

Torah Weekly

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PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

25 Iyar – 2 Sivan 5784
2-8 June 2024

Torah: Numbers 1:1-4:20
Haftorah: Hosea 2:1-22

Every Jew Counts

Once there was a small town consisting of only a few Jewish families. Between them, they had exactly ten men over the age of bar mitzvah. They were all dedicated people and they made sure that they never missed a minyan. One day, a new Jewish family moved in to town. Great joy and excitement; now they would have eleven men. But a strange thing happened. As soon as they had eleven, they could never manage a minyan!

When we know we are indispensable, we make a point of being there. Otherwise, "count me out."

This week in the Torah reading of Bamidbar, we read of the census taken of the Jewish people. This portion is always read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, the "season of the giving of the Torah." One important and obvious connection is that in the Torah, too, every letter counts. One missing letter invalidates the entire scroll. Likewise, one missing Jew leaves Jewish peoplehood lacking, incomplete. Nine of the holiest rabbis cannot make a minyan. Enter one little bar-mitzvah boy, and the minyan is complete! When we count Jews, there are no distinctions. We don't look at religious piety or academic achievement. The rabbi and the rebel, the philanthropist and the pauper — all count for one: no more, no less.

If we count Jews because every Jew counts, then that implies a responsibility on Jewish communal leadership to ensure that no Jew is missing from the kehillah, from the greater community. It implies a responsibility to bring those Jews who are on the periphery of Jewish life inside. To make sure they feel that they belong and are welcome — even if they haven't paid any membership fees. It also means that the individual Jew has commitments and obligations. If

you're important, don't get lost. You are needed.

Today, we are losing a lot of Jews to ignorance. But sometimes we also lose them because we didn't embrace them as we could have. At a time when they were receptive, we didn't make them feel welcome.

Other faiths, ideologies and cults are using "love bombs" to entice Jews to their way of life. Very often they prey on the weak and vulnerable among us. Anyone desperately seeking warmth, love and a sense of belonging will be an easy target for such groups. But there are lots of ordinary, stable people who crave these things too. Don't we all? If the Jewish community doesn't provide that warm welcome, we may very well find them going elsewhere.

Some years ago, we had a visiting Rabbi from Canada speaking in our shul. His talk was about the very real threat of "Jews for J." and so-called "Hebrew-Christians" who preyed on unsuspecting Jews by using Jewish symbols and even so-called "shuls," or Messianic Synagogues, which are really nothing more than churches in disguise. He described how these individuals make every deceitful effort to confuse ignorant Jews into believing they are going to a Jewish house of worship. A woman in the audience then asked, "Rabbi, if I am traveling out of town and want to go to shul, how will I know if I am going to a real shul or one of these impostor synagogues?" The Rabbi laughed and said, "When you go into these places, they bombard you. As soon as they see a new face, a dozen people will come over to welcome you and give you a seat and a book and make you feel at home. But what happens when you go into a real shul? Nobody greets you. Nobody looks at you. And the first person to say a word to you growls at you because you're sitting in his seat!"

A sad, sad joke indeed.

We need to embrace everyone who walks in through our doors. And we

need to do more than just wait for people to come to shul and make them feel welcome. We need to go out and find our people wherever they may be. Most certainly, when someone shows a spark of interest — a soul seeking its source — we need to be there, as an organized community, and as individuals. So next time you notice someone sitting at the back of the shul looking lost, or even just a new face in the crowd, try and spare a smile. You may save a soul. Every Jew really does count. Let's count them in.

By Yossy Goldman

Desert Honeymoon

I was sitting at the dining room table this week when a movement outside the window caught my eye: I looked up to see a roadrunner. For those of you not in the desert, a roadrunner is a kind of bird that looks like a cross between a woodpecker and an eagle that hasn't eaten for a week. In its mouth this roadrunner was holding a white lizard, which looked like a Mattel dinosaur that hadn't been painted yet. I ran to grab my new camera, a birthday present. My kids have been too busy to show me how it works and I've been too slow to learn.

I snapped away as the roadrunner repeatedly flung the lizard to the ground until the lizard's neck became covered with blood. The pictures, of course, didn't come out, so no, I won't be featured in next month's National Geographic.

To the right of our place forty homes are going up; to the left, hundreds. The desert vistas are giving way to tract homes. Those who haven't been to the desert are surprised when they get here; apparently, they expected to see silent sand dunes baking in the sun all the way to the horizon. Those who live here think of it as hotter than Los Angeles, with better air than the Valley and less traffic than Orange County. But

Psalms Daily

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Pirkei Avot (6:1)

Rabbi Meir would say: Whoever studies Torah for Torah's sake alone, merits many things; not only that, but [the creation of] the entire world is worthwhile for him alone.*

** In this context, "Torah" refers to, not just to the Bible itself, but also its commentaries, such as the Talmud.*

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No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

with the homes, golf courses, pools, and malls the desert part of it is easily forgotten. Or ignored. The desert is desolate, bare; where survival is chancy and death stares you in the face. Where without irrigation and air-conditioning you would never go, never mind go for a honeymoon. But this is where the good L-rd took us as soon as we left Egypt.

There was no food, no water, and enough sun and scorpions to kill many times over. And we went. Blindly.

He led and we followed and years later, when the marriage went sour, He remembered our blind love and He turned a blind eye. And then we got sour with Him and we too turned

a blind eye, and we settled into being an old married couple. But before we had a chance to get too grumpy, along came a Rebbe who brought a zest and a zing and everything back to the marriage so that we're back on a honeymoon.

And for a honeymoon there is no place better than the desert. Not because of the golf courses. The desert has its own beauty. The vastness, the emptiness, the stark majesty call to the fore something big, majestic, and unchanging. Trees and grass for all their beauty and usefulness block that. Houses and fences, for all that we need them, call to mind our accomplishment. And in the face of

accomplishment, the stark majesty is lost. We go back to the desert, that state of blind love and that state of vast majesty. Our love, His majesty. His love, that majesty that pulsates somewhere inside of us. Underneath all the accomplishments. It is the week we begin Numbers, the fourth book of the Torah five, which calls attention to "in the wilderness". It calls attention to this state in the week of Shavuot, the holiday which commemorates when the Torah was given in the desert. At Sinai. And as our 3336th anniversary draws close, we hold His hand and are grateful that our marriage feels young.

By Shimon Posner

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, June 2, 2024-25 Iyar, 5784

Cologne Jews Saved (1096)

During the First Crusade, the crusaders were locked out of Cologne, Germany and the local Jews saved, following the orders of the local bishop to close the gates to the city. In several local provinces, where the local bishop tried to avert the masses from harming the Jews, the Bishop had to escape for his own safety.

Toledo Massacre (1355)

1,200 Jews were massacred by a Christian and Muslim mob attack on the Jewish section of Toledo, Spain, on this date in 1355.

Monday, June 3, 2024-26 Iyar, 5784

Six-Day War (1967)

In the spring of 1967, the Arab capitals paraded their arms and openly spoke of overrunning the Land of Israel and casting its inhabitants into the sea. On Iyar 26 (June 5, 1967), Israel launched preemptive strikes on its southern, eastern, and northern frontiers. In just six days, the Jewish army defeated five Arab armies on three fronts and liberated territories of its promised homeland amounting to an area greater than its own size, including the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Wednesday, June 5, 2024-28 Iyar, 5784

Passing of Shmuel (877 BCE)

The Prophet Shmuel (Samuel) passed away on 28 Iyar 2884 (877 BCE).

Adolf Eichmann Executed (1962)

Adolf Eichmann was hanged at Ramleh Prison in Israel following his trial and conviction for his crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, and war crimes during World War II. Eichmann was a key party in the implementation of Hitler's infamous "final solution." The height of his "career" was reached in Hungary in 1944, when he managed to transport 400,000 Jews to the gas chambers in less than five weeks.

Jerusalem Liberated (1967)

The Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount were liberated during the 1967 Six-Day

Thursday, June 6, 2024-29 Iyar, 5784

Passing of R. Meir of Premishlan (1850)

R. Meir of Premishlan was a famous Chassidic master and a noted miracle worker. Although he lived in poverty, he exerted himself tirelessly for the needy and the suffering. His divine inspiration and his ready wit have become legendary.

Friday, June 7, 2024-1 Sivan, 5784

Flood Waters Recede (2105 BCE)

150 days after the rains stopped falling in the Great Flood, the raging waters which covered the face of the earth calmed and began to subside at the rate of one cubit every four days.

Encampment at Sinai (1313 BCE)

On the 1st of Sivan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE), six weeks after their exodus from Egypt, the Children of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai in the Sinai Desert and camped at the foot of the mountain "as one man, with one heart" in preparation for the receiving of the Torah from G-d. On this day, however "Moses did not say anything to them, because of their exhaustion from the journey."

Korach Swallowed (1312 BCE)

Korach, who led a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, met his end when, miraculously, "the ground split beneath them... And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained to Korach, and all their possessions" - Numbers 16:31-32

Worms Jews Massacred (1096)

At the end of a week in which a group Jews took refuge in a local castle in Worms, Germany, the crusaders massacred them during their morning prayers.

Ezekiel Describes Assyria's Downfall (423 BCE)

In a reprimand to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, Ezekiel describes the downfall of Assyria in the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, some twenty years earlier. Using highly descriptive terms, Ezekiel likens Assyria to a lofty, mighty cedar tree that was chopped down.

Shabbat, June 8, 2024-2 Sivan, 5784

Chosen People (1313 BCE)

Sivan 2 is marked on the Jewish calendar as Yom HaMeyuchas ("Day of Distinction"); it was on this day that G-d told Moses - when Moses ascended Mount Sinai for the first time - to tell the people of Israel: "You shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine. You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" - Exodus 19:4-6

Israel Captures Golan Heights (1967)

Until the Six-Day War, the Syrian army was deployed in strong fortifications on the Golan Heights, from which they repeatedly shelled the Israeli settlements below. On the fifth day of the war, the Israeli army broke through the Syrian front. Facing very difficult topographical conditions, they scaled the steep and rugged heights. The Engineering Corps cleared the way of mines, followed by bulldozers which leveled a route for the tanks on the rocky face. After more than 24 hours of heavy fighting, the Syrian deployment collapsed, and the Syrian forces fled in retreat.

Passing of R. Chaim Elazar Spira, Rebbe of Munkatch (1937)

R. Chaim Elazar Spira was a Chassidic Rebbe who lived in Munkatch (today known as Mukachevo, in western Ukraine). One of the prominent leaders of Orthodox Jewry in interwar Europe, R. Spira was known for his community activism and strong convictions. Among his many works are Minchat Elazar, Ot Chaim V'Sholom, and Divrei Torah.