

One of the great errors of our day is that we do not teach our children how to fail. Everyone in life ultimately fails. There will always be somebody who will run faster than we can, be smarter than we are, and be more successful than we are. Our very physical bodies will weaken and eventually fail. No doctor in the long run ever saves a patient. He may restore a patient's health for a few years but eventually the patient's body will cease to function. In our success-oriented society we have, by our undue stress on fleeting worldly success, maimed ourselves and our children. We have taught them that they can not be happy unless they always succeed. This is completely false.

Judaism does not measure the worth of a man's life based on the criteria of worldly success. Whether you are a successful doctor or lawyer or accountant or businessman is irrelevant. Whether you became a millionaire or big politician does not really count. What counts is whether you have tried your best and were able to expand the realm of the good and raise a family who, too, is interested in expanding the realm of the good in this world. If a person tries his best, raises good children, and does good deeds then, by Judaism's standards he is a very, very successful individual. That's why the greatest tribute that can be paid to a person after he is gone is for his children to light a yahrzeit lamp, come to the Synagogue, and conduct the service. This symbolizes that a person left behind children who are also interested in expanding the realm of the good in this world. Of course, if a person's children are complete bums and no-good-niks, saying Kaddish does not help. To raise a child who will follow in the path of the good and right is the greatest thing that a person can do in Judaism.

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We believe in the conservation of morality. Just as there is a scientific law of the conservation of matter and energy which means that no matter or energy can ever be destroyed. (Since Einstein, we learned how to change matter into energy ~~and~~ not destroy it.) So, too, we believe that there is a law of the conservation of morality. No good deed that a person ~~ever~~ does in this life is ever lost. It continues and, based on it, the world can become better and better. A person who always tries his best and does ~~all~~ the good deeds ~~that come to his hand~~ ^{he can} and raises children who also recognize the importance of doing good deeds is, according to Judaism, a very successful person even though he may have failed at business, may never have gotten a college degree or any acclaim or money. By all the standards of today, he might be a failure but, according to Judaism, he is a huge success.

Many of these thoughts are emphasized on the holiday of Shavuos. The Rabbis have arranged that almost always we will read the Torah portion Bamidbar before the holiday of Shavuos. Only exceptionally, like this year, do we read the next Torah portion, Noso. Both of these Torah portions have to do with ^{the} counting of the Jewish people. Bamidbar begins the count. In the Torah portion Noso we conclude the count. Over and over again we are told that the Jewish people were to be counted "by their families according to the house of their fathers". The expression "by their families according to the house of their fathers" recurs constantly. This repetition of the phrase "by their families according to the house of their fathers" was meant to teach us that the Jewish people could not receive the Torah until they demonstrated ~~that~~ ^{they} ~~had valuable~~ families. Families are the basis of everything in our religion. Without families, the Torah cannot be implemented. Where are we to learn compassion, self-sacrifice, and the importance of the spiritual over the material except in a family? Where are ~~they~~ ^{we} to learn that relationships are more important than things? Only in a family.

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A family, in order to be effective, must have a father and a mother and children. That's why the expression "by their families according to the house of the fathers" is used over and over again.

In the Jewish tradition, we are taught that in many ways women are considered superior to men. It was the women who would not worship the golden calf. It was the women who paid no heed to the evil report of the spies who came back with a bad report of the land of Canaan. It was because of the moral strength of the women that the slavery in Egypt came to an end. The Rabbis teach that what was created later in the description of creation was on a higher level. Woman was created after man. They, also, say that when a woman thanks G-d for being created according to His will only she can make that blessing because she is closer to G-d's will than is man. A man has many more violent aggressive impulses than does a woman. The Rabbis, also, teach us that when G-d came to give the Torah to the Jewish people He said "thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel". The House of Jacob refers to the women. - The children of Israel to the men. The women were given the Torah first because G-d knew that if they would not accept it, the Torah would not endure in Judaism. A woman's unique moral courage is the necessary component to insure that the Torah will continue and be implemented.

Men do not have ~~to~~ risk their lives to bring forth life. Men do not have to face death in order to produce children and, because of this, men know that women are innately more courageous than men. Perhaps, this explains why men throughout the centuries have sought violence and war to demonstrate their own bravery. The bravery of men, though, in these circumstances does not produce life but the horrors of war. This is why the expression "the House of the Fathers" is used over and over again in discussing

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families. We might think that the raising of children should be left exclusively to women. This is not so. The self-sacrifice and willingness on the part of the man to share what he has and work for his wife and children is an essential component in the teaching of compassion and the importance of relationships over things, to the next generation. Households that are headed only by mothers, unfortunately, are not as effective in bringing up children as households of two parent families. It is very, very difficult to raise a child in a one parent family and to inculcate into him or her the correct values. The self-denying example of the father as well as the moral courage of the mother is required.

In nature almost always the father has almost nothing to do with raising children. His job just takes a few seconds and he is gone. In many animal species if the male has not left already the female pushes the father away after children are born and attacks him if he comes near. When a child is born it is part of the mother and only very remotely of the father. The father does not have the same ties to it that the mother usually has. In the animal world this is very pronounced. We, though, are not animals. A father, by the very fact of his staying on and providing for his family, teaches his children through example the importance of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. The father does not just pick up and spend the money all on himself. He does not leave the mother. If he does, then the children are scared and it is very hard to teach them the values of the Torah. However, when a father is devoted and a child sees the unselfishness of both his parents then he learns how to be compassionate and concerned for relationships rather than things. Immediate self-gratification is not stressed in a family. The good of the total family is stressed. One family member is willing to sacrifice for another. The spiritual, the unseen, the family bond is stressed, not things. This is what is required before

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we could receive the Torah, a sense of the importance of relationships, of the spiritual over the material.

The Rabbis teach us that on Shavuos we received the Ten Commandments because of the merit of Jacob. It does not mention the other patriarchs. This is because only Jacob succeeded in raising a family who all stayed together, who in the end helped and supported each other. We received the Ten Commandments on stone. The word for stone in Hebrew is "Even," which is a combination of the word Av and Ben, father and son. Only when father, son, mother, and daughter are together will the Ten Commandments endure. The family is the foundation stone upon which the Torah is based. Relationships are important, not things. Things may fail but relationships endure.

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The fourth book of the Bible begins with a census of the Jewish people. It tells us how many were in each tribe and it outlines the duties of the tribe of Levi according to their three clans. The Torah portion ends on a peculiar note. It says "and they shall not come to see as a sanctuary is being taken apart lest they die". Usually a Torah portion must end on a happy note. In fact, one of the difficulties of dividing up a Torah portion in order to get the required number of aliyahs and especially on Bar Mitzvahs when people want more aliyahs is that each Torah portion must end on a happy note. Here we see that a whole Torah portion ends on a sad note "lest they die". How can this be? What's more, what is so bad about people seeing the tabernacle being taken apart? After all, that was the purpose of the portable tabernacle. It was to be taken apart so that it could travel with the people. Also, what does the description of the Leviites' duties have to do with the census? It is true that people have to belong, that unless people feel that they belong they are not happy. It is one of the most unfortunate statistics during times of war mental illness decreases because people then know that they are part of something greater than themselves. They feel part of a whole. This Torah portion teaches everyone that he has a place, that he is needed and that he counts. This feeling of unity is important. Unfortunately, many times people try to forge this type of unity in a negative way. They try to incite the people against things instead of unifying them around positive things. For example, Argentina is having many economic problems, they have suppressed freedom, the junta there has killed between 10,000 and 15,000 people, they have problems with Chile so the only way they can achieve unity was to start up with the Falkland Islands. It is easy to achieve unity through destruction. It is easy always to get a crowd together who are willing to criticize others. It is easy to get people together to point out the faults of Synagogues or other institutions. It is hard, though, to get people together to work for positive things. People rely so much on appearances. The way things look on the outside is so important to them. Sometimes appearances are deceiving. What goes on beneath is what really counts. It takes, though, a very special kind of individual to watch when things are being taken apart and not to become disgusted or join in the boos. This Torah portion really ends on a happy note

not a sad note because it says that it is possible to unify people around positive things not negative things. You do not have to start a war in order to unify a people. We are not supposed to look at the negative things, at taking people apart and we do not have to. Each man can stand by his flag. Each person can have a part to play. We do not need to knock each other down. Unity can come from positive experiences. Let us not always look at appearances. Let us look at what is really deep down. This reminds me of a story about a woman who brought her husband to see a doctor. After the doctor examined the husband he took the wife aside and said, "You know, I don't like the way your husband looks", and the woman said, "Well, doctor, to tell you the truth, I don't either but he is good to the children". Each of us should remember we can unify people around positive experiences. If we are just going to unify people around negative things we will only destroy not build.

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In the Torah portion Bamidbar we learn how at the very end of the Sedra the Levites from the sub-clan of Kahas were to carry the furniture of the Tabernacle when it was to be moved. We learn "in this do for them and they shall live and will not die when they approach the Holy of Holies. Aaron and his sons will come and appoint each one to his services and burden and they will not come to see when the holy things are taken apart and die." This is a very strange statement. Firstly, because why should they not see when the articles of the Sanctuary were taken apart? Why could they only carry them after they were covered and, what's more, we have a principle that no Torah portion ends on a sad note. In fact, you

many times to add an extra Aliyah, but here we see that the whole Torah portion ends on a sad note. Some Rabbis say that the lines actually belong to the next Torah portion and that in the course of time some rabbis decided to end it here. However, others say this could not be so. We also have another strange concept. We learn in this Torah portion also about how the Levites had to be ritually clean. We learn that a vessel cannot become unclean unless it is whole. A broken vessel, even if it contains something, could not become ritually unclean. Only a whole vessel can become ritually unclean. The question is asked many times, how do we get inspiration? Where does inspiration come from? The reason why the Rabbis tell us the Levites could not see when the Tabernacle was taken apart was not only because it is depressing to see things taken apart and it is a lot easier to put things back together than take them apart, but also because we are to learn something about inspiration. In Judaism we do not believe that the total is equal to the sum of the parts. You can have all the parts present except one and yet fail. Inspiration is similar to electricity. You can have a billion dollar power plant and a million dollars worth of elevators, lines, and generators, but if one five-cent switch is not working you will not get any electricity. Inspiration comes when all the essential parts are working, when there is a connection between all the parts. It is true that if there is not a rug on the floor it will not affect the current. Too many people today are only concerned

about appearances. Judaism cannot work if we only have beautiful Shuls, if the essential ingredient which connects you to your G-d and fellow man is not meant. The Levites could not see the Tabernacle taken apart because the religion was not whole then. These parts could then become idolatries if worshipped alone. They have to stand as a connection between man and G-d, man and man, and man and community. If they do not then they are just objects of worship which then becomes idolatry. Inspiration and the strength of our religion comes from knowing you are connected. This is the same reason why only a whole vessel could become ritually unclean. A defective vessel does not even have the possibility of being impure. It is true that electricity is not only a benefit, but if used wrong it can harm a person but if you are not connected with the sources you cannot find inspiration. It is true some people may interpret the sources incorrectly and do wrong things but it comes from being connected. Judaism has lived for 3500 years because it has given inspiration to the people. It is not a fake or a phony, but you just cannot take a part here and a part there. You have to be connected as much as you can. I am reminded of the story of the teacher who asked her pupils who invented Communism. Nobody knew. She said, "I'll give you a clue. Was it a philosopher or scientist?" One boy said, "It must have been a philosopher." The teacher asked, "Why do you say that?" He replied, "Because it if would have been a scientist he would have tried it on animals first." Judaism has existed because it satisfies man's needs. It is tried and tested and can give you inspiration if you are connected.

What A Jewish Education Must Have?

MAY 1985

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We are all in agreement that Jewish education is essential if we are to be able to survive as Jews. Without Jewish education, Judaism will not survive. The problem is, what constitutes Jewish education? What is it that we must have in order for Jewish education to succeed? Just sending children to any kind of school whose curriculum may be filled with Jewish trivia will not assure that they will grow up to be committed Jews. A generation ago when Jews still married early and when we had lots of Jewish children (unlike today), most of them received some sort of Jewish education. Although they learned about the Holidays and how to daven and were prepared for their Bar Mitzvah, many of them turned their backs on Judaism by intermarrying and joining cults, and others became indifferent to Judaism by becoming non-affiliated. It seems that the Jewish education that many of them received was not sufficient to cause them to want to remain committed Jews.

In the Torah portion, Bamidbar, we have a strange statement. It says that the members of the subclan of the Tribe of Levi, called Kahas, when they went into the portable Tabernacle to carry its furniture to the next location in the desert, were not to see the Sanctuary when it was being taken apart lest they would die. This sentence is doubly strange because it is found as the last sentence in the Torah portion. We have a tradition that a Torah portion must always end on a happy note. This is one of the difficulties of dividing up a Torah portion because we must always end every Aliyah on a happy note. Many times when we want to split an Aliyah, we not only have to be careful that not only are there three sentences ^{are at least} ~~from~~ ^{left} in the end of paragraph, and that not only are there ^{at} least three sentences from the beginning of the paragraph, but we also ~~have to~~ ^{have to} make sure

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There are many types of learning. One type requires us to disassociate ourselves from the subject matter we are studying. We are supposed to try to not become involved with our subject matter. We are supposed to be merely objective observers of interesting phenomena. We are not at all to be emotionally involved. This is not Jewish education. Jewish education is meant to affect us. It is meant to motivate us to want to live a life filled with Jewish values. Jewish education is meant to teach values not just facts. Facts, alone, do not constitute a Jewish education. Moreover, when Jewish education becomes just the learning of a bunch of disjointed facts out of context, the whole enterprise can become absurd.

When the Tabernacle in the wilderness was being taken apart, those who were to carry it were not to see it being taken apart. The reason for this was that they would lose all respect for it. They would see individual pieces and snatches here and there and would not understand that all these fit into a harmonious whole. When you take something out of context, you can make it look ridiculous. This is what happens with a lot of Jewish experiences. When they are taken out of context, they are made to look ridiculous, and people do not any longer respect them or appreciate them. How many bad jokes have been made about the mikvah? It is very strange, too, since the whole Christian concept of baptism comes from our mikvah. Today, too, in an era in which women's rights are trumpeted, it is hard to understand why the mikvah, which gave and gives women great dignity and control over sex, is still disparaged. The same goes for many other Jewish concepts.

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We now understand the importance of the food chain and the effect of ingested chemicals on man, yet kashruth is still ridiculed, etc.

Learning isolated disjointed facts does not lead to a correct appreciation of a way of life unless that way of life is the basis of the culture and everyone understands the basic premises upon which that culture rests. In America today everyone understands the basis of America: freedom, self-government, respect for the individual, etc. Therefore, learning individual facts of American history buttresses and enhances an already previously made commitment to a particular way of life. The same is true of Judaism. Learning isolated disjointed facts can only be useful if there is a prior commitment to the Jewish way of life. That's why the rabbis tell us the fire that burned on the altar of the Tabernacle was never allowed to be extinguished. Even when the altar was moved along with the rest of the portable Tabernacle, the fire was never extinguished. Even when the altar was covered with a cloth, a metal plate separated the fire from the cloth covering and allowed it to keep burning. Fire, of course, is a symbol of commitment in the Jewish religion.

The Ner Tamid, or eternal light, which burns in every synagogue, is a symbol of the Jewish people's eternal devotion to Judaism. The most important ingredient in any Jewish education is commitment. A student should not be learning things in order to pass a test or even to acquire a skill. A student should learn things which will allow him to live a more meaningful life and, through the things he is learning, bring redemption to the world. The student must be made to feel that not only do the things he learns enhance his life but they are important for the world, too. The world needs

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him to be a Jew.

One of the reasons why the Zionists at the turn of the century were successful was because they were not just creating a Jewish State for themselves, but they were creating it to be a light unto the nations. We are Jews not just for ourselves, but because the world needs the message of Judaism. That's why we learn that if the Jewish people on Mount Sinai would not have accepted the Torah, G-d would not have permitted the world to exist any longer. The most important elements in Jewish education should be the realization by the students that they are learning something which they need in order to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life, and which the world needs if there is ever going to be peace, justice, and brotherhood in the world. They are not just learning quaint customs. They are learning how to be a light to humanity.

Many times you will find that students who come from homes in which there is a great deal of Jewish observance but whose parents mock their own observances by always excusing themselves by saying, "This is the way I grew up" or "I can't help being this way", end up almost always abandoning most Jewish observances while, on the other hand, children who are raised in homes where the parents who, for one reason or another have not been able to observe as much of the Jewish religion as they would like but who know Judaism's importance and who try to impress upon their children that importance of Judaism for their lives and the world, end up to be more observant than their parents.

It is this commitment to see Judaism not as a group of customs and

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The rabbis tell us that ~~with three things~~ was the Torah given, with fire, with water, and in the wilderness. The fire of commitment must always burn bright if the Torah is to have any effect on a person. Water is a symbol of purity and depth. The trouble with much of Jewish education today is that it has no depth. The kids say that they are bored, that they have learned it all before. It is just repetitive. The reason is that there is no intellectual depth to a lot of our education. The kids just learn a lot of disjointed facts, surface customs, ceremonies, prayers which are not related to anything. Depth is necessary in order for a person to feel that the learning can elevate ^{him} them and can purify ^{him} them. Unfortunately,

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there is very little depth in most Jewish education today.

Also, the Torah was given in the wilderness. In Hebrew "wilderness" is "Midbar." Midbar also means "speech" or "talk." We must train our children in such a way that they believe that the tradition speaks to them, that it is relevant to their lives. Also, just like in a wilderness, a person has to have the correct tools in order to survive. We must equip our children with the correct tools so they can look up things in the sources, themselves. In the wilderness you cannot depend on others for all your sustenance. Jewish learning should equip our children to be able to look up things that bother them in the sources, themselves. Most Jewish youngsters, if they have a problem, would not even think of looking in our tradition for the solution to their problems. They would look into secular learning or in other places. They do not realize the richness of our sources. Many of our youngsters are drawn to cults because they do not know anything about Jewish mysticism or ethics, etc. We have presented to our children a type of superficial antiseptic Judaism which they do not feel is relevant to their lives at all.

The holiday of Shavuos is almost upon us. On this holiday the Jewish people received the Torah. The Torah only became part of the Jewish people's lives because we accepted it with fire, with water, and in the wilderness. We, too, must transmit the Torah to our children with commitment, with depth, and with relevance and intellectual honesty if we want them to accept it and live it, too. The Torah is like an electrical circuit. If any piece of it is missing, then it will not turn on or turn us on. The power may be there but since

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the transmission line is down or the switch is not working, none of it can be received. We, unfortunately, are shortcircuiting our children. We have not been giving them the correct Jewish education because we have not stressed enough commitment, depth, relevance, and intellectual honesty.

The sons of Kahas could not see when the Tabernacle was taken apart because the Torah handed over piecemeal can only lead to the death of the Jewish people, not to its constant rejuvenation. Yes, the last sentence of the Torah portion Bamidbar is a happy sentence, because it tells us that we can transmit Judaism if we only transmit it with depth, commitment, relevance, and intellectual honesty.

Bamidbar

What A Jewish Education Must Have!

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ceremonies or as a way of identifying with ancestors, but as a way of life which the world desperately needs and which will enhance each individual's life, which allows Jewish education to have an effect on the child. That's why the word "Bala", "taking apart the ^{when talking about the Sanctuary} ~~Sanctuary~~", was used, ^{be} ~~we~~ can also translated as ~~not "take apart" but~~ as "when they swallow." "They should not come to see when ^{they} swallow the Holy and ^{is} ~~they~~ die." When people look at religion as something that ^{is} ~~you~~ just swallow, as just another experience like going to the movies or going to a ball game, then it will die. The Jewish religion, to our children, must be more than just another experience. It must the "the" experience of their life. It must give them mission and purpose. Our Jewish education must do more than teach facts. It must also teach commitment. The fire must burn even when sometimes, because of circumstances, parts of Judaism are covered. Our children must believe that the world needs Judaism, and that they need it personally.

The rabbis tell us that ~~with three things~~ was the Torah given, with fire, with water, and in the wilderness. The fire of commitment must always burn bright if the Torah is to have any effect on a person. Water is a symbol of purity and depth. The trouble with much of Jewish education today is that it has no depth. The kids say that they are bored, that they have learned it all before. It is just repetitive. The reason is that there is no intellectual depth to a lot of our education. The kids just learn a lot of disjointed facts, surface customs, ceremonies, prayers which are not related to anything. Depth is necessary in order for a person to feel that the learning can elevate ^{him} ~~them~~ and can purify ^{him} ~~them~~. Unfortunately,

with three things:

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there is very little depth in most Jewish education today.

Also, the Torah was given in the wilderness. In Hebrew "wilderness" is "Midbar." Midbar also means "speech" or "talk." We must train our children in such a way that they believe that the tradition speaks to them, that it is relevant to their lives. Also, just like in a wilderness, a person has to have the correct tools in order to survive. We must equip our children with the correct tools so they can look up things in the sources, themselves. In the wilderness you cannot depend on others for all your sustenance. Jewish learning should equip our children to be able to look up things that bother them in the sources, themselves. Most Jewish youngsters, if they have a problem, would not even think of looking in our tradition for the solution to their problems. They would look into secular learning or in other places. They do not realize the richness of our sources. Many of our youngsters are drawn to cults because they do not know anything about Jewish mysticism or ethics, etc. We have presented to our children a type of superficial antiseptic Judaism which they do not feel is relevant to their lives at all.

The holiday of Shavuos is almost upon us. On this holiday the Jewish people received the Torah. The Torah only became part of the Jewish people's lives because we accepted it with fire, with water, and in the wilderness. We, too, must transmit the Torah to our children with commitment, with depth, and with relevance and intellectual honesty if we want them to accept it and live it, too. The Torah is like an electrical circuit. If any piece of it is missing, then it will not turn on or turn us on. The power may be there but since

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the transmission line is down or the switch is not working, none of it can be received. We, unfortunately, are short-circuiting our children. We have not been giving them the correct Jewish education because we have not stressed enough commitment, depth, relevance, and intellectual honesty.

The sons of Kahas could not see when the Tabernacle was taken apart because the Torah handed over piecemeal can only lead to the death of the Jewish people, not to its constant rejuvenation. Yes, the last sentence of the Torah portion Bamidbar is a happy sentence, because it tells us that we can transmit Judaism if we only transmit it with depth, commitment, relevance, and intellectual honesty.

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In the Torah portion Bamidbar we learn how the Jewish people were numbered. It does not use the normal word for number, the word "minyan", but it uses the word "Pekudehem," which has the same meaning as "to appoint, to entrust, to attend to." Every Jew is considered important. We are not numbers. We are unique individuals. The only time a Jew was considered a number was in the Nazi concentration camps and the numbers were singed onto their arms. There are two numbers which are unique in mathematics: zero and infinity. Zero times any other number is still zero, and infinity, of course, cannot be numbered at all. Every human being, according to our religion, is an infinity. Every human being is priceless. No human being is considered as just a number. During this past week we saw how these Jewish concepts were called into play. 1150 Arab prisoners were exchanged for 3 Israeli prisoners. Israel faced a terrible dilemma. On the one hand, Israel has made it a policy never to bargain with terrorists. When hostages are taken on buses or in shchools or on airplanes Israel never bargains with the terrorists even if it costs casualties. They go in and wipe out the terrorists. This, of course, is a wise policy because if Israel would not do so they would be plagued day in and day out with hostage crises. On the other hand, Israel also has another policy and that policy is the policy of making sure that her soldiers are never abandoned. In Israel an Israeli soldiers knows that he can always count on his comrades. If he is wounded he will always be rescued, and even if he dies his bones will be brought back and given a proper burial. One of the secrets of the Israeli army's fighting prowess is that every soldier knows he can count on all other soldiers and does not want to let his fellow soldiers down. This has always marked a good army. In an army where the officers do not trust the soldiers and the soldiers do not trust the

officers, the fighting is nil. These two principles came into conflict: never giving in to terrorists and never abandoning Israel soldiers.

It was a hard decision to know what to do. The leadership chose not to abandon their three soldiers. However, another problem is brought up: what to do with the members of the Jewish underground?

They, after all, for the most part, did not kill anyone. They were just planning acts. Out of these 1150 Arab convicted terrorists there were over 150 convicted murderers. How can you let them go and keep Jewish boys in jail? But if you let them go, what's going to happen to your judicial system? These are not easy decisions.

That's why it is hard to be a leader. In this Torah portion, too, we learn that the Tribe of Judah led the march of the Jewish people.

Judah was flanked by Zebulun and Esachar and together they led the march of the Jewish people through the desert. We understand why Judah was made into a leader because he could take responsibility even when things went wrong. He could admit error. Usually most people only like to take credit for things. They never like to take the blame. In most of the organizations I am associated with, most of the effort is built around all sorts of manuevers by people who do not want to be blamed if something goes wrong. They want to take the credit but not the blame. These people are not true leaders.

Judah, in order to make his decisions, needed the expertise of the Tribe of Esachar, which is a tribe of scholars. However, scholars have a tendency to concentrate on one thing, to not see the whole picture. They concentrate so much on their problem that they cannot take into account the good of the total society. Their advice is needed, but they cannot always make the right decisions. Zebulun stood for the people of wealth. They, many times, are very practical,

but they, too, have a failing. They are only interested in making money and sometimes they are very shortsighted. They want their taxes low so they fail to invest in education and the proper infrastructure and so they gain short term profits but cannot compete with other countries and groups, and they go under. It takes a Judah to look at all aspects of a problem and come to a decision which he is willing to back, even if he has to take the blame for a wrong decision.

It is not easy to be a politician. It is not easy to lead the Jewish people or any people because we have conflicting goals to reconcile. Many times politicians have gotten a bad name not because of what they do, but because society has so many conflicting goals and it is impossible to achieve them all at one time. I am reminded of a story they tell about a politician which is indicative of this attitude. They say that once somebody went to Cannibaland and there they went into a restaurant. They found on the menu "fried missionary, \$5.00," "baked chief, \$10," "boiled politician, \$25." The person was very surprised and turned to the owner of the restaurant and said, "How come boiled politician costs so much?" The owner said, "Have you ever tried to clean one?" This attitude I do not believe is fair. Politicians have a difficult time because society has so many conflicting goals, and it is hard to reconcile these goals and principles. May our politicians lead us truly in the spirit of Judaism, and may their decisions be always for the people.

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In the Torah portion Bamidbar we have the numbering of the Jewish people. That is why this fourth book of the Bible is called Numbers in English because it speaks about the numbering of the Jewish people. At the end of this Torah portion we learn how the Tribe of Levi was designated to take the Tabernacle apart when the Jewish people broke camp and were ready to move, and how they were commanded to put the Tabernacle back together when the Jewish people camped. The sub-clan of Levi Kahas was in charge of taking care of the holy things of the Tabernacle. At the very end of the Torah portion we learn how it said, "They shall not come to see when the holy things are taken apart and they will die." In other words, the Tribe of Levi, especially the sub-clan of Kahas, was not to see as the holy things were taken apart, that they were not to view these things or they would incur the death penalty. Of course, this refers to a death penalty from G-d, not from man, but it seems a very severe punishment that these members of the Tribe of Levi should not see when the holy things were being taken apart. What was so bad about that? Why should they incur such a penalty as death for seeing the Tabernacle being taken apart? It seems too severe a punishment.

Actually here we have stated something which is very important in our own day, and that is that people do not understand that things are composed of an organic whole, that you cannot chop up one thing here and one thing there and expect a living organism or an institution to live. For example, I cannot decide that my finger is superfluous and say, "Well, I'll cut it off. I don't really need it. The rest of my body will be okay." That is a very risky procedure. You can die from it because you can get blood poisoning, an infection, a myriad of other problems if you

try to cut off just your little finger. The body is an organic whole, all connected one to the other. When people try to separate things that are an organic whole they end up destroying and killing. This, of course, especially holds true with the truth. There are so many people who play fast and loose with the truth. They do not tell lies, but they rearrange the truth. They put the truth in another order, and when they do things like that they are, of course, killing, killing institutions, misleading people, killing relationships, causing trust to be lost, destroying all semblance of good will. Unfortunately, there are many people who are very clever. They feel that since they are smarter than other people around them, that they can manipulate them at will and that there is nothing wrong with rearranging the truth, but people who do these things inevitably end up by destroying, by killing all relationships, by destroying the institutions they want to protect. Sometimes they have good motives, but the result of their actions is to destroy the very institutions they are trying to preserve. Blake once said, "The truth that is told with bad intent beats all the lies that you can invent." When it comes to the truth we have to be careful that we deal with the whole truth and not just part of the truth.

That is why, I believe, this statement was stated where it is in the Torah portion which deals with numbers, which deals with each of us as individuals. We are all counted individually, because it is very difficult to deal with other people's problems unless you actually stand in their shoes. Sometimes people from a distance think they can solve everybody's problems and they know all the answers, but when they get into the situation themselves then they realize that it is not so simple. Sometimes they falsify the situation by simplifying it, by making it

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into something it really is not. That, of course, leads to all sorts of problems. It leads to people looking down on one another. It leads to people being stirred up against one another, because the truth is really indivisible. There are so many people who like to rearrange it, who like to state things and assumptions that are not really there, who put the truth in different perspective. This, of course, falsifies it. I am especially concerned now about what is happening in our country. When President Reagan gets on the television and talks about the Persian Gulf he seems to make out that the oil boycott in 1973 was caused by Iran. He forgets all about the Arabs. After all, why won't the Arabs let us have bases on their own soil if they want us to protect them? The whole situation is very dangerous and can lead to another war, not because any lies have been told but because of the way the truth has been arranged. In fact, it seems to me that what will happen in this scenario is dangerous because we will not end up fighting Iran but Russia. What will happen if Iran shoots a missile at one of our ships? We will retaliate against the missile base and maybe other important military objectives in Iran. Then, of course, there may be a civil war in Iran. Different groups that have been suppressed up to now will come forth and start a civil war, and then Russia will, of course, intervene. Russia has been trying to take over Iran for centuries. Stalin took over half of it after the Second World War. It was only after pressure from Truman that he withdrew. The Russians will say they are coming in to settle the civil war, or they will decide that one side is the victor and declare that a legitimate government and then come on the side of that government. Then we will be confronted with a situation where we will have to intervene in Iran and fight a war thousands of miles away from our borders against Russia who borders Iran. It is a very dangerous

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situation, and it is very difficult to deal with this situation when the truth is being used fast and loose, when gas lines are being thrown in, when all sorts of other extraneous material is being used. After all, if the Arabs are so anxious to protect their own interests, why won't they help us? Why won't they give us bases there? Besides which, there is a pipeline that flows now from Saudi Arabia all across the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf is really not that vital anymore.

We have to be careful when we play with the truth. There are so many people who play with the truth even in our own shul, even in the relationships between spouses. I know sometimes spouses come to me with their problems. One of the main problems that exists in many of these relationships is that one spouse is always trying to manipulate the other, to be an "Überchocha", to always try to twist the truth around to get the spouse to do what they want to do making the spouse feel like a fool. Sometimes the second spouse, who is not as smart as the first, cannot answer. They do not know what is wrong, but they know something is wrong, and it leads to a great deal of frustration. The same thing happens, of course, in institutions where people bring up extraneous facts and even twist the truth in such a way that it is almost lies, and then they wonder why the organization does not work well. There cannot be trust unless we have a reverence for the truth. When the truth is taken apart, be careful; because it can lead to death, death of relationships. It can even lead to death in war.

I am reminded of the story they tell of a man applying for a job. He put on his application that he had 35 years experience. The interviewer said, "You could not be that old. How old are you?" The man replied

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that he was 36. The interviewer then asked, "How can you have 35 years experience?" The man then replied, "Well, I worked a lot of overtime." We can always stretch the truth. We can rearrange it. We can put it into different contexts, but we have to be careful because when we do so we destroy trust and we kill relationships. Let us always have a respect for the truth, the whole truth.

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In the Torah portion Bamidbar the Jewish people were counted. It said, "And G-d spoke to Moshe in the dessert of Sinai in the tent of meeting". Why does it have to say "in the dessert of Sinai"? Why doesn't it just say G-d spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai or at Sinai? Why the dessert of Sinai? Also, when it speaks about the counting it says that Aaron and Moshe are supposed to count the Jewish people, and then afterwards it says, "And with you there should be each man from a tribe". Why did there have to be anybody from the tribes with them? Also, we learn later on something very strange. We also learn later on that when the tribes were counted, the Tribe of Levi was counted, it says, "And these were the generations of Aaron and Moshe and the day that G-d spoke to Moshe at Mount Sinai". Here is says Mount Sinai. It says, "These are the names of the sons of Aaron. The eldest is Nodov and Avihu, Eliezer and Yisolom. And these are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priest, who were anointed who were consecrated to minister in the priest's office. And they died, Nodov and Avihu before G-d when they offered strange fire before G-d in the dessert of Sinai, and they did not have children. And Eliezer and Somer served on the face in the presence of Aaron, their father." What is going on here? First it says these are the generations of Aaron and Moshe, and then it only mentions Aaron's sons. Why don't they mention Moshe's sons? What is happening here?

What's more, if we look carefully, according to Rashi, at the censuses that were taken of the Jewish people we will see that there were three censuses taken of the Jewish people within one year and one month. There was a census that was taken of the Jewish people when they left Egypt; there was another census that was taken right after the sin of the golden calf; and then there was this census that was taken a month after the dedication of the Tabernacle. Seven or eight years later there was going to be another census taken before they entered the land of Israel, but there were 3 censuses that were taken within a year and a month, and then there was not another census taken for 38 years. Why did they

have to take so many censuses in a year and a month?

There is a medrash that perhaps explains what is going on here. Perhaps if we learn this medrash we can get the answer to all our other questions. This medrash says that the Torah was given with fire, with water, and in the dessert, that these 3 elements are needed if the Torah is to endure in Israel. We all know about fire. Sinai, itself, stands for fire, that the mountain of Sinai, itself, was enveloped in smoke and fire. What does fire stand for? Fire stands for enthusiasm. It stands also for commitment. We must have a fire and enthusiasm to withstand the blandishments of society. What is the problem with modern Judaism is that there is no commitment, no fire. If a Friday night dance conflicts with Shabbos, goodbye Shabbos. There is no commitment to Shabbos. There is a greater commitment to the Friday night dance. If you want to buy a new car then you are committed to the new car and goodbye UJA and Federation. Goodbye helping Israel and Russian Jewry. Commitment requires sacrifice, and that is one element which seems to be lacking in modern Jewish life, at least among many Jews. We need to have commitment. It takes a great deal of commitment to send your kids to Jewish schools and to spend the amount of money that is necessary.

The second element that is needed if Judaism is to endure is water. What is the characteristic of water? Water flows down to the lowest level. That's why it says, "And with you there shall be each man down below," not to a tribe but to down below, that water flows, that if a person is imbued with the spirit of Torah he wants to share it with those who have less knowledge than him. He wants to help people who do not have this same commitment. He wants to help those who are beneath him in age or beneath him in education or beneath him in religious observance. He wants to connect to people. That's what water teaches us. Water also teaches us that no matter how low a Jew has sunk he can always be redeemed. Water is water. Water can be purified and be used over and over again. Also,

water is pure. Water also needs to have depth in order for it to flow, and, therefore, it is also very important that the Torah be accepted with water, that we are willing to reach out to others, to our fellow Jews, and help them in any way we can especially in a spiritual way and not only in a material way.

Finally, the Torah was given in the dessert to teach us that the Torah can be observed in every situation and in every area, that you do not just have to live in a solid Jewish ghetto to observe the Torah. You do not have to live in a borough park to observe the Torah. You can observe the Torah even when you are one or two families scattered in this city or that village. In fact, that is actually the way they used to live in Europe. They did not live in Europe as they do here all congregated in big cities. There were 3 families in this village, 4 families in that village, 5 families in another village, and they used to get together on the High Holidays to make sure they had a minyan. There was no fear of them assimilating because the Jewish people felt culturally superior to the people around them, just like today when Americans go overseas. They feel culturally superior to the people around them so, therefore, they live like American colonies no matter where they live, Saudi Arabia or Asia or South America. It does not mean that they feel they are superior on an individual basis but culturally they feel they have much to teach the world and it does not have that much to learn from anybody else, and that is the way Jews in Europe felt. If you feel internally secure with your religious principles you are going to be able to live them no matter where you are, whether you are only 2 or 3 people in a college or 3 or 4 families in a city. As long as you feel secure within your own religion. Judaism, in order to survive, needs to have that type of internal feeling. I remember in another shul I had there was a person who was always giving me trouble because he was always wanting me to be stricter and stricter and stricter. He was known as a tzadek. Later he had to move to New York. When I visited him

in New York I learned in that shul that everybody in that shul considered him that shul's heretic because just as in our town he was trying to do everything different from everybody else by going to the right and in that synagogue he was trying to do everything different by going to the left. All he wanted to do was be different, but most people cannot stand to be different. Most people have difficulty in standing out unless they feel that the principles that they espouse are true and right and that the surrounding peoples can learn from him how to live.

This is, of course, why the Jewish people were counted three times as well. They were counted when they left Egypt because that showed a commitment. They were going into the dessert following G-d. They were counted again after the sin of the golden calf to teach us no matter how low the Jewish people sink we have to reach down and bring them up, that G-d still loves them and cares for them and still reaches out to them. We were also counted a month after the dedication of the Temple, not right before the dedication of the Tabernacle, again, to teach us the very important lesson that in the future the Tabernacle may be destroyed, the Jewish people may be dispersed but still we can exist. It would be hard to exist without the Tabernacle but the Jewish people can exist under all sorts of adverse conditions if they want to, even in the dessert they can exist. That is why it says, "And G-d spoke to Moshe in the dessert of Sinai." It is very important that we accept the Torah with commitment, that we accept the Torah with water, that we are willing to reach out to those that are beneath us in age or beneath us in knowledge or beneath us in commitment, and, finally, that we are willing to observe the Torah even when we are the only one or very few are observing the Torah where we are. Why does it say, "And these are the generations of Aaron and Moshe", and then it fails to list any of Moshe's children? The answer is that they are actually talking about the priesthood here, about Aaron

and only Aaron's children were the priesthood. Why does it mention here about Moshe? It mentions Moshe because Moshe taught them, and because Moshe taught them he is considered to be like their father. Nodov and Avihu, the rabbis say, sinned because they offered strange fire to G-d. They were only interested in themselves. In fact, the Tzav Sofer says that all they were interested in was studying Torah. They were not interested in sharing their Torah. They did not want to get married or have children. All they were interested in was studying Torah and, therefore, that was the strange fire. That is the type of commitment that Judaism does not want and does not demand and considers sinful. The type of commitment that we want is the commitment to Torah and to live Torah but to be willing to share it with others. That, of course, was Moshe. Moshe took time out from his busy schedule to teach Aaron's children.

Today we are also honoring another Moshe, a Moshe who is a role model for our children. He is a role model for our children because in a situation that he finds himself in at Rice where there are not that many Jews, yet, he still keeps Shabbos, he still keeps kosher, and he is still so popular with everyone in his college that out of the 350 young men and women at Will Rice College (there are 8 colleges at Rice University) he was elected president. He not only helps with the young minyan and does sometimes two every Shabbos and is always available to the youngsters who adore him and bring to him their problems and he always has time for them. They affectionately call him Mo Jo and they love to be around him. We owe him a great debt not only for what he does with the youth minyan and for the fact that he lains the Torah for us every Shabbos in the chapel and lains for us every mincha on Shabbos and is always available to help. He has never led the NCSY but everytime we have had a Shabbaton he has been there willing to help, willing to be a part of any activity that will aid the youth of our congregation. He never tells us no. He is a very fine young man who also feels a deep obligation to serve the United States of America. He is going to be inducted

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as a second lieutenant in the army of the United States on May 31. He is the captain of his ROTC. He was known affectionately at Rice as Moses because he lays down the law to them as the president of Will Rice College and as a captain of the ROTC. He is a very fine young man. Not only has he accomplished much in our synagogue but he has been such an excellent role model to our children that he is someone that they can all emulate and can all look up to and relate to and see that you can be an observant and pious Jew and still participate in the life of America and still attain the respect and love of all Americans whether they are Jewish or not. We salute him and we wish him well in the future. He certainly has those qualities which we spoke about in this week's Torah portion. He has a strong commitment to Judaism and to the ethical way of life. He has a strong commitment to help others. He reaches out to those who are beneath him in age and beneath him in learning and beneath him in religious commitment to help them. He also is staunch in his faith and his belief so that no matter what the outside environment is he is still able to maintain his Jewishness. May all our children be able to do these things as well. Amen.

I am reminded of the story they tell about how Einstein passed on and went up to heaven. There is was placed in a room with three other people. The first one came up to him and said, "I have an IQ of 180." Einstein said, "Good, now we can talk about Quantum Mechanics." The second person came up and said, "I have an IQ of 160." He said, "Good, we can talk about mathematical theory." The third person came up and said, "I have an IQ of 140." He said, "Good, we can talk about the theory of arcs." Another person came up to him and said, "I have an IQ of 100." Einstein said, "Do you think interest rates will go up or down?"

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In the Torah portion Bamidbar we learn how the Jewish people were counted.

The Jewish people were actually counted three times in the first 13 months since their exodus from Egypt. They were counted immediately after they left Egypt, they were counted after the sin of the golden calf, and they were counted one month after the Tabernacle was erected. The Tabernacle was erected on the first day of Nisan. After that, the Jewish people were only counted right before they entered the land of Israel. It seems strange that G-d commanded that the Jewish people be counted 3 times within the first 13 months of their exodus from Egypt. How could the ~~members~~ ^{numbers of the Jewish people} have changed so greatly within these 13 months that G-d would want them to be counted again?

Also, the first two times they were counted after they left Egypt and after the sin of the golden calf only Moshe was commanded to count the Jewish people, but the count that is mentioned here in the Book of Bamidbar, in the Book of Numbers, Aaron was included also with Moshe to count the people. Why was Aaron included here to count the people? Also, later on we learn how the Levites are counted separately. They are counted from one month and up, while the rest of the Jewish people are counted from 20 years and up, and it says when the Levites were counted, "They were given and they were given." In other words, they were given over to serve in the Tabernacle to assist the Kohanim, the sons of Aaron in the duties in the Tabernacle. The firstborn had forfeited their right because they had participated in the sin of the golden calf.

We also know that this Torah portion is always read before Shavuos and that we are told that the Torah was given with fire, water, and in the wilderness. What does this mean? It seems to me that we can understand the answers to these questions if we look at the word that is being used to count the Jewish people. It is not the normal word. The normal word is "Manah", to count. That is the root of the word to count, but here it says "Pokad" - you shall count them. Pokad, of course, means not only to count but it also means to visit and to

assume responsibility. The modern Hebrew word for a job is a Tafkeed. If you are given a job to do you are given a Tafkeed. In the army you are given a Pekudah, which is an order. A Pahkeed is a clerk, a member of the bureaucracy who has a job to do. He is called a Pahkeed so we see that the word here does not just mean to count. The word means to assume responsibility, to be entrusted with a job. It means that the Jewish people ~~were counted 3 times that they~~ were counted ^{when} ~~3 times~~ ^{3 times} after they left Egypt, it was not just to know how many people there were, but ^{also} ^{know to} it was in order to ensure that the Jewish people wanted to assume different responsibilities, that they wanted to be counted in as a part of the group who were going to change the world. In fact, when the Jewish people were counted here, they were counted not only as individuals but as members of families, because we all know that families are very, very important in Judaism. In Judaism there is always attention to the individual and to the family. It is not like in America today where we have wholly come down on the side of the individual and have even proclaimed in our high school curriculum, etc. that the family is something you have to rebel against and is something that hinders progress and is something that gets in the way of you developing your abilities. We all know that in such novels as You Can't Go Home Anymore or Look Homeward Angel. We know that it is impossible in America to really have that same sense of family that we had in Europe and that we had throughout history because the family actually has no place in America. The family is only perhaps for inheritance, but a brother is not responsible to support his sister. Grandparents have no real responsibility for their ^{grand} children. Even parent's responsibilities legally are very limited after a child becomes 18, so we see that there is really no interpersonal feeling of responsibility. Now, it is true that you can ^{go} to the other extreme, too, and you can squash the individual entirely by just stressing ^{too much} family. That is, of course, what happened to the Italian families when they

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came here to America, ~~that~~ truancy laws had to be enacted because they would not send their children to school. They wanted their children to help them out in their business. We all, of course, know how the Mafia family has gone wild, where if a person does not listen to the dictates of the family he is liable to be killed.

We know that in Judaism the family is important and the individual is important. We have to balance them. Of course, it says this very clearly in Jewish law that the family cannot tell you who to marry. The family cannot tell you what business to go into. Yet, you have responsibilities to your family and your family has responsibilities to you. The strength of Judaism has always been that we have always had strong families. When our families weaken then, of course, we disappear.

We see that here in America where the rate of assimilation is so high. There is one scholar who says that if all the Jews would have remained Jews who came to America as Jews and their families had remained Jews, there would be over 60 million Jews in America. My brother has a shul in Charleston, South Carolina, ^{Charleston} and a few years ago the South Carolina Jewish community celebrated their 350th anniversary of the first shul founded there, and only one family still remains from the original families of that shul. They decided to knock on all the doors of the leading people in town who they knew, after checking genealogical records, were the descendants of the original founders of the synagogue and ask them if they would like to participate in the 350th anniversary celebration. Of course, they all slammed the door and said, "Don't you dare!" Family is important in Judaism and the individual is important in Judaism. The purpose of the count was to ascertain whether the people were willing to assume the responsibilities to be part of a group who would further Jewish aims, who would further the aims that G-d had set out for the Jewish people. They were counted first when they

left Egypt because they were going into a wilderness and they were going without adequate provisions. They were going based upon faith that G-d had told them ^{the} ~~that things would be okay when~~ ~~and instructed them that~~ ^{World} ~~they were~~ to leave Egypt. Did they want to be counted in, ^{be part of} ~~our~~ this enterprise? Did they want to be part of their family and the Jewish people who would further this type of an enterprise? They were counted, too, after the sin of the golden calf because not only ~~now~~ did they have to make a declaration that they wanted to be part of this enterprise but they also had to make a declaration that they would not use pagan means in order to further Jewish goals, that they would reject entirely the negative influences of paganism. Did they want to be counted in on that? Finally, they were counted a third time a month after the Tabernacle was constructed to know whether they wanted to not only reject pagan views but if they wanted to positively, in their family life and in their personal life, propagate Jewish values. Would they personally make a commitment? Would they be counted in? Would they accept this responsibility? ^{now} ~~for this third count~~ They waited until after a month after the Tabernacle was working to make sure that they understood what it was that they were actually committing to.

That's why here, too, it says that Aaron was also included with Moshe in the last count because in the last count it required a positive action. It required not just going along with the people into a wilderness and starting over again. It did not just require a negative rejection of pagan values, but it required a positive assertion of Jewish values, and this meant that they would have to work cooperatively, together, that it was not just enough just to be interested in social values and community values but they also had to be interested in religious values in order to make the Jewish dream into a reality. Of course, we all know that when the Jewish people left Egypt, that unless they would be willing to cooperate on a community level, ~~then~~ they could not survive in the desert. It would be impossible to survive in the desert. We also know that if the Jewish

people would not be willing to reject pagan influences, then there would be terrible divisions among them. We also know that without a religious element they could not propagate positive Jewish views.

That is what happened to many of our ancestors, and we are now honoring a man who came to this country in 1913. Herman Kless was born in Dubasara Russia. His father was a learned man. He made his living as a tobacco farmer. He leased land from the nobles who lived in the Ukraine. On both sides of his family there were many famous rabbis. He went to cheder until he was 11 yrs old, and he even learned Gemara. His father hired a tutor to teach him secular subjects. He learned english and math, etc. When he was 11 he took tests in order to pass 2 years of high school. When he was 12 he took tests to pass the last 2 yrs of high school. He went to college when he was only 12 years old. He graduated college when he was 16 years old as a mechanical engineer in 1913 from a college in Odessa. In Russia you couldn't get a degree to practice as an engineer until you were 21, so his family decided to send him to America for a few years to get a degree there and then to return to Russia to help in the family business. In 1914 he came to New York at the age of 17. He did not realize he would never see his family again. World War I broke out which prevented him from going home. Then the communist revolution occurred. His mother was killed by a pogrom during the fighting after the revolution. All his father's property was taken away, and his father lived until 1939. Herman never saw him again. He worked as a draftsman in America to support himself. He went to Cooper Union College for 6 months, then went to Newark Tech in Newark, NJ. He finished college in America in 2 1/2 years. When he came to this country, he like his ancestors of old, came to a wilderness. In order to survive in America the immigrants had to help one another, and they did help one another. Herman had an uncle in Houston named Ben Feingold. He therefore came to Houston in September 1918.

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He worked for Luce Mfg. for 2 years and he worked for Reed Roller Bit for 17 yrs.

Then Texas Iron works for 11 years, then he had his own office for 6 years. Then he retired. He holds 3 patents on drilling bits. He is a superb engineer and designer. The immigrants also had to realize too that they had to reject the negative stereotypes of the Jewish people which were being foisted upon them by a culture which was not too friendly to them. And they also had to make sure ~~that~~ they stood tall and proud and that they did not believe the lies that were told against the Jewish people and did not accept other norms. It was not enough though just to stand as a proud Jew. ~~He~~ ^{Their} also had to stand as a Jew who stood for positive Jewish ideals, and there you needed not just a society that would help you, not just individuals who would help you, but you needed a family, a spouse who would stand by you and be with you and allow you to propagate spiritual values together because it was only if you were sure in your spiritual values that you would be able to withstand the blandishments and the temptations of the society around you. Herman know that he needed a family to help him stand up as a positive Jew and he therefore sought out Silka Juran. A woman who came from a devoted jewish family. It was love at first sight. He courted her for 8 months. They were married for 62 years. Florence, RubyLee, and Jackie, their three daughters, were the light of their eyes. They continued the tradition of their parents by having positive Jewish homes. Their grandchildren, Gay, Mark, Marsha, Sandi, Kaye, Heidi, Jonathan, and Jeffrey were a source of great nachas to them. Their great grandchildren, Cyvia, Joshua, Jaimie, Todd and Matt were a special joy. Herman always was not only proud of his Jewishness and maintained our spiritual values but he also believed that we should participate fully in American society, and, of course, we should contribute our full share to the economic well being of the country and participate in all the civic organizations and participate in the Masons and the Elks, etc. even as we realize that we have a spiritual message to give to the world ~~and~~ ^{that} we have to also make sure that our

religious practices are sacred and kept, that our Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Shabbos, that our holidays are important and that our children should know about them and be proud of them and observe them. Herman has been a member of the Masons for 62 years. His main job in the Masons was to train new members. He taught everyone from 3rd degree to 32nd degree Scottish Right. He was very active in the Blue Lodge. Herman has belonged to our shul since 1918. He has lived through all the great events of Jewish history. He was alive when Herzl founded the zionist movement. His family lived not far from Kishnev when the terrible pogrom occurred there. His father organized the Jewish self-defense league of Dubasara in 1905 and the anti-semites didn't dare start a pogrom there. His whole family, brothers, sisters, nephews, neices, etc. were killed by Hitler in WW II. He has always been a proud Jew, ^{who} not only believed he ^{also} had to keep Judaism because it was his duty but who believed Judaism added so much joy and happiness to life. He's always been an optimist. It's such a pleasure having him celebrate his 3rd Bar-Mitzvah, his 96th year, by reading beautifully and correctly his Haftorah. We're all looking forward to his 4th Bar-Mitzvah. *He knows that Judaism rests on optimism,*

Pesach, Shabbos, that our holidays are important and our children should know about them and be proud of them and observe them. ^{hot} * (3)

That is why, too, it says that the Levites were given twice. They were given to bear the burden of the Mishkan when it was transported from place to place. They were also given another job, and that job was to sing. It is not only the physical work of maintaining yourself in a new country which is important, it is not just writing a check that is important, but it also having a spiritual joy, realizing how much joy the practice of Judaism gives to you. Those Levites who were not willing to bear the burden could not sing. Those who would not sing could not bear the burden either, so we needed both of them. You had to physically support Jewish institutions. You had to give of your means. You had to be there serving on committees and help and do things, but you also had to feel the joy and the happiness of Judaism. That would assure the continuity of the Jewish people and that would assure that we would be able to positively propagate the message of Judaism, which is, of course, the important purpose of the third count. We read this before Shavuos when we got the Torah because it teaches us what we need in order to make sure that the Torah continues. The Torah was given with fire and with water and in the wilderness. Yes, the Torah was given in the wilderness to teach us that we can exist in a wilderness, that if we go to a new place, if we have to make new beginnings the Torah is not a hindrance but a great help. The Torah was given with fire and with water. We take that water and we are supposed to squelch the pagan ideas around us. We are supposed to stay cool and not get enthusiastic about them, but it was also given with fire, with the enthusiasm that we should have for our own religious practices, for our own religious ideals so that they will continue forever. Yes, it takes this type of optimism. It is only this type of optimism which says that you have the ability to squelch the ideals that are false and that lead to violence and hatred and that you also have the ability to propagate Judaism

with enthusiasm in a new place and in a new time and under new circumstances. That has always been the faith of the Jew, that the Torah is not just for one place and one time, that the Torah can even apply in the wilderness and that if you apply ~~enthusiasm~~ ^{truth} ^{can} ^{the} enthusiasm, ~~if~~ you have singing as well as the burden, although you have to bear the burden, too. You just cannot sing all day without bearing the burden, without building institutions, ^{but with both} ^{Herman Underwood this} then Judaism will thrive. Judaism has enough within it to squelch all the ideals of paganism and violence and hatred and it has within it the necessary enthusiasm to make sure that its own ideals can be propagated correctly.

I am reminded of the story they tell about twins. One was terribly pessimistic and the other was optimistic. The one who was pessimistic was afraid to cross the street because maybe a car would hit him. The one who was optimistic would cross the street assuming no car would ever hit him. The parents were concerned so they went to a psychiatrist to find out what they could do for the boys. The psychiatrist advised them that on their next birthday they should get the pessimist a real nice present and a real crummy present for the optimist. They woke up the boys on their birthday and told them to go to the garage where their presents were. There for the pessimist was a beautiful 10-speed bicycle and the boy started to cry. There for the optimist was a pile of horse manure and he was laughing and singing. The father asked the pessimist why he was crying. He said, "I'm crying because I am afraid to ride the bike. It may break." He asked the optimist why he was so happy. The boy said, "Well, listen, if there is horse manure around there must be a pony. I'm going to go look for that pony." We see that it is the enthusiasm which allows you to overcome all the problems, ~~but~~ even if you assume responsibilities, it also requires an enthusiastic assuming of responsibilities. It requires singing as well as the assumption of responsibility. Yes, in Russia life was hard. Yes, in many ways physically it was a very bad

place but it was ~~alw~~ys spiritually developed. It was not a spiritual wilderness. People knew what to expect and Judaism flourished. When they came to America it was a wilderness spiritually and they had to start all over again. The Torah assures us that we can do the job.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a woman who came to Moscow and she knocked on the door and she said, "Is your daddy home?" The little girl said he was not. She asked when he would be home. The little girl said he would be home in 8 hours, 45 minutes and 13 seconds. The woman asked how she could be so exact. The said, "My daddy is a cosmonaut and that is when he lands." The woman then asked if her mother was at home. The little girl said she was not. The woman asked when she would come home. The little girl said she did not know. The woman said, "What do you mean, you don't know?" The little girl said, "Well, she went out to buy bread." Yes, in Russia things were uncertain physically but spiritually they were whole for the Jewish people. In America we had a much great chance to succeed physically but spiritually it was a wilderness, but if we assumed our responsibilities with joy, if we realized that we could ^{the} squelch negative ideals of the golden calf and of paganism by the ideals of the Torah and that we could also bring out the enthusiasm that was within each of us when we contemplate the beautiful ideals of the Torah and its beautiful practices, then we can rest assured that the Torah can flourish not only in a settled place but also in a wilderness. Let us hope and pray that the Torah will continue to thrive in America so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

people would not be willing to reject pagan influences, then there would be terrible divisions among them. We also know that without a religious element they could not propagate positive Jewish views.

That is what happened to many of our ancestors, and we are now honoring a man who came to this country in 1913. ⁽¹⁾ ~~He came to a wilderness. He forsook his family. He did not realize when he came here that he would never see his family ever again. When the original immigrants came to this country they came to a wilderness. They had to realize that they had to help one another. They did help one another. Family did help one another. They also had to realize, too, that they had to reject the negative stereotypes of the Jewish people which were being foisted upon them by a culture which was not too friendly to them, but they also had to make sure that they stood tall and proud and that they did not believe that the lies that were told against the Jewish people and did not accept other norms. Of course, we know that certain Jews could not stand it and they forsook their identity and assimilated and melded into the population. ~~That~~ ^{pick up} ~~It~~ was not enough ~~though~~ just to stand as a proud Jew. ~~We~~ ^{we} also had to stand as a Jew who stood for positive Jewish ideals, and there you needed not just a society that would help you, not just individuals who would help you, but you needed a family, a spouse who would stand by you and be with you and allow you to propagate spiritual values together because it was only if you were sure in your spiritual values that you ~~were~~ ^{would be} able to withstand the blandishments and the temptations of the society around you. ~~etc.~~ ⁽²⁾ ~~pick up~~ Of course, we should participate fully in American society, and, of course, we should contribute our full share to the economic well being of the country and participate in all the civic organizations and participate, as many people have, in the Masons and the Elks, etc. but we ~~should also~~ ^{even as we} realize that we have a spiritual message to give to the world and we have to also make sure that our religious practices are sacred and kept, that our Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur,~~

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The rabbis have always arranged that we read the Torah portion Bamidbar or Naso before the holiday of Shavuos, the holiday on which we received the Torah. Normally, we read the Torah portion Bamidbar, and in both these Torah portions we learn about the numbering of the Jewish people. The Torah portion Bamidbar starts off with the words, "And G-d spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai in the tent of meeting in the first of the second month in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt saying, 'Lift up the head of all the congregation sons of Israel according to their families to the house of their fathers according go the number of names of all males according to their poles.'" The question is, why is it that the rabbis have selected the Torah portion Bamidbar to be read almost every Shabbat before the holiday of Shavuos? Why should this be so? There are so many other Torah portions that seem to be appropriate.

The rabbis answer by saying that before the Jewish people could receive the Torah, they had to prove that they had families. It is essential that we demonstrate that we had families before we could receive the Torah. The Torah requires that we be part of a family, part of a group. Unless we are part of a family and part of a group, we would not be able to keep the Torah. The Torah demands that we not be loners, people who roam free, as the American expression goes, are not a people who can fulfill the obligations of the Torah. Our ideal is not the weak philosopher's ideal, which is found in Plato and Aristotle, of a person who was self-contained. Our ideal is a person who realizes that he needs others, that he is counted not just as an individual but as part of a family, a people. They have to realize that they have to have loyalty not just to themselves but also to others. We cannot make it if we just feel that

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we are individuals who are self-sufficient and self-contained.

The rabbis also tell us that the Torah was given at Mount Sinai in the middle of the desert. They say that the Torah was given with fire, with water, and in the desert. It is hard, though, to understand why it is that Mount Sinai is not really considered an important mountain in Judaism. After all, this is where we got the Torah and the Ten Commandments, but the rabbis do not even know where Mount Sinai is. We do know that there is a place called Mount Sinai in the Sinai Peninsula and there is a monastery there, but, according to the rabbis, that is not really Mount Sinai. We are not exactly sure where it is. This really seems astounding. After all, the most important event in human history when G-d made His presence known to all the people of Theophony, when 600,000 males, 3 million people, men, women, and children felt G-d's presence, and we do not even know where that spot is. In fact, the holy mountain in Judaism is Mount Moriah. It is the mountain where the Temple was built, and that is a holy mountain in Judaism. The rabbis ask, why is that? The answer they give is because on Mount Sinai the Jewish people were passive. All they did was receive the Torah, but on Mount Moriah one Jew sacrificed for another. It was on Mount Moriah that we learned that the most important thing was not the receiving of the Torah. In fact, the holiday of Shavuos is called Zeman Matan Torah, the time of the giving of the Torah because the Torah is always given. The important thing is, do we implement the Torah? Are we putting its ideals in practice? Are we forging wonderful relationships? Are we willing to help each other, sacrifice for each other? That is important. The fact that we

received the Torah is not important in itself. What is important is whether we are going to act on what we learn. In fact, the rabbis say that the reason Mount Moriah was chosen, besides the fact that it was the Akedah, the place where Isaac was bound and willing to sacrifice himself for the Jewish people, was because this mount was originally owned by two brothers, and one brother was childless and the other had many children. After they brought the crop in, they would divide the crop fifty fifty, but the childless brother said, "How can I keep half the crop? After all, my brother has all those mouths to feed. I'll split my crop in half and keep only a quarter of the total and give three-quarters to my brother." So he loaded up half of his half of crop to bring it over to his brother's granary. At the same time, his brother said, "How can I keep half of the crop? My brother has no children. Who is going to support him in his old age? He needs a kitty to be put away for him." In those days there was no social security. So he said, "I will take half of my half, I'll only keep a quarter, and I'll take this half of my half and give it to my brothers." Both brothers met on the path prepared to give each other another quarter of the total crop. The rabbis say that because they treated each other so well, because they were sensitive to each other's needs, therefore, this mount is going to be the holy mountain in Judaism.

That, of course, is very, very important. The rabbis stress the fact that the Torah was given in the desert, not the fact that the Torah was given on Mount Sinai. Why? Because we know that unless you conquer the desert, the desert is going to conquer you. There is no middle ground. Each of us has within us a desert. Each of us has to conquer ourselves.

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Each of us has to work on ourselves every day to make sure that we are upstanding, good people, and unless we work on it every day, then the desert will get the best of us. People are not naturally good. People are not naturally evil either, but we have to work on ourselves to make sure that we just do not take the path of least resistance, but that we work on ourselves to turn our own desert into a flourishing green, moral person. This, of course, is very, very important. That's why the rabbis say the Torah was given in the desert.

I remember reading or hearing recently about how a person once wrote the Shtieippler Rebbe complaining about some marital problems he was having with his wife. He wrote a whole long letter. The Shtieippler Rebbe read the letter and then wrote him back and said, "I do not know exactly the answer to all your problems, but I can tell you one thing. You are wrong. You are at fault." Well, his student was astounded. The rabbi had not even spoken to the man personally or his wife and already he said that the man was wrong. He could not understand it, so what did he do? He personally left his town and went to see the Shtieippler Rebbe. He said, "How is it possible that you said that I was wrong when you did not even see me personally or talk my wife?" The Shtieippler Rebbe looked at him and said, "Well, because in the very first paragraph of your letter you said I, I, I, I, I, I, six times. All you think about is yourself." We have to make ourselves a desert, in the sense that we have to be sensitive to other people. If we are not sensitive to other people, we are making ourselves a desert, a desert which shows that we are only interested in selfishness. We have to be sensitive to others and to others' needs. This takes a lot of work not to say I, I, I all the

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time, but also to think of the other person, too.

The Torah was also given with fire. Fire means we have to do the Torah with enthusiasm. It has to be part of us. We have to feel that it is uplifting our lives. That's why it says, "Lift up all the heads of the sons of Israel." We must feel that the Torah gives us a better life. True, the Torah does not allow us to do this and that, but it elevates us. It teaches us how to control ourselves so that we do not fall prey to all sorts of excesses which cause us to be prey to alcoholism and drugs and AIDS and all sorts of other things. The Torah says to uplift ourselves. We should keep the Torah with enthusiasm.

Also, the Torah was given with water. Water is a sign of purity and of depth, and if we see that we are observing the Torah, but when we observe the Torah we are not being pure, we are being avaricious and greedy and taking advantage of others through the use of the Torah, then that is not the Torah either. In fact, I remember once when a mother came to me complaining that every time she asks her son to help her he said he had to daven and learn. That was not using the Torah with purity. It was perverting the Torah. We must remember that the Torah was given to us only after we proved we had families, only after we proved that we were giving, caring people who could control the desert within us, who could create wonderful relationships. The Torah was given to us only after we proved we could have enthusiasm and lived lives of purity. Yes, sometimes it is difficult, but the Torah tells us that we can do it. We can turn all our desert into a flourishing garden. We can turn ourselves

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into a flourishing garden. Yes, it may be difficult, but we can do it. Each one can do it. That is why we were counted according to our heads. If we use our heads, if we study, if we realize that we have the capacity to create within ourselves menschen, we can do it. We just have to do it.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a polar bear on an ice flow in the middle of the Arctic Sea. He turned to his father and said, "Daddy Polar Bear, am I really a polar bear?" The Daddy Polar Bear said, "Son, I am a polar bear, your mother is a polar bear, my father and mother were polar bears, your father and mother are polar bears, you are a polar bear." The son looked at his father and said, "Father, if that's true that I am really a polar bear, how come I'm freezing?" Of course, the answer is probably that he did not eat well and do what he was supposed to do, and, therefore, he could not fulfill his potential. We all know that we all have potential. We all know that we can turn the desert within us and make it into a flourishing garden of goodness, that we can transform ourselves into all being a mensch. That, of course, is what we should do. We should all become menschen. Let us all hope that we will all become menschen so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day.

Amen.

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In the Torah portion Bamidbar, we learn about the census of the Jewish people. We learn how this was the third time the Jewish people were counted in their first thirteen months after the Exodus. We learn, too, how the Levites were counted specially. They were not counted among the other children of Israel. They were to take the place of the firstborn who had sinned at the time of the golden calf and had lost their privilege of being priests and teachers in Israel. In this Torah portion we learn how there were 22,000 Levites from one month old up. However, if you add up all the Levites from their different clans, you will see that there are actually 22,3000. We know that because there were 22,273 firstborns, that a special ceremony called Pidgeon Habein, or redeeming the firstborn, was performed. We still perform that ceremony today, but why should that ceremony have been required since there were actually 22,3000 Levites?

The answer, the rabbis say, is because among the 22,3000 Levites, there were 300 who were firstborn, and they were not used to offset the 273 firstborn above 22,000. Why, though, were the Jewish people counted three times in the first thirteen months after the Exodus?

We always read this Torah portion before Shavuot. The rabbis tell us we read this because before the Jewish people could receive the Torah, they had to prove that they had families. In fact, there is a special day on the Jewish calendar, the second day of Sivan, four days before we received the Torah on the sixth of Sivan, which is called Yom Hamayuchas, which means the days of establishing a family. We also learn that the

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Jewish people had to be counted to the house of their fathers, according to their families, according to the house of the father. Why?

The answer, the rabbis tell us, is because you need fathers as well as mothers to raise a family. The rabbis tell us that it is because of the moral courage of the women that the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. The women did not worship the golden calf. They also did not heed the spies who came back with a bad report about the land of Israel. It is essential that a child see the moral courage of his mother. However, it is also important that a child see the self abnegating qualities of a father, a father who hands over his paycheck to his wife and children, a father who defers his own pleasure so his family can have what it takes to live. How does a child learn that spiritual things are more important than physical things? When he sees how his father defers his own natural pleasure for love, for the sake of his wife and children. We know that unless Jews have families and realize that spiritual values, the things we cannot see, are more important than physical values, we will not be worthy of receiving the Torah, but⁵ there is also another precondition for us receiving the Torah, and that is that we have to love each other, that the Jewish people must always love every Jew no matter what their level of observance or non-observance. After all, we were the Jewish people before we received the Torah. We were known as the Jewish people when we were in Egypt and G-d counted us three times after we left Egypt to remind us of this fact. He counted us after we left Egypt before we received the Torah; he counted us after we sinned at the golden calf to teach us that we are still precious to Him even when we had sinned; and He counted us again a month after the Tabernacle was dedicated because He knew that even

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after the Tabernacle was dedicated, there would be many Jews who would not bring sacrifices.

That's, too, why He did not have us count these extra 300 Levite firstborn again because they, too had sinned by not protesting the sin of the golden calf. Even among the so-called righteous, there are those who are not so righteous. No Jew should look down on another Jew. As Rabbi Soloveitchik has taught us, every Jew is under two covenants: the covenant of Goralu, fate, and the covenant of destination or mission. Everyone knows that when people want to attack G-d, they attack the Jewish people, even Jews who were not worthy of being a symbol of G-d's presence on earth. Hitler tried to kill every Jew, even those Jews who became Christians, because he wanted to attack that Semitic G-d with His thou shalts and thou shalt nots. All Jews share a common fate and must be loved and recognized as Jews.

We know, too, that the Jewish people have been given a mission. We have been given the Torah to help us implement this mission to be a partner with G-d in creating a better world. We learn, "As they camped so they will travel," which means when Jews have similar values, they will travel in the same direction. We should all try by being open and loving to all Jews, convince them to continue on the Jewish journey. Before the Jews, though, could get the Torah, had to know that they had to love all Jews. Why was it that the tribe of Levi was chosen? Levi was actually cursed by Jacob on his deathbed as being vessels of violence. They, along with Shimon, had slaughtered the city of Schem. Jacob did not like that and they were cursed because they were told they would

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not be able to gain land in the land of Israel. They would be given just 48 cities. They were able to change their curse into a blessing. They were able to turn their fanaticism into positive avenues by being the teachers and preachers in Israel. In Egypt, they were the only ones who still maintained circumcision. We are commanded to love all Jews, too cooperate with them all before we could receive the Torah. All Jews have the potential to go back and fulfill the Torah, but first it must be loved and cared for.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who was to be sent by the CIA to be spy in a far away country. There he was to meet a female agent and register in a hotel. After he arrived at the hotel, he signed his name with an X and then put a circle around it. The clerk asked, "Why did you put a circle around the X?" The man replied, "Because sometimes a man does not want to use his right name." We all must learn to love all Jews, even if it seems that they are not using the right name and acting in the way we would like them to act. We were still Jews even before we accepted the Torah. May we all realize that none of us is worthy to receive the Torah unless we love all Jews. May we all do this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion, Bamidbar, we learn how it says, "And G-d spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai, 'Lift up the head of all the congregation of the sons of Israel.'" We almost always read this Torah portion before the holiday of Shavuot. If we do not read this Torah portion, we read the next Torah portion, Naso, which also begins with counting the Jewish people. The rabbis teach us that the Torah was acquired with fire, with water, and in the desert. They interpret this to mean that to acquire Torah, we have to be filled with enthusiasm. We also have to immerse ourselves in it, just like water will not do us any good unless we either immerse ourselves in it completely to wash ourselves, or to drink it.

It also says we have to make ourselves humble like the desert. Many people misunderstand what humbleness is. Humbleness is not when you say, after somebody compliments you on a good thing, it was not a good thing. That is telling a lie. That is not being humble. Humbleness means that you realize that even after you have done many good things, you still could have done more, and you do not expect now to rest on your laurels and receive compliments. Many people who have done good things become vain. They just want to sit on their laurels and not do anything else and just receive compliments. Many

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people also confuse humbleness with feelings of inferiority or inadequacy. So many people have told me, "Oh, Rabbi, I couldn't do that job. I'm not up to it." These people are not being humble. They are, for the most part, suffering from feelings of inferiority or inadequacy. Most of the jobs I have asked them to take on, they could have done, but for some reason, they feel inadequate. These people need more self-esteem. They are not humble.

Moshe Rabbeinu is considered the humblest of all people, but this was not because he felt inadequate. It was because he knew that even though he had done a lot, he could have done more. He did not just say he would rest on his laurels. He took the people out of Egypt, and that's enough. Let somebody else bring the Torah down to them, and lead them in the desert. Moshe knew that he had potential to do more, and just like a farmer in the desert cannot say, "Oh, I irrigated last year. I don't have to do it this year," or, "Last year I shielded my crops from the sun, but I don't have to do it this year." He will get no new crops. Moshe also knew that he had to lift up the heads of the Jewish people.

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There are two other words for counting in Hebrew, both of which are used often in the Torah, but here the expression lift up is used because the purpose of a leader is to lift up the people, to direct them to important goals, to allow them to grow physically and spiritually.

At the end of this Torah portion, we learn how when the holy appurtenances of the Tabernacle were taken apart, the ark, etc., they had to be covered when they were taken apart because if they would be seen only partially, they would bring death and destruction to the people. This is true, too, of leadership. If leadership only sees part of the people and does not see all the people, then divisions and destruction and disintegration occur. A leader must look at the whole people and do what is best for all the people. If he does not, then the society will disintegrate and violence will ensue. You cannot just run a country for half the people. You have to run a country for all the people.

I thought that the Rabin government was not a good government, not because of the peace plan, but because they disregarded half the people. Even today in Israel, the left feels that they can do things they will not allow the right to do.

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For example, there was a rabbi who had said four years ago, and which now just came out, that just as the enemies of Israel died, so Rabin and Peres will die. He was, of course, lambasted for this and rightly so, but, on the other hand, a professor of Ben Gurion University who is a member of the executive of Meretz, said that he hoped that Sharon would die from a heart attack. Liberman, the head of the Yisroel Baytaynu party, accused some police officers of anti-Semitism. He was investigated, but, on the other hand, the head of Shinuue Lapid made terrible anti-Semitic statements about the ultra orthodox and was applauded. This type of division is no good. A leader has to see all the people, and a leader has to have courage to direct the people.

That was Sol's great mistake. King Sol was afraid of the people. He would not make decisions that might offend the people. There are two sins mentioned in the Bible why his crown was taken from him. One, the prophet Samuel told him to wait at Gilgal for an important ceremony. Sol did not wait. Samuel asked why, and Sol said, "Because the people did not want me to." The second sin was when, after Sol waged war against Amalek, he saved the sheep, and, again, the prophet Samuel asked why, and he said, "Because the people wanted

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the sheep." Samuel then told him his kingdom would be wrested from him. Who cares what the people think if you are a real leader? Of course, you have to know where they are so you can lift them up. You have to be able to talk to them, but a leader sets the agenda.

That's the difference between a leader and a politician. That's why politicians are not so well thought of. They just read polls. A leader has a vision. We know that in the United States, too, if it would depend upon what the people would want, I am sure there would never have been desegregation in the south, and we would not have had social security or medicare. That's what representative democracy means. The people many times have to be educated. Of course, they can always throw the leaders out if they do not lead them on a correct path. Churchill was a great leader, even though he kept telling people things they did not want to hear. Sometimes a leader is defeated. Sometimes you cannot get your way, but people know you stand for something. The prime prerequisite of a leader is courage.

In this week's Torah portion, we learn how the Jewish people were divided into

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four camps around the Tabernacle. The first camp was led by Judah. Judah had a blue flag with a lion on it. He stood for courage. He was willing to take responsibility and to lead, and in each of the other three camps also courage was an important element. Alongside Judah was Yisachar, whose flag had a black background with the moon and some of the stars. Even in the blackest of nights, we have to remember there are certain ideals and goals which we must reflect, like the moon, that we must guide our course by our vision of the stars, etc., and also sharing leadership of Zevulun who had a white flag with a ship on it, which means he always had to chart his course honestly, that in business, too, he must be honest. A leader must chart a course for his people and try to get them to move. He must be humble, like Moshe Rabbeinu, not looking for honors, and he must always lift up the people and convince the people they have potential, that they can reach these worthwhile goals, that it is important that they reach these worthwhile goals. That's what leadership demands.

I am reminded of the story about a restaurant in Canniballand. A person went into the restaurant and noticed on the menu a dish called boiled missionary. It was \$25 a plate. There was a second dish called friend chief. It cost \$50.

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Finally, there was a third item called boiled politician, which cost \$100. The person went to the owner and asked, "Why does boiled politician cost so much?" The owner said, "Have you ever tried to clean a politician?" Let us hope and pray we will all be blessed with real leadership who have looked out for the totality of the Jewish people, and always made us try to bring out our full potential so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion, Bamidbar, we learn how the Jewish people were counted for the third time since they left Egypt. The expression used here is "Seuh Es Rosh - lit up the heads." Why is this expression used? Why isn't the normal expression used of Manah - to count? Also, later on, we learn, "From 20 years and up all will go into the army in Israel, Tifkadu, you will count." Again, this word Tifkadu has many meanings, but the meaning can be summed up by the word responsibility. The Paki is a clerk, a Tafkid is a job, and a Pekuda is an order. Again, the ordinary word for counting, Manah, is not used.

Also, in the second chapter, verse 17, we learn, "As they camped so they will travel." Why did it have to tell us this? It should have just said they traveled. What does this mean, "As they camped so they will travel?" Also, we learn how Moshe Rabbeinu was to count the Levites separately. They were not to be counted the same way the rest of the Jewish people were to be counted. They were to be counted from one month up. A baby is viable if it has lived one month. before that, especially in the olden days when so many babies died right after birth, it was doubtful whether the baby would live, but once it passed 30 days, the presumption was that it would live. The normal Jewish people were counted from 20 to 60, but the Levites were counted from one month up. We

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read in chapter 3, verse 17, "And Moshe counted them according to the word of G-d." The rabbis ask the question, what does it mean "according to the word?"

Moshe had a problem. We know today when we are taking a census, it is hard to get everyone. Not everyone will let a census taker into their home, and many people may lie about the number of children they have. Some may not want others to know how many children they have, or some may say they have fewer or more children or no children. When Moshe was counting adults, it was easy. They would come to him, but when it came to counting little babies, how was Moshe to know the accurate number?

Rashi deals with this problem. Moshe said to G-d, "How can I enter into their tents to know the number of their nursing babies? After all, it is not a modest thing to do." G-d said to Moshe, "You do your thing, and I will do My thing." Moshe went and stood at the opening of the tent, presumably knocking on the door, and asking the people how many children they had. G-d's presence, though, preceded him, and as Moshe left the tent, a heavenly voice would come

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out of the tent and tell him that there were so many children in this tent. Therefore, it says in the text, "according to the word of G-d." In other words, Moshe was to go to the tent, and G-d would tell him how many children were in each tent. The problem with this answer is, why did Moshe have to go to the tent at all? G-d knew how many children were in each tent. Why didn't He just tell Moshe to sit down, and He would tell him how many children were in each tent among the Levites? Why did He make Moshe go to each tent? In the Rashi, G-d tells Moshe, "You do your thing, and I will do My thing." In other words, G-d helps those who help themselves. We are not a quietistic, pietistic religion which says we should stay passive and G-d will do everything. G-d wants us to do our part, and then He will do His part so we can succeed. That is why there are so many do good Jews in organizations. It has been ingrained in us that we can do good things, that we can make beneficial changes, that if we do our part, G-d will do his part.

This is the point of a story I love to tell. A great flood occurred near Houston, and a man had to go to the second floor of his house. A rowboat came along to help him. The man said, "Go away. G-d will save me." The water rose

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higher, and the man moved to the roof of his house. A second rowboat came along. The man again said, "Go away. G-d will save me." The water kept getting higher. The man finally climbed a tree. A helicopter came by to rescue him. He turned them down saying, "G-d will save me." A huge wave came along and threw him into the water, and he drowned. When he came to heaven he said, to G-d, "G-d, what happened? Why didn't You save me?" G-d replied, "Who do you think send the rowboats and the helicopter?" It is up to us to act.

Today, we are honoring the graduates of the Beren Academy. It is important that they realize that they just cannot sit back and expect things to happen. They have to act and if they act, G-d will help them, and they will be able to achieve their worthwhile goals. Why does it say here when the Jewish people were being counted, "Lift up the heads of all the community of Israel." Everybody can make a contribution. We want people to feel positive about themselves. They should lift up their heads. They should not feel they cannot achieve things. They should always be positive. You graduates have been grounded in Jewish values, and have been taught many important secular skills.

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You can achieve. Anybody who has been through the double programs of the Beren Academy can surely overcome any obstacles and achieve worthwhile goals. You need not feel inferior in any way. You should be filled with confidence that if you do your best, you will be able to achieve.

We learn also that it says, "As they camped so they traveled." Why does it say that? Why doesn't it say they traveled? We all know that what your goals are, where you want to camp will determine how you travel. We all know how wonderful Shabbat is. It gives a goal during the week. We work for Shabbat so we can enjoy the spiritual delights of Shabbat. The food is prepared before. Our clothes are set out and pressed and cleaned from before. Our guests are invited from before. Even what we learn is set out before. Shabbat is such a delight because it is our goal. It is where we are going to rest, where we are going to camp. This applies through life. Your goals determine how you are going to act. If you have worthy goals, you can resist peer pressure because you know you are going some place. You are going to achieve something. The way you travel is dependent upon where you hope to rest. If you have wonderful, positive goals which are informed by Torah ethics, you will be able

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to achieve great things, and you will not be taken in by charlatans and fads. You will see things the way they are. That is very important. As you now prepare to take another step in life's journey, remember G-d helps those who help themselves. Always keep your head up. Know that you can accomplish. You have the self-worth and self-esteem to do great things, and, finally, choose wonderful, meaningful, moral goals. Therefore, you will not stumble on the path you have chosen to achieve these goals. If, however, you do not have worthy goals, you will be prey to every fad and charlatan.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a lawyer just out of school. He was defending a client the prosecutor claimed had swindled five million dollars from the company for which he worked. The young lawyer said, to the jury, "If my client would have stolen five million dollars, do you think he would have hired me as his attorney?" We all need to think clearly and have positive goals to achieve success in life. I wish all you graduates Hatzlocha Rabbah, great success, L'Chol Tuv, and much good health and good things. May you all make us proud so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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Second Chances, The Physical, Spiritual, & Spiritual

JUNE 2003

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One of the reasons that many people fail today is that they cannot or will not make second efforts. Success in life is usually determined by whether or not we make a second effort. We know this in sports. It looks like the running back is stopped, but he makes a second effort, and either breaks free or gains many yards. We know this in business, too. It looks like a deal is lost, but the salesman makes another call and adds a sweetener, and the deal is closed. We know the same thing in interpersonal relationships. You inadvertently insult a person, and then, after making a cursory attempt at reconciliation, drop the matter instead of making a second effort which would allow your relationship to endure. We know that this applies to spiritual matters, too, learning Torah and observing mitzvahs, how people will take a stab at learning Torah or at keeping this observance or that observance, but will not make the second efforts necessary to make it part of their being.

In life, in both the physical and spiritual realms, we must make second efforts. This is the theme of almost all the books of the Torah. Each of them speaks about how our forefathers and matriarchs had to make second efforts to stay Jews, how not everybody was redeemed from Egypt because many Jews

there gave up. However, in Bamidbar, the fourth book of the Torah, which we always begin before Shavuot, the holiday on which we received the Torah, this is stressed over and over again. We all must make second efforts. G-d always gives us many chances. We should not give up even if we have failed.

Today, we started the fourth book of the Bible, Bamidbar. The Ramban tells us that Bereishit, the first book of the Bible, talks about the Ovos. It gives us the history of the Jewish people, and it tells us how we are just like everybody else, how we were descended from idol worshippers. Tereach was an idol worshipper, and we Jews, unless we keep to our traditions, can also become idol worshippers again. Bereishit explains why G-d chose the Jewish people because of the personal qualities of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. However, we all know that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov had children who backslid. Yaakov was able to keep all his children Jewish. Avraham and Yitzchak could not. If we are to maintain ourselves and our children as the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, we have to maintain our traditions. We have to want to maintain our link with G-d.

The second book of the Bible, Shemos, speaks about redemption, how we were redeemed from Egypt, but even there, according to the Medrash, many

Jews were not redeemed, in fact, as many as four-fifths of the Jewish people because they did not want to be redeemed. They did not want to make the necessary second efforts to stay Jewish. The book also speaks about the building of the Tabernacle, which allows each of us to get close to G-d. The third book of Bible, Vayikra, gives us the details how we are to become holy, how we are to uplift ourselves. We are to love our neighbor as ourselves. It also speaks about how the Kohanim are to make peace between us and our Father in heaven, and peace between each of us on earth by giving us second chances.

The fourth book of the Bible, Bamidbar stresses over and over again how we all are always given another chance. In it, we learn about the spies, about Korach's rebellion, and we learn about the concept of Teshuva, of repentance. It is important that we always realize that we always get another chance.

In the beginning of this Torah portion, we learn how a census was taken of the Jewish people. Two words are used to describe this census. One is Seuh, which means to lift up, and the other is Tifkadu, which means something is lacking. It is used when you notice that someone physically is missing. The normal word for counting is Manu. In fact, this is the word that we are all

acquainted with when we say we need a minyan. Minyan comes from the word to count, Maneh. Why are the two words, Seuh and Tifkadu, used instead of the word Manu?

Rabbi Cook tells us that it is because there are two aspects to a human being: a spiritual aspect and a physical aspect, and both are needed. Seuh refers to the spiritual, and Tifkadu to the physical. He says this is true for a nation also. It must have a physical and a spiritual component. The spiritual component is the culture of the people, the religion of the people, the language of the people. The physical has to do with its armies, politics, and government. In Europe, the Jewish people had a wonderful spiritual life, but they had no physical structure as a people, no army, no government, no intelligence services, etc., and they were wiped out during the Holocaust. On the other hand, you can have an army, a government, and an intelligence service, but if you have no inner spirit, you will not be willing to sacrifice for your cause, for your nation. Communism fell without almost a shot being fired because nobody was willing to fight for it. South African apartheid fell apart because nobody was willing to fight for it. Arafat thought and still thinks that Israel and Zionism will fall apart, too. All you have to do is give Jews a few casualties because Jews do not believe in Zionism anymore. We

all need to have the spiritual to overcome the vicissitudes of life, because without the spiritual, we will not have the will to fight and defend ourselves, and sacrifice for the future.

In America today, we need to have physical structures like synagogues and federations and old folks homes and schools, but they will not endure unless the people feel that Judaism is worthwhile. We know that sending your child to a day school is essential to preserve Judaism for the next generation, but most Jews will not do it. They are not willing to sacrifice to do it. After all, it costs almost \$9,000 a year to send your child to day school, and even if you get half scholarship, it will still cost you \$4,500. It requires a great deal of spiritual grit to want to send your child to day school.

We know that in a marriage, too, there has to be not only physical attraction, but also spiritual attraction. You have to be willing to sacrifice for each other, and help each other, and want to communicate with each other. A marriage based only on physical attraction will not last. On the other hand, a relationship only based on spirituality without intimacy will not last either. We need both, and in both the spiritual and physical realms there is always room for a second chance.

The Jewish people sinned by listening to the spies. They failed spiritually. They did not feel equal to the task of entering the land of Israel. They did not feel that they could conquer the land of Israel. During the rebellion of Korach, many of them sinned physically. Korach wanted power, and his followers wanted power. It is true that many of the Levites wanted a closer relationship with G-d, but most of Korach's followers were only interested in furthering their position in society.

The book of Bamidbar teaches us that in both realms, physical and spiritual, we are always given second chances. The rabbis teach us that we always read either the Torah portion Bamidbar or Naso before Shavuot to teach us that the Torah was given with fire, with water, and in the desert. To appreciate the Torah, we must have enthusiasm, a spiritual quality. We must also have persistence, like water. Water is a very soft thing, but it makes its mark on stone by being persistent. This is required in both the spiritual and physical realm. Finally, it was given in the desert to teach us that we have to be adaptable. We cannot say we will only learn Torah in an air conditioned room surrounded by aromatic essences, and in the physical realm, too, we cannot say that we will only take this kind of job or that kind of job. We must

be adaptable.

On the holiday of Shavuot, the rabbis tell us we celebrate the marriage of G-d to Israel. This marriage requires physical as well as spiritual attributes. We need the wherewithal to procure the things we need for Shabbat, to buy the books we need to study Torah. We should always remember that G-d gives us second chances. We should never say that just because I have not been able to celebrate Shabbat up to now, I will not do it. I cannot do it. Somehow, you will be able to get a job which will allow you to keep Shabbat. A person should never say I have not learned Torah up to now. I cannot do it. You can do it. We just have to keep making second efforts. We need to have both the physical and the spiritual, but this requires constant second efforts. If one way fails, we must always try another way.

I am reminded of a story Bob Hope used to tell. He said that every girl he met was very spiritual, and he just could not measure up. When he would ask a girl for a date, she would say, "Bob, you don't have a prayer." Let us all hope and pray that we will all learn the lessons of the fourth book of the Bible, that we will always know that G-d is always giving us second chances, and that we should never give up on our spiritual and physical lives so that we

can get closer to Him and, thus, to each other so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

Baonibar 2003

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