

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion contains a counting of the Jewish people. Nachmanides offers several ideas to explain the reason for such a census. Each reason has a deep message.

First, the census expresses G-d's mercy. When Yaakov (Jacob) came to Egypt he brought with him only seventy souls. Now, thanks to G-d's strong and compassionate hand in Egypt, the Jews were a stronger nation as they prepared to enter the land of Israel in large numbers.

The message: one should not take G-d's gifts for granted. Proper thanks is due the Almighty for the existence, growth and success of the people of Israel. The census was a way of saying "todah rabbah" to G-d.

Nachmanides also explains that each person received a special merit by virtue of being counted separately. Every single person, no matter their status in society, had to pass by the leaders, by Moshe (Moses) and Ahron (Aaron) and be counted. They set their eyes upon each person as an individual.

The message: in most countries-like here in the US-when a census is taken, there is a great danger that the very people who the census is supposed to benefit, become mere numbers. As individuals, their names are secondary. In the Torah census, the accent is on every persona, showing us that each is created as unique and irreplaceable images of G-d.

Finally, since the Jews were preparing to enter the land of Israel, the count was necessary. It was important to find out how many soldiers were available for pending war. Invariably, before wartime the Bible almost always tells us that a census was taken.

The message: while G-d is always there to help, no individual or nation should rely on miracles. As humans, we must do what we can in order to help ourselves. In this case, proper preparation was necessary before entering Israel.

These three views actually interface. A comment made by S. Y. Agnon illustrates the point:

Once a king reviewed his returning soldiers who

**This issue of Toras Aish is sponsored by
Jay Jaffe
in honor of the yarzeit of his mother
Ganesha bas Moshe haLevi z"l**

had been victorious in battle. He was ecstatic and joyous upon their valiant return. But G-d is not like this type of king. G-d, the King of Kings, when reviewing the returnees, understands that they are not necessarily those who left with the same battalion. Individuals were killed in the war and they, unfortunately, would not be coming back.

Here we have the co-mingling of the three opinions offered by Nachmanides. When going to war, each soldier must be viewed as a person with endless value. Upon returning safely, all returnees ought give thanks to the Lord.

These are important ideas worth remembering especially when considering current events. Too often it is tragically the case that an Israeli soldier is struck down and, we in the Diaspora don't know, or having become so accustomed to these losses, fail to reflect on the tragedy. Those murdered become a mere number and we fail to feel the pain of the bereaved families and friends.

It should not be this way. The loss of a soldier killed defending the land and people of Israel is a deep loss not only for his family and friends, but for all Jewish people. Similarly, the loss of any of our sisters and brothers who are victims of terror.

May we be spared such losses. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha marks the beginning of our reading of the fourth book of the Torah. The book concerns itself with the travels and travails of the Jewish people during their sojourn in the desert of Sinai. The book is replete with names of the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the count of the number of people in the camp of Israel and of many events that shaped the future of Israel for many generations to come. All of the commentators to Torah are perplexed by the great detail recorded in the book of Bamidbar. Of what value is it to know the names of the leaders of the tribes of Israel? And what do the numbers of the count of the individual tribes and families of the Jewish people teach us? In a Torah where every word and nuance is important, why all of the long detail and the names and numbers that are seemingly unimportant facts? There are many and varied explanations to this challenging problem, but I wish to dwell on one idea that I hope will

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA NEWSLETTER
DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB.
SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR MORE
INFORMATION**

EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG

**COPIES OF TORAS AISH ARE AVAILABLE FROM THE
FOLLOWING ADDRESS ON THE WEB (WWW) :**

HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is solely the work of the AishDas Society, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

give us more meaning and understanding in the parsha and the book of Bamidbar itself as well.

The Torah is determined to emphasize to us the importance of each and every person in this world. Merely stating that there were approximately six hundred thousand male Jews from the ages of twenty to sixty only gives us a statistic. Most statistics are faceless, impersonal and sometimes even meaningless. They never carry a moral or even educational lesson to the reader. They are cold numbers. The Torah therefore personalizes the numbers in this week's parsha and in the book of Bamidbar generally. It does give us the names of the leaders of the tribes and their fathers and families and traces for us their lineage. It tells us that some of them had large families and others much smaller ones. It points out the difference in numbers and in leadership of each of the tribes so that we should not view the Jewish society then - and certainly now - as being monolithic. Through the numbers that are now flesh and blood people, the stage is set for understanding some of the later events that occurred in the desert - the rebellion of Korach and the behavior of Pinchas and Zimri for example. The challenges of Moshe in leading the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai are more understandable to us when we see the wide variety and great numbers of people who he had to deal with day in and day out for forty years. Once the numbers are personalized and broken down the story becomes much clearer and more relevant to every age.

It is one thing to say that the Holocaust destroyed six million Jews. But that statement of fact remains impersonal and cold, unfeeling and without emotion. However, reading or listening to the story of just one Holocaust survivor brings the whole awful tragedy into immediacy and some understanding. Lifting the count of the Jewish people from mere statistics to a position of human empathy and understanding is part of

the goal of this week's parsha and the entire book of Bamidbar. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The name by which this fourth Book of the Five Books of Moses (Pentateuch) is most popularly known is Bamidbar, or in the Desert-an apt description of the forty years of the Israelite desert-wanderings which the book records.

Indeed, this desert period serves as the precursor of-as well as a most apt metaphor for-the almost 2000 years of homeless wandering from place to place which has characterized much of Jewish history before the emergence of our Jewish State in 1948.

The Hebrew word for desert, midbar, is also pregnant with meanings and allusions which in many ways have served as a beacon for our Jewish exile. The root noun from which midbar is built is dabar, which means leader or shepherd. After all, the most ancient occupation known to humanity is shepherding, and the desert is the most natural place for the shepherd to lead his flock: the sheep can comfortably wander in a virtual no-man's land and graze on the vegetation of the various oases or their outskirts without the problem of stealing from private property or harming the ecology of settled habitations. And perhaps dabar means leader-shepherd because it also means word: the shepherd directs the flock by meaningful sounds and words, and the leader of people must also have the ability to inspire and lead by the verbal message he communicates; indeed, the Ten Words (or Ten Commandments, aseret hadibrot) were revealed in the Sinai desert, and they govern Israel-as well as a good part of the world-to this very day.

Moreover, it must be noted that wherever the Israelites wandered in the desert, they were always accompanied by the portable desert mishkan, or Sanctuary, which literally means (Divine) Presence (Shakon). However, G-d was not in the Sanctuary; even the greatest expanse of the heavens cannot contain the Divine Presence, declared King Solomon when he dedicated the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. (Kings I, 8) It was rather G-d's word which was in the Sanctuary, in the form of the "Ten Words" on the Tablets of Stone preserved in the Holy Ark, as well as the ongoing and continuing word of G-d which He would speak (vedibarti, Ex 25:22) from between the cherubs on the end of the Kapporet above the Holy Ark. It was by means of these Divine Words that even the desert- a metaphor for an inhospitable and even alien exile environment which is broilingly hot by day, freezingly cold by night and deficient in water which is the very

elixir of life-can become transformed into sacred space. And indeed the word succeeded in sanctifying the many Marrakeshes and Vilnas of our wanderings!

Allow me to share with you a story from my previous life (in the exile of the West Side of New York City) which taught me how the word can bring sanctity into the most unlikely of places. In the early 1970's, a disco opened up in a window storefront building on 72nd Street and Broadway; despite the fact that it was called the Tel Aviv Disco and was owned by Israelis living in New York, it remained open every night of the year, even Kol Nidre night. I must have placed at least two dozen calls to the owners to try to persuade them to close at least on the night of Yom Kippur, only to have finally received a message from their secretary informing me that the owners would not speak to rabbis!!

During this period, Rav Yitzhak Dovid Grossman-a beloved and respected friend who is the Rav of Migdal HaEmek-spent Shabbat with us at Lincoln Square Synagogue. He is a charismatic religious leader who is well-known for the many prisoners and other alienated Jews whom he has brought back to religious observance. After a delightful Friday evening meal at my home, replete with inspiring Hassidic melodies and words of Torah, he suggested that we go for a "shpatzir" (Yiddish for leisurely walk). I tried to explain that the general atmosphere of the West Side streets of Manhattan were hardly conducive to Sabbath sanctity-but to no avail. His steps led us in the direction of 72nd Street and Broadway, right in front of the window revealing the frenzied disco dancers. "Did you ever see a mosquito captured in a glass jar?" he asked me in Yiddish (our language of discourse). "The mosquito is moving with all sorts of contortions, and appears to be dancing. In reality, however, the mosquito is gasping for air. That is the situation of those "dancers" in the disco. They are really gasping for air, struggling in their search for a real Shabbos. Let's go in and show them Shabbos."

Before I could say "Jackie Robinson," he was inside the disco-and as a good host, I felt constrained to follow him. He sported a long beard and side-locks, and was wearing a shtreimel (fur hat) and Kapote (silk gaberdine), and I was dressed in my Sabbath Prince Albert, Kippa and ritual fringes out; as we entered the disco, the band of Israelis immediately stopped playing. I immediately recognized three young men from the Synagogue-who seemed totally discombobulated; two ran out covering their faces, and the third tried to explain to me that he wasn't really there, that his mother had had some kind of attack and he thought that her doctor might be at the disco... Rav Grossman began to sing, Sabbath melodies. Almost miraculously, the men danced on one side, the women on the other. After about twenty minutes, he urged me to speak to them in English. I told them of the magical beauty, the joy and the love of the Sabbath, and they listened with wrapt

attention. Rav Grossman led them in one more song-and we left.

I cannot tell you that the miracle continued, it didn't take five minutes, and we could hear the resumption of the disco band music. However, before the next Yom Kippur, the Tel Aviv Disco closed down; I don't know why, because the owners wouldn't speak to rabbis. And for the next two years, at least a dozen young singles joined Lincoln Square Synagogue because they had been inspired by our Disco visit....

In a few days, we shall celebrate Yom Yerushalayim. The vision of Jerusalem is the City of Peace, from whence the "word of G-d" (davar HaShem) will emanate to all nations of the world, will sanctify and uplift every spiritual desert. And if the word can sanctify a disco, it can sanctify every desert out-post as well!

© 2005 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe and Aharon took these men, who had been specified by name" (Bamidbar 1:17). Which men? The context of the previous verses (1:5-16), naming the 12 Heads of Tribe who would help Moshe and Aharon take the census, makes it plainly obvious that it was these men being referred to. It even says "these men" explicitly, i.e. the men just named. Yet, Rashi felt there was a need to tell us that "these men" meant "those 12 Heads of Tribe." The commentators on Rashi, from the earliest through the modern day, have tried to explain what Rashi was trying to convey with this seemingly superfluous explanatory note.

Rashi's other comment on this verse, where he says that the names were specified "to him, here," are just as puzzling, as to whom else (besides Moshe), and when else, would these names be given? These questions led one of the leading commentators on Rashi, the Sefer HaZikaron, to write, "I don't have an explanation as to why [Rashi] z"l said this, and all that I have heard or seen written about it doesn't enter my ears (i.e. doesn't answer the difficulties)." One might be tempted to just throw up his hands and give up, for if all of these great scholars struggled to understand what was bothering Rashi, how can we try to enter the foray? Nevertheless, with trepidation, let's try taking a closer look at the selection of these 12 Heads of Tribe, and Rashi's comments on it.

These same men are mentioned, by name, in next week's Parsha, as the Heads of Tribe (Nesi'im) that brought the first "offerings" to the newly consecrated Mishkan. Each "Nasi" brought his offering on his own day, starting with the first day the Mishkan was in service and continuing for 12 days. These offerings were brought from Nisan 1 through Nisan 12, 2449, with the first day being "the first day of the first month of the second year" in the desert after leaving

Egypt (see Shemos 40:17 and Bamidbar 7:10). The census was taken one month later, as G-d commanded Moshe to appoint the 12 men to be Heads of Tribe on "the first day of the *second* month of the second year after having left Egypt" (Bamidbar 1:1). Which begs the question of why Moshe had to appoint them to be the "Nesi'im" if they were already the Nesi'im a month earlier? And, truth be told, it seems obvious from Rashi that they had already been Nesi'im way before that.

When the nation donated for the building of the Mishkan, we are told (Shemos 35:27) that the precious stones for the Kohain Gadol's Choshen (breastplate) and shoulder straps (as well as the oil and incense) were donated by the Nesi'im. Rashi there (and on Bamidbar 7:3) tells us that the Nesi'im were extremely zealous about bringing the first offerings for the new Mishkan because of what had happened when the materials were first donated for its construction. They had waited to see what would be needed to be donated, figuring that they could provide whatever would be lacking. When everything for the building had already been collected from the nation, they were only left with the opportunity to donate for the priestly garments (and the oil and spices). They therefore learned their lesson, and brought offerings right away.

It seems quite clear that the same Nesi'im who are mentioned - by name - by the offerings, were already "Nesi'im" the previous Tishrei, when the donations for the Mishkan were given/collected. (Even though the Ba'alay Tosfos say that each Nasi brought a precious stone for his own Tribe's name to be carved into, and the 12 stones on the Choshen included the Tribes of Levi and Yosef and did not include Efrayim and Menashe - while the latter two had Nesi'im, but the former didn't - there doesn't seem to be a midrashic source for this, and no indication that Rashi is of the same opinion. Just as Tosfos says that the shoulder stones and oil and spices were jointly donated, if Rashi says that they were the same Nesi'im in Tishrei as in Nisan, they may have jointly donated all of the stones, including those of Levi and Yosef. Actually, Yosef's stone was a "shoham," which was the type of stones on the shoulders. The Pesikta Rabasi (47:5) says that they represented Menashe and Efrayim, so even if each of these Nesi'im donated a specific stone for their Tribe, Efrayim and Menashe could have each brought a "shoham" stone, with the stones for Levi and Yosef being the two that were jointly donated.)

The bottom line here is that the Torah says explicitly that these same men had already been designated as "Nesi'im" a full month before their "appointment" by the census, and Rashi (and the numerous midrashim upon which his comment is based) seems to say that they were the same Nesi'im referred to months earlier. To quote the Netziv (Bamidbar 1:4), "from the time of the donations for the Mishkan and also by its consecration, they had already been the Nesi'im. However, they had been made

Nesi'im by their [respective] Tribes, which had agreed that they were fit to lead them. Here (by the census) the Holy One, Blessed is He, showed His agreement (with their choices) and appointed them through the word of G-d. And we learn from this that the Congregation of Israel did not choose their leaders based on wealth and ability to lead alone, but because they also excelled in Torah and fear of G-d - to the point that they were worthy of being the leaders and of standing before G-d as the Head of the Tribe."

Yes, they had already been "elected" as Nesi'im by their Tribes, but it was only now, as the nation was preparing to move from Sinai on their journey to the Land of Israel, that G-d confirmed that they were the appropriate selections.

In this context, Rashi's comments take on a whole new meaning. Rather than confirming that "these men" refers to the same men identified immediately prior to this verse, Rashi may be pointing out that "these men" are "those same 12 Nesi'im" that had been previously chosen by the nation, but were being appointed/chosen by G-d "here" (i.e. now), with their names given by Him "to Moshe." None of the words are superfluous; instead they convey the drama of the moment. The people had chosen whom they felt should lead them, and G-d agreed with their choices. © 2005 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

At the end of this week's Torah portion and in the beginning of next week, Moshe is commanded to assign the families of the Levites their specific tasks. Several times in Chapter 4, the ages are noted - for example, "From thirty years and above, until the age of fifty years, everybody who joins the work force, to perform the service in the Tent of Meeting" [Bamidbar 4:3]. However, a different age is given in Chapter 8 for the time of starting to serve. "From the age of twenty-five and above, let him come to serve in the labors of the Tent of Meeting" [8:24]. Why is there such a contradiction in the ages?

The commentators have given various suggestions in answer to this question. Rashi writes, "How can this be? The answer is that at the age of twenty-five they come to study the laws of the service, and they study for five years. Then, at the age of thirty, they begin to serve. This teaches us that a student who does not accomplish his educational goal within five years will never succeed." It is difficult to accept this explanation at face value, since there is no indication in Chapter 8 that the verse is referring only to study - rather, it seems to be referring to the actual service. Other commentators have made other suggestions (see Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and how the Ramban rejects their ideas).

One reasonable suggestion is that of the Ramban, who feels that the two ages correspond to voluntary and obligatory service. "Those counted by Moshe and Aharon, at the ages of thirty and up, were individually assigned specific roles, every man with his work and his burden, while here the Torah command is that everybody who knows that he will be able to do the work when he reaches the age of twenty-five can fulfill his desire and participate." Thus, this week's Torah portion is related to the age when a Levite is required to serve, thirty years, while Chapter 8 is concerned with the age when a Levite can start working if he wants to, and this is twenty-five. This difference is indicated by what is written in Chapter 8, "And from the age of fifty let him return from the work force, and he will not work any more." [8:25]. This implies that the Torah wants to establish a principle, which does not appear in Chapter 4, such that the two age limits are different-while it is possible to start working earlier than the official required age, the age of retirement cannot be changed: "He will not work any more."

Why is there a difference between the two ages? Evidently, the Torah was interested in limiting the length of the service of the Levites. In last week's Torah portion, we were told about the highest ages of the equivalent value of a man (when making a donation), "From twenty years until sixty years, your value will be fifty silver Shekels" [Vayikra 27:3]. In spite of this, the obligatory age of service for the Levites is between the ages of thirty and fifty. Thus, the Torah emphasizes the need for completeness in the service of the Levites, by insisting that it be performed at the time when a man is most productive. Before this optimum age, when a man is advancing towards the best stage, the Levite is allowed to volunteer, but at the end a man is not given permission to serve, at an age when most people have already passed their prime. On the other hand, it is clear that the Torah views this higher age as important in itself, and therefore the final verse is, "And let him serve with his brothers, to maintain the watch," even though "he shall not work" [Vayikra 8:26].

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

Rav Frand

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

This week's parsha explains the configuration by which the Children of Israel traveled in the wilderness: "The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp" [Bamidbar 2:2]. The Torah enumerates a leading Tribe in each direction (Yehudah on the East; Reuven on the South; Ephraim on the West; and Dan on the North) and two associate tribes that traveled and camped alongside the main tribe in each direction.

The Baal HaTurim points out an interesting phenomenon. In each case, when the Torah lists an "associate tribe," they are introduced by the conjunctive "vov" (meaning 'and'), with one exception. The exception is the Tribe of Zevulun. Zevulun traveled as an associate tribe under the Banner of the Tribe of Yehudah, as did Yissocher. However, unlike all the other associate tribes, the Torah does not introduce the Tribe of Zevulun with the word 'And'.

The Baal HaTurim explains the reasoning as follows: The Tribes of Yissocher and Zevulun were really like one tribe. Since it was Zevulun who supported Yissocher, allowing that Tribe to devote themselves to the study of Torah, the two tribes are like inseparable twins. [There is a well-known Medrash that the tribe of Zevulun engaged in business, but used their profits to support the tribe of Yissocher so that they could study.] No distinction could be made between them in the encampments, and no distinction will be made between them in terms of spiritual reward in the World to Come.

Each Tribe had its own banner ('degel'). We typically think of flags as a secular phenomenon. Flags began with the Tribes in the Wilderness. Each flag had the symbol of the Tribe (usually based on Yaakov's Brachos to his children). The symbol of the Tribe of Yehudah featured a lion. The lion is king of the beasts. Yehudah was the tribe of monarchy. Therefore his flag featured a symbol of a lion.

The flag of the Tribe of Yissocher featured the sun, the moon, and the stars. The reason for this was because the Tribe of Yissocher possessed "men of understanding of the times" [Divrei Hayamim I 12:33]. They mastered the astronomical sciences and served as consultants to the Sanhedrin for questions dealing with the calculation of the appearance of the new moon.

The symbol of the Tribe of Zevulun was a ship. They were the merchant marine. They made their living by the sea. Consequently, their symbol was a ship.

The question can be asked; if the Tribe of Zevulun supported the Tribe of Yissocher, and G-d wanted to see to it that they earned a good livelihood, why didn't G-d make life easy for Zevulun? Why couldn't Zevulun have a nice clean job, where they sit behind desks, make some phone calls, and generate profits? Instead, they were sailors, traveling the distant seas in unsafe vessels. Those who "descend to the sea" (yordei haYam) are one of the categories of people that need to thank G-d for saving them (by 'bentching Gomer') each time they return from a trip. The Tribe of Zevulun probably had the most dangerous profession of any of the tribes. Why wasn't Zevulun given a break? He is a nice guy who is supporting his brother. Shouldn't he be given the choicest of jobs? Why did Providence decree that his lot should be that of a sailor?

The Kol Dodi cites a Gemara [Kiddushin 82a] to the effect that the majority of sailors are pious (rubam Chasidim). The reasoning is that "there are no atheists in a foxhole." Surviving the ordeal of a journey at sea

brings one closer to his Maker. Every time a sailor leaves dry land, he puts his life into G-d's Hand. Sailors see and feel Divine Providence throughout their journeys. That is why G-d steered Zevulun into the merchant marine. He wanted Zevulun to support Yissocher. He wanted Zevulun to be generous (Baalei Tzedakah). The people who are most likely to be Baalei Tzedakah are the people who see the Hand of G-d in their livelihood.

I see this in my experience as well. Business people who have no idea how much they are going to earn in a certain year or how many clients or customers will come their way, always talk about the "Hashgocha" [Divine Providence] of their success. People who are salaried and receive the same paycheck every single week and know from the beginning of the year exactly how much they will be earning, are typically less sensitive to the Hand of G-d in their financial success. They are more likely to think, "I earn the living" (as opposed to "I earn the living by the Mercy of G-d"). They are more likely to think, "My strength and the might of my hand made me this great wealth" [Devarim 8:17].

People who are constantly reminded that they are dependent upon G-d are generally more generous. So, precisely because G-d wanted Zevulun to support Yissocher, He put him in a type of work where he would sense G-d's involvement in his life on a daily basis. As such, he will be more generous in his giving of charity.

© 2005 Rabbi Y. Frand and torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reveals Hashem's indescribable love for His people. The prophet Hosheia opens with warm words of blessing and says, "The Jewish people will be likened to the sand of the sea that cannot be measured or counted." Hosheia digresses then and says, "And in place of not being recognized as My nation, they will be regarded as 'the sons of Hashem.'" This passage indicates that, prior to this prophecy, they experienced serious rejection. In truth, the preceding chapter reveals that they temporarily forfeited their prominent status of Hashem's people. Scriptures state, "Declare them no longer My nation because they are not Mine and I am not theirs" (1:9) Yet, one passage later we find Hashem blessing His people in an unlimited capacity conveying upon them the elevated status of "sons of Hashem." We are amazed by this sudden, drastic change of attitude from total rejection to full acceptance in an unparalleled way. What brought about this change and what can we learn from it?

Chazal address these questions and answer with the following analogy. A king was enraged by his wife's atrocious behavior and immediately summoned a scribe to prepare her divorce document. He calmed down, shortly thereafter, and decided not to carry out

his original plan. However, he faced a serious dilemma because he was unwilling to cancel the scribe and reveal his drastic change of heart. He finally resolved his problem and ordered the scribe to rewrite his marriage contract doubling its previous financial commitment. Chazal conclude that the same was true of Hashem. After instructing Hosheia to deliver sharp words of reprimand Hashem retracted them. However, instead of canceling the initial prophecy Hashem tempered it with warm words of blessing. These words were so uplifting that they reflected the Jewish people in a newly gained status of "sons of Hashem". (Sifrei, Parshas Balak)

We can attempt to uncover Chazal's hidden lesson in the following manner. When studying the analogy of the king and his wife we sense the king's deep affection for her. Although he was angered to the point of total rejection this anger was short-lived. He was appeased within moments and his true affection immediately surfaced. In order to compensate for his initial rash response, he strengthened his relationship with her by doubling his expression of affection. The queen undoubtedly understood her husband's compassionate response to her outrageous behavior. Instead of totally rejecting her he actually increased his commitment to her. She sensed this as his way of securing their relationship even after her previous conduct. This unbelievably kind response evoked similar feelings from her and she reciprocated with her fullest expression of appreciation to him.

This analogy reveals Hashem's deep love and affection for His people. The Jewish people in Hosheia's times severely strayed from Hashem's will and engaged themselves in atrocious idolatrous practices. Hashem's was enraged by their behavior and summoned the prophet Hosheia to serve them their rejection papers. This severe response elicited Hashem's counter response of unlimited compassion for them and He immediately retracted His harsh decree. However, Hashem did not stop there but saw it appropriate to intensify His relationship with His cherished people. He therefore elevated them from their previous status of merely His people to the highly coveted status of His children.

We now understand Chazal's message to us. Hashem was sincerely angered by the Jewish people's conduct and sent Hosheia to reject them. Yet, even this angry response could not interfere with Hashem's boundless love for His people and He immediately retracted His harsh words. The Jewish people however, needed to understand the severity of their actions. Hashem therefore instructed Hosheia to reveal the entire story, their intended rejection and ultimate acceptance. Hosheia's prophecy served its purpose well and the Jewish people sensed Hashem's boundless love for them. Although their actions called for total rejection Hashem's compassion for them would not allow this. Instead of rejecting them Hashem actually

increased His display of affection towards them. This undoubtedly evoked their reciprocal response which ultimately produced their side of their newly gained status of "sons of Hashem". They previously enjoyed the status of Hashem's people but after this they would be known as His cherished children.

We find a parallel to the above in this week's sedra which describes the Jewish nation's encampment. They were previously stationed at the foot of Mount Sinai for nearly a year. During that time they developed a special relationship with Hashem receiving His Torah and witnessed many revelations. This intimate bond, however, was interrupted by their inexcusable plunge into idolatry. Hashem was enraged by their atrocious behavior and immediately summoned Moshe Rabbeinu to deliver their rejection papers. Hashem informed His loyal prophet of His intention and Moshe Rabbeinu pleaded on their behalf. Moshe subsequently sensitized the people to their severe wrongdoing and they returned from their shameful inappropriate path. Hashem accepted their repentance and reclaimed His nation. But Hashem's compassion extended far beyond forgiveness and Hetherefore consented to dwell amongst them resting His Divine Presence in the Mishkan.

In our sedra we discover that even the Mishkan was insufficient expression of Hashem's love for His people. He therefore acquiesced in their request and permitted them to camp around the Holy Ark and encircle His Divine Presence. This special opportunity created an incredible feeling of affection, tantamount to embracing Hashem Himself. Indeed Shlomo Hamelech refers to this unbelievable experience of intimacy in the following terms, "And His flag was for me an expression of love". (Shir Hashirim 2:4) Although Hashem initially rejected His people this did not interfere with His boundless love for them. After rededicated themselves to Him they deserved all of His warmth and affection, even the sensation of embracement itself.

We learn from this the unbelievable love Hashem possesses for His people and that even during moments of rejection Hashem's true affection for us is never effected. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & Torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

We now begin the fourth book of the Torah, Sefer Bamidbar. Perhaps it is fitting that we read these parshiyot in the summer because they relate events that happened while Israel was traversing the hot desert.

The Book of Bamidbar (Numbers) begins with G-d's command to Moses to take the census of the Children of Israel. Each of the Twelve Tribes had a leader-Prince-who would be in charge of the census of his tribe. After the names of these princes are enumerated, we find the following summary sentence.

"And Moses and Aaron took these men who were designated by name." (Numbers 1:17)

"These men"-RASHI: "These twelve princes."

Who were designated-Rashi: Here, by [their] names.

This Rashi comment has puzzled all the major Rashi commentators, without exception. What do you think bothered them about this comment?

A Question: What has he added, they ask, to our understanding by his comment? What he says, we already know from the verse itself. Certainly Rashi wouldn't waste ink to repeat in his own words what the Torah itself tells us.

Can you think of an answer that explains the necessity of this comment? If you don't have an answer yet, let me show you what some of the major commentators suggest as the reason for Rashi's comment.

The Mizrahi (the most famous of Rashi commentators) says: "The verse ordinarily should have used a pronoun and said 'And Moses and Aaron took THEM...' But since it went out of its way to elaborate and say 'these men who were designated by name' we might have mistakenly thought that these were some other men than those mentioned in the previous list. Therefore Rashi comes to set us straight; he tells us that in fact these are the very same men referred to above."

But this answer is problematic. Why would you say it is problematic?

An Answer: First of all, maybe they are different men! How does Rashi know they are not? Rashi's sole source of information is the words of the Torah unless he cites a midrash. Here he doesn't cite a midrash, so he knows what he knows from the Torah itself. How does he know that these are not different men? And if we insist that they are the same men, then why did the Torah use all these extra words?! They actually tell us nothing more than the single word "them" would have told us. This question seriously weakens the validity of the Mizrahi's answer.

The Gur Aryeh (this is the Maharal of Prague) offers his answer: "The words 'these men' makes them sound like ordinary men. But they were of a higher stature; they were princes. Therefore Rashi changes the wording by saying 'these twelve PRINCES.'" But there are problems with this answer as well.

What are they? Some Problems:

Again we ask: So why did the Torah refer them as "men" and not as princes, as the Maharal thinks they should be called? It wouldn't be wise to think that Rashi was smarter than the Torah itself! Another problem is that Rashi himself says (Numbers 13:3), when the Torah calls the spies "anashim" ("men"), that the term "anashim" always means important people, not ordinary people. So the Gur Aryeh's answer is twice weakened!

Another early commentator, the Mesiach Illmim, offers the following strange answer: "Since the names

of the princes include the father's name, like Nachshon son of Aminadav, I might have thought these are two different people (Nachshon AND Aminadav) and that there were in fact 24 (!) men. Therefore, Rashi's comment is meant to straighten us out by saying "these TWELVE princes."

The problem here should be obvious: No one would ever make such a mistake and think that Nachshon the son of Aminadav were two separate people. Therefore Rashi does not need to tell us there are only 12 and not 24 men here, I understand that on my own.

Why then does Rashi make this comment? This is a real brainteaser. Can you think of an answer?

Do you want a hint? See Rashi Exodus 28:10.

An Answer: The previous time, before this verse, the Torah refers to the princes of the tribes in Exodus 35:27. (There is no mention of them in the book of Vayikra.) There it says that the princes brought the stones for the ephod and the choshen mishpat. In them were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes.

We gave a hint to look at Rashi's comment on Exodus 28:10. There Rashi tells us who the twelve tribes were, who were inscribed on the stones in the High Priest's ephod. He names them. Did you notice a difference between those twelve tribes and the twelve tribes listed here?

Of course you did (right?). On the stones of the ephod the tribe of Levi was included while the tribes of Ephraim and Menashe were excluded. We can reasonably assume that the princes who brought these stones were the princes of these twelve tribes. But in our listing here in Bamidbar, Levi is out and Ephraim & Menashe are in. So, it turns out that the twelve princes enumerated here in Bamidbar were not the same princes referred to earlier.

That is Rashi's point. He is stressing these men, THESE PRINCES, and not those princes in Exodus. Therefore the Torah does not say just "Moses...took THEM" as we would have expected, but it rather states explicitly "THESE MEN WHO WERE DESIGNATED BY NAME." And the second Rashi-comment reflects this precisely. Rashi adds the word "here"-who were designated here by name. His one-word addition is precise and significant, because these princes are designated by name only here, while those in Exodus were never designated by name. (Only Rashi tells which tribes they came from). The Torah itself here stresses this because this is the first time in the Torah that Menashe and Ephraim take their place among the twelve tribes. This necessarily must push one of the tribes out (because there can only be a total of twelve tribes). Levi is the tribe excluded. And because this is unusual (being the first time, though not the last), the Torah stresses this and repeats this three different times in this chapter. See 1:47 "But the Levites...were not numbered among them." Again in verse 1:49; and again in verse 2:33.

This, I believe, is the point of Rashi's enigmatic comment. Each of his words in these brief comments is chosen judiciously. © 2005 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Bamidbar begins with the third official count of the Jewish nation. The term used in the Torah is that we should "count the heads" (1:2) of all the households, but the Hebrew words could also mean, "lift the heads". Why would the Torah use such ambiguous language? Also, why were they to be counted according to their households, which had never been done in the past, and must have had significance in this particular count? Rashi teaches that prior to the census, each Jew was required to produce a book of his lineage. The Midrash adds that producing this book was also required be able to receive the Torah. Why is receiving the Torah dependent upon having a book of lineage? As Rabbi Zweig explains, a person who is the first in his family to receive a college education will be elated when he is accepted to a community college. However, a person who descends from a family that boasts ten generations of Harvard graduates will be completely devastated if the only college willing to accept him is a community college. Surpassing the expectations that have been defined by ones social upbringing is what gives a person a sense of accomplishment. If a person is able to identify his lineage, we conclude that he stems from individuals who took responsibility for themselves and had honorable standards. For the nations of the world, the very act of taking responsibility for themselves is, in itself, an elevating sense of accomplishment. However, behaving responsibly is not considered an accomplishment for Hashem's chosen nation. We are expected to behave differently than animals, to act responsibly, for our forefathers have set a standard that makes anything less unacceptable. This explains why households were important enough to be counted, and the Ramban helps us understand the use of language: The "lifting" of the heads could be good, but only if the body comes with it! It's important to feel good about our accomplishments, but the Torah is telling us to make sure we don't elevate our heads without taking our bodies/actions with it! Our minds can plan on greatness, so long as our bodies plan on acting on it! © 2005 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



<http://www.kehilasmy.org/>