



CANDLE LIGHTING 8:02 PM | 14 SIVAN | MAY 30, 2026 | HAVDALA 9:06 PM

**שבת פרשת נשא**  
**SHABBAT PARSHAT NASO**

Haftorah is Judges 13:2-25. Pirkei Avot Ch. 1. The final time for Kiddush Levanah of Sivan is tonight, this Motzei Shabbat (May 30 - 15 Sivan) until the following daybreak.

**SHABBAT KIDDUSH**

Kiddush is sponsored in honor of Barbara & Ziv Farajun to wish them bracha, hatzlacha and yishuv tov on moving to Israel.



**FRIDAY EVENING**

<b>MINCHA</b>	<b>6:36 PM</b>
EARLIEST CANDLES	6:47 PM
SHKIA	8:20 PM
TZAIT HAKOCHAVIM	9:00 PM

**UPCOMING JUNE BIRTHDAY/ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH**



Next Shabbat is the birthday/anniversary kiddush! \$36 per family for all birthday/anniversary June listings. Sponsor/provide names here: SIMCHA, by tomorrow night.



**SHABBAT**

<b>HASHKAMA</b>	<b>7:45 AM</b>
<b>SHACHARIT - MAIN</b>	<b>9:00 AM</b>
POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR	≈ 9:11 AM
LAST KRIAT SHEMA	9:11 AM
FUNDAMENTALS SHIUR	≈ 11:30 AM
PRE-MINCHA SHIUR	7:15 PM
<b>MINCHA</b>	<b>7:55 PM</b>
SHKIA	8:21 PM
<b>MAARIV</b>	<b>9:06 PM</b>

**UPCOMING GRADUATION KIDDUSH**

The Graduation Kiddush is in two weeks, on Shabbat, June 13. Sponsorship is just \$36 per family. Email seplotnick@gmail.com to sponsor, listing each graduate's name, school, special graduation-related honors (e.g., valedictorian, summa cum laude, or similar honors) and her or his degree and major if graduating from college. Graduates so far can be found on page 2.

 ORTHODOX UNION Enhancing Jewish Life	SUNDAY 5/31	MONDAY 6/1	TUESDAY 6/2	WEDNESDAY 6/3	THURSDAY 6/4	FRIDAY 6/5
<b>WEEKDAY MINYANIM AT AHAVAT ACHIM</b>						
<b>SHACHARIT</b>	<b>8:00 AM</b>	<b>6:15 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>	<b>6:15 AM</b>	<b>6:25 AM</b>
<b>2ND SHACHARIT MINYON - YISHTABACH AT 7:40 AM</b>		<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>	<b>7:25 AM</b>
<b>MINCHA/MAARIV</b>	<b>8:10 PM</b>	<b>8:10 PM</b>	<b>8:11 PM</b>	<b>8:12 PM</b>	<b>8:12 PM</b>	<b>6:40 PM</b>
<b>ZMANIM</b>						
<b>Earliest Talit</b>	4:19 AM	4:19 AM	4:18 AM	4:17 AM	4:17 AM	4:16 AM
<b>Gedolah</b>	1:32 PM	1:32 PM	1:32 PM	1:32 PM	1:32 PM	1:33 PM
<b>Shkia</b>	8:22 PM	8:22 PM	8:23 PM	8:24 PM	8:24 PM	
<b>Tzait</b>	9:02 PM	9:02 PM	9:03 PM	9:04 PM	9:04 PM	

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**June 14** - Bowling at Bowlero, Fair Lawn! Sunday, 8:00 PM, RSVP here: [PINS](#)

**June 23** - Annual Membership Meeting, Ice Cream Social, 8:45 PM. If partaking in the Ice Cream, please RSVP here: [Vanilla](#)

**July 3** - Friday Night Independence Day BBQ /Shabbat Dinner. RSVP here: [250 Years](#)

**July 12** - Summer Hike, Ramapo Valley. 10:00 AM. RSVP: Take a [Hike](#)

## IN OUR FUTURE - KIDDUSH, SEUDAH SHLISHIT, & ETC.

**June 6** - Birthday and Anniversary Kiddush

**June 6** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Eli Zezon in memory of ברוך מפציר בן שמואל.

**June 13** - Graduation Kiddush

**June 13** - Seudah Shlishit is sponsored by Ziv Farajun in memory of his mother Lea (Lili) bat Batya<sup>ה</sup>.

**June 20** - Kiddush is sponsored by Shelly & Steve Winchester celebrating Daniel's Auf Ruf and upcoming wedding to Yael Simons.

**Aug. 15** - Kiddush is sponsored by Seymour Wigod in honor of Tali & Neal Wigod, Moshe, Shua, and Shy, to wish them bracha, hatzlacha and yishuv tov on moving to Israel.

## BIRTHDAY & ANNIVERSARY KIDDUSH

To add a birthday or anniversary to upcoming lists (next Kiddush on Shabbat, June 6), click here: [SIMCHA](#). Listings/sponsorships are \$36 per family per month. RSVP for the June birthday/anniversary Kiddush by Sunday night, May 31.

## SHIURIM



- PESHAT OF THE PARSHA, Tuesdays at 1:00 PM, click here: [Parsha](#).
- TORAH FOR YOUR COMMUTE, via Whatsapp, with 3-minute daily Halacha insights. To join email Rabbi Shestack at [rabbishestack@gmail.com](mailto:rabbishestack@gmail.com).
- POST-HASHKAMA SHIUR, analyzing Mishlei (Proverbs).
- FUNDAMENTALS OF JEWISH THOUGHT, after Kiddush.
- HOW TO READ HEBREW, for beginners, w/ Stephen Agress. Details to come.
- SHABBAT SHIUR, **SANHEDRIN CH. 8**, 40 minutes prior to mincha.
- TZURBA M'RABANAN w/ Zack Doberman, Wednesdays at 8:30 PM. In-person at the shul and via Zoom.
- SEDER ON THE SIDDUR, at Seudah Shlishit.



## GITA COOPERWASSER<sup>ה</sup>ע YOUTH EVENTS

**May 30** - Perek in the Park (Edison), 3:45 PM

**June 6** - Perek in the Park, 3:45 PM.

## GITA COOPERWASSER<sup>ה</sup>ע SHABBAT YOUTH INFO



- **SHABBAT YOUTH LEADERS:**  
**3<sup>RD</sup> - 5<sup>TH</sup>: LETIZIA & SOPHIA**  
**K - 2<sup>ND</sup>: ABBY & NICOLE**  
**3 YRS - PRE-K: PERRI & ZOE**

- Youth groups for 3rd through 5th Graders starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on left on entering the social hall.
- Youth group for children 4 years old through 1st Grade starts at 9:00 AM (Drop Off) in the Youth Room on the right upon entering the social hall.
- Parent & Me, 9:00 AM in the Beit Midrash.
- Rabbi Meet & Greet, Friday night, kids can come over to the Rabbi after davening to receive a cup of grape juice and a ticket!
- Children earn tickets for coming to minyan (Friday night and/or Shabbat day), asking the rabbi questions or attending parent-child learning programs! Tickets can be redeemed for prizes.
- HIATUS UNTIL FALL - Children's corner at Seudah Shlishit, 1st to 5th graders will get 10 Torah questions in 10 minutes from Rabbi Shestack, with special snacks, tickets and more.

## GRADUATION KIDDUSH



Graduation Kiddush is Shabbat, June 13. Sponsorship is just \$36 per family. Email [seplotnick@gmail.com](mailto:seplotnick@gmail.com) to sponsor, listing each graduate's name, school, special graduation-related honors (e.g., valedictorian, summa cum laude, or similar honors) and her or his degree and major if graduating from college. Graduates so far: **Moshe Baron** (Yeshivat Noam, Class Speaker), **Bez Bernstein** (Fairleigh Dickinson University, Cum Laude, BS Accounting), **Max Brooks** (Yavneh Kindergarten), **Judah Czinn** (Alef Preschool), **Coby Finkelstein** (TABC), **Leora Finkelstein** (Rutgers University School of Social Work, MSW - LSW), **Adin Hochbaum** (Alef Preschool), **Ariella Jacob** (Fair Lawn High School w/High Honors), **Sophie Mayer** (Golda Och Academy Middle School), **Gabriel Mihailevsky** (Yeshivat He'Atid Elementary School), **Eden Riskin** (The Frisch School), and **Michael Riskin** (Binghamton University, BA Psychology).



Mishlei/Proverbs  
Post-Hashkama Shiur 30 – Happiness and One’s Heart

”לב שמח ייטב פנים ובעצבת־לב רוח נכאה: ”לב נבון יבקש־דעת ופי (כתיב ופני) כְּסִילִים ירעה אנלת: ”כִּלְיָמִי עֲנִי רַעִים וְטוֹב־לֵב מִשְׁתָּה תמיד: ”טוֹב־מַעַט בִּירָצָה וְהַמְּאֹצָר רָב וּמְהוּמָה בּוֹ: ”טוֹב אֲרֻתָת נֶרֶק וְאַהֲבָה־שֵׁם מִשׁוֹר אָבוֹס וְשִׁנְאָה־בּוֹ: ”אִישׁ חָמָה יִגְרָה מְדוֹן וְאֶרֶד אֲפִים יִשְׁקִיט רֵיב: ”גִּדְרָךְ עֲצָל כְּמִשְׁכַּת חֶדֶק וְאֶרֶח יִשְׁרִים סִלְלָה: ”כֵּן חֶכֶם יִשְׁמַח־אֵב וּכְסִיל אֲדָם בּוֹנָה אִמּוֹ: ”אֲנֹלֶת שְׂמִתָּה לְחֶסֶר־לֵב וְאִישׁ חֲבוּנָה יִשְׁרֵר־לֶכֶת: ”בִּהְפֹר מְחֻשְׁבוֹת בְּאֵין סוֹד וּבְרֵב יוֹעֲצִים תִּקּוּם: ”יִשְׁמְתָה לְאִישׁ בְּמַעֲנֵה־פִיו וְדָבָר בְּעֵתוֹ מֵה־טוֹב: —

13A merry heart makes for a cheerful face, but a sad heart [will] break one’s spirit. 14The heart of a prudent person seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools befriends skepticism. 15All the days of a pauper are wretched, but a good-hearted person has a perpetual feast. 16Better a little [acquired] through fear of the Lord, than a great treasury accompanied by turmoil. 17Better a meal of [nothing more than] vegetables where there is love, than a fattened ox where there is hatred. 18A hothead incites strife, but one who is slow to anger can defuse a quarrel. 19The lazy man’s way is [obstructed by] a fence [made up] of thorns, but the path of the upright is evenly paved. 20A wise son makes his father happy, but a fool humiliates his mother. 21 Skepticism brings joy to one who is devoid of sense, but a man of an understanding heart walks upright. 22Plans are thwarted due to a lack of counsel, but they are established through many advisers. 23Having a ready response satisfies a man, and how good is it [to have the right] word[s] at the [right] time!<sup>1</sup>

---

A. Our next set of verses in Mishlei have a few overlapping themes. Let’s look first at some of Mishlei’s thoughts relating to happiness and one’s heart in different contexts:

- V. 13 → A **merry heart** makes for a **cheerful** face, but a sad **heart** [will] break one’s spirit.
  - o The couplet, on first reflection, does not seem to offer much insight. On further reflection, however, the cause-and-effect parallel is not exact. If a merry heart produces a cheerful face, we might have expected the second half to say that a sad heart produces a despondent face. Instead, the pasuk says that sadness crushes the spirit. Perhaps the insight is that joy naturally expresses itself outwardly on the face, while sadness may remain hidden; outwardly, a person may maintain composure, even as his spirit is crushed.
  - o The Sfat Emet sees this as a lesson in bitachon, suggesting that even in calamity, a person with true bitachon can maintain inner joy and a cheerful countenance through trust in Hashem.
- V. 14 → The **heart** of a prudent person seeks knowledge, but the mouth of fools befriends skepticism.
  - o In a related vein, Rabbeinu Yonah reads this pasuk as a continuation of the previous one, such that a wise suffering person will seek knowledge to help him realize Hashem’s will and thereby change his countenance, while a fool instead chooses to wallow in his sorrow by befriending skepticism.
- V. 15 → All the days of a pauper are wretched, but a **good-hearted** person has a perpetual feast.
  - o One’s circumstances do not define a person’s emotional well-being. If a person has a good heart, it will be as if he has a perpetual feast. Query whether the reverse is also true. *i.e.*, whether an unhappy person with all the money in the world lives a wretched existence.
- V. 20 → A wise son makes his father **happy**, but a fool humiliates his mother.
  - o This harkens back to the beginning of the “Proverbs section” of Mishlei, verse 10:1, which reads: “Proverbs of Solomon: A wise son makes his father happy, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother.” Vilna Gaon sees the verse in chapter 10 referring to a child, where our verse here references an adult. A wise son, young or old, makes his father happy. But while a foolish child causes the mother grief, it is his actions with “intent” as an adult that here causes the mother to be humiliated.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mishlei Chapter 15.

## Post-Hashkama Shiur 30

- V. 21 → Skepticism brings **joy** to one who is devoid of sense, but a man of an understanding **heart** walks upright.
  - My personal perception is that skeptics are often joyful over what they perceive to be their intellectual superiority, when in fact their logic is deeply flawed and their understandings are superficial, while a man of understanding does not need to judge others as he has the self-confidence (walking upright) and does not need to look down on others to elevate his self-worth.
- V. 23 → Having a ready response **satisfies a man**, and **how good is it** [to have the right] word[s] at the [right] time!
  - Very apt today, where social media allows a person to hone his “gotcha” questions, making others feel foolish in their inability to defend their positions because they did not have time to formulate a thoughtful response. How satisfying it is when one is able to shock the condescending questioner with a powerful response.

### B. An elevation of relationships (with Hashem and with one’s fellows) over materialism.

- V. 16 → Better a little [acquired] through fear of the Lord, than a great treasury accompanied by turmoil.
  - Rashi sees this as a reminder that to acquire what you have through righteous means is satisfying, while ill begotten gains result in a person always looking over their shoulders.
- V. 17 → Better a meal of [nothing more than] vegetables where there is love, than a fattened ox where there is hatred.
  - A parent that provides a child out of love, even if just vegetables, will prove more beneficial to the child than a gift of meat given without love or perhaps even with disdain.

C. As is fairly common throughout Mishlei, in the context of themes (*e.g.*, the heart and materialism, discussed above), certain more worldly advice is interspersed. The types of people and ideas discussed below were (broadly speaking) addressed in previous contexts (as mentioned, Mishlei is a collection of Shlomo’s Proverbs that were compiled by Chizkiyahu’s men and later canonized by the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah). Here are some connections to earlier Proverbs we learned showing the variations.

- V. 18 → A **hothead** incites **strife**, but one who is **slow to anger** can defuse a quarrel.
  - 10:12 → Hatred arouses **strife**, but love covers up all transgressions.
  - 14:17 → A **hothead** commits folly, and a scheming man is hated.
  - 14:29 → Being **slow to anger** shows insight, but a **hothead** elevates foolishness.
- V. 19 → The **lazy man**’s way is [obstructed by] a fence [made up] of thorns, but the path of the upright is evenly paved.
  - 12:27 → The **slothful man** does not roast a catch, but the wealth of an honest [diligent] man is precious.
  - 13:4 → The soul of the **lazy man** desires but has nothing, but the soul of the diligent shall be sated.
  - Perhaps the obstruction is caused by laziness itself, whereas the upright have paved their own path.
- V. 22 → Plans are **thwarted** due to a **lack of counsel**, but they are established **through many advisers**.
  - 11:14 → Without **strategy** the people **fall**, but **with many counselors** there is victory.
  - 24:6 → For by **strategy** you shall wage war, and salvation comes **through many advisers**.



AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

# SPRING-SUMMER EVENTS

FRI-SAT  
MAY 22-23

SHAVUOT

SUN, MAY 24

COMMUNITY  
SOFTBALL GAME  
FOLLOWED BY PIZZA

SUN, JUNE 14

BOWLING NIGHT  
FOR ADULTS

TUES, JUNE 23

ANNUAL MEETING  
+ ICE CREAM SOCIAL

FRI, JULY 3

BBQ SHABBAT DINNER

SUN, JULY 12

SUMMER HIKE  
AT RAMAPO VALLEY  
COUNTY RESERVATION

For More Information Visit:

[www.ahavatachim.org/aa-events/upcoming-events/](http://www.ahavatachim.org/aa-events/upcoming-events/)

# Perek in the Park

**MAY 30 AND JUNE 6 @ 4:15**

**Edison Park**

**Enjoy time at the playground.  
At 4:15, we'll offer a relaxed 10-minute parent-child learning activity for anyone interested.**

**Led by Chayim Goldberg, Adam Nudelman & Yoni Hochbaum (5/30 - Chapter 1)  
and Rabbi Shestack, Chava Goldberg & Akiva Gordon (6/6 - Chapter 2).**

**For kids of all ages!**

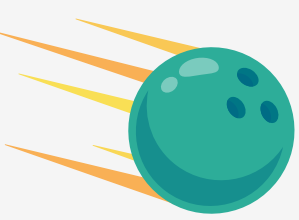
**SNACKS AND FRUIT  
WILL BE SERVED**



**AHAVAT ACHIM**  
קהלת אהבת אחים

www.ahavatachim.org





**AHAVAT ACHIM**  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

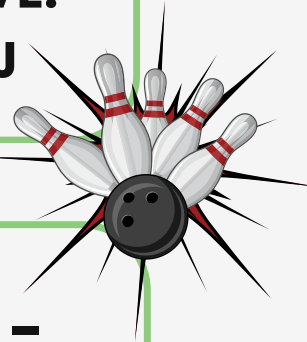
# BOWLING NIGHT



**THIS IS AN ADULTS ONLY EVENT**

**SUNDAY, JUNE 14  
@ 8:00 PM**

**BOWLERO  
22-22 MAPLE AVE.  
FAIR LAWN, NJ**



**\$25 PER PERSON  
COVERS BOWLING SHOES,  
LANE FEE, AND SNACKS**

**RSVP EARLY -  
MAX 20 PLAYERS!**

**\*MINCHA+MAARIV AT THE BOWLING ALLEY\***



**RSVP BY JUNE 10 TO SAVE YOUR SPOT:  
[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/AABOWLING26](https://tinyurl.com/aabowling26)**





AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

# ANNUAL MEETING & ICE CREAM SOCIAL

RSVP!

Join us for our Annual General Membership Meeting and Ice Cream Social – an evening of community, connection, important updates, and sweet treats for everyone to enjoy!

Tuesday, June 23 2026

At 8:20 pm

## Agenda:

- Mincha/Maariv (8:20pm)
- Ice Cream (8:45pm)
- Year in Review (9:00pm)
- Shul Updates
- 2026-2027 Budget
- Incoming Slate of Officers

Zoom link to be  
provided on 6/9!

VOTE!





AHAVAT ACHIM  
קהלת אהבת אחים  
THE FAMILY SHUL

CONGREGATION AHAVAT ACHIM INVITES YOU TO A

# SHABBAT FRIDAY BBQ DINNER

Join us for a very special Shabbat,  
as we celebrate with a themed  
dinner and BBQ halachot shiur.  
Celebrate 250 years of American  
independence with your Ahavat  
Achim family!

**07.03.2026 | AFTER MAARIV**

### *Early Bird Pricing:*

RESERVATIONS MADE BEFORE 6/11:

ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - \$25

CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - \$10

CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - \$3

FAMILY MAX - \$70

RESERVATIONS MADE AFTER 6/11:

ADULTS (12 YEARS OLD +) - \$30

CHILDREN AGES 6 - 11 - \$13

CHILDREN AGES 3 - 5 - \$5

FAMILY MAX - \$85

**RSVP NOW!**





AHAVAT ACHIM  
 קהלת אהבת אחים  
 THE FAMILY SHUL

FOR  
 THE WHOLE  
 FAMILY!

# Summer Hike

at

## Ramapo Valley County Reservation

**SUNDAY,  
 JULY  
 12**

**10:00 AM**  
 Meet at the main  
 parking lot

Ramapo Valley Rd  
 (Route 202),  
 Mahwah, NJ

- Only ~20 minutes away from Fair Lawn!



### HIKE OPTIONS:

#### A. SCARLET OAK POND TRAIL

- STROLLER FRIENDLY!
- PAVED LOOP AROUND THE POND
- PICNIC AREAS FOR RELAXING AND ENJOYING THE VIEWS

#### B. RIDGE LOOP - VISTA LOOP TRAIL

- ADVANCED OPTION, ~3 MILES
- SCENIC VIEWS WITH A RIVER
- A UNIQUE VIEW POINT WITH NATURAL CACTUS!

**RSVP HERE  
 BY 7/10**

**[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/SUMMERHIKE26](https://tinyurl.com/summerhike26)**





# Covenant & Conversation

Jonathan Sacks  
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

NASO • נאש

FROM THE TEACHINGS AND WRITINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ז"צ

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel. "I have loved the Torah of R' Chaim Schimmel ever since I first encountered it. It strives to be not just about truth on the surface but also its connection to a deeper truth beneath. Together with Anna, his remarkable wife of 60 years, they built a life dedicated to love of family, community, and Torah. An extraordinary couple who have moved me beyond measure by the example of their lives." — Rabbi Sacks

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks ז"ל in 5773 (2012–2013). These timeless messages are accompanied by a new [Family Edition](#) created to inspire intergenerational learning on the Parsha.

## What Counts?

This week's sedra begins with a continuation of the census begun in last week's – the act that gives the entire book its English name: the book of "Numbers." Two things, though, are puzzling. The first is the very act of numbering the people. Jewish tradition conveys two quite different - apparently contradictory - attitudes toward the taking of a census.

Rashi notes that this is not the first time the people had been counted. Their number ("about six hundred thousand men on foot, not including women and children") had already been given as they prepared to leave Egypt (Ex. 12:37). A more precise calculation had been made when the adult males each gave a half shekel toward the building of the Sanctuary (yielding a total of 603,550; Ex. 38:26). Now a third count was taking place. Why the repeated calculations?

Rashi's answer is simple and moving:

Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, God counts them often. He

counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His Presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the Sanctuary), He counted them again.

Rashi on Bamidbar 1:1

For Rashi, the counting of the people was an act of Divine love. Yet this is not the impression we receive elsewhere. To the contrary, the Torah sees the taking of a census as profoundly dangerous:

Then the Lord said to Moshe, "When you take the census of the Israelites, as you count, each must give ransom for his life to the Lord, so that no plague strikes them when you count them.

Ex. 30:11-12

Centuries later, when King David counted the people, there was a moment of Divine

anger, during which 70,000 died. It seems hard to reconcile the idea of counting as an act of love with the fact that counting involves great risk.

The second source of perplexity is the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: *naso/se'u et rosh*, literally, “lift the head.” There are many verbs available in classical Hebrew to indicate the act of counting: *limnot*, *lifkod*, *lispor*, *lachshov*. Why, in the books of Exodus and Numbers, does the Torah resort to the strange circumlocution, “lift the heads” of the Israelites?

To understand the revolution the Hebrew Bible brought to the world, we have first to enter imaginatively into the consequences for humanity of the birth of civilisation. In the earliest hunter-gatherer societies, people lived together in small groups. There were, as yet, no cities, no states, no large concentrations of population. The Torah attributes the building of the first city to Cain.<sup>1</sup> Cities emerged with the birth of agriculture – in the fertile alluvial plain in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates, and the well-irrigated Nile delta.

Twice in the book of Genesis the Torah sketches a portrait of urban culture: first, the Tower of Babel, second, the Egypt to which Joseph is brought as a slave. They are both highly critical accounts. In Babel, human life was cheap (when the Tower was being built, said the Sages, if a person fell and died, no one noticed. If a brick fell, they wept). In Egypt, entire populations – among them, eventually, the children of Israel – could be

pressed into service as a labour force to build pyramids, temples and monuments, many of which still stand today.

The birth of agriculture and the growth of towns had huge social implications. For the first time, surplus wealth was possible and could be stored in the form of money (initially, precious metals such as silver and gold). So too, as populations expanded and the division of labour became more elaborate, social stratification began. Inequality – deep, pervasive, and systemic – became one of the universal features of the earliest societies. At the top was the king, emperor, or pharaoh, seen as no less than a god or child of the gods, who held a massive concentration of power. Below him or her were the various ranks of privilege: court circles, military chiefs, administrators and priests. The mass of the people – poor, illiterate, expendable – was significant, whether as an army or a construction force, as a mass, by sheer weight of numbers. Hence the significance of censuses in the ancient world (and in this respect, little has changed from then to now). Size meant strength, military or economic. Population counts gave rulers information about the size of the army they could muster, or of the income they could raise by taxation.

The religion of Israel is a sustained protest against this view – military, political, and economic – of the human situation. At this distance in time, it is hard fully to appreciate the breathtaking novelty, the transformative potential, of the cluster of ideas generated by a single revelation – that the human person as such, man or woman, rich or poor,

---

<sup>1</sup> See Gen. 4:17.

powerful or powerless, is the image of God and therefore of non-negotiable, unquantifiable value. We are each equally in the image of God, therefore we stand equal in the presence of God. Much of Torah, Jewish history, and the development of Western civilisation is about the slow translation of this idea into institutions, social structures, and ethical codes.

It should now be clear why the taking of a census is fraught with spiritual risk. The numbering of a people is the most potent symbol of humankind-in-the-mass, of a society in which the individual is not valued in and for him- or herself but as part of a totality whose power lies in numbers. That is precisely what Israel is not. The God of Israel, who is the God of all humankind, sets His special love on a people whose strength has nothing to do with numbers, a people that never sets itself to become an empire, that is never commanded to wage holy war in order to convert populations, that was and remains tiny in both absolute terms and relative to the empires with which it was and is surrounded, standing as it does at the vulnerable crossroad between three continents.

Both questions with which we began are now answered. There is a difference between a human census and one commanded by God. David's was a human census. As Israel's second king, he had laid the foundations of a nation. He had waged successful wars, united the tribes, and established Jerusalem as his capital. Shortly after his death, Israel reached its zenith as a power in the Middle East. Under Solomon, through strategic alliances, it became a centre of trade and

scholarship. The Temple was built. It must have seemed at the time as if, after many centuries of wandering and war, Israel had become a power to rival any other. It was a short-lived, cruelly-shattered illusion. Almost immediately after Solomon's reign, the kingdom split in two, and from then on its this-worldly fate was sealed. A history of defeats, exiles and destructions began, which has no parallel in the annals of any other nation. The Hebrew Bible is not wrong in seeing the starting-point of this decline in the moment at which David acted like any other king and ordered a census of the people.

A Divine census is utterly different. It has nothing to do with strength-in-numbers. It has to do, instead, with conveying to every member of the nation that he or she counts; that every person, family, household is held precious by God; that distinctions between great and small, ruler and ruled, leader and led, are irrelevant; that we are each God's image and the object of His love. A Divine census is, as Rashi says, a gesture of endearment. That is why it cannot be described by the usual verbs of counting — *limnot, lifkod, lispor, lachshov*. Only the phrase *naso/se'u et rosh*, "lift the head", does justice to this kind of enumeration, in which those entrusted with the task are commanded to "lift the head" of those they count, making every individual stand tall in the knowledge that they are loved, cherished, held special by God, and not merely a number, a cipher, among the thousands and millions.

There is a wonderful verse in Psalm 147 which we say every morning in our prayers:

“He counts the number of the stars and calls them each by name.” A name is a marker of uniqueness. Collective nouns group things together; proper names distinguish them as individuals. Only what we value, do we name (One of the most chilling acts of dehumanisation in the extermination camps of Nazi Germany was that those who entered were never addressed by their names. Instead they were given, inscribed on their skin, a number).

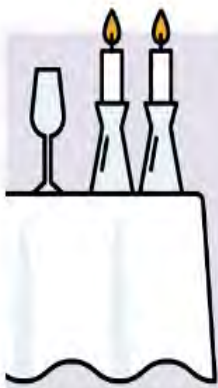
God gives even the stars their names, all the more so human beings – on whom He has set His image. God counts to signal to us that each of us counts, for what we are as individuals, not en masse. He “lifts our head” in the most profound way known to humankind, by assuring each of us of His special, enduring, unquantifiable love.

That is the nature of the census in the book

of Numbers. As the Israelites prepared to become a society with the Sanctuary - visible home of the Divine Presence - at its centre, they had to be reminded that they were to become the pioneers of a new and revolutionary social order, whose most famous definition was given by the Prophet Zechariah as the Israelites prepared to rebuild the ruined Temple:

“Not by might, nor by strength, but by My spirit, says the Lord.”

Zechariah 4:6



## Around the Shabbat Table

1. Think of a time when you felt seen and valued as an individual. What made that moment special?
2. In what ways can social media make people feel like numbers rather than individuals?
3. What is one thing you could do this week to make someone feel that they truly count?

● These questions come from this week's **Family Edition** to Rabbi Sacks' Covenant & Conversation. For an interactive, multi-generational study, check out the full edition at <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/what-counts/>