

On Thursday night we counted the 43rd day of the Omer. Count the next number for Shabbat on Friday night

Potomac Torah Study Center

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May 21-23, 2028; Shavuot (double issue because I won't be able to post with the short week)
Friday May 15 is Yom Yerushalayim

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

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Our tradition is that there should always be a Shabbat between the curses of Bechukotai and Shavuot so we do not go into Yom Tov with curses. The result is that we always begin reading Sefer Bemidbar before Shavuot. Next week is a short work week for me before Shavuot begins, so I shall be unable to post next week. This issue therefore covers both Bemidbar and Shavuot.

Sefer Bemidbar opens with B'Nai Yisrael still camping at the base of Har Sinai, where they have been since shortly after departing from Egypt – in terms of the Chumash, between Beshalach and Yitro. (According to Rashi and many commentators, the Torah is not precisely chronological around the beginning of Yitro – not a subject for me today.)

As Bemidbar opens, God has Moshe take a census by tribe and family, and He then sets places for each tribe to organize around the Mishkan. Anyone who is tamai must leave the camp until becoming ritually pure (tahor) again. Tamai includes both physical impurities and spiritual ones (such as cheating in business). The focus on spiritual purity again at this point (with the census and instructions on where to place each tribe and family) indicates that something significant is about to happen. B'Nai Yisrael are about to leave the base of Har Sinai to resume their journey to the land that Hashem had promised to our ancestors.

In the first part of Sefer Bemidbar, the tone is optimistic. The people look forward to the next stage and finally entering the promised land. The leaders of the tribes prepare to make their gifts for the Mishkan – and they coordinate to give exactly the same gifts, no tribe trying to outstage any of the others. Some members of B'Nai Yisrael who were tamai or too far from the camp to participate in the Korban Pesach on the first year in the Midbar ask Moshe to find a way for them to participate. Moshe consults with Hashem, who initiates Pesach Sheni to accommodate their wish to be a part and engage in all the mitzvot with everyone else.

In the third parsha of Bemidbar, the tone remains optimistic – Yitro even meets the camp, and an excited Moshe invites Yitro to join B'Nai Yisrael. Finally, in the 6th aliyah, B'Nai Yisrael start the journey with great ceremony. However, almost immediately, soft voices raise questions and concerns. Some people look for an excuse to complain. The complaints spread, and everything falls apart. What starts with unity and great optimism turns into despair and tragedy. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, presents an extensive and brilliant introduction to Sefer Bemidbar and mentions that this entire

process, which is spread over much of the Sefer, occurs in only twenty days! The *Torah Anthology* demonstrates that Miriam's tzaraat, Korach's rebellion, and the sin of the Meraglim all take place the same week, while B'Nai Yisrael wait for Miriam to recover from tzaraat. The Rav, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik zt"l, put together the story of optimism turning to despair in a brilliant Dvar Torah that I share every year for Behaalotecha. I present the citation to Rabbi Sacks' introduction at the end of his Dvar Torah below.

I shall also present the citation to the Torah Anthology when I post for Behaalotecha.

This week is especially busy for my family, because we have three straight evenings with obligations in addition to numerous tasks as usual during this time of year. I must post early this week and do not have time for my usual more detailed introduction. I have been consulting with the staff of Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander, President and Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, about featuring some of the outstanding young leaders that OTS has been training for leadership roles in the Jewish community. The first such young leader to feature is Gabi Gardner, a young woman who completed high school and chose to serve Israel coordinating counselors for Bnai Akiva. As Rabbi Brander teaches us, young people such as Ms. Gardner work to bring elements of the Jewish community in Israel closer – an important part of what the Jewish community needs to work together for a brighter future.

Friday (tomorrow as I write) is Yom Yerushalayim, anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967, 59 years ago. I remember the day well, and Hannah and I fondly remember attending the Bar Mitzvah celebration of the reunification in 1980 from the walls of Jerusalem (guests of our cousins). We look forward to returning to Israel in a few months with our children and grandchildren, where we hope to introduce our grandchildren and daughter-in-law to the miracle of our homeland.

Shabbat Shalom; Chag Shavuot Samaich. Happy 59th year anniversary of the reunification of Jerusalem.

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeez Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

From: Friends of the IDF

Friday, May 15 is Yom Yerushalayim, Jerusalem Day. On the 28th of Iyar, 1967, three words rose from the smoke of the Old City: **Har HaBayit beyadeinu! The Temple Mount is in our hands.**

For nineteen years, the Kotel had stood beyond reach. Then, the 55th Paratroopers Brigade, led by Mordechai "Motta" Gur, broke through Lion's Gate, and the city returned to its people.

On Yom Yerushalayim, we celebrate our soldiers who carried a 2,000-year-old prayer across a battlefield and made it a reality. Because of them, families today climb to the Kotel, students fill the yeshivas, and the ancient city stands whole.

As Shavuot approaches, we remember that the soldiers of '67 returned us not only to a city, but to the holy place where

thousands gathered just days later to celebrate—and where families still gather today for prayer, hope, and community.

We will always honor and support our protectors who continue to guard these same gates, ensuring the historic city of Jerusalem remains open to every generation that follows.

Am Yisrael Chai. Always.

Haftarat “Machar Chodesh”: The Rosh Chodesh Jew

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

At first glance, the haftarah for Erev Rosh Chodesh, which we read this week, seems to have little to tell us about the day itself. Its choice as the reading for the day before the start of the new month appears to derive from the phrase machar chodesh, “Tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh,” which Yehonatan says to David in the opening verse (I Samuel 20:18). But beneath this detail lies a story of family, friendship and national dynamics.

Rosh Chodesh, marking the start of the Jewish month, is a time of renewal, reflection, and spiritual alignment. Perhaps its appearance in this story can shed some light on how we are meant to think about the start of a new month.

In the story, King Shaul awaits the arrival of those closest to him to his palace. David, attempting to avoid Shaul, does not arrive at the palace, and a concerned Yehonatan warns him that Shaul will notice his absence. Nonetheless, David stays away, leading Shaul to be enraged not only with David, but with his own son, Yehonatan, whom he (rightly) fears has chosen loyalty to David over loyalty to his father. This dramatic episode, in which Shaul begins to lose his grip on his own household and Yehonatan aligns himself with David, unfolds against the backdrop of Rosh Chodesh – the day that marks renewal and the possibility of change.

Although as a festival, Rosh Chodesh is not dressed in much external pomp and circumstance, it determines the timing of all the other festivals in our calendar and thus enables our annual spiritual and ritual rhythm. It also reflects the authority vested in us by God to oversee the calendar, to shape our experience of time and, in turn, our communities. For the sanctification of the month takes place through conversation and engagement between strangers: Two observers come before a court of three judges to report that they have seen the new crescent moon. Holiness in Judaism is never created in a vacuum, but through the capacity for dialogue and connection.

Shaul’s refusal to engage with David and his inability to communicate with him contributes directly to his downfall; while Yehonatan’s friendship with and commitment to David, even in the face of political risk, is what allows the new king to eventually rise to power; bringing for a time unity amongst the Jewish people and the family through which the Messiah will be ushered into the world. This story of brotherly engagement is framed in the context of Rosh Chodesh. For that is precisely what the day demands: that we use time to forge meaningful relationships that can transform the world around us. One might say that Yehonatan, despite his limited character development in Tanakh, emerges as the force who makes this transition possible, the paradigmatic ‘Rosh Chodesh Jew’.

We today are facing unprecedented, existential challenges as a people, and we too must strive to become Rosh Chodesh Jews. As we enter the month of Sivan, the month in which we celebrate receiving the Torah, we must seize this moment to reconnect with each other. The Midrash (Mekhilta, quoted in Rashi on Exodus 19:2) tells us that when the Jewish People stood at Sinai, they were “as one man, with one heart.” To reclaim that moment, we can emulate Yehonatan’s respect for others and willingness to put aside his own ego in the name of brotherly love. The Torah was given when the Jewish people were willing to stand together – even with their differences.

Rosh Chodesh is about enabling connection and conversation. One of the ways this happens is when we reach out to Jews who are different from ourselves, across the lines that divide us. Even strangers must find common ground in shared experiences, just like the witnesses to the new moon, who were privileged to report the light they had observed to another group of Jews, the beit din.

As we approach this and every new month, may we be reminded of Rosh Chodesh's lesson: to prioritize meaningful dialogue and relationships, even – especially – when challenges arise. Only through understanding and connection can we fulfill our shared purpose as a people and continue to merit the bountiful gifts God has bestowed upon us.

Shabbat Shalom

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-machar-chodesh-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

Parshat Bamidbar: All Take Part

By Gabi Gardner * (May 25, 2025)

The parsha of Bamidbar launches the Book of Bamidbar, the third of the five Books of the Torah, which revolves around the Israelites' journey through the wilderness — a forty-year passage between the Exodus from Egypt and their arrival at the Land of Israel, primarily focusing on the beginning and conclusion of that journey.

The opening verses of Bamidbar begin with God's command to Moshe to take a census of the children of Israel:

"Take a census of the entire assembly of the children of Israel, by families, according to their fathers' houses, counting the names of all males, head by head, from the age of twenty years and up, all who go out to the army in Israel. You and Aharon shall count them according to their divisions." (Bamidbar 1:2–3)

As the portion unfolds, these instructions are broken down according to tribe. In other words, the Torah enumerates each of the twelve tribes by name and reiterates the same directive God gave Moshe — that every male aged twenty and above must be counted for military service.

This leads to a compelling question: Why does the Torah repeat the same instructions for each individual tribe? Why devote nearly half the parsha to repeating these commands tribe by tribe? The Torah could have simply listed the names of all the tribes and then presented the general directive Moshe received from God.

Our Sages teach that this repetition underscores the value of the individual. It was not sufficient to record these commands merely as general guidelines; rather, the Torah shifts the focus to each person — emphasizing that every single individual matters.

Only last week, we concluded the reading of Vayikra, a book largely devoted to sacrificial offerings; the construction of the Mishkan, the details of bringing a personal sacrifice versus a communal one, and more. And yet now, in Bamidbar, we are reminded that the people of Israel can only emerge from the wilderness as a unified whole. Each person, with his distinct qualities, contributes something essential. Each must enlist for the sake of the collective. That is why our portion details the enlistment of each tribe so thoroughly.

Thus, the census is not merely a technical procedure — it is a profound expression of the worth of every individual in the eyes of God.

I would like to draw a parallel between this part of the parsha and the reality we have experienced over the past year and a

half.

On Simchat Torah 5784, we were thrust into a complex and painful chapter — one in which the majority of our nation mobilized for the greater good, each within his own sphere.

In challenging times, it is possible to issue a sweeping call for everyone to rise to the occasion. But the true strength lies in the personal contributions: reservists on the front lines; those engaged in intelligence, education, or logistics; national service volunteers supporting families, children, youth, hospitals, and security services; students in yeshivot and midrashot learning Torah for the merit and success of the people; and students in both religious and secular high schools, ulpanot, and elementary schools who, after hours of study, also bolster the home front. Even hikers, simply by cherishing and preserving the beauty of the Land of Israel, play a part.

To confront a difficult reality, the contribution of each individual is essential. If we — the sons and daughters of Israel — are called to rise, to mobilize ourselves to action, and to fulfill the will of God, then we will do so. Each one of us will play his or her part. Because this is what the moment demands. Because we are needed. Because we all yearn to emerge from this harsh and wearying wilderness.

God commands that the enlistment of each tribe be described in detail. He sees each and every person as a participant in the collective mission.

Later in the parsha, the arrangement of the camps is laid out: each tribe is assigned its specific place around the Tent of Meeting. Only the tribe of Levi encamps at the center, surrounding the Mishkan, as it is written:

“But the Levites, by their fathers’ tribe, were not counted among them. And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Only the tribe of Levi you shall not count, and you shall not take their census among the children of Israel. And you shall appoint the Levites over the Mishkan of Testimony, over all its vessels and all that belongs to it. They shall carry the Mishkan and all its vessels, and they shall serve it, and they shall encamp around the Mishkan.” (Bamidbar 1:47–50)

The tribe of Levi is excluded from the general census due to its singular role: they are charged with the service of the Mishkan — its transportation and upkeep — and they replace the firstborns, who were redeemed following the Sin of the Golden Calf. The parsha also details the division of responsibilities within the tribe of Levi itself: the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari are each tasked with the care of specific components of the Mishkan.

The parsha’s meticulous structure and precision reflect a sense of sanctity and a striving for order — both spiritual and societal. These are not merely technical instructions; they shape a national and religious identity for a people who have just emerged from slavery and are stepping into a new reality of freedom and responsibility. The journey through the wilderness is not only a physical transition — it conveys a deeper message: a formative process in preparation for entering the Promised Land. Each tribe knowing its place and its mission reflects a vision that makes space for everyone, while also emphasizing both personal and collective responsibility.

The portion of Bamidbar thus teaches us that even in life — especially in our present moment — structure, order, a sense of belonging, and a readiness to assume responsibility are indispensable. Every individual plays a part in building a society, and every task — even one that may appear marginal or technical — is woven into the greater whole, contributing to a more moral and meaningful existence.

* Alumnus of Ohr Torah Stone Girls’ High School in Ramot, Jerusalem; komunarit (counselor coordinator) for Bnei Akiva in Charish, Israel. OTS has provided a series of Devrei Torah from young scholars, and I hope to include more of them over time.

[Ed. note: from OTS: Among this year’s overseas students at Midreshet Lindenbaum’s Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program, 16 young women - 27% of the cohort - have chosen to remain in Israel next year to serve the country, whether in the IDF or some other form of National Service.]

<https://ots.org.il/gabi-gardner-on-parshat-bamidbar/>

Dvar Torah: Shavuos: New Meaning (5776)

by Rabbi Label Lam

A great deal of preparation goes into planning for and getting ready for the Yom Tov of Shevuos. We have all been diligently counting up to the 50th Day with great anticipation. Now the cooking and food preparation intensifies and then comes the great day! I have always wondered what makes some days more valuable than others. Why are so many regular days sacrificed for one big day? I had the same question when planning a Bar Mitzvah celebration and more recently a wedding. Why are we giving away so many days for the benefit of a single day? What makes that day so much more important?

I asked this question aloud at one of my son's Bar Mitzvos, which was near Rosh HaShana time. Again, why are so many days dedicated to the production of one special day? The answer, I do believe, is that the single day is not only one day. In the case of Rosh HaShana, it's the whole year? The whole year is scripted right there in the head of the year. By a Bar Mitzvah boy-man, the entirety of his future as a Ben Torah is hinging on how he launches his career on the day of his Bar Mitzvah. So too on Shevuos! It is an extra special time! A serious new beginning! Our individual and collective lives hang in the balance on such a day. It's not just one day! It's the entire future!

That's how I have been thinking about it for a good while until I recently revisited this fundamental Rashi on a well-known verse from near the beginning: *"And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good, and it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day."* (Breishis 1:31)

Rashi comments: the sixth day: Scripture added a "hey" on the sixth day, at the completion of the Creation, to tell us that He stipulated with them, [*you were created*] *on the condition that Israel accept the Five Books of the Torah.*] [The numerical value of the "hey" is five.] Another explanation for "the sixth day": They [the works of creation] were all suspended until the "sixth day," referring to the sixth day of Sivan, which was prepared for the giving of the Torah. (The "hey" is the definite article, alluding to the well-known sixth day of Sivan, when the Torah was given.)

Rashi unloads literally "earth shattering news" based on a seeming "extra letter "hey" – which is a prefix equal to the definitive article "the." There was something extra special about that 6th day which is a signal and a major reminder of another 6th day that will happen in the future. Without that date with destiny on Mt. Sinai 2448 years after creation, the world and its fullness would be deemed unjustifiable and unworthy of existence right from the very beginning.

Without that grandiose national acceptance of the Torah in the future then the entirety of creation would have been aborted. Let us park for now all the major philosophical questions that explode from this notion. How can a free willed act be determined to happen in advance? This new understanding adds a whole new giant dimension to the value of receiving of the Torah on Shevuos. It not only impacts the quality of life going forward but it breathes life into the entirety of the past.

What good is that? Why does history matter? What is the value of justifying and rectifying the past? I think we can easily understand this in a very practical way. If someone invests hours to give a presentation and then they are not called upon to deliver that generates feelings of disappointment.

We can all relate to that. If we spend 50 days preparing for an event that never happens then that disappoints all the energies and the many days of dedication. HASHEM would not dare to disappoint a creature, let alone frustrate an entire creation.

One grandmother commented with an uncommon frankness about her feelings of extra love and adoration for her Shomer Shabbos grandchildren over and above her other non-Jewish biological grandchildren, *"When I see these children I see the whole past and the whole future! When I see those, I don't see the past and I don't see the future!"*

The Holy Day of Shevuos serves to unify the entirety of creation. It weds the whole past with the whole future. It awakens those vast continents of time and space seemingly void of real purpose with **new meaning**.

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5776-shavuot/>

Bamidbar – Was the Mishkan Wheelchair Accessible?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The leadership that should be our standard is of a different sort. It is a leadership that spreads God's Torah in a way that teaches respect for all Jews. It is a leadership that teaches that Jews who never enter the Sanctuary can still have God in their midst if they orient their lives towards God in ways that are less obvious or ritualistic. It is a leadership that values and respects difference and diversity and believes that we are enriched by it. In a world where small-mindedness and

intolerance are rife, where Jewish identity and shared values are elusive concepts, it is no small matter for a community to embrace this alternate vision, and asking a leader, a rabbi, to help shape such a community may seem like asking the impossible. But in striving to achieve this vision, we will do much to transform the Jewish community and our respect for one another.

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

Nishmat HaTorah: Parshat Bamidbar Sefer Bamidbar: Their Story and Ours

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

We are starting a new Sefer this week, switching from Sefer Vayikra, the third book in the Pentateuch, to the fourth, Sefer Bamidbar. And that is of great theological significance. The five books of the Torah chart the unfolding story of klal Yisroel's relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu (“HKBH”), with each sefer marking a new stage in that relationship. Switching sefarim, therefore, is not merely literary or organizational. It signals transition and ascent. And that transition has profound implications for our own spiritual lives.

Sefer Breishit, in large part, narrates the story of our ancestral encounter with HKBH, first as individuals and then as a tribe and clan. We learn how our forebears' relationship with HKBH took shape and deepened. Sefer Shemot then tells the story of transformation: how Yakov and his offspring became a nation, and how they began building a richer and more structured relationship with God through the Mishkan and those devoted to His service. Sefer Vayikra follows by spelling out the means through which that relationship is cultivated. Korbanot, pilgrimage, and the Beit Hamikdash become the vehicle through which closeness to HKBH is pursued and sustained.

Then comes Sefer Bamidbar, the book we begin this week. Here we are introduced to a new and more complex phase of the relationship, one marked by tension, rupture and repair. In the course of the coming weeks we will encounter moments in which the relationship experiences severe tension and immense conflict.

And perhaps that is precisely the point.

For the first time, the Torah confronts us with the vulnerability that intimacy itself creates. The closer a relationship becomes, the more emotionally and spiritually demanding it also becomes. And that is true of a relationship with HKBH no less than any other relationship. A keshet to HKBH experiences moments of profound closeness, but also periods of distance and strain.

As I have mentioned in the past, Chassidut speaks eloquently about the dynamic of אוצר בוש, the idea that religious life is not linear but oscillatory. Our relationship with HKBH moves back and forth. There are moments of great closeness and intimacy, but there are also periods in which distance enters the relationship, moments when one feels removed and spiritually far away. And that is not a sign of failure. That is religious vibrancy. That is spiritual authenticity.

And that is why the story of Bamidbar is not only their story, but ours as well.

When we read the Torah, we are not merely studying our ancestral past. We are encountering those same spiritual experiences ourselves. As Midrash Rabba repeatedly reminds us, the stories of our ancestors serve as templates for their descendants. The Torah is teaching us what a life of closeness to HKBH actually looks like: its slow beginnings, gradual growth, moments of spiritual intensity, and periods of complexity and struggle.

This idea lies at the heart of a famous Chassidic reading of Matan Torah. When describing revelation at Sinai, the Torah says that God spoke in a loud and unending voice. Talmidei Ba'al Shem Tov understood Matan Torah itself as an ongoing spiritual reality. The giving of the Torah did not happen only once, at a distinct moment in history. It continues to unfold in every generation, each age encountering Torah through the realities and challenges of its own time.

Therefore, each week, when we read the parsha, we are not merely recounting what happened long ago. We are encountering those same spiritual movements in the here and now. Just as our ancestors experienced the shifting movements of closeness and distance in their relationship with HKBH, so too do we.

Thus, this week, as we begin Sefer Bamidbar, we should pause and celebrate. The relationship is turning up a notch. But as with every relationship, greater intimacy brings with it both promise and challenge.

And that is what makes the relationship meaningful.

A spiritually alive relationship with HKBH is not static. It moves between closeness and distance, yearning and frustration, joy and pain. The תויה, the sense of spiritual aliveness we seek in avodat Hashem, emerges precisely from that movement.

I would not have it any other way.

Perhaps this also sheds light on a beautiful liturgical custom. Every time we complete one of the books of the Torah, the Ashkenazi custom is for the entire congregation to proclaim together: *"Chazat, Chazak, Ve'Nitchazek!"* According to some interpretations, the phrase means: *"We are strong, and we pray to become even stronger."*

At first glance, the custom seems strange. Why would finishing a sefer prompt us to ask for strength?

But in light of everything we have said, it makes perfect sense.

Switching sefarim is a moment of spiritual transition. One chapter in the story of our pursuit of closeness to HKBH has come to a close, and another is beginning. And every new stage of religious life brings with it new possibilities, but also new demands.

Thus, as we move from one sefer to the next, we ask for strength. Strength to continue growing. Strength to navigate the tensions that deeper closeness inevitably creates. Strength to continue pursuing kirvat Elokim even when the relationship becomes difficult.

Indeed, Chazak, Chazat, Ve'Nitchazek; we are strong, and we pray to become even stronger as we continue our journey toward deeper kirvat Elokim and greater kedusha.

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

The Wisdom of the Wilderness: Thoughts for Parashat Bemidbar

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Kotzker Rebbe (1787-1859) was an insightful Hasidic master whose wisdom continues to impact on thinking Jews of our times. He made an important observation based on the fact that the Torah was originally given and taught in Midbar Sinai, the wilderness of Sinai.

He taught: the Divine Presence only rests on one who sees him/herself as being in the wilderness. No matter how much one has learned, he/she still remains in a place that is vast and untouched — i.e. there is so much more to know. And just as a wilderness remains empty and unproductive unless it is seriously cultivated, so a person remains empty and unproductive unless he/she expends tremendous energy and effort to attain wisdom. Only such a person can merit genuine knowledge of Torah and the blessing of being touched by the Divine Presence.

The Kotzker Rebbe had little patience for pseudo-scholars and pseudo-intellectuals. He was repelled by the phenomenon of self-contented, self-righteous and arrogant individuals whose vanity made them think they were great and important. He despised sham piety, pretentiousness, and inflated egotism.

I was recently reminiscing with a friend about our years at Yeshiva College during the 1960s. One of the teachers who made a lasting impact on me (and on so many others) was Professor Alexander Litman. Dr. Litman taught philosophy in a unique way. He took a topic from Plato and suddenly — he WAS Socrates. He asked us questions, probed all aspects of the issue, he challenged our assumptions. He made us think! Other professors of philosophy may have given academic discussions about philosophers: Dr. Litman was a philosopher.

I remember Dr. Litman's slow and deliberate way of speaking, his cryptic smile, the sparkle in his eye when he made a particularly clever remark. He would end class with an announcement: "We will meet again on Thursday...if there is a Thursday."

Dr. Litman knew a tremendous amount. But like Socrates, he saw himself as a searcher for truth. He understood that in spite of all that he had read and learned, he was still in a wilderness, far from achieving ultimate truth. He might well have identified with the words of Socrates: *"And I am called wise, for my hearers always imagine that I myself possess the wisdom which I find wanting in others: but the truth is, O men of Athens, that God only is wise;...he is only using my name by way of illustration as if he said: He, O men, is the wisest, who like Socrates, knows that his wisdom is in truth worth nothing."*

The Kotzker Rebbe probably never read Plato, and Dr. Litman may not have been familiar with the teachings of the Kotzker. But both of these men, like all genuine teachers, understood the essential qualities required of those who strive for wisdom: humility, critical thinking, hard work. Both of these men, like all genuine teachers, taught their students to think, to reject glib and superficial people who pretend to be learned or wise.

One of the influential artists and teachers of art in early 20th century America was Robert Henri (1865-1929). In his book *The Art Spirit*, he observed: *"There are two classes of people in the world: students and non-students. In each class there are elements of the other class so that it is possible to develop or to degenerate and thus effect a passage from one class to the other. The true character of the student is one of great mental and spiritual activity."* (p. 104)

Students are those whose minds are active, interested, searching. Non-students are those who are intellectually stagnant, vacuous, self-contented. Students always feel they are in a wilderness, with so much more to learn and so much territory that needs to be cultivated. Non-students feel they know a lot, that they have truth in their pocket, that they are smarter and cleverer than most everyone else.

If a man is a great rabbinic scholar, he is popularly called a *"talmid hakham,"* a student of the wise. Jewish folk tradition has

understood that even the most learned of people is considered to be a student. Once a person forgets that he/she is a student, then he/she degenerates into the class of non-students.

We read Parashat Bemidbar prior to the festival of Shavuoth, the holiday that celebrates God's revelation to the People of Israel at Mount Sinai. It is fitting that we remember the wilderness experience as we prepare to commemorate our receiving the Torah. Unless we understand the message of the wilderness as taught by the Kotzker Rebbe, we indeed will be living in a frightening wilderness of foolishness, ignorance, and spiritual complacency.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/not-somebody-else-us-thoughts-shabbat-behar-behukotai>

Jerusalem Undivided: Thoughts for Yom Yerushalayim

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

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

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

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

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

[emphasis added]

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

Why did this "politically correct" position gain so much credence? Doesn't everyone know that Israel's claim to Jerusalem goes back 3000 years, and that Jews have prayed facing Jerusalem from time immemorial? Don't both Christianity and Islam recognize the sanctity of the Hebrew Bible – a Bible that highlights the centrality of Jerusalem in so many texts?

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

Israel has a right to flourish and to enjoy the fruits of its labors and creativity and idealistic endeavors. Israel does not ask to be judged more kindly than any other nation – only that it should not be judged less kindly than any other nation.

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

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

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

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/jerusalem-undivided-thoughts-yom-yerushalayim>

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Bamidbar -- Streets Paved with Gold

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* ©2020 Teach 613

[Because we shall be out Thursday evening, I had to post early, before receiving Rabbi Rhine's new Dvar Torah. This selection is from my archives]

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

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

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

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

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

But, there is a second lesson as well.

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

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

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

The era that we are living through, that of the coronavirus/ COVID-19, is a time of both adversity and opportunity. The challenges that so many face regarding health, financial stability, education, and just overall concern, are quite significant. Even those not so directly affected, are certainly engaged in reaching out and trying to help. But, it is also a time of opportunity. During the many weeks that we have been separated, we have had so many opportunities to choose between stagnation and growth. We have the opportunity to daven better without any distractions, if we choose. We have the opportunity to learn Torah without our regular shul routine, if we choose to. And, we have the option to give Tzedaka daily, even if we are not solicited by the clanging of the Pushke in shul, if we make the effort to do so. These are examples of seeing opportunities for greatness, even if adversity doesn't force it upon us.

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

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

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

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

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

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com.
For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.

On Trust and Leadership: Why the Book of Numbers is not about numbers

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

What's in a name?

The book of BeMidbar suffers of somewhat of an identity crisis. It is easy to determine the identity of the other books of the Torah. Genesis is about the creation and the life of the forefathers, Exodus is about the exodus and the tabernacle, Leviticus deals with the laws of the Levites and the Kohanim, and Deuteronomy, as its names suggest, is the repetition and review of law and history. But what is BeMidbar about? Numbers? Is it really the Book of Census, as it was known in Rabbinic literature, a travelogue, or a collection of unrelated data, laws, and history?

I believe that BeMidbar's story conveys an extremely important message to humanity, which is that the most sophisticated and detailed program could fail, even if it is Divine, without the engagement and commitment of the humans in charge of carrying it out.

Perfect Society, Perfect Hierarchy

BeMidbar starts with the description of a perfect society, with clearly drawn boundaries and set roles. The Israelite camp is presented as a center of holiness surrounded by concentric circles in descending order. The order is as follows: The Holy of Holies at the center; the Holy; the Tabernacle's courtyard; the Levites and Aaron, in descending order: Aaron and family, Kehat, Gershon, Merari; and finally, the Israelites. After the inner order of the camp has been established, the Torah calls for spiritual and hygienic boundaries: lepers, people who suffer from sexually transmitted diseases, and those who were in contact with a corpse must leave the camp. Their exile is temporary, and each one of them must wait the symbolic seven-days period before rejoining the camp.

The Torah also singles out the deviate woman and the Nazir as two extremes. The deviate woman lets herself be controlled by desire while the Nazir decides to detach himself from society and abstain from wine. Both are conceptually, if not physically, ostracized. The Torah suggests that they are outside the camp because their behavior is not healthy, and that it is preferable to reach a balance between pursuing of spirituality and enjoying life.

Between the two sections, the one which deals with lepers and those who suffer from spiritual contamination, and the one dealing with the Nazir and the deviate woman, there is a paragraph which seems out of place. It speaks about paying back financial obligations, and it also states that an unpaid obligation to another person is considered an offense towards God. According to the theory offered here, not only this paragraph belongs here, but it is an excellent example of how the Torah considers transgression against others to be a religious offense. The Torah declares that in order to maintain the camp clean and holy, it is not enough to send away those we consider unholy because of diseases, but also those whose business ethics are flawed.

Following the clarification of boundaries and the cleansing of the camp, the divine blessing is bestowed upon the people, offerings are brought, the Tabernacle is inaugurated, and the Israelites start their first journey: they traveled, for the first time as an organized camp, by the word of God, delivered through Moshe!

Perfect Society, Imperfect Individuals

Within three days, the people complain for no reason, and then cry for food. Moshe is willing to quit his job, and when he is told by God that everyone is going to get meat, he appears to be incredulous. Two men prophesy without Moshe's permission, Miriam and Aaron speak against Moshe, the scouts start a rebellion... the list goes on and on.

Thus, we see how a perfect plan fails without the commitment of individuals to put aside their pride and sense of entitlement and carry the plan out.

David Brooks writes in *The Social Animal*:

You can siphon money to poor areas, but unless a culture develops self-control, social mobility is unattainable.

You can raise or lower taxes, but without trust and confidence, corporations and institutions will not form, and people will not invest in each other.

You can declare elections, but without responsible citizens, democracy will not flourish.

Criminologist James Q. Wilson, who devoted his life to shaping and writing public policy, finally arrived at this fundamental truth: "...at the core, in almost every field of public engagement we seek to encourage people to act morally and ethically, whether we deal with students, people applying for government aid, potential criminals, voters, or elected representatives."

The narrative of BeMidbar teaches us that same idea, as valid today as it was millennia ago in the desert.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Haim Ovadia.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia, who has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright rights to this material.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

We are living in unbelievable times - times that generations before us could only dream about. Times about which they would have said: we were like dreamers.

As an example of this, leading up to this Shabbat, the President of the United States sent out an official presidential message encouraging American Jews to observe a national Shabbat in honour of America's 250th birthday. He wrote:

"In special honour of 250 glorious years of American independence... Jewish Americans are encouraged to observe a national Sabbath."

We are living in a time when the nations around us are reminding us of the importance of keeping our own Mitzvot, keeping Shabbat and even encouraging us to do so.

Just think about it: the Western world, which came from the Roman Empire – an empire that once prohibited Jews from keeping Shabbat, now has a Western leader publicly encouraging Jews to keep Shabbat. Whatever your outlook may be on the credibility and quality of world leaders, what amazing times we live in.

So let us all come together in the spirit of Jews around the world keeping Shabbat and let us here in New Zealand kick it off as the first community in the world to welcome and keep Shabbat together.

I look forward to seeing increased numbers on Friday night and Shabbat day.

Wishing everyone a meaningful Shabbat. B'ahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

Rav Kook Torah Shavuot: The Torah is our Spiritual Holy Land

For Rav Kook, it was axiomatic that the Jewish soul and the Torah are a match made in heaven. In his book analyzing the essential nature and value of Torah study, Orot HaTorah, he categorically asserted that *"The Torah is bound together with*

the spirit of Israel" (12:1). This is true not only for the Jewish people as a whole, but also for each individual:

Just as Knesset Yisrael [the soul of the Jewish people] can only realize its full potential in the land of Israel, so, too, each individual Jew can only realize his spiritual potential through Torah study. The Torah is our spiritual 'Holy Land'; it corresponds to the special qualities of the Jewish soul. All other fields of knowledge, with regard to the spiritual potential of the Jewish soul, are like foreign lands. (12:7)

While this is nice in theory, in practice things are not so simple. Not everyone takes to Torah study like a fish to water. If Torah study is indeed so natural to the Jewish soul, why do Jewish educators need to work so hard?

Rav Kook was aware of this problem. There are a number of reasons why the words of Torah may not find a place in one's heart — some practical, some spiritual. In analyzing the reasons why a person may feel disconnected from Torah, Rav Kook noted several underlying causes.

Appreciating Torah

To properly appreciate the value of Torah study, we must recognize the essential nature of the Torah. The Torah is a revelation of ratzon Hashem, God's Will in the world. It is only due to the limitations of our physical state that we are unable to recognize the Torah's true greatness.

Similarly, we need to have a proper appreciation for our Divine soul and its natural sense of morality. People occasionally err and stumble; but overall, we should have faith in our innate moral sensibilities. Thus there exists an inner correlation between the Torah's ethical teachings and the soul's inner qualities. The extent that one enjoys studying Torah is a function of refinement of character; the greater one's moral sensitivity, the more readily one will identify with the Torah and its teachings.

This fundamental insight is essential in order to properly appreciate Torah study. When Torah is studied in holiness, one may sense the greatness of the Torah and how it emanates from the very source of holiness.

Elevating the Details

A basic appreciation for Torah, however, is not enough. Even if one recognizes the Divine nature of the Torah, one may feel a sense of impatience when faced with its myriad laws and complex details. One may be attracted to lofty matters, and feel restricted and frustrated when studying the detailed minutiae of Halachah.

The remedy for these feelings of restriction is not to avoid Halachic studies but rather *"to elevate the value of each detail of practical studies to the richness of its spiritual source"* (OT 9:8). A detail may acquire great significance when illuminated by a flash of insight or sudden inspiration. Success in *"elevating the details"* requires spiritual refinement and perseverance in the contemplative pursuit of the boundless heights of holiness.

In fact, each word of Torah contains infinite light, a reflection of the Torah's absolute morality. One who has learned to perceive this light will gain insight into the inner spiritual content of each detail.

Find Your Portion in the Torah

An additional aspect that needs to be addressed is that not all areas of Torah appeal to all people equally. In general we should occupy ourselves with those pursuits that interest us. This is especially true regarding Torah study, as the Sages

taught, “*One only learns that which one’s heart desires*” (Avodah Zarah 19a).

Some have strayed from and even abandoned the Jewish people because they failed to follow their personal inclinations when choosing what area of Torah to study. They may have been predisposed to philosophical inquiry, but lacking appreciation for their own innate interests, they dedicated themselves to conventional Halachic studies. Unsurprisingly, they felt an inner resistance to this course of study, since it was not compatible with their natural inclinations. Had they focused on learning more suitable topics, they would have realized that their inner opposition to Halachic studies was not due to some flaw in this important area of knowledge, but because their soul demanded a different field of Torah study.

Since they failed to understand the root cause of their inner conflict with Torah study, they attempted to suppress their natural tendencies. But as soon as an alternative path became available, they rejected the Torah and the faith of Israel. Some of these individuals subsequently attempted to promote great ideals lacking practical foundations, and they misled the world with their false visions.

Others are naturally drawn to the sciences and secular studies. These individuals should follow their natural interests, while setting aside set time for Torah study. Then they will succeed in both areas. As the Sages counseled in Pirkei Avot 2:2, “*It is good to combine the study of Torah with worldly endeavors.*”

(*Silver from the Land of Israel*. Adapted from *Orot HaTorah* chapters 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12.)

https://ravkooktorah.org/shavuot_66

Bamidbar: The Sound of Silence (5776, 5783)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former UK Chief Rabbi *

Bamidbar is usually read on the Shabbat before Shavuot. So the Sages connected the two. Shavuot is the time of the giving of the Torah. Bamidbar means, “*in the desert.*” What then is the connection between the desert and the Torah, the wilderness and God’s word?

The Sages gave several interpretations. According to the Mechilta, the Torah was given publicly, openly, and in a place no one owns because had it been given in the Land of Israel, Jews would have said to the nations of the world, “*You have no share in it.*” Instead, whoever wants to come and accept it, let them come and accept it.[1]

Another explanation: Had the Torah been given in Israel the nations of the world would have had an excuse for not accepting it. This follows the rabbinic tradition that, before God gave the Torah to the Israelites, He offered it to all the other nations and each found a reason to decline.[2]

Yet another: Just as the wilderness is free – it costs nothing to enter – so the Torah is free. It is God’s gift to us.[3]

But there is another, more spiritual reason. The desert is a place of silence. There is nothing visually to distract you, and there is no ambient noise to muffle sound. To be sure, when the Israelites received the Torah, there was thunder and lightning and the sound of a shofar. The earth felt as if it were shaking at its foundations. But in a later age, when the Prophet Elijah stood at the same mountain after his confrontation with the prophets of Baal, he encountered God not in the whirlwind or the fire or the earthquake but in the kol demamah dakah, the still, small voice, literally “*the sound of a slender silence*” (1 Kings 19:9-12). I define this as the sound you can only hear if you are listening. In the silence of the midbar, the desert, you can hear the Medaber, the Speaker, and the medubar, that which is spoken. To hear the voice of God you need a listening silence in the soul.

Many years ago British television produced a documentary series, *The Long Search*, on the world's great religions.[4] When it came to Judaism, the presenter Ronald Eyre seemed surprised by its blooming, buzzing confusion, especially the loud, argumentative voices in the beit midrash, the house of study. Remarking on this to Elie Wiesel, he asked, "*Is there such a thing as a silence in Judaism?*" Wiesel replied: "*Judaism is full of silences ... but we don't talk about them.*"

Judaism is a very verbal culture, a religion of holy words. Through words, God created the universe: "*And God said, Let there be ... and there was.*" According to the Targum, it is our ability to speak that makes us human. It translates the phrase, "*and man became a living soul*" (Gen. 2:7) as "*and man became a speaking soul.*" Words create. Words communicate. Our relationships are shaped, for good or bad, by language. Much of Judaism is about the power of words to make or break worlds.

So silence in Tanach often has a negative connotation. "*Aaron was silent,*" says the Torah, after the death of his two sons Nadav and Avihu (Lev. 10:3). "*The dead do not praise you,*" says Psalm 115, "*nor do those who go down to the silence [of the grave].*" When Job's friends came to comfort him after the loss of his children and other afflictions, "*they sat down with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, yet no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his pain was very great.*" (Job 2:13).

But not all silence is sad. Psalms tells us that "*to You, silence is praise*" (Ps. 65:2). If we are truly in awe at the greatness of God, the vastness of the universe and the almost infinite extent of time, our deepest emotions will indeed lie too deep for words. We will experience silent communion.

The Sages valued silence. They called it "*a fence to wisdom*" (Mishna Avot 3:13). If words are worth a coin, silence is worth two (Megilla 18a). R. Shimon ben Gamliel said:

"All my days I have grown up among the wise, and I have found nothing better than silence."
Mishna Avot 1:17

The service of the Priests in the Temple was accompanied by silence. The Levites sang in the courtyard, but the Priests – unlike their counterparts in other ancient religions – neither sang nor spoke while offering the sacrifices. One scholar, Israel Knohl, has accordingly spoken of "*the silence of the sanctuary.*" The Zohar (2a) speaks of silence as the medium in which both the Sanctuary above and the Sanctuary below are made.

There were also Jews who cultivated silence as a spiritual discipline. Bratslav Hassidim meditate in the fields. There are Jews who practise ta'anit dibbur, a "*fast of words.*" Our most profound prayer, the private saying of the Amidah, is called tefillah be-lachash, the "*silent prayer.*" It is based on the precedent of Hannah, praying for a child.

"She spoke in her heart. Her lips moved but her voice was not heard." 1 Sam. 1:13

God hears our silent cry. In the agonising tale of how Sarah told Abraham to send Hagar and her son away, the Torah tells us that when their water ran out and the young Ishmael was at the point of dying, Hagar cried, yet God heard "*the voice of the child*" (Gen. 21:16-17). Earlier when the angels came to visit Abraham and told him that Sarah would have a child, Sarah laughed inwardly, that is, silently, yet she was heard by God (Gen. 18:12-13). God hears our thoughts even when they are not expressed in speech.

The silence that counts, in Judaism, is thus a listening silence – and listening is the supreme religious art. Listening means making space for others to speak and be heard. As I point out in my commentary to the Siddur,[5] there is no English word that remotely equals the Hebrew verb sh-m-a in its wide range of senses: to listen, to hear, to pay attention, to understand, to internalise and to respond in deed.

This was one of the key elements in the Sinai covenant, when the Israelites, having already said twice, “*All that God says, we will do,*” then said, “*All that God says, we will do and we will hear [ve-nishma]*” (Ex. 24:7). It is the nishma – listening, hearing, heeding, responding – that is the key religious act.

Thus Judaism is not only a religion of doing-and-speaking; it is also a religion of listening. Faith is the ability to hear the music beneath the noise. There is the silent music of the spheres, about which Psalm 19 speaks:

*"The heavens declare the glory of God
The skies proclaim the work of His hands.
Day to day they pour forth speech,
Night to night they communicate knowledge.
There is no speech, there are no words,
Their voice is not heard.
Yet their music carries throughout the earth." Tehillim 19*

There is the voice of history that was heard by the prophets. And there is the commanding voice of Sinai that continues to speak to us across the abyss of time. I sometimes think that people in the modern age have found the concept of “Torah from Heaven” problematic, not because of some new archaeological discovery but because we have lost the habit of listening to the sound of transcendence, a voice beyond the merely human.

It is fascinating that despite his often-fractured relationship with Judaism, Sigmund Freud created in psychoanalysis a deeply Jewish form of healing. He himself called it the “*speaking cure,*” but it is in fact a listening cure. **Almost all effective forms of psychotherapy involve deep listening.** [emphasis added]

Is there enough listening in the Jewish world today? Do we, in marriage, really listen to our spouses? Do we as parents truly listen to our children? Do we, as leaders, hear the unspoken fears of those we seek to lead? Do we internalise the sense of hurt of the people who feel excluded from the community? Can we really claim to be listening to the voice of God if we fail to listen to the voices of our fellow humans?

In his poem, ‘*In memory of W B Yeats,*’ W H Auden wrote:

*In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start.*

From time to time we need to step back from the noise and hubbub of the social world and create in our hearts the stillness of the desert where, within the silence, we can hear the kol demamah dakah, the still, small voice of God, telling us we are loved, we are heard, we are embraced by God’s everlasting arms, we are not alone.[6]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Mechilta, Yitro, Bachodesh, 1.

[2] Ibid., 5.

[3] Ibid.

[4] BBC television, first shown 1977.

[5] Koren Shalem Siddur.

[6] For more on the theme of listening, see parshat Bereishit, *"The Art of Listening,"* and parshat Eikev, *"The Spirituality of Listening."*

Around the Shabbat Table:

[1] Where else could God have chosen to give the Torah to the Children of Israel? Why do you think He chose the desert instead?

[2] Why is listening important? Why is it "supreme religious art"?

[3] Do you find it hard to listen? How can you improve this skill?

Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I normally select an earlier Devar.

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bamidbar/the-sound-of-silence/>

For Rabbi Sacks' profound and deeply insightful introduction to Sefer Bemidbar, read and study <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/bamidbar-numbers/an-introduction-to-numbers/> unfortunately this source is too long for my format.

Parshah for the Anxious - Bamidbar: How to Know When to Give Up

By Eliezer Shemtov * © Chabad 2026

What do you do when your efforts don't yield visible results? Do you keep going or do you give up?

Is perseverance always a virtue? Might it sometimes be a form of vanity — an unwillingness to admit failure?

As with so many such questions, the answer is: it depends.

It depends on why you are doing what you are doing. Are you doing it to showcase your personal greatness or out of dedication to something greater than yourself?

A man named Morris once visited his friend who was in charge of evaluating recruits for the Israeli army. He was invited to observe a fitness test and watched a group of young men running under the hot Israeli sun. After a while, one of them collapsed and had to be carried off the track by medics.

"That one definitely won't be given an important assignment," Morris remarked.

"You couldn't be more wrong," his friend replied. *"He'll be among the most valued."*

"But he was the first to fall! What use does the army have for someone that weak?"

"It's simple. In our army, what we value most is commitment. That young man gave every last drop he had. The physical

weakness we can address through training; unconditional dedication like that can't be taught."

We live in a world that prizes the individual, personal rights, and personal interests above all. And this is not entirely wrong. The Talmud affirms that each human being is irreplaceable. *"No two people are alike,"* our sages say.¹ But does it end there? What about the value of community? How do we reconcile the value of independence with the value of belonging — and the dependence that comes with it?

To answer this, we must first ask: Does belonging to a community diminish or enlarge me? Weaken or strengthen me?

In this week's Torah portion, Bamidbar, G d commands Moses to take a census. Two data points were to be recorded: names and numbers. In other words, how many people composed each family and tribe.

A name expresses individual identity; a number, by contrast, disregards individuality and emphasizes belonging to a collective. The Torah teaches that both are equally important and, in fact, mutually reinforcing.

When individuality is expressed within a community, it is elevated and strengthened by being part of something greater. And the community is strengthened when it honors the unique contribution of each person. It is hard to put it more elegantly than Hillel the Elder did: *"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?"*²

To return to the original question about perseverance: if you are persisting at something for personal reasons and seeing no results, continued effort may well be a form of pride and unwillingness to admit failure. But if you are persisting at something whose value extends beyond yourself, perseverance in the face of every discouragement is a sign of genuine strength and nobility.

I am reminded of a conflict I witnessed between a couple.

"Why do you dedicate so much time to work and never make time for me?" the wife complained.

"Because I prefer to dedicate myself to something where I know how to succeed, rather than trying again and again at something I always fail at," the husband replied.

What do you think, dear reader? If a husband who tries again and again to satisfy his wife and repeatedly fails refuses to give up and keeps trying, is that admirable or deplorable?

The answer, once again, is: it depends. If he insists on trying yet again his own way, it is an expression of ego, and, according to the formula attributed to Einstein, the very definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. But if he adjusts and tries according to what his wife asks of him, that is a sign of genuine nobility. This may in fact be implicit in the Talmudic principle that spells out marital priorities clearly: to love one's wife as oneself, and to honor her more than oneself.³

The tool for this week: Continuing to dedicate yourself to tasks that produce successful results without resting because of what you've already achieved is certainly commendable. But it does not come close to the value of someone who persists in fulfilling their responsibilities and commitments even when they have not yet seen the fruit of their labor.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Sanhedrin 38a

2. Avot, 1:14

3. Yevamot 62b; Mishneh Torah, Laws of Marriage, 15:19

* Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Montevideo, Uruguay.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/7354817/jewish/How-to-Know-When-to-Give-Up.htm

Bemidbar Activating the Torah

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

G-d instructed Moses to organize the 12 tribes into a specific army formation. The Tabernacle was in the middle, surrounded by three tribes on each side.

The Israelites must camp, each man by his banner, by the insignias of their fathers' houses. They must camp at a distance around the Tent of Meeting. (Num. 2:2)

Both the Jewish people and the Torah play an integral role in channeling G-d's beneficence into the world. The Torah is the instrument through which G-d's blessings flow, but the Jewish people are the ones who activate and use this vessel to accomplish the goal.

G-d therefore had the people – His newly formed army, organized to combat the materiality of the world – take their formation around the Tent of Meeting, i.e., the Tabernacle, the innermost chamber of which housed the two Tablets of the Covenant, i.e., the Torah.

By studying the Torah and obeying the commandments it contains, we “*activate*” the Torah, using it as G-d's instrument to remake the world into His home and bestow infinite goodness upon it.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Shabbat Parashat Bemidbar

5786 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Ever Repeated Story

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

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

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

But the Torah is not mere history as a sequence of events. The Torah is about the truths that emerge through time. That is one of the great differences between ancient Israel and ancient Greece. Ancient Greece sought truth by contemplating nature and reason. The first gave rise to science, the second to philosophy. Ancient Israel found truth in history, in events and what God told us to learn from them. Science is about nature, Judaism is about human nature, and there is a great difference between them. Nature knows nothing about freewill. Scientists often deny

that it exists at all. But humanity is constituted by its freedom. We are what we choose to be. No planet chooses to be hospitable to life. No fish chooses to be a hero. No peacock chooses to be vain. Humans do choose. And in that fact is born the drama to which the whole Torah is a commentary: how can freedom coexist with order? The drama is set on the stage of history, and it plays itself out through five acts, each with multiple scenes.

The basic shape of the narrative is roughly the same in all five cases. First God creates order. Then humanity creates chaos. Terrible consequences follow. Then God begins again, deeply grieved but never losing His faith in the one life-form on which He set His image and to which He gave the singular gift that made humanity godlike, namely freedom itself.

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

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

Act III is the subject of the book of Shemot. God rescues the Israelites from Egypt as He once rescued Noah from the Flood. As with Noah (and Abraham), God makes a covenant, this time at Sinai, and it is far more extensive than its precursors. It is a blueprint for social order, for an entire society based on law and

justice. Yet again, however, humans create chaos, by making a Golden Calf a mere forty days after the great revelation. God threatens catastrophe, destroying the whole nation and beginning again with Moses, as He had done with Noah and Abraham (Ex. 32:10). Only Moses' passionate plea prevents this from happening. God then institutes a new order.

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

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

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In memory of Martha Martz, a"h

society.

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Message of the Census Counts

"Count the heads of the entire witness community of the children of Israel." (Numbers 1:2) The book of Numbers opens with a most optimistic picture of a nation poised for redemption. The Israelites have been freed from Egypt with great miracles and wonders; they have received the Revelation at

Sinai, which provided them with a moral and ethical constitution for a soon-to-be established sovereign state, along with a commitment of faith to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests, which is their mission for the world; the twelve uniquely endowed and individually directed tribes, each with its own flag, are united around a common Sanctuary dedicated to divine service; a standing army is organized; the tribe of Levi is trained to teach Torah and fulfill all the requirements for the sacrificial service. The only missing ingredient is the necessary obligatory war to pave the way for our settlement of the Promised Land of Israel!

But what follows instead is a total degeneration, a descent from the heights of an exalted rooftop down to the depths of a muddled pit. The Hebrews become involved in petty squabbles and tiresome complaints; the reconnaissance mission decides against the attempt to conquer Israel; Korach, Datan, and Aviram stage a rebellion against Moses; a prince of the tribe of Simeon defies Moses' leadership by publicly fornicating with a Midianite woman; the entire desert generation dies in the wilderness; and only Moses' successor, Joshua, and the newly-born generation will get to live in the Promised Land.

What happened and why? How could a nation so committed that it pledges "Whatever the Lord has spoken we shall do and we shall internalize" (Exodus 24:7) completely lose their sense of purpose and idealism and "gang up" against the very individual who was their great liberator and law-giver?

I believe that the reason for the change is hinted at in the Midrashic name of this fourth book of the Bible, Sefer Pikudim – the "Book of Censuses" in Hebrew, or the book of Numbers (number counts) in English, after the two censuses, or number counts, of the population, which are taken between its covers. Indeed, our book (and this portion) opens with the command to count the Israelites, stipulating as follows:

"Count the heads of the entire witness community of the children of Israel, by their families, by their parents' houses, with the number of names of each male body, from twenty years of age and above, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel." (Numbers 1:2–3)

Such are the details of the census given at the beginning of the book, when the Israelites are still imbued with a vision of mission and "manifest destiny," and when we still expect them to wage a war for the liberation of the Land of Israel.

Likutei Divrei Torah

However, twenty-five chapters later, after the scouts' refusal to attempt to conquer Israel, after the various rebellions against Moses culminating in Prince Zimri ben Salou's shameful public adultery with the Midianite Kozbi bat Tzur directly in front of the presence of Moses himself, a second census is ordered:

"Count the heads of the entire witness community of the children of Israel, from twenty years of age and above, with their household parents, everyone eligible for army conscription." (Numbers 26:2)

It is clear that the identification of each Israelite for the purpose of the census is radically different in the second census from the way it was in the first census. The first time the count included "the families [proving everyone's tribal affiliation harking back to Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham], the household parents, and the individual personal names"; the second time, the tribal affiliation and the personal names of each were missing, with only the names of the household parents of each individual provided!

Clearly, herein – between the lines of the significant omissions – lies the secret of the degeneration of the Israelites. This is apparently why the Midrash names this the "Book of Censuses" (Sefer Pikudim) rather than the Book of the Desert (Bamidbar): in order to point us towards the solution to our presenting problem by highlighting the different stipulations of each census respectively. In the first census, taken during the heyday of the generation of the Exodus, each individual Israelite felt connected to his tribal parent, to his biblical patriarchs and matriarchs; by the second census, however, that connection was woefully gone, and the individual only related to his immediate biological parents. Allow me to explain.

The book of Exodus, our birth as a nation, is built upon the book of Genesis, our origins as a very special family. The patriarchs and matriarchs were originally chosen by God because of their commitment to "compassionate righteousness and moral justice" – traits which would make them "a blessing for all the nations of the world" (Genesis 12:3) and ideals to which they were to "command their children and their households after them" (Genesis 18:19). This unique Hebraic culture was to be nurtured and developed within a special land, the Land of Israel, which is the very "body" and the national expression, the physical matrix, of our eternal covenant with God. Only against the backdrop of their land and state would Israel be able to teach compassionate righteousness and moral justice to the other nation-states. The towering personalities of the book of Genesis develop, falter, repair, sacrifice,

persevere, and ultimately prevail on these twin altars of commitment to land and law, to sensitive humanity and sovereign nationality; these founding parents established the foundation for the continuity of an eternal people through whom the entire world will eventually be blessed by the peace of ultimate redemption.

“Yichus,” lineage or pedigree, has little to do with privilege and special rights but has everything to do with responsibility and ancestral empowerment. Grandfather Jacob blesses his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph, that “they shall be called by his name and the name of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac” (Genesis 48:16); this does not only mean naming them Abe and Ike and Jackie but rather means linking them to their patriarch’s ideals, to their values, to their commitments. It also means endowing them – and empowering them – with the eternal promise they received from God that their seed would inherit the Land of Israel and would eventually succeed in conveying to the world the message (and blessing) of divine morality and peace.

Tragically, the desert generation lost its connection with the book of Genesis, with the mission and empowerment, with the dream and the promise of the patriarchs and matriarchs of their family. As a consequence, the second census no longer connected them to the tribal children of our patriarchs and matriarchs. And the loss of connectedness to Abraham and Sarah resulted in a disconnect from the God of our forebears, from the promise and the covenant of that God, from the unique message and mission of Israel provided by the DNA and idealistic life-models of our ancestors. That generation lost faith in itself, became in “their own eyes as grasshoppers, and so were they in the eyes of their enemies,” and lost the courage to conquer the land, despaired of the dream to teach the world. By disconnecting from their past, they lost their future; and so, they did not even merit individual names, names which would count and could only be counted if they were linked with the proud names which founded Jewish eternity. Herein lies the secret of the dissolution of the desert generation. Are we in Israel today not faced with a similar disconnectedness from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, from Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, patriarchs and matriarchs of our past who must always remain paradigms for our future?

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
I Called Him "Dad"

Last week, on the 25th day the month of Iyar, we commemorated the 55th anniversary of his death. He was my grandfather, my mother’s father, but we, my sisters and cousins and I, called him “Dad”!

He came to the United States from what was then called Austria-Hungary, near the end of the nineteenth century. He was a young boy at the time. He struggled but ultimately succeeded in his own business. He suffered misfortune in the Great Depression but recovered in the aftermath of World War II. His business associates and customers called him “Max”, but I called him “Dad”.

He was a strong personality, observant religiously despite his sparse Jewish education. He helped establish the Shomer Shabbos shtiebel in Boro Park, Brooklyn, and was its president for many years. He was committed to its policy of only accepting strict Sabbath observers as privileged voting members of the shul, although all Jews were welcome to pray there. The shul exists, and thrives, to this day. He was known there as Mr. Hartman, and his Hebrew name, Mordechai ben Nachum Shmuel, still graces a memorial plaque on the synagogue’s eastern wall, but I called him “Dad”.

During the pre-Holocaust years, he helped support the members of his family who had remained in Europe. In fact, he traveled there several times to visit them and attempted to convince them to come to America, with little success. While there, he was approached by dealers in sacred books and returned with what became a well-stocked library of rare seforim. Book dealers called him “Der Amerikaner”, but I called him “Dad”.

He had little, if any, formal Jewish education. But as he grew older, he attended many rabbinic lectures and public classes. He expected me to become a Torah scholar and proudly “stole” my parchment semicha certificate the day after my ordination and displayed it on the bulletin board of his shtiebel (much to my dismay!). He regretted that he could not teach me Torah himself. But he encouraged me to use his well-stocked library and bequeathed much of it to me in his will. I still cherish those books and have had them rebound and restored by a master of the trade. Those books contain the secret of why I call him “Dad” to this very day.

For, you see, a centerpiece of the library was a complete set of the Pentateuch, the Five Books of the Torah, with a commentary known as Torah Temimah. The author of that work was Baruch HaLevi Epstein, an impressive Torah scholar who earned his livelihood as a bank employee in his native Belarus but published a wide range of remarkably lucid and innovative works. Those works are still widely appreciated nowadays.

In one passage of this work, Torah Temimah, you will discover why I call Mordechai

Likutei Divrei Torah

Hartman, may he rest in peace, “Dad”. That is, why I refer to grandfather as “father”. The passage is in this week’s Torah portion, Bamidbar (Numbers 1:1-4:20).

There, in chapter 3, verses 1 and 2, we read: “This is the line [of descendants] of Ahron and Moshe at the time that the Lord spoke with Moshe on Mount Sinai. These were the names of Ahron’s sons: Nadav, the first-born, and Avihu, Elazar and Itamar.”

Rashi immediately comments that although only the sons of Ahron are named here, they are referred to as descendants of Moshe. He explains that this is because Moshe taught his nephews Torah. All who teach another’s child Torah are considered “parents” of that child, as if they gave birth to that child.

The author of Torah Temimah finds the source of Rashi’s contention that he who teaches Torah to another is in some manner that person’s “Dad” in a passage in the Talmud, Sanhedrin 19b. That is my reason for calling my grandfather “Dad”. In his own way, “Dad” taught me Torah, a lot of Torah.

Torah Temimah expands upon this teaching. He cites another Talmudic passage, Sanhedrin 99b, in which the sage Reish Lakish asserts that “he who teaches Torah to another’s child is considered by scripture to have “made” that child,” meaning he has “formed” the child, or better has “transformed” him. Reish Lakish draws upon the verse in Genesis 12:5 which refers to the “souls that Avraham and Sarah ‘made ’in Charan.” That is, the souls of the masses who were “transformed” by our Patriarch and Matriarch.

By granting me access to his precious tomes, “Dad” helped to transform me from a rather bored adolescent to an eager bookish soul.

Torah Temimah has much more to say about the meaning of the word “father” or “Dad”. These words connote much more than a “male biological parent”.

This is evidenced by the verses in Genesis 4:20-21 which names Yaval as “the ‘father ’of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds,” and his brother Yuval as “the ‘father ’of all who play the lyre and the pipe.” Clearly, argues the author of Torah Temimah, “father” refers to the ability of these two brothers to transform the cave dwellers into tent dwellers and hunters into shepherds, and to grant humanity the gift of beautiful instrumental music.

“Dad” erected a tent for me, the “tent of Torah”, and although he was decidedly not musical in the simple sense of the word, he surely opened my ears to the “sounds of the music” of Torah.

Never satisfied with just a few observations on the text, the author of Torah Temimah raises a question: Did not Moshe teach Torah to all Jews, not just his brother Ahron's children? Why is he not called "father" of the entire Jewish nation?

He responds by proposing, or perhaps by supposing, that whereas Moshe taught Torah to the Jewish people as a group, he surely must have delivered special private personalized tutorials for his dear nephews. By giving them "fatherly" attention, he merited to be called "Dad".

My "Dad" gave each of us individual attention, and in my case, it took the form of his library of sacred books, Torah Temimah being just one of many hundreds.

I've learned much from Torah Temimah over the years and became aware of many aspects of Baruch HaLevi Epstein's life. He was the son of the author of Aruch HaShulchan, and a nephew of the famed Netziv of Volozhin. He spent the years 1923-1926 in the United States of America and served as the head of Ezras Torah before the famed Rav Henkin. My late Uncle Moshe Weinreb was acquainted with him during those years.

Tragically, he died at a very advanced aged after the German army occupied his city of Pinsk. Although most records of his death suggest that he was hospitalized there and died of a serious illness, I've seen accounts insisting that he was brutally murdered by the Nazis. HaShem yinkom damav, zecher tzaddik livracha.

And "Dad" too, may your memory be a blessing to all whom you "fathered" by bringing us closer to Torah, one way or another.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Double-Edged Sword of Opportunity and Responsibility

This week's parsha contains the mitzvah of counting the Jewish people: "Count the entire congregation of Israel by their families, by their fathers' house." (Bamidbar 1:2). This mitzvah appears twice in Sefer Bamidbar, once here and once in Parshas Pinchas. That is why Bamidbar is called Chumash Hapekudim – the Book of the Countings or the Book of Numbers.

In expressing the idea of counting, the Torah uses the expression "se-u es rosh" (Lift up the heads). The Medrash comments on this peculiar language: The expression "nesius rosh" employed here by the Torah can connote either the greatest heights or the lowest depths. Yosef tells the butler that Pharaoh will

reinstate him to his position of glory with the expression "Yisa Pharaoh es roshcha" (Bereishis 40:13). On the other hand, Yosef uses a similar expression in telling the baker that Pharaoh would behead him (Bereishis 40:19).

According to the Medrash, use of this particular language for the census indicates that every Jew has a very special opportunity, coupled with a very special responsibility.

People can have tremendous opportunity thrust upon them, and with that opportunity, they can rise to the greatest heights. But if they don't treat the opportunity correctly, but rather they squander it, the opportunity can lead to tremendous downfall. That is why the Torah employs the language "Se-u es rosh" (lift the head). We must know that there is opportunity associated with being a part of the am segulah (chosen people). But responsibility comes together with privilege. Therefore, if a person squanders that privilege, the person will not be the same as before – but rather worse off.

There is a story from the noted baal mussar, Rav Eliyahu Dessler, who lived from 1892 to 1953, first in Lithuania, then in England, and finally in Israel. Rav Dessler relates that when he was a boy, there were two beautiful glass dishes in his home. One day, he broke one of the dishes. When his mother found out, she yelled at him terribly. A couple of weeks later, one of the chickens that were running around the house (in late nineteenth century Europe) broke the other glass dish. Rav Dessler's mother picked up the broken pieces and put the chicken back into its cage. Rav Dessler, as a little boy, said, "It's better to be a chicken."

He relates that upon reflection – even as a little boy – he recognized his error. He could eat at the table and get real food, but the chicken was kicked around and got fed dry corn, etc. He concluded that it was in fact better to be a person.

The moral of the story is that – yes, a chicken has less responsibility and less to worry about, but it remains a chicken, nothing more. A person has tremendous responsibility, but also tremendous privilege and opportunity. It is only when we squander and ruin the opportunity that we may ask, "why do I need this?"

That is why the Torah uses the language of "Se-u es rosh," which can mean Pharaoh will raise you up, or it can mean Pharaoh will lift off your head.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why are deserts so important within Jewish tradition?

Likutei Divrei Torah

So important, in fact, that the Torah was given to us in a desert — something we remember every year on the festival of Shavuot, which we'll be celebrating in just a few days' time.

This Shabbat, we read the portion called Bamidbar — "within the desert" — which begins the entire book by that name.

There are many explanations as to the significance of deserts, of wildernesses, within our tradition. Let me cite just two.

The first is that the desert is barren. It doesn't boast much. Because of this, the desert calls out to us to ensure that when we follow a Torah-true way of life, we do so with deep humility. No wonder, then, that the greatest of all our leaders— Moses — was renowned most of all for being the most humble of human beings.

And then there is a second explanation.

A desert is hefker — it is ownerless. You won't find people who have real estate in the desert. The desert belongs to the entire nation. It belongs to everybody. And so too, the Torah — given in a desert — belongs to us all.

In the same way that on the festival of Pesach we recognize, "Keneged arba'ah banim dibrah Torah" — the Torah speaks to, four different types of Jewish people: wise people, people who let us down, simple people, and people who don't even know how to ask — so too, on the festival of Shavuot, we recall how the Torah was given to our entire nation. "Vechol ha'am" — every single person was there.

It happens quite often that people are with me, and they'll say something like, "Oh, Chief Rabbi, sorry, you can't eat this because you're religious." And then they go ahead and have a bite.

The point they're unfortunately missing is that the Torah was not only given to religious people. The Torah was given to every single one of us. And therefore, as we approach this festival of Shavuot, let's guarantee for "Vetein chelkeinu beToratecha" — that every single one of us will find our portion within our glorious Torah. And as a result of being true to its teachings, we will certainly be blessed with a meaningful and joyous life.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

All Take Part - Gabi Gardner

The parsha of Bamidbar launches the Book of Bamidbar, the third of the five Books of the Torah, which revolves around the Israelites' journey through the wilderness—a forty-year passage between the Exodus from Egypt and their arrival at the Land of Israel, primarily

focusing on the beginning and conclusion of that journey.

The opening verses of Bamidbar begin with God's command to Moshe to take a census of the children of Israel:

"Take a census of the entire assembly of the children of Israel, by families, according to their fathers' houses, counting the names of all males, head by head, from the age of twenty years and up, all who go out to the army in Israel. You and Aharon shall count them according to their divisions." (Bamidbar 1:2–3)

As the portion unfolds, these instructions are broken down according to tribe. In other words, the Torah enumerates each of the twelve tribes by name and reiterates the same directive God gave Moshe—that every male aged twenty and above must be counted for military service.

This leads to a compelling question: Why does the Torah repeat the same instructions for each individual tribe? Why devote nearly half the parsha to repeating these commands tribe by tribe? The Torah could have simply listed the names of all the tribes and then presented the general directive Moshe received from God.

Our Sages teach that this repetition underscores the value of the individual. It was not sufficient to record these commands merely as general guidelines; rather, the Torah shifts the focus to each person—emphasizing that every single individual matters.

Only last week, we concluded the reading of Vayikra, a book largely devoted to sacrificial offerings; the construction of the Mishkan, the details of bringing a personal sacrifice versus a communal one, and more. And yet now, in Bamidbar, we are reminded that the people of Israel can only emerge from the wilderness as a unified whole. Each person, with his distinct qualities, contributes something essential. Each must enlist for the sake of the collective. That is why our portion details the enlistment of each tribe so thoroughly.

Thus, the census is not merely a technical procedure—it is a profound expression of the worth of every individual in the eyes of God.

I would like to draw a parallel between this part of the parsha and the reality we have experienced over the past year and a half.

On Simchat Torah 5784, we were thrust into a complex and painful chapter—one in which the majority of our nation mobilized for the greater good, each within his own sphere.

In challenging times, it is possible to issue a sweeping call for everyone to rise to the occasion. But the true strength lies in the personal contributions: reservists on the front lines; those engaged in intelligence, education, or logistics; national service volunteers supporting families, children, youth, hospitals, and security services; students in yeshivot and midrashot learning Torah for the merit and success of the people; and students in both religious and secular high schools, ulpanot, and elementary schools who, after hours of study, also bolster the home front. Even hikers, simply by cherishing and preserving the beauty of the Land of Israel, play a part.

To confront a difficult reality, the contribution of each individual is essential. If we—the sons and daughters of Israel—are called to rise, to mobilize ourselves to action, and to fulfill the will of God, then we will do so. Each one of us will play his or her part. Because this is what the moment demands. Because we are needed. Because we all yearn to emerge from this harsh and wearying wilderness.

God commands that the enlistment of each tribe be described in detail. He sees each and every person as a participant in the collective mission.

Later in the parsha, the arrangement of the camps is laid out: each tribe is assigned its specific place around the Tent of Meeting. Only the tribe of Levi encamps at the center, surrounding the Mishkan, as it is written:

"But the Levites, by their fathers' tribe, were not counted among them. And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Only the tribe of Levi you shall not count, and you shall not take their census among the children of Israel. And you shall appoint the Levites over the Mishkan of Testimony, over all its vessels and all that belongs to it. They shall carry the Mishkan and all its vessels, and they shall serve it, and they shall encamp around the Mishkan." (Bamidbar 1:47–50)

The tribe of Levi is excluded from the general census due to its singular role: they are charged with the service of the Mishkan—its transportation and upkeep—and they replace the firstborns, who were redeemed following the Sin of the Golden Calf. The parsha also details the division of responsibilities within the tribe of Levi itself: the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari are each tasked with the care of specific components of the Mishkan.

The parsha's meticulous structure and precision reflect a sense of sanctity and a striving for order—both spiritual and societal. These are not merely technical instructions; they shape a national and religious identity for

Likutei Divrei Torah

a people who have just emerged from slavery and are stepping into a new reality of freedom and responsibility. The journey through the wilderness is not only a physical transition—it conveys a deeper message: a formative process in preparation for entering the Promised Land. Each tribe knowing its place and its mission reflects a vision that makes space for everyone, while also emphasizing both personal and collective responsibility.

The portion of Bamidbar thus teaches us that even in life—especially in our present moment—structure, order, a sense of belonging, and a readiness to assume responsibility are indispensable. Every individual plays a part in building a society, and every task—even one that may appear marginal or technical—is woven into the greater whole, contributing to a more moral and meaningful existence.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Shabbos and Yom Tov - Hashem and His People

During this upcoming week we will experience two different periods of kedushas zman in the form of Shabbos and Shavuot. Kedushas yom tov differs from kedushas Shabbos in several ways. There are activities such as aspects of food preparation that are permissible on yom tov even though they are prohibited on Shabbos. In the realm of positive mitzvos, the mitzvah of simcha - rejoicing is, according to most opinions, unique to yom tov and does not apply to Shabbos. Not only are there intricate halachic distinctions between the two, but the very source of the two sanctities is fundamentally different. Chazal highlighted this by instituting the culmination of the beracha of shemone esrei and kiddush different on yom tov than that which is recited on Shabbos. On Shabbos there is no mention of the Jewish people sanctifying Shabbos, rather Hashem is the Mekadesh Hashabbos - the One who makes Shabbos holy. On yom tov, however, we conclude this parallel beracha by acknowledging that Hashem declares the Jewish people to be holy and they, in turn, sanctify yom tov.

Several hundred years after the destruction of the second Beis Hamikdash a critical question arose that would impact upon the future observance of all the yomim tovim. Kiddush hachodesh - the sanctification of the new moon based on witnesses and the declaration of the beis din - ceased to exist. There was no longer a beis din qualified to perform this mitzvah and as such the question of how to observe Rosh Chodesh in its absence was of great concern; without Rosh Chodesh there could not be any yom tov. It was at this time that the set calendar that is in use until today was set up by Chazal under the leadership of Hillel the second. There is a dispute between the

rishonim as to precisely how a set calendar can suffice in place of a monthly declaration by beis din. The Rambam's view is that the Jewish community living in Eretz Yisrael "declares" Rosh Chodesh by simply observing it as such. Our entire observance of yom tov today is only possible because the Jewish people, represented by those in Eretz Yisrael, sanctify Rosh Chodesh. No such procedure is necessary, however, for Shabbos. Declared holy by Hashem, Shabbos occurs with no input by the Jewish people. In fact, Shabbos predated the Jewish people as Hashem sanctified the Shabbos of creation well before Klal Yisrael existed. Rosh Chodesh and yom tov only came into existence upon the formation of Klal Yisrael as a nation when they were leaving Mitzrayim.

Matan Torah similarly has two dimensions to it. There is a part of Torah that emanates entirely from Hashem. The written Torah and the actual halachos that were given directly to Moshe require no human input, and they are similar to Shabbos in this respect. However, there is a portion of Torah that necessitates human involvement. Many halachos must be determined by using the rules of Torah interpretations given to Moshe at Har Sinai. When different opinions arise about the correct applications of these principles to new situations, we are required by the Torah to put the issue to a vote among the sages of the generation, and their decisions become an integral part of the Torah. Additionally, there are rabbinic enactments that are made that also become halacha, and this aspect of Torah is closer in nature to yom tov than to Shabbos. Hashem gave the Torah sages the ability to help determine the laws of the Torah, which is similar to the Jewish people's role in declaring the sanctity of yom tov.

Delegating the awesome responsibility to human beings to declare yom tov and decide Torah law is fraught with danger. One can begin to think that we have the authority to tamper with Hashem's word. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Shabbos is called "Rishon l'mikraei kodesh - the first of the holy days". One must be totally committed to the notion of Shabbos before approaching yom tov. We can only declare yom tov if we are completely subservient to the will of Hashem. It is a privilege to be asked by Hashem to join Him in the sanctification of time. As His humble servants we accept this privilege by totally following His directives dictated to us by the halachos of kiddush hachodesh.

Perhaps an even greater challenge presents itself when being given the responsibility to delve into Hashem's Torah and apply its laws and protect it with rabbinic enactments. One can erroneously think that free reign is given to

tamper with the Torah and adjust it to one's own desires. Only great Torah sages who are completely dedicated to the entire Torah as the eternal word of Hashem can undertake the tremendous responsibility of interpreting and applying its laws properly.

As we observe yom tov and Shabbos during this year's celebration of Zman Matan Toraseinu, let us strengthen our resolve to be recipients of Hashem's kedushas hazman and His Torah. We look forward to the time when kiddush hachodesh and the Sanhedrin will return, and when we will merit the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy - "כי מציון תצא תורה" ודבר ה' מירושלים.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez- The Jewish Army

This week, Rav Doron attended a memorial for a soldier who died in an accident during his IDF service 28 years ago – the soldier would have turned 50 this year.

At the memorial, Rabbi Michael Brom spoke movingly about the spirit of this generation. Despite the pain and tragedy of the current war – the longest in Israel's history – there is no national despair. Instead, there is strength. There is unity. There is an unshakable sense of purpose and pride in our soldiers and in the people of Israel.

From the very first verses of Sefer Bamidbar, we see that only those of military age were counted – not because war is glorified, but because defending life is sacred. The Torah's army was never mercenary or professional. It was a people's army – of the people, by the people, and for the people.

And in a Jewish army, every life counts. Every soldier matters. Every name is known. Every loss is felt.

This is the spirit we carry today: one for all, and all for one. May Hashem protect all our soldiers.



BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON BAMIDBAR - 5786

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YUTORAH IN PRINT Bamidbar 5786

Flags Speaking Across the Generations Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

The Jewish calendar this year marks **Yom Yerushalayim**, the Torah reading of Parashat Bamidbar, and Shavuot in close succession, in a space of seven days. One of the most recent additions to the holidays of our people, one of the most ancient, and between them the parashah of the flags of the tribes of Israel. Today, it is a flag that proudly stands for the State of Israel in front of the world; it is the flag that so prominently represents Yom Yerushalayim; and it evokes the flags that were central to Shavuot as well.

Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah, when, the midrash relates, Mount Sinai was surrounded by angels carrying flags. The Jewish people, witnessing this, desired flags for themselves, and God complied, as conveyed by the verse (Song of Songs 2:4), "He brought me to the house of wine, and his banner over me was love" (Bamidbar Rabba 2:3).

Rav Kook, writing decades before the independence of the modern State of Israel, explained the significance of Sinai being termed "the house of wine" in conjunction with flags. Wine removes inhibitions, and allows one's true personality to emerge, unobscured. The Sinaitic moment was not only a transmission of information: it was the creation of a national identity, of a people, of individuals who merged their identity to become a collective. They became greater than the sum of their parts, no longer defined by details but by a shared essence. A flag, a symbol that speaks more than a thousand words, becomes a most fitting vessel.

That collective essence does not erase the individual; it demands individuality. Rav Chaim Yaakov Goldwicht, citing the Sfat Emet (Avot 1:14), reads "if I am not for myself, who will be for me; and when I am only for myself, what am I" as the very mechanism by which the people of Israel is constituted. If one does not develop his own unique capacities, no one else can do so in his place; yet those capacities are meant to be brought into the service of the larger whole. He extends this to the midrash of the flags at Sinai. The angels whose flags inspired the Jewish people were beings entirely devoted to a mission, and the request for flags was a request to share in that mission-centered identity. The declaration of na'aseh venishma reflects the same posture (Shabbat 88a), a readiness to be defined by one's purpose even before one fully understands its details.

Rav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, in Mishneh Sachir, takes up the same theme from another direction. The haftarah of Bamidbar describes the people of Israel as "the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered" (Hoshea 2:1), an image that seems to contradict the careful counting and ordered placement of the camp in the parashah itself.

Chazal note that sand carries a particular blessing: it passes through fire and emerges as glass, clear and beautiful and strong. So too the Jewish people endure through fire and come out as something transparent to its purpose, something that holds together while remaining open to the light. Rav Teichtal lived this image; he passed through the Holocaust and wrote the Eim HaBanim Smeicha out of that fire, and the image of sand becoming glass speaks not only to the survival of the people but to the building of the State that received those who emerged.

The culture that was formed at Sinai matters, and is expressed not only through laws and practices but through the formation of an entire canvas on which to paint its

from: ישיבת הר ברכה - יעקב וינברגר <yaakov@yhb.org.il>

date: May 10, 2026, 1:26 PM Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

The Obligation of Genizah in the Age of Recycling

There is no need to place the 'Revivim' articles in genizah • It is permissible to place the newspaper in recycling bins, or in the trash • It is Biblically forbidden to erase any of the Names by which God is called • There is no need to place in genizah the pages of sacred books that were printed for the purpose of proofreading • Regarding sacred books that contain no holy Names, according to all opinions, the prohibition against destroying them is rabbinic • Ideally, source sheets and pamphlets whose purpose is Torah study should be placed in genizah • Shabbat pamphlets that remained in the synagogue and

were never opened at all have the same status as proofreading pages, and do not require genizah

Must the 'Revivim' Articles Be Placed in Genizah?

Q: Must the 'Revivim' articles and other articles containing Torah content in the newspaper 'Besheva' be placed in genizah?

A: Although there are many opinions on this matter, the practical ruling is that they do not need to be placed in genizah, and it is permissible to place the newspaper in recycling bins or in the trash, while taking care that the newspaper not be open to the Torah articles.

In order to explain the halakha properly, I will also clarify related issues.

The Prohibition Against Destroying Holy Names and Sacred Books It is Biblically forbidden to erase any of the Names by which God is called, as it says regarding the idols of idol worship: "And you shall destroy their names from that place" (Deuteronomy 12:3), and immediately afterward it says: "You shall not do so to the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 12:4) meaning, it is forbidden to destroy His Name. One who intentionally erases any of the Names that were written in holiness — even a single letter of the Name —

transgresses a Biblical prohibition and is liable to lashes (Shevuot 35a; Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 6:1; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 276:9). Therefore, our Sages said that a Torah scroll, tefillin, and mezuzot that have worn out require genizah (Megillah 26b; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 282:10; Orach Chaim 154:5). It is also forbidden to destroy sacred books that contain no holy Names, and therefore, they must be placed in genizah — however, the prohibition against their destruction, and consequently the obligation of genizah, is rabbinic (Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 6:8; Chinuch 437; Tashbetz 1:2, and many others). Pages of Chumashim and Siddurim Printed for Proofreading This brings us to a question that the later poskim (Jewish law decisors) have discussed extensively: Before printing a book, one must first print a single sheet for the purpose of proofreading, in order to verify that the pages came out straight and in order. In earlier times, this was also done in order to perform final corrections on the book. Sometimes an error occurred and additional sheets had to be printed. Print shops were accustomed to throwing these sheets into the garbage, and many times the sheets would be scattered in a disgraceful manner near the print shop, and non-Jews would take them and treat them with great disrespect — such as using them for wrapping food, and wiping in the outhouse. In order to prevent this disgrace, some suggested burning these pages (called "korrektin"), and the poskim disagreed as to whether it is permitted to burn them in order to prevent their disgrace. According to the Ikarei HaDa"t (Orach Chaim 8:12), it is forbidden to destroy them by hand, and they must be placed in genizah. And according to the Magen Gibborim (Orach Chaim, Shiltei Gibborim 154:2), there is even a Biblical prohibition in doing so.

On the other hand, according to many authorities, since the pages were printed in order to proofread the book for printing errors — they possess no sanctity, because their purpose is not for study but for proofreading, and therefore they were never consecrated (Responsa Ein Yitzchak 5–7 by Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan of Kovna; Rabbi Elyashiv, Kovetz Teshuvot 2:6). The Netziv likewise ruled this way (Meshiv Davar 2:80) for an additional reason: since they were printed for short-term use, they were never consecrated, and it

is permitted to destroy them. And some ruled that even regarding proofreading pages of Chumashim and Siddurim that contain many Names, the same law applies (Meshiv Davar ibid.; Zaken Aharon 2:70; Yechaveh Da'at Chazan 3:10).

In the Responsa Avnei Nezer (Yoreh De'ah 376), the ruling is even more lenient. In his opinion, even sacred books, as long as one has not yet begun to study from them, sanctity has not yet taken effect upon them, and there is no prohibition to destroy them.

In practice, the accepted ruling is that there is no need to place in genizah the pages of sacred books that were printed for the purpose of proofreading, as written in the Responsa Tzitz Eliezer (3:1), that it is permissible to burn the proofreading pages, but not to throw them into the garbage in a disrespectful manner. And it appears from the words of the poskim that if one places them in recycling bins or in the trash when they are wrapped in a bag or box in order to preserve their dignity, this is not considered a disrespectful manner.

The Dispute is in Rabbinic Law, and Therefore the Lenient Opinion is Followed

Beyond the fact that most poskim ruled leniently regarding the burning of proofreading pages, the dispute concerns rabbinic law. For even regarding a holy Name that was written or printed out of belief and recognition of its sanctity in order that people study from it — such as the Names in Chumashim and Siddurim — the poskim disagree as to whether the prohibition against erasing it is Biblical. The majority opinion among the poskim is that since it was not written explicitly for the sanctity of the Name in the manner that Sta"m (Torah scrolls, tefillin, and mezuzot) are written, the prohibition against erasing it is rabbinic (Machaneh Ephraim, Hilchot Sefer Torah, p. 54a; Seder Mishnah, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 6:1; Ein Yitzchak 1, Orach Chaim 5; Melameid LeHo"il 2:88; Achiezer 2, Yoreh De'ah 48. And Rabbi Herzog in Psakim UKetavim 4, Yoreh De'ah 107, wrote that this is the opinion of the majority of poskim). When it comes to sacred books that contain no holy Names, according to all opinions, the prohibition against destroying them is rabbinic (Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah 6:8). And this is how the poskim have treated all books of the Oral Torah — such as volumes of Gemara — as books containing no holy Names (Avnei Nezer, Yoreh De'ah 376:4; Har Tzvi 231; Igrot Moshe 4:39; Aseh Lecha Rav 3:28). And although it is known that the Gemara contains holy Names, apparently, because the Names within them are few and are not an essential part of the book as they are in the Tanach or in the Siddur, the intent of the one who brings it to press and the printer is not upon them, and therefore, we follow the majority and primary content which constitutes sacred books containing no holy Names — and accordingly, the prohibition against their destruction is rabbinic. Since the dispute regarding proofreading pages concerns rabbinic law, the ruling follows the lenient opinion.

Shabbat Pamphlets That Were Never Opened

It appears that the same law that applies to proofreading pages likewise applies to booklets of Torah content that are attached to newspapers or sent by mail, whose recipients do not intend to study from them — as well as Shabbat pamphlets that remained in the synagogue and were never opened at all. For it is known to those who bring them to press that some of them will never be studied, and therefore as long as they have not been studied, they have the same status as proofreading pages, and do not require genizah.

Weekly Torah Portion Pamphlets and Source Sheets

The status of weekly Torah portion pamphlets, booklets of Torah articles, and source sheets is more stringent than that of proofreading pages. For they are intended for Torah study, whereas proofreading pages are not intended for study at all — and therefore according to many, pamphlets and source sheets require genizah (this was the inclination of Zaken Aharon 2:70; Minchat Yitzchak 1:18; Minchat Asher, Talmud Torah 9. And likewise, all those who hold that Torah articles in newspapers require genizah, as cited below).

However, some hold that since the study from them is one-time — they were never consecrated and need not be placed in genizah, but rather it is permissible to place them in recycling bins (Yechaveh Da'at Chazan, Part 3, Orach Chaim 10), or in the trash wrapped in a bag (Teshuvot VeHanhagot 1:553; Siach Nachum 74).

And although the entire discussion concerns rabbinic law, the accepted ruling is that ideally, source sheets and pamphlets whose purpose is Torah study should be placed in genizah. Those who are lenient and place them in recycling bins or in the trash wrapped in a bag have valid authorities upon whom to rely.

A Secular Newspaper That Contains Torah Content

The status of Torah content printed in newspapers and religious pamphlets whose majority is secular material is lower than that of weekly Torah portion pamphlets and source sheets, since most of the newspaper or pamphlet deals with secular matters, and accordingly the primary intent of their printing is for secular purposes.

Nevertheless, some are stringent and hold that the Torah content must be cut out and placed in genizah (Rabbi Greenfeld in Yerushat Platah 29; Halichot Shlomo, Tefillah 20:72; Rabbi Shlomo Man HaHar, Techumin 3, in response to the article of Rabbi Dasberg; Chevel Nachalato 10:38). And some ruled thus ideally, while permitting in after-the-fact situations to recycle them (Rabbi Elyashiv, Kovetz Teshuvot 2:6; Aseh Lecha Rav 3:28; BeMar'eh HaBazak 5:89).

However, some hold that we follow the primary nature of the newspaper or pamphlet: if its primary nature is secular — it was printed with that intention, and there is no need to place in genizah the Torah content within it (Minchat Yitzchak 1:18. And similarly in Shevet HaLevi 5:162). And these may be added to those who are lenient even regarding weekly Torah portion pamphlets and source sheets — because they are intended for one-time study, as explained in the previous paragraph.

Therefore, it is permissible to place them in recycling bins or in the trash in a manner where the secular pages cover the page containing Torah content. It goes without saying that there is no need to place in genizah Torah articles in secular newspapers, for even though one side may have Torah content printed on it, the other side may contain things that are completely contrary — and it is specifically by placing them in genizah that disgrace would result.

Care Regarding the Printing of Holy Names

However, the writers of articles and the printers of newspapers and the preparers of source sheets must be careful not to write holy Names, for even though according to the majority of poskim sanctity does not take effect upon them, there is disgrace in writing them outside the framework of a sacred book that will endure for many years.

As we learned in tractate Rosh Hashanah (18b), the Greek kingdom decreed against Israel that they may not mention the Name of Heaven. When the Hasmoneans prevailed and defeated them, they

saw a need to strengthen the faith by mentioning the Name of Heaven, and they instituted that it be written in all legal documents. And so, they would write: “In such-and-such year of Yochanan the High Priest of God Most High.” But this practice caused a problem, for after a person would pay his debt, he would many times discard the document without placing the Name in genizah, and the Name of Heaven would end up lying in the garbage. Therefore, our Sages abolished this practice, and even established the day of its abolition as a holiday.

From here the poskim learned that one must be careful not to write the Name of God in newspapers or in letters, or even in greeting cards that may sometimes come to disgrace. Likewise, one must avoid writing them in decorations hung in the synagogue when there is concern that they will wear out and become disgraced (Sha'arei Teshuvah, Orach Chaim 11:3). However, when there is no concern that they will be disgraced, it is permitted to write the Names or engrave them — such as on the Holy Ark, or before the prayer leader (Mishnah Berurah 1:4). Nevertheless, if the printers of source sheets or articles made an error and printed holy Names, since they did not intend to do so, the status of the articles and source sheets is as explained above.

Tests and Workbooks

Q: Must tests, worksheets, and notebooks from Torah and Oral Torah classes be placed in genizah?

A: Since their primary purpose is to engage the students and not for them to study from them — they were never consecrated, and one may treat them according to the lenient opinion and place them in recycling bins or in the trash wrapped in a bag. However, notebooks containing Torah content that a person intends to keep in order to review and study from again — these require genizah.

Rav Schachter on the Parsha III

Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of **Rav Hershel Schachter** Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman
<https://tinyurl.com/RavSchachterontheParsha> and at torahweb.org
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Parshas Bamidbar

Pidyon Bechorim [and The 5-Tier Hierarchy of Rov]

קח את הלויים תחת כל בכור בבני ישראל ואת בהמת הלויים תחת בהמתם
Take the Levi'im in place of every firstborn of Bnei Yisrael, and the livestock of the Levi'im in place of their livestock. (Bamidbar 3:45)

The Torah teaches that bechorim, both human and animal, have kedushah. Hashem commanded Moshe to count the bechorim among the Yisraelim and to take the male Levi'im as a pidyon (redemption) for those bechorim. Each Levi counted as a pidyon for one Yisraeli bechor. The Torah relates that the 22,273 firstborn Yisraelim outnumbered the 22,000 Levi'im available for pidyon. Therefore, 22,000 of the bechorim were replaced by Levi'im, and the remaining 273 (who were identified by goral) had to pay the usual five shekalim to a Kohen for pidyon haben. Hashem also commanded Moshe at this time to take the animals of the Levi'im as a pidyon for the firstborn among the animals of the Yisraelim. Not all animals were involved in this pidyon, however, as all bechor beheimah tehorah (firstborn kosher animals) whether they belong to Kohanim, Levi'im, or Yisraelim are sanctified from birth and are brought as korbanos (if unblemished). The only firstborn livestock that require pidyon, and which are therefore the subject of the passuk cited above, are pitrei

chamor (firstborn male donkeys). These are assur b'hana'ah (forbidden with regard to benefit) prior to being redeemed with non-sanctified sheep (Bechoros 9b), and the sheep must then be gifted to a Kohen as one of the twenty-four matnos Kehunah.

The Gemara in Bechoros (4b) points out that the Torah records only the number of human Yisraeli bechorim who were in excess of the Levi'im, but not the surplus among the animal firstborn, even though the pitrei chamor of all the shevatim presumably outnumbered the sheep of the Levi'im. We see from this that although one Levi could only take the place of one bechor, "שה אחד" - one sheep of a Levi exempted [from pidyon] many firstborn donkeys of a Yisrael". Unlike the other aspects of the parsha, which were merely hora'os sha'ah (temporary rulings), this is a din l'doros that continues to be relevant. The underlying principle of this din is that a seh used for pidyon does not become imbued with kedushah in place of the petter chamor, as that would preclude it from being used for the pidyon of another chamor. Thus, if a Yisrael gave a Kohen a seh as pidyon for his petter chamor and he then purchased that seh back from the Kohen, he may use it to be podeh another petter chamor. In the pidyon bechorim described in our parsha, the sheep were not given to Kohanim. Instead, they removed the kedushah of the Yisraelim's pitrei chamor through merely being designated as their pidyon. Thus, each seh could effect the pidyon of many pitrei chamor even initially. Regarding the mitzvah l'doros, when pitrei chamor have to be redeemed with sheep that are given to Kohanim, a Yisrael cannot initially use a single seh to be podeh several pitrei chamor, because the pidyon is effected by giving the seh to a Kohen, and the Kohen is entitled to one seh for each chamor. Therefore, one may use a seh for a second pidyon only if he bought it back after giving it to the Kohen.

The Gemara in Bechoros (11a) quotes a Beraisa that discusses a case involving questionable pitrei chamor. A Yisrael had ten donkeys that had never given birth, and each of them produced a set of twins consisting of a male and a female, but it is not known whether the male or the female emerged first. Every one of the newborn males is thus a safeik petter chamor. The Beraisa teaches that in such a case, "מפריש עליהן עשרה שייין ומעשרן והן שלו" - he sets aside ten sheep [as pidyon] for them; he then tithes [the sheep], and they are his". If we were certain that the male chamorim were firstborn, the owner would not have rights to the sheep used for pidyon ; they would be the property of the Kohanim, and the owner would not take ma'aser from them. Since the status of the chamorim is questionable, however, the Halachah differentiates between the issur aspect of pidyon petter chamor and the monetary aspect. As far as the issur hana'ah of a petter chamor prior to pidyon, we follow the rule of sfeiqa d'oraissa l'chumra (we rule stringently in cases of doubt regarding Torah law). Thus, the owner must perform a pidyon on the questionable pitrei chamor in order to remove the possible issur and to permit working with them. After the owner performs the pidyon, however, he is not required to give the sheep to a Kohen, because the Kohen's monetary right is questionable. When dealing with doubts regarding ownership of property, we apply the principle of "המוציא מחבירו עליו הראיה" - the one seeking to exact property from [the possession of] his fellow bears the burden of proof". Since the Kohen is unable to prove that he is entitled to the sheep, they remain in the possession of the Yisrael, as he is the muchzak (the one who had initial possession). Since the Yisrael is legally entitled to keep the sheep, he is required

to separate ma'aser beheimah from them as if they were definitely his.

The famous sugya of Takfah Kohen (Bava Metzia 6a-7a) utilizes this case involving the pidyon of questionable pitrei chamor to determine the extent of the principle of "המוציא מחבירו עליו הראיה". Specifically, the sugya seeks to answer the question of whether a muchzak, who had the object in question in his possession at the time the safeik arose, continues to keep it b'toras vadai (on definite terms) or only b'toras safeik (on questionable terms). The Gemara presents the question in the following way. If the Halachah views disputed property as definitely belonging to a muchzak, then "תקפו כהן מוציאין" - if a Kohen seized [a questionable bechor or the seh used for pidyon of a safeik petter chamor], we remove it from his possession". However, if the Halachah considers the disputed animal as only questionably belonging to a muchzak and as possibly belonging to the Kohen, "תקפו כהן אין מוציאין אותו מידו"; if the Kohen were to seize the animal, he would not have to return it, since he would then become the muchzak. The Gemara demonstrates from the fact that the Yisrael is obligated to separate ma'aser beheimah from the sheep used for the pidyon that due to the principle of "המוציא מחבירו עליו הראיה", the Halachah considers him the definite owner of the sheep. The requirement to separate ma'aser beheimah only applies when the animal that will be counted as ma'aser is of definite status, not when it will attain only a doubtful status of ma'aser: "עשירי ספק". Thus, an owner is required to separate ma'aser only from those animals that are definitely his. If the sheep were only questionably owned by the Yisrael, who may keep them only because the Kohen is unable to prove that he is entitled to them, the sheep would be considered like laku'ach (animals that were bought), which are exempt from ma'aser beheimah (Bechoros 55b). Evidently, then, the status of the sheep with regard to ma'aser beheimah, and the identity of their owner, is not in doubt.

Tosfos (Bava Metzia 7a, s.v. mafrish; see Tosfos, Bechoros 4b, s.v. u'podeh) notes that the Beraisa states that the owner must separate ten sheep to redeem the ten questionable chamorim. Given the Gemara in Bechoros we saw above, which states that "שה אחד" - one sheep for the pidyon of the chamorim. Since the Yisrael is the muchzak on the disputed sheep, he is not required to give the sheep to the Kohen after he performs the pidyon. Therefore, he should be able to use the same seh over and over again to be podeh all ten chamorim! Rav Eliezer Kirzner offered a mathematical answer to this question. The Gemara in Bava Basra (92b) teaches the rule, "אין" - We do not follow the [principle of] majority in matters involving money". In other words, although rov (likelihood, or ruba d'lesa kaman) is used to determine the halachah in the realm of issura (prohibitory law), in momona (monetary cases), when someone is in possession of disputed property, a rov does not suffice as a basis for exacting the property from him. We allow the property to remain in the possession of the muchzak, even when a rov indicates that he is, in fact, not the rightful owner. Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Teshuvos, Tinyana 103:5,15), however, restricts this rule to cases with a standard rov. In the presence of a 99% rov, the principle of rov is operative ; we would follow such a compelling rov to exact money, even from a muchzak. He explains that the reason for "אין" - join the minority to the chazakah (the possession of the muchzak)," which

has the effect of weakening the rov. However, if the mi'ut (minority possibility) is so improbable that it is deemed a mi'uta d'mi'uta (a minority of a minority), this argument cannot be made.

Given this distinction, Rav Kirzner reasons as follows. After a seh is used to be podedh one safeik petter chamor, there is a 50% chance that the Yisrael still owns the seh ; if that chamor is really a firstborn, the seh used for its pidyon is the property of the Kohen. After a second pidyon, by virtue of the additional safeik, the chances that the Yisrael still owns the seh are reduced to 25%, with a 75% likelihood that he must give it to the Kohen. Nevertheless, the Yisrael need not give the seh to the Kohen at this point, since he is the muchzak, and we follow the rule "אין הולכין בממון אחר הרוב". However, as the same seh is used consecutively to be podedh other pitrei chamor, the chances that the Yisrael remains its owner is reduced further and further - to 12.5%, then to 6.25%, 3.125%, 1.56%, and so on. Eventually, we will reach a point that the overwhelming likelihood is that the seh is owned by the Kohen, and at that point, the Yisrael may not use it for pidyon any longer. Even though he is the muchzak, he will be forced to give the seh to the Kohen, since the chances that he has a right to keep it are only a mi'uta d'mi'uta. As Rabbi Akiva Eiger contends, we may no longer invoke the rule of "אין הולכין בממון אחר הרוב" when the Kohen has a 99% rov in his favor. This is the reason that the Beraisa chooses to speak of a case in which the Yisrael uses ten sheep for the pidyon of the chamorim, rather than using the same sheep repeatedly. Only then does he retain ownership of the sheep and continue to be obligated to separate ma'aser beheimah from them.

Rebbi Akiva Eiger's distinction between a standard rov and a rov of 99% is better understood in the context of a broader discussion addressing the classification of the different forms of rov. When the Torah formulates the principle of "אחרי רבים להטות" - yield to the majority" (Shemos 23:2), it stands to reason that there are different degrees of statistical probabilities. **In fact, we may identify five distinct categories of rov in Halachah.** [Rov was also discussed in recent daf yomi Chulin 11a]

First, the Halachah recognizes a rov that constitutes a mere **51% majority**. We would not follow this type of weak rov in all cases, such as when the rov is in conflict with a chazakah, a legal presumption that the status quo remains unchanged.

The Gemara in Kiddushin (80a) teaches, however, that in the presence of a **stronger rov**, such as a rov in the range of **70-80%** "רוב וחזקה רובה עדיף" - in a conflict between a rov and a chazakah, the rov prevails".

The Halachah gives even more credence to a third type of **rov of 95%**, where the opposing mi'ut is merely a **mi'ut she'eino matzui** (uncommon minority). A practical manifestation of the difference between the latter rov and the previous one can be found in the Ramban, who discusses why we must check animals for sirchos of the rei'ah (adhesions of the lung), but not for each of the other sixty-nine simanim (signs) of treifos that render animals non-kosher. The Ramban explains that this is due to the fact that sirchos of the rei'ah are found in a mi'ut hamatzui (common minority) of animals. Whenever there is a mi'ut hamatzui of the presence of an issur and it is not difficult to ascertain whether the issur is in fact present, one is obligated to check. The Ramban asserts that on a level of d'oraisa, one would have the right to rely on the rov of the second category (70-80%) that the majority of healthy animals do not contain simanei

treifah. There is, however, a requirement midrabbanan to investigate cases in which the frequency of the presence of an issur constitutes a mi'ut hamatzui. In a case of a 95% rov, however, there is not even a rabbinic requirement to investigate. The presence of one of the other sixty-nine simanei treifah is more uncommon than sirchos of the rei'ah, and thus one need not be concerned for the mi'ut she'eino matzui that the animal is a treifah.

As mentioned above, in a **fourth category of rov**, where the likelihood is as great as **99%**, Rabbi Akiva Eiger maintains that we do not follow the principle of "אין הולכין בממון אחר הרוב". In a situation with such a significant rov, the principle of rov is operative, and we rely on it **even to exact money from a muchzak**.

Finally, a **fifth form of rov** is characterized by a likelihood of **99.99%**, and is relevant to the rule, "אין הולכין בפיקוח נפש אחר הרוב" - We do not follow the majority when saving a life is concerned" (Kesubos 15b). **When a person's life is in danger, even if there is only a small possibility of danger, a mi'uta d'mi'uta, the matter is still regarded to be in doubt, and we violate issurim - for example, chillul Shabbos - to save his life.** Nevertheless, the Chasam Sofer argues that if the chance of sakanah is so remote that it is only "אחד מני אלף" - one in a thousand," the average person is not at all concerned about such a risk. In such a case, we may apply the concept known as "שומר פתאים ד'" - Hashem protects the foolish" (Tehillim 116:6), and rely upon Heaven to have mercy and ensure that no mishap occurs. This situation is not labeled as a safeik sakanah at all, and therefore does not override the violation of issurim.

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Rabbi Yakov Haber

Yonasan and Dovid, the Two Mashiachs and Jewish Unity

The haftara of "Machar Chodesh," read when Rosh Chodesh falls out on the day after Shabbos (as it does this coming week), presents an episode in the great friendship between Yonasan and Dovid. Notwithstanding his father, King Shaul's, enmity and threats toward Dovid - who eventually would succeed Shaul as king, thus preventing Yonasan from assuming his father's throne - Yonasan willfully accepts Dovid's eventual reign over Israel and even assists him in fleeing from his father. In Jonathan's moving words as David is about to flee, "Go in peace! [We mutually commit to] that which we have sworn by Hashem's name, 'May Hashem always be between me and you and between my descendants and yours forever!'" (Shmuel 20:42).

This friendship between a descendant of Rachel, through Binyamin, and a descendant of Leah, through Yehuda, with the former pledging to assist and even be subservient to the latter is reminiscent of the reverse situation occurring centuries earlier. Yehuda, although initially responsible for the sale of Yosef, a son of Rachel, pleads before the Egyptian viceroy (Yosef himself!) to save Binyamin, Rachel's other son, from slavery, offering himself in his stead. The initial enmity between the sons of Leah and the son of Rachel was, for a moment in history, replaced with mutual responsibility and concern. This sense of mutual mission repeats itself in the opposite direction with the concern of Jonathan for David. If we should assume that both sons of Rachel, Yosef and Binyamin, to some extent represent the same aspect of Divine service, the

following pattern seems to emerge. Chazal had a tradition that the descendants of Eisav, and specifically Amaleik, would fall into the hands of the descendants of Yosef (see Rashi, beginning of parshas Vayishlach). Indeed, midrashic sources teach that the primary role of mashiach ben Yosef is to destroy Amaleik, whereas the role of mashiach ben Dovid, coming from the tribe of Yehuda, is to build the mikdash and lead the people in the service of Hashem in the messianic era. Some commentaries (see Sheim Mishmuel, Vayeishev 5677) note that the initial plan was that Shaul, a descendant of Binyamin, Yosef's brother, was to fulfill the role of "mashiach ben Yosef" and destroy Amaleik, as indeed he was charged to do. Then, Dovid, the "mashiach" from Yehuda would build the mikdash and lead the Jewish people, with Shaul becoming a viceroy.[1] Disappointingly, this plan failed. Shaul did not totally destroy Amaleik, and, as a result, when king David assumed the throne, he had to subsume in his role the mission of fighting against the enemies of Israel, including Edom, the descendants of Eisav. Consequently, he, who "fought many wars and spilled much blood" (Divrei Hayamim I 22:8) was not able to construct the mikdash, the building of which was delayed until the reign of his son, King Shlomo. Yonasan, realizing that his father's reign was destined to fail, willfully accepted his secondary role as a descendant of Binyamin under Dovid's primary leadership, thus somewhat preserving the original Divine plan of unifying the two main family branches in a joint rule. Unfortunately, this plan, after Yonasan's tragic demise in battle, did not come to fruition either.

Since both branches of the tribes, that of Yosef and that of Yehuda, were destined for kingship and leadership in some capacity, the kingdoms eventually split into two: one, the kingdom of Judah, led by Rechavam, Shlomo's son, and his descendants, and one, the kingdom of Israel, led by Yeravam, a descendant of Yosef through Efrayim.

On another level, the battles against the enemies of Israel are part of attending to the physical dimension of the welfare of the Jewish nation. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohein Kook zt"l[2] teaches that just as Yosef primarily tended to the physical needs of the Jewish people, being the "mashbir" in Egypt and facilitating a smooth, comfortable transition into the years of Egyptian exile, so too would his descendant, mashiach ben Yosef, be assigned that task. By contrast, mashiach ben Dovid's more spiritual mission was rooted in the role of his ancestor, Yehuda.[3] This perhaps finds its initial indication in the fact that Yehuda, not Yosef, was charged by Ya'akov to found a beis Talmud in Egypt (Rashi, Bereishis 46:28). The holy city of Yerushalayim, the reunification of which is to be shortly celebrated, is known as "עיר שחברה לה יחדו" - a city joined together within itself" (Tehillim 122:3). In addition to other interpretations of the cohesive nature of Jerusalem, some explain that Yerushalayim also represents the combination of the two aforementioned forces, the physical and the spiritual. It is both mikdash melech, ir melucha, the seat of the royal kingdom, and beis mikdash'cha, the city in which Hashem's dwelling place on earth radiates to the whole world. I once heard from Rav Yoel Schwartz zt"l that this is the reason its name is ירושלים with the plural suffix "ים" as it is meant to combine both aspects.[4]

Rav Kook writes that on the long road to redemption there is a necessity to repair and rebuild both the physical as well as the spiritual destruction caused by the long exile. Unfortunately, these

two forces, rebuilding the physical and rebuilding the spiritual, are oftentimes in conflict with each other rather than working together in harmony as was the Divine plan. In Rav Kook's penetrating words:

When these two forces work at cross purposes as a result of the calamity of exile, shortsightedness and disarray, these are the "birthpangs of Messiah," or to be more exact, the "birthpangs of Messiahs." The Psalmist writes: "That Your enemies have defied, O Lord; that they have defied the footsteps of Your Messiahs." Two footsteps of two Messiahs.

More recently, in the Holy Land, the yishuv having gone through over two years of difficult war and other social upheavals, these two forces continue to be in constant friction with each other. Those for whom only the mission of physical rebuilding is significant often view those for whom the spiritual is their primary focus as pariahs, and worthless members of society. Those who attempt to combine both the physical and the spiritual have, of late, (to my humble mind, painfully and unfairly) been criticized as misrepresenting Torah by some groups who devote more time to the purely spiritual or as "messianic radicals" by the former group. Unfortunately, we continue to witness that which Rav Kook writes in his day: the two forces battle with each other instead of cooperating.

As Rav Kook himself writes: Now the truth is, as long as the nation is fractured and incapable of uniting the powers, at times an attempt at unification will actually result in some theological or moral damage. This deep separation is the source of controversy in Israel. A true unity and symbiosis between these seemingly opposite aspects seems elusive. Nonetheless, with dialogue, mutual respect and the avoidance of harsh rhetoric, we hope and pray that by appreciating the diverse roles and personalities of the many individuals involved in spiritually and physically rebuilding both the city of Yerushalayim and the Land of Israel that the day will come soon, as the prophet Yechezkel states:

Say to them, So says the Lord God: Behold I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel his companions, and I will place them with him with the stick of Judah, and I will make them into one stick, and they shall become one in My hand....And My servant David shall be king over them, and one shepherd shall be for them all, and they shall walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and perform them. (Yechezkel 37:19,24)

[1] Also see Sheim Mishmuel (ibid.) for the theological, conceptual framework for this division of roles. [2] See Lamentation in Jerusalem, translation by Rav Bezalel Naor, available here. [3] See the above essay in which Rav Kook explains how this duality was manifest in the leaders of the two kingdoms, Judah and Israel. [4] He playfully stated that the nations of the world call it "Jerusalem" and not "Jerusalayim" not realizing its dual dimension!

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Rav Frand on Parshas Bamidbar

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Klal Yisrael: a Role-Oriented Religion & a Role-Oriented Nation

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly

portion: #1382 The Halachic Issues with Milchig Bread. Good Shabbos.

Klal Yisrael is a Role-Oriented Religion and a Role-Oriented Nation. The pasuk in Parshas Bamidbar says, “The Children of Israel shall encamp, every man at his camp and every man at his division...” (Bamidbar 1:2). During their journey in the midbar (wilderness), there was a specific order in which they traveled. Each of their camps had their own “degalim” (flags). This is how they camped around the Mishkan and this is how they traveled. Rashi quotes (in one of his interpretations) that the signs with which the shevatim (tribes) camped were “the signs given over to them by Yaakov their father.” In other words, the arrangement of four units, with three shevatim per unit, was all specified by Yaakov as the configuration in which they were to carry his body up from Mitzrayim (Egypt) (to the Mearas Hamachpelah in Eretz Canaan for burial).

Rashi brings the same idea in Parshas Vayechi, where the Torah describes the actual transport of Yaakov’s body from Mitzrayim to the Mearas Hamachpelah: He specified positions for them; three to the east, three to the south, three to the west, and three to the north. Rashi there mentions that their eventual travel in the midbar after Yetzias Mitzrayim was established back then. For example, Levi was instructed not to carry Yaakov’s coffin, just as his shevet would not take part in the travel configuration in the midbar (because Shevet Levi had the separate job of carrying the Aron). Likewise, in the transport of Yaakov’s body back to Canaan, Yosef did not participate in the carrying because he was a king (i.e. – Egyptian royalty), so his sons Menashe and Ephraim took his place.

The Medrash (Medrash Rabbah Bamidbar Parsha 2 Os 7) explains that this is the meaning of the phrase in the pasuk “ish al diglo b’osos” – using the “osos” (signs) that their father (Yaakov) gave them for carrying his coffin, they gathered under their respective “degalim.”

At first glance, it seems rather strange that there is such serious concern as to how they travelled in the midbar. We must remember that the transport of Yaakov’s body to Canaan happened hundreds of years earlier! Why was there such hakpada about the order of the shevatim’s travel upon leaving Mitzrayim?

I saw in a sefer that this was much more fundamental than just the idea of positioning. When Yaakov Avinu gave his deathbed instructions to his sons regarding how to travel when they transport him from Mitzrayim, he was also conveying to them something far more basic. When the shevatim gathered around Yaakov’s deathbed, he told each of them their strengths and their weaknesses, and he also assigned to them their future roles in Klal Yisrael. Shevet Levi would have the kehuna. Yehuda would be the melech. Shevet Yissocher would devote themselves to learning and Zevulun would support them, etc. etc. In other words, Yaakov was not just assigning east-west north-south positions. He was defining their roles in Klal Yisrael.

Judaism is a role-oriented religion and Klal Yisrael is a role-oriented nation. The only way to have a successful nation is if everyone’s roles are defined. “Vayehi b’Yeshurun melech, b’hisasef roshei am yachad shivtei Yisrael.” Achdus (unity) is necessary. In order to have achdus, it is necessary to establish “mi b’rosh?” (who will lead?). Someone needs to be the chief, and the others need to be the Indians. When all the Indians want to be the chief, there will be trouble!

So, when Yaakov Avinu assigned the positions in which they would travel, included in that assignment was their roles and their hierarchy. That is why when they finally became a nation and began travelling in the midbar, it became incumbent to establish the roles of each shevet.

This is not unlike the armed services of the United States. The Navy needs to take care of the ocean. The Air Force needs to take care of the sky. The Army needs to take care of the ground. Each of these roles are defined. When one service wants to usurp and take over the “territory” of another branch of service, it causes division and arguments.

Therefore, the importance of how they travelled was not merely about travelling. This is what Chazal wished to emphasize: They had this configuration from the Zeida Yaakov, who had the vision of what Klal Yisrael would look like. He recognized that in Klal Yisrael, not everyone could be the king, not everyone could be the learner, and not everyone could be in charge of the avoda in the Beis Hamikdash (Temple Service). Everything had to be defined. That definition was established by Yaakov Avinu, and that is why it was so important to maintain that same configuration while they travelled in the midbar.

Klal Yisrael is a Role-Oriented Religion and a Role-Oriented Nation

I would like to point out another insight on this very pasuk, but with a totally different emphasis:

“**Every man at his camp and every man at his division...**” (Bamidbar 1:52)

Another very interesting Medrash (Medrash Rabbah Bamidbar Parsha 2 Os 2) seems to be saying disparate things that may actually be related.

By making every shevet have degalim, Hashem expressed his love for the Jewish people. The Medrash cites the pasuk “He has brought me into the wine cellar and diglo (his flag) is upon me as a demonstration of His love” (Shir HaShirim 2:4). The Medrash quotes various interpretations of the pasuk:

One interpretation of this Medrash is: Even if a person is sitting and learning and skips around (m’daleg) from place to place, from pasuk to pasuk, and from halacha to halacha, the Ribono shel Olam’s reaction is ‘This person is dear to Me, v’dilugo Alai ahava (his skipping is upon Me for love). The Tanna makes a very interesting play on words, switching from v’diglo (and his flag) to v’dilugo (and his skipping). “I like the fact that he skips!”

Another interpretation of the Medrash is: At Kabalas Hatorah (Revelation), thousands upon thousands of malachim (angels) descended with the Ribono shel Olam. The pasuk indicates that the malachim were each carrying degalim, as it is written, dagul m’revava. When the Jews saw that the malachim were each carrying degalim, they began to strongly desire their own degalim. They said, halevai that we too should have degalim like the malachim do.

Therefore, the pasuk states: He has brought me into the wine cellar and diglo (his flag) is upon me, as a demonstration of His love.

The Sefas Emes points out that there is a common denominator to the theme of these interpretations: Normally Yiddishkeit is a religion of hadraga (taking things in steps). A person cannot suddenly jump from the lower to the higher rungs of spirituality. A person must go step by step over a long period of time. This is the normal way of doing things. Usually, if someone goes overnight from eating

neveilos and treifos to wearing rabbinic garb, such growth does not last. But this Medrash is saying, according to the Sefas Emes, that sometimes the Ribono shel Olam lets you skip. When the Ribono shel Olam sees your passion to grow and become greater and sees that you have a burning desire to improve, then the Ribono shel Olam says “Yes. I can accept that and I will let you skip and I will even help you skip.”

That is the meaning of skipping pesukim and perakim. Here is a person who says “I want to learn. I want to know. But it is just too hard for me so I skip it!” The Ribono shel Olam sees his desire and passion. He says “That is what I like. I like the passion.” Therefore, even though you may be skipping this and skipping that, your feelings are in the right place and I appreciate that. “V’dilugo Alai ahava” – His skipping is dear to Me (because his skipping comes from a place where he really wants to learn, but it is just too hard for him).

This, says the Sefas Emes, is the same message as that of the malachim. Klal Yisrael sees thousands and thousands of malachim descending and they all carry degalim. They have a passion to become like malachim. Wait a minute! You can’t be a malach, you are a human being! Why do you have a passion for that? It is beyond your scope. The Ribono shel Olam says, “Yes, I see it is beyond your scope but I see your passion. I see your desire. That is what I like.” Therefore, the two interpretations of “dilugo Alai ahava” are intertwined. There is a common denominator between the person that skips and Klal Yisrael that had a passion for the degalim. There is an element there that the Ribono shel Olam appreciates and loves, and in fact, He will sometimes let a person skip a couple of steps along the way, in order to fulfill that strong desire.

This is the meaning of the pasuk “He has brought me to the wine cellar and diglo (his flag) is upon me with love.” Sometimes it is dilugo (allowing you to skip) which demonstrates His love because He sees your passion to grow and become a better Jew.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

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Rabbi Yehuda Zev Klein

[A National Call to Shabbos]

By now, we all know about President Donald Trump’s proclamation. In honor of the 250th anniversary of American independence, and during the weekend of “Rededicate 250,” he encouraged Jewish Americans to observe a national Sabbath. Such a statement is unprecedented. Never has a sitting leader or the President of the United States, the leader of the free world, publicly encouraged the Jewish people to observe Shabbos. Even more striking was his call

for all Americans to draw inspiration from the Jewish day of rest. From sundown on May 15 until nightfall on May 16, he invited Americans to experience a 25-hour period of rest modeled after the Shabbos faithfully observed by Jews each week.

More than fifty years ago, another moment captured the attention of the American public and became one of the greatest modern examples of Kiddush Hashem. In 1965, Sandy Koufax, the legendary pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers, chose not to pitch Game 1 of the World Series because it fell on Yom Kippur. Koufax is widely regarded as one of the greatest left-handed pitchers in baseball history. He won three Cy Young Awards and became the youngest player ever inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. He was the marquee star of the sport, and the entire nation anticipated seeing him take the mound on baseball’s grandest stage.

Yet despite the immense pressure and expectation, Koufax made the courageous decision to place faith before fame. Though not fully observant and despite having played on Yom Kippur in earlier years, he chose that night not to stand before millions in a packed stadium, but instead to fast and attend Yom Kippur davening in shul. Decades later, despite all of his athletic accomplishments, Koufax is remembered most significantly for the game he did not play. That singular act ignited Jewish pride throughout America and became an enduring symbol of Jewish conviction and identity. The twentieth century’s most prominent Shabbos-observant political figure was Joseph Lieberman.

Early in his career, while serving as a Connecticut State Senator in 1971, the Senate delayed a Friday evening vote because Lieberman needed to leave in order to observe Shabbos. He would later go on to serve with distinction in the United States Senate and, in the year 2000, came within mere hundreds of votes of becoming Vice President of the United States.

In 2011, Lieberman authored a book titled *The Gift of Rest*, in which he reflected on the beauty and necessity of Shabbos. He wrote that every generation has its own form of bondage, its own “slave masters,” shaped by the spirit of the age. In our generation, he argued, those forces are often the endless distractions of technology: phones, tablets, computers, and devices that consume hour after hour of our lives. Shabbos, he explained, liberates us from that tyranny. For twenty-five sacred hours, we are freed from the constant noise and pressure of the modern world.

And now, in the twenty-first century, the most powerful man in the world, a leader with unparalleled reach and influence, is publicly encouraging Klal Yisrael to embrace Shabbos. “Lev melech b’yad Hashem—The heart of a king is in the hand of Hashem” (Mishlei 21:1). Perhaps Hashem is sending us a message.

Perhaps this is a call for the Jewish people to strengthen their shemiras Shabbos, and He has placed that message specifically in the mouth of someone capable of reaching millions. Chazal teach: “If the Jewish people would keep even one Shabbos properly, Mashiach would come immediately” (Yerushalmi Taanis 1:1; Shemos Rabbah 25:12). (See Shabbos 118b which states that if the Jewish people would keep two Shabbos properly, they would be immediately ‘redeemed’; cf. Rashi, Bamidbar 15:30). How fitting that this message emerges specifically now, in the days leading up to Shavuot. The mitzvah of Shabbos itself preceded Har Sinai. Chazal teach, “Shabbos b’Marah nitztavu—The Jewish people were

commanded regarding Shabbos already in Marah,” before the giving of the Torah (Shemos 15:25; Rashi, ad loc.; Sanhedrin 56a).

Rav Menachem Mendel of Vorka once posed a fascinating question. What should we call the Shabbos before Shavuos? The Shabbos before Yom Kippur is known as Shabbos Shuvah. The Shabbos before Pesach is called Shabbos HaGadol. So what is the Shabbos before Shavuos called?

He answered: it is called Shabbos Derech Eretz. Because derech ertz kadma l’Torah—human decency, refinement of character, and moral sensitivity must precede Torah itself. Before receiving the Torah, a person must first become a vessel worthy of carrying it. Perhaps today we may add another dimension to that idea. Before receiving the Torah anew on Shavuos, we must demonstrate that we are truly the children of Hashem. Shabbos is the eternal sign between Hashem and Klal Yisrael, a gift uniquely entrusted to the Jewish people. Chazal teach, “Nochri she’shavas chayav misah—A nonJew who observes Shabbos is liable to the death penalty” (Sanhedrin 58b). The covenant of Shabbos belongs uniquely to Am Yisrael. Thus, before Kabbalas HaTorah, we reaffirm who we are through our embrace of Shabbos itself.

And so, as America commemorates 250 years of independence, perhaps Jews throughout the world should welcome this Shabbos by lighting a candle in honor of its sanctity. Remarkably, the word “ner” has the numerical value of 250.

May it be the will of Hashem that in the merit of Shemiras Shabbos, the promise of Chazal be fulfilled: If Klal Yisrael would keep even one Shabbos properly, Mashiach would come immediately. May it be this Shabbos. Have a beautiful and uplifting Shabbos.

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalhorowitz@gmail.com> date: May 14, 2026, 8:03 AM

Bamidbar 5786: Unity Before Sinai

By Michal Horowitz on May 14, 2026 Parshas Bamidbar is always read the Shabbos before Shavuos, the yom tov that commemorates Matan Torah. Chazal teach us that this juxtaposition is not incidental. The Torah reading that precedes Shavuos carries within it an essential message about the preparation necessary to receive the Torah.

At Har Sinai, the Torah states: וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגְדַּ הָהָר - And Israel encamped there opposite the mountain (Shemos 19:2). Rashi famously notes that the Torah uses the singular form וַיִּחַן, “and he camped”, rather than the plural וַיִּחַנו, “and they camped,” teaching that Bnei Yisrael stood at Sinai כאיש אחד בלב אחד - like one man with one heart.

Unity was not merely a beautiful ideal surrounding Matan Torah. It was a prerequisite for receiving the Torah itself.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski z’l develops this idea in a profound way. Reflecting on the encampment of Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness, he notes that the Torah repeatedly emphasizes that every individual and every shevet had a specific place within the nation. The Torah states: אִישׁ עַל דִּגְלוֹ בְּאֶתֶת לְבַיִת אָבֹתָם יִחַן בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - The Children of Israel shall encamp, each person by his banner according to the sign of his father’s household (Bamidbar 2:2).

Each tribe had its role. The Leviim had their responsibilities. The Kohanim had their avodah. Every individual had a unique place within the structure of Klal Yisrael.

Rabbi Dr. Twerski explains that genuine unity does not mean sameness. On the contrary, unity emerges when each person recognizes his own unique mission and respects the role of others. Much conflict and jealousy arise when people attempt to occupy someone else’s “time and place,” rather than appreciating the distinct role that Hashem has given them.

He cites the teaching of Pirkei Avos: “אֵין לָּהּ אֶדָּם שֶׁאֵין לוֹ שָׁעָה, וְאֵין לָּהּ אֵין לָּהּ אֶדָּם שֶׁאֵין לוֹ מְקוֹם” - There is no person who does not have his hour, and there is no thing that does not have its place (Avos 4:3).

Every person has a purpose. Every soul has significance. Every individual contributes something unique to the greater whole.

Rabbi Dr. Twerski compares Klal Yisrael to a symphony orchestra. An orchestra achieves harmony not because every musician plays the same instrument, but because each one contributes his own distinct sound at the proper time and in the proper way. If one musician becomes focused on another’s role, the harmony is lost. But when each person fulfills his own assignment, the result is something beautiful and complete (Twerski on Chumash, The Shaar Press, p.268).

This understanding also helps explain why the Torah was given in the desert. The Midbar belongs to no individual and no tribe. It is open and ownerless, reminding us that Torah is not the possession of any one group or segment of Klal Yisrael. Every Jew has a portion in Torah, and every Jew stood at Sinai. The ability to receive Torah requires the recognition that we stand before Hashem not only as individuals, but as part of a greater nation united in purpose and destiny.

This idea carries particular significance as we approach Shavuos. The Torah could only be given to a nation capable of standing together in unity. But that unity was not built upon uniformity. It was built upon mutual respect, shared purpose, and the recognition that every member of Klal Yisrael has value and importance.

Perhaps this is one of the impactful lessons of the reading of Bamidbar before Matan Torah.

Very often, people measure themselves against others. One person’s success can become another person’s source of frustration or insecurity. We compare accomplishments, talents, positions, and recognition. In doing so, we can lose sight of the truth that Hashem did not create any two people with the exact same mission.

The Midbar itself reflects this message. The wilderness appears empty and vast, yet it became the place where the Jewish people were formed into a nation and received the Torah. In that setting, external distinctions faded, and what mattered was the willingness of each person to stand together before Hashem.

True achdus (unity) emerges not when everyone becomes identical, but when each individual brings his own strengths into the service of something greater than himself.

This perspective also transforms the way we view others. When we recognize that every person has a unique tafkid (role), we become less threatened by the success of others and more capable of appreciating their contribution. Another person’s accomplishments do not diminish our own purpose. On the contrary, the strength of Klal Yisrael depends upon the contribution of every individual.

As we prepare for Shavuos, this message becomes especially meaningful. Receiving the Torah is not only an individual experience; it is a national one. We receive the Torah together, as one people standing before Hashem.

May we merit to approach Shavuot with greater humility, greater unity, and greater appreciation for the unique role that each person plays within Klal Yisrael.

May we learn to value both our own mission and the mission of others.

And in this merit, may we once again stand כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב אֶחָד, like one man with one heart, united in our commitment to Toras Yisrael, Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael.

<https://jewishpress.com/yerushalayim-a-city-the-world-cannot-ignore/>

Yerushalayim – A City the World Cannot Ignore

By **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

In the Moreh Nevuchim (3:45), the Rambam addresses the striking absence of Yerushalayim from the Torah. Though Tanach later overflows with references to the city, the Torah itself never names it explicitly, even when describing visits to it. The Rambam explains that this omission is deliberate. Had the Torah clearly identified the site of the Mikdash and the resting place of the Shechinah, it would have drawn the attention and hostility of surrounding nations, who might have seized or desecrated it. The city would have been engulfed in violence.

Evidently, not every element of this plan, as described by the Rambam, has unfolded as envisioned. From as early as 500 BCE, Yerushalayim has stood at the center of relentless struggle, fought over, claimed, and reclaimed across generations. That struggle has not faded. To this day, we continue to grapple with asserting a fully recognized and internationally accepted Jewish sovereignty over our city.

Though the name Yerushalayim does not appear explicitly in the Torah, each of our Avot encountered this mountain. Avraham's journey to the Akeidah already traces the future path and trajectory of our city.

A Moral City

In truth, Avraham had already visited Yerushalayim long before the Akeidah. After defeating the four tyrants who had imposed a reign of terror across the region, Avraham arrives at the city then known as Shalem. There he encounters a mysterious religious figure, Malki Tzedek, a priest-king who presides over the city.

Something about this place stands apart. Unlike Sedom, already marked by corruption, unlike the culture of Egypt which seizes women from their husbands, and unlike the empires of the four kings who ruled with brute force, this city carries a different tone. They offer bread and wine to a war-weary Avraham and extend hospitality and shelter as he recovers.

This behavior is not incidental. The city is called Shalem, suggesting a human striving toward moral wholeness, guided by a religiously attuned leader who seeks to shape a city worthy of that name.

It is also not incidental that the first moral city in Sefer Bereishit emerges on this mountain of Hashem. There is an instinctive recognition of a divine moral presence, and an attempt to shape human life in that image. Chazal identify this figure as Shem, the son of Noach, who had already grasped a form of monotheism even before Avraham's discovery.

Without Transcendence

This encounter between Avraham and Malki Tzedek shows what had already been achieved. It also shows what still remained beyond

reach and begins to point toward what Avraham himself would later introduce. They had built a moral city and were striving for ethical refinement. Yet their vision of shleimut was limited. They could not grasp that full religious perfection cannot be achieved on human terms, through human logic or moral intuition alone.

Religious perfection requires transcendence, an encounter with the Ribbono Shel Olam, a presence that does not conform to human categories. That encounter arrives in Parshat Vayeira, when Avraham is summoned up the mountain to meet Hashem on His terms, beyond human comprehension and beyond moral instinct, to perform a command that defies understanding.

Hospitality, Not Sacrifice

This is why the Torah spotlights the bread and wine. Rashi comments that this gesture foreshadows the korbanot that Avraham's descendants will one day bring upon this mountain, particularly the menachot, composed of flour and wine. There is a quiet contrast embedded in this moment. Malki Tzedek does not offer these items as sacrifice. The bread and wine remain gestures of hospitality and expressions of human courtesy. They are noble gestures, but they remain within the human sphere. One day, Avraham and his children will take these same materials and place them upon a mizbe'ach, redirecting them toward a Higher Being and transforming them into a korban. The same bread and wine will be lifted from the human sphere of courtesy into the divine realm of avodat Hashem. From morality to divine encounter.

The meeting between Avraham and Malki Tzedek becomes a quiet transfer, a passing of the baton. Malki Tzedek and his community introduced moral aspiration into a violent and fractured world. But transcendence had not yet entered the picture. Avraham, by returning to this mountain for the Akeidah, acknowledges and absorbs what they achieved, yet recognizes that something deeper still lies beyond it.

Seen, But Not Seeing

At the Akeidah, Avraham hears the mountain named as the site where Hashem "sees," or "be'har Hashem yera'eh." It is not a place where human beings come to see or comprehend Hashem. That remains beyond reach. Hashem cannot be grasped, and His commands, as the Akeidah so sharply illustrates, do not submit to the limits of the human mind. This is not a mountain we ascend to see Hashem, but to be seen by Him.

Eventually, the city carries both original names, preserving the achievement of Malki Tzedek alongside Avraham's breakthrough. It is formed from the joining of Shalem and Yir'eh, becoming Yerushalayim.

For generations, we retraced Avraham's steps, ascending to Yerushalayim three times a year, not to behold Hashem but to stand before Him. "Shalosh pe'amim yera'eh kol zechurecha et pnei Hashem Elokecha." We came without expecting to understand, without expecting to see, but ready to stand there before Hashem.

1967, Beyond Logic

In 1967, we returned to this city in a manner that echoes the Akeidah, beyond calculation and beyond logic. In the weeks and months leading up to the war, fear dominated. The prospect of returning to Yerushalayim did not enter the imagination. It was a war for survival. A dark joke captured the mood: "the last one out should turn off the lights at Ben Gurion Airport."

What followed defied expectation. In a sudden and astonishing turn, Hashem restored us to His city. The victory unfolded with a swiftness and scope unlike anything familiar in military history. Just as the natural world was formed in six days, so too, after thousands of years, the world of geulah took shape in six days. Not through the steady logic of history, but in a moment that stood beyond comprehension.

Intuitive Attraction

The story of Malki Tzedek reveals a second dimension of Yerushalayim. Even without direct divine instruction or an explicit compass, humanity is drawn to the mountain upon which human history was launched. Hashem formed man from the earth of Har HaMoriah, and something within the human spirit recognizes that origin. People gravitate to this mountain and attempt to build upon it. There is something subliminal about this site. Humanity senses it, even without the language to explain it. That was true then, and it has remained true across history. There is an intuition that this is where history begins and where it will ultimately find its resolution. And for that reason, whenever Jews return to this place, it stirs the world. They recognize that when we return to Yerushalayim, history moves forward.

As we crossed the Yam Suf, far from Yerushalayim, there was already an awareness that our arrival there would unsettle the world. During the song of Az Yashir, we gave voice to that awareness: “The nations will hear and tremble; the inhabitants of the surrounding lands will be seized by fear; the leaders of Edom and Moav will panic; the residents of Canaan will melt away. And then we will be brought and planted upon the mountain of Hashem’s inheritance, the place He established as His dwelling, the sanctuary fashioned by His hands.”

When the people of Hashem return to Yerushalayim, the world reacts. History does not stand still. It begins to move forward in a visible way, and that movement unsettles. It stirred then, and it stirred again in 1967.

1948 vs. 1967

In 1948, the world did not respond in the same way. A fractured parcel of land was granted. In part, this reflected a world still burdened by the memory of the Holocaust and confronted by a Jewish refugee crisis. It was a necessary act, even a moral gesture, but it did not yet carry the weight of history shifting course.

1967 was different. The response was sharper and more charged. Some embraced it, and many religious non-Jews continue to support our presence with conviction. Others recoiled. This return signaled more than survival. It suggested that history itself was advancing, that Hashem’s presence was reentering the world in a more visible way.

In Shir HaShirim, the nations of the world are described as the daughters of Yerushalayim. The Midrash teaches that in the future, every nation will stand in relation to Yerushalayim, as branches extending from a central city that reclaims its place at the heart of human experience, under the gaze of Hashem.

People sense, even if they cannot explain it, that Yerushalayim will one day stand at the center of history. That is why events in and around the city draw the attention of the entire world. Not everyone can articulate it. Malki Tzedek himself could not fully give it language. But the intuition remains.

Parshas Bamidbar Naso Shavuot: Five Unique Books

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

ANALYZING THE CENSUS

Sefer Bamidbar begins with God's command to Mosheh that he take a census of the B'nei Yisra'el, tribe by tribe.

Within the context of this census – and several other related sections in Bamidbar – a few questions come to the fore:

* 1) Why is Levi excluded from the regular counting? Although the Torah states that the Levi'im were not to be reckoned among the B'nei Yisra'el (Bamidbar 1:49), no reason is immediately given. Pursuant to the organization of the "camps" (Ch. 2), the Torah describes the special sanctity of the Levi'im – but this is immediately followed by a separate census of the Levi'im! We would assume that keeping the Levite census separate (if they were going to be counted in any event) was because the "main" census was geared towards military preparedness – and the Levi'im were not going to go into battle. This explanation brings its own difficulties, as we will see below.

* 2) Why is Re'uven counted first? We would assume that it is because of the pre-eminent position of the firstborn (Re'uven). This would explain why Re'uven is identified as B'khor Yisra'el (the firstborn of Yisra'el – 1:20); however, if the census is oriented towards military readiness (see the previous question) – why is Re'uven, subsequent to being counted first – relegated to the second "camp"(2:3)? In other words, if the goal of the census is to prepare for war (explaining the exclusion of the Levi'im), why is the tribe that will lead us into war (Yehudah) not counted first? Indeed, why is Re'uven identified as B'khor Yisra'el – what does that have to do with the 46,500 descendants of the Ya'akov's firstborn?

* 3) In the same vein, the identification of Ephraim and Menasheh seems a bit inconsistent throughout the Sefer. In our census, both tribes are grouped as B'nei Yoseph, with Ephraim mentioned first (compare 1:10 with 1:32-35; see also 13:8,11 and 26:28). Later on in Bamidbar, Menasheh is mentioned first (of the two) and once (13:11) identified as the sole Ben Yoseph! Why the inconsistency here – and why the concern with mentioning Yoseph? If we are reckoning the descendants of the children of Ya'akov, why mention Ephraim and Menasheh independently? On the other hand, if we are concerned with a census of the tribes, why mention Yoseph? After all, didn't Ya'akov promise him that his two sons, Ephraim and Menasheh, would be considered "equal" to Re'uven and Shim'on (B'resheet 48:5)?

II

THE LARGER QUESTIONS

Once we step back from the "detail" questions about the census, focussing on the style of presentation, we are faced with some larger questions about the beginning of Bamidbar:

* 4) Why does the Torah detail the census – and repeat the count (compare 1:20-43, 46; 2:1-32)? Indeed, a second complete census is taken at the end of the forty years (ch. 26) which, again, we are given in detail.

* 5) This leads us to an even larger question: We are accustomed to deriving significant amounts of Halakhah from extra phrases, words and even letters. On the other hand, there are some sections of the Torah which not only go into great detail – but which are repeated – sometimes many times. Perhaps the most glaring example of this phenomenon is in Parashat Naso (justifying the joint heading of this shiur!): Chapter 7 is a description of the dedication of the altar. The prince of Yehudah, Nachshon b. Aminadav, brings an offering which is detailed most explicitly (7:12-17). Next, we read about the second day's offering – brought by Yissachar's prince (N'tan'el b. Tzu'ar) – which is identical to the one brought the day before. Instead of saying "on the second day, the offering was brought by N'tanel b. Tzu'ar, prince of the tribe of Yissachar – and he brought the same offering", the Torah repeats the detail of the offering. This goes on for each of the twelve days of dedication – approximately 55 seemingly superfluous verses in the Torah!

This phenomenon is not limited to Sefer Bamidbar. A well-known comment of Hazal comes to justify the repetition of Eliezer's story in B'resheet 24 – "the [idle] talk of the servants of the Patriarch's homes is more beloved [before God] than the Torah of their children" – explaining why, on the one hand, we derive Halakhot from extra letters, yet the narrative of Eliezer is repeated in detail. (B'resheet Rabbah 60:8)

Two other examples will serve to highlight the problem: The Torah not only details the structure and makeup of the Mishkan (Sh'mot 25-30), it repeats those details when describing what the B'nei Yisra'el did to properly complete the job (Sh'mot 35-40). In a slightly different vein, the Mitzvah to desist from M'lakhah on Shabbat shows up in numerous places in the Torah, even though many of them do not directly give us new instruction relating to the observance of Shabbat. What are we to make of this?

III

THE META-QUESTIONS

These “larger” questions lead us to reassess our understanding of Torah in a most fundamental way.

* 6) First of all, as we are all aware, the Torah (meaning the Five Books – i.e. the Written Torah) is part of the T'nakh (Bible). Yet, it would seem that this “grouping” is a bit hard to decipher. Torah does not seem to share much with Nevi'im (Prophets) and K'tuvim (Scriptures). Whereas we generally perceive the Torah as an essentially Halakhic document (note Rashi's first comment on the Torah – that it should have begun with the first Mitzvah in Sh'mot 12), the other parts of T'nakh are almost anything but legalistic. “Nakh” (Prophets and Scriptures) are replete with history, moralizing, prophecy, wisdom literature, poetry, dirges, prayers, proverbs, satire and more. Although there are a few occasions where Halakhah is associated with the text of Nakh (e.g. Yeshayah 58, Yirmiyah 17, Hagai 2, Esther 9), these exceptions prove the rule – that Nevi'im and K'tuvim are not Halakhically-oriented texts. What then do we make of the grouping of Torah with Nakh?

One possible response is that the association of Torah with Nakh is purely “source-directed”, i.e. that they represent the complete books which contain the revealed word of God – but that thematically they are not of one type. There is a Midrash in Sh'mot Rabbah which seems to point us elsewhere. In commenting on the verse vaYiten el Mosheh k'Khaloto, the Midrash plays on the word k'Khaloto (lit. “when He was finished”) to compare the Torah to a Kallah (bride): “Just as a bride is adorned with 24 ornaments (evidently the custom during the times of the Gemara), similarly, a scholar must adorn himself with the 24 books [of T'nakh] (The 24 books includes all 3 sections – 5 of Torah, 8 of Nevi'im and 11 of K'tuvim)”. (Sh'mot Rabbah 41:5)

* 7) At the beginning of Mishnah Avot (“Perek”), we are taught that “Mosheh received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua'...” which seems to contradict the teaching in the Torah (D'varim 4:44) that “Mosheh placed the Torah before the B'nei Yisra'el”; i.e. did Mosheh present the Torah to everyone or just to his closest student? Which leads us to the basic question...

* 8) What is Torah shebiKhtav (the written Torah)? When we look at the Five Books, what are we seeing? If we are looking at a purely Halakhic work, which provides the fundamental structure of our legal system, what are we to make of the many chapters of non-Halakhic information – and how do we understand the repetitive and detailed descriptions of some Halakhic institutions – whereas others are barely mentioned – to be found in allusions, extra phrases etc.?

It is prudent for us to examine this, not only to help us resolve our earlier questions – but also to gain a fresh understanding in the nature of Torah and, therefore, the event of Mattan Torah which is the focus of the upcoming holiday of Shavu'ot.

IV

MIDRASH AND MISHNAH

Within the study of Halakhah, there are essentially two formats of presentation – Midrash and Mishnah. I am not referring to specific works; rather types of presentation. Indeed, there are some Mishnayot – e.g. Bikkurim 1:2 – which are Midrashic in style. The term “Mishnah” refers to any presentation which is apodictic – in which the law is presented without reference to the source, be it textual or reasoned, for that law. “Midrash”, on the other hand, is textually-based teachings, in which the specific law is presented with its Scriptural basis and the method of derivation.

There is a debate among scholars of the Halakhic process as to the chronology of the development of these two modes –

did “Mishnah” come before “Midrash” or vice-versa?

If we accept the antecedence of “Midrash”, that may mean that Halakhot were actually derived from the text via the various rules of exegesis (e.g. R. Yishma’el’s 13 rules of interpretation). That means that the written Torah is the foundation of Halakhah and the source for finding new Halakhic teachings. There are quite a number of Talmudic sources which support this position (see Albek’s *Mavo laMishnah* pp. 42-43).

The other position, that which posits that Midrash Halakhah was a later development in the evolution of Halakhic teaching, assumes a different posture with regards to the source of Halakhah. In this scenario, Halakhah was originally an oral transmission, divorced from the text (thus explaining the opening line in Mishnah Avot, as above). In later times, for reasons of education or polemics, a “bridge” was formed between text and Halakhah. There are, again, many sources in the Talmud which support this position – such as the use of *Asmakhta* (a scriptural association which comes to support a preexistent law).

(For a complete treatment of this issue, see Elon’s *Mishpat Ivri*, p. 243 ff. In English, the reader is referred to “How Do We Know This” by Jay Harris and “Midrash, Mishnah and Gemara” by David Weiss Halivni, as well as Halivni’s “Peshat and Derash”.)

Parenthetically, this second position provides some insight into the enigmatic Aggadah (Menahot 29) regarding Mosheh’s inability to understand the various lessons taught by R. Akiva, upon his mystical visit to the latter’s Beit Midrash – and his ultimate comfort when R. Akiva answered that a specific Halakhah is “a tradition from Mosheh at Sinai”. If the Halakhah was originally a purely oral transmission, devoid of textual reference or sourcing, it is easy to understand Mosheh’s consternation at the various derivations employed by R. Akiva. We then understand why the final answer – “this was a tradition from Mosheh at Sinai” eased his mind – because that is exactly the way that he received it from HaKadosh Barukh Hu!

[For a related treatment of this Gemara, the reader is referred to Dr. Moshe Koppel’s recent work “Meta-Halakhah” – a very worthwhile read].

If we accept the second position, we can begin to formulate a fresh approach to the nature of Torah shebiKh’tav, one which will ease the questions raised above.

Even if we accept the first position, however, we may still be able to reassess our understanding of Torah shebiKh’tav; it may well be the case that even if Midrash preceded Mishnah chronologically, that may only be a question of presentation, not derivation. In other words, it may be that Halakhah was always an oral transmission, disassociated from the text – but that the beginnings of instruction were “text-linked” for reasons mentioned above.

One step further: Even if there are some Halakhot that were totally derived from text, such that without that text there would be no reason to legislate in that manner, we still have many *Asmakhtot* in the Talmud, as well as numerous Halakhot without textual basis (all of those which are considered Halakhah l’Mosheh miSinai, such as the laws regarding various minimum measures known as *Shi’urim*).

In any case, we must certainly provide an explanation for the nature of Torah shebiKh’tav which moves us beyond the legalistic, since every position must address the elemental divorce of Halakhah from text in at least some cases. How do we then understand the written Torah?

V

TORAH SHEBIKH’TAV AS “KETUBAH”

Midrashic literature is replete with references to the stand at Sinai as a wedding between haKadosh Barukh Hu and the B’nei Yisra’el. The Midrash (*Sh’mot Rabbah* 46:1) utilizes the analogy of a Ketubah (marriage contract) for the Torah. What is the Ketubah? It defines the parties, who they are and their lineage; what they are bringing into the relationship and their responsibilities towards each other. I would like to suggest that, instead of viewing the written Torah solely as the essential framework and skeleton of Halakhah (even according to the first position, above), we will understand it, thematically and stylistically, if we view it as the essential document of the relationship between us and God. This would also explain why the written Torah – the Ketubah – was presented “before the B’nei Yisra’el”, whereas the detailed Halakhah was transmitted privately, teacher to student, until the publication of the Mishnah – thus answering question #7

above. (This is, admittedly, an oversimplification of the issue; but a detailed presentation of this point is well beyond the scope of this shiur.) This is, at least, one answer to question #8, above.

Since the Torah shebiKh'tav is the Ketubah, it stands to reason that those elements of the relationship which are central and help define the relationship will play a central role, be repeated, stressed and detailed. This explains why some narratives – e.g. the building of the Mishkan (the most intimate setting of the relationship) or the marriage of Yitzchak (our lineage) are presented in great detail. (This answers question #5 above). This also explains the “coherence” of the unit known as T'nakh – it is all about the relationship of God and the Jewish people. The difference between Torah and Nakh is one of the quality of prophecy (see Rambam's 7th principle), not the teleology of the book (thus answering question #6 above). Once we understand the parameters of that relationship, we can address all of our questions.

VI

FIVE UNIQUE BOOKS

Unlike the division into chapters, which is a foreign “overlay” onto the Torah (generally credited to Stephen Langton, an English churchman, who created this division in 1205 CE), the division into five books is inherent in the text itself. Not only does every Sefer Torah contain four blank lines between each Sefer, but each begins and ends in a style that is appropriate for a beginning or ending (as the case may be); case in point is the end of Vayyikra, the beginning of D'varim etc.

Each of these books reflects our relationship with haKadosh Barukh Hu through a different perspective:

B'RESHEET: THE PEOPLE AND THE LAND

In his first comment on the Torah (mentioned above), Rashi asks the famous question in the name of R. Yitzchak : Why did the Torah begin with the story of Creation – it should have begun with the first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people? His answer gives us an insight into the nature of the entire book of B'resheet: By committing the Creation to writing, our “deed” to Eretz Yisra'el becomes affirmed. In the future (!), when the nations of the world will come to dispute our claim on Eretz Yisra'el, we will show them that the Land is not theirs – nor is it ours. The Land belongs to God (as demonstrated in the Creation narrative); He gave it to whom He favored and then took it from them to give it to us. B'resheet is the only book of the Torah which takes place in the Land; it is the description of our well-anchored past there and the development of the covenant with the Patriarchs which gives us title to the Land. The final statement of this book is Yoseph's reminder to his brothers that one day, God will remember them and take them out of this land to bring them back to the land that He promised to the Avot. In summary, B'resheet is a description of our relationship with the Almighty through Eretz Yisra'el.

SH'MOT: THE PARADIGM OF JEWISH HISTORY

As we see through the rest of T'nakh – and in literature and liturgy until this day – all of Jewish history is viewed through the prism of the Egypt-Sinai- experience, known broadly as Y'tziat Mitzrayim. Whether the focus is on the oppression of slavery, the miracles of salvation, the Song of thanksgiving, the faithfulness of the desert experience, the stand at Sinai or the intimacy with the Divine realized in the Mishkan, the events of Sefer Sh'mot serve as the all-encompassing paradigm for Jewish history. In summary, Sh'mot is a description of our relationship with God through history.

VAYYIKRA: THE MISHKAN-RELATIONSHIP

As is easily evidenced, the entire focus of the book of Vayyikra is our relationship to God as it is realized through the vehicle of the Mishkan. Here, unlike in Sh'mot, the Mishkan is not an end in and of itself, rather it is that place of offering Korbanot, coming close to God – with all of the attendant restrictions and considerations. Vayyikra is, indeed, a description of our relationship with God through the Beit haMikdash/Mishkan.

D'VARIM: "ASEH L'KHA RAV"

Unlike the first four books, Sefer D'varim is not said in God's "voice"; the voice of this book is Mosheh's. God is presented in the "third person". From the introductory line: "These are the words that Mosheh spoke..." to the finale, the eulogy for Mosheh, D'varim is a book in which our Master and Teacher, Mosheh Rabbenu, takes center stage. D'varim is a description of our relationship with God through a Rebbe – through our association with tradition through our teachers.

BAMIDBAR: THE BOOK OF K'LAL YISRA'EL

Now, to our book – Bamidbar is the description of our relationship with the Ribbono shel Olam through K'lal Yisra'el – the interactions of the Jewish people.

This explains why there is a dramatic shift, at the beginning of Bamidbar, to the division of tribes, where each one marches and camps, how each one participated in the dedication of the Mishkan etc. It also explains why the dedication of the Mishkan, which belongs in the middle of Sefer Vayyikra, is presented in Bamidbar. Since each tribe offered its gift independently, this is as much about our interrelationship as it is about the Mishkan. This also explains the placement of the story of B'not Tz'lofchad, the demands of the 2 and a half tribes (to inherit outside of the Land) etc. in Bamidbar (we will deal with some of these narratives in the coming weeks). (This answers question #4, above).

VII

BACK TO THE CENSUS

With this approach in hand, we can now address our original, "local" questions about the census. By viewing the presentation in Bamidbar as a description of our interrelationship, we see that the Torah places a great emphasis on the continuity of generations. The 46,500 Reubenites are not just coincidentally related; although any individual Re'ubenite may "rise above" the legacy of the eponymous founder of that tribe, the group as a whole is defined by the actions and relationships developed by their ancestor. As much as Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov helped shape our destiny, so did Re'uven play a role in developing the personality of his descendants.

Although we will look at this in greater detail next fall (God willing), it is clear from the latter half of B'resheet that Re'uven lost his rights as firstborn due to his impetuous nature and failed leadership. As such, the Torah counts his tribe first, properly noting that he is B'khor Yisra'el – and then moves him away from the leadership by putting Yehudah's camp first. Keep in mind that Yehudah was the brother who was given the rights of the firstborn, at least from a military and political perspective, by father Ya'akov.

On other hand, the preference of Ephraim over Menasheh was not due to a failure on the part of Menasheh, rather because of Ya'akov's prophecy that Ephraim would supercede him in greatness (see our shiur on Parashat Vay'chi from earlier this year). Therefore, we find that both "B'nei Yoseph" are included in that honored position – sometimes Ephraim (as in our Parashah) and sometimes Menasheh.

Why was Levi taken out of the census? When we look back at the development of the tribes, our first encounter with Levi is negative – he and brother Shim'on lead the murderous attack on Sh'chem (B'resheet 34). Unlike Shim'on, however, Levi (his progeny) is able to turn this trait around and use it for the good – when the "sons of Levi" raised their swords and fought with Mosheh against the calf-worshippers (Sh'mot 32:26-28). It was specifically this event that earned the Levi'im their august position, replacing the first-born as the worship-representatives.

We can now understand why Levi was counted separately; even though they were to be reckoned, it was their ability to transform their own traits and use them in accordance with God's will that earned them their special position within the people. Within the context of "who we are and how we relate to God", the Levi'im occupy a unique and distinct position, a legacy for all of B'nei Levi until this day.

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