

# הַמִּתְחַלֵּץ וְהַמִּתְחַלֵּץ THE PATH TO FOLLOW

**№ 83**  
**BAMIDBAR**  
**26 IYAR 5765**  
**JUNE.04.2005**

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*Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan*

**BY THE MERIT OF TORAH, THE JEWISH PEOPLE ARE ABOVE NATURE**

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

**I**n the Haftorah of our Parsha, it is written, "Yet the number of the Children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured nor counted" (Hosea 2:1), a verse that is difficult to understand. Today we can certainly count the Children of Israel, and besides, what is the meaning of the expression "like the sand of the sea," which cannot be taken literally? In addition, in the desert the Children of Israel from 20 to 60 years of age were counted, which, moreover, leads us to ask why they were only counted starting from the age of 20 (Numbers 1:3) and only up to the age of 60, omitting the children, women, and elderly.

There is another teaching that we need to understand. The Sages have said that Moses was equal to 600,000 of the Children of Israel (Zohar III:282b). Why was he not equal to all of the Children of Israel (who numbered more than 600,000 at the beginning of the book of Numbers), rather than to exactly that round number? (Concerning the number of the Children of Israel, consult the book Pituchei Chotam on Parsha Bamidbar).

We learn from this that the principle number of the Children of Israel is 600,000, those in addition to this number being reincarnations or sparks of holiness belonging to the 600,000. As the Rashash wrote, a man should repent even of the sins that he hasn't committed, for it's possible that his soul is connected to someone who has in fact committed them. Consequently, Moses was equal to 600,000 of the Children of Israel, who are in fact the indispensable portion of them. The totality of the Jewish community (including the reincarnations and the sparks) is including in that number, as well as the women, children, and elderly. This is because Eve was the mother of all the living (Genesis 3:10) and

she herself was part of Adam. Now the descendants of Adam are the principle element, and the souls of the Children of Israel are completely a part of it (see Zohar Chadash Shir Hashirim 82b).

This is why the Children of Israel were compared to "the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured nor counted," for each time that they will number 600,000, there will also be among them reincarnated souls and sparks that are impossible to count, and consequently the evil eye will have no power over them. In fact, when the Satan will want to number them in order to make them vulnerable to the evil eye, he will stop at 600,000 and be unable to continue, not knowing to whom the rest belong and who the reincarnated souls and sparks are connected to. He will therefore be incapable of striking Israel with the evil eye. This is the reason why G-d commanded that only 600,000 be counted, not more. The Satan would thus be unable to go beyond this, and there would be no evil eye in Israel. It is like this in every generation: The Children of Israel are not counted lest an epidemic strikes them (Yoma 22b), and so that the evil eye has no power over them.

We already find this idea concerning Balaam the son of Beor, who wanted to curse the Children of Israel but did not receive permission to do so. His intention was to make them susceptible to the evil eye, as the Ohr HaHaim says on the verse that states, "Who has counted the dust of Jacob or numbered a quarter of Israel?" (Numbers 23:10), and as the Zohar explains at length (Zohar III:147b). However Moses, having sensed this beforehand, beat him to it by counting the Children of Israel (which is recorded in our parsha). Furthermore, Aaron the Kohen gave them the priestly blessing (Numbers 6:23) in order that they be protected from the evil eye and all harm, for nothing is worse than the evil eye. This is why it

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is said concerning Balaam, “And he took up [vayisa] his parable” (Numbers 23:7), an expression which uses the same term as in the passage, “When you take [tisa] the sum of the Children of Israel” (Exodus 30:12). This is a word that designates counting, his intention being to strike them with the evil eye, something extremely harmful, since it has already been said that the evil eye is the cause of 99 deaths out of 100 (Bava Metzia 107b). But G-d closed his eye and he didn’t see the Children of Israel well enough to strike them with it, as it is written, “And thus says the man whose eye is closed” (Numbers 24:3).

We can also add that the wicked Balaam was a great prophet of the nations (Sifri Deuteronomy 34:10) and that he was mistaken. He thought that there were only 600,000 Children of Israel, corresponding to the number of shining stars, and he wanted to put the evil eye on them at the exact instant of G-d’s wrath (Berachot 7a), for he was deprived of the power of cursing. Yet when he saw that they were several times more numerous than 600,000, he didn’t know from where to begin counting, nor to whom the others were connected. This pertained to hidden matters, for even Moses was not included, following G-d’s orders, in the count of the Children of Israel. This was a very good thing, meant to protect us from the curse of the wicked Balaam and from his evil eye (see the Zohar on this). And this is the meaning of the verse that states, “Behold, the eye of the L-RD is on those who fear Him, upon those who await His kindness” (Psalms 33:18).

According to this, we perfectly understand the two different interpretations of the expression shetum ha’ayin (Numbers 24:3: “closed eye” or “seeing eye”). For Rashi, it refers to an eye that has been removed and can no longer see, whereas for Onkelos it refers to vision that is exceptionally clear. [Editor’s note: Certain commentators say that one eye is wide open while the other is shut, an opinion also found in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 105a). There is thus no contradiction between the two opinions]. On one hand, Balaam could see perfectly and wanted to count and to curse the Children of Israel in order that they be subject to the evil eye, but on the other hand he was confused when he saw more than 600,000, and he didn’t understand that they were sparks and reincarnations. His ability to see was therefore useless, for it is impossible to know the number of the Children of Israel, which can neither be measured nor counted.

## THE STORY OF THE WEEK

### THE SUN DID NOT SET

It was just before Shabbat, and Abba Tachana the Chassid returned to town with a large package on his shoulders. At a crossroads not very far from where he was headed, he saw a man lying on the ground. Approaching him, he realized that he was severely injured, his whole body being covered with wounds. While he was examining the injured man, the latter began to beg him, “Rabbi, have pity on me. Bring me into town!”

Abba Tachana stopped to think for a moment. It was impossible to carry both the sick man and his heavy load at the same time, and if he left his package to bring the sick man, he would not be able to return to get it, for Shabbat was fast approaching. Now this package contained every important thing that he possessed. Without it, how would his family live? On the other hand, if he abandoned this wounded man, he would be responsible for his death.

He placed his package by the side of the road, took the sick man in his arms, and brought him all the way to town. When he arrived, he noticed that Shabbat had not yet begun, and he profited from this to rush back to the spot where he had left his package. When he arrived back in town at twilight with the heavy package on his shoulder, the inhabitants asked themselves, “Is that really Abba the Chassid? Is it possible for a man like him to be walking about at such an hour as if it were a regular weekday?” He himself was, for that matter, bothered by the same doubts. “Perhaps I desecrated Shabbat,” he began to ask himself with pain and trembling. The Holy One, blessed be He, saw his grief and kept the sun out for a little longer. It didn’t set until the Chassid had gotten back home. At that moment, a Heavenly voice was heard saying, “Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart, for G-d has already approved your deeds” (Ecclesiastes 9:7).

# PERKEI AVOT

## THE CAUSE OF ALL TRAGEDY

**I**t is written, “Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Each and every day a Heavenly voice goes forth from Mount Horev, proclaiming and saying, ‘Woe to the people because of their affront to the Torah!’ For whoever does not occupy himself with the Torah is called ‘censured,’ as it is stated: ‘Like a golden ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion’ [Proverbs 11:22]. And it is further stated, ‘The Tablets were the work of G-d, and the writing was the writing of G-d, charut [“engraved”] on the Tablets’ [Exodus 32:16]. Do not read charut but cherut [“freedom”], for there is no free man except one who occupies himself with the study of Torah, and anyone who occupies himself with the study of Torah becomes elevated, as it is stated, ‘From Mattanah [“the gift of Torah”] to Nachaliel [“the heritage of G-d”], and from Nachaliel to Bamot [“high places”]’ [Numbers 21:19]’ (Perkei Avoth 6:2).

Woe to mankind that scorns and insults the Torah. In the preceding passage we have seen that one who occupies himself with Torah, who unceasingly sacrifices himself for it, becomes incapable of sinning. Now Rabbi Yehoshua reminds us, quite appropriately, that insult to the Torah or scorn shown to those who study it are a tragedy for all humanity.

All the tragedies that have fallen upon mankind since the creation of man, all the pain that it has suffered, are the consequence of the scorn that it has heaped upon divine revelation. According to our Sages, poverty, misery, and the ravages of famine and war are not inevitable disasters. After the passage through the Red Sea, the first step in its long journey across the desert, Hashem told His people, “If you hearken diligently to the voice of the L-RD your G-d and do what is right in His eyes, give ear to His commandments, and observe all His decrees, then any of the diseases that I have placed upon Egypt, I will not bring upon you” (Exodus 15:26). It is because mankind always refuses to listen to the “voice of Mount Horev” – because it scorns the Torah and its followers; because it never manages to peacefully resolve any of its problems – that the history of man is but a long series of evermore destructive and murderous wars.

But the echo of the voice from Mount Horev, this lament, still addresses itself with increasing insistence to the Jewish people. If Israel were to turn away from the Torah, it would no longer have any reason to exist. It would then truly merit being called nazuf (contemptible), rejected at the same time by Hashem and the other peoples. In the language of the prophets, our people are often compared to a vine. In the same way that a vine, if its owner takes proper care of it, produces delicious fruit whose juice “gladdens G-d and men” (Judges 9:13), so too does Israel, by sacrificing itself without cease for the Torah, become the most precious product that the “soil of men” can offer to the Creator. However when the vine is neglected and doesn’t bring forth fruit, even its wood

is worthless, unusable for work, and only good for burning. It is the same with our people if they abandon the Torah.

The proverb cited in our text compares the one who is reprimanded in this way to a pig that carries a gold ring in its snout. The Torah itself is symbolized by this gold ring, for it is the most beautiful ornament that Israel can carry. Yet when a Jew turns his back on the Torah, when it ceases to be his most prized possession, this jewel that he received as a heritage will lose its value. It will then be like that gold ring in the snout of a pig, which obviously cannot appreciate its beauty and thus covers it with mud and rubbish. According to a metaphor of our Sages, this object has turned from a zer (ornament) into a zar (a foreign object). When Israel becomes unfaithful to its mission, it is also compared to a beautiful woman devoid of sense and modesty; her beauty is offset by her moral degradation.

Many are those among us who don’t realize their moral degradation, and who consider the obligations that the Torah imposes on us as slavery, something undignified for free men. Following his remarks cited above, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi expresses the certainty that one day the Torah will manage to penetrate the ears of those who rebel against his words, We learn this from the symbolism of the Tablets, which though made of rock were engraved with G-d’s words, and which became the Luhot HaEdut (Tablets of the Testimony), a testimony to the irresistible power of the Divine Word.

Do not read “engraved” but “freedom”. The rebellious imagine that they would lose their freedom if they accepted the revealed law. They are mistaken, for they confuse liberty with anarchy. One is not free who does what he wants, but only one who wants to perform his duty with all his might. The one who is ready to give in to all the whims of his personal desires is in reality a slave to his whims, his passions, and his desires. The only one who is free is the one who knows how to renounce his desires, and who occupies his free time with perfecting himself, with educating himself in order to know what his duties are.

“There is no free man,” Rabbi Yehoshua tells us, “except one who occupies himself with the study of Torah.” It is only then that he will be able to benefit from his freedom, in elevating himself above the mediocrities of his material life, because “anyone who occupies himself with the study of Torah becomes elevated.” The verse in Numbers that is cited by Rabbi Yehoshua teaches us that for the person who knows its value, this Mattanah (gift of Torah) becomes Nachaliel (the heritage of G-d), a heritage that remains inalienable to him, even if all the material advantages of life evade him. The Torah, “given in the desert,” is the only treasure that deserves being pursued. It allows us to finally attain the Bamot (heights) where physical sufferings lose their intensity and where frivolous pleasures lose their charm.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI YOSSI BEN HALAFTA

**R**abbi Yossi ben Halafta lived during a dark time of our history, an era of persecution and danger. He was one of the four disciples whom Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava ordained at the risk of his life (Sanhedrin 13b). It was the time of the cruel decrees of Emperor Hadrian, who after the fall of Betar tried by all means possible to destroy Judaism at its very foundation: He prohibited the study of Torah study, the ordination (smicha) of Torah instructors, the recital of Shema, circumcision, etc. It was also the era in which nascent Christianity tried to become popular among our ranks.

Persecution subsided after the death of Emperor Hadrian, but these cruel decrees were still not revoked.

Rabbi Yossi was one of the best-known teachers of the Mishnah. His name is cited hundreds of times in Halachic discussions. According to an ancient tradition, he was the descendant of the famous Jehonadab son of Rehab (see II Kings 10:15), who himself was a descendant of Jethro. Rabbi Yossi thus descended from the Rachabites, who were cited by the prophet Jeremiah for their loyalty to Hashem and tradition. He was a descendant of this illustrious family, and in the Mishnah he calls upon us to honor the Torah.

“The one who honors Torah is honored by men.” Rabbi Yossi lived in the Galilee, in the town of Sepphoris. According to a passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, the inhabitants of that town “were hard-hearted and scarcely honored the teachers of Torah” (Taanith 3-4).

On the other hand they were very sensitive, like most Galileans, to their honor. It was thus in this setting, the one in which Rabbi Yossi lived, that the words of the Sage cited in the Mishnah found particular resonance and brought those who had previously been indifferent to Torah close to it. “The one who

honors Torah is honored by men.” Rabbi Yossi made use, as it were, of their ambitions – of their need to feel honored – by putting these ambitions into the service of Torah. And this lesson, of course, is valid for all ages.

The honor due to Torah is a great thing. Sometimes Rabbi Yossi made an appeal to the feelings of the believer, and sometimes he appealed to his intelligence and reasoning. In all cases, this effort to honor Torah will drive the believer to better honor and respect Hashem Himself.

This honor is due first to the Sefer Torah, to holy books in general. Yet it does not only consist of treating them with respect. To study sacred texts – to get close to them – this is completely our way, and it is a way that should always be replete with respect. Rabbi Yossi teaches us, therefore, that one who honors Torah, by showing respect both to books and to those who instruct it, will be honored by men.

### THE PATH OF THE JUST SHAME - PART III

It is well known that in private, men undertake various actions, state many things, and imagine countless thoughts all with one underlying concern – that these remain secret. If the actions committed by them since their youth, as well as their words and their thoughts, were revealed to everyone, they would experience intense shame. How much more should we be embarrassed and ashamed before the Holy One, blessed be He, Who probes the heart, knows the mind, and observes the actions, words, and thoughts of a man throughout his life, with nothing being forgotten.