. In a small village in Poland (circa mid to end of eighteenth century), there lived a (seemingly) simple Jew – unerudite, could not read or write, poverty-stricken, physically misshapen (facial countenance). For all public intent and purposes, he seemed (and was considered to be) mentally challenged. He spoke to no one (people thought he was unable to speak), mumbling incoherently to himself all day. He would sit on the outside steps leading into the *shul* all day repairing shoes. He had his little box with a shoe form on it, a hammer and nails, and would earn his meager living by repairing whatever shoes people gave him. His name was Tzvi Hirsch, and the

members of the community had nicknamed him, “Hershel the Shoemaker.” Sadly, he was the brunt of everyone’s jokes, from scholar to children. A day did not pass that someone who entered the *shul* did not in some manner denigrate him. Hershel never responded – always accepting the ridicule with grace, as he continued mumbling to himself and banging his hammer onto the shoes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ואלה תולדות אהרן ומשה... נדב ואביהו אלעזר ואיתמר

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

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

In his *Gur Aryeh* commentary, the *Maharal* wonders why the Torah emphasizes Aharon’s sons more so than any other Jew. After all, Moshe was the *Rabban shel kol Yisrael* – every Jew’s *Rebbe*. He explains that while Moshe certainly taught all Jews, he spent extra time and expended greater devotion to teaching Aharon’s sons. This teaches us that the *rebbe* who is *massur b’lev v’nefesh*, devoted heart and soul to the student, to the point that he spends his own time, going beyond the “clock,” he is the one who can view his *talmidim*, students, as sons.

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

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

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

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

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

Indeed – whether collectively as a nation or individually, we Jews suffer, but we ultimately gain from it. In the secular world, this is a well-known cliché: “no pain – no gain”. It is no different in the spiritual world. Hashem tests us, because He knows that we are able to pass. If we pass or fail is up to us. If we fail, we should not give up. We just did not perform according to our capacity. *Horav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, zl*, teaches, “Serving the

Almighty properly involves constant challenges, which demands consistency and persistence to achieve success... Only fools give up hope.” Why do we often give up? Because we do not have faith in ourselves to succeed. The *Sifrei Chassidus* teach that just as one must believe in Hashem, he must also believe in himself. Obviously, Hashem believes in him – otherwise, he would not have tested him. We all have the capacity to overcome evil, to rise above challenge, to make ourselves great again!

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

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

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

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

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

Va’ani Tefillah

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

The *Bircas Hodaah*, Thanksgiving blessing, begins with our acknowledgement of Hashem’s greatness and our relationship to Him. We then continue with specifics – the particulars for which we are thankful to Him. The actual meaning of *modim/nodeh* is to confess or acknowledge a fact. We “confess” our indebtedness to Hashem, as we recount the many reasons for which we are grateful. But, as *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, observes, is it possible to even begin to encapsulate the immense gratitude that we have to Hashem? Furthermore, is it possible to repay Him? Thus,

while we are unable to properly offer our gratitude, we begin by praising Him. The *Rav* adds that since we owe Him so much for which we are unable to ever express ourselves appropriately, we offer praise to Him whenever the opportunity presents itself. This is the source/reason for the custom of responding to inquiries concerning one’s health with “*Baruch Hashem*, Thank G-d, I am well.” We must never forget that whatever condition we are in, it is always, *Baruch Hashem*. This is one of the fundamentals of *chinuch ha’banim*, educating our children: to inculcate them with the notion that everything comes from Hashem. We must constantly reiterate this verity to them.

Sponsored לעילוי נשמת ר' אלתר חיים דוד בן ר' מנחם שמואל ז"ל נפ' ל"ח אייר תשס"ז ת.צ.ב.ה. In Memory of Mr. David Salomon ©All rights reserved Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org>

reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il

subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion
Shabbat Shalom: Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20)
By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

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

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

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

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

Moreover, wherever the Israelites wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert Mishkan, or Sanctuary, a word which is derived from Shechina, Divine Presence. However, God was not in the Sanctuary; even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, declared King Solomon when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem (I Kings 8:27). It was rather God’s word, *dibur*, which was in the Sanctuary, in the form of the “Ten Words” on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing word of God which He would speak (*vedibarti*, Ex. 25:22) from between the cherubs on the ends of the Kapporet above the Holy Ark. It was by means of these divine words that even the desert, the midbar—a metaphor for an inhospitable and even alien exile environment which is boiling hot by day, freezing cold by night, and deficient in water that is the very elixir of life—

can become transformed into sacred space, the place of the divine word (dibur). Indeed, another name for our Holy Temple or Sanctuary is D'vir, the place of the word. And those words from the desert of Mount Sinai (diburim) succeeded in sanctifying the many Babylons, Marrakeshes, Vilnas, and New Yorks of our wanderings! God's word can transform a desert—any place and every place—into a veritable Sanctuary; indeed the world is a midbar waiting to become a dvir (sanctuary) by means of God's dibur, communicated by inspired leaders, dabarim.

I believe that this understanding will serve to answer another question which is asked by our sages, the answer to which is especially relevant on the week of BaMidbar leading into Shavuot. The Midrash di Rabbi Yishmael Commentary on Parshat Yitro queries why God's Revelation was given in a par'osia—a desert, a no-man's-land, an open space—rather than at Mount Moriah, the place of Abraham's sacrifice later to become the Temple Mount. Is it not strange that the most important message—a kerygma to use the Greek—given to Israel emanated from a mountaintop in a desert outside Israel rather than from the sacred land which God Himself bequeathed to His chosen people? The response given by the Midrash has many ramifications for us today. The midrash maintains that had the Torah been given on the Temple Mount, the Israelites would have assumed that it was only for them. God specifically chose a par'osia in order to demonstrate that the Torah was ultimately meant for the entire world; in the very words of the Mechilta, "Let any human being who wishes to accept the Torah take it upon himself." This will help us understand the midrash in the beginning of V'zot habracha which pictures God as first offering the Torah to the Edomites of Mount Seir and then to the Ishmaelites of Mount Paran (BT Avoda Zara 2b, see also Rashi to Deut. 33:2). Unfortunately, they were not ready to accept it at that time; only Israel was willing to say, "We shall perform [the commandments] and we shall internalize them." It then became our task as a "Kingdom of Priest-Teachers and a Holy Nation" to expose and eventually teach the Torah as "a light unto the nations of the world." At that time there will be a second revelation in which "God will inform us a second time before the eyes of every living being that He is to be their God," a prayer which we repeat every Sabbath in the Kedusha of the Musaf Amida prayer. The desert then becomes a symbol of a no-man's-land which will eventually become an every-person's-land.

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

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

from: Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff <ymkaganoff@gmail.com>

to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com

May I Participate in the Census?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

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

Question #1: Counting Sheep

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

Question #2: Counting from a List

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

Question #3: Ki Sissa or Hoshea?

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

Answer: Analyzing the Sources in Chazal:

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

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

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

The Gemara quotes three Biblical sources for this prohibition:

1. When the nation of Ammon threatened the Jewish community of Yaveish-Gilad, Shaul gathered a large Jewish army and counted them in an indirect manner (Shmuel I 11:8). According to one opinion in the Gemara, Shaul counted the members of his army by having each throw a piece of broken pottery into a pile. Thus, we see that even to fulfill a mitzvah, one may count Jews only in an indirect manner.

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

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

Isn't the Torah a Clearer Source?

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

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

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

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

Why the Prophets?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Counting from a List

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

Advertising Campaigns to Help the Needy

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

The Census

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

Parshas Ki Sissa, which should appear to be the Torah source for this mitzvah, begins with the words "Ki sissa es rosh bnei Yisrael." Although the explanation of this pasuk is "When you count the members of Bnei Yisrael," literally, the words can be translated as "When you lift up the heads of Bnei Yisrael." The question is why did the Torah use this expression rather than say more clearly that it is defining how to count the Jewish People. Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe, Ki Sissa) explains as follows: When someone realizes that he did something wrong, that individual may justify what he did by saying, "I am not important. What difference does it make if I do not do what is expected of me?" Unfortunately, this type of mistaken humility can become a person's undoing.

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

from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org
reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org
subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU
Six for Six : How the World Changed in Six Days
May 21, 2020, by Rabbi Moshe Taragin

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

1. The Return to the Biblical “Corridor”

In 1948, Jews were graciously “permitted” to return to a carved-up parcel of Israel. This immigration soothed the world’s conscience after the horrors of the Holocaust and, additionally, solved the ugly issue of unwanted Jewish refugees. By contrast, in 1967, we returned to the Biblical corridor – a passage of land which cuts through the heart of Israel and the heart of Jewish history. This territory stretches from Shechem in the north, snakes its way through Jerusalem, bends toward Beit Lechem and Chevron finally levels off in Be’er Sheva in the south. Jewish history, narrated in the book of Breishit, emerged in these lands and our return to this Biblical passageway signaled the resurgence of the History. Jews actually living in the provinces of original Jewish history signals the acceleration of history in a way that the important but indefinite events of 1948 did not.

2) A Emergent Superpower

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

3. Jews Flocking Home

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

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

4. Gradual Diplomatic Acceptance

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

5. Religious Revival

The legendary scenes of Israeli soldiers sounding the shofar while standing at the newly liberated Kotel galvanized an entire people. Witnessing G-d’s explicit intervention in the historical process prompted a revival of religious sentiment. Over the past 50 years Israel has rightly established itself as the epicenter of worldwide Torah study. The euphoric aftermath of 1967 launched the national religious world of yeshivot and Torah institutions, which, alongside the Charedi Torah world, has dramatically augmented the spread of Torah study. Beyond the advances in Torah and halachik observance, our country has also witnessed a revival of ‘traditionalism’ amongst a majority of Israeli Jews who identify as “Masorati”. They may not and in His historical mission for His people. 1967 altered the religious landscape of Israel!

6) The Confidence Index of Worldwide Jewry

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

Six days and six seismic shifts in Jewish history !

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

7 חדשות ערוץ 7

Return to the gates of Zion - 1967

Rabbi Dr. Aryeh Hirsch

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

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

There is a connection between these two statements:

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

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

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

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

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

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

This process began in 1948, and continued on Wednesday, June 9, 1967, when the Israel Defense Forces, under commander Motta Gur, received a Divine gift and routed the foreign occupiers, the Jordanian army, and returned Zion to the people of Israel. Yisrael Ariel was one of the paratroopers that day. He was then a student of Rav Tzvi Yehudah's at Yeshivat Mercav Harav. He never left those watchtowers of Zion, and he has for decades been the director of Machon Hamikdash, the Temple Institute. The Institute studies the laws of the Temple, has been preparing people and vessels to use in our future Temple, and gives guided tours in Jerusalem's Old City.

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

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

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

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

Battle-hardened soldiers were moved to tears by the bravery of Rav Goren, and by Rav Goren's blowing of the shofar in the midst of battle. When another Mercav Harav student, Yoram Zamush, succeeded in planting the Israeli flag on the top of the Kotel, Commander Motta Gur had called up to

him that he deserved a prize for his efforts, and he should name whatever he wanted.

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

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

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

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

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

As soldiers bowed in thanks to the Almighty, prostrating themselves on the plaza in front of the Kotel, others caressed the stones of the Holy Temple, and others began singing Psalm 126: "A song of ascents, when the Lord will return the captivity of Zion, we will be as dreamers".

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

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

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

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

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