



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

10 COBBLERS MAKE A MINYAN

The sidra deals with the census of the Children of Israel in the wilderness.

From the human point of view the census has an obvious importance. We need to know how many people make up our population and whether our numbers are growing or declining.

But it is God who commands the census, and He is all-knowing - so why does He need the numerical information from the census?

Rashi explains that the census was a sign of God's love. It wasn't for God Himself that the numbers had to be ascertained, but in order to teach His creations a lesson.

That lesson is that whichever place an individual occupies in the community list, God still loves him or her exactly the same as anyone else.

A Jewish saying says that nine rabbis do not make up a minyan but ten cobblers do.

There are places where the shammash stands outside the shule when they need a tenth man for minyan, and nobody complains if the tenth man he brings in is

a High Court judge - or a street sweeper. God loves them all.

LET THE WILDERNESS REJOICE

Shabbat B'midbar reminds us of the prophet's words, "Let the wilderness and its cities rejoice" (Yeshayahu 42:11).

A wilderness rejoicing? Surely not. By definition, a wilderness is crude and cruel, and no-one would really want to live there.

But if we take the word "wilderness" metaphorically - representing the people of Israel - we come to a different conclusion.

The prophet Yeshayahu is comforting Israel. Israel has suffered so much that it feels bereft, bothered and bewildered.

But the people that knew darkness and despair is being told that its future is assured, that it will still find joy in life, and the darkness will vanish and be replaced by light and happiness.

In our day, history has seen the prophecy come true, and the State of Israel is one of the happiest places on earth. Repeated studies have found that more than most nations, the people of Israel are high up on the global happiness scale.

The voices that call for Israel's dismantling ought to be jealous. If only their own people had something of the Israeli spirit!

Two things have brought about Israel's emotional and psychological triumph - our God, and our own spirit.

The hostile winds of criticism might howl, the acid tongues of criticism might shoot their barbs, but the erstwhile wilderness has become an oasis. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH