

This Week In Torah *B'Midbar*

Time for some little bits of trivia---

1. **The names of the books of the Torah are assigned in Hebrew by the first key word in the text: *bereshit*, *shemot*, *Vayikra*, *b'midbar*, and *devarim*. While they were assigned by English name according to a major theme in the text: Genesis [creation], Exodus [leaving Egypt], Leviticus [priestly and cultic material], Numbers [census], Deuteronomy [second telling of Law].**

We are starting the fourth book of Torah this week, which deals with a census of the Levites. We meet various groups within that clan, such as the Kohathites who we read about in chapter 4 who are the packers and movers of the *Aron HaKodesh* [the Holy Ark] and all the sacred objects of the *Mishkan*. Our own Rabbi Eleanor Pearlman taught us that when names appear in Torah, they should be viewed as one of the greatest honors possible. They are singled out and their names should jump out to us—for even God thought the work and/or presence was of great importance. By and large, the work of the Levites have come to an end—first as our ancestors' wanderings ceased when they reached the Promised Land. And then the work of Levites and the *kohanim* ended when the Second Temple was destroyed. Yet, we cherish their legacies.

2. **According to the Talmud in Tractate *Nazir*-- when a member, a Levite who lived in a town was invited to work in the Second Temple, the Levite was “elevated” and carried out of town as an emissary for their community. In Torah-- when a census is taken, people “lifted their heads” to be counted. The custom of lifting a person in a chair at a *simcha* is a combination of these 2 practices.**

When we take count of those whom we care about, we are elevating them in our eyes. They will stand out as they are lifted above the mundane that clouds our lives. It is

not merely enough to count them—but to count ON them as well as having them count on US. That is the difference between a census and a sacred element of living our lives which values the people in our lives.

3. Towards the end of Tractate Sotah, there is a bizarre story of the prophet Elisha performing miracles in the town of Jericho.

Afterwards, he was left to travel alone. On the road by himself, he was accosted by 42 “children” and as they assaulted, a bear jumped out from the forest and ate the children. The text goes through many challenges in this gruesome tale—such as: what kind of children were these?, is there really a forest around Jericho which is at the edge of the Judean desert?, and what message does this deliver to us?

The answer to the last question is the teachable moment—we are responsible for what happened to these “children!” If Elisha the Prophet was not left alone to walk from Jericho to his next destination, the “children” would not have assaulted him nor would have the bear mauled the children. The upshot of this tale—don’t leave someone to travel alone. For us, in the context of this *d’var Torah*, let us remember that when we count people who are important in our lives, do not leave them vulnerable as they travel life’s road—be with them just as you would need them to travel with you. Check in on loved ones, friends and people you care about and do not abandon them after you have elevated them in your heart and have counted on them. Add to this the fact that every soul has been created in the image of God and thus we have the obligation to care about them and never to leave one prone to assault in any kind.

The fourth book of the Torah starts off with a counting of those who are important to the people of Israel. For us, we should take a census of those who are important in our lives. Once we acknowledge them, don’t let them go—elevate your kindness to them. And do not abandon them at any point along life’s journey.