

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

The book of Bamidbar begins with a census of the Israelites. That is why this book is known in English as Numbers. This raises a number of questions: 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. Additionally, does counting have anything to do with leadership?

The place to begin is to note what appears to be a contradiction. On the one hand, Rashi says that the acts of counting in the Torah are gestures of love on the part of God: Because they (the Children of Israel) are dear to Him, God 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 God 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 God said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to God 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 seventy thousand

people died. (2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21) How can this be, if counting is an expression of love?

The answer lies in the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: se'u et rosh, literally, "lift the head." (Num. 1:2) 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 for the census, 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 sixty million people, or a company with one hundred thousand employees, or a sports crowd of sixty thousand. Any total tends to value the group or nation as a whole. The larger the total, the stronger 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 their place. If one person leaves the organisation, someone else can be hired to do their job.

Notoriously, too, crowds have the effect of tending to make the individual lose their 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 of people their money in the 1720s, and the tulip mania in Holland when entire 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,

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by

Noa Meira Weiss

in honor of her new parents
and her big brother Yair!

Sorry for keeping you guys up all night!

But I'm worth it.
You're welcome.



playing on people's fears and their sense of victimhood. Such leaders, Le Bon noted, are "especially recruited from the ranks of those morbidly nervous excitable half-deranged persons who are bordering on madness," (pg 134) a remarkable anticipation of Hitler. 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 civilisation before -- on the dignity and integrity of the individual. We believe that every human being was created in the image and likeness of God. The Sages said that every life is like an entire universe. (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:4) Maimonides wrote that each of us should see ourselves as if our next act could change the fate of the world. (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 3:4] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot 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 six hundred thousand Israelites together in one place. It is: "Blessed are You, Lord... who discerns secrets." (Brachot 58a) The Talmud explains that every person is different. We each have different attributes. We all think our own thoughts. Only God 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, God 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. God 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, God 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. (Beitsah 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 bowling teams. He called this phenomenon "Bowling alone." (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." 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" (Ex. 4:10). He thought this was a deficiency 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. They must "lift their heads." If you seek to lead, however small or 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. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l 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. God 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. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Our Parsha begins this fourth book of the written Torah by stating that the Lord spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai. In fact, this entire book takes its identity from the fact that it was spoken to Moshe and written by him while in the desert of Sinai. A question naturally arises about the significance that all of this was taught and expounded upon in the desert of Sinai. What difference does it really make where it happened? Since there is nothing haphazard or extraneous in the Torah, it must follow that there is a lesson, a message, and insight in this detail.

This is a most foreboding venue in which to give over lessons and ideas. The Torah itself describes its harshness and difficult atmosphere – a place of serpents and scorpions, shifting sands, and the absence of water. Is that the proper classroom in which to teach the Jewish people the eternal laws and values on the Torah? Would it not be more fitting to have a more congenial and comfortable setting, so that the listeners and students could more easily concentrate on the message and lesson being delivered? Yet, the Torah seemingly goes out of its way to emphasize that this was revealed and taught to Israel while they were wanderers in the inhospitable environment of the desert and wasteland of Sinai.

One of the lessons of teaching Torah in this difficult place is that this demonstrates that Torah is not to be limited by any specific locality or geography. If the Torah had been given in the land of Israel, then there would be a tendency to say that it only applies there, and that outside the land of Israel it is not incumbent upon the Jewish people to observe the Torah. The human mind attaches teachings to the environment and

geographic location in which they are learned.

If it were had been given in the land of Egypt in its entirety, before the Jewish people were free from bondage, there would be room to say that it was given only to that generation of freed slaves, but that later generations that have never experienced the lashes of the Egyptian taskmasters would not be bound to keep it. Human beings are influenced not only by lessons taught in the classroom, but also by the location of the classroom itself. By teaching the Torah in the middle of nowhere, the words, so to speak, show the features and eternity of Torah in a 'classroom' that is not limited by any sovereignty or appealing geographic location.

As such, the lessons remain as pristine as possible, unaffected by other outside environmental influences. It is the nothingness of the desert that is the proper backdrop, and it is the greatness and eternity of the words of the Torah that continually instruct and guide our lives and values. ©2021 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

Sinai, Tabernacle (also called Ohel Moed, the Tent of Meeting) and midbar (desert). At the outset of the Book of Numbers, the Torah mentions these three places in a sentence: "The Lord [spoke] to Moses in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting" (Numbers 1:1). In the Torah, they mark the focal point from where God speaks:

- At Mount Sinai, God gave the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:18; 20:1).

- After the people left Sinai, the Tabernacle was built. There, God speaks "from above the ark cover, from between the two keruvim" (Exodus 25:22). While Mount Sinai was God-made, the Tabernacle was built – as per God's instructions – by people.

- As the Jews begin journeying through the desert, the Tabernacle is no longer stationary, it "walks" with the nation through the wilderness.

In sum: when the Jewish People is first formed, God reveals Himself intensely at Sinai, soon afterwards in the Tabernacle. Ultimately the Tabernacle is replaced by the Temple in Jerusalem. In all these places, God's presence is intense, compressed into one space – above Mount Sinai, above the Ark in the Tabernacle and Temple. Like a high-voltage wire, God's pure presence in these places is potentially dangerous for us, and we are enjoined not to come too close (Exodus 19:12, 13).

The destruction of the Temple was a horrific moment in Jewish history. But a sliver of light emerged. Replacing the Temple were small temples as Jews set up synagogues and learning centers worldwide. With

God more diffuse, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg suggests, the voltage is lower. People can come closer.

Indeed, over time, the idea of Tabernacle evolved into Shechinah (the Presence of God). In fact, the noun Shechinah first appears in rabbinic literature after the Temples have been destroyed. The God Who particularly appeared in the Tabernacle manifests as Shechinah – literally, the God Who is omnipresent. The Midrash makes this point when it says, "There is no place devoid of God" (Shemot Rabbah 2:5).

A parable sheds light on how the post-Temple era has aspects that are more conducive to feeling the presence of God: "When a king is in his palace, it is difficult to approach him. Once he leaves and mingles among his constituents, even the lowest of commoners is able to interact with him. Similarly...when the Shechinah has been exiled from the Temple, it is as if the Ruler of rulers, the Holy One, blessed be He, roams among His subjects. This is a more favorable time for the average person to gain access to Him" (Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, Sefer Or Gedalyahu).

Parashat Bamidbar speaks of God Who appears at Sinai and the Tabernacle and ultimately in the Temple. It is in these places that He is more visible. But post-Temple, while God is less visible, He is more present. ©2021 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Beware of Going Up the Mountain

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When the Jewish people received the first set of Tablets, they were warned: "Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its border" (*Shemot* 19:12). Similarly, before G-d gave the second set of Tablets, He instructed Moshe: "No one else shall come up with you, and no one else shall be seen anywhere on the mountain; neither shall the flocks and the herds graze at the foot of this mountain" (*Shemot* 34:3). This second warning was even more sweeping than the first. This time, the people were warned away from the entire mountain, even its base (where they had stood the first time). Furthermore, even cattle were prohibited from grazing. Finally, the first time the elders ascended part-way with Moshe, while the second time no one else joined him.

The first warning about the mountain continued: "No hand shall touch it" (*Shemot* 19:13). The *Mechilta* offers a homiletic reading: "No hand shall touch **it**" – this applies to the mountain only, but not to the Tabernacle and the Temple. Thus, according to this view a person is allowed to touch the stones of the *Kotel*, which is the remnant of the retaining wall around

the Temple. Even though it is possible that it is forbidden to enter the area behind the *Kotel* as we are all impure, touching is still allowed. Some, though, are so strict about not entering that they avoid getting too close to the *Kotel*. This is because then they might end up putting their fingers between the stones of the wall, which might count as forbidden entering.

It should be noted that some interpret the *Mechilta* as saying that the admonition “No hand shall touch it” comes to include the Tabernacle and the Temple in the prohibition of touching. However, the straightforward reading of the *Mechilta* is as we explained above, that these are excluded from the prohibition. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

These are the descendants of Aharon and Moshe, on the day Hashem spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai.” (Bamidbar 3:1) Rashi quotes the Gemara that though the next posuk mentions only Aharon’s children, the purpose is to teach us that whoever teaches someone else’s child Torah is considered to have given birth to them. Indeed, we know that if a person has to do something for his father or his teacher, the teacher takes precedence since the father brought the person into this world but the Rabbi brings him into the World to Come.

The question, though, is why Moshe’s birth children are not mentioned here also. True, they are mentioned as part of the Levite family of Amram, since Amram’s only son who was not a Kohain was Moshe, but they are not mentioned as Moshe’s children as a follow-up to this posuk.

The Chasam Sofer comments that while Moshe taught Torah to Aharon’s children, though that was an obligation on their father, Aharon, so he is considered to have sired them, he did not teach Torah to his own children. Moshe bore the responsibility for teaching Torah to the Jewish People and he moved the Ohel Moed outside the camp. Whoever wanted to learn would come to him, but Moshe’s own children did not come. This would explain why Aharon’s children are mentioned as his sons but not his own. Only those who were brought into the spiritual world of Torah truly remained as Moshe’s children, thus Nadav and Avihu were considered alive even after their deaths.

What we see from this is striking. What could be more of a parental connection than bloodlines? The answer is Torah. The relationship two people have which is built on Torah is deeper and stronger than one based on family ties. And it is more than that.

The lesson we learn is that it is the spiritual connection which binds people more than the physical one, because the world is not really physical. That’s an illusion Hashem provides to enable us to be challenged

and to choose right from wrong. Every physical item has a spark of spirituality at its essence and now we find out that it is that spark which has primacy. The day Hashem spoke to Moshe at Har Sinai, the day which we know as Shavuot, was the day we got our priorities straight and learned the truth about the world.

A journalist in Israel was writing an article about Baalei Teshuva, people who chose to come closer to Hashem and learn about their Jewish heritage. After a class, he stopped one of the men who was leaving and posed this question: “Who do you think will get more reward, you, or someone who has been religious his entire life?” He thought the man would refer to the dictum of Chazal that “in the place where penitents stand, even the completely righteous cannot.”

Without hesitation the man replied, “Definitely, one who has always been observant will get more reward.” He explained. “They will be rewarded because they think there is something better out there, yet they don’t pursue it. I know that the world without Torah and without G-d is empty. For me, coming here is the only logical response, so why do I deserve reward?”

On Shavuot, we read the story of Rus HaMoaviah, the woman who chose to turn her back on her royal lineage and cling to an even more regal line, though it did not appear so at the time. Just as Rus recognized the truth of Hashem and Torah as being “real” when everything about her home and upbringing was revealed to be myths and falsehoods, we, by looking at the world through the prism of Torah, can differentiate and see the eternal nature of the Torah’s reality and the transient impression of reality which the world around us gives off, in an effort to mislead us and make us miss out on the opportunity for greatness. May Rus’s heir arrive soon! ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and *Migdal Ohr*

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

The Personal Touch

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Z”L had a very special custom. Shortly after a relative, friend or close student would move into a new home, he would ask to visit. Although he would only stay for a few minutes, R’ Shlomo Zalman made sure to walk through the entire apartment.

When questioned about this practice, Rav Shlomo Zalman would explain that he wanted to give his “ayin tova”, a personal blessing for positive vibes in the new home.

The Ramban (1:45) relates that giving an “Ayin Tova” is one of the main reasons behind the census commanded to be taken in Parshat Bamidbar.

HaShem counted the us out of His boundless love for the Jewish people. When something is cherished, like a special collection, we make certain to keep a close eye on it.

As part of the counting process, each person

passed before Moshe and Aharon in order that these two righteous leaders could give their “ayin tova”, a personal viewing and blessing.

Those few seconds before the leaders made the people feel special through a brief but personal connection to the “father of all Nevi'im” and the “Kohen Gadol”. They were not “just a number” but rather an individual member of the Jewish nation.

Everyone appreciates personal attention from others in their life. We all need to be recognized. Unfortunately, true human interaction has been replaced with “social media”, “remote learning” and “virtual friends”. Texting, messaging and “emojis” are now considered acceptable forms of conversation. While convenient and cute, these types of communication can't replace a real voice or handwritten note.

We are all busy with our own lives and responsibilities. I do not imagine however, that any of us have more to do than Moshe, Aharon or Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach. And yet, each of these giants took the time to greet and bless each and every member of the Jewish people.

Those few seconds of personal connection made the lifetime for the recipients of their attention.

I always marvel at the hosts of a simcha who take the time to go from table to table greeting their guests. During the height of their special occasion, they take the time for that personal touch.

Let's try to refocus on being real people again. Reach out to family, friends and neighbors with even a few minutes of a visit or telephone call. Instead of adding new “friends” and followers in social media, rekindle the true relationships with those important to you.

As the old telephone advertisement suggests, “reach out and touch someone”. Give them your time, your attention and an “ayin tova”, the few moments of positive influence that can make someone else feel truly special. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Teaching Should be Parenting

The Torah tells us, “These are the offspring of Aharon and Moshe on the day Hashem spoke with Moshe on Har Sinai. And these are the names of the children of Aharon, the first-born Nadav, and Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar. These are the names of the children of Aharon, the anointed Kohanim whom he inaugurated to minister. And Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered an alien fire before Hashem in the Wilderness of Sinai, and they had no children; but Elazar and Itamar ministered in the

presence of Aharon, their father.”

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch deals with the order of this section which is interjected between the counting of the B'nei Yisrael and the counting of the Leviim. “The sons of Israel had been counted as the eidah, the community. Now the Levites are to be counted as the guardians of the eidot (communities). But first Moshe and Aharon are thought of, those who were not among the counted but were the counters.” Aharon's sons were not counted among the Leviim even though they were from the tribe of Levi, because they were no longer reckoned as Leviim but as a separate group known as Kohanim. Moshe's sons, on the other hand, were absorbed into the Leviim (their rightful place) and were counted in the family of Amram in the subdivision of K'hat. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin adds that Moshe is mentioned here among the Kohanim because he acted as the Kohein (the minister to Hashem) for the sacrifices that were offered before the anointing and inauguration of the Kohanim. Therefore, Moshe was housed around the Mishkan on the Eastern side together with the Kohanim. His sons who did not minister to Hashem in this capacity were housed in their family group with the descendants of K'hat.

The first of question arising from the text comes from Rashi who answers his question based on Gemara Sanhedrin. “But it does not remember except the sons of Aharon yet they are called the sons of Moshe.” The Gemara, answers, “(he was called their father) since he taught them Torah, and one who teaches the son of his friend Torah it is as if he fathered him.” The Kli Yakar and the Or HaChaim ask, “Why is Moshe singled out as a father to Aharon's sons even though he taught Torah to the entire congregation of the B'nei Yisrael? Should he not be considered a father to all of them?” Hashem wanted to destroy Aharon as a punishment for aiding in the Golden Calf, but Moshe prayed for Hashem to spare Aharon. Moshe extended his prayer to include saving Elazar and Itamar, the sons of Aharon. Hashem forgave Aharon and his sons only because of Moshe's prayers, so they owed their lives to him.

HaRav Sorotzkin explains that in Parashat Yitro, the B'nei Yisrael accepted the Torah by saying only “na'aseh, we will do.” They had lost the idea of “na'aseh v'nishma, we will do and we will listen,” (a commitment to do all the mitzvot because Hashem commanded them) and that made possible their break with Hashem. It was not until the aftermath of the Golden Calf that they answered “na'aseh v'nishma.” It was the tribe of Levi which included the Kohanim that accepted “na'aseh v'nishma” from the beginning. The tribe of Levi did not sin at the Golden Calf, but instead destroyed those Jews who had worshipped it. It is for that reason that Moshe taught the Kohanim Torah before he began to teach it to the other tribes.

The sons of Aharon are also referred to by the title Kohanim haMushchim, the Kohanim who were anointed with oil. Sforno tells us that this distinguished them from future generations of Kohanim. According to Sforno, when the sons of Aharon were anointed together with him, they took on the same responsibilities as Aharon. They were not the Kohein Gadol, but they were Kodesh K'doshim (Holy of Holies) and were not permitted wives like future Kohanim, but were limited to non-divorcees and non-widows. A Kohein Hediot (a regular Kohein) was permitted a widow but not a divorcee. Because they adhered to the same standard as the Kohein Gadol, Elazar and Itamar could replace Aharon should he become impure. The Ramban explains that the final part of the phrase, "in the presence of Aharon their father," does not speak of Elazar and Itamar, but instead refers to the death of Nadav and Avihu. These two sons died while their father was still alive. The Ramban disagrees with Rashi and others who say that Elazar and Itamar served as Kohein Gadol when Aharon became impure. One of the reasons given for Nadav and Avihu's demise was that they chose not to have children. Had they had sons when they were anointed, those sons would have served as Kohanim in the future. In Gemara Yoma, we find that the Kohein Gadol needed to have a family when he prayed for the forgiveness of all the People on Yom Kippur. Nadav and Avihu could not have served as a substitute Kohein Gadol had Aharon become impure. This was considered a transgression on their part.

The concept that a teacher is considered to be like a father is intriguing. As an educator, one of my deepest convictions was that students become great when they are given the opportunities and the skills to become independent of the teacher. At that point, no limit can be placed on the child, for he will far exceed any limits that one might expect. The younger the child, the greater the variety in his approach to acquiring knowledge. This is exactly the importance of any approach that a parent takes with his child if he expects to develop an independent thinker. Each child is different and each child's process of learning may be different. It is not important whether a child answers correctly in the beginning, but whether he can develop the skills which will enable him to readjust his original approach to enable him to achieve the correct answer. The teacher must allow the child to grow just as a parent should allow his child to grow. Too often teachers and parents reject independent thinking rather than assist the child to support or reject his own thoughts. Helping a child learn, not what to think but how to think independently, gives every child an opportunity for success in life. It also gives him the opportunity to develop on his own and continue that development throughout his adulthood. That is the real responsibility of both a Teacher and a Parent. May we

each approach our children and our students with this in mind. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah reveals Hashem's indescribable love for His people. The prophet Hoshea 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." Hoshea 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 Hoshea 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 stayed 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 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 word "Se-u" 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? Rashi informs us that prior to the census each Jew was required to produce a book of their lineage. The Midrash adds that producing this book was also required to be able to receive the Torah. Why is receiving the Torah dependent upon having this book of lineage?

Rabbi Zweig explains that surpassing the expectations that have been defined by one's social upbringing is what gives a person a sense of accomplishment. If a person is able to identify their lineage, they might learn that their ancestors were people who took responsibility for themselves and had honorable standards. For the rest of the world, the very act of taking responsibility is in itself an elevating sense of accomplishment. However, behaving responsibly is not considered an accomplishment for G-d's chosen nation. Jews 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. The Ramban (Nachmanides) enforces the lesson of our Parsha by explaining the use of the Torah's language: The alternative meaning of "lifting" of the heads can also be a positive, but only if the body and its actions are lifted with it. Our heads and minds can lift us to greatness, so long as we have our actions to take us there. © 2017

Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

