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THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

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“In The Desert...” (1:1)

DESERT SONG - 1

The desolation of the desert stands eternally as the antithesis of life and activity. The symbol of civilization, of the flow and vitality of life, is *the city*. A city is comprised of houses, and the houses, of stones. The words of a sentence are like stones. Just as each stone by itself is devoid of life, but when combined together into a house they form the setting of life and vitality, so too are the letters of a word. When left by themselves they radiate no light or life. They are merely lifeless stones. But when they are built into words and sentences, sayings and utterances, they radiate the light of intellect that infuses life into man, that leads him and guides him.

“With the word of Hashem, the heavens were made.” The entire world was created with the combination of the letters of the Hebrew *aleph-beis*. The letters and the words are spread out and dispersed over the whole face of the earth. If, through them, we recognize and see the thread of Godliness pervading the world, if they are like beads of a necklace, revealing the Godly thread that weaves the world into one, then the world is no longer a desert of desolation, but a populous city vibrant with life and purpose. However, if we fail to comprehend the writing of the Divine Hand, if we make no effort to assemble the letters of existence into words and sen-

INSIGHTS

tences, then the world remains a desolate wilderness.

It's like two people reading the same book. One reads with insight and understanding, and the other spews forth a jumble of letters and words without grasp or comprehension. The first reader kindles the light of wisdom that is in the words; he brings them to life. The second is left with a collection of dead stones. The world is a large book. Fortunate is he who knows how to read and understand it.

DESERT SONG - 2

Just as a lover is obsessed with his beloved, so must the true student of the Torah be obsessed with his ‘beloved’ - the Torah. It must occupy his thoughts all the time, and nothing else can be as important to him. He must feel that only the Torah gives meaning to his life, that for the Torah he is prepared to forgo all the material comforts of this world, to make himself like a desert - void and ownerless. He must make himself like a virgin canvas for the Torah to paint its landscape on his soul.

The Torah was given to us in the desert. To imbibe the Torah deeply, for it to ‘water’ our soul, we must thirst for its living waters like a man thirsting for water in a desert.

We must be as humble as the desert, lowly and abandoned, forsaking our preconceived ideas, prepared to relinquish our

material desires and the distorting effects of passion. For only when we let the Torah mold our thought processes will Hashem open our eyes to the real world.

• Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin
- Torah U'Moadim

DESERT SONG - 3

Every year on the festival of Shavuos, the Jewish people again receive the Torah. On the Shabbos before Shavuos we prepare for this event. Historically, Shabbos was given to the Jewish People *before* the giving of the Torah, and it was the power of Shabbos that brought us to Sinai. For Shabbos creates unity in the Jewish People. And unity among the Jewish People is a pre-requisite for receiving the Torah. When we sit together as brothers, like one family at the Shabbos table, we re-create that same unity which was necessary for receiving the Torah at Sinai. If the unity that Shabbos creates is one way we prepare for receiving the Torah, another way is the self-abnegation of Shabbos: Instead of being ‘full with ourselves,’ we make ourselves like the desert, void of all concerns except the desire to do Hashem’s will. Every Jew has this capability of self-abnegation which expresses itself each Shabbos when we refrain from doing *melacha* (creative work).

Thus Shabbos is a necessary prelude for the receiving the Torah. As it says in the Haggada of Pesach: “*And He gave us the Shabbos and He brought us close to Mount Sinai.*”

• Sfias Emes

The book of *Bamidbar* (‘In the desert’) begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a census of all the men over the age of twenty – old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *Levi'im* 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: to the East, South, West and North. Since Levi is singled out, Yosef is split into Efraim 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 exchange is made between

the first born and the *Levi'im*, whereby the *Levi'im* take over the role the firstborn would have had serving in the *Mishkan* before the sin of the golden calf. The exchange is made using all the 22,000 surveyed *Levi'im* from one month old and up, even though only *Levi'im* 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 sons of Kehas had to carry the *Menorah*, the Table, the Altar and the Holy Ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the Ark and the Altar are covered only by Aaron and his sons, before the *Levi'im* prepared them for travel.

OVERVIEW



יום זה מְכֻבָּד
"THIS DAY IS HONORED..."

"This day is honored above all other days for on it rested The Rock (or Molder) of the Universe." The term "Tzur" used in the refrain of this song is generally translated as "Rock," referring to Hashem's power and stability. But when Chana, the mother of Shmuel Hanavi, offered thanks to Hashem for blessing her with a child (Shmuel I 2:2) she said "there is no Tzur like our G-d," which our Sages interpret as meaning that there is no "tzayar" - molder - like Hashem. A human artist, they point out, can only mold a figure on a wall but cannot instill it with life and a soul, but the Divine Molder molds a form within a form and instills it with life and soul. It is in this sense, that Hashem is the all-powerful Creator of the universe and the Supreme Molder of everything in it, that we sing this song of praise on the day when He rested from this effort.



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THE LITTLE THINGS THAT COUNT

Avraham Silvers

<silvers@netvision.net.il>wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

My son Akiva has the following question:

I am 12 years old. At parshat 'Emor' I will be observing my Bar Mitzvah. Until now I have been counting the Omer with a bracha [blessing]. When I reach thirteen I will be counting the Omer as an adult and previously I was only counting as a minor for 'chinuch' [educational purposes]. When I become bar Mitzvah, should I continue counting with a bracha as I do have a certain level of 'Temminut' [completeness], but on the other hand the quality of my mitzvah is not the same as if I had begun at the beginning? Thank you for your time, Akiva Silvers

Alan Shear of Yeshiva College

South Africa <yeshcol@global.co.za > wrote:

Dear Rabbi

Many people have asked me the following question which can really be a bit perplexing. A boy who has his bar mitzvah during Sefirat HaOmer, may he continue counting with a Bracha? This has practical application here right now, so a timely answer would be greatly appreciated. Many Thanks

Dear Akiva & Alan,

The Torah says "From the day after Pesach you shall count seven **complete** weeks..." We therefore count each day for 49 days between Pesach and Shavuot, saying "today is the first day of the Omer, today is the second day of the Omer, etc." Each day we make a blessing.

The authorities differ whether each day's count is a mitzvah by itself, or if together all 49 days comprise one single mitzvah. The differ-

ence would be in a case where someone forget to count:

If each day is a separate mitzvah, someone who forgot a day continues to fulfill the mitzvah by counting the following days. So he should continue counting and each day say the blessing.

But if together all 49 days comprise one single mitzvah, someone who missed a day can no longer fulfill the mitzvah. Consequently, he can't say the blessing.

In practice, someone who forgets a day continues to count — in accordance with the first opinion — but does not say the blessing — in consideration of the second opinion.

But what should **you** do? On the one hand, you've counted every day! But since you're not yet *bar mitzvah* and aren't



commanded by the Torah to count, perhaps your counting 'doesn't count.' Perhaps your "seven **complete** weeks" are **incomplete**.

Most *Poskim* rule that if you counted every day until your *bar mitzvah*, you continue counting with a blessing.

Interestingly enough Akiva, the command to count the Omer is found in *Parshat Emor* — your *bar mitzvah* Parsha. The verse says "Count after Pesach, the day you bring the *Omer* offering, seven complete weeks..." In Hebrew, the word '**complete**' is the 12th word of the verse. Perhaps this hints that even though you are only 12 years old and not yet *bar mitzvah*, your mitzvah of counting is nonetheless 'complete'!

Speaking of counting: Two mathematicians were debating whether a person has nine fingers or ten. Unable to convince each other, they decided the only way to resolve the argument was to actually count.

"There are ten!" said one, lifting up his hands. "Go ahead and count!" "Zero, one, two, three,..." began the other.

Sources:

- *Minchat Chinuch*, Mitzvah 306
- *Aruch HaShulchan Orach Chaim*. 489:15
- *Sheilot U'tshuvot Ktav Sofer* 99
- *Sheilot U'tshuvot Maharam Shick* 260

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last week we asked: Three members of the Jewish People whose names are mentioned in the Torah did not go out of Egypt during the Exodus. Who are they?

Answer: Tziphora, Gershom and Eliezer. Moses' wife Tziphora and his two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, lived in Midian at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Although Moses had planned to bring them along when he returned to Egypt, Aharon convinced him to the contrary. "Aren't there enough Jews suffering in Egypt already?" said Aharon.

Sources: *Exodus 18:2,3 and Rashi*

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WHEN FLESH AND FAT COMBINE

When the blood of an animal sacrifice is applied to the altar it serves as a catalyst for the fatty parts of the sacrifice (*cheilev*) to be burned on the altar and for the flesh of the sacrifice to be eaten.

What if both the fatty parts and the flesh disappeared before the blood was applied to the altar?

The rule stated by Rabbi Yehoshua is that at least a *kezayis* (olive-size) of either flesh or *cheilev* must remain intact in order for the blood application to take place. Otherwise it serves no significant purpose and cannot be performed.

Even if there is half a *kezayis* of flesh and half a *kezayis* of *cheilev* the blood is not applied to the altar for we cannot combine the altar's consumption with human consumption. But if the sacrifice in question is an *olah* which is completely consumed upon the altar the blood will be applied

even if only half a *kezayis* of flesh and half a *kezayis* of *cheilev* remain. The reason is that in the case of the *olah*, flesh and *cheilev* are both consumed upon the altar and are therefore considered one entity.

• *Menachos 9a*

the *kohanim*.

What if a non-*kohen* gathered this frankincense and handed it to a *kohen* to burn on the altar?

Rabbi Yannai ruled that this would be invalid since performed by a non-*kohen*.

The question arises, however, as to why such a seemingly inconsequential action as gathering the frankincense should be valid only if a *kohen* performs it.

Rabbi Yirmiyahu points out that both in regard to animal sacrifices and *mincha* offerings the relaying of something to the altar is considered an essential part of the service which only a *kohen* can perform.

In the case of the animal it is relaying the blood to be applied to the altar; in the case of the *mincha* the relaying of the *kometz* of meal or the frankincense to be burned on the altar. Although the non-*kohen* fails to take a single step his gathering of the frankincense and handing it to the *kohen* reduces the distance which the *kohen* would have been compelled to walk in order to perform the service of relaying this frankincense to the altar and it is therefore considered an integral part of the service which is invalid when performed by a non-*kohen*.

• *Menachos 13b*



A SACRED SHORTCUT

In the sanctuary service of

Insights, explanations and comments for the seven pages of Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle.

offering a *mincha* (a meal offering) a *kometz* (a palm-full of meal) is taken from the *mincha* and brought to the altar to be burned. Then the frankincense on the *mincha* is gathered and also burned on the altar while the remaining meal is consumed by

1. How were the Jewish People counted?
2. What was the minimum age for drafting someone?
3. Why was the Tribe of Levi not counted with the rest of the Jewish People?
4. How far away from the *Ohel Mo'ed* did the individual tribes encamp, and why this distance?
5. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
6. In what formation did the Jewish People travel in the desert?
7. Why does the Torah call the sons of Aaron the "sons of Aaron and Moshe"?
8. Why did the *Levi'im* receive a tithe ("*ma'aser rishon*")?
9. Why were the *Levi'im* chosen to serve in the *Ohel Mo'ed*?
10. Why were the *Levi'im* counted only after the age of one month?
11. Name one member of the tribe of Levi who was counted at birth.
12. Who assisted Moshe in counting the *Levi'im*?
13. What negative influence did the family of Kehas have on its neighbors?

14. What positive influence did Moshe have on his neighbors?
15. Which descendant of Levi was not numbered along with the *Levi'im*?
16. In verse 3:39, the Torah states that the total number of *Levi'im* was 22,000. The actual number of *Levi'im* was 22,300. Why does the Torah ignore 300 *Levi'im*?

17. The firstborn males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five shekels which was equal to twenty pieces of silver. What other firstborn had previously been valued at this price?

18. There were 22,000 *Levi'im* who were an "exchange" for the firstborn. There were 22,273 firstborn among the other Tribes. The remaining 273

redeemed themselves by paying five shekels. How did Moshe determine which of the first-born had to pay?

19. During what age-span is a man considered at his full strength?
20. As the camp was readying itself for travel, who was in charge of covering the vessels of the *Mishkan* in preparation for transport?



I Didn't Know That!

The *Nasi* of the Tribe of Shimon, Shlumiel ben Tzorishadi (1:6), appears in the Torah in two other places under different names. He was Shaul ben Canaanis, who entered Egypt as one of the 70 souls (*Bereishis 46:10*). Also, he was Zimri ben Salo, who was killed by Pinchas at the end of *Parshas Balak*.

Sanhedrin 82b

Bonus Question ?

At the conclusion of the census (1:44-46), the Torah emphasizes three times that the Jewish People were "numbered." Why?

Answers on back page

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

- 1:2 - Each person donated a half-shekel (see *Shemos* 38:26).
- 1:3 - Twenty years old.
- 1:49 - Since they were "separated" for service in the *Mishkan* they were counted separately. Also, those who were "numbered" would die in the desert, and *Levi'im* were not to be punished since they did not participate in the sin of the golden calf.
- 2:2 - 1 *mil* [2000 *amos*], the permitted distance for travel on Shabbos. This allowed them to go there on Shabbos.
- 2:9 - The cloud over the *Ohel Mo'ed* would depart, and the *Kohanim* would blow the trumpets.
- 2:9 - In the formation in which they encamped.
- 3:1 - Because Moshe taught them Torah.
- 3:8 - The *Levi'im* served in the *Mishkan* in place of everyone else, and received tithes

as "payment".

- 3:12 - Since the *Levi'im* did not sin with the golden calf, they were chosen to replace the first borns who did sin and were thereby disqualified.



- 3:15 - A child is not known to be viable until it has lived thirty days.
- 3:15 - Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, was born while the Jewish People were entering the gates of Egypt. She is counted as one of the seventy souls who entered Egypt.
- 3:16 - The *Shechina*.

- 3:29 - Their proximity to the Tribe of Reuven led some of the Reuvenites to become involved in the rebellion of Korach.
- 3:38 - Moshe camped in the East, adjacent to the Tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar, and Zevulun. Many from these Tribes became great Torah scholars.
- 3:39 - Aaron *HaKohen*.
- 3:39 - The *Levi'im* were being counted in order that they might be used to redeem the firstborn of the Jewish People. Since 300 *Levi'im* were themselves first born, they could not be used to redeem others. Thus, the Torah didn't include them.
- 3:46 - Yosef, Rachel's firstborn, was sold by his brothers for 20 pieces of silver (*Bereishis* 37:28).
- 3:50 - By lottery.
- 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50 years old.
- 4:5 - The *Kohanim*.

Recommended Reading List

RAMBAN	IBN EZRA
Introduction to <i>Bamidbar</i>	1:19 Organization of the Camp
1:3 The Draft Age	
1:45 The Reason for Counting	SFORNO
2:2 The Organization of the Camp	Introduction to <i>Bamidbar</i>
3:14 The <i>Levi'im</i>	
4:16 The Role of Elazar ben Aaron	

Bonus Answer!

To stress that the census served three distinct purposes. They were:

- To determine who was fit for military service.
- To publicize *Hashem's* greatness, that from 70 souls who entered Egypt, He created a nation of over 600,000.
- To allow Moshe and Aaron the opportunity to bless each member of the Jewish People individually.

• *Ksav Sofer*

HAFTORAH: Hoshea 2:1-22

The history of the Jewish People shows that specifically in those lands in which we have been oppressed and separated into ghettos, Jewish Life has flourished. However, where we have experienced acceptance and dwelled in comfort with equal rights, the scourge of assimilation and the disappearing Jew has taken root. This spiritual holocaust has caused a hemorrhage

"And it shall be in the place where it will be said of them 'You are not my people,' it will be said to them 'The children of the living G-d.'" (2:1)

which has ravaged whole limbs of the body of the Jewish People. The prophet Hoshea teaches us here that "It shall be in the place that it will be said to them you

are not my people" - specifically in those places where the Jews will be rejected and scorned as being inferior, "it will be said to you — children of the living G-d." There it will also be that you will guard well your source, the Torah, until it will become apparent and clear that you are the "children of the living G-d."

• *Bikurei Aviv*

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