

TORAH WEEKLY

02 June – 08 June, 2019
 28 Iyar – 05 Sivan, 5779
 Torah: Numbers 1:1 - 4:20
 Haftorah: Hosea 2:1-22
PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

CALENDARS

We have Jewish Calendars. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi / Chaplain to contact us.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please contact or have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

GRAPE JUICE & MATZAH

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

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 No One Alone,
 No One Forgotten.

WISDOM FROM THE WILDERNESS

“Numbers” may be the name by which the fourth of the Five Books of Moses is commonly called, but in the Hebrew original it is known as Bamidbar, or “In the Wilderness.” It is interesting to note that this Parshah is always read immediately before the festival of Shavuot, “the season of the giving of the Torah.” What is the connection?

The Sages teach that it is not enough for G-d to give us the Torah; we have to be ready to receive the Torah. What makes us worthy recipients of this most precious and infinite gift from G-d? This is where the “wilderness” idea comes in. A wilderness is a no-man’s land. It is ownerless and barren. Just as a desert is empty and desolate, so does a student of Torah need to know that he is but an “empty vessel.”

Humility is a vital prerequisite if we are to successfully absorb divine wisdom.

As long as we are full of ourselves and our preconceived notions, we will not be able to assimilate and integrate Torah into our being. Even if are already somewhat accomplished in our Torah studies, we still need to remember—as the Kotzker

Rebbe put it—that “as much as you know, you are still an undeveloped wilderness.”

Then there is the idea that an ownerless wilderness is there for anyone to stake his claim. No person or group of people has a monopoly on Torah. It belongs to each and every single Jew, not just the rabbis or the yeshivah students, or the religiously observant. “The Torah that Moses commanded us is the heritage of the entire

Congregation of Jacob” (Deuteronomy 33:4). While we acknowledge that there is much hard work ahead of us if we are to acquire the Torah and make it ours, we also know that with diligence and effort we can succeed. Indeed, some of our finest Torah scholars throughout the generations have hailed from the simple, ordinary folk—tailors, cobblers and the like.

Maimonides, in his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Torah Study 3:1), states: “With three crowns was Israel adorned—the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of royalty. The priesthood was the privilege of Aaron . . . royalty was the privilege of King David . . . the crown of Torah is there ready and waiting for all of Israel . . . and it is the greatest crown of all.”

However, while Torah may be “free for all” as a desert wilderness, we must surrender ourselves to it, emptying ourselves of our ego and our preconceptions, rather than attempting to adjust it to our own circumstances and lifestyles.

And then, like the empty and uninhabited wilderness, the Torah personality may well find himself alone and isolated. We might express our strongly held values and beliefs, only to discover that we stand alone. We might display the courage of our convictions and find ourselves, like Abraham, “on the other side” of the whole world. Our principles may well prove unpopular, especially should they step on toes or upset apple carts. No matter. Being true to G-d and His Torah means standing by it, under

any and every circumstance. May the literal title of our Parshah of Bamidbar, and the many lessons it conveys, serve as a fitting prelude for the beautiful festival of Shavuot. May we receive the Torah with joy and earnestness, so that this important festival will be both memorable and meaningful.

by Rabbi Yossy Goldman

IS G-D JUST TREATING ME LIKE A NUMBER?

The funny thing about customer service is that it often doesn’t serve the customer. “To them I’m not a person, just an account number,” customers often complain. And there is nothing quite so cold as being treated like a number.

Strikingly, the fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar, is referred to as the Book of Numbers. At the beginning of the book, a year after the Jews left Egypt, G-d instructs Moses to conduct a census of Israel, the firstborns and the Levites. And at the end of the book, in Year 40 of wandering in the desert, G-d once again instructs Moses to count the people. Why all this counting? Hence the name “Book of Numbers,” or in Hebrew, Chumash ha-Pekudim.

Why all this counting? The commentaries explain that counting expresses G-d’s love and care for His nation. That seems counterintuitive. A census just gives you a bunch of numbers for each tribe and group, nothing personal. How is that loving and caring?

The standard Hebrew word for counting is cheshbon or

minyan. But throughout the Torah a different word, pekudim, is used. This word and its derivatives are used in many different ways throughout the Torah and Prophets. Among them are:

1. To remember, as in “G-d remembered (pakad) Sarah . . . and Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son to Abraham,” (Genesis 21:1.) or in G-d’s promise to take the Jewish people out of Egypt: “G-d will surely remember you (pakod yifkod) and bring you out of this land.” (Genesis 50:24.)
2. To be missed, as in the famous haftarah about David and Jonathan: “David’s place was missing (vayipakeid).” (I Samuel 20:25.)
3. To assign, as in the responsibilities of the Levites: “And the assignment of (pekudat) the Merari family.” (Numbers 3:36.)
4. Destiny, as in Korach’s rebellion: “And the destiny (pekudat) of all men will be brought upon them.” (Numbers 16:29.)
5. Accounting, as when Moses gives an accounting for all the donations to construct the Tabernacle: “This is the accounting (pekudei) of the Tabernacle.” (Exodus 38:21.)
6. To command (in Modern Hebrew).

Why so many usages for this word? I believe there is one unifying definition: “to take notice.” When G-d remembers Sarah, He takes notice of her and blesses her with a child. When G-d takes notice of the Jewish people, He sends Moses to take them out of Egypt. When no one gets overlooked. David is absent from King Saul’s table, his absence is noticed. The Levites are noted for their assignment and special role in the Tabernacle. The same goes for a command—you are taking notice of the person you are commanding.

When G-d instructs Moses to count the Jewish nation, G-d says pekod, not menah. G-d doesn’t simply want a number to put into his spreadsheet. G-d wants Moses to take notice of every single Jew. Because G-d loves and cares for every individual. No one gets overlooked. Chumash ha-Pekudim—a whole book of G-d taking notice of the Jewish people. What great love

By Rabbi Sholom Raichik

SHAVUOT The holiday of Shavuot is a two-day holiday, beginning at sundown of the 5th of Sivan and lasting until nightfall of the 7th of Sivan (June 8–10, 2019). The word Shavuot (or Shavuos) means “weeks.” It celebrates the completion of the seven-week Omer counting period between Passover and Shavuot. The Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai on Shavuot more than 3,300 years ago. Every year on the holiday of Shavuot we renew our acceptance of G-d’s gift, and G-d “re-gives” the Torah. Customarily, we try to increase our dairy food on this holiday.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, June 2, 2019 - 28 Iyar, 5779

Passing of Samuel (877 BCE). The prophet Samuel (931-877 BCE) was one of the most important figures in Jewish history; our sages describe him as the equivalent of “Moses and Aaron combined.” Samuel was the last of the Shoftim (“Judges”) who led the people of Israel in the four centuries between the passing of Joshua and the establishment of the monarchy, and the author of the biblical books of “Judges”, “Samuel” and “Ruth” Samuel was born in the year 2830 from creation (931 BCE) after his barren mother, Chanah (Hannah), prayed for a child at the Sanctuary at Shiloh and pledged, “O L-rd of hosts... If You will give Your maidservant a man child, I shall dedicate him to G-d all the days of his life...” (I Samuel 1:11). At age two, his mother brought him to Shiloh in fulfillment of her vow, where he was raised by Eli the High Priest; shortly thereafter, Samuel had his first prophetic communication (described in I Samuel 3). In 890 BCE, Samuel succeeded Eli as leader of the Jewish people. After ten years under Samuel’s guidance, the people approached him with the request, “Appoint for us a king... like all the nations around us.” Samuel disapproved of their request, believing that the people of Israel should be subject only to G-d and not to any mortal king; but G-d instructed him to do as the people ask. Samuel then anointed (879 BCE) Saul as the first king of Israel. When Saul disobeyed G-d during the war on Amalek, Samuel proclaimed David the legitimate king in Saul’s stead. Shortly thereafter, Samuel passed away in his birthplace, Ramah, in the hills of Judah, on the 28th of Iyar of the year 2884 from creation (877 BCE).

Monday, June 3, 2019 - 29 Iyar, 5779

Passing of R. Meir of Premishlan (1850). R. Meir of Premishlan was a famous chassidic master and a noted miracle worker. Although he lived in poverty, he exerted himself tirelessly for the needy and the suffering. His divine inspiration and his ready wit have become legendary.

Wednesday, June 5, 2019 - 2 Sivan, 5779

Chosen People (1313 BCE). Sivan 2 is marked on the Jewish calendar as Yom HaMeyuchas (“Day of Distinction”); it was on this day that G-d told Moses -- when Moses ascended Mount Sinai for the first time -- to tell the people of Israel: “You shall be My chosen treasure from among all the nations, for all the earth is Mine. You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:4-6).

Friday, June 7, 2019 - 4 Sivan, 5779

Moses Transcribes (first part of) Torah (1313 BCE). On Sivan 4 of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE)--two days before the revelation at Mount Sinai--Moses wrote down the first 68 chapters of the Torah, from Genesis 1:1 (“In the Beginning G-d created the heavens and the earth”) to the Giving of the Torah in Exodus 19 (Exodus 24:4; Rashi *ibid.*).

Shabbat, June 8, 2019 - 5 Sivan, 5779

Jews Accept Torah (1313 BCE). On this day, Moses made a covenant with the Jewish people at the foot of Mount Sinai at which the people declared, “All that G-d has spoken, we shall do and hear” (Exodus 24:7) committing themselves to observe the Torah’s commandments (“do”) and strive to comprehend them (“hear”), while pledging to “do” also before they “hear.”