

# Torah Weekly

## PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

May 3 – May 9, 2026  
16 – 22 Iyar, 5786

Torah Reading:  
Bamidbar: Numbers 1:1 - 4:20

Haftarah:  
Samuel I 20:18-42

PSALMS DAILY

### Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

*Psalm 117*

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.  
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal.  
Hallelujah!  
(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

### Negative Mitzvah 179: Creeping Creatures or Insects

It is forbidden to eat any creeping creature or insect. Though there are other prohibitions regarding specific types of insects and creeping creatures (e.g., flying ones, ones that creep on the ground), this prohibition adds a second "encompassing" prohibition on all sorts of creeping creatures, so that one who eats a specific type of creeping creature has transgressed two commandments.

### Negative Mitzvah 180: Creatures that were not Properly Slaughtered

It is forbidden to eat any [kosher animal, beast or bird] that has died [without being ritually slaughtered].

## THE CENSUS: MAKING EACH PERSON COUNT

Nearly 60 years ago, Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan declared, "The medium is the message," proposing that the medium affects society primarily by the characteristics of the medium itself, rather than the content it carries.

Although viewed as groundbreaking in the field of media theory, this idea was actually expressed thousands of years ago in this week's Torah portion, Bamidbar.

G-d instructed Moses and Aaron to count the Jewish people. The census was the medium through which it would become known how many would be eligible for battle, and later, how the Land of Israel would be apportioned. This census, unlike our modern decennial census, was not conducted online or even through the mail. Tribe by tribe, each head of household appeared individually before Moses and Aaron to give his name and be counted.

Each person was counted not as a mere number, but as an essential component of a greater distinctive whole. Nachmanides states that one reason for the census was so that every individual had the opportunity to benefit from the attention given to them by Moses and Aaron.

The characteristics of the medium (census) thus affected society in a much greater way than just the content (the actual number of people). Embedded within the medium of the Torah's narrative is the message that each Jew holds a designated place within the cohesive structure of the Jewish people. Each person is Divinely endowed with traits and specific abilities meant to be developed. Each of us has an essential role to play in a greater collective journey, spanning generations.

### Sunday Dollars: Greeting Every Individual

The Rebbe personified the supreme importance of the individual in relation to society. Every Sunday, he stood for eight hours or more to greet and bless his worldwide

followers individually. Hundreds of people would wait patiently in line for hours, just to have the opportunity to be in the Rebbe's presence for a moment. The Rebbe would hand a dollar to every visitor so that they could donate it to charity, thus fulfilling the mitzvah of tzedakah. These moments were both life-changing and life-affirming. Every person was uplifted by their brief but transformative encounter with, and heartfelt blessing from, the Rebbe.

We all want and need to feel that we are valued. Feeling isolated or marginalized from society, family or even friends is painful. We begin to shut down. The fact that G-d wanted us to be counted should instill in us a sense of self-worth and purpose. Just as every note and instrument in a musical score has its designated time and purpose, so does every person play a significant role in G-d's symphony of the world. We are only as strong as the individuals, families and communities that comprise the collective whole.

### We Are Just a Half Without Another

In taking a census, such as the one described in Parshat Bamidbar, it is forbidden to do a literal head count of the Jewish people. The manner of counting was through each person's donation of a half-shekel coin. Each half-shekel represented one person. The half-shekel is a reminder that no Jew is complete on his or her own; we must join together to achieve unity. By working together for the overall greater good, we form a totality and wholeness. Like concentric circles, this completes and expands us.

Nevertheless, while we must join together in unity, we are not to forfeit our individuality. Rather than focus the count on the totality of the mass, the focus was on the individual. The individual is not to be "lost in the crowd" or devalued. Every human is created in G-d's image.

Maimonides taught, "Each of us should see ourselves as if our next act could change the fate of the world." What will be your next action? Make it count. Value who you are and the special role that G-d

wants you to assume.

Every life is like an entire universe. Recognize your inner value, and realize that you truly matter and can make a difference. Lift up your head. In fact, the counting is called "lift the head" (se'u et rosh) of all the people since the counting was meant to lift each of us up.

### It Begins With Each Of Us

Each of us can strive to integrate these lessons into our lives. Communicating to others that we appreciate their contributions validates their dignity. There are often "others" who for various reasons are on the sidelines and often excluded. Include them, count them as valued and lift them up. Judaism insists that the dignity of each individual be upheld.

We are a nation, but we are also individuals; this is both a challenge and a strength. May we strive to view ourselves not just as separate entities, but rather as valued members on the same team.

Moreover, we are not to lose ourselves to the alluring conformity of the latest trends and current "values." To retain our distinctive and distinguishing Jewish identities, we must "lift our own heads" above the "herd mentality" of the times.

The census itself was the medium designed not just to count each person but to make each person count!

### Making It Relevant

1. Strive to view yourself as inherently worthy and act with dignity.
2. Practice treating others with respect and validate them.
3. "Lift the head" of someone else, especially one in need of encouragement and compassion.

Katia Bolotin  
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### DONA GRACIA MENDES-NASI (MID-1500S)

Few other figures in Jewish history, particularly in the Middle Ages, played such an inspiring and beneficial part for their fellow Jews as did the noble Jewish lady Dona Gracia.

The legends that have woven

Sacred material please do not desecrate

### Aleph Institute

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No One Forgotten.

around this extraordinary personality are numberless, but the historical facts prove that she was indeed an outstanding personality. Many thousands of conversos and other persecuted Jews called her by no other name than "Our Angel."

Dona Gracia was born in Portugal in the early sixteenth century, to the noble family of Benveniste, which had come there from Spain after the flight from the Inquisition. Herself from a rich home, she had married the even richer Francisco Mendes-Nasi, member of one of the largest international trade and banking firms in the world. When her husband died while still young, Dona Gracia decided to leave Portugal together with her only child, Reyna, and several other relatives. For Portugal was then beginning to feel the mighty arms of the Inquisition, which made life unbearable for the conversos, the people who, like Dona Gracia, were living secretly as good Jews but had adopted the Catholic church for appearances' sake, in the hope for a chance of escape.

Though Dona Gracia had to leave a considerable part of her huge wealth behind, she fled Portugal and settled in Antwerp, where her brother-in-law Diogo was the head of the branch of the Mendes-Nasi firm, which had connections with most European courts.

Many other conversos were then coming to the capital of Flanders to build new homes, but the powerful arms of the church began to be felt there too, and the conversos found they had to be even more careful there to appear as good Christians, instead of gaining the freedom they had sought when they fled Spain and Portugal.

Dona Gracia (or Beatriz de Luna, as she was known by her non-Jewish name) was a woman of extraordinary beauty, culture and wealth. She was highly respected by the noble and influential people of the highest rank of France, Flanders and the other countries with whom the Mendes establishments dealt. But, being a good Jewess, she hated every moment that she had to hide her true feelings, and she felt very uncomfortable in her disguise.

She began to make plans to leave Antwerp

for a free country, especially after the death of her brother-in-law. Suspecting that she planned to leave with her entire wealth, Emperor Charles V tried to seize her fortune. But Dona Gracia succeeded in leaving Antwerp in 1549 with her daughter, her windowed sister, her niece and most of her wealth.

Together they traveled to Venice, from which port many vessels left for distant lands where Jews did not need to be afraid of living openly according to their religion. Like her nephew, the famous Don Joseph Nasi, who had already found a haven in Turkey and had become one of the mightiest men of Europe as a minister to the sultan, she planned to go to Constantinople. But she had to wait a few anxious years before she was able to live in freedom and again in possession of her huge wealth.

The king of France, a willing tool of the church, was very angry at her slipping away from Antwerp, and more so at her taking most of her wealth with her before he could confiscate it. At his instigation, and because of the careless remarks of her own relative, the governors of Venice put her and her family in prison, and confiscated her huge wealth, before she could sail for Turkey.

But then Don Joseph Nasi used his influence with the Turkish sultan, who was only too glad for an excuse to start trouble with the competing Venetian traders. His government sent a special envoy to Venice with the request to release the converso woman and her wealth. But it took two years of negotiations and threats of actual war until this release was effected. Dona Gracia was released and, with her daughter, settled temporarily in Ferrara, where they openly returned to their Jewish religion. By 1552, Dona Gracia settled in Constantinople, where she became the center of worldwide help to conversos and Jews in suffering. Her wealth was used not only for business, but to buy the favors of princes, opening many doors to the persecuted. She fostered Jewish culture, and poets wrote at great length in praise of her many achievements as a patron and helper of Jewry in those dark days. She built synagogues, established yeshivot and

libraries, and supported scholars and students of the Torah. She helped to resettle hundreds of conversos, to enable them to return to their Jewish faith.

By Nissan Mindel

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### BAMIDBAR IN A NUTSHELL

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary. They replace the firstborn, whose number they approximated, since they were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to redeem themselves.

When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the Ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary's entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem.

### IN JEWISH HISTORY

#### Wednesday, May 13, 2026 – 26 Iyar, 5786 Six-Day War (1967)

In the spring of 1967, the Arab capitals paraded their arms and openly spoke of overrunning the Land of Israel and casting its inhabitants into the sea. The international media was almost unanimous in its belief that the small Jewish state, outflanked and outgunned by its enemies, stood little chance of survival. It seemed that, for the second time in a generation, the world was going to stand by and

allow the enemies of the Jewish people to slaughter them in the millions. On Iyar 26 (June 5, 1967), Israel launched preemptive strikes on its southern and northern frontiers. In just six days, the Jewish army defeated five Arab armies on three fronts and liberated territories of its promised homeland amounting to an area greater than its own size, including the Old City of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount (see "Today in Jewish History" for Iyar 28). The openly miraculous nature of Israel's victory

spawned a global awakening of the Jewish soul, fueling the already present and growing teshuvah movement of return to G-d and Jewish traditions. The Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, of righteous memory, called it a moment of biblical proportions, an "opportunity the likes of which has not been granted for thousands of years." Many thousands of Jews flocked to put on tefillin and pray at the newly liberated Western Wall of the Temple Mount.