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# א ביסל תורה!

The Maimonides School Parsha Newsletter

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במדבר

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## Letting Go of the Past

By Avi Berlove

This week's פרשה is פרשת במדבר. We see throughout this פרשה the important idea of accepting our missteps and moving on. This idea is derived from the first עליה of our פרשה. There, רש"י notes an interesting phrase that the תורה uses when describing the process of counting the Jews. There the תורה describes how how when the Jews gathered, "ויתילדו על משפחתם לבית אבותם", and the Jews "יתילדו" according to their families and father's houses. רש"י explains the word יתילדו as meaning the Jews "ספרי יוחסין", brought books of lineages when they were being counted. Why do we care about lineage, though? Shouldn't we let anyone who wants to join a tribe to do so? After all, a person from any nation can join the Jewish people through conversion?

To answer this question I would like to use a משל, a parable: Once, there was a river and a dam. On that dam, the engineers had sluice gates to let water through, but those gates had filters to prevent large debris from coming through. One day a rock came and wanted to come through the gate, but he was just too big. Day after day, he would try to move through the filter and fail. Year by year, however, the water wore down the rock so much that one day the rock was able to be let through.

The נמשל, explanation of the parable, is that the rock is the Jew who, through factors out of his control, is feeling blocked from ה' because of his status. Yet, can the rock blame ה' for his status! No, the rock is a rock because he was compressed by millions of years of pressure into his current state. The fact that the rock can't get through is a result of those millions of years of formation. While the rock isn't to blame for his status, the factors that came before him clearly are keeping him from getting through. When the water comes, the rock starts to change. So too, the flow of תורה washes away the excess material that separates the Jew from his maker. The water breaks off the excess material that has built up, and the newly purified Jew is allowed entry to the holy of holies, ה' ה' "inner chamber." While lineage might be a barrier now, there is a way to reverse the contamination that has built up through the generations. Through תשובה, תפילה, and צדקה, the Jew can wash away the externalities that keep him from accessing ה'.

May we all merit to take this message of purification with us this Shabbos. Hashem gives every Jew daily opportunities to return to him. We cannot keep ourselves from having taken on the junk/sediment we have already accumulated, but through purification of the soul we can remove it. The process will be long and difficult sometimes, but G-d will help those who start the effort to complete it.

# The Significance of Counting

By Binyamin Orkaby

This week's פרשה is פרשת במדבר. At the beginning of the פרשה, משה commands בני ישראל to count בני ישראל, As the פסוק says "בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת כָּל-זָכָר לְגִלְגָּלְתָּם:" the number of names, every male, head by head (במדבר א:ב). בני ישראל explains that לְגִלְגָּלְתָּם is referring to the שקלים which were used to count בני ישראל. This is because בני ישראל are not supposed to be counted one by one, and so are instead counted by חצי שקלים, half shekels. The next פסוק then tells us that the ones who are counted are the ones which are "מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה" above the age of twenty. The פסוק notes that the end count for the number of people counted in פרשת במדבר is exactly the same number as the one in our פרשה. There must have been some people who reached the age of twenty between the time of the counting in פרשת במדבר to the counting in our פרשה. Furthermore, the פסוק brings the פסיקתא זוטרתא which says that no one died during the time in which the משכן was being built. It would then seem that more people died in the short time after the משכן was finished, than those that were killed because of the חטא העגל, says the פסוק. Explains the פסוק that the first time בני ישראל were counted it included the לויים, as per (שקלים פ"א מ"ג), but this time the לויים aren't counted which accounts for the fact that the two numbers are equivalent. However, there is also the question as to why בני ישראל needed to be counted in the first place?

A פשוט reading of the text would seem to say that the reason בני ישראל were counted was to know how many men of soldiering age were available to בני ישראל. As the פסוק says "כָּל-יֹצֵא צֶבֶא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל" תִּפְקְדוּ אֹתָם count all the members of בני ישראל (above age 20) who are able to bear arms.

רש"י, however, has a different explanation. He explains that every time משה counts בני ישראל it is to show how much He loves us. Furthermore, the פסוק brings down that בני ישראל weren't counted 1,2,3 but rather in a כבוד. As the פסוק says "בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת", count their names, to show how much משה loves each and every individual. משה here is teaching us the value of each and every person. By counting each person's name individually, instead of just asking for a tally of how many people were in each house from the head of the households, משה showed us how that each person is valuable.

We can learn from the counting of בני ישראל that every person should be treated with respect. Each person is valuable to משה and so too we should treat people with proper regard. Each of us is tasked to make a קדוש משה not only with people outside our community circle, but even more so with those that are close to us, and in our community. May we all be able to treat people with respect and act as יראי שמים.

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