



Parshas Bamidbar

For the week ending 29 Iyar 5759
14 & 15 May 1999

Overview

The Book of Bamidbar — “In the desert” — begins with G-d commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty — old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The Levites are counted separately later, because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the *Mishkan* and its furnishings and putting them together when the nation encamps. The Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the *Mishkan* in four sections: East, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out, the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Ephraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp. A formal transfer is made between the first born and the Levites, whereby the Levites take over the role the firstborn would have had serving in the *Mishkan* if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed Levites from one month old and up. Only Levites between 30 and 50 will work in the *Mishkan*. The remaining firstborn sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our firstborn today. The sons of Levi are divided in three main families, Gershon, Kehas and Merari (besides the *kohanim* — the special division from Kehas’ family). The family of Kehas carried the menorah, the table, the altar and the Holy Ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the ark and the altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the Levites prepare them for travel.

Insights

THE LONGEST MARRIAGE IN THE WORLD
“Take a census (lit. ‘lift up the head’) of the sons of Kehas ... according to their fathers’ households” (4:1)

Once upon a time, there was a princess who married a king. The king loved the princess very much. He wrote into their marriage agreement that he would give her a king’s ransom in jewels and palaces.

Shortly after the wedding, the king was called away on urgent business. Before he left, he told his young bride that he might be away for a long time, but she could trust that he would eventually return to her. A month went by. Then two. A year passed. There was no sign of the king. Two years went by. After five years, the people grew restless and decided to elect a new monarch. They told the princess to forget the king, that he would never return. But she said she knew that he would come back.

When it became known that a new king had ascended the throne, eligible suitors started to arrive at the door of the princess, attempting to woo her. She turned down flat every offer. She could never think of marrying another. Eventually, everyone forgot the king, except the princess.

Many, many years later, the king suddenly returned. He was amazed and overjoyed that the princess was still waiting for him. He asked the princess “How were you able to stay faithful to me for so long?” She answered, “Whenever I used to get a little sad and depressed, I would take out my marriage contract from the cupboard and read all the things that you promised me. I knew it wasn’t an illusion, because it was written in black and white.”

G-d is the King. The Jewish People are the bride. The Torah is our marriage contract.

Over three thousand years ago we went under the *chupa* wedding canopy with the Master of the World. This year, on Friday the 21st of May, we celebrate our

Prepared by Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem, Israel

©1999 Ohr Somayach International - All rights reserved.

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

info@ohr.org.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

Somayach@MSN.com

Dedication opportunities are available for Torah Weekly — Please contact us for details.

Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Eli Ballon

3,311th wedding anniversary. We don't see the King, but despite His "absence," the Jewish People still faithfully await His "return."

What keeps us going? The inviolable pact He made with us at Sinai. Ever since the nations gave up on the King, they have tried to woo the Jewish People away from waiting. However, as a nation, we have never succumbed to their blandishments.

With every year, the wait grows more difficult; further from that wedding day some three thousand years ago. But we are still here, and we know that His return is imminent.

In the weekly Parsha of *Bamidbar*, the Torah speaks about Kehas the son of Levi. Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kehas and Merari. Their families were charged with various aspects of setting up and transporting the *Mishkan*.

There are some interesting anomalies in the way the Torah speaks of these three families. In the census of Kehas it says "*Lift up the head of the sons of Kehas ... to their families, to the house of their fathers.*" However, when the Torah mentions the family of *Gershon*, it adds the words "*them as well.*" When speaking about the third son, *Merari*, however, it doesn't mention to "*lift his head*" at all.

What does all this signify?

The three sons of Levi represent three eras in the history of the Jewish People. Kehas hints to the time that the Jewish People will live in their land, concentrated and gathered together in one congregation. The name Kehas comes from the word *kehilla*, congregation. During this epoch, the greatness of the Jewish People will flow directly from their illustrious ancestors, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Thus their "*head is lifted up ... to the house of their fathers.*" Their greatness will come from the connection to the *Avos* (Patriarchs).

Then comes the era of the Diaspora. The name *Gershon* comes from the word meaning exile. The Jewish People will wander from place to place, never finding a permanent rest. Nevertheless it will still be possible to say: "*Lift up the head of the sons of Gershon, them as well, to the house of their fathers.*" Like the sons of Kehas, their honor and their distinction will come from their connection to their fathers, *as well*.

The last phase of Jewish History is embodied by *Merari*. This will be the bitterest chapter, when millions will be lost either physically or spiritually. The name *Merari* comes from the word meaning bitter (like the *maror*, bitter herbs we eat at the Seder).

When a marriage breaks down, the first thing to go is the celebration of the anniversary. When paralysis in Torah observance sets in, the first casualty is Shavuos. Pesach has been immortalized by Maxwell House. *Bris*

mila circumcision is for life. Friday night chicken soup dies hard. Everyone wants to wave a *lulav* and *esrog*. But Shavuos? What do you do on Shavuos?

On Shavuos, we celebrate our anniversary. In this bitterest of epochs, the lonely bride who waits for the return of the King is symbolized by the tribe of *Merari*. Of *Merari*, the Torah does not say "*lift up his head,*" for these last generations do not derive their honor from their connection to "the house of their fathers."

The generations who will survive a holocaust both of body and soul will need no connection to their ancestors to establish their worth. Their merit and their greatness will be self-evident.

They are like the princess who waits for the King.

... *AND COUNTING*

"Hashem spoke to Moshe...saying: Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel" (1:1,2)

Why did G-d want Moshe to count the Jewish People? Didn't He already know how many they were? Imagine you come back from doing the shopping, and your spouse takes out a pack of granulated sugar and starts to count the number of sugar grains in the pack. You would probably reach for the phone and call the doctor. However, when the bank statement drops through the letterbox, we examine every penny to make sure there are no mistakes.

We only count things that are important to us.

G-d wanted Moshe to count the Jewish People to show us how important we are to Him. For every Jewish soul is an essential part of the creation.

Sources:

The Longest Marriage In The World - Midrash, Chasam Sofer in Iturei Torah

... *And Counting - Divrei Chaim*

Haftarah: "Machar Chodesh"

Samuel I 20:18 - 20:42

The obvious reason for reading this *haftarah* when the Shabbat is a day before Rosh Chodesh is the first verse mentioning the morrow as a Rosh Chodesh. The episode took place after Saul decided to kill the young David — already his son in law — to avoid the fall of his declining reign and assure it to his worthy son Jonathan. However, Jonathan the crown prince was a good comrade of David; he wished to save him from death even at the expense of losing his future throne. The *haftara* narrates the secret pact of friendship between the two and how Jonathan warned David to flee for his life by an agreed sign they had between them.

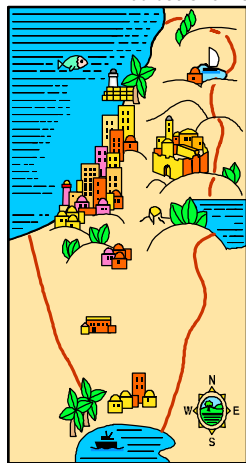
EARLY GENERATIONS

Historians and Bible critiques try to prove from this episode that the people of antiquity had the same nature as we do, with the same moral flaws and selfish inclinations, as seemingly King Saul tried wrongly to kill his fellow for the sake of maintaining his kingdom. We as believing Jews have a different outlook upon the early generations, who were much closer to G-d and had the privilege of Divine revelations through prophecy. Consequently we believe they were aloof and above the moral flaws we know today.

The deeds of Saul are easily explained that at that time the nation needed a monarchy for its survival; to this effect the Torah commands the king to maintain his kingdom, and for this permits him to kill people who seem a potential danger to his reign. Quite the contrary, King Saul was only complying with the command of the Torah when he pursued David. The proof for this is that although Jonathan met with David after sending back the lad, he did not relate the warning to flee with his own lips but relied upon the agreed sign. He did not wish to transgress the Jewish law prohibiting this, and the exchange of words between them at that meeting was only to affirm their pact of friendship.

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



GAGOT TZERIFIN AND AYIN SUKAR

TWO PLACES, TWO GRAINS, TWO HOLIDAYS

On the second day of Pesach the Omer offering was brought upon the altar of the Beit Hamikdash from barley flour. On Shavuot, seven weeks later, the Two Loaves made from wheat flour were offered in the Beit Hamikdash.

The mishna (Menachot 64b) tells us that although the grain used in both of these offerings should come from as close to Jerusalem as possible, where this was impossible it could come from distant places in Eretz Yisrael as well. This actually happened during the Hasmonean civil war, which found Aristobolus entrenched within the walls of Jerusalem, while his brother Hyrkonus laid siege without. The latter's forces had destroyed all the produce in the vicinity of Jerusalem, so a call was issued if anyone knew where barley for the Omer could be acquired. A mute Jew came along and put one hand on a roof and another on a shack. Mordechai, of Purim fame, asked the people if there was a place called Gagot (Rooves), Tzerifin (Shacks) or Tzerifin Gagot. A search was made, a place named Gagot Tzerifin was found, and barley was secured for the Omer. When the time came to find wheat for the Two Loaves on Shavuot, the same scenario ensued. This time the mute placed one hand on his eye and the other in the hole in the doorpost into which the bolt is placed. Mordechai asked if there is a place called Ayin (Eye), Sukar (Hole) or Sukar Ayin. Ayin Sukar was located, and wheat was brought for the Two Loaves.

There is no other historical record of these two remote spots that had their moment of glory in Jewish history. But the contrast between the grains used for the Omer and the TwoLoaves mentioned in this story communicates an important message. Barley is traditionally regarded in the Talmud as animal food, while wheat is the staple of humans. The Omer brought on the Festival of Freedom, Pesach, comes from barley because we achieved only physical freedom with our Exodus from Egypt, and that is only animal-like liberation. Only on Shavuot when we received the Torah did we achieve the Divine guidance that endowed us with true human intelligence and responsibility. We therefore bring our Two Loaves from the grain that is the food of humans — wheat.

Parshas Bamidbar

For the week ending 29 Iyar 5759, 14 & 15 May 1999

Torah Weekly is available from several sources:

- World Wide Web: Our address is <http://www.ohr.org.il>
- Fax and Mail in Israel and US-MAIL in America. Send us a note requesting a subscription in Israel, or call 800-431-2272 in the US for details.
- E-Mail via InterNet. To subscribe, send the message "sub weekly {your full name}" to listproc@virtual.co.il

This publication contains words of Torah. Please treat it with due respect. Do not let this land on a garbage heap.