1st Seder Weekly Divrei Torah
A BAIS MEDRASH PROGRAM FOR MEN

This week's 1st Seder Bais Medrash has been dedicated in memory of
Herbert Marshall Goldman Chaim Ben Shmuel a"h
on his yortzite כח' אייר by his children Amir & Stacey Goldman

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PARSHAS BAMIDBAR – PLEASE TAKE A NUMBER

Rabbi Shlomo Caplan

"Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnai Yisrael…by the number of names…" (Bamidbar 1:2). Rav Yosef Sorotzkin notes that the words 'number' and 'name' have very different connotations. The purpose of the census was to arrive at a total number of each Shevet and all of Bnai Yisrael. From this perspective, each person is merely a number, an anomalous segment of a greater number. The idea of a name expresses individuality – a distinct personality with a distinct role, a recognition of each person's unique essence, with very distinct characteristics.

Rav Sorotzkin finds this dichotomy implied in Hashem's promise to Avraham Avinu. Hashem told him, "I will increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the seashore" (Bereishis 22:17). These two metaphors reflect both dimensions of Klal Yisrael. The comparison to stars denotes the individuality of each Yid. Each star has its own name (as per Tehillim 147:4) and is a galaxy unto itself. Its magnitude is awesome. Each grain of sand has no significance other than it is one of many billion small specks that make up the seashore.

In Klal Yisrael both perspectives can be integrated. We are all part of a greater entity of Bnai Yisrael. The Torah was given to the nation of Yisrael – "Ke'ish echad beleiv echad – as one person with one heart" (Rashi Shemos 19:2). As the Kabbalists explain, there is a single collective neshama of Klal Yisrael. On the other hand, each person must declare "Bishvili nivra ha'olam – the world was created for me" (Sanhedrin 37a). Each one of us is a unique individual with a very specific destiny – someone who never existed before and will never exist again.

It is more than a philosophical enigma, it is a very profound psychological dilemma. Every human being, from infancy on, is in a lifelong process of establishing and defining his or her personal identity. Who are we and what is our raison d'etre? Or more bluntly, what is our reason to be alive here on this planet? The human psyche cannot accept the idea that man has no greater significance than an anomalous grain of sand. Furthermore, as a Jew, each one us must strive to reach his potential level of self-perfection. This endeavor tends to separate us from the rest of Klal Yisrael.

Yet we cannot, and dare not, divorce ourselves from Klal Yisrael and its sublime destiny. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3:11) states, "One who divorces himself from the tzibbur…has no share in Olam Haba." Indeed, Rav Chaim Volozhin repeatedly asserted, "Man was not created (merely) for himself, rather for him to help others in every way that he can." Anything that affects Klal Yisrael affects us and anything that affects us affects Klal Yisrael.

I believe that it is this specific enigma which Hillel addresses in Avos (1:14): "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" No one can live my life for me. No one can strive for my self-perfection but me. This is what defines who I am. Yet, "If I am for myself, what am I?" If I become all wrapped up in myself, I have torn myself away from the Klal, from the greater neshama of Bnai Yisrael and from their destiny.

The answer to Hillel's questions are up to each of us to resolve on a very personal level. Each one of us has the capacity to harmonize these two very distinct roles in our own unique way. We must strive to live with a conscientiousness of both, and to know when and where to emphasize one aspect over the other. (Think of a chasuna: sometimes you are just a link in a circle and sometimes you alone are dancing with the chassan or kallah.)

While it could take us a lifetime to accomplish, Hillel adjures us, "If not now, when?"

HALACHA Q&A FROM RABBI YISROEL UNGAR

Please contact R' Ungar (Ymungar@gmail.com) with questions or comments

QUESTION: What ברכה does one make on a vegetable soup that was pureed into a smooth liquid consistency? What ברכה does one make on apple sauce? Apricot jam?

ANSWER: Any food that is mashed up and still retains some of its original form, retains its original ברכה. If one chopped up a carrot into very small pieces, the proper ברכה is still האדמה. If you grind up apples to make apple sauce and there are pieces of apple in the apple sauce, the ברכה remains העץ. If, however, when mashing/pureeing the apple it is liquified, and no pieces remain, then the apple sauce becomes a שהכל. When you obliterate the original form of the fruit or vegetable it downgrades to a שהכל. If you mistakenly made a העץ on finely pureed apple sauce, you are יוצא and may continue eating. A vegetable soup that is pureed finely in a way that you don't see pieces, is שהכל. If you are not sure if it is considered fine enough to be שהכל, then you should show it to someone and ask if they could identify what it is. The color does not play a factor. Potato kugel that is finely ground, is a מחלוקת what ברכה since some say it still retains its look and consistency of potatoes. If the blade you use to make the kugel produces strands of potatoes then everyone agrees the ברכה is האדמה.

עי' סימן ר"ה סעי' ד' וסימן ר"ב סעי' ז' ברמ"א.

POLITICAL AD SABOTAGE

Questions for discussion at your Shabbos table by Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

Meir was hired by the Likud, one of the political parties in Israel. His job on Election Day was to drive around Ramat Gan in a car provided by the party. The car had a large sign on top that read: "Vote Likud, Vote Likud." For this job, he was supposed to earn 500 shekels for the day, simply by driving around so people would see the campaign sign.

So Meir starts driving at 7:30 in the morning. He spends hours driving around the city. Then, sometime around midday, a group of teenagers surrounds the car. They dance around it and fool around near the vehicle. Meir notices them, but he doesn't think much of it. He assumes they're just playing around and ignores them.

What Meir does not realize is that the teenagers secretly place a large sticker over the original campaign sign. They cover "Vote Likud" and replace it with "Vote Avoda" — essentially changing the message to support the opposing political party, Avoda, Labor. Meir has no idea this happened. The teenagers eventually leave, and he continues driving around the city for the rest of the day — all the way until the polls close at around 7:00 PM.

That night, Meir returns to party headquarters and asks to be paid. The manager, whom we'll call Aaron, says: "Meir, do you realize that for a large part of the day you were driving around advertising the opposite party?"

Meir is shocked. He looks at the car and, for the first time, notices the sticker saying "Vote Avoda." He immediately realizes what the teenagers must have done. Meir says, "I honestly had no idea. You gave me the car with the proper sign. I was just doing my job. I didn't realize someone had changed it during the day."

But Aaron replies, "I'm sorry, but we can't pay you. We hired you to drive around promoting Likud. Instead, you ended up promoting Avoda — our political rival. That wasn't the agreement."

Meir argues back: "What do you want from me? I did the work. I drove around the entire day."

Aaron responds: "No — your job wasn't merely to drive around. Your job was to drive around with a sign saying 'Vote Likud.' Since the sign ended up saying 'Vote Avoda,' the terms of the job were not fulfilled."

This question was later brought before Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein: Is Meir entitled to be paid? On one hand, you could argue that he performed the
physical labor he was hired to do. He drove around all day exactly as instructed, and the sabotage was completely beyond his control. On the other hand, perhaps the essence of the job was not merely driving, but specifically advertising Likud. Since the actual result was the opposite message, maybe the agreed-upon service was never fulfilled. So what do you think the Halacha is? Should Meir get paid or not?

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Regarding last week's question about the stolen Sefer Torah, Rabbi Zilberstein answered that the person who gave the Haftorah did the right thing, and he does not have to pay anything for the loss to the shul. This is because the decision he made under the threat of a gun is considered to be an onnes, and we do not apply the principle of adam muad l'olam; therefore, he is exempt. Secondly, he made the right calculation: it is better to give away a Navi than to give a Torah, because the robber may desecrate the Torah.

"NIT AZOI GEIT A GENERAL"

R' Chaim Yitzchak Eizek Sher was the son-in-law of the Alter of Slabodka. He had remained in Europe, serving as rosh yeshivah in the Slabodka branch of the yeshivah, and he first arrived in Eretz Yisrael in 1942. He would eventually open the Slabodka Yeshivah in Bnei Brak, but until the time was right, he lived in Yerushalayim and davened at Chevron Yeshivah.

Young Baruch Mordchai Ezrachi, raised to cherish the Torah of Slabodka, tried to absorb as much as he could from R' Eizek. R' Eizek took notice of the young man, and one morning he invited Baruch Ezrachi to walk him home. They walked from Rechov Chaggai to R' Eizek's home on nearby Rechov Yonah, but when they reached the apartment, R' Eizek suddenly turned and made his way back to yeshivah, as if he had forgotten something.

When they reached the yeshivah, he turned around, heading back toward his home. The bachur was bewildered, but he was confident that R' Eizek's every step was precise and deliberate. The third time R' Eizek turned around, Baruch finally asked why they were retracing their steps.

R' Eizek, a man of impressive comportment and regal bearing, looked down at the bachur walking next to him. Keeping his eyes trained on the young man, R' Eizek resumed walking yet again, and this time he called out, "Nit azoi geit a general." That is not how a general walks. R' Eizek was teaching the bachur how to walk, how a ben Torah is meant to carry himself!

Baruch Ezrachi squared his shoulders and straightened his back as they walked, once again, toward R' Eizek's home. This time R' Eizek parted from him and entered the apartment, the message conveyed.

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