



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Greatness of a Sigh

A businessman from Warsaw once handed the Chafetz Chaim a list of his books that he wished to buy. After taking a quick glance at the list, the Chafetz Chaim asked him: "I notice that you ordered all of my books except Chafetz Chaim – the laws of Lashon Hara. Why did you leave out such an important work?" "I really would like to buy that book as well," came the reply. "However I'm afraid. You see, I come in contact with many people during the day, and in my position it's impossible for me not to speak or hear Lashon Hara." The Chafetz Chaim replied, "I am fully aware of the problem. I have even spoken to Rabbi Israel Salanter about it. He told me, 'It is worthwhile for someone to read your book on Lashon Hara even if the only result will be a sigh when he finishes it.'"

COME AND BE COUNTED IN HASHEM'S ARMY

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

As we know, the book of Numbers is called Chumash HaPekudim ("the Book of Counting"), since from its very beginning we read of the census of the Children of Israel, who were counted in the desert by their tribes. As to the question of why they were counted, Rashi cites the Sages in stating: "This can be compared to a shepherd whose flock was encroached upon by wolves, which killed some of them. He counted them to know how many were left" (Rashi on Numbers 26:1). Here too, after the sin of the golden calf, Hashem wanted to count the Children of Israel in order to know how many remained.

When we look into the verses that detail the numbering of the Children of Israel, we discover some astonishing things. First of all, why does the Torah go to such lengths in describing this census, which was done on a tribe-by-tribe basis? Furthermore, why does it go on to describe the banners of the tribes, the way in which they encamped, the identity of those who marched in front, who was included in the camp, and so on? Why devote so much time to such details?

There is more. Although we find the counting of the tribe of Levi in our parsha, only the family of Kohath is numbered. In Parsha Nasso, however, the rest of the tribe of Levi (the families of Gershon and Merari) are numbered. Why does the Torah divide the count between two parshiot? Why not make the count in a single parsha, as was done for all the other tribes of Israel? Finally, there is something else that we need to understand: From the very first verse of our parsha, we read in detail about where and when the counting took place: "The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Egypt." Why does the Torah describe, in such minute detail, where and when the Children of Israel were numbered?

All these issues lead us to reflect on how we must conduct ourselves throughout our life on earth.

The making of the golden calf was the greatest sin committed by the Children of Israel in the desert. They abandoned Hashem their G-d, Who had performed miracles and wonders for them, taken them out of Egypt, split the sea, brought them manna in the desert...and for what? To follow a small calf made of gold, of which they said: "These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt"? Let us think about this for a moment. Are we capable of understanding the magnitude of such a sin? How can a person who has received everything he needs from his father – along with miracles and wonders – abandon his father in order to serve an idol? As we know, the Children of Israel living in the desert at that time were known as a "generation of knowledge" (Vayikra Rabba 9:1). It is precisely for this reason that they did not want to remain without a leader for a single instant. When they saw that Moses had ascended to Heaven and was not returning, they had to do something in order not to remain leaderless. Their eyes were then blinded, and they made an idol of gold for themselves. Afterwards Hashem came and said: "I want to know the ones who, despite the difficult situation, remained firm in their faith. I want to know who continued to believe in Me even when they were leaderless." Thus Hashem desired to count them. It is not without reason that each tribe was counted again and again, in detail, with regards to those over the age of 20. Hashem wanted to show the whole world that these individuals – the ones who remained – had been unwavering in

their faith and were loyal warriors in the army of Hashem. They were the ones who did not turn their backs on Hashem, the ones who remained Jewish despite all the hardships they endured while others made the calf. Yet that is not all.

Every Jew has a purpose in this world. Everyone has their own way of serving Hashem, for we know that each Jew is linked to Him by a special connection, and it is through this connection that a person receives Hashem's beneficences. This is why the Holy One, blessed be He, said that each tribe was required to have a special banner. Each tribe had to have a different colored banner because each received Hashem's beneficences in its own particular way. If someone involves himself in what another person receives, then the world cannot exist, for everything would end up in a state of utter confusion.

How can a Jew receive Hashem's beneficences? It is by the intermediary of the tzaddikim, who implore and beseech Hashem for the community and the individual. In their greatness, they can ask for and receive an abundance of blessings and success for each Jew. Hence the members of the tribe of Levi, who as we know did not worship the golden calf (since they responded to Moses' appeal, "Whoever is for the L-RD, join me" [Exodus 32:26]), were the tzaddikim of that generation. They were counted separately, for the tzaddikim hold a special place with Hashem.

Furthermore, only the descendants of Kohath are counted in our parsha, whereas the descendants of Gershon and Merari are counted in Parsha Nasso. This teaches that even those who are called "children of Merari" because they are marim ("bitter") with Hashem, and even those who are called "children of Gershon" because they are megurashim ("exiles") from Hashem, can come closer to Him by the intermediary of the tzaddikim in each generation. This is why descendants of Gershon and Merari are singled out.

Above all, the Torah goes into great detail concerning when and where the census of the Children of Israel took place. It states, "In the desert of Sinai" in order to teach that we can only be counted in Hashem's army when we resemble the desert of Sinai, meaning when we make ourselves as plain as a desert. Only then are we capable of acquiring Torah. If we act in this way, we will be able to come inside "the Tent of Meeting." However this will only happen "on the first of the second month." Which is the second month? It is Iyar, a word formed by the same letters as reiyah ("sight"), for every person must see, perceive, and acknowledge the reality of "I have set the L-RD before me always" (Psalms 16:8). In other words, he must realize that Hashem is always before him.

What does this mean for us? It means that everyone must be a soldier in Hashem's army. A Jew must do this even where there are trials to overcome, even when there is a golden calf outside. How can a Jew be a faithful soldier in Hashem's army? It is solely by having faith in the tzaddikim, those through whom abundant good comes to us from Hashem. At the same time, we must always see the reality of Hashem and study Torah as if we were like a desert. If we act in this way, we will always be counted as soldiers in Hashem's army. Hashem will then send us an abundance of blessings and success, without limit, in both the material and spiritual realms. Amen, may it be so!

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

A People of Tribes

It is written, “Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers’ household” (Numbers 1:2).

This week’s parsha lays great importance on the tribal divisions. The tribes of Israel are numbered one by one, and there is an accurate numerical description given for men over 20 years of age in each tribe. In addition, the parsha stresses the lines of separation between the tribes and assigns actual physical limits for each. Every tribe was given a fixed area in which it had to encamp around the Sanctuary, this area being its home, the place where it was to dwell. A tribe was required to know its place and not mix among others.

Each tribe also had a special banner with its own color and particular design. In his commentary on Parsha Bamidbar, Rabbeinu Bechaye gives a description of these banners, which waved above the camp in the desert. He wrote: “You will have 12 banners, one for each tribe, and they will differ from one another by their colors.... Judah’s banner was sky-blue, and at its center was the portrait of a lion. Issachar’s banner was dark-blue, and in the center was a portrait of the sun and moon, for he was skilled in astronomy. Zebulon had a white banner, which designates wealth (since silver is white), with a portrait of a ship at its center. Reuben’s banner was red, and mandrakes were portrayed on it. Simeon’s banner was green, and on it was the portrait of Shechem. Gad’s banner had a mixture of black and white, and it carried the portrait of a military camp. The banner of Ephraim carried the portrait of an ox, while Manasseh’s banner carried a unicorn. Benjamin’s banner had the portrait of a wolf, Dan the portrait of a serpent, Asher the portrait of an olive tree, and Naphtali the portrait of a deer.”

We must understand why the Torah felt the need to immortalize these tribal divisions. Instead, why did it not take advantage of the joy of the exodus to unify the people?

The answer is that just as people differ from one another, so too do groups. The same applies to their material and spiritual needs, as well as their various approaches to life. This is why their personal and social development must be adapted to the specific characteristics of each. Thus when Hashem desired to give the Torah to His people in order for them to develop their individual and collective spiritual abilities, this had to be done in accordance with the different characteristics of the people, characteristics which found their expression within the various facets of the 12 tribes. It is precisely such divisions that are needed, ones made in complete recognition of the differences among groups, with each group and individual being themselves and feeling comfortable among themselves. In Chassidut this is called “the root of the soul.” Teaching divisions of this kind is meant to show the individual how to “find himself” within the greater community.

A Pearl From the Rav

It is written, “These are the offspring of Aaron and Moses.... These are the sons of Aaron” (Numbers 3:1-2).

At first the text states, “These are the offspring of Aaron and Moses,” but then only the sons of Aaron are listed, not those of Moses. Here our Sages said, “He who teaches the son of his neighbor the Torah, Scripture ascribes it to him as if he had begotten him” (Sanhedrin 19b). Since Moses had instructed the Torah to Aaron’s sons, they were also considered to be his offspring. In his book *Pahad David*,

Rabbi David Pinto Shlita writes, “We see from here that the primary thing in having children is to develop spirituality. As our Sages have taught, ‘What is the fruit of the righteous? Life, religious actions, and good deeds’ (Bereshith Rabba 30:6). These are the main things. According to this, we can fully understand the teaching of our Sages: ‘How dull-witted are those other people who stand up for a Torah scroll, but do not stand up for a great personage’ (Makot 22b). This is because the essential thing in studying Torah and raising children are connected, and everything is necessary to grow in Torah. Therefore it is obvious that we must rise before a talmid chacham, for he fulfills his task by studying Torah and performing good deeds.”

Three Things

It is written, “The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting” (Numbers 1:1).

Why did Hashem speak to Moses in the desert? Our Sages have said that the Torah was given by three things: Water, fire, and the desert. The Mahari Assad explains this as follows: “Why by Water? Water alludes to coolness. When a person rushes off to commit a sin, he should cool down and avoid sinning. Why by fire? Fire symbolizes heat. When a person is about to perform a mitzvah, he should do it with heated enthusiasm. Why by the desert (midbar)? When we find ourselves among people who are speaking (medabrim) of useless things (not forbidden words, but simply useless ones), we should remain silent.”

Walking on the Marked Path

It is written, “They gathered together the entire assembly on the first of the second month, and they established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers’ household, by number of the names, from 20 years of age and up” (Numbers 1:18).

If a person’s confusion is so great that he doesn’t know which path to follow in life, he should travel “according to their fathers’ household.” This means that he should follow the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He must not try to look for new paths to follow. The wisest of all men, King Solomon, wrote: “If you do not know, O fairest of women, go out in the paths of the sheep and graze your kids by the shepherds’ tents” (Song of Songs 1:8). This provides the answer to Israel’s question, “Tell me, O You Whom my soul loves, where will You graze [Your flock], where will You rest [them] at noon?” (v.7). In other words, when Israel asks Hashem where He is putting His sheep at noon, when it is too hot for the flock (i.e., where we should go and how we should live during the exile), Hashem replies: “If you do not know, O fairest of women, go out in the paths of the sheep” and according to their paths you will know. Look to where your fathers have gone and follow that path.

“...And Given Us His Torah”

A maskil came to synagogue and received an aliyah, at which point he recited the blessing: “Blessed are You... Who has chosen us... and given us His Torah.” The Rav of the synagogue said, “He doesn’t want the Torah, so why is he blessing Hashem for having given it to us? It’s simple, really. This maskil follows the ways of non-Jews: If they put on earrings, he puts on earrings; if they grow a ponytail, he grows a ponytail. The fact that he looks ridiculous doesn’t bother him in the least. The important thing for him is to look like non-Jews. To him it was a miracle that non-Jews didn’t accept Hashem’s Torah, otherwise he too would have been obligated to follow its ways. That’s the sense of the maskil’s blessing: ‘Who has chosen us from among all the nations and given us His Torah.’ In other words: ‘Lucky for

me, I can resemble non-Jews and go on wearing my earrings and ponytail. If non-Jews had accepted the Torah, however, I would have been forced to observe it in order to resemble them.’ ”

Issachar and Zebulon

It is written, “When the Sanctuary journeys, the Levites shall take it down, and when the Sanctuary encamps, the Levites shall erect it” (Numbers 1:51).

The Ketav Sofer said that this verse contains an allusion. The Levites in relation to the Sanctuary are like Zebulon in relation to Issachar. Just as Zebulon supports Issachar the scholar, enabling him to continue studying Torah all day long, so too did the Levites play this role in regards to the Sanctuary. In any case, when Issachar is seated in the tent of Torah study, Zebulon takes care of him. However if Issachar begins to wander about in the streets and thereby shows contempt for the Torah, Zebulon will tell him that he doesn’t need him. He will lower this Torah scholar from his greatness, of which he is not worthy. The verse alludes to this by stating, “When the Sanctuary journeys” – when Issachar goes wandering about – “the Levites shall take it down” – Zebulon will no longer support him. However “when the Sanctuary encamps” – when Issachar sits down to study – “the Levites shall erect it.”

A Person With Two Heads

When the Children of Israel were being numbered, it is stated that they were counted “according to their heads” (Numbers 1:2). The same is not said with regards to the Levites, nor to the firstborn, who were counted from the age of one month and up. Why did this head count only apply to the non-Levites among the people, those 20 years and older? The Midrash states that the king of the demons presented King Solomon with a man who had two heads. King Solomon was asked how he could wear tefillin, and his answer was that such a person could not live for more than a year. Thus anyone who has reached the age of twenty can possess only one head, for otherwise he would have died long before. Among those who were counted from the age of one month and up, namely the firstborn and the Levites, it was possible for one of them – though still regarded as a single individual – to have had two heads. Therefore individuals, not heads, were counted among the firstborn and Levites.

– Aish Dat

Overview of the Parsha

Following the book of Leviticus, which describes the connection between holiness and the Jewish people, the book of Numbers deals with the organization of the people around the Sanctuary. Just as the book of Exodus (which comes before Leviticus) deals with the formation of the people when they left Egypt, received the Torah, and built the Sanctuary, the book of Numbers (which comes after Leviticus) deals with the formation of the people when they found themselves in the desert with their Torah and Sanctuary. Parsha Bamidbar begins with a census in the desert of Sinai and the organization of the people by their encampments and banners. The tribe of Levi is counted separately, as are those among the Levites who replaced the firstborn of Israel. The task of transporting the Sanctuary is shared among the descendants of Levi’s three sons, with the children of Kohath transporting its holiest components.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

Quality and Quantity

It is written, “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).

On one hand the verse states, “The number,” yet on the other hand, “which can neither be measured nor counted!” The Sages explain: “This is no contradiction: [The latter case] speaks of the time when Israel fulfills the will of the L-RD, [while the former case speaks] of the time when they do not fulfill His will” (Yoma 22b).

How are we to understand that when the Children of Israel repent, their number suddenly increases to the point that they can neither be measured nor counted? In the Torah we find some people who were, in terms of quantity, single individuals, but in terms of quality they were like a great number of people. Our Sages said as much with regards to Moses, who was as valuable as the entire Jewish people, and also with regards to Yair the son of Manasseh, who was equal to the greater part of the Sanhedrin (Bava Batra 121b). Hence the Sages wanted to teach us that when the Children of Israel fulfill Hashem’s will, each of them becomes so great and important that their number, in terms of quality, increases to the point that there is no way of numbering them. Therefore they “can neither be measured nor counted.”

The book Kav HaYashar (262) cites a story from the Zohar: Rabbi Yossi died, and when his son cried out and implored G-d’s mercy, Rabbi Yossi’s soul returned to his body. However in exchange for Rabbi Yossi’s soul, the Angel of Death was given the lives of twelve people.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Engraved For All Time

It is written, “These are the names of Aaron’s sons” (Numbers 3:2).

Commenting on a verse from the book of Micah, Rashi states: “From here we deduce that whoever recites each day a verse beginning [with the letter] and ending [with the letter] as his name begins and ends, the Torah saves him from Gehinnom” (Rashi on Micah 6:9). Concerning chibot hakever (punishment after death), it is written that the wicked forget their names in the grave. As for a person who daily recites a verse that begins and ends with the same letters as his name, this is a segula that he will not forget his name (Kitzur Shelah, p.115a).

On this subject, the book Tuvecha Yabiu recounts a story about the Rav of Ponevezh, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman Zatzal. During lunchtime, the Rav would visit the cafeterias of schools located next to the Ponevezh yeshiva, and there he would encourage children by speaking with them. One day the Rav asked some children, “Tell me, does everyone know the verse that mentions his name, the one he should recite at the end of Shemoneh Esrei?” The children replied that they did. After hearing each child’s particular verse, he asked them all, “Does anyone know the origin of this custom?” One child said that his teachers had taught him that the source was found in the holy Shelah, who wrote that it’s a segula to help a person remember his name when he stands in judgment. The Rav nodded his head in agreement. He then approached one of the children and asked, “Tell me Moshele, how many times do you hear your name being mentioned from your rebbes and friends each day? Dozens of times, right? Let’s think about this for a moment. Since your name is mentioned so many times during the day, how is it possible that you could forget it on the day of judgment – yet by reciting the verse that mentions your name only three times a day, you won’t forget it!” The children were not sure how to answer this question, so the Rav asked them to carefully listen to what he was about to say: “The fear of the day of judgment is unimaginable! It even makes a person forget his own name! The only things engraved in the depths of a person’s soul are the words of Torah that he studied during his lifetime, for the Torah of Israel is eternal! Even the verse you recite at the end of Shemoneh Esrei is Torah. That’s why, even if you forget your name, you will remember the verses that you recited during your lifetime. And because of the verse that mentions your name, you will be able to remember it even with the great fear of the day of judgment.”

A TRUE STORY

You Can't Just Quit

It is written, "These are the ones summoned by the assembly, the leaders of their fathers' tribes" (Numbers 1:16).

One who takes on a public role and faithfully deals with the needs of the community is very important. However such work is not always easy, and sometimes it can swing back on a person. A man came before Rabbi Eliyahu Chaim Meizel (d. 1912), the Rav of Lodz, and explained that he was involved in charity work. However he was extremely hurt when one resident in town slandered him. The man complained to the Rav about his situation, saying that he was going to quit his job. The Rav, however, refused to hear of it: "There is an explicit Gemara which states that those who deal with the needs of the community have no right to quit."

News of the Rav's answer spread throughout Lodz, and it made waves in all places of Torah. However nobody could understand which Gemara he was referring to. Those who pondered the issue had an opportunity to raise the question with the Rav when they gathered in his home. To answer their question, the Rav opened tractate Sanhedrin before them, leafed through a few pages, and placed his finger on a line from folio 17a. The text in question dealt with the verse, "My lord Moses, forbid them" (Numbers 11:28), a statement that Joshua made to Moses concerning Eldad and Medad. In the Gemara the Sages explain it to mean: "Lay upon them public cares, and they will cease by themselves." The Rav asked, "Why will they cease by themselves? Can they not just abandon their tasks?" He answered, "This means that a person who deals with the needs of the community has no right to leave his job."

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Israel Hager – The Ahavat Israel of Viznitz

Rabbi Israel Hager was the son of the saintly Rabbi Baruch of Viznitz (may his merit protect us all), and a descendant of the Ahavat Shalom of Kossov, Rabbi Naphtali of Ropshitz, and the great Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Dov Ber. Rabbi Israel was recognized for his refined character early on in life, and he was always quick to help those who were afflicted or depressed. Apart from this, he was known to spend all his hours immersed in Torah study and the service of Hashem.

When his father the Rebbe of Viznitz passed away in 5653, Rabbi Israel assumed the leadership of the community. As the new Rebbe of Viznitz, he revealed himself as a very lofty individual, one who shared in the pain of both the community and the individual, and who rejoiced with each and every person. From every neighboring province, multitudes came to him in order to stand in his shadow. Opening his Beit Midrash of Viznitz, the chassidim of Romania saw in him a great leader, a father, and a protector. He poured out his soul before Hashem in prayer, especially on festivals and the Days of Awe. His melodies took root among his chassidim, and they are even sung to the present day. They also found a place within the greater Chassidic world. In 5665 the Rebbe founded the famous Viznitz yeshiva, which today continues his work throughout the land of Israel, especially in Bnei Brak. In 5678 he went to live in Grosswardein, where he remained until his passing. Rabbi Israel Hager served as the Rebbe of Viznitz for many years, until his soul ascended to the celestial academy on Sivan 2, 5696. He left behind four sons: Rabbi Menachem Mendel (Av Beit Din of Vishiva), Rabbi Eliezer (Av Beit Din of Viznitz), Rabbi Chaim Meir (Rebbe in Bnei Brak and father of the present day Rebbe of Viznitz Shlita), and Rabbi Baruch (father of the Rebbe of Seret-Viznitz Shlita). After the Second World War, Rabbi Israel Hager's remains were moved to the Zichron Meir cemetery in Bnei Brak. May his merit protect us all.

CONCERNING PERKEI AVOTH

In Heaven Above

It is written, "Do not seek greatness for yourself, and do not covet honor; let your deeds exceed your learning. Do not yearn for the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs" (Perkei Avoth 6:5).

In his book Chasdei Avoth, the Chida cites the great men of Mussar in stating that with regards to the material realm (i.e., eating, drinking, and clothing), we must not try to emulate those who are greater than us in wealth or honor, nor should we be jealous of their lifestyle. Rather, we should look to those who are below us. The Gemara tells us that Rabbi Akiva lived with his wife in abject poverty. In fact they were so poor that they slept on straw. One day a man (actually Eliyahu HaNavi in disguise) came to Rabbi Akiva's home asking for some straw, since his wife was in labor but had nothing to lie on. Rabbi Akiva said to his wife, "See! Here's a man who lacks even straw!" (Nedarim 50a). When a person contents himself with what Hashem has given him, he will be continually happy, as it is written: "Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot" (Perkei Avoth 4:1). However with regards to spiritual characteristics, such as studying Torah, performing mitzvot, and perfecting one's character, we must seek out and emulate those who are greater than us. An indication of this can be found in the verse, "That is in Heaven above or that is in the earth below" (Exodus 20:4). In other words, with regard to spiritual things pertaining to Heaven, we must look above. We must look to one who is higher than ourselves in order to learn from him. As for things "in the earth below" – material and earthly matters – we must look to one who is below us and rejoices in his lot. It is written, "A path of life above for the intelligent one, so that his soul will turn away from the grave below" (Proverbs 15:24). Thus with regards to the spiritual realm, we must learn by looking above. In his commentary on the book of Proverbs, the Vilna Gaon explains that man is called "one who advances" from strength to strength. We must continually advance and ascend level by level, for if we fail to ascend to the top, we are liable to fall to the bottom, a fall that will start with a reversal.

– Anaf Etz Avoth

EISHET CHAYIL

Six Good Years

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Ruth 607) recounts the story of a poor and pious man who earned a living by working for a landowner. One day as this pious man was working in the field, Eliyahu HaNavi appeared to him as an Arab. He said to the man, "You have six good years of fame and fortune coming to you. When do you want them – now or near the end of your life?" The man replied, "I have to go and speak to my wife about it." When he told his wife the story, she said to him, "Tell him that you want them now." When the man gave Eliyahu his response, he said to him: "Go back home, and before you reach your doorway you'll witness a blessing in your home." When the man got back home, he learned that his children had discovered a chest of gold coins, and he became very wealthy. What was his wife's reaction? She said, "Since the Holy One, blessed be He, has demonstrated His generosity to us, having given us a great deal of money that will tide us over for six years, let's practice generosity and give to tzedakah. Who knows? Perhaps Hashem will be pleased with us and give us more." This is precisely what they did. After six years had passed, Eliyahu HaNavi came and found the pious man studying in the Beit Midrash. He said to him, "The time has come for me to take back what I have given you." The man said to him, "Just as I took your money with my wife's permission, so now let us go and tell her together." When they arrived at the man's home, his wife said to Eliyahu, "Go and ask Hashem, Who sent you here, if there's ever been people more faithful than we have been. If so, we will return the money." The Holy One, blessed be He, recognized their righteousness and generosity, and He granted them blessing after blessing, until the end of their days. Hence in them was fulfilled the expression, "Tzedakah leads to peace."