

# Toronto Torah

## Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Bamidbar

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There will be no Toronto Torah publication for Parshat Naso

### How the Princes Restored Their *Yud*

### Ezer Diena

Bamidbar 1:5-15 lists the *nesi'im*, the princes of each tribe, who were to stand beside Moshe and Aharon as they took a census of the Jewish People. Both before and after the commandment to select these people to oversee the counting process, these leaders receive tremendous praise in the Torah itself, and are referred to as "head of the house" (1:4; all translations from alhatorah.org), "the called of the congregation", "princes" and "heads of the thousands of Israel". (1:16) Not only that, but the Torah names each of them, and then explicitly calls attention to the fact that they were each called by name! (1:17)

Many commentators continue to extol their virtues. Rabbi Yitzchak ben Yehudah haLevi (*Paneiach Raza* to 1:16) contrasts the spelling of the word "called", or *keri'ei*, found in the title here (1:16), with its spelling in Bamidbar 16:2, referring to Korach's band of men, where the same word lacks a *yud*. He explains that this additional *yud* hints that these princes were fitting to have received the Ten Commandments [ten is the numerical value of the letter *yud*]. Even though the entire nation alive at that time received the Torah from Hashem, this indicates that they were on a very high spiritual level.

Yet, if one looks back to Shemot 35:26, we have another case of a missing *yud* as it relates to the princes – but rather than highlight their virtues, it does the opposite. While detailing the contributions of the princes to the

Mishkan, the word *vehanesi'im* is spelled without a second *yud*. Rashi (ad loc.) cites the midrashic view (Bamidbar Rabbah 12:16) that this was a punishment of sorts for the lack of initiative shown by the princes in donating to the Mishkan. Rather than immediately offer a nice donation, they simply told the collectors that they would fill in anything lacking.

Rabbi Shlomo Luntschitz, in his *K'li Yakar* to Shemot 35:26 and 25:1, is bothered – what is the meaning of the letter *yud* specifically being removed from this word as a punishment? He explains that *yud* is one of the letters of Hashem's Name, and Hashem represents humility. When the *nesi'im* proclaimed that they would provide anything missing from the Mishkan, they acted in a haughty manner. Thus, Hashem removed one of the letters of His Name, to show that they lacked that which He stood for – humility.

In particular, we can suggest that part of the arrogance in their statement about the Mishkan collection was that they separated themselves from the rest of the Jewish People; they viewed their constituents as below their level. No doubt it was a humbling experience for the *nesi'im* when those same people donated so much to the Mishkan that the princes barely had any room to give! Returning to Bamidbar, Hashem instructs Moshe and Aharon to gather these same leaders and have them present during the counting, but not to count their tribes (see Rashi and

commentaries to Bamidbar 1:4). This may have been a special message to the *nesi'im*: Hashem intended that they stand by and watch as every individual from among the Jewish People was counted and equally valued. No one was more important or greater than any other, even if they were wealthier or more learned. Together with their experience of missing out on the important donations to the Mishkan, this allowed the *nesi'im* to internalize the lesson of humility that they were lacking before.

Since they demonstrated their humility through their actions at this time, the Torah now not only lists them each by name, but also takes the opportunity to speak about how special they really were. What is really extraordinary, however, is that through the contrast with the spelling of *keri'ei* elsewhere, we see that Hashem returned His "*yud*" to them, not just to show that they were worthy of the Ten Commandments, as Rabbi haLevi suggests, but to show that they had indeed atoned for their earlier sin, and were now acting with the Divine trait of humility.

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**Summary**

Our chapter opens with Hashem’s reply to Shlomo’s request for sustained Divine favour. (8:38-42) The Divine response will be contingent upon Israel’s adherence to His Torah: “...If you walk before Me as your father David walked...to do in accordance with all that I have commanded you...then I shall uphold the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever...But if you and your children turn away from Me...and worship the gods of others...then I shall cut off Israel from upon the face of the land that I gave them, and the Temple that I have sanctified for My name, I shall dismiss from My presence...” (9:4-7, Artscroll tr.)

Following this prophecy, we are told about many of the fruitful political and economic endeavours that characterized the twilight of King Shlomo’s reign.

Shlomo gave Chiram, king of Tzor, twenty cities in the Galilee as compensation for the cedar trees, cypress trees, and gold that Chiram supplied for Shlomo’s building projects. (9:11) Chiram, however, found these

cities undesirable, and disparagingly called them “the land of Kavul” (lit. chained), in reference to the low quality of the ground, which caused those who walked on it to sink. (Rashi to 9:13, Shabbat 54a) Despite this hiccup, Shlomo and Chiram remained strong allies; Chiram even sent Shlomo a gift of 120 *kikar* of gold, and they continued to partner in economic ventures. (9:27-28)

During his reign, Shlomo levied several taxes for his many building projects, including the Beit HaMikdash, his palace, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Chatzor, Megiddo, as well as for the rebuilding of Gezer, which had been conquered and destroyed by an Egyptian pharaoh. (9:15-18)

This period was marked by prosperity and comfort for Israel. For example, no Jews were enslaved, although Jewish men were designated to serve in Shlomo’s peacetime army. (9:22, Radak) Indentured labourers were procured solely from pockets of Canaanites who had remained since the time of Yehoshua. (9:20-21)

**Insight**

It is difficult to read these sections describing the glorious beginnings of the first Beit HaMikdash, without being sobered by the reality that, unfortunately, we did not merit its endurance. Does this mean that Shlomo’s efforts did not produce lasting impact?

Rambam (Hilchot Beit HaBechirah 6:16) contends that while the legal sanctity of the Land of Israel – affecting various land-linked mitzvot – was nullified when the Jewish people were exiled, the sanctity of the site where Shlomo built the Beit HaMikdash will always remain. Rambam explains that the Beit HaMikdash was imbued with sanctity from the *Shechinah* (Divine Presence), which can never be removed. Therefore, Shlomo’s tireless commitment to building the Beit HaMikdash, and his prayers for its success, were certainly not in vain; to the contrary, Shlomo enabled Hashem’s presence to be eternally magnified in that holy place.

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**The Israeli Farmer: Growing Potato Roses**

**Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

One challenge in planting cuttings is that they often dry out before their roots can develop. Several years ago, an ancient farming technique was popularized on the Internet: place the root of the cutting in a buried potato. The potato functions as a surrogate root, communicating moisture to the plant until roots develop. One common use of this technique is for rose cuttings. [See [here](#), for example.]

From a halachic perspective, though, this method of cultivation is problematic. Vayikra 19:19 prohibits planting *kilayim* in our fields; we understand this to include biblical prohibitions against grafting trees of different species, as well as grafting trees with vegetables. (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 295:1) Would rooting a rosebush in a potato constitute *kilayim*? In a 2018 article (Techumin 38), Rabbi Shai Weissbrot discussed two potential grounds for permitting this practice.

**1: Rooting below the surface of the soil**

Two centuries ago, Rabbi Moshe Sofer recorded a practice of inserting a wheat kernel in a cutting, to help the plant during the rooting stage. (Chatam Sofer Yoreh Deah 287) Rabbi Sofer reported objecting when a member of his household did this, but he did not feel confident prohibiting it for people in general. His reason for leniency was that the Talmud (Kiddushin 39a) links the prohibitions against grafting plants and interbreeding animals, and animals live above the ground. Therefore, perhaps the prohibition against grafting plants applies exclusively where the plants will exist above the ground.

As Rabbi Weissbrot notes, this deduction from the Talmud is surprising; the Talmud does not present this application of the link between grafting and interbreeding. Further, a

mishnah (Kilayim 7:1) states that one may not plant seeds atop a grapevine that is embedded in the ground, even though both are subterranean. [One might argue that the mishnah’s case is different, though, there both the grapevine and those seeds will lead to aboveground plants.] He also points out that Rabbi Natan Adler, mentor to Rabbi Sofer, prohibited rooting myrtle branches by placing a barley kernel in the branch stem. (Mishnat Rabbi Natan, Kilayim 7:1)

**2: No actual graft**

Rabbi Avraham Yeshayah Karelitz (Chazon Ish, Kilayim 2:17) commented on Rabbi Sofer’s case, contending that if the wheat would only contribute moisture but not join with the cutting in developing roots, this would not be considered *kilayim*. This would seem to permit the “potato rose”.

However, Rabbi Weissbrot rejects this leniency as well. He notes a mishnah which states, “One may not insert a grapevine into a melon, for the melon to provide moisture for the grapevine.” (Kilayim 1:8) This mishnah makes clear that even where there is no blending of the plants, the prohibition against *kilayim* still pertains.

Rabbi Weissbrot concludes that a Jew may not make use of this technique; Machon HaTorah v’Ha’Aretz [rules](#) likewise. This should apply outside of Israel as well, since the prohibition against grafting trees and plants applies outside Israel. (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah *ibid.*) However, Machon HaTorah v’Ha’Aretz [suggests](#) that there may be room for leniency outside Israel, where the Torah’s laws against *kilayim* are limited.

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**Biography**  
**Rabbi David Cohen**  
Rabbi Adam Friedmann

Rabbi David Cohen (1887-1972) was born in the greater Vilna area of Lithuania. At a young age he distinguished himself as a very capable student in Talmudic studies. He studied at the yeshiva of Radin under the great Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan ("Chafetz Chaim"), and at the yeshiva in Volozhin. However, Rabbi Cohen possessed an inquiring philosophical mind, which led him to pursue studies outside of the Talmud curriculum. He became initiated into these studies through the works of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Eventually, his curiosity led him to universities in Germany and Switzerland where he studied philosophy, literature, and law.

Rabbi Cohen observed extreme ascetic practices. During his time in Switzerland he took upon himself a lifelong Nazirite oath. He therefore refrained from cutting his hair and consuming anything derived from grapes. His status as a nazir is the basis for his title *HaRav HaNazir* (the Nazirite Rabbi). In addition to this, Rabbi Cohen was a strict vegetarian. He also undertook vows of silence on various days throughout the year.

A critical moment in Rabbi Cohen's life occurred when he met his major mentor and teacher, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook. The meeting took place in St. Gallen, Switzerland in 1915 while Rabbi Kook was prevented from returning to Israel due to World War I. Rabbi Cohen had heard that Rabbi Kook was present, and the former made his way from nearby Basel for the meeting. This encounter transformed Rabbi Cohen, and he resolved to abandon his secular studies and follow Rabbi Kook.

In 1922 Rabbi Cohen moved to Israel to join the staff of Rabbi Kook's new Central Yeshiva in Jerusalem. He was intimately involved in developing the yeshiva's broad curriculum, and he taught Talmud, philosophy, and ethics.

Rabbi Cohen's literary output was largely limited to editing the writings of his teacher; he produced a four-volume set titled *Orot HaKodesh* which reorganized Rabbi Kook's various notes in a more coherent system. The exception to this is his own book, *Kol HaNevuah*, which details what Rabbi Cohen viewed as the unique system of Jewish logic and philosophy.

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**Torah and Translation**  
**Everything Ascends**  
**Rabbi David Cohen, Mishnat Nazir 60**  
Translated by Rabbi Adam Friedmann

אמש כשהראני מרן הרב שליט"א את המאמר על כתיב הרב קוק מאת רמון, שבו הביע חסרון הריכוז הפילוסופי שבהם, הבעתי לרב את דעתי ומבוקשי מאז על חיבור שיטתי מאת הרב בג' חלקים: אלקי (מיטפיסי) מוסרי (תורני) ולאומי (התחיה). והרב שליט"א בעומק הגיוני חקרי לבבו אמר לי כי זה הוא רצונו אלא שקשה לו, גם נראה ונוח לו שהדברים יהיו נאמרים באופן טבעי כמו שהם נובעים מעומק הגיוני רוממות נשמת א' שבאדם החכם הישראלי, והריכוז והעיבוד השטתי המדעי שם מעצור ומפריע לזה. ובוזה צדק מאד. הודיע לי גם כן מעיקרי שיטתו כדלקמן השלמות האלקית היא מוחלטה שאין בו כל חסרון (זה כלל פילוסופי מפורסם) אך מצד שני ההתעלות וההתרוממות מעלה מעלה בקודש גם כן שלמות היא ויהי חסרון בשלמות אם לא תהי התעלות בה.

ואמר, זה כמו שר' עזריאל אומר, שהגבול באין סוף, השלם העליון שאין בו חסרון, שלמות הוא. וכשהעירותי על ההבדל העיקרי שבין שיטת ר' עזריאל, שעיקרה המנוחה מתימטית, ושיטת הרב שעיקרה התנועה, הסכים לזה שודאי כך הוא, והדמיון הוא רק באופן חיצוני בצד ה"ל", כשם שבשלמות יש שלמות מצד החיסרון, כך בשלמות יש שלמות מצד ההתעלות.

והנה זהו יסוד ועיקר לכל השיטה, ההתעלות שבנפש האדם, ההשתלמות וההתפתחות בדורות, התיקון, הכל הוא משפע חיות קודש העליון, ושם תנועה, ענין, התעלות.

[This excerpt from Rabbi Cohen's diary described Rabbi Kook entrusting him with editing his writings. In it, Rabbi Kook describes the ideological core of his philosophical system.]

Last night, when our master the Rav [Rabbi Kook] showed me the article about the writings of Rav Kook from Rimon, in which he expressed the lack of philosophical focus in them, I expressed to the Rav my opinion and long-time request for a systematic work from the Rav in three parts – the Divine (Metaphysics), the ethical (Torah) and the national (Renaissance). The Rav said, from the depths of the logical examination of his heart, that this was his desire as well, but that it is hard for him. It also appears to him more pleasant that the words be said in a natural way as they flow from the depths of the lofty logical workings of the Divine soul which is in the person of the Jewish sage, and that the concentration and orderly scientific preparation in it [i.e. in a clear explanation of Rabbi Kook's ideas] would stop up and detract from this [i.e. the natural flow of the ideas]. In this he was very right. He also told me about the fundamentals of his approach, as follows: Divine perfection is absolute and lacks nothing. (This is a well-known philosophical principle) On the other hand, however, ascent and rising higher and higher in holiness are also [a type of] perfection, and there would be a deficiency in perfection if there were no ascent in it.

And he said that this is like the position of Rabbeinu Azriel [of Gerona], that the [existence of] limitation in Ein Sof, the supernal completeness which lacks nothing, is itself perfection. When I noted the fundamental difference between Rabbeinu Azriel's position, which is based in [perfection found in] mathematical rest, and the position of the Rav which is based in [perfection found in] dynamic action, he agreed that this is true, and the comparison is only an external one in the aforementioned manner, just as in perfection there is perfection due to lacking, so too in perfection there is perfection due to ascent.

And behold, this is the basis and foundation of the entire approach, the ascent in the soul of man, the perfecting and development of the generations, the repair, all of it comes from the overflow of supernal holy life-force, in which there is movement, namely, ascent.

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**SPECIAL PROGRAMMING**

**10:00 AM Wed. May 19: Biblical Battlefields of Israel, a 5-part series  
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, Week 5: Elah**

**12:30 PM Wed. May 19: The Ethical Challenge, a Business Ethics Mini-Series (CLE-eligible)  
Week 3: Rabbi Sammy Bergman, Unscrupulous Clients in Law and Halachah**

**8:00 PM Wed. May 19: Jewish Art: Symbolism or Idolatry?, a 5-part mini-series  
Rabbi Chaim Metzger, Week 4: Cherubs and Griffons**

**DAILY**

**Mon-Thu 10 AM to Noon, Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres, via ZOOM (men)**

**- Only meets on Wednesday and Thursday this week -**

**Mon/Wed: Gemara Succah, Orot haTeshuvah**

**Tues/Thurs: Parshah, Tanach: Shemuel**

**WEEKLY**

**Shabbat May 15**

**After minchah at Shaarei Shomayim, How Coffee Changed Shavuot Forever?, R' Sammy Bergman**

**Sunday May 16 Erev Shavuot**

**9:20 AM Contemporary Halachah, Netanel Klein (not this week)**

**10:00 AM Gemara Shabbat, Rabbi Aaron Greenberg (University) (not this week)**

**7:30 PM Ketuvot, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) (not this week)**

**Monday May 17 Shavuot**

**8:30 PM Gemara Shabbat, Chap. 15, Rabbi Moshe Yeres (not this week)**

**Tuesday May 18 Shavuot**

**1:30 PM Megilat Ruth, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (not this week)**

**7:30 PM Shemuel Ch. 1, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (men) (not this week)**

**Wednesday May 19**

**6:15 AM Talmud Eruvin, Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

**7:00 PM Religious Zionism: Rav Kook, Mashiach and Secular Zionists, Rabbi Sammy Bergman**

**7:00 PM Pirkei Avot: Should Torah Study Be Painful?, Rabbi Alex Hecht**

**Thursday May 20**

**8:30 AM Daniel, Rabbi Chaim Metzger (University)**

**1:30 PM Shemuel Ch. 20, Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner (women) (not this week)**

**8:00 PM Gemara Beitzah, Rabbi Eitan Aviner (men, advanced)**

**9:00 PM Gemara Bava Metzia, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University women)**

**Friday May 21**

**8:30 AM Parshah, Rabbi Sammy Bergman (University)**

**10:30 AM Shemitah! with Rabbi Sammy Bergman and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner**

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