

CHIZUK *and* IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

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The fourth book of the Torah, Sefer Bamidbar, is also known as Sefer HaP'kudim - the Book of Censuses. The Sefer begins with the command to Moshe Rabbeinu to: "Take a census of the entire assembly of the children of Israel according to their families, according to their father's house, by the number of names..." (Bamidbar 1:2)

A census is not usually the most dramatic of events. More often than not the census merely provides us with a "dry" series of numbers - the sub-total of each tribe, tabulated together in order to reach the final sum...

[Sometimes, though, even the "dry" numbers themselves can tell a rather dramatic tale. Having just celebrated Yom Yerushalayim, here are a few numbers to ponder: In the year 1267, the Ramban reports two Jews living in Jerusalem; In the year 1553 the Ottoman registry recorded two thousand Jewish residents in the holy city. This number which had

slowly risen and reached thirteen thousand by the turn of the century, and ninety-seven thousand by the year 1944, has ballooned to more than half a million Jews today! - (Now is the time to work on increasing some other numbers as well. I have my eye, of course, on the annual average of Olim from North America...).

Rashi, in the Parasha, points out that the Torah's call for a census should not be seen as merely filling an instrumental function. Were this to be the case, Rashi reasons, surely the Torah would not have repeated this counting on so many different occasions! Therefore, he writes, the Divine command to count the People of Israel is best understood as a sign of Divine love towards his chosen nation - MITOCH CHIBATAN L'FANAV MONEH OTAM KOL SHA'A.

This emotional angle may help explain the manner in which the census was actually executed. The Torah tells us that the people were counted: B'MISPAR SH'MOT - "by the number of names". This phrase seems to be somewhat contradictory. A number is anonymous, lacking any singular character or traits; numbering people is an act which strips them of their individuality. [Indeed, the Nazis, yimach sh'mam v'zichram, tried to reduce the Jewish People to numbers engraved upon their arms]. A

person's name, on the other hand, is representative of his unique personality; the name represents his essence and individual identity. Thus, in order to mark the loss of the six million Holocaust victims, for whom there are no cemeteries, no headstones, the Yad Vashem museum created The Hall of Names. Leaning on the words of Yeshayahu: "And to them I will give in my house, and written upon my walls, a memorial and a name (Yad Vashem)... that shall not be cut off" (56:5), this memorial houses an extensive collection of millions of 'pages of testimony', containing the victims' names, pictures and short biographies. In order to counter the attempt to obliterate all recollection of the victims' existence, the Hall of Names' sole purpose is to preserve their memory for generations to come.

The Torah describes how the census is not only focused on names but on family history as well: The People of Israel are counted "according to their families, according to their father's house". Alas, too many of the Holocaust survivors had their yichus annihilated, and out of necessity set out - through their children and grandchildren - to create a new family tree. Interestingly, while the Torah designates lineage as the determining factor in a person's

yichus, the Rizhiner Rebbe, was heard stating otherwise. At the Tena'im of his third daughter, when his Mechutan began recounting his illustrious lineage, the Rebbe said: "My dear Mechutan, by us a person's yichus is not traced back to their father, but rather, forwards through their offspring, as it states in Tehillim TACHAT AVOTECHA YIHYU BANECHA, instead of your fathers will be your children whom you shall make Princes of the Land (45:17).

Indeed, it is a great blessing to a parent to see their offspring continuing in the path of their forefathers. When meeting new people one is inevitably asked whether you are related to so and so... I always feel most gratified to answer my interlocutor that they are referring to one of my sons or daughter-in-laws; to my daughter or my son-in-law. TACHAT AVOTECHA YIHYU BANECHA.

With Shavuot upon us, the theme of family lineage; fathers-mothers and sons, naturally leads me to think of Elimelech and Naomi. They were leading a prosperous life with two sons who were destined to become Princes of the Land. However, Elimelech's refusal to accept his communal responsibility to care for others - for the poor and the downtrodden - led to his and his

sons' demise. The Megilla teaches us that his decision to leave Israel for the imagined "good life" in Chutz La'aretz, spelled his spiritual end as his sons married out, and ultimately his family lay in complete ruin. Naomi's process of rebuilding; of replanting a new family tree - one which would ultimately lead to none other than David HaMelech - began with her decision to return to Eretz Yisrael.

Many Jews living in the Diaspora today, thinking that they are leading the 'good life', tend to ignore their obligation to the Land of Israel. By coming to Israel you may not be creating a new family tree, but, you will be cultivating a new branch - the Israeli-branch, and your children will, no doubt, become "Princes of the Land". 🇮🇱👉