

# THE ALMIGHTY EMPLOYS A DIFFERENT SET OF

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Bamidbar

### The Almighty Employs A Different Set Of

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD# 902 - Dancing On Yom Tov. Good Shabbos!

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The Book of Bamidbar is referred to by the Sages as the "Book of the Counts" [Chomesh haPekudim]. In English it is referred to as the Book of Numbers. This week's parsha contains the first of the two censuses which appear in Sefer Bamidbar. (The second count takes place in Parshas Pinchas.)

I saw an interesting observation cited in the name of Rav Chatzkel Levenstein, zt"l (1895-1974): We are given the breakdown of the population of each Tribe that was part of this census. The population of the Tribe of Dan was 62,700 while the population of the Tribe of Binyomin was 35,400. This means that Dan was almost twice as numerous as Binyomin. In fact the Tribe of Dan was the second most populous of the Tribes. Only the Tribe of Yehudah was larger.

It was perhaps for this reason that the Tribe of Dan acted as the "caboose" - the last tribe at the end of the entire encampment (in travel formation). They were called "the gatherer for all the encampments". When one has a population - including men, women, and children - of over 2 million people that are travelling as part of the Jewish encampment, inevitably there are bound to be many lost objects. The Tribe of Dan picked up all lost objects and served as the Lost and Found department for the rest of the Jewish people.

It is curious that when we look back to Parshas Vayigash which lists the "second generation" of the various Tribes of Israel, Binyomin provided 10 grandsons to Yaakov Avinu and Dan provided only one. Dan's single son, as it so happened, was disabled. Chushim, son of Dan, was deaf.

Every actuarial table and demographic projection would have predicted - at the time the Jews went down to Egypt - that the Tribe of Binyomin would be far larger than the Tribe of Dan by the time of the Exodus. The opposite occurred.

There is a lesson in this. The lesson is that "Many are the thoughts in the heart of man; but G-d's plan is what will occur." [Mishlei 19:21] All these predictions concerning how many children someone will have or how healthy they will be or how wealthy they will be must be taken with a strong grain of salt. These matters are not up to us. They are in the Hand of G-d. If Hashem wants something to happen, He will make it happen; if He doesn't, it won't happen.

The Torah is sending us a message here. Look at what happened with the Tribe of Dan. Look at the great size of this family in Israel that started out with a single disabled child.

The Ramban expresses a similar thought regarding the Tribe of Levi. He writes that Levites were counted from 30 days old, unlike the other tribes who were counted from 20 years of age and above. Based on this change of guidelines for their census, we would have expected that the Tribe of Levi would have the largest number of people. That was not the case. In actuality, they numbered only 22,000. Even more striking is the fact that from the age 30 and above there were only 8,000 Levites! Why is it, asks the Ramban, that the Tribe of Levi - the Army of Hashem - had so few people? It does not make any sense! We would have expected that this tribe be the most populous and blessed of all the families of Israel.

The Ramban answers that this discrepancy substantiates the teaching of the Medrash Tanchuma that the Tribe of Levi was not included in the Egyptian enslavement and the back breaking labor about which it is written [Shemos 1:12] "the more the Egyptians tortured them, the more they multiplied". Although from a scientific, demographic, perspective the tribe that did not suffer and was not persecuted in Egypt should have become more populous than the other tribes, it was the Will of G-d that just the reverse occurred. Those segments of the nation that were persecuted were specifically those tribes that were blessed with extraordinary birthrates.

This counter-intuitive result based on Divine Plan and Divine Will is an idea that we encounter throughout the Torah and throughout Jewish history. This is, for example, the lesson of the Sabbatical year. The Torah teaches us to let the land lie fallow during the seventh year of the Shmittah cycle.

What happens if one does not work for a year? He will not have a livelihood! The Master of the Universe commands: "Do not work on the seventh year and you will have more." The Almighty's set of "cause and effect" relationships is not that of the rest of the world.

In Europe, there was a custom that before davening Maariv at the conclusion of Shabbos, people would recite Tehillim. A Jew once walked into shul on a Motzai Shabbos before Maariv and saw one Jew in particular crying his heart out. After Maariv, he went over to this Jew and asked him "Why are you so distressed? Why are you so distraught?" He responded, "The whole week, I work away from home. I come home only on Shabbos. I have a daughter who can't find a shidduch (appropriate marriage partner) because I have no money for her dowry. I get so upset on Shabbos to see the plight of my daughter, when we say Tehillim at the end of Shabbos, I just break down and all my

emotions start to flow. The whole week, I am removed from the family and I don't see her anguish, but when I spend the entire Shabbos with her, it hurts me so much that by Motzai Shabbos I have to let it all pour out in the Tehillim."

The second Jew told him: Listen, we have something in common. We both have no money. You have a daughter. I have a son. Let's make a shidduch between our children. So there it was. The two paupers in town made a match between their children. What could we expect would come out from such a couple?

In fact, that couple had four sons, all of whom became illustrious Torah scholars. One of them became the Ketzos haChoshen. A second wrote the work known as the Kuntres haSefeikos. This was from a desperation shidduch because they were too poor to marry anyone else. One never knows "from whence my Help will come" [Tehillim 121:1].

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## **The Book of Psalms Reflects the Strength of Its Author's Great-Grandfather**

The Talmud teaches [Bava Basra 91a] that Boaz - the great grandfather of Dovid HaMelech [King David] - made 120 celebrations for his various children. We are taught he had 30 sons and 30 daughters. He married off all 60 children and not only did he make a celebration for the wedding, he made a big celebration for the engagement party as well.

He invited everyone in town to each of these 120 parties - everyone that is except an undistinguished, childless, Jew named Manoach. Manoach eventually became the father of a son who grew up to be the great Shimshon haGibor, leader of the Jewish people.

According to the Gemara, Boaz figured that since Manoach was childless, he would never make any weddings and would not be able to reciprocate. That was why he did not invite him. The Talmud relates that, as apparent punishment, all of Boaz's 60 children predeceased him.

This Gemara is amazingly difficult. Boaz was a righteous person. He was the great grandfather of King David. What does the Talmud mean that he did not invite Manoach because he did not expect to be invited back to the weddings of Manoach's children? Was Boaz, chas v'Shalom, too cheap to add one more couple to his guest list?

The Maharsha provides us with an insight. He writes that in those days, people were so loath to accepting any type of gift from their friends and neighbors that one did not even go to someone's wedding celebration unless he could reciprocate at a later date. Only then would one avoid the stigma of being a "freeloader". Boaz, knowing that Manoach had no children and could not reciprocate, did not invite him. It was not a matter of Boaz being cheap, but rather he wanted to

spare Manoach the awkwardness of being invited to a wedding he could not attend without appearing to be a freeloader!

Apparently, Manoach did feel pain that he was not invited and because of the pain that Boaz unintentionally caused Manoach, he buried his own 60 children.

After Boaz lost his 60 children, he also lost his wife. The commentaries tell us that the "commotion in the city" on the day that Naomi and Rus returned to Bais-Lechem [Ruth 1:19] was because the funeral of Boaz's wife was taking place that very day.

Boaz lost his sixty children and then became a widower. What is such a person supposed to do? Conventional wisdom is that he is supposed to roll over and die. What is there to live for? Imagine it! Heaven Forbid!

Boaz did not do that. What did he do? He remarried. He tried to rebuild. He had a child (Oved), who had a child (Yishai), who had a child (Dovid), who became the founder of the Davidic Dynasty.

That ability to not give up in despair, in the face of overwhelming tragedy, is the strength of the book of Tehillim. When Jews are desperate, what do we grab? We grab the book of Psalms, written by this very Dovid HaMelech, the great-grandson of Boaz. Where does the inner strength of Sefer Tehillim come from? It comes from Boaz. Boaz had the ability to cling to hope in the face of tremendous tragedy.

We pick up a Tehillim and read a chapter. We have an affinity for this special volume even when all hope seems lost because we intuitively know who wrote it and we know the story of where he came from. It is the power and the never-give-up-hope attitude of Boaz that infuses the book of Tehillim with the inner dynamism that even when times are desperate, we turn to it as a source of comfort and a source of strength.

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