

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Zvi and Tzilah Raczkowski on the *aufbruch* and upcoming marriage of their son, Yisroel Moshe, to Devora Greenberg, daughter of Stewie and Shari Greenberg of Woodmere, New York. Mazel Tov to the grandparents, Jerry and Rachel Bernstein, Nathan and Joan Rothman, and Ozzie and Florence Greenberg. Mazel Tov also to the great-grandmother, Ilse Warburg. May Yisroel Moshe and Devora be *zoche* to build a Bayis Ne'eman b'Yisrael.

Thank you to the drasha sponsors:

- Ezra & Racheli Friedberg “in honor of Rabbi Marwick and his inspiring Drashas.” Thank you!
- Mordechai and Miriam Gordon, in memory of Mordechai’s father, Harry Gordon, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan. May his *neshama* have an *Aliyah*.
- Barry and Phyllis Levi, in memory of Barry's father, Eric Levi, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 5<sup>th</sup> of Sivan. May his *neshama* have an *Aliyah*.
- Zvi and Tzilah Raczkowski, in honor of the *aufbruch* of their son, Yisroel Moshe, and his upcoming marriage to Devora Greenberg. Mazel Tov!
- Chanie and Paul Schuster in loving memory of our father, Dr. Frank Feist Schuster, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 5<sup>th</sup> of Sivan. May his *neshama* have an *Aliyah*.
- Sonny Taragin, in memory of his father, Saul Taragin, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Sivan. May his *neshama* have an *Aliyah*.

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha* and *hatzlacha* and good health!

I am pleased to share that we have prepared a very exciting learning program for Tikkun Leil Shavuos and both days of Yom Tov. We will have open space throughout the shul building for *chavrusa* learning, and round-the-clock *shiurim* and *chaburas* for members of all ages. I encourage everyone to look over the robust schedule and to learn as much Torah as you can this Shavuos. What better way to celebrate *Mattan Torah* (the giving of the Torah) than with a real, personal *kabolas Hatorah* (accepting the Torah)!

There are still sponsorship opportunities available...please see the President or email the office.

Also, children twelve and above are now eligible to receive the Pfizer vaccine. Please take advantage of this opportunity to keep your children and our community safe and sign up as soon as possible.

We are all deeply concerned about the terrorist attacks in Israel. The barrage of thousands of rockets fired upon Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the necessity of closing Ben Gurion airport, and the pogroms and burning of shuls in Lod by Arab neighbors and “friends” with whom we coexisted peacefully just the day before, is a reminder that ancient antisemitism is alive and well. We can try to explain the situation in current geopolitical terms, but we must acknowledge that this is just a contemporary manifestation of the reality that *בכל דור ועשׂו שׂוּנא את יעקב* and *וְדוֹר עוֹמְדִים עֲלֵינוּ לְכַלּוֹתֵנוּ*. It is a time to deepen our faith that *וְהַקֵּב"ה מְצִילֵנוּ מִיָּד*, that Hashem is our protector, and to deepen our commitment to *am Yisrael*. Ultimately, we can only count on the protection of Hashem, and the promise to us as a nation that we will survive.

As the **Rambam** writes in *Hilchos Tefilla*, our custom is to begin reading Sefer Bamidbar before Shavuos.

*רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק יג הלכה ב: וְהַמְנַהֵג הַפְּשׁוּט שִׁיְהוּ קוֹרְאִין בְּמִדְבַר סִינִי קוֹדֵם עֲצֵרָת,*

What is the connection between Parshas Bamidbar and *Mattan Torah*, which we commemorate on Shavuos?  
What lessons does Parshas Bamidbar teach us that are relevant to receiving the Torah?

Chazal refer to Sefer Bamidbar as *Chumash Hapekudim*—the Book of Numbers or the Book of Counting, because the *sefer* opens with Hashem’s command to take a census of the Jewish people.

To understand the connection between Shavuos and counting, we must first understand the concept of counting...What do we accomplish by counting?

Conceptually, counting is the act of unifying different objects into a greater whole. It is about finding the common bond between diverse entities and joining them together to form one greater unit—all represented by one final larger number. Counting individuals as a group is about going beyond their individuality...to fashion them into something bigger.

**Rav Hirsch** writes: *The fourth book of the Torah now returns to the national reality. It shows us Israel as it actually is; it presents before us the actual nation in its relationship to the ideal of its calling. It opens with the command to take a census of the nation as an “eida,” a community united by its common calling. All the independent members of the nation are to be counted, one by one. A census of this nature makes it clear to the nation’s representatives that the community is not merely an idea but, rather, exists only in the actual totality of all its members.*

Seeing yourself as part of a greater entity called Klal Yisrael is so fundamental to Judaism that it was the basis for *Mattan Torah* and that, in turn, was the beginning of our identity, not as a collection of individual Jews, but as a Jewish nation, the *kehillah kedosha*... עם ישראל.

In 1925, **Rav Kook** wrote a letter (*Mishpat Kohen* 124) to Rav Meir Don Plotzky after the latter sent him a copy of his seforim on chumash called *Klei Chemda*.

שיש בציבור של ישראל קדושה ומציאות כללית, שאינה נערכת כלל כלפי החלק של כל פרט, והיא עומדת למעלה מגדרי חלוקה, ובשביל כך קרבנות ציבור צריכין להיות משל ציבור דוקא, שזהו ענין הקדושה של הכלל כולו.. ועיקר קדושת תורה שבע"פ, שהיא תורת הברית של ישראל, הוא מפני קדושת הכלל שניכר בה יותר

In this letter, he writes that the Jewish people have a *kedusha* as a *klal* beyond the sum of its parts---they join together to produce a holy entity called *Klal Yisrael*.

How does one connect to that *kedusha*? One must completely identify with the *klal* emotionally, physically and financially. The **Mishna in Avos** (אבות ו'ו') teaches that one crucial aspect of *kinyan Torah* [the acquisition of Torah] is *חבירו עמו בעול* sharing someone else’s burden. We understand that sharing a burden is certainly a nice chessed, but why is it so crucial in acquiring the Torah?

**Rav Yisrael Meir Lau**, the former chief rabbi of Israel, writes in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*, that *נושא בעול עמו* is crucial because the Torah was given to the Jewish people as a whole, and not to any single individual. To attain Torah, a person must actively identify as part of the larger community.

In his introduction to *Nefesh Hachaim*, **Rav Yitzchak of Volozhin** writes about his father Rav Chaim Volozhiner: “*He would routinely rebuke me that I do not share in the pain of others. This is what he would constantly tell me: that the entire person was not created for himself, but to be of assistance to others, whatever he finds to be in his ability to do.*”

This is the message of Bamidbar—By counting the Jews—by taking a census—G-d showed how each individual is connected to the Jewish people as a whole. He showed how each individual can contribute to, and is a crucial part of, the greater unit called *klal Yisrael*. Together, we can accomplish what none of us can do alone; and thus only when we are together are we able to receive the Torah.

So, this raises a question. Counting people should be very much encouraged. Why is counting Jews, taking a census of the nation, dangerous and full of risk?

שמות (פרשת כי תשא) פרק ל פסוק יב

(יב) כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת־רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְקֹדֵיהֶם וַנִּתְּנוּ אִישׁ כְּפָר נַפְשׁוֹ לֵה' בְּפָקֹד אֹתָם וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה בָּהֶם נֶגֶף בְּפָקֹד אֹתָם:

Then God said to Moses, “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to God a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. **Then no plague will come on them when you number them.**” (*Ex. 30:11-12*).

The **Panim Yafos** writes that counting, giving each individual a separate number, has the potential to break us apart, to separate us from the *klal*.

פנים יפות שמות (פרשת כי תשא) פרק ל פסוק יב

ונראה כי ענין מניעת המנין לגלגלותם ממש כי שורש כל ישראל הוא האחדות כמ"ש [דה"א יז, כא] ומי כעמד ישראל גוי אחד וכמו שפירש רש"י [בראשית מו, כו] גבי שבעים נפש, וכמ"ש הלל בשבת דף ל"א. כי מ"ע ואהבת לרעך כמוך הוא כללות כל התורה כמו שביארנו שם, ובהיותם באחדות בשורשם אין צריכים שמירה כמו שנאמר [תהלים צא, ט] כי אתה ה' מחסי עליון שמת מעוניך, אבל כשמתחלקים לענפים רבים צריך כל אחד שמירה, וע"י התרומה שיתן כ"א כופר נפשו הוא מעלה ומרומם כל אחד לשורש עליון, והיינו דכתיב מחצית השקל תרומה לה'

*At its root each Jew is connected to the Jewish people, as it says "Who is like you Israel, one nation" and as Rashi comments on the use of the word Nefesh in singular describing the 70 souls who came down to Mitzrayim, and as Hillel presented when he described the Mitzva of loving your neighbor as yourself as the fundamental principle of Torah. When the Jews are united, they do not need extra protection, but when they are broken down into separate united (by being counted) they risk being separated from their source, the Klal. When each person gives a donation to the greater good, they receive divine protection.*

**Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky** makes a similar point when addressing why Hashem waited a year—until after the construction of the Mishkan—to split the Jewish people into assigned camps with their own flags.

אמת ליעקב במדבר (פרשת במדבר) פרק א פסוק א

ולכאורה תמוה, הלוא תיכף כשיצאו בני ישראל ממצרים יצאו בני ישראל על צבאותם וכדכתיב [שמות י"ד פ"ח]: ובני ישראל יוצאים ביד רמה, וכן [שם י"ג פ"ח]: וחמשים בני ישראל וגו', הרי שלא יצאו כעבדים הבורחים מאדוניהם אלא כעם חפשי, ואמאי המתינו מלסדר את הדגלים שנה תמימה, אתמהא! אלא שבאמת ענין הדגלים לכאורה הוא פירוד הלבבות, כי זה ודאי שכל צבע יש בו איזה סמל מיוחד, וכן הציורים שהיו על כל דגל ודגל,2, הלא זה ציין כי כל שבט ושבט יש לו תכונה או שאיפה מיוחדת - ומטרת האחד שונה ממטרת השני, ונמצא כי לכאורה הדגלים גרמו לפירוד הלבבות, אלא מכיון שהיה לכולם מרכז אחד, והיינו המשכן, וכולם חונים מסביב למשכן, אין זה גורם לפירוד אלא כל א' עומד על משמרתו המיוחדת לו ואין כאן שום פירוד. . .

It was only after a year in the Midbar that the Bnei Yisrael were counted in order to be set up under the *Degalim*, where each *Shevet* was given their own flag. Why did Hashem wait so long to give them this mitzva?

Rav Yaakov says that, in principle, creating the *Degalim* was a dangerous move. By dividing up a group of people—with each one having their own banner and motto—competition could evolve with feelings of tribalism. However, if all of the groups have the same goal, and each group contributes to the cause in their own unique way, this danger doesn't exist. The Mishkan was not erected until Nissan of the second year. Hashem wanted to wait for the *Degalim* until the *Avodas HaMishkan* become the focal point of life in the Midbar. Only then was it safe to give a clear identity to each *Shevet*. That is why the *pasuk* says (Bamidbar 2:2), "*Ish Al Diglo B'Osos L'Bais Avosam... Saviv L'Ohel Moed Yachanu*," only when their lives revolved around the *Mishkan* did Hashem divide them up and give them each their own specific mission.

But there is another reason that counting Jews specifically is dangerous, and the danger is avoided by contributing a *shekel* to the communal fund.

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** writes: *Nations take censuses on the assumption that there is strength in numbers. The larger the people, the stronger it is. And that is why it is dangerous to count Jews. If Jews ever believed that their strength lay in numbers, we would give way, God forbid, to despair. In Israel, they were always a minor power surrounded by great empires. In the Diaspora, everywhere they were a minority.*

**Where then did Jewish strength lie if not in numbers? The Torah gives an answer of surpassing beauty. God tells Moses: Do not count Jews. Ask them to give, and then count the contributions. In terms of numbers, we are small. But in terms of our contributions, we are vast.** In almost every age, Jews have given something special to the world: the Torah, the literature of the prophets, the poetry of the Psalms, the rabbinic wisdom of Mishnah, Midrash and Talmud, the vast medieval library of commentaries and codes, philosophy and mysticism.

*Then, as the doors of Western society opened, Jews made their mark in one field after another: in business, industry, the arts and sciences, cinema, the media, medicine, law and almost every field of academic life. They*

*revolutionized thought in physics, economics, sociology, anthropology and psychology. Jews have won Nobel Prizes out of all proportion to our numbers.*

*The simplest explanation is that to be a Jew is to be asked to give, to contribute, to make a difference, to help in the monumental task that has engaged Jews since the dawn of our history, to make the world a home for the Divine presence, a place of justice, compassion, human dignity and the sanctity of life. Though our ancestors cherished their relationship with God, they never saw it as a privilege. They knew it was a responsibility. God asked great things of the Jewish people, and in so doing, made them great.*

*When it comes to making a contribution, numbers do not count. What matters is commitment, passion, dedication to a cause. Precisely because we are so small as a people, every one of us counts. We each make a difference to the fate of Judaism and the Jewish people. Zechariah said it best: 'Not by might nor by power but by My spirit, says the Almighty Lord.'*

*Physical strength needs numbers. The larger the nation, the more powerful it is. But when it comes to spiritual strength, you need not numbers but a sense of responsibility. You need a people, each of whom knows that he or she must contribute something to the Jewish, and to the human story. The Jewish question is not, What can the world give me? It is, What can I give to the world? Judaism is God's call to responsibility."*

Tonight, we will finish another counting related to Shavuot; our count of *sefiras ha'omer*. We counted the 49 days from Pesach to Shavuot, when we will commemorate the gift of the Torah on Har Sinai. We counted the days—reaching a total of 49—and hopefully made all the days count as well. And now, reading about the census in the Midbar reminds us that we are privileged to be part of a larger group, the miraculous nation of *Klal Yisrael*. And it is time also, to think about what we as individuals do contribute—and can contribute—to this miraculous nation.

But there is one last thing that has always kept us together. The **Medrash** says Moshe Rabbeinu was worried about the placement of the *Degalim* and where everyone would be placed during their travels. He was worried that everyone would complain about their “seats.” Hashem responded that the tribes will be placed where they stood when they carried Yaakov Avinu's coffin and no one will complain. Why did that keep them from complaining?

I believe the answer is that our unity has always been predicated on our shared faith, as exemplified by the Mishkan and Har Sinai, but also on our shared history. When Yaakov Avinu was on his deathbed the shevatim proclaimed שמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד, which Chazal understand as both a statement of faith, as well as a statement of unity. Remembering our shared past, and our shared faith; knowing that as a nation we have been through so much together, helps us work together and appreciate one another, and the privilege of being a Jew.

I recently heard a shiur from **Rav Moshe Taragin** where he told the story of a 14-year-old girl who was injured in the Sbarro bombing in 2001, a girl whose family he knew. Her father said that during the entire Shabbos after the bombing, the injured girl kept asking about the large Danish family that was with her in the restaurant. Not wanting to upset her by letting her know that the parents and three of their children died in the attack, the father kept evading the question. Finally, after persistent questions, he asked her why she was asking. The girl told him that she saw the little boy bleeding profusely and he asked his father to help him. His father responded—I am on fire and cannot help—but reach out your hand and we will say Shema Yisrael together.

Shema Yisrael—a statement of faith and a statement of unity. During these challenging times for Klal Yisrael, let us strengthen our faith and connection to our history, and connection to our people. Let us work on the *midda* of *achdus*. That has always been our secret weapon. It has helped us merit to receive the Torah and many other miracles throughout our history. May we work on the important *midda* of unity, and merit the ultimate *geula*...to see the days when the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt and all the world will recognize the truth and glory of Hashem...*bimhera vi'yamenu*...amen.