



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

An Elixir of Life

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 19b) relates that Reb Alexandry called out: "Who wants life? Who wants life?"

A large crowd soon gathered. They said to him, "Give us life!" Reb Alexandry proceeded with a quote from Tehillim (34:13-14), "Who is the man who desires life and loves days that he may see the good? Guard your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit."

At first glance this seems puzzling. What novel idea did Reb Alexandry reveal to those people? He merely cited a verse known by all.

The Chafetz Chaim explained thus: When the people first heard Reb Alexandry's offer of life, they thought he was selling a drug or medicine that had the power to increase a person's life span. But he showed them a spiritual drug that can actually give a person long life in this world, as well as Olam Haba. (It is worth noting that the Chafetz Chaim lived for almost one hundred years.)

– Guard Your Tongue, p.30

EVERYONE IS INCLUDED IN THE COUNT

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

At the beginning of this week's parsha we read: "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 the exodus from the land of Egypt, saying: 'Take a census of the entire assembly...from 20 years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the army in Israel'" (Numbers 1:1-3). Here Rashi comments, "Because they were dear to Him, He counted them often: When they left Egypt, He counted them. When [many] fell because of the golden calf, He counted them to know the number of the survivors. When He caused His Shechinah to rest among them, He counted them." We begin a new book with this week's parsha, the book of Numbers. From the very start, however, we encounter a subject that needs to be clarified and understood, namely the census of the Children of Israel. The Torah is eternal and addresses every person in each generation. The mitzvot are eternal as well, and the accounts given in the Torah also constitute lessons that apply for all time. For example, Parsha Korach teaches us the lowliness of dissension and what awaits those who provoke it with erroneous arguments and obstinacy, until they themselves are lost.

The census of the Children of Israel occurred at a given point in time, and their numbers were susceptible to change. Today they are a certain number, and tomorrow they are another number. Therefore why did the Holy One, blessed be He, decide to describe this subject in His Torah and bequeath it to every generation? It can only be because the census contains a timeless lesson for all the generations and everyone among us. What is the lesson that we learn from the census of the Children of Israel? We shall soon see. Hashem demands that we focus our efforts in this world on the study of Torah and unity, each being ineffective without the other. This is because we cannot attain the Torah without unity, and the Torah without unity does not lead to a bond with Hashem. Instead, such an approach leads to ruin.

Man was born with the role of "serving and protecting" the Torah and cleaving to the Creator. To accomplish this task, he must understand the world through the study of Torah. Just as a person must understand how a car works in order to drive it (otherwise he may be risking his life), and just as he must know how to correct problems as they arise when operating a machine, so too must he realize that there are other people in the world, people who also have a role to play in it. He needs to realize that he must respect, love, and see them as they truly are, namely an integral part of Creation. Above all, a person must realize that within everyone created by Hashem, there exists a soul that is a Divine spark, the spiritual component within man. If a person is content on studying Torah while forsaking the respect he owes to his fellow – and thereby failing to perform the mitzvah, "You shall love your fellow as yourself" – it might be because he thinks that he is rectifying Creation through his study of Torah. Such an idea is completely mistaken! Far from cleaving to the Creator of the universe, such a person is in fact destroying himself. What he is actually doing is failing to recognize the Divine spark in his fellowman. He is also failing to recognize the Torah and the true purpose of others, which is his way of denying all that is important.

Hence the Creator of the universe gave us, as part of the goal of Creation, the mitzvah: "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). In other words, you must not only respect your family and circle of friends, but all Jews, those included in the task of "working and keeping [the garden]." The goal of this work, namely the study of Torah in unity, must be accomplished by everyone. Therefore at the giving of the Torah we read, "Israel encamped opposite the mountain" (Exodus 19:2), like a single

person with a single heart. This was the only way that the Torah was received, with the Children of Israel standing in the desert and humbling themselves like the dust of the earth, each yielding before the other. It was only then that they could receive the Torah and achieve perfection.

In light of all this, we understand that the Creator of the universe knows all His creations, including their numbers, even those of insects and animals, as well as the number of grains of sand. Everything is counted. That being said, why did Hashem tell Moses to take a census of the Children of Israel? It was in order for them to realize that they cannot live separately, but instead to be counted among the collective, among the group.

Just as people know the number of their children, siblings, and friends, so too did the Holy One, blessed be He, demand unity among the people, that they be aware of one another and help each other before the giving of the Torah. Since the Torah only endures among the humble (Taanith 7a), the Children of Israel merited to hear Hashem's words at the giving of the Torah because they nullified themselves and were humble. Now the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of man together have the same numerical value as Torah (611+2=613), and they will be illuminated by the Divine spark found within each person.

This also explains the expressions found at the beginning of this week's parsha. The expression, "The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai" means that we must nullify ourselves before others, and in so doing we will merit a connection to Hashem. This will be like the giving of the Torah, when Israel encamped opposite the mountain, which represents the evil inclination (see Sukkah 52a). This alludes to a person rising up like a mountain and separating a person from his fellow, from the Creator of the universe, and from His Torah. The Children of Israel fought, encamped before the mountain, and humbled themselves. Thus by the power of unity and mutual love, we can fight the evil inclination and overcome it.

The expression, "In the Tent of Meeting" alludes to the present world, which a person must "work and keep." Everyone was created starting from one man, and therefore no one can say that he cannot love his fellow. Everyone descends from the first man, which is why we must be united.

The expression, "On the first of the second month" means that if a person wants to work for the Jewish community and see to its needs without exception, he can only succeed if he humbles himself before people ("the second"), meaning that he does not place himself before others. It is during the chodesh (month), a sign that he must constantly l'chadesh (renew) his love for others. He will then see himself as being second, meaning as secondary with regards to others, and this will lead to a connection between Hashem, the Torah, and Israel, which are one. The expression, "The second shana [year]" alludes to the fact that we must never leshanot (change) our feelings with regards to others, meaning that we must always love them. By being secondary to others, and by everyone fulfilling the mitzvah, "You shall love your fellow as yourself," we will fulfill the goal of the exodus from Egypt.

From here we see that unity and love for others is of the utmost importance. If a person harms his primary bond with others, he also harms the Divine spark that he carries within himself. He will no longer be connected to Hashem, Who can no longer help him in any way. That being the case, what can we say? We must obviously love others like ourselves, for then we will be truly connected to the Holy One, blessed be He, at each hour and every instant. May Hashem help us to achieve this. Amen, may it be so.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Appeasing King Fouad's Anger

The Midrash states, “The Torah was given to the accompaniment of three things: Fire, water, and desert. Fire. From where is this derived? From the text, ‘All of Mount Sinai was smoking because the L-RD had descended upon it in fire’ [Exodus 19:18]. Water. From where is this derived? It is said, ‘Even the heavens dripped, even the clouds dripped water’ [Judges 5:4]. Desert. From where is this derived? From the text, ‘The L-RD spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai’ ” (Bamidbar Rabba 1:7).

In his book *Darchei Mussar*, Rabbi Yaakov Neiman explains that the Torah was given by fire. He writes: “The Torah is light, it illuminates the path that man must follow, and everyone must conduct himself according to what the Torah says. During the time of Czar Nicolas, it was decreed that no Jew could purchase land in Russia. A certain Jew wanted to purchase land for a Gentile friend, a person whom he completely trusted. When this Jew went to see Rabbi Simcha Zissel for advice, he said to him: ‘There is a clear answer to your question. Eliezer, Abraham’s servant, was a faithful servant who took care of all his master’s concerns, as it is written: “Who ruled over all that he had” [Genesis 24:2]. Yet when Abraham sent him to look for a wife for Isaac, he did his trust his Canaanite servant. Instead he made him swear an oath to faithfully carry out his mission. If Abraham did not want to trust Eliezer, how much more should we not trust a Gentile who simply appears loyal.’ This Jew, however, did not follow Rabbi Simcha’s advice, and in the end the Gentile deceived him and he lost all he had.”

The book *Tuvcha Yabiu* (part 1, p.73) recounts a story that took place in the palace of the Egyptian King Fouad, a story in which we can also see the Torah illuminating man’s path. One day as the king and his queen were walking in the royal garden, the queen suddenly decided to bathe in a fountain located within the courtyard. The king ordered her not to do this, but she insisted. In the end, she disobeyed his orders and did what she wanted. The royal ministers mentioned to the king that he should treat this matter seriously. The king therefore appointed three advisors, one of whom was Rabbi Nachum, the Rav of Cairo. Rabbi Nachum sent an urgent message to the Maharil Diskin in Jerusalem, asking him what he should tell the king. The Maharil Diskin replied with a Gemara which states that when a person prostrates himself before water in a fountain, the water does not become forbidden, for the water to which he prostrated himself has already flowed out, and the water now flowing from it is different (Avodah Zarah 47a). The Maharil Diskin said, “Go and tell the king that the queen did not transgress his orders, for the water in which she bathed was not the water that he had prohibited her from using.” Rav Nachum followed this advice, and it pleased the king.

A Pearl From the Rav

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita writes that the book of Numbers describes most of the Children of Israel’s experiences in the desert, from the second year of their departure from Egypt until the fortieth year. It also describes the encampments and journeys of the Children of Israel in the desert, and especially the places where they upset Hashem during those 40 years, such as when the spies disparaged the land of Israel, or when Korach and his followers rebelled against Moses. It is not without reason that this book is called *Bamidbar* [literally “in the desert”], for it explains that the Children of Israel irritated Hashem in the desert because they did not

make themselves into a desert. The Baal HaTurim comments on the beginning of the parsha by stating, “It is written earlier [at the end of Leviticus], ‘These are the mitzvot’ and immediately afterwards, ‘in the desert of Sinai,’ to tell us that if a person does not make himself into a desert, he cannot know Torah and mitzvot.”

This evokes a statement of the Sages: “Just as the desert is open to all, the Torah is open to all” (Tanhuma, Vayakhel 8). Thus the Children of Israel – although they were in the desert, and despite the fact that they were the generation of knowledge – did not learn to become like a desert themselves, which is why the book carries this name.

Three Things

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

Our Sages have said, “The Torah was given to the accompaniment of three things: Fire, water, and desert. ... Why was the giving of the Torah marked by these three features? To indicate that as these are free to all mankind, so too are the words of the Torah free” (Bamidbar Rabba 1:7). The commentators have remarked that these three things – fire, water, and desert – show us the path to follow in order to grow in Torah and the fear of Heaven. Fire is the flame of Hashem, the flame of enthusiasm in the heart of the Jewish people for their Father in Heaven. Water is humility, sound judgment and level-headed thinking. The desert is the symbol of modesty and prudence, as the Sages have said: “Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation, and toil in the Torah” (Perkei Avoth 6:4).

Constant Devotion

The gaon Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin once told a close colleague, “The Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to the Children of Israel in order for them to fulfill it in all situations and under all conditions. They were also to be ready to give their lives for their faith in the Creator of the universe. This does not just entail giving up one’s life, but also accustoming oneself to living under conditions of oppression and suffering, conditions that demand constant devotion over long periods of time. From the very outset, with the appearance of Abraham, the story of our people is filled with individual and collective examples of this concept. In fact the Midrash alludes to this by saying that the Torah was given with three things: Fire, water, and desert. (1) Fire alludes to Abraham, who jumped into the fiery furnace for his faith, an example of devotion on an individual level. (2) Water alludes to Nachshon ben Aminadav, who jumped into the sea before all the Children of Israel, an example of devotion on a collective level. (3) The desert alludes to the deeds of our fathers, who walked in a barren desert for 40 years and remained connected to Hashem, an example of devotion on the part of the Jewish people that was both constant and admirable.” – Parperaot LaTorah

All Are Holy

It is written, “Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel” (Numbers 1:2).

Rabbi Yitzchak Karo of Castile explains:

Why is the book of Numbers placed immediately after the passage on equivalent values at the end of the book of Leviticus? It is to teach us that just as Hashem is unique and has no equivalent – as it is written, “There is none as holy as the L-RD, for there is none besides You” (I Samuel 2:2) – so too will He not exchange Israel for another people.

This is what the Holy One, blessed be He, said to the Children of

The Torah and Mishnah

A man presented himself to the author of *Ohr Yesharim* and asked the following question: “The Holy One, blessed be He, gave me a wonderful son, and He also gave me the mitzvah of educating him and seeing to his future. We learn that a father must educate his son in Torah, teach him a trade, and take a wife for him. What are the steps involved in this, and how should I proceed?”

The Rav replied, “We learn this from the order of the books of the Torah: The first book, Genesis, contains the story of our fathers, which is a sign for the children. It also describes the punishment of the first man after the sin, the generation of the flood in its depravity, the people of Sodom in their wickedness, and the love of the holy Patriarchs and the reward of their righteousness. Similarly, the first years should be devoted to helping a child acquire good middot, meaning a love for kindness, a fear of punishment, and a desire for reward. We must also set a personal example, for the deeds of the fathers are a sign to the children. Next, the book of Exodus describes the giving of the Torah and the construction of the Sanctuary in order to serve Hashem, and the book of Leviticus contains the rules concerning the offerings, which actually correspond to prayer. This represents the years in the yeshiva, when a young man learns Torah and grows in the service of Hashem and in prayer. It is a time when he acquires a solid foundation for the rest of his life. Only then does the book of Numbers come, containing an account of the journeys of the Children of Israel, their encampment around the Sanctuary, and their travels with the Ark leading the way before them. This alludes to earning a living to the utmost of our abilities in the light of Torah and in an atmosphere of Torah. Finally, the book of Deuteronomy points to soul-searching, which corresponds to retirement, when we have a chance to rectify our sins and elevate ourselves.”

Similarly, we see that Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi redacted the Mishnah by dividing it into six orders: Zeraim, Moed, Nashim, Nezikin, Kodashim, and Taharot. These orders correspond to the periods of a person’s life: Zeraim deals with blessings and mitzvot that are connected with the vegetable realm, the primary source of man’s food, which he requires each day. Hence it is the first order. Next comes Moed, which comprises the laws of Shabbat and the festivals, for Shabbat occurs each week and we must be aware of its laws. Moed therefore comes right after Zeraim. The third order is Nashim, which comprises the laws regulating divorce and marriage, which is the next stage in a person’s life, namely marrying and establishing a home. Once married, a person must provide for his family, which corresponds to the fourth order, Nezikin. It comprises the laws regulating commercial transactions. After these four orders come Kodashim and Taharot, which comprise the laws regulating sacrificial slaughter, as well as the laws dealing with purity and impurity. May Hashem soon show us the building of the Temple and the establishment of the offerings.

Israel: “Do not exchange Me for anyone else, just as I will not exchange you for others. You call yourselves a flock, and just as one animal is not exchanged for another, so will I not exchange you.”

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch said that the juxtaposition of the books of Numbers and Leviticus is fitting, for in the last parsha of Leviticus we learn how to count the flock so as to remove a tenth part that is consecrated to Hashem, and in the book of Numbers we also find a flock consecrated to Hashem. These are the Children of Israel, all of whom passed under the staff of the supreme shepherd, and therefore all of them became completely consecrated to Hashem.
– Ma’ayanot HaNetzach

A Soldier in Hashem’s Army

It is written, “From 20 years of age and up, everyone who goes out to the army in Israel” (Numbers 1:3).

When the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Sanz was just four years old, he already knew all 613 mitzvot (as classified by the Rambam) by heart. When the tiny Chaim was asked why he learned them by heart, he replied: “I told myself that we’re soldiers in Hashem’s army, and we should know His orders and laws. Since I wanted to be a good soldier, I learned them all by heart.”

The Sanctuary: A Unifying Center

It is written, “The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ house. At a distance around the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp” (Numbers 2:2).

As we know, this statement was made “on the first of the second month, in the second year after the exodus from the land of Egypt” (Numbers 1:1). It is surprising to learn that the issue of the banners was delayed for an entire year while they were in the desert, and that they did not receive this order upon leaving Egypt.

At first glance, the issue of the banners seems likely to have divided the people. Since each banner represented an aspiration and goal that was unique to each tribe, thereby separating each tribe by its special characteristics and tasks, dissension could have easily occurred between them. Yet since they all had the same center, namely the Sanctuary around which they encamped together, there was no longer anything to separate them. Instead, everyone stood in their particular place in the overall assembly. Hence as long as the Sanctuary had not been assembled, and as long as this unifying center did not exist, the banners were not organized, lest it would lead to dissension. It was only once the Sanctuary was assembled that the Children of Israel were ordered “to encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignias of their fathers’ house... around the Tent of Meeting.”

– From Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky

Overview of the Parsha

Following the book of Leviticus, which describes the bond between the Holy One 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 precedes the book of Leviticus) deals with the formation of the people when they left Egypt, received the Torah, and built the Sanctuary, the book of Numbers deals with the formation of the people when they found themselves in the desert with their Torah and their Sanctuary. Parsha Bamidbar begins with a census in the desert of Sinai and the order of the banners and encampments. The tribe of Levi is counted separately, for they redeemed the firstborn of Israel. The work of transporting the Sanctuary during their travels is shared among the descendants of Levi’s three sons, with Kohath’s descendants being responsible for transporting the Sanctuary’s holiest vessels.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

The Torah Grants Wisdom

Rabbi Levi said, “There was once a certain innkeeper in the south who used to arise in the night, get dressed, and say to his guests: ‘Arise and go out, for a caravan is passing.’ They would go out, whereupon a band of robbers would fall upon them and kill them. They would then enter the inn and share the spoils with him. On one occasion, Rabbi Meir arrived there and was received as a guest. He [the host] arose, got dressed, and said to him: ‘Arise and go out, for a caravan is passing.’ He replied, ‘I have a brother for whom I must remain here and wait.’ [The innkeeper] asked, ‘Where is he?’ ‘In synagogue.’ ‘Tell me his name, and I will go and call him,’ he urged. ‘His name is Ki Tov,’ he replied. The innkeeper went and spent the entire night calling out ‘Ki Tov’ at the door of the synagogue, but no one responded. In the morning Rabbi Meir arose, put his bags on his donkey and prepared to leave, when the innkeeper asked him: ‘Where is your brother?’ He said, ‘Behold, he is here, for it is written: “And G-d saw the light ki tov [that it was good]” [Genesis 1:4]’ ” (Bereshith Rabba 92:6).

The Torah grants wisdom to man and allows him to understand the ploys and schemes of the wicked, allowing him to become even more clever than them.

ESHET HAYIL

Their True Identity

After the end of the Second World War, when a great number of orphans were brought to live in monasteries, the Rav of Ponevezh learned that hundreds of Jewish children had been taken to a certain monastery. The Rav immediately set out to rescue them. When he arrived at the monastery, he faced tremendous opposition. The director said to him, “We have young orphans from all around the world, and nobody knows who’s Jewish and who’s not. The children themselves are too young to know, so it’s impossible to check.” The Rav nevertheless insisted and asked to be let in, assuring him that he could identify the Jewish children. The director refused, for he was adamant that there was no way of verifying who was Jewish, and therefore the Rav’s efforts were a waste of time. The Rav asked that he be allowed to see the children for at least a minute. “Sixty seconds?” the director sneered. “What can you do with that?” The Rav was brought into a large hall where all the children were located, and he stood before them and proclaimed in a loud voice: Shema Israel, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad! About 200 children suddenly got up and ran towards him, crying out for their mothers. “These children are Jewish,” said the Rav, who was given permission to leave with them. The Rav explained to the priest, who was moved to the point of tears, that all Jewish mothers recited Shema Israel to their children at bedtime. This is why the children remembered their mothers and their true identity.

– Yalkut Avarech

A TRUE STORY

A New Family Tree

It is written, “They established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers’ house” (Numbers 1:18).

Rashi states, “They brought the records of their genealogies and witnesses of their birth claims, so that each one should trace his genealogy to a tribe.”

When the tzaddik Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk was a boy, a fire broke out in his hometown. Most houses were made entirely of wood at that time, which is why the fire quickly spread to many homes. The house of Rabbi Yehudah Leibush, the father of Rabbi Menachem Mendel, also burst into flames. The boy’s mother quickly escaped from the house with her children, and when they were far enough away she began to weep.

The young Menachem Mendel, who was about ten years old at the time, said to her: “Is a wooden house with wooden furniture worth such tears?” His mother caressed his head and said, “My dear, I’m not crying for the house or for the furniture that’s burning with it. I’m upset because of the precious family tree that remained in the house and is now burning.” Menachem Mendel consoled his mother by saying, “Don’t cry, mother. G-d willing, I promise that when I grow up, I’ll write you a new family tree starting with me.”

– Torat HaParasha

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira – The Rebbe of Munkacz

The saintly Rabbi Chaim Elazar Zatzal was the son of the tzaddik Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Shapira, the author of Darchei Teshuvah and the Rebbe of Munkacz. Born in the small town of Strzyzow in 5632, he was known for his holiness and extreme purity from an early age. In fact many of the great Torah figures of the generation visited his father in order to meet the child prodigy, who amazed everyone who saw him. By the age of ten, he was already writing his Torah commentaries in a special notebook, and many came to see what he had written. At the age of 13 he wrote his own Bar Mitzvah discourse, and everyone was amazed to hear the penetrating words that he uttered. At the age of marriage he wed the granddaughter of Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Peshischa and moved to the town of Tchebin. There he became acquainted with numerous Torah greats. He also wrote his famous book Minchat Elazar, which was supported by many of the great men of the generation. Among them was Rabbi Yitzchak Schmelmkis of Lvov, the author of Beit Yitzchak.

In 5664 Rabbi Simcha Bunim left Tchebin for Munkacz, where he was named as Rav and Av Beit Din. In 5674, after the passing of his father Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch, Rabbi Chaim Elazar was appointed to succeed him as Rebbe. Thousands of chassidim flocked to him from all the surrounding towns.

Rabbi Chaim Elazar was known for his sharp and brilliant mind, a man who feared no one. He fought vigorously against everyone who harmed Judaism, even if only by a hair. In 5690 he made an eleven-day journey to Eretz Israel, but returned to Munkacz and continued leading the community with both a firm and gentle hand. Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira left this world on Sivan 2, 5697, being laid to rest in the presence of thousands of people from Munkacz. May his merit protect us all.