

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

The place to begin is to note what looks like a contradiction. On the one hand Rashi says that the acts of counting in the torah are gestures of love on the part of G-d: "Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, G-d counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the sanctuary), He counted them again." (Rashi to Bamidbar 1:1)

When G-d initiates a census of the Israelites it is to show that He loves them. On the other hand the Torah is explicit in saying that taking a census of the nation is fraught with risk: "Then G-d said to Moses, 'When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to G-d a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them.'" (Ex. 30:11-12).

When, centuries later, King David counted the people, there was Divine anger and 70,000 people died. (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 2) How can this be if counting is an expression of love?

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by the family of
Phyllis Appleton A"H
L'iluy Nishmat
Tzipporah Faygel bas Yaakov HaCohen A"H
on the occasion of her Shloshim

This issue of Toras Aish is also dedicated by
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נפתר כה אייר תשכב
תנצבה

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

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

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

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

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

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.**

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madness," a remarkable anticipation of Hitler (Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd*, London, Fisher Unwin 1896, 134). It is no accident that Le Bon's work was published in France at a time of rising antisemitism and the Dreyfus trial.

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

There is a wonderful blessing mentioned in the Talmud to be said on seeing 600,000 Israelites together in one place. It is: "Blessed are You, Lord... who discerns secrets." (Berakhot 58a) The Talmud explains that every person is different. We each have different attributes. We all think our own thoughts. Only G-d can enter the minds of each of us and know what we are thinking, and this is what the blessing refers to. In other words, even in a massive crowd where, to human eyes, faces blur into a mass, G-d still relates to us as individuals, not as members of a crowd.

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

Against that, G-d tells Moses to lift people's heads by showing that they each count; they matter as individuals. Indeed in Jewish law a *davar she-be-minyan*, something that is counted, sold individually rather than by weight, is never nullified even in a mixture of a thousand or a million others. (Betsah 3b) In Judaism taking a census must always be done in such a way as to signal that we are valued as individuals.

We each have unique gifts. There is a contribution only I can bring. To lift someone's head means to show them favour, to recognise them. It is a gesture of love.

There is, however, all the difference in the world between individuality and individualism. Individuality means that I am a unique and valued member of a team. Individualism means that I am not a team player at all. I am interested in myself alone, not the group. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam gave this a famous name, noting that more people than ever in the United States are going ten-pin bowling but fewer than ever are joining teams. He called it "Bowling alone." (Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000) MIT professor Sherry Turkle calls our age of Twitter, Facebook, and electronic rather than face-to-face friendships, "Alone together." (Sherry Turkle, *Alone together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, New York, Basic Books, 2011) Judaism values individuality, not individualism. As Hillel said, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" (Mishnah Avot 1:14)

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

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

It is hard to lead a nation of individuals, but this is the most challenging, empowering, inspiring leadership of all. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd these are the names of the men that shall stand with you: of Reuven, Elizur the son of Shedeur. Of Shimon, Shelimuiel the son of Zurishaddai. Of Judah, Nachshon the son of Aminadav..." (Numbers 1:5-7).

For as long as I can remember, Orthodox Judaism has been perceived by much of the world - even the Orthodox world - as a conservative, sheltered, old-fashioned way of life unwilling to take risks in the face of new challenges, preferring to retreat into its own shell like a turtle.

A Midrashic comment on this week's portion of Bamidbar makes the point that a conservative, risk-free existence is not a genuine Torah value. Certainly standing by on the sidelines is hardly a characteristic to be found in the person of Nachshon, prince of the tribe of Judah, who jumped into the Reed Sea in advance of the Egyptians. It was only after his demonstration of faith that the Almighty went the next step and split the Reed Sea.

The Midrash (also recorded in B.T. Bava Batra 91a) points out that this courageous Nachshon had four sons, including Elimelech, husband of Naomi, and Shalmon, father of Boaz; hence Nachshon was father and grand-father of two major personalities in the Scroll of Ruth, which we will be reading shortly on Shavuot.

In presenting such a genealogy, the Midrash stresses not only the characteristics of risk-taking by the descendants of Nachshon, but also what kind of risks are favored by the Torah and what kind are not.

The fact is that courage and risk-taking, or the lack of it, may be seen as an underlying theme of the whole book of Bamidbar, records the history of the Israelites' forty years of wandering in the desert. When the spies return with a frightening report about the Promised Land and the ability to conquer it (Num. 13-14), the Israelites demonstrate a total lack of resolve, fortitude and faith. They wail, they tremble, they plead not to go on with the mission. They are not prepared to take the risk of war even for the conquest of the Promised Land.

Nachshon at the shore of the Reed Sea shines as the antithesis of a cowardly "desert generation." Because of his fearless daring, the people were saved. Indeed, the Gaon of Vilna points out that the Torah first describes the Israelites as having gone "into the midst of the sea on the dry land" (Ex. 14:22), and later "on dry land in the midst of the sea" (Ex. 14:29). The initial description refers to Nachshon and his followers who risked their lives by jumping into the raging waters. G-d made a miracle for them, the waters splitting into dry land and serving as a wall, homa, on the right and the left. The latter description refers to the rest of the Israelites who only entered after the dry land appeared; for them the waters also became a wall, but this time written without the letter vuv, which forms the alternate reading of hema, or anger!

Nachshon's remarkable ability to take risks was transmitted to his son Elimelech and grandson Boaz. Hence, the Scroll of Ruth closes with the names of ten generations from Peretz (son of Judah) to King David, and Nachshon appears right in the center, the pivotal figure between the age of the patriarchs and the generation of monarchy-messiah. But while Nachshon and Boaz are to be praised for their risk-taking, Elimelech can only be reviled for his.

When a terrible famine descends upon Bethlehem, the home of Elimelech, he packs up and

decides to start a new life in the land of Moab. Undoubtedly, this demonstrates courage on the part of Elimelech, the ability to risk the unknown in a strange environment.

But his motivation was greed. He refused to share his bounty with his starving kinsmen, and he was willing to leave his homeland and his ancestral roots for the sake of his wealth. Hence, tragedy strikes.

Elimelech dies, and his sons, inevitably, marry Moabite women. His progeny die as well, causing Elimelech to have reaped as his harvest only oblivion - from a Jewish point of view.

In contrast, Boaz does not leave Bethlehem during the famine. And when the challenge arises to do an act of loving-kindness for Naomi and redeem Elimelech's land, as well as to marry the stranger - Ruth, a convert - Boaz assumes the financial obligation and the social risk involved in the marriage. The descendant from this union turns out to be none other than King David, from whom the messianic line emerges.

Elimelech's risk was based upon greed, and forsaking his tradition; it ends in his death and destruction. Boaz's risk was based upon loving-kindness, and results in redemption. The Elimelech-Boaz dialectic is a perennial theme in the Jewish world. Risk is positive, and even mandatory, from a Jewish perspective. The question we have to ask ourselves is the motivation, and that determines the result. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

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

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

For instance, the criterion for the speed and intensity of reciting the words of prayer is the rate of speed that one would use in counting valuable coins. The care in counting is itself the expression of the underlying attachment to what is being counted. I always note that people leaving the ATM cash

dispenser invariably check the bills that they have received. This is not only an act of prudence; it is an act of affection and importance. So the count of the Jews in the parsha, even in its detail and length, is logical and makes perfect sense.

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

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

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

So counting the Jewish people are not empty numbers to the leaders of Israel, but rather the list of challenges and opportunities presented before them. May both the counters and the counted of Israel in our day be great in numbers, spirit and accomplishments. ©2014 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah, in this week's portion, alludes to the redemption of the first born son. (Numbers 3:40-51) Originally, the eldest son in each family was designated to serve in the Temple. After the eldest in the family faltered by participating in the sin of the golden calf, the Temple work was transferred to the tribe of Levi, which was not involved in the sin. The Torah required the redeeming of each first born at that time for five coins. One wonders why, if the redemption already took place, it is repeated for every first born son to this day.

In Egypt, the first born functioned as priests. In this way, every Egyptian family was connected to the Egyptian religion. Appropriately, it was the Egyptian

first born who was killed in Egypt as they were the religious visionaries and therefore most responsible for enslaving the Jews. Once they were killed, and the Jewish first born were saved, they, too, were designated to dedicate their lives to religious service. (Exodus 13:15) This was done, not only in recognition of having miraculously escaped the slaying of the Egyptian first born, but also as a means of binding each Jewish family to the Holy Temple.

From this perspective, it can be suggested that the ceremony that we have today of redeeming the first born (pidyon haben) is meant as an educational tool to remind families that there was a time when one of their own was connected directly to the Temple service. Such a reminder, it is hoped, would result in a commitment by the entire family, to a life of spirituality and religious commitment.

During the pidyon haben ceremony, the Kohen (Jewish Priest) asks the parents of the child if they prefer to keep the child or to pay for the redemption, with the assumption that the parents will pay for the redemption. As a Kohen, I always wondered what would occur if the father decided to keep the money rather than take his child. Interestingly, Jewish Law insists that regardless of the response, the child remains with his family. If the end result is the same, why is this question asked in the first place?

When the Kohen asks, "What do you prefer, the money or the child?" what he is really asking is, "what is your value system? Is it solely based on money, or does it have at its core, the essence, the soul of the child?" The Kohen has the responsibility to challenge the parent with such a question. With the response to this rhetorical question, the family reaffirms that spiritual values are the highest priority in raising a child.

Note that if one of the child's grandfathers is a Kohen or Levi, he is not redeemed. This is because, even in contemporary times, the pidyon haben reminder is not necessary for there are roles unique to his family's religious life which serve as an aid in remembering the priorities of a spiritual quest.

So, the next time we go to a pidyon haben, we should not rush through it. We should realize what is happening. We should recognize that through their words, a family is making a commitment to live the Torah and walk with G-d throughout their days. ©2012 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

This week's parsha, Bamidbar is always read on the Shabbat prior to the Shavuot holiday, suggesting that this Torah reading teaches us important

lessons about the holiday.

Bamidbar begins by telling us that G-d spoke to Moshe in Midbar Sinai. Rabbi Nachman Cohen in 'A Time for All Things,' maintains that the confluence of Bamidbar and Shavuot is to underscore the great significance of the Torah having been given in the desert -- no man's land. Rabbi Cohen points out that the location of the vast expanse of the wilderness is significant for it teaches us that the Torah is not the exclusive property of given individuals. Living a desert existence makes us feel vulnerable. Giving the Torah in the desert also teaches that Torah can only be acquired if a person humbles themselves. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Parashas Bamidbar is full of numbers (pun intended). Not just the number of adult males in each Tribe, but also the number of adult males in each "Degel" (encampments/formations comprised of three Tribes). Since we were already given the total number of adult males in each Tribe, shouldn't we only need to be told which Tribes were in each Degel? Can't we do our own math to figure out how many adult males were in each of the four Degalim? Not only that, but to save us the trouble of turning back a page or two (or having to scroll back a couple of columns), the Torah repeats how many adult males were in each Tribe of the Degel before giving us the total number. Why are these numbers spelled out for us, and why were some (i.e. the number for each individual Tribe) repeated?

Ramban (2:4 see also Ibn Ezra on 2:32) says that the numbers were repeated to point out that there were exactly the same number of people when the nation started traveling, on the 20th of Iyar (see 10:11) as there were when the census was taken, on the 1st of Iyar (see 1:1). It is quite unusual for there not to be even one death over a 20 day stretch in such a large nation, yet this is exactly what happened. However, giving just the total each Degel and allowing us to compare it with the sum of the Tribes in each Degel (as they were 20 days earlier) would accomplish the same thing. Additionally, we don't know how long the census took to complete; if it took more than a day, there are no longer 20 death-less days. [It should be noted that there are some (e.g. Tosefes B'racha on 1:46) who say that the numbers given in the census are not exact, but are rounded off. Obviously, those commentators who say that the numbers being the same show that there were no deaths over those 20 days must be of the opinion that the numbers were exact; otherwise the same rounded-off number could apply even if some had died during those 20 days.]

Rav Shimon Schwab makes a suggestion based on Rashi saying (1:1) that G-d counted the

Children of Israel numerous times because they are so precious to Him; He counted them again less than a month later to show how extremely precious they were. Rav Schwab points out between the first census and the description of the Degalim the Levi'im were commanded to surround the Mishkan, creating a barrier between it and the rest of the nation (1:48-53). Whether to counter the mistaken notion this might have led to, that they couldn't be that cherished if G-d kept them at a distance, or because He cherished them even more after they agreed to have the Levi'im set up camp between them and the Mishkan (see 1:54), He counted them again despite how recently they had been counted. The numbers being repeated regarding the Degalim reflect this second counting. [Although only the first totals were based on an actual census, since Rashi (1:1) includes their being counted when they left Egypt as one of the instances of G-d "counting" them, and there was no census there either (only a mention of how many adult males there were, see Sh'mos 12:37, it is clear that merely mentioning a number is considered to be a counting by the All-Knowing One.)

The total given for the entire nation (Bamidbar 1:46 and 2:32) could also be considered unnecessary, since we could add up the population of all 12 Tribes ourselves. (Having to add twelve numbers together rather than just three does not really change the question.) Nevertheless, this isn't much of an issue, since the sum of the nation is greater than its parts, and stating how many there were in the entire nation is not considered superfluous despite the ability to figure it out by adding together the totals of the 12 Tribes. (This applies when giving the total for all 12 Tribes and when giving the total for all four Degalim.) Similarly, a Degel can be considered a significant enough unit to warrant giving the number of its total population despite the ability to add up the population of the Tribes that the Degel is comprised of. By the same token, though, when giving a total population, there is also a need to avoid minimizing the importance of each of the parts that makes up that sum.

The commandment to conduct a census included counting them "according to the number of their names" (1:2), an expression repeated as each Tribe was counted. The commentators, in various forms (see, for example, S'fornu), explain this expression as a reference to how important each individual was, manifested by each one being counted by name (not just by counting the half-shekalim). In other words, when the total of each Tribe is given (as well as several times when referring to counting the nation as a whole), the importance of each individual is stressed as well. The same can apply regarding giving the population of each Degel; even when considered a unit of three Tribes, the uniqueness and individuality of each of the Tribes is not to be lost, so the population of each Tribe is repeated before giving the Degel's total population.

We would have known how many adult males the Children of Israel was comprised of without the Torah giving us the total, based on knowing how many were in each Tribe, and we would have known how many were in each Degel by adding up the numbers in each Tribe. Still, because each Degel was its own entity (not just three Tribes that happened to be grouped together), and the Nation of Israel was more than just twelve Tribes with a shared history and ancestors, the total population of each Degel, and of the nation, was given. Conversely, in order to highlight how important each Tribe was within that entity, the population of each Tribe is given separately. The same applies when the population of each Degel is given; the population number for each Tribe is repeated in order to highlight the importance of the unique contribution of each Tribe within the framework of the Degel. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

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 He therefore 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. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Little Things Count

Bamidbar is known as the Book of Numbers. Though the Hebrew word Bamidbar means in the desert, I assume that the name Numbers was derived from the fact that the first parsha begins with a count. Moshe is told to count the entire populace males that is from twenty and up. One tribe, however, was not counted together with the general population. Shevet Levi was counted separately and differently. Though the all the other tribe's males were counted only from age twenty and older, even the babies of the tribe of Levi were counted. Even infants from age thirty days and above were counted!

All the other tribes were counted in relation to military age -- twenty-years old. What made the tribe of Levi different? Why were the infants counted? In fact, even a day old baby would have been counted if not for the fact that until one-month of age the infant was of questionable viability. Why is Shevet Levi's count intrinsically different?

A number of years ago a dear friend of mine, I'll

call him Dovy, received a knock on the door of his home in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A distinguished looking man stood at Dovy's door. The stranger had a beard and looked at least ten years older than Dovy. He appeared to be either a Rebbi in a Yeshiva or a leader of a congregation. Dovy went for his checkbook.

"I just came to your home to say thank you," he said gratefully. "Thank you?" asked my friend in astonishment. "I don't even know who you are! In fact I don't even think I ever saw you in my life!" "Let me explain," said the visitor in a clear and reassuring tone. "About fifteen or twenty years ago, you must have been no more than ten, I visited Pittsburgh. At that time, I was totally non-observant. I was facing many paths in my life. I lacked vision and direction. I explored returning to my roots, but I was not moved. Then I met you."

Dovy looked at him incredulously. "Me?" He thought. "What do I have to do with this rabbi? And besides I was only about ten years old at the time."

The Rabbi continued as if he read Dovy's mind. "You were about ten years old and returning from a ball game. Your tzitzis were flying in every direction and beads of sweat were still on your face. And you were running.

"I stopped you to ask where you were going. You told me about Mincha, we spoke about what you were learning in your school. To you it was just the way of life, normal routine, but to me I saw something else. I saw a pure enthusiasm for everything Jewish from prayer to Talmud. All from a ten-year-old-kid. I asked for and made a note of your name.

"I left college to study in Israel. I did well. I am now a teacher in an Israel yeshiva. All these years I made sure to remember to thank the little kid whose little acts made the biggest impact on my life. You taught me something that no teacher had taught me until that time!"

Each tribe had a role for the Jewish nation. But the tribe of Levi's role was unique. Their members were the teachers and mentors of the Jewish people and they were counted in that vein. And being that their role was different, they were counted in a totally different manner -- separately and beginning at a much younger age.

The Torah teaches us that when counting the tribe of teachers, one need not start appreciating only those who are ordained as official rabbis. One need not focus his appreciation for those who are over twenty, or even over Bar-Mitzvah. He can learn from a child who is one-month-old as well. Even the child whose tzitzis are flying as he runs home from playing in the yard, has something to teach. If he is immersed in the world of the Levite -- the world of teaching Torah, then he is part of the teacher tribe -- and he counts! And if he counts, you can count him as well! ©2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI YOSSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Boaz did not do that. What did he do? He remarried. He tried to rebuild. He had a child (Oved),

who had a child (Yishai), who had a child (Dovid), who became the founder of the Davidic Dynasty.

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

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

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Parsha Puns!

**I'm not even reMOTely trying to
DESERT or cASH in the chips - so
throw down a FLAG, CUT OFF
any negative and make this
Shabbos COUNT!**



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