

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Anonymous, thanking all those who helped him with his recovery from surgery. Refuah Shleima.
- Phyllis Levi, Aaron and Risa Levi, and Shana and Avi Zuckerbrod, in memory of their beloved father-in-law and grandfather, Eric Levi, Eliyahu ben Baruch Halevi, whose yahrtzeit is the 5th of Sivan, May his *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Cheryl Mitnick, in honor of Yom Yerushalayim.

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

I want to thank Ellen and Noah Lightman, who are sponsoring the shul kiddush today as a *kiddush hoda'a*, thanking Hashem for Ellen's miraculous recovery from her accident, and thanking the community for their support over the past year. I'm sure I speak for everyone in wishing Ellen continued good health, *bracha* and *hatzlacha*, *nachas* and *simcha*, and may she continue to inspire us all with her positive attitude and all her kindness and *maasim tovim* for many years to come.

I am very excited to invite everyone to a community-wide Yom Yerushalayim program in our shul, beginning at 6:15 this afternoon. Bringing five community rabbis and a chazzan together to celebrate Yerushalayim will, IY"H, be a true *kiddush shem shamayim*. We are looking forward to people from all over our community coming together to hear a meaningful panel discussion and participate in heartfelt singing and true yearning for a rebuilt Yerushalayim. In this vein, Yerushalayim is truly עיר שחברה לה, יחדיו, a city that connects all Jews at the deepest level. I want to thank Linda and Michael Elman for sponsoring the event in memory of Michael's father, Julius Feigelman, Yehuda ben Yechiel Michel. May his *neshama* have an *aliya* and may we see the *geula shleima bimhera viyamenu...amen*.

I am also very excited to announce that we have a very stimulating and packed learning program in Shul this Shavuot. The shiurim begin on Thursday evening and continue all night and throughout the Yom Tov. There are learning programs for people of all ages. For our elementary school age boys, once again we offer the very popular stories of *tzadikim* from Rabbi Yossi Brecher. We have an open Beis Medrash, round the clock *shiurim*, and *chaburas*. I encourage everyone to review the robust schedule and learn as much Torah as possible this Shavuot. What better way to celebrate *Mattan Torah* (the giving of the Torah) than with a real, personal *kabolas Hatorah* (accepting and receiving the Torah)!

The **Rambam** writes that our custom is to begin reading Sefer Bamidbar before Shavuot.

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק יג הלכה ב: ויהמנהג הפשוט שיהיו קוראין במדבר סיני קודם עצרת,

What is the connection between Parshas Bamidbar and *Mattan Torah*, which we commemorate on Shavuot? What lessons does Parshas Bamidbar teach us that are relevant to receiving the Torah?

Chazal refer to Sefer Bamidbar as *Chumash Hapekudim*—the Book of Numbers or the Book of Counting-- because the *sefer* opens with Hashem's command to take a census of the Jewish people. Related to this theme, the Haftarah, from the second *Perek* of Hoshea, which is usually paired with this Parsha, begins on a very optimistic note about **numbers** and Klal Yisrael:

וְהָיָה מִסְפַּר בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּחֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמָּד וְלֹא יִסָּפֵר וְהָיָה בְּמִקְוֵם אֲשֶׁר־יֹאמַר לָהֶם לֹא־עַמִּי אֲתֵם יֹאמַר לָהֶם בְּנֵי־קֹלֶהּ:

*The number of the people of Israel shall be like that of the sands of the sea, which cannot be measured or counted; and instead of being told, "You are Not-My-People," you shall be called Children-of-the-Living-God.*

For a people that has chronically suffered as a minority, this prophecy comes as a cheerful source of encouragement. But what does it mean? As **Rav Hirsch** notes: "*Israel in itself is one of the **smallest** of nations. . . repeatedly decimated in the storms of world history.*" Indeed, the Torah already notes that the Jewish people are not destined to be large in numbers...

דברים (פרשת ואתחנן) פרק ז פסוק ז: לֹא מֵרֵבָבָם מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים חָשַׁק ה' בָּכֶם וַיִּבְחַר בָּכֶם כִּי־אַתֶּם הַמְעַט מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים:  
*It is not because you are the most numerous of peoples that Hashem grew attached to you and chose you—indeed, you are the smallest of peoples....*

But **Rav Hirsch** continues: “... it is not its actual material number that is to give it importance. [Nevertheless, says our Prophet,] these descendants of Israel, materially so puny, are to become as important amongst the nations as the sand of the seashore, which, insignificant in its particles, is not measured or counted, still form the mighty protective wall against the intruding waves of the sea. In the same way, the children of Israel, scattered amongst the nations as the bearers to mankind of the eternal world saving Truth of the One free willed God, and of pure free willed humanity, will form the mighty bulwark behind which the weary human race...will ultimately find refuge and salvation,”

Similarly, the **Ramban** points out that Shevet Levi, despite all their importance and influence, was the smallest of the *shevatim*. Importance is measured in quality and impact and not quantity and numbers.

רמב"ן במדבר פרק ג פסוק יד: והנה לא היו שבט הלויים כשאר השבטים, כי מבין חדש ומעלה לא היו רק עשרים ושנים אלף (להלן פסוק לט), ומבין שלשים שנה כלם שמנת אלפים, והנה לא יגיעו מבין עשרים שנה ומעלה לחצי שבט מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל הפחות שבכלם, ועדין לא נשאו הארון שתהיה הקדושה מכלה בהם, וזה תמיה איך לא יהיו עבדיו וחסידי ברוכי ה' כשאר כל העם.

Our **significance** is found in our **contributions**, our **impact**, what we **stand for**, and the **light and kindness we bring** to the world.

**Rashi** tells us that, because of the prohibition to count Jews directly, Jews are counted indirectly--by having them contribute a donation—and then the donations are counted...

רש"י במדבר (פרשת במדבר) פרק א פסוק ב: לגלגלתם - על ידי שקלים בקע לגלגולת:

*Rashi: By their polls, that is, by means of shekels, “a beka for each head (לגלגלת),” as was prescribed on a previous occasion.*

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks** wrote: “*The danger in counting Jews is that if they believed, even for a moment, that there is strength in numbers, the Jewish people would long ago have given way to despair. How then do you estimate the strength of the Jewish people? To this the Torah gives an answer of surpassing beauty. Ask Jews to give, and then count their contributions. Numerically, we are small, but in terms of our contributions to civilization and humankind, we are vast.*”

And where did the contributions go? To the Mishkan, the House of Hashem—symbolizing that our greatest contribution is in making a 'קדוש ה', bringing glory to the name of Hashem. That is why Chazal write, when explaining the prophecy of the Navi Hoshea that we cited before, וְהָיָה מִסְפָּר בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּחֹל that the Jewish people will be infinite like the sand **when they keep the 'רצון ה'**, the will of Hashem.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף כב עמוד ב: אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני, רבי יונתן רמי: כתיב: והיה מספר בני ישראל כחול הים וכתוב אשר לא ימד ולא יספר! לא קשיא: כאן – בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום, כאן – בזמן שאין עושין רצונו של מקום. **Chazal (Gemara Yoma 22b)** understand that the *pasuk* is describing the most important of all the Jewish people's gifts to the world. Beyond all the contributions to the world, in ethics and morality, science and technology, and medicine, the greatest contribution of the Jewish people is more subtle —by living Godly lives and perfecting the world through our acts of chesed, by doing the will of Hashem and modeling the values of Hashem. We may not even realize how much this helps the world...every Godly thought, word, and action...has a major impact. Chazal understood that this is the greatest contribution each individual Jew, and the Jewish people as a whole, can make to this world...

But what is the connection between Shavuot and counting? One could suggest that it is Torah that gives us meaning and significance as a people. But I think there is another message as well. Conceptually, counting is the act of unifying different objects into a greater whole. It is about finding the common bond between diverse entities and joining them together to form one greater unit—all represented by one

final, larger number. Counting individuals as a group is about going beyond their individuality...to make them into something bigger. As **Rav Hirsch** writes: *The fourth book of the Torah now returns to the national reality...It opens with the command to take a census of the nation as an "eida," a community united by its common calling. All the independent members of the nation are to be counted, one by one. A census of this nature makes it clear to the nation's representatives that the community is not merely an idea but, rather, exists only in the actual totality of all its members.*

**It is Torah that makes us into a community.** Seeing ourselves as part of a greater entity called Klal Yisrael is so fundamental to Judaism that it was the basis for *Mattan Torah* and that, in turn, was the beginning of our identity, not as a collection of individual Jews, but as עם ישראל.

In 1925, **Rav Kook** wrote a letter (*Mishpat Kohen* 124) to Rav Meir Don Plotzky after the latter sent him a copy of his *seforim* on *Chumash* called *Klei Chemda*.

שיש בציבור של ישראל קדושה ומציאות כללית, שאינה נערכת כלל כלפי החלק של כל פרט, והיא עומדת למעלה מגדרי חלוקה, ובשביל כך קרבנות ציבור צריכין להיות משל ציבור דוקא, שזהו ענין הקדושה של הכלל כולו... ועיקר קדושת תורה שבע"פ, שהיא תורת הברית של ישראל, הוא מפני קדושת הכלל שניכר בה יותר

In this letter, he writes that Torah gives the Jewish people a *kedusha* as a *klal* beyond the sum of its parts---they join together to produce a new holy entity called *Klal Yisrael*.

And a holy entity lifts up and inspires the entire entity...Hence, the **Ramban** points out, the language of...ראש means counting by literally lifting up the heads—while showing them how they have an important part to play, in contributing to the greater entity known as עם ישראל. Torah unites us and makes us into a community and we are all uplifted and given the opportunity for נצחיות, everlasting significance, by being part of the Jewish community.

I want to read you the message Ellen Lightman wrote to invite our community to the kiddush she and Noah are sponsoring today as a קידוש הודאה. "*The day before Shavuot last year, my life changed. I was hit by a car Shabbos afternoon as my husband and I walked in the crosswalk at the corner of Greenspring and Smith. Needless to say, the trauma and subsequent hospitalizations have left a number of deficiencies on my physical self. At the same time, many benefits have followed. I have experienced many of Hashem's nissim (miracles) and survived many tenuous moments. I have learned from firsthand experience what a wonderful community in which we live. So many of you davened for me, showed Chesed, offered words of encouragement, and smiled. You showed you really cared. I believe it really mattered in the eyes of Hashem. Saying thank you is trite and insufficient. But, please know how appreciative I and my family are. To mark the year, we are sponsoring a Kiddush Hodahah this Shabbos M'Vorchim Sivan, May 20, after davening at Shomrei Emunah. If you can attend we'd love to see you; if not, know that we shall forever be grateful. Ellen"*

That is one example of what it means to be a part of a community. To be embraced and uplifted and cared for by a community. And Ellen—you continue to inspire our community with your strength and resilience, and your care and concern for the Jewish community.

Every weekday morning, we recite מְזִמּוֹר לְתוֹדָה הָרִיעוּ לָהּ כָּל הָאָרֶץ, "A song of thanksgiving; everyone must sing praise to ה'." As the name suggests, this paragraph of *Tehillim* was sung by the Leviim as an accompaniment to a *Korban Todah*, which was brought by an individual to express his or her thanks. Why does the *mizmor* begin with one's personal gratitude, then go on to say כָּל הָאָרֶץ לָהּ הָרִיעוּ, "let everyone sing praise." Why does the whole world have to express gratitude because something good happened to one individual?

**Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l** answered this question with a story: *One day after davening in Bnei Brak, one of the attendees took out a tablecloth from a bag and spread it on the table. He then placed cake and*

whiskey on the table and invited everyone in shul to share in his good fortune. Apparently, the day before he had been crossing the highway, and was hit by a car. He was thrown up into the air and landed on his side, but, other than a few slight bruises and a soiled suit, he was fine. He provided cake and whiskey, so that the participants would all have a l'chaim in honor of the miracle he had experienced.

The next day, following Shacharis, another member of the shul took out a small tablecloth, placed it on a table, and proceeded to place cake and whiskey on the table. He invited everyone to share. "What happened to you?" they asked. "Perhaps you were also hit by a car?" "No," he answered. "Nothing of the sort. It is just that yesterday when I heard that fellow relate how he miraculously escaped serious injury, it dawned on me that I have been crossing that highway for the last 20 years, at the exact same place - and nothing has ever happened to me! Is that not a miracle? I therefore want to thank Hashem publicly for all of His graciousness to me!"

Rav Chaim explained, "מזמור לתודה" refers to one's personal deliverance from tragedy, as well as all the things that 'could have been.' קל קאָרן, seeing another person pay gratitude to Hashem should spur one to introspect and realize how much he, too, owes Hashem. True, he may not have experienced the same misfortune, and that in itself is a miracle!" **We cannot take our good fortune for granted.** It is all a gift from Above. We should all take the time to appreciate all the bracha in our lives.

And gratitude towards Hashem מזמור לתודה should lead us to live inspired lives בשמחה, serving Hashem with joy. Rav Hirsch, in his commentary on Tehillim, Mizmor 100, writes: עבדן. It is regrettable that the concept of "Divine service" is understood to consist primarily of the ritual of prayer and sacrifice in the Temple and in synagogues. This is not in accordance with the Jewish idea of עבודה ה'. The true "service of God" is primarily and most truly performed in the process of day-to-day living. To serve God means to devote all one's energy, all the means and talents at one's disposal and every moment of one's life, to the execution of God's will, and he whose entire life is devoted to the service of God in this spirit is called עבד ה'...We are summoned to serve God with gladness, and to serve Him outside the confines of the Temple. For it is only if we thus serve Him in our everyday lives that בואו וגו', the mood of joy which will remain in our hearts as a result, will accompany us into the House of God.

The **Netziv** writes that Sefer Bamidbar is about transition for the Jewish people. The Jewish people would leave the miracles of the midbar—and move to Eretz Yisrael, where they would need to incorporate the awareness of Hashem's power into their everyday mundane existence.

העמק דבר הקדמה לספר במדבר: משום דעיקר זה הספר הוא מחליף ומשנה הליכות עם ה' בחיי העולם מאז שהגיעו לא"י. מן הדרך שהלכו במדבר... שבמדבר היו מתנהגים במדת תפארת שהלך לימין משה שהוא לגמרי למעלה מהליכות הטבע. ובא"י הלכו בדרך הטבע בסתרי השגחת מלכות שמים ב"ה.

*The main theme of this Book, the transition and transformation in the worldly affairs of God's Nation from their living in the wilderness to when they entered the Land of Israel. While living in the wilderness they [experienced God's] glorious manner "march to the right of Moses," i.e. totally transcending nature; whereas in the Land of Israel their affairs accorded with nature, concealing the providence of God's Kingdom, may He be blessed.*

Hashem does not intend for us to live in a perpetual state of obvious miracles, but He sends us some, to inspire change and infuse our lives with a knowledge of His presence. Let us thank Hashem for all the miracles in our lives. And let us approach Shavuot with a sense of gratitude, and mission, appreciating the gift of life; the gift of Torah; the gift of being a Jew, and the gift of being part of such a wonderful Jewish community. May we be zoche to see the day when Hashem's presence and glory will be seen by all, with the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash, bimhera viyamenu...amen.