

A Taste of Torah

A Prophetable Venture

by Rabbi Shmuel Halpern

Imagine being given an assignment to read through a New York census circa 1900. What new information might you pick up on? A strange sounding name or perhaps a bizarre profession?

One can ask the same question regarding this week's parsha: What insight can we glean from the counting of the Jews in this week's Torah portion? This counting seems to be of utmost importance; in fact, the Sages call this fourth book of the Torah the Book of the Counting. Let's take a deeper look at some of the terms used to describe this counting. "From twenty years of age and up - everyone who goes out to the legion in Israel, you shall count (*tifkidu*) them according to their legions." (Bamidbar 1:3)

Rabbi Gedalia Schorr (1910-1979) points out that the term "*tifkidu*" means to appoint to office. This tells us that each and every Jew was given a very specific position within the Jewish national community. Looking a bit deeper, we find that they were counted relative to their families, tribes, and the general Jewish population. The level of specificity indicates that every Jew has a vital role to play within his family, local community, and the entire Jewish nation. The Torah is teaching us a vital lesson: We can't get lost in the details of our daily lives when we carry the eternity of the Jewish Nation upon our shoulders. On the other hand, we can't lose sight of our responsibilities to our immediate families and communities.

In the same way that we approach our responsibilities in a two-pronged fashion, so, too, we must appreciate the value and contribution of our fellow Jews in this way. Every Jew we encounter has a critical role to play on so many different levels and deserves

our greatest respect. In addition, the role that we play on a national level can't be fulfilled alone as individuals; we have to join forces so that we can accomplish great things together.

Taking this all into account, we are faced with a question: How can we know what our specific role is in the greater community? The Vilna Gaon (Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer of Vilna; 1720-1797) explains that in the times of the prophets, one would be able to go to a prophet and discover what one's specific role was in the greater scheme of things. The prophet would be able to discern the particular talents and character of each person and advise them accordingly. Unfortunately, we no longer merit to take counsel from prophets, so how is one to know his or her personal task in life?

Perhaps the answer lies in a comment by the Ramban. The Ramban writes that when each individual came before Moshe and Aharon during the counting process, the individual would become known by name would access the merit of the entire congregation. In addition, Moshe and Aharon would pray for each individual's welfare and success. Perhaps we may suggest that if we are able to see the latent greatness and potential in our fellow Jews, we'd be able to encourage and inspire them to realize their unique role in the Jewish People. We have collectively been tasked with the responsibility to realize not only our own potential, but that of our families, communities and, indeed, the entire Jewish nation. This means that, on some level, we are all the "prophet" for our fellow Jew. May it be the will of Hashem that we join forces and approach the holiday of Shavuot with the ability to truly reach our potential.

Stories For The Soul

A Bright Idea

A *maskil*, a Jew who believed that Jews needed be reeducated so they could fit into modern society, often at the expense of Torah-observance, once entered the Telshe Yeshiva of Lithuania. He began speaking about the progress and revolution going on in the outside world, complaining that the yeshiva students were accomplishing nothing by remaining devoted to their Torah studies.

The brilliant and pious Rabbi Mordechai Pogromansky (1904-1949), then a student in the yeshiva, asked the man, "Tell me, if I were to tell you about a genius who locked himself away in his attic for three years and last week finally emerged proudly and victoriously with a new invention that gives off light from electricity, what would you say?"

"Is this a new kind of light bulb?" asked the *maskil*. "Is it more efficient than the old one?"

"No," said Rav Mordechai. "It is identical to the previous invention."

"I would say that he is brilliant, but pathetic," said the *maskil*. "The poor guy spent three years inventing something that someone already invented years ago!"

"Exactly!" agreed Reb Mordechai. "Therefore, you will surely agree me that you are wasting your time. Whatever your *haskala* (enlightenment) has invented, the Torah spoke about thousands

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Kollel Happenings

LEARN-A-THON & SIYUM THIS SUNDAY!

Join the communal completion of an entire tractate of Talmud in the course of one hour of Torah study! Men, sign up and study a preassigned section of Tractate Kiddushin with a class or chavrusah. Women, sign up and attend a special study session or learn a special curriculum with a chavrusah. Visit denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org, or call 303-820-2855.

TOUGH LOVE: DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT PARENT AT THE JUNE T4T

Join Ari Hoffman, Counselor, MA, LPC, and Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher, Senior Educator for the Denver Community Kollel, as they explore this emotionally-fraught and sensitive subject. Wednesday, June 7, at 12-1:15 p.m. at the East Side Kosher Deli. Cost: \$25. RSVP info@denverkollel.org.

HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: Are there any cases of exception to the general custom of reciting the *bracha* only after kindling the Shabbos lights (i.e., when would one recite the *bracha* before the kindling)?

A: 1. According to many halachic authorities, when kindling the lights for Yom Tov, one should reverse the regular order, and recite the *bracha* before the kindling. Since kindling (from an existing flame) is permitted on Yom Tov, the reason for preceding the kindling does not apply. Some add that those who light the Yom Tov lights after dark (as is the custom of many, provided that Yom Tov doesn't coincide with Shabbos), should definitely recite the *bracha* before the kindling. 2. According to some, a man,

who halachically never accepts Shabbos by kindling or reciting a *bracha* on the Shabbos lights, should recite the *bracha* prior to kindling. This would also apply to a woman who verbally announced her intention not to accept Shabbos with her kindling (although the validity of making that declaration is a subject of dispute among the authorities).

(Sources: Mishna Berurah 263:27 and Bi'ur Halacha ibid., Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasa 44:7)

This week's question: Why is Parshas Bamidbar generally read on the Shabbos prior to Shavuot?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the Maharshal

The past weeks focused on the life of the Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles. We will now move on to the Rema's contemporary and friend, Rabbi Shlomo Luria, known by the acronym Maharshal (Moreinu [our guide] Harav Shlomo Luria). The Maharshal was one of the preeminent Torah scholars, halachic decisors, and teachers of his time. His leadership, scholarship and writings had a profound

impact on the Jewish world.

Shlomo Luria was born in Brest-Litovsk, Lithuania in 1510. His father, Rabbi Yechiel, was the rabbi in Slutzk, Lithuania. As a youth, he was sent by his parents to study in Poznan (Posen) by his grandfather, Rabbi Yitzchak Klauberia. He left Posen in 1535, in a large part due to a fire that destroyed his grandfather's property.

Stories For The Soul

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of years before.

"I am not from the leaders of our generation, but a student here in the yeshiva," said Reb Mordechai. "But I challenge you to tell me any and all of the enlightening scientific inventions and I will tell you where the Torah alludes to them."

Suddenly the two were surrounded by a large circle of curious students, including the son of the great Rabbi Tzvi Pesach Frank, who retold this eyewitness account. The *maskil* bombarded Reb Mordechai with the latest and greatest inventions, and Reb Mordechai calmly pointed

them all out from the Torah. The *maskil* finally gave up and started to walk out in defeat. "Where are you going?" called out Reb Mordechai. "If you want to invent the light bulb, join us here in the Bais Medrash and learn some Torah!"

The Jewish People lived in the desert studying Torah, set apart from the physical world. This prepared them for living in the natural world, for by imbibing the Torah they could relate to the world through the Torah that had become a part of them. The world through the lens of the Torah is vastly different than the world without it.

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