

## SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

### BEMIDBAR

Haftarah: Hoshea 2:1-22  
Rosh Hodesh Sivan will be celebrated on Friday, May 30.

MAY 24, 2014

24 IYAR 5774

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO Dr. Baruch Kahn and to Yosef Zohar Kahn

Monday is Memorial Day – Join us for a ceremony opposite the VFW at 9:00 AM

### SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

Candle lighting this Friday evening is at 7:53 p.m. Shir Hashirim 7:15 Mincha at 7:30 SHARP

Thanks to all of you who joined us at 7:30 on Friday.  
Please be on time this Shabbat – we really appreciate it!  
Please join us!

SHABBAT Class at 8:30, Relevant Daily Halachot based upon the teaching of HaRav Ovadia Yosef Hashem Melech at 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:20AM

We will endeavor to keep it to the 7 aliyot, somech, samuch and maftir each week.

This week's Kiddush is sponsored in honor of  
Dr. Baruch Kahn and his son Yosef Zohar  
Celebrating their birthdays

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30  
Ages 0-5 - in the Playroom/ Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library / Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

Children's afternoon program with the Bach at the Bach from 5:30 to 6:30

Rav Aharon is away this weekend in the city  
Mincha at 7:15 – Followed by Seudah Shelishi at 7:45  
Class with David – The Umbrella of Protection

Birkat HaMazon at 8:35  
Arbit at 8:40 - Shabbat Ends – 8:53

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE  
Shaharit Sunday and Monday 8:00AM, Tues -Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Thursday)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE - Men and Women are Invited  
Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai 7:30

Daily class with Rabbi Colish - Weekday 6:30 AM (ADDITIONAL NEW TIME Sunday Mornings 7:30)  
Kaballah as a Guide to Spiritual Growth based upon the teachings of Likutei Moharan

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**Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame. Mincha at 4PM through October 30<sup>th</sup> – Please join us! 212-289-2100**

### Editors Notes

**Appreciating Every Individual - Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Maslaton, z'sl,**

We begin the book of Bamidbar this week. I am not sure why we call it BaMidbar when the vowels clearly determine that the reading of the word should be BeMidbar. While the word translates to "In the Desert", in English we call this the book of Numbers. The first part of the Book discusses the census of the Israelites that Moses conducted after the erection of the Mishkan or Tabernacle. Rashi questions the census and explains that, Out of love for His people, Hashem counted us at important junctures of our history. The completion of the Tabernacle was one of these occasions.

In a way Hashem counts and values each of us as important. It takes a G-dly perspective to see the good in every one of us.

The world is blessed with some special people who can also see the good in everyone and draw that good out. Some do it in a quiet way. My dad was one of those people as I have mentioned who saw the selem elokim, the image of G-d in everyone and helped draw that image out.

On Saturday night I was shocked to hear of the very sudden passing of Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Maslaton, z'sl, affectionately known by many of us as Rabbi Murray. Murray Maslaton was able to see within each Jew, their Holy Neshamah. He lived by the knowledge that each person's soul yearned and was most capable of getting close to Hashem. Where others saw no hope in some people, Rabbi Murray sought those out and in a non-physical way beat them until their corporeal bodies would allow those holy souls to shine. Where my father was quiet, Rabbi Maslaton was loud. And Rabbi Murray was very successful. He most certainly touched the lives of thousands and was personally responsible for bringing back so many of them to the path of Torah and Mitzvot.

His great nephew Saul Kassin explains that, many Rosh Yeshiva's attested that the boys or girls Rabbi Murray brought and requested to be accepted into their Yeshiva, didn't look the part, weren't on par educationally nor spiritually with those in the Yeshiva. The Yeshiva heads did not see how it was possible for these kids who were so far from religion to even become observant, let alone learners. And it was beyond imagination that they would become Talmidei Hahamim, scholars and rabbis. But these same Rosh Yeshivas testified that they were wrong and that on each and every occasion Rabbi Murray was right. And furthermore not only did these students perform on par with the Yeshiva, many actually became the elite of the study hall.

How many lives did he change forever?

Two weeks ago Sunday, I spoke with Rabbi Murray for close to an hour, or better said he spoke and questioned me. He loved my father. They were very close and I remember countless occasions where he came to my dad for advice. His zealousness sometimes got him into trouble and my dad was a master at untangling webs. He told me how much he missed my dad. But he had his finger on the pulse of the community and wanted me to understand things from his perspective.

Rabbi Murray was like a cousin. Everyone knows how close and intermingled the Maslaton and Bibi families are. My uncle Morris and Aunt Rebecca were the Rabbi's uncle and aunt, and his uncle Isadore and aunt Esther were like my aunt and uncle.

Although we only spoke a handful of times, there was always closeness. I knew he loved me. But perhaps he had that with everyone.

My earliest memories are of Rabbi Murray talking with my dad along Avenue S. They would speak for hours and I remember standing there waiting, but I never minded as I would wander off into the candy store on the corner of East 7th where Jerry would give Victor and me anything we wanted. Later on we prayed in his children's minyan in the Midrash of Shaare Zion until we were able to replicate what he built with Rabbi Mevorach at Ahi Ezer.

I'll never forget the pressured sales attempt when I was in eighth grade. He desperately wanted me to study under his Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman in ner Yisroel in Baltimore. My mother quickly nixed that and Rabbi Murray knew that the one person he didn't have a shot with was my mom! Nobody messes with a Gindi girl!

When he learned 25 years ago that I was a student of Rabbi Abittan in Long Beach, he was quite happy. From then on, I became "Long Beach" to him and his primary concern was that I remain connected to the community and grow in Torah. When I received semicha, he told me that he always knew I had it in

me and the detour via Flatbush rather than Baltimore just added some years onto the path.

In our last conversation he was particularly interested in the community's presence in Manhattan where I spend much time. He was pleased to know that there were at least three active daily Synagogues and that in Safra there were two minyanim each morning and classes every day. He was concerned that those in Manhattan keep their connection to Brooklyn and even more concerned lest the community members begin thinking that they were like the modern orthodox in the city. We had to be aware that we were different.

We discussed the recent phenomenon of what is being labeled as "Social Orthodoxy." As I understand from some recent emails from KJ, it is described as "Modern Orthodox Jews who live a committed Jewish life that doesn't rely on God or a divinely authored, authoritative Halakha for inspiration or obligation. In their minds, no one is being obligated to do anything. Social Orthodox Jews are developing what might be described as a voluntary commitment to behave in a religious way as a manifestation of their commitment to the Jewish people, to a 4,000 year old history, to Zionism, and to Jewish culture. All of this is expressed through serious, religious practice including Shabbat, Yom Tov, prayer, tefillin, kashrut and other forms of observance."

Jay Lefkowitz writes in Commentary Magazine: "And so for me, and I imagine for many others like me, the key to Jewish living is not our religious beliefs but our commitment to a set of practices and values that foster community and continuity. This way of life makes the social Orthodox Jew part of the Jewish people and the sweep of Jewish history in a very powerful and fulfilling way."

Rabbi Maslaton at first commented that orthodoxy without G-d could not last even a generation or two. Without Anochi Hashem – "I am G-d", the first of the commandments, there is nothing. He further stressed that this idea of practicing without belief is the exact opposite of what our community is all about. Even the most non-observant among us have a direct connection to Hashem. Even if people don't practice all the laws, they are believers and the children of believers. We are emotionally and spiritually connected to G-d, as a child is forever connected to their parent. We may wander, but we never go lost and we always know there is a path back. He bid me that I remind people that we are different, that we are special and that we are always attached to our Father in Heaven. Our problems are different, and our paths are different and we and our children

and our grandchildren, need guides who know us, know our parents, our grandparents, our DNA and our souls; we need rabbis and teachers who understand us and recognize how to guide us. We are not and pray G-d, never will be Social Orthodox.

He stressed that wherever we go, we need to keep attached and never forget that there is no place like home and that someone is waiting for us when we get back.

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Maslaton knew and appreciated the value of every Jewish soul. He loved everyone and saw the beauty within everyone. He was selfless, took nothing for himself and always gave of himself to others. He impacted generations and his touch will be felt for generations to come. I know I will never forget him. The community mourns the loss of a scholar, a worker and a leader. Tehi Nafsho Serurah BeSror HaChayim.

Shabbat Shalom  
David Bibi

**PS .... In commenting on last week's article on the importance of saying hello, I received many, many emails. Within minutes of sending the newsletter so many of you let me know that the article struck a chord and that you would try to remember to say hello and greet others with a smile.**

The emails continued and a few days later the article found its way into Denver. Rabbi Asher Klein of the Dat Minyan sent me a beautiful note. After receiving his note, I stopped into Rambam and told Rabbi Friedman and Rabbi Eliach that they should take pride in such a special graduate in whose words I could hear their voices echo.

Then the article got posted on some Facebook page and I received a few emails from people upset in Denver. As I've been sending this to close to 20,000 people for almost 20 years in addition to the readership from the Jewish Voice and the multiple re sends, you guys know my style. But in reading me the first time, some took offense.

An excerpt from one note: .... "I never write letters like this but I feel that I needed to express my thoughts in a way that I hope is respectful and clear. Yes, a proper greeting is so important and I hope people will read your article and think twice before they ignore someone they see in shul or walking down the street. However, these same people might have a negative view of a shul in a community that they have never seen because of how you expressed

your message. This is what is very troubling about your article. The power of negative words can be so damaging, just like the power of saying hello to someone can be so positive. You made your point but also illustrated the effects of Lashon hara”.

I'll need to consult the Chafetz Chaim Shemirat HaLashon on the Lashon hara accusation, but I am sorry that I offended some in Denver. I specifically did not mention any synagogue other than DAT and I was simply praising them, although I can see how in contrast my words look like criticism of the other synagogues. The other Synagogues did what most places do. They minded their own business. No different than most places I have prayed at in New York. The article was meant to encourage and appreciate the extra effort at DAT. But it's just that, an extra effort.

Let me stress that even if no one spoke with me in those other Synagogues, I greatly appreciate that there were Synagogues for me to come into and pray in with a minyan. Again I ask their forgiveness.

**Op-Ed: Anti-Israel campaign at UCLA echoes of McCarthyism By Abraham Cooper and Aron HierMay 20, 2014 3:58pm**

LOS ANGELES (JTA) – UCLA has some proud moments in the history of civil liberties.

After World War II, UCLA and the University of California, Berkeley, were the hotbeds of opposition to an anti-communist loyalty oath that California tried to impose on academics. Ultimately the professors won in court in 1954.

Sixty years later, a different pressure group purportedly speaking for the “progressive” grassroots wants to impose on UCLA students a loyalty oath of sorts — a pledge forswearing going on trips to Israel sponsored by certain Jewish organizations. Issued by five pro-Palestinian groups, the call demanded that candidates for student government take the pledge.

Who would have thought that McCarthyite tactics would be used to target, harass and intimidate pro-Israel students — Jewish and non-Jewish — at UCLA? There are ominous echoes here of both the medieval witch hunts against Jews and Stalin's show trials.

Leading the charge is Students for Justice in Palestine, which is funded in part by two organizations dedicated to the destruction of Israel, American Muslims for Palestine and Al-Awda.

SJP is using cyberbullying to punish Jewish students in the UCLA student government majority who voted against a recent resolution to divest from and boycott Israel. Jewish students who opposed the resolution reportedly feel uncomfortable even walking on campus because of the hate mail they have received.

Adding insult to injury, SJP has introduced an initiative calling for a judicial board investigation of student council members who have taken trips to Israel sponsored by groups such as the Anti-Defamation League, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and Hasbara Fellowships — the SJP deems the groups have “political agendas that marginalize multiple communities on campus.”

On other campuses across the country, SJP tactics include mock eviction notices against Jewish students, “die-ins,” and promotions of virulently anti-Israel speakers and events.

The SJP initiative demanding that candidates for student government positions sign a pledge not to take certain trips to Israel violates both the UCLA Principles of Community Conduct and the Student Conduct Code against harassment of all kinds.

Unfortunately, what's happening at UCLA is not an aberration but part of a national trend. Here are examples from a coast-to-coast report compiled by Tammi Rossman-Benjamin, a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a founder of the AMCHA Initiative, a nonprofit group that combats campus anti-Semitism:

\* At UC Davis, a student who expressed concern about anti-Semitic banners displayed at an anti-Israel “occupation” rally was physically assaulted by a protester who screamed in his face, “You are racist and you should die in hell.”

\* At UC Berkeley, a Jewish girl holding an “Israel wants peace” sign was ramrodded with a shopping cart by the head of the local SJP chapter.

\* At San Francisco State University last fall, the General Union of Palestine Students hosted an all-day event where participants could make posters and T-shirts that said, “My heroes have always killed colonizers” — meaning Jews.

\* At Harvard University, the Palestine Security Committee frightened Jewish students by placing mock eviction notices on their dormitory rooms.

\* At Northeastern University in Boston, SJP vandalized a menorah and disrupted Jewish events.

\* At the University of Michigan, anti-Israel student activists hurled death threats at Jewish student council members and called them “dirty Jew” and “kike.”

Why is it that so many university administrators and academics seem paralyzed to act if the victims of campus bullying are Zionist Jews?

UCLA Chancellor Gene Block’s reactions to the developments on his campus have been unsatisfactory. First, according to the Daily Bruin, he wanted to “leave the matter to be resolved by students.” Later, he said, “I am troubled that the pledge can reasonably be seen as trying to eliminate selected viewpoints from the discussion,” but he nevertheless stood up for the pledge as free speech protected by the First Amendment.

By defending the organized demands that students who have taken sponsored trips to Israel should disqualify themselves from participating in UCLA student body elections as “sacrosanct” and “within the realm of free speech,” Block is doing more harm than good. It’s the equivalent to leaving the matter to a lynch mob seeking to bar Jews from the fundamental rights of political association and free expression.

Aggrieved UCLA students have had to turn to the University of California system’s president, Janet Napolitano, and the Regents in an attempt for relief. Napolitano released a statement saying she shared Block’s concerns.

Is it so-called free speech when the goal is to end Jewish students’ full access to free expression and politically active lives on campus? Dressing up intimidation as a “sanctified” right is an obscene distortion of the First Amendment.

It’s time for our colleges and universities to rediscover their moral compass. If necessary, major Jewish donors should withhold their gifts. Jewish philanthropists should support only schools that protect the rights of all students to participate fully in campus life from the quad to the classroom without fear or intimidation — including lovers of Zion.

(Rabbi Abraham Cooper is associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and its Museum of Tolerance. Aron Hier is the Wiesenthal Center’s director of campus outreach. Historian Harold Brackman also contributed to this piece.)

Read more: <http://www.jta.org/2014/05/20/news-opinion/opinion/op-ed-anti-israel-campaign-at-ucla-echoes-of-mccarthyism#ixzz32M5uFIVZ>

**SO WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THIS ... My daughter Mikhayla was in a program some years back which made a huge difference in her life. Programs like this can have an incredible effect.**

The Write On For Israel program has been a life-changing experience. Alumni often tell us that the Write On For Israel program instilled within them the confidence to articulate their views on Israel and the Middle East, through the lens of journalism. Write On provided them with the education, long-term relationships, and dedication that are critical to becoming a leader in the pro-Israel movement on campus, and set them on a path of lifelong Israel advocacy and Jewish leadership.

Thanks in large part to the achievements of our more than 400 alumni, demand for the program has increased exponentially. We’ve accepted 48 students for the 2013 cohort – an unprecedented number, but a very small percent of the overall applicant pool. The need for Write On continues to increase, as tens of thousands of Jewish teens arrive on college campuses each year with little knowledge about Israel or the ability to make Israel’s case. Your support is critical to providing hundreds of high school students with the knowledge, connections, and confidence to make Israel’s case on campus.

Since its inception 11 years ago, the Write On For Israel program has been supported in full by the Avi Chai Foundation. As you may know, Avi Chai recently finalized plans to spend down its capital base and close its doors forever. While Avi Chai remains dedicated to Write On’s mission, we have begun an aggressive fundraising campaign to not only sustain our core program, but also to expand our programming to help many more Jewish teens develop a deep, lifelong commitment to Israel.

We at Write On For Israel tell the compelling true story of the Jewish people and their 4000 year relationship with the land of Israel. We tell the story of the rebirth of an ancient Jewish idea expressed in all of our prayers and literature, namely the yearning to reestablish sovereignty in our ancestor homeland. We tell the story of the struggle to re-establish a Jewish state in the Shadow of the Holocaust. We tell the story of how modern Israel has been like the Judea of Ezra and Nechamia where they held a plow in one hand and sword in the other. We teach and show them that the young IDF soldier who fought in Operation Cast Lead is just as Heroic a figure as the

soldiers who broke the siege of Jerusalem in 1948. In short we tell the truth! We tell Israel's story, and our Teenage American Jewish Students have an epiphany! Not only do they feel enlightened and liberated by this knowledge, they feel compelled to share it!

Please consider making a donation to help Write On For Israel sustain its operations in the New York Area. With your tax-deductible contribution, we will be able to provide as many teens as possible with the education they need to make Israel's case when they reach college campuses.

Please make checks payable to FJC on memo line please write Write On For Israel.

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### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd Aliyot: Moshe counts all males over the age of 20, and registers them according to their paternal ancestry. The total, not including Shayvet Layvie, was 603,550. The total number of Jews was around 3 million.

3rd Aliya: The tribes are each assigned their position within the camp, and in the order of the traveling.

4th Aliya: In preparation for separating the tribe of Layvie, the Torah establishes Aharon's genealogy. Although the Kohanim were also from the Tribe of Layvie, they were counted by themselves.

5th Aliya: Moshe counts the Leviyim according to their three basic families: Gershon, Kehas, and Mirarri. Their individual responsibilities in transporting the Mishkan is stated, and their total was 22,000.

6th Aliya: Being that the Leviyim were to be in direct exchange for the first born, Moshe counts all the first born in the rest of the nation. Their total was 22,273. The extra 273 first born are instructed to redeem themselves from Aharon the Kohain for 5 silver shekels.

7th Aliya: The Parsha concludes with detailed instructions for the family of Kahas. Their primary

responsibility was to transport the vessels of the Mishkan. Only Aharon and his sons were allowed to cover the vessels in preparation for transport. Once covered, the family of Kahas did the actual carrying.

his week's Haftorah is from Hoshea. Hoshea's prophecy is a seemingly contradictory presentation of the relationship between the Jews and G-d. On the one hand Hoshea compares the Jews to a Harlot who betrays her husband and can not in good conscience claim that her husband has fathered her children. On the other hand, Hoshea concludes his prophecy with G-d's promise that he will never abandon the Jews and that despite the nations betrayal and disloyalty, the children are still His.

In order to understand this prophecy, a little background is in order. G-d had stated to Hoshea that the Jews had sinned. Hoshea responded by suggesting to Hashem that He exchange the Jews for another nation. As a Prophet, it was Hoshea's responsibility to follow Moshe's example and fight on behalf of the nation, not reaffirm their guilt and sins. In essence, Hoshea had spoken Lashon Harah about the Jews.

As a part of Hoshea's training, Hashem instructed him to marry a woman who was a prostitute. He fathers three children whom he gives unusual names reflecting his personal frustration with the Jews. His oldest is named Yizrael - The G-d Who plants. His second child, a daughter, he names Lo Ruchamah - One who does not deserve mercy. His third child, a boy, he named Lo Ami - Not My nation.

Hashem then told him to send away his wife and children. Hoshea begged G-d to rescind His order because he loved his family and did not want to be apart from them. G-d then says to him, "Isn't your wife a prostitute, and don't even know if your children are yours? Yet you love them! So too is my relationship with the Jews. No matter how they betray me I still love them and do not want to be apart from them!"

Hoshea understood the lesson and changed his entire attitude toward the Jews. Instead of presenting the angry demeanor of harshness and judgment, Hoshea prophesied some of the most beautiful and optimistic prophecies that we have.

The final words of the Haftorah capture the eternity of G-d's love for His Chosen People. "I shall marry you to Me forever..."

## EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

### “They were registered by ancestry according to their paternal families” (Bemidbar 1:18)

The fourth book of the Torah begins with a counting of the Israelites. That is why Bemidbar is called by some as “Numbers.” We find repeated references to the tcm, the army. The nation’s able-bodied men are called the Army of Hashem. Rashi explains that they actually had to bring proof of their ancestry. Why was it necessary to investigate the pedigree of the men who were eligible for military service? Rabbi Hirsch explains that while prime qualifications for members of the armies of other nations are bravery, courage and physical strength, a Jewish army has an entirely different set of standards: pedigreed family purity. The reason for this is because lineage is an assurance that the soldiers will possess the qualities of mercy and kindness inherited from their ancestors. These qualities are essential in a time of war to avoid needless shedding of innocent blood through massacres and brutalities.

Rabbi Hirsch also says that the Army of Hashem is not exclusively for military service. What it means is that every man who is able is duty bound to step out of his simple, private life into the public service of the community whenever it is demanded of him. Why is it described as an army? Because in the army, every man is assigned a post and every soldier knows he must not abandon his position. Similarly, in the service of Hashem, every Jew has a job to sanctify Hashem’s name in this world. Hashem, in His direct involvement in our lives, has placed us all in different positions. Many of us are in the workplace; many are teachers, students, housewives and Rabbis. Hashem has placed us all; there is no position in life in which a Jew doesn’t have the opportunity to give honor to Hashem’s name. We are all good at what we do. Don’t leave your post; sanctify Hashem’s name. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

### RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
Is It Worth It?

The Torah in Parashat Bamidbar tells of the role assigned to the Leviyim to transport the Mishkan (Tabernacle) when Beneh Yisrael traveled. We read how the Kohanim were responsible for designating the Leviyim for their individual roles, such that each and every Levi knew precisely which item he needed

to carry during travel. The Midrash comments that this was necessary because the Leviyim would fight over the privilege of carrying the most sacred item – the Aron (ark). Each Levi vied for the opportunity to transport the Aron which contained the two tablets and upon which the Divine Presence resided. This resulted in violent and even fatal clashes among the Leviyim, and G-d therefore instructed the Kohanim to appoint each Levi to a particular role, so each one would know his job and the fighting would stop.

The Mesilat Yesharim (chapter 20) cites this Midrash amidst his discussion of “Mishkal Ha’hasidut” – the “scale of piety.” He explains that there is certainly great value in “Hasidut,” in going beyond the strict requirements of Halacha and taking upon oneself additional measures of piety. A child who truly loves his father will not just obey his father’s wishes, but also do what he feels will make his father happy. Similarly, if we are truly devoted to the Almighty, we will do not only what He demands of us, but even more. However, the Mesilat Yesharim warns, extreme care must be taken when accepting upon ourselves additional measures of “Hasidut” to ensure that these measures are indeed achieving their desired goal. Very often, such measures have adverse “side effects,” and we need to think long and hard whether the pious act in question is truly worth the undesirable consequences. Of course, when it comes to our strict Halachic requirements, we must fulfill our obligations regardless of what this entails. But when it comes to “Hasidut,” we must weight our actions on the “Mishkal Ha’hasidut”; we must weigh their value against the adverse effects they may cause, and then determine whether they are indeed “pious” and worth the consequences.

The Leviyim genuinely sought to fulfill the great Misva of transporting the Aron, but their desire for this privilege led them to fight with and harm other people. If this is the result of their attempts to carry the Aron, then this pious act fails the “Mishkal Ha’hasidut.” Quite simply, it is not worth it. There is no question that we should not be taking upon ourselves voluntary measures of piety if this causes fighting and discord.

It is told that Rav Yisrael Salanter was once seen using a small amount of water for Netilat Yadayim, just enough to fulfill the strict Halachic requirement. The onlookers were puzzled, as the Gemara speaks of the value in using copious amounts of water, and how it brings wealth. (The word “Mayim” – “water” – has been viewed as an acrostic for “Maleh Yadenu Mi’birchotecha” – “fill our hands with Your blessings.”) They asked the Rabbi why he used such a small amount of water for this Misva, and he explained that

the water was brought to the meal by the elderly maid who carried water on her back.

"Is it right for me to earn blessings on this woman's back?" the Rabbi rhetorically asked.

Rav Yisrael understood that the concern not to overburden a hardworking housekeeper was far more important than using large amounts water beyond that which Halacha strictly requires.

Another story is told of the Hafetz Haim, who once hosted guests for Friday night who were astonished to see the Rabbi begin Kiddush as soon as he returned from the synagogue, without singing "Shalom Alechem."

"The Rabbi does not sing 'Shalom Alechem' on Friday night?" they asked.

"I know that you have not eaten all day," the great Sage explained. "The angels don't need to eat, so they can wait for 'Shalom Alechem.' But I should not make you wait when you are hungry so I can sing."

There are many situations when we need to keep this perspective in mind, and ensure to maintain our priorities when measures that are not strictly required can harm other people. Although one brings great merit to a deceased parent's soul by leading the prayer services, one brings far greater merit to the soul by allowing somebody else to lead the service in the interest of avoiding conflict. Similarly, Rav Avraham Pam would instruct his students not to continue dancing after a wedding when the parents and other guests want to go home. As important as it is to dance with the groom, as the hour gets late it is more important to show sensitivity to those who need to leave.

As valuable as it is to "carry the Aron," to go beyond our strict obligations to get close to Hashem, we must always ensure that the extra measures are truly worth it, and do not cause more harm than good.

### **Rabbi Wein IT IS ALWAYS OUR FAULT**

Part of the fallout from the ill-starred negotiations that recently ended in failure is that somehow blame for this failure cannot be laid at the door of the facilitator, the American State Department and its Secretary of State, but rather it must be assigned to the participants themselves. Originally, President Obama seemed to be even-handed in blaming both participants for the failure of this fool's errand, but as

the recent interviews with "senior" American officials have indicated, it is now clear that Israel is to be held to be at fault for the failed negotiations.

This follows the pattern of the past decades when, since Oslo and Wye, Israel has been unable to fulfill the escalating expectations and demands of the Palestinian Authority. It is easy to see why Israel was blamed for the failure of the talks. Placing the blame on the Palestinian side would have been a tacit admission that, from the onset, the talks had no chance of success – a fact that certainly would again emphasize the ineptness of American foreign policy in this past decade.

So it was the refusal of Israel to release the last batch of terrorist murderers and the announcement that it was going to continue building new housing mainly in the "occupied" Jerusalem area – Gilo, Ramat Shlomo, Ramat Eshkol, Maaleh Adumin, Gush Etzion, etc. – that was the root cause of the failure of the talks. This is another one of the many fairy tales that completely becloud the truths of the Middle East in today's wonder world.

Everyone knows what will remain Jewish property no matter if and when a "final" agreement is reached and that is where Israel is building. But someone must be blamed for the failure of the talks so it might as well be Israel.

A long time ago – forty years ago to be exact – I was the head of the OU Kashrut Division and I was flying from New York to Los Angeles on "business" matters but not in business class. Next to me – I was naturally in the middle seat – was an apparently very high-powered business woman who was working furiously on the spread sheets she laid out before her on the seat tray. This was the period of time in world affairs after the Yom Kippur War when the Arab oil boycott had greatly inconvenienced ordinary Americans and was inhibiting their ability to drive their automobiles.

After a period of time, without any further introduction or preparatory remarks, she turned to me and said curtly "You know that all of this is your fault!" I was naturally somewhat taken aback by this outburst and by the tone of voice employed by this woman, but somehow I gathered myself and I calmly responded to her: "No, madam, it may be because of me. But it is not my fault!" There is no doubt that the Lord has riled up the whole Middle East because of us. But it is not our fault. We are not to be arbitrarily blamed for the mistakes and stubbornness of others.

What the consequences of the failure of the recent talks will be is certainly not known now. The new shotgun marriage of Hamas and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority has yet to pass the test of time and problems. Will the Palestinians declare a state at the UN? And if so, so what? Will there be an attempt to mount a new wave of violence against Jews living in Israel, God forbid? Will Israel continue to be labeled as an apartheid state while no Jew is allowed into Saudi Arabia or even Ramallah? Again, if so, so what?

This is the unknown future that faces us. We can only admit that the future is certainly inscrutable. But the future has always been one of mystery and unexpected events and unimaginable results. And, only the past can help us understand the present and prepare us to face the unknown future. If after a century of Arab violence against Jews in the Land of Israel we still don't understand their intentions towards us, then we are truly dense.

What we can hope for, and in fact what we should insist upon, is a change in the mindset of our neighbors, a willingness to recognize that Israel is here to stay and will engage in legitimate negotiations that will have a chance to succeed and produce a viable settlement. That agreement will not only satisfy each side but will be one that both sides will be able to live with. Until then we can only wait and keep on building.

### Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

The book of Bamidbar begins with a census of the Israelites. That is why it is known in English as Numbers. What is the significance of this act of counting? And why here at the beginning of the book? Besides which, there have already been two previous censuses of the people and this is the third within the space of a single year. Surely one would have been sufficient. And does counting have anything to do with leadership?

The place to begin is to note what looks like a contradiction. On the one hand Rashi says that the acts of counting in the torah are gestures of love on the part of God:

Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, G-d counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the sanctuary), He counted them again. (Rashi to Bamidbar 1:1)

When God initiates a census of the Israelites it is to show that He loves them.

On the other hand the Torah is explicit in saying that taking a census of the nation is fraught with risk:

Then G-d said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to G-d a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. (Ex. 30: 11-12).

When, centuries later, King David counted the people, there was Divine anger and 70,000 people died.[1] How can this be if counting is an expression of love?

The answer lies in the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: se'u et rosh, literally, "lift the head." This is a strange, circumlocutory expression. Biblical Hebrew contains many verbs meaning "to count": limnot, lifkod, lispod, lachshov. Why does the Torah not use these simple words, choosing instead the roundabout expression, "lift the heads" of the people?

The short answer is this. In any census, count or roll-call there is a tendency to focus on the total: the crowd, the multitude, the mass. Here is a nation of 60 million people, or a company with 100,000 employees or a sports crowd of 60,000. Any total tends to value the group or nation as a whole. The larger the total, the stronger is the army, the more popular the team, and the more successful the company.

Counting devalues the individual, and tends to make him or her replaceable. If one soldier dies in battle, another will take his place. If one person leaves the organisation, someone else can be hired to do his or her job.

Notoriously, too, crowds have the effect of tending to make the individual lose his or her independent judgment and follow what others are doing. We call this "herd behaviour," and it sometimes leads to collective madness. In 1841 Charles Mackay published his classic study, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions And The Madness Of Crowds*, which tells of the South Sea Bubble that cost thousands their money in the 1720s, and the tulip mania in Holland when fortunes were spent on single tulip bulbs. The Great Crashes of 1929 and 2008 had the same crowd psychology.

Another great work, Gustav Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895) showed how crowds exercise a "magnetic influence" that

transmutes the behaviour of individuals into a collective "group mind." As he put it, "An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will." People in a crowd become anonymous. Their conscience is silenced. They lose a sense of personal responsibility. Crowds are peculiarly prone to regressive behaviour, primitive reactions and instinctual behaviour. They are easily led by figures who are demagogues, playing on people's fears and sense of victimhood. Such leaders, he said, are "especially recruited from the ranks of those morbidly nervous excitable half-deranged persons who are bordering on madness,"[2] a remarkable anticipation of Hitler. It is no accident that Le Bon's work was published in France at a time of rising antisemitism and the Dreyfus trial.

Hence the significance of one remarkable feature of Judaism: its principled insistence – like no other civilization before – on the dignity and integrity of the individual. We believe that every human being is in the image and likeness of God. The sages said that every life is like an entire universe.[3] Maimonides says that each of us should see ourselves as if our next act could change the fate of the world.[4] Every dissenting view is carefully recorded in the Mishnah, even if the law is otherwise. Every verse of the Torah is capable, said the sages, of seventy interpretations. No voice, no view, is silenced. Judaism never allows us to lose our individuality in the mass.

There is a wonderful blessing mentioned in the Talmud to be said on seeing 600,000 Israelites together in one place. It is: "Blessed are You, Lord ... who discerns secrets." [5] The Talmud explains that every person is different. We each have different attributes. We all think our own thoughts. Only God can enter the minds of each of us and know what we are thinking, and this is what the blessing refers to. In other words, even in a massive crowd where, to human eyes, faces blur into a mass, God still relates to us as individuals, not as members of a crowd. That is the meaning of the phrase, "lift the head," used in the context of a census. God tells Moses that there is a danger, when counting a nation, that each individual will feel insignificant. "What am I? What difference can I make? I am only one of millions, a mere wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea-shore, dust on the surface of infinity."

Against that, God tells Moses to lift people's heads by showing that they each count; they matter as individuals. Indeed in Jewish law a *davar she-be-minyan*, something that is counted, sold individually rather than by weight, is never nullified even in a mixture of a thousand or a million others.[6] In

Judaism taking a census must always be done in such a way as to signal that we are valued as individuals. We each have unique gifts. There is a contribution only I can bring. To lift someone's head means to show them favour, to recognise them. It is a gesture of love.

There is, however, all the difference in the world between individuality and individualism. Individuality means that I am a unique and valued member of a team. Individualism means that I am not a team player at all. I am interested in myself alone, not the group. Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam gave this a famous name, noting that more people than ever in the United States are going ten-pin bowling but fewer than ever are joining teams. He called it "Bowling alone." [7] MIT professor Sherry Turkle calls our age of Twitter, Facebook, and electronic rather than face-to-face friendships, "Alone together." [8] Judaism values individuality, not individualism. As Hillel said, "If I am only for myself, what am I?" [9]

All this has implications for Jewish leadership. We are not in the business of counting numbers. The Jewish people always was small and yet achieved great things. Judaism has a profound mistrust of demagogic leaders who manipulate the emotions of crowds. Moses at the burning bush spoke of his inability to be eloquent. "I am not a man of words." He thought this was a failing in a leader. In fact it was the opposite. Moses did not sway people by his oratory. Rather, he lifted them by his teaching.

A Jewish leader has to respect individuals. He or she must "lift their heads." However large the group you lead, you must always communicate the value you place on everyone, including those others exclude: the widow, the orphan and the stranger. You must never attempt to sway a crowd by appealing to the primitive emotions of fear or hate. You must never ride roughshod over the opinions of others. It is hard to lead a nation of individuals, but this is the most challenging, empowering, inspiring leadership of all.

[1] 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21.

[2] Gustav Le Bon, *The Crowd*, London, Fisher Unwin 1896, 134.

[3] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4: 4.

[4] Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 3: 4.

[5] *Berakhot* 58a.

[6] *Betsah* 3b.

[7] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

[8] Sherry Turkle, *Alone together : why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, New York, Basic Books, 2011. [9] Mishnah Avot 1: 14.

**AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL**

“And I, behold have taken the Levites” (3:12)

A remarkable lesson is provided by this episode. The family of Levi was singled out as a penalty for their wrathfulness when they imperiled Jacob and his sons by taking heavy vengeance for the dishonor done to their sister (Bereshheet 34). Their father had rebuked them for endangering the whole family (ibid 34:30); and on his deathbed he cursed their anger and deprived them of a share in their land (ibid. 49:7). But we see that just because of their wrath, they became chosen by Hashem instead of the Bechorim (first-born). For when Moshe saw the Golden Calf he announced “Who is for Hashem, to me!” “And all the sons of Levi were gathered to him” (Shemot 32:26); and because of their wrathful action against the sinners they were now chosen by Hashem forever.

Thus we learn that no natural emotion or character trait is intrinsically evil: “G-d made the Man right (Yashar) (Kohélet 7:29). But good or evil depends on the manner in which these emotions and Character traits are exercised.

Anger and even cruelty, jealousy and ambition, indulgence and temperance, indolence and alacrity; each has its proper place. And when employed in Hashem’s service all of these motivations gain recompense in this life and everlasting reward in the Afterlife. The anger which endangered Jacob’s family was cursed and was punished by landlessness, but when the anger was utilized to combat idolatry it was rewarded by an eternal covenant. “The Levites shall be Mine.”

Quoted from “Journey Into Greatness” by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT’L