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A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

Numbers

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If anyone would open up an article or listen to the news about our current pandemic, they would be inundated with numbers and statistics. How many current cases are there? How many new ones? How many have died? Is the death rate going down? Additionally, we have currently hit the ten-year mark where the US constitution mandates that we take a national census. How many people have been born? How many have passed on? How big has my state grown? How many more people have moved to the US? These numbers are critically important, as they will dictate to the respective governments how to plan and execute plans for the future that will affect all of us. However, there is also an element to all these numbers and statistics that numbs and desensitizes ourselves to the individual. When we look at and study numbers and figures as plots on a curve, we miss the importance of what is behind each number.

We all know that Sefer Bamidbar is called the Book of Numbers, presumably due to the census of the Jewish people taken at the beginning of it and towards the end. Really, however, the first census that was taken occurred in the book of Bereishis. When we look at all of these numbers and counting, we see an important pattern emerging with a tremendous lesson the Torah is teaching us. The first counting occurred shortly after Rochel Imeinu passed away and Reuven, in his hastiness, erroneously moved his father's bed into his mother's tent. There the Torah counts each of the shevatim. mentioning each one by name. The next time a counting of the Jewish people occurs is when Yaakov and his family embark on their journey to Mitzrayim, their very first exile. There again, the Torah mentions each of the names of the 70 people who

went down, but this time, all individuals are tied to their respective tribes, which are, in turn, tied to their respective mother, the wives of Yaakov. The next official census comes in our parasha, where individuals are counted among their families, which are then grouped into their tribe, which are then counted among the whole of the Jewish people. We see a pattern emerging where the total numbers aren't merely counted, but rather, they are broken down into tribes, families, and then the individual. The Torah is teaching us that when we look at a national census, the sum total is not the only important number to look at it; there are tribes, families within the tribes, and then the named individuals themselves, no matter who they are or what they've done. They are part of a bigger, beautiful picture made of many pieces such that if even one were missing, the picture would be incomplete.

As we follow the news and numbers, it is important to keep in mind that each affected individual, and G-d forbid, death is not just a part of a figure. Each individual is a father/mother, son/daughter, sister/ brother, aunt/uncle, etc., part of a bigger picture of a family who are all affected in their own; each family lives in a state which is also affected; each state is part of a county which is affected as well. If we can regain this perspective, we can commiserate more with those affected, helping us to be more empathetic and ultimately increasing our sense of unity and attachment to everyone around us. When we are part of a unit, our spiritual power multiplies many times over, giving us the strength and merit to, with the help of Hashem, overcome our current situation to eventually become a much stronger nation than we were before!

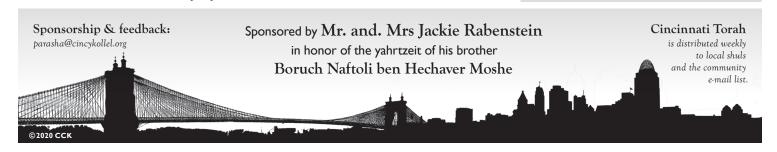
A TIMELY HALACHA

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

There is a well-known custom for men to stay up all Shavous night learning Torah (M.B. O.C. 480:1 in the name of the Zohar). The Poskim debate whether one who remains awake the entire night is required to recite Bircas haTorah the next morning or not. Some authorities (refer to Magen Avraham 47:12 and Chai Adom 9:9) do not require it, since they hold that the previous day's blessings are still valid. In their view, unless a major interruption - such as a night's sleep - occurs, yesterday's blessings remain in effect. Others maintain that this bracha was instituted to be recited every day regardless of whether or not one slept, similar to all other Birchos Hashachar which are said in the morning, whether one slept or not. Accordingly, a new bracha should be recited even if one did not go to sleep (Aruch Hashulchan 47:28). According to the Mishna Brurah (47:23), this issue remains unresolved. Therefore, it is advisable and customary to do one of the following:

- Listen to the *bracha* from someone else who had a proper night's sleep (M.B. 47:12). The one who recites the *bracha* should have in mind to exempt the listener and the listener should have in mind to be exempt. After responding *amen*, the listener should say a few *pesukim* afterwards (M.B. 47:28).
- Sleep during the day (Erev Shavous) for at least a half hour on a bed. As long as he did not learn immediately after Maariv, he may

► CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE →



A TIMELY HALACHA

CONTINUED

recite *Bircas haTorah* the next morning (R' Akiva Eiger 4:12 & *M.B.* 47:8).

- Have in mind while saying Ahavah Rabbah by Shachris to be yotzei Bircas haTorah and learn a bit after davening.
- Some are of the opinion that while reciting *Bircas haTorah* on erev Shavuos, one may clearly stipulate that his blessings should be in effect only until the next morning. In this case, he may recite the blessings on Shavuos morning although he did not sleep (*Doleh U'mashka* p 198, *Halichos Shlomo Tefillah* 6:3 and opinion of R' S Elyashiv quoted in several places).

If one did not avail himself of any of these options and *Bircas haTorah* was not recited, one may recite it upon awakening from his sleep on Shavuos morning (after *davening*).

A LESSON LEARNED

As one of the boys of the Yeshiva of Manchester accompanied the venerable head of the Yeshiva, Rabbi Yehuda Zev Segal, on an errand, the boy shared a thought on the section of Talmud the Yeshiva was currently studying. He had worked long and hard to come up with an original explanation of a seeming difficulty. Rabbi Segal would comment here and there on what the student was saying and enjoyed the student's explanation. When the student had finished, Rabbi Segal asked him if he was able to recite a tosfos (commentary on the Talmud) that was relevant to the topic the student had discussed. The student answered in the affirmative and began to recite it, glad that Rabbi Segal had picked one that he had reviewed many times. After reciting it Rabbi Segal looked at him warmly and said, "You did

very well but you did miss two words," and then continuing, "I remember the whole tosfos with all the words. Do you know why? Because I don't just learn tosfos, I love tosfos!" The student was somewhat perplexed, what had he missed already? Opening the volume they were studying he found what he had missed the words "v'chein b'eirachin," words that mean that an idea mentioned in tosfos is also found in the tractate of Eirachin. Now he knew what Rabbi Segal meant. When you learn tosfos you might find details that to you seem insignificant. But when you love tosfos there is no such thing as an insignificant detail!

A PARASHA Q 4 U RABBI DOVID SPETNER

What sum total given in the parasha is imprecise?

Bring this question to the Shabbos table and see who knows the answer!



BEYOND ELLIS ISLANDTHE TRAILBLAZERS, TRIALS, & TRIUMPHS OF AMERICAN JEWRY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

An oft-quoted phrase from President George Washington's response to the Jewish community of Newport, RI, is, "The Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance..." Less known is that these words were actually borrowed from the letter of the Newport community congratulating Washington on his election to the presidency, which they had presented to Washington when he had visited Newport to escape the summer heat of Philadelphia. Washington did not have a secretary and so he himself had to answer every letter he received. In order to respond more efficiently, Washington would often borrow phrases from the letter he was answering, in this case that of Moses Seixas, leader of the Newport congregation. This was actually the second of three letters that would be sent to and answered by Washington. There was originally an attempt to write a joint letter for all six American congregations in existence at that time (New York City, Philadelphia, Newport, Savannah, Charleston, and Richmond). Disagreement about who should write it and apparent procrastination led the community of Savannah and then Newport to write their own letters, finally followed by the remaining four together. Washington's response to the outpouring of congratulations was that "the affection of such a people is a treasure beyond the reach of calculation... expressions of your address again excite my gratitude and receive my warmest acknowledgments."

SOURCES: Levine, Dr. Yitzchok. "Manuel Josephson's Congregational Petition and Letter to George Washington." Jewish Press. 2013. https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-07-02-0036 https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ldquo-to-bigotry-no-sanction-to-persecution-no-assistance-rdquo

