

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT BAMIDBAR • 27 IYAR 5782 28 MAY 2022 • VOL 29 NO. 30
THIS WEEK IS BEHAR OUTSIDE ISRAEL - SAVE THIS FOR NEXT SHABBAT

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

In The Family

“Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Yisrael... according to their families.” (1:2)

When it comes to exercise, swimming is a arguably a more effective exercise than either weight training or running or any other exercise for that matter. Swimming laps, back and forth, is much more calming than the repetitive “dreadmill” for most people I know. It is more fun, carries a much smaller chance of injury, and is the perfect way to cool off from the summer heat or get an effective indoor workout during the snowy winter months. Swimming is the easiest way to get a full-body workout. And if you have a good technique in your swim stroke, you can safely perform all of the cardio that any goal requires without doing damage to your body.

My wife is a keen swimmer. One of our daughters is not as keen, to put it mildly. One day, however, my wife managed to persuade her to go with her to the pool. After a mild look of distaste as she got into the water, my daughter actually started to enjoy herself.

Leaving my daughter, my wife went over to the other side of the pool where two lanes are marked off for the “serious” swimmers. She started to do her laps.

About ten minutes later, someone swimming on the wrong side of the lane banged into her with considerable force. “What are you doing?” she said. “Don’t you know what side of the lane you’re supposed to swim on? I hope you don’t drive a car!” After she had drained the water from her goggles, she took a look at this “reckless driver” and said, “Oh, darling, it’s you!” It was my daughter. “Are you okay? I hope I didn’t hurt you!”

A renowned rabbi once taught, “The souls all have one Father, and it is on account of this common root in the One Hashem that all of Israel are called ‘brothers’ – in the full sense of the word. Only the bodies are distinct from each other. Therefore, there can be no true love and fraternity between those who regard their bodies as primary and their souls secondary, but only a love based on an external factor.”

If we see every Jew as our brother – or our daughter – and if we see each other “according to their families,” we will truly be a nation of brothers and sisters.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an "ot" and a "degel"?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed techum Shabbat - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 amot on Shabbat?
6. What was the signal for the camp to travel?
7. What was the sum total of the counting of the 12 tribes?
8. Why are Aharon's sons called "sons of Aharon and Moshe"?
9. Who was Nadav's oldest son?
10. Which two people from the Book of Esther does Rashi mention in this week's Parsha?
11. Why did the levi'im receive ma'aser rishon?
12. Which groups of people were counted from the age of one month?
13. Name the first descendant of Levi in history to be counted as an infant.
14. Who assisted Moshe in counting the levi'im?
15. Why did so many people from the tribe of Reuven support Korach in his campaign against Moshe?
16. Why did so many people from the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun become great Torah scholars?
17. In verse 3:39 the Torah states that the total number of levi'im was 22,000. The actual number was 22,300. Why does the Torah seem to ignore 300 levi'im?
18. The firstborn males of the Jewish People were redeemed for five shekalim. Why five shekalim?
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?

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

Answers

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe's flag was the color of that tribe's stone in the breastplate of the kohen gadol.
4. 2:2 - An "ot" is a flag, i.e. a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A degel is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 amot from the Ohel Moed. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the Ohel Moed on Shabbat.
6. 2:9 - The cloud over the Ohel Moed departed and the kohanim sounded the trumpets.
7. 2:32 - 603,550.
8. 3:1 - Since Moshe taught them Torah, it's as if he gave birth to them.
9. 3:4 - Nadav had no children.
10. 3:7 - Bigtan and Teresh.
11. 3:8 - Since the leviim served in the Mishkan in place of everyone else, they received tithes as "payment."
12. 3:15, 40 - The leviim, and the firstborn of Bnei Yisrael.
13. 3:15 - Levi's daughter Yocheved was born while the Jewish People were entering Egypt. She is counted as one of the 70 people who entered Egypt.
14. 3:16 G-d.
15. 3:29 - The tribe of Reuven was encamped near Korach, and were therefore influenced for the worse. This teaches that one should avoid living near the wicked.
16. 3:38 - The tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun were encamped near Moshe, and were therefore influenced for the good. This teaches that one should seek to live near the righteous.
17. 3:39 - Each levi served to redeem a first-born of the Jewish People. Since 300 leviim were themselves firstborn, they themselves needed to be redeemed, and could therefore not redeem others.
18. 3:46 - To atone for the sale of Yosef, Rachel's firstborn, who was sold by his brothers for five shekalim (20 pieces of silver.)
19. 4:2 - Between the ages of 30 and 50.
20. 4:5 - The Kohanim.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 12) – BLESSING OF PROSPERITY

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”
(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The ninth blessing reads: “Bless on our behalf, Hashem, this year and all its kinds of crops for the best, and give [*in the winter we add: ‘dew and rain for’] a blessing on the face of the earth, and satisfy us from Your bounty, and bless our year like the best years. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who blesses the years.”

Following the sequence of the blessings we now ask Hashem for financial security. The previous blessing was asking for physical and spiritual wellbeing, and this blessing is a request for material wellbeing. Why is it the *ninth* blessing? The Hebrew letter for the number nine in *gematria* is *tet*. The Talmud teaches (*Bava Kamma* 55a) that to see the Hebrew letter *tet* in a dream is a propitious omen. Our Sages explain that the first place the letter *tet* is found in the Torah is in Genesis 1:4, where it begins the word “*tov* – good.” Therefore, *tet*, and its numerical value nine, represent goodness.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab questions how it is possible to ask Hashem for material success. After all, Rabbi Tachlifa the brother of Ravnai Choza’ah teaches (*Beitzah* 16a-b) that a person’s livelihood is determined each year during the days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur. During these Ten Days of Repentance a person can change, with prayer and repentance, their total income for the coming year, but once Yom Kippur is over, there seems to be nothing a person can do to increase their annual income. Rabbi Schwab points out that Rabbi Tachlifa’s statement continues by explaining that expenses made in honor of Shabbat and Yom Tov,

and any expenditures for teaching our children Torah, are not included in a person’s annual income. Accordingly, every year, anew, a person’s earnings can change both for the good and for the not-so-good depending on how much they invest in Shabbat and Yom Tov and in Torah education. As Rabbi Schwab writes so eloquently about supporting Torah education, “This does not mean only that one pays tuition and supports the yeshivahs where his own children learn, but it also means that he supports the yeshivahs and Torah institutions where other children learn.” Therefore, the more a person “invests” in these spiritual pursuits, the more their income will be enhanced – not just to cover these specific expenses but in every aspect of life. This is as the Talmud continues, “If one spends less, he receives less, and if he spends more, he receives more.” Rashi explains that the amount that a person spends on these mitzvahs will determine how profitable all their business projects will be.

Our blessing requests that Hashem “bless our year like the best years,” but there is no description of the identity of these “best years”. In *Devarim* (32:15) is a somewhat enigmatic verse that reads, “*Yeshurun* became fat and kicked”. Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the term *Yeshurun* is referring to the Jewish nation at its peak of spiritual connection to Hashem. Being “fat” means that they were blessed with a plentitude of material wealth. In fact, so much wealth that it caused them to succumb to their physical desires and, ultimately, to kick (i.e. to rebel) against Hashem. Consequently, the *Siach Yitzchak* defines “best years” as the Jewish nation being on the highest spiritual levels and being blessed with great

material blessings *without* this being the cause of our downfall.

The Brisker Rav married into a very wealthy family. So wealthy, that his father-in-law gave him an entire street in Warsaw for his dowry! However, the gift came along with many obligations, such as finding tenants, collecting rent, hiring superintendents to maintain the houses. All these responsibilities were distracting him from the only thing that he truly wanted to do, which was to learn Torah. In order to be able to continue learning undisturbed, the Brisker Rav decided he would hire an agent to sell all the houses for him so that he did not have to worry about their profitability. However, before the agent was able to sell anything, the First World War broke out and the Brisker Rav had to flee Warsaw temporarily. When he finally returned, the agent was no longer alive. The Brisker Rav went to the government archives to see what had happened to his properties. He discovered that the agent was not honest and had registered the street with all its houses in his own name, leaving the Brisker Rav with no assets or income and with no legal recourse for justice. To encourage himself to try to overcome this enormous setback, the Brisker Rav reviewed the chapter about faith and trust entitled *Sha'ar HaBitachon* (Gate of Trust) in the classic work *Chovat HaLevavot* (Duties of the Heart) by Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Paquda. He reviewed it many times in order to

truly internalize its messages, and he was successful in applying these teachings to his personal condition. Later on in life, the Brisker Rav would say, "I used to think that someone who owns a street in Warsaw is wealthy. Now I know that someone who studies *Sha'ar HaBitachon* tens of times is wealthy. Because no one in the world is happier than someone who has trust in Hashem!"

In a certain way, the Brisker Rav was paraphrasing the prophet Yirmiyahu (9:22-23), "Thus said Hashem, let not the wise man glorify himself with his wisdom and let not the strong man glorify himself with his strength, [and] let not the rich man glorify himself with his wealth. For only with *this* may one glorify himself: [by] contemplating and knowing Me..." Rabbi Moshe Alshich (1508-1593) is considered to be one of the most influential scholars and Kabbalists of his generation. Among several other works, he wrote commentaries on the Torah and the Prophets that are considered to be classic masterpieces. In his commentary on the verse above, he writes that wealth, strength and intellect are all gifts granted to a person by Hashem. The only thing that we can really lay claim to as being truly ours is the amount of toil and effort that we invest in our Torah learning.

To be continued

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PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE BARLEY STALK

The barley stalk says: "A prayer of the poor man as he bends over, and he pours out his supplication before Hashem" (*Tehillim* 102:1).

The barley grain is associated with lowliness. It is bare of chaff and appears uncovered and unprotected, resembling a poor man. It is appropriate for animal fodder, but not for bread that is fit for human beings. Yet, it is with this very inferiority that the barley stalk sings of the ideal stance of the supplicant: humble, vulnerable, and dependent upon Hashem, like "a poor man as he bends over, and before Hashem he pours out his supplication."

Barley is not offered in the Beit Hamikdash, except to symbolize a lowly and unrefined state, such as for the Omer offering immediately following Pesach that marks the beginning of the count leading up to Shavuot. The seven weeks of this count is a transitory period of national purification in preparation for the receiving of the Torah on Shavuot, similar to how one contaminated as a *zav* must count seven days of purification. Whenever we bring an offering, we are humbling ourselves, and this is especially so regarding the lowly Omer offering. Therefore, the first step in quest to refine ourselves is to humble ourselves through this offering.

▪ Sources: *Kol Rinah*; *Shem MiShmuel* (*Shemini*)

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of Bamidbar – "In the desert" – begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty – old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The *levi'im* are counted separately later on because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the Mishkan and its furnishings, and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 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 *levi'im*, whereby the *levi'im* take over the role the first-born 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 *levi'im* from one month old and up. Only *levi'im* between 30 and 50 will work in the Mishkan. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver, similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided into the three main families of Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the *kohanim* – the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat 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 *levi'im* prepare them for travel.

PARSHA PONDERERS

by Rabbi Rafi Wolfe

Fire, Water & Desert

“Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting...” (*Numbers 1:1*)

The Jewish nation, ever since our inception at the Exodus from Egypt and the National Revelation at Mount Sinai, has been pursued by the enemies of Torah. Throughout the generations there were always new means created to try to extinguish the flame of our tradition. Our national memory recalls that these efforts have grown stronger and mightier, seemingly beyond the boundaries of nature. We know it was not only one Jew who gave up their life to preserve the Torah, but myriads. Yet, our enemies' efforts to slaughter us have proven futile, as the Torah is just as present as ever.

What is our nations' secret to such superhuman strength? How have Jews always been able to refuse to budge and stand up for what is right even under threat of death? The key is to examine how the Torah was given. Our Sages tell us that the Torah was given to us with fire, with water and in the desert (*Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7; Midrash Tanchuma Bamidbar 6*). It was given to us with fire, as the verse says that Mount Sinai was burning with fire (*Exodus 19:18*). It was given to us with water, as the verse says that at that time the Heavens and clouds dripped water (*Judges 5:4*). Finally, it was given to us in the wilderness, as the verse says that Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai. These three things symbolize the ability of the Jewish People to be *moser nefesh*, to give up our lives for what is right.

Fire reminds us of our forefather Avraham. Our Sages teach us that he was ordered to bow down to an idol, or that he would be thrown into a fiery furnace. Avraham defiantly rejected any form of idol worship and was consequently thrown into the fiery furnace (see Rashi to *Genesis 11:28*). This showed tremendous strength of character. A miracle occurred and Avraham was not harmed. However, one could perhaps argue that Avraham was a unique character in history. Who says that the Jewish nation has any remote connection to his superhuman abilities?

As a response to this we are told that the Torah was given with water. This reminds us of the splitting of the sea. As the Jewish people were escaping Egypt, they hit a dead end, with the sea in front of them and the Egyptians quickly approaching from behind. Moshe told the Jews to travel nonetheless, and they fearlessly proceeded forwards. Every member of the nation risked their life for the sake of Hashem, and the sea miraculously split. However, that was a one-time majestic show of faith. Who says it is something that would or could last, having any relevance to us today?

To this, we are told that the Torah was given in the wilderness. What's the significance of this? The wilderness is not a safe place. There are snakes and scorpions. There are no natural resources, such as food and water. The Jews left Egypt without the proper provisions. They ended up wandering seemingly aimlessly for forty years. The entire time, the Jews remained strong with their love of Hashem. They were not afraid of the elements. Although they were technically endangering their life by following His word, they knew that Hashem would take care of them. This reliance on Hashem in the face of danger made a tremendous impression on generations to come.

Now we can understand why our Sages say that the Torah was given with fire, water and in the wilderness. These three things symbolize three pivotal moments in Jewish history where a grand display of *mesirut nefesh*, the ability to surrender one's life, was performed. They ingrained in our “spiritual DNA” the ability to withstand all trials, allowing the Torah to last for all generations.

**This essay is based on the introduction to Ohr HaMeir, the responsa of Rav Meir Shapiro, the founder of the Daf Yomi movement*

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Yevamot 65-71

Bending the Truth

Rabbi Illah said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Rabbi Shimon, "It is permitted to 'change one's words' for the sake of peace..." Rabbi Nasan said, "It is a mitzvah..."

Although the Torah teaches not to lie, this is not stated in absolute terms. Instead of the Torah stating, "Do not lie," it says "Distance from falsehood." (Exodus 23:1) The implication is that one should maintain "distance" from lying, but that under certain circumstances it is not forbidden to lie.

Another interpretation of the concept of distancing from falsehood is to carefully word one's statement in a way that is not absolutely false. For example, one might say something that "contains" two different messages. Even if one message is not true but will appease the listener, if it also conveys a second message that is true, the statement cannot be called a lie. Some commentaries explain this is what is meant in our *sugya* by the phrase "to change one's word." In addition, omitting a fact in one's statement for the sake of peace might also be considered as changing one's word, and be permitted, as opposed to vocalizing an outright lie.

I recall a question a mother asked me some time ago. She said, "My daughter lied about taking a large amount of candy from the pantry, which I had bought for another purpose. She wanted to bring it to school to help entertain her friends on a long field trip bus ride. She lied outright, promising us she didn't take it. A little later, we spoke about it jokingly as "the mystery of the candy," and she continued to lie. Soon after, I found it in her room. What should we do?"

I replied, "In the vast majority of cases, the truth is by far the best route to take. I suggest you tell your daughter in a non-accusatory way that you found the

candy in her room and that you know that she took it. We are taught to be honest by the Torah to keep a distance from falsehood. Or, as people say, "Honesty is the best policy."

I then proceeded to explain to the mother that she should not be quick to harshly judge her daughter's lie.

I explained why: "Is a white lie really considered a sin? Especially in a situation where it would incredibly hurt the feelings or affect the actions of the person implicated? A "white lie" – a falsehood that does not cause any harm – is not as serious as cheating or being dishonest in business. Nevertheless it is still usually prohibited or at least frowned upon, but in limited cases is permitted. One such case, for example, is where it will bring peace between people. Moshe's brother Aharon HaKohen is praised for the way he made peace between quarreling parties, including husband and wife. He would approach one of the people and say "The other person sent me with apologies for their behavior." Then he would go to the other person and say the same thing. The next time the two people met on the street or in the house, they would ask each other for forgiveness. Aharon HaKohen is exemplary in Torah literature as one who "loves peace and pursues peace." (The Midrash adds that when the reunited families would have baby boys, they would name them Aharon after him.)

Even when it is permitted to lie, one should avoid it if possible, as illustrated by the following incident in Shas. The wife of the great Sage Rav always did the opposite of what he requested. If Rav asked for lentils, she made beans, and if he asked for beans, she made lentils. When Rav's son, Chiya, grew up, he tried to correct the situation. Chiya told his mother the opposite of what his father wanted, thereby tricking her into making the correct food. Rav,

realizing what Chiya had done, chastised him by quoting the verse: "They have taught their tongues to speak falsehood." Rav meant that a person should avoid lying even where it is permitted, so as not to become accustomed to lying and lose one's integrity.

falsifying, beginning with dishonesty in crime and monetary matters and ending with a few types of "white lies." I highly recommend the study of this essential Torah work.

▪ *Yevamot 65b*

Rabbi Yona Gerundi in his classic "The Gates of Repentance" enumerates nine different levels of

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

The Census: Where Everyone Counts

The opening command of this fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar, is to take a census of the nation as an *eidah*, a community united by a common calling. The counting of individuals conveys that every individual personally 'counts' as an important member of the community, and that the communal mission may be accomplished only when each member devotes himself to it. The manner of counting was by donation of a half-shekel, and the total sum collected was used for the upkeep of the Sanctuary. The message in this mode of counting is that every Jew is counted and valued only on the basis of his commitment to the Torah; the census is taken in the service of the Sanctuary.

This *eidah* community of the *Children of Israel* is counted in their subgroups – according to their *families*, which in turn comprise their *tribes*. The tribes are called *matot*, literally *branches*, on account of their one common stem, and they are also called *beit avot* on account of the numerous families in each tribe.

This is the uniqueness of the Jewish nation: The nation as a whole is considered one house, the House of Israel, and its members are called the

children of one man, the Children of Israel. Our myriads descend from one man – our forefather Yisrael. And although multitudinous and even diverse, not a single member is left without the impression of the same stamp, the stamp that bears throughout the ages our heritage of one mission and one destiny.

Amidst this fundamental unity, the counting also emphasizes the diversity of qualities unique to the tribes and families of Israel. This diversity is nurtured and preserved as much as is the unity of mission. Indeed, the unified mission can be accomplished *only* when diversity is embraced, and the special character traits, variety of professions and positions in life, are given their full expression, and passed on to the next generation. This is why the hundreds of thousands of members of the *Children of Israel* do not come to the nation as unorganized multitudes, but rather according to *their families*, according to *their father's heads* (tribes), *by name*. The sum here is a sum only of its parts – each indispensable part with a name, a family and a tribe.

▪ *Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 1:2*