

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bamidbar

29 Iyar, 5780/May 23, 2020

Vol. 11 Num. 33 (#454)

This edition of Toronto Torah is dedicated by David and Agnes Miller
in honour of the birthday of their granddaughter Avigayil "ג. Mazal tov!

Of Tribes and Identities

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

The Jews shall camp each with his standard, under the banners of their ancestral house; they shall camp around the Tent of Meeting at a distance. (Bamidbar 2:2, JPS translation)

Bamidbar begins with a military census of the Jewish people. After detailing the numbers of each tribe, the Torah then repeats the numbers a second time, this time in the context of describing how each tribe camped around their banner or flag. This repeated enumeration seems superfluous.

Malbim (2:2) notes this, and suggests that time had passed between the initial count and the physical organization around the Mishkan. The Torah repeated the numbers to show the miracle of G-d – that no one had died in the interim. This seems insufficient to explain the repetition for several reasons. Aside from having to posit an undeclared miracle, one would also need to assume that no one had turned sixty and thus aged out of the count, nor had anyone turned twenty and thus been added to the totals. While one can understand the benefit of having no one die, there is no reason to assume that years earlier, G-d had ensured that no one would be born on these dates in order to negate the possibilities of a birthday that would confuse the count. One could posit that exactly the same number of people crossed the threshold in and out of the count, but this seems equally unlikely. Thus, it seems more likely that this is merely a repetition of numbers, which forces us to return to

the original problem.

One could maintain, per Malbim, that time had indeed passed, and suggest that the numbers may have changed but are not recorded. As many have noted (see Pnei Dovid to Noach citing Ri Trani, Piskei Rosh end of Pesachim), the numbers in the Torah are rounded, and perhaps there was a passage of time and a change in numbers, but not enough to alter the rounded calculation. This, however, makes the repeated count even odder.

It seems that the answer lies in the context. The first chapter of Bamidbar seems dedicated to providing a total picture of the military capabilities of the Jewish people – 603,550 men between the ages of twenty and sixty. To get there, each tribe was counted, but the thrust of this chapter is national – the tribes are just parts of the whole.

However, the second chapter notes that each of these tribes, as much as they were part of the nation, also had an independent identity. This, it seems, is the purpose of repeating the count in the context of their individual flags. As the midrashim and commentaries note, each flag had its own colour, parallel to the tribe's stone on the *choshen* worn by the kohen gadol. It additionally displayed a symbol, capturing the essence of the tribes as described in the blessings of Jacob (a lion for Judah, for example). Perhaps the numbers were repeated to show that every tribe had a dual identity – as a composite part of the nation of Israel, and a group with unique characteristics.

In some midrashim, both the national and tribal identities were represented on the flags – the tribal symbols noted above, as well as a letter from the names of the patriarchs, which could only be read as part of a complete name in conjunction with the flags of all the other tribes. It is similar to the way that many local government buildings fly the national flag, state/provincial flag, and perhaps even city flag. [This complexity is also seen in a mishnah in Horayot 1, where the Sages debate whether only the Jewish people as whole are defined as a *kahal* (congregation), or each tribe is a *kahal* unto itself as well.]

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Haameik Davar to 2:2) suggests that not only were the ancestral families represented with these flags, but each family or clan had its own flag as well, with a letter that represented it. This further develops this notion of multiple layers of identity.

As COVID-19 has kept us away from our normal communities and has isolated us as family units, we should internalize what makes us unique, while we look forward to using those characteristics to contribute to our broader communities with whom we hope to reunite soon.

jjziring@torontotorah.com

OUR BEIT MIDRASH

ROSH BEIT MIDRASH	RABBI MORDECHAI TORCZYNER
SGAN ROSH BEIT MIDRASH	RABBI SAMMY BERGMAN
AVREICHIM	EZER DIENA, RABBI ALEX HECHT, NETANEL KLEIN
SEDER BOKER DIRECTOR	RABBI MOSHE YERES
ISRAELI CORRESPONDENTS	RABBI ADAM FRIEDMANN, RABBI BARUCH WEINTRAUB, RABBI JONATHAN ZIRING
CHAVEROT	ORLY AZIZA, MINDY CHAPMAN, SOFIA FREUDENSTEIN, ATARA GASNER, TEHLA HELFENBAUM, AILEEN MORRIS, HADAS MOYAL, TIFERET NICKERSON
CHAVERIM	MOISHY KANOFKY, ARI KARON, YEHUDA LEVI, COBY LYONS, ILAN SHIELDS, NATAN SNOWBELL, DANIEL SUTTNER, URIEL WEISZ, ELI WELTMAN, MARK WERNER



An affiliate of Torah MiTzion and YU

Find our upcoming classes on-line at
www.torontotorah.com

We are grateful to
Continental Press 905-660-0311

Summary

As our chapter begins, David continues to flee from King Shaul and arrives at the Desert of Ein Gedi. King Shaul learns of David's whereabouts, gathers three thousand of his troops, and pursues David. After arriving at a place on the road where sheep are grazing, Shaul enters a cave to relieve himself. However, by doing so, Shaul unwittingly puts himself in the clutches of his enemy, as David and his men are hiding in the cave. (24:1-3)

Convinced that this auspicious occurrence is the result of Divine providence, David's men inform him that G-d has fulfilled His promise by allowing David to take his rightful position as the next king of Israel and placing Shaul in David's hands. (Malbim 24:5) David approaches Shaul, but instead of killing him, David surreptitiously severs the corner of Shaul's coat. David tells his men that it would be beneath him to raise his hand against G-d's anointed, and prevents his men from harming Shaul. (24:4-7)

As Shaul leaves the cave, David follows him and calls out, "My master, the king!" After getting Shaul's attention,

David shows Shaul the corner that he had cut off of Shaul's coat, demonstrating that he had spared Shaul's life and he held no rebellious intentions. David proclaims that although he would not try to harm Shaul, G-d should take vengeance for him from Shaul for his unnecessary rampage against David. (24:8-15)

Shaul is moved by the mercy and loyalty David demonstrates toward him. Shaul praises David for his righteousness and proclaims that Hashem should repay David for his kindness. Shaul agrees that David will become the king of Israel, and he asks David to take an oath that he will not wipe out Shaul's household. David takes the oath, and Shaul abandons his pursuit of David and returns home. (24:16-22)

Insight

24:6 states, "David's heart struck him over his severing of the corner of Shaul's coat." Considering that Shaul was literally in pursuit of David's life, David's reaction is difficult to understand. Why did David have remorse over the damage he had inflicted upon Shaul's coat? Certainly,

Shaul deserved much worse!

Ralbag (ad loc.) suggests that David had actually attempted to strike Shaul, but had missed and only cut off the corner of his coat. After failing to kill Shaul, David regretted trying to do so. Ralbag explains that although David had the right to kill Shaul, who had status of a "pursuer", David worried that if he were to kill Shaul, it would set a dangerous precedent for the future treatment of Jewish kings.

On the other hand, Malbim (ad loc.) argues that David cut the coat on purpose, because he was unsure whether the ordained time had arrived for him to assume the throne. He decided to perform a test, committing an act of rebellion toward King Shaul by severing the corner of his coat. When he felt a strong negative reaction, David understood that Shaul's reign had not yet come to an end.

sbergman@torontotorah.com

Holy Land Halachah: Between Individual and Country

In a speech to the World Mizrahi Convention in 1933 (previously discussed in these pages, see [Toronto Torah, Ki Tavo 5777](#)), Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel delineated some of the distinct ideological positions of the Mizrahi. One of these was that over the course of exile, the Jewish people had little need to consider matters of national governance. Consequently, the development of halachah in these areas was stunted, and in some cases, disregarded entirely. The revival of this branch of halachah, which Rabbi Amiel titled "mitzvot for the sake of maintaining the Jewish nation," is critical for a functioning Jewish state.

If we survey halachah, we do, indeed, find that in many areas, classical models are woefully unequipped to address questions at the national level. An example is public health, where discussions of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) that centre around an individual's obligation to save someone currently in distress break down when we attempt to scale them to larger groups of people, where no one is currently sick, but someone definitely will be. Historically, in countries where Jews were not making higher level decisions, this was not an issue. In the State of Israel, however, maintaining these traditional approaches is tantamount to admitting that Halachah has little to say about running a modern medical system. For this reason, we find contemporary *poskim* who have articulated the notion of *pikuach nefesh* of the population as a whole.

These national-level models raise a further question. How do national-level mitzvot devolve upon the individual Jew, living in a Jewish society? Does the individual's obligation end once there is a government that is taking care of national needs, or are there concrete actions required as well? Rabbi Shaul

Yisraeli (*Amud HaYemini*, chapter 17), for example, argues that policies which save lives on aggregate carry the halachic force of *pikuach nefesh*, even where there is no present threat to life. He therefore allows for police patrols on Shabbat in Israel, even though these patrols violate Shabbat and most of them will not result in any life-saving activity. This kind of reasoning bridges the halachic gap between public policy and individual obligation, creating a kind of "mitzvah between man and his country." It means that when faced with the prospect of upholding a public policy, a person cannot only consider the immediate consequences to himself and those around him; the public's attempt to fulfill a national-level obligation is also an operative halachic force on individual behaviour.

This way of thinking raises many new questions about how to define the contours of national halachic obligations, as well as precisely when and how these obligations affect individual behaviour. These definitions can and must be developed from within our Torah tradition. Through them, the Jewish state, and people, can become the ethical exemplars about whom the nations declare "surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people." (Devarim 4:6)

afriedmann@torontotorah.com

Biography

Rabbi Sraya Deblitsky

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Rabbi Sraya was born in 1926, in Lithuania. In his youth, he met Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook – then Rabbi of Boisk, in Lithuania – which left an unforgettable impression on him. When young Sraya was only 12 years old, his family made the journey to Eretz Yisrael and settled in Tel Aviv. After learning with some of the local rabbis, he went on to learn in the Kamenetz and Chevron yeshivot (both were in Jerusalem). Rabbi Sraya did not limit himself to any specific group, learning from Ashkenazi and Sephardi Rabbis, as well as Chareidi and Zionist ones, absorbing as much Torah and wisdom as he could.

After marrying in 1945, Rabbi Sraya moved back to the Gush Dan area, and became closely associated with the Chazon Ish, learning a great deal from his personality as well as his teachings.

Rabbi Sraya was known for his unique halachic opinions, which reflected his courage and independence. For example: Rabbi Sraya held that halachic times should be decided by the eye and not by a calendar, and held a minyan at his home following this approach; he used a special type of *techelet* for his tzitzit; and more.

Rabbi Sraya had a broad spectrum of Torah knowledge – from Halachah to Kabbalah to linguistics to customs. He wrote more than sixty books, and exchanged letters with both Rabbis and academic researchers.

His relentless search for truth was also reflected in his prayers, where he changed some of the words in accordance with changes in reality, such as omitting the reference to Babylon in the *Yekum Purkan* prayer, and changing the *Shir HaYichud* for those in Eretz Yisrael to omit “we are on an impure land”.

Rabbi Sraya’s position towards the Jewish state was complicated. Revering both Rabbi Kook and the Chazon Ish, Rabbi Sraya insisted on our obligation to thank G-d for His miracles for us, but at the same time viewed voting in Israeli elections as a forbidden partnership with heretics.

Rabbi Sraya passed away three years ago, at the age of 93.

bweintraub@torontotorah.com

Torah and Translation

Establishing a Holiday for the Six-Day War

Rabbi Sraya Deblitsky, *She'arim* (Sivan 5768)

Translated by Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

מנהג ישראל מדור דור לקבוע יום שמחה והודיה על הצלתם ופדות נפשם מההמנים שבכל דור ודור שעמדו עלינו לכלותם... דבר זה, חוץ מאשר השכל מחייבו, שורשו פתוח כבר בדברי חז"ל אשר ברוח קדשם מיד הקב"ה עליהם השכיל, קבעו כבר ברכות כברכת הגומל וברכת שעשה לי נס במקום הזה... כל זה כמובן בא להמחיש ולקבוע בלבנו את עיקר אמונתנו הקדושה, ויסוד כל התורה כולה, שהכל הוא בהשגחה פרטית מלמעלה יתברך שמו...

ימי החרדה שעברו עלינו אשתקד, הנסים הגדולים והישועה הגדולה שבאה לנו שניצלנו ממות בטוח לחיים, בעקבות התפלות והתחנונים, סליחות ותהלים ותעניות שקוימו בארץ וברחבי העולם יומם ולילה, מחייבים בהחלט קביעת יום הודיה ושמחה בכל שנה ושנה לזכר ניסי הקב"ה ונפלאותיו, וכפי מנהג ישראל זה מדור דור.

לתומנו חשבנו שבקביעת יום פורים כזה יהיו כל רבנינו וגדולינו מהקצה עד הקצה תמימי דעה ומעש, כי הגזירה היתה על כולם וכולם היו באותו נס. לא נאמין לאפשרות שקיימים כאלה שהשלו את עצמם שאם יראו לרוצחים הפראים את תעודת הזהות שלהם, שהנם שייכים לחוג זה או אחר היו ניצולים ממות. עדיין לא קיימים טיפשים כאלה בתוך עמנו החכם ונבון...

כפי הצעתנו צריך יום זה להתבטא, באי אמירת תחנון כפי שהיה נהוג בכל הקהילות ביום כזה, ואמירת הלל שלם בלי ברכה אחר התפלה ממש לשם שינוי והיכר... איסור הספד ותענית, וקביעת סעודת מצוה באותו יום. אין בזה שום פגיעה בדיני הספירה...

ההידברות בין כל החוגים שהיו באותו הנס היא הכרחית בעינינו זה, ומאידך ההשתקה והדיכוי של כל צליל הבעת שבח ותודה היא בגדר משגח חמור מאד.

It is a generations-old Jewish custom to establish a day of happiness and thanksgiving when being rescued from the various Hamans who rise upon us to destroy us in every generation... This [custom], apart from being obligated by common sense, also has roots in the words of our Sages, who, in their holy inspiration, given by G-d, already established such blessings as “*HaGomeil* [He who rewards]” and “He performed a miracle for me in this place”... All that, of course, is to illustrate and set in our hearts the principle of our holy faith and the foundation of the whole Torah, that everything comes by Divine providence from the One above, blessed be His Name...

The days of fear we experienced last year, the great miracles and salvation that came to us, as we were saved from certain death to life – following the prayers and pleas, selichot, Tehillim and fast days observed, in Israel and around the world, day and night, certainly obligate us to establish an annual day of thanksgiving and happiness, to remember G-d’s miracles and wonders, as has been the Jewish custom for generations.

In our naiveté, we thought that in the establishment of such a “Purim” day, all our rabbis and leaders from one end [of the spectrum] to the other would be unified in thought and action. For the decree was upon everyone, and all were part of the miracle. We cannot believe the possibility that some of us deceived themselves [thinking] that they would show the savage murderers their identification card, proving that they belonged to some group or the other, and would be saved from death. Such foolish people do not exist, yet, in our wise and understanding nation...

According to our suggestion, this day should be expressed by not saying Tachanun – as was the minhag in all the communities on such a day – and the recitation of a full Hallel with no blessing, after the prayer itself to mark its difference [from other Hallel recitations which were established by the Sages]... Eulogies and fasts should be banned, and a “mitzvah meal” should be established. There is no violation in this to the laws of [mourning which coincide with] Sefirat Ha’Omer...

Dialogue between all those who experienced the miracle is essential in this regard, and on the other hand, the silence and suppression of all praise and gratitude is a very grave mistake.

This Week on Zoom!

Click Underlined Lines to Open Zoom Sessions
Or look for clickable Zoom links at www.torontotorah.com/letslearn

SPECIAL PRE-SHAVUOT LEARNING

7:00-10:00 PM Sunday May 24

Pre-Shavuot Learnathon! bit.ly/shavuothon

Dedicated by Nathan Kirsh in loving memory of his brother Jerry z"l

7:00 PM EDT, EZER DIENA, TANACH: NO SHOES, NO SERVICE? A STRANGE CUSTOM IN RUTH

7:30 PM EDT, R' MOSHE YERES, JEWISH LAW: DAIRY DELIGHT... BEEF TONIGHT

8:00 PM EDT, R' ALEX HECHT, JEWISH THOUGHT: THE CHOSEN PEOPLE?

8:30 PM EDT, R' MORDECHAI TORCZYNER, PRAYER: AKDAMUT: THE ART OF SETTING THE STAGE

9:00 PM EDT, NETANEL KLEIN, CHUMASH: BIKKURIM: OF FRUITS AND SHAVUOT

9:30 PM EDT, R' SAMMY BERGMAN, HISTORY: HOW COFFEE CHANGED SHAVUOT FOREVER

Monday May 25

8:00 PM EDT, Volunteering for Vaccine Trials, with R' Mordechai Torczyner & Zichron Yisroel (pwd grysman)

9:00 PM EDT, Standing for the Ten Commandments, with Ezer Diena & Ayin l'Tzion

Tuesday May 26

9:15 PM EDT, The Mystery and Mysticism of Torah for Its Own Sake, with R' Sammy Bergman & Shaarei Shomayim

Wednesday May 27

9:00 PM EDT, Making Up Missed Torah Readings, with R' Mordechai Torczyner & BAYT

9:30 PM EDT, Reincarnation Carnations? Kabbalah and Springtime, Ezer Diena & BAYT

Thursday May 28 (Erev Shavuot)

3:00 PM EDT, Beer and Shavuot, Ezer Diena & Aish Thornhill

5:00 PM EDT, Ruth and the Woman of Valour, R' Mordechai Torczyner & Aish Thornhill

DAILY

Adult Seder Boker, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Mondays-Thursdays at 10:00 AM EDT (men)

Mondays and Wednesdays: Gemara, Orot haTeshuvah, Tuesdays and Thursdays: Parshah, Tanach

WEEKLY

Sunday May 24

9:15 AM EDT Contemporary Halachah: Meat or Milk?, with Netanel Klein

10 AM EDT Gemara Shabbat for university students, with Rabbi Aaron Greenberg (pwd: 613613)

11 AM EDT Contemporary Halachah Rotation for university students: De-Mystifying Yoshon, with R' Alex Hecht

Monday May 25

8:45 AM EDT She'arim baTefillah Chabura for university students, with Rabbi Alex Hecht

7:30 PM EDT Exploring the Book of Ruth, with Ezer Diena - Week 5 of 5

8:30 PM EDT Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 13, with Rabbi Moshe Yeres

Wednesday May 27

10:30 AM Bava Metziah Perek 6, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Thursday May 28

2:15 PM EDT Mishlei for university students, with Ezer Diena

NOT THIS WEEK

Sunday: 7:30 PM EDT Gemara Avodah Zarah, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) (pwd: 18)

Tuesday: 1:30 PM EDT Yeshayah, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (pwd: 18)

Tuesday: 7:30 PM EDT Shoftim, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) (pwd: 18)

Wednesday: 7:00 PM EDT Stories from the Talmud, with Rabbi Alex Hecht

Wednesday: 7:40 PM EDT Ancient Texts, Modern Meanings, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman

Thursday: 1:30 PM EDT Shemuel, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women) (pwd: 18)

Thursday: 7:30 PM EDT Gemara b'Iyun: Laws of Yom Tov for university students, with Rabbi Sammy Bergman (women)

Thursday: 8:30 PM EDT Gemara Beitzah, with Ezer Diena (men)

FOR MORE OPPORTUNITIES, GO TO WWW.TORONTOTORAH.COM/LETSLEARN!