

# 5.

## Bamidbar

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### Equality vs. Individuality: Are They in Conflict?

*If I Am I Because You Are Not Me, Then  
I Am Not I and You Are Not You*



*Dedicated to Neil Rock  
on the occasion of his birthday.*

*May he go from strength to strength and  
enjoy good health, happiness, nachat from his  
loved ones, and success in all of his endeavors.*

## PARSHAH OVERVIEW

### *Bamidbar*

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary, replacing the firstborn, whose number they approximated, who were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel “ransom” to redeem themselves.

When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center

of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary’s vessels (the ark, the menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary’s entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south,

Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and

Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nasi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem.

## I. EQUALITY

### *Bamidbar and Matan Torah*

## TEXT 1

SHEMOT (EXODUS) 19:1-2

בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ  
מִדְבַּר סִינַי:  
וַיֵּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים, וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר, וַיִּחַן שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל  
נֶגֶד הָהָר:

In the third month of the Children of Israel's departure from Egypt, on this day they arrived in the desert of Sinai.

They journeyed from Rephidim, and they arrived in the desert of Sinai, and they encamped in the desert, and Israel encamped there opposite the mountain.

## TEXT 2

SHULCHAN ARUCH, ORACH CHAYIM 428:4

לעולם קורין פרשת במדבר סיני קודם עצרת.

The Torah portion of *Bamidbar* is always read before the holiday of Shavuot.

## Unity at the Mountain

### TEXT 3

RASHI, SHEMOT (EXODUS) 19:2

“ויהן שם ישראל”. כאיש אחד בלב אחד, אבל שאר כל החניות  
בתרעומות ובמחלוקת.

“And Israel encamped there”: As one man with one heart,  
but all the other encampments were with complaints and  
with strife.

**Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki  
(Rashi)**  
**1040–1105**

Most noted biblical and Talmudic commentator. Born in Troyes, France, Rashi studied in the famed *yeshivot* of Mainz and Worms. His commentaries on the Pentateuch and the Talmud, which focus on the straightforward meaning of the text, appear in virtually every edition of the Talmud and Bible.

## Unity as a Prerequisite for Torah

### TEXT 4

SIDDUR TEHILAT HASHEM, AMIDAH

שִׁים שְׁלוֹם, טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה, חַיִּים חַן וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים, עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל  
יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ. בְּרַכְנוּ אֲבֵינוּ כְּלָנוּ כְּאַחַד בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ, כִּי בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ  
נִתְּנָה לָנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ תּוֹרַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד, וְצִדְקָה וּבְרָכָה וְרַחֲמִים  
וְחַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם, וְטוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ לְבָרֶךְ אֶת עַמָּךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכָל עֵת וּבְכָל  
שָׁעָה בְּשָׁלוֹמְךָ.

#### *Siddur Tehilat Hashem*

One of the prayer books that follow the tradition of the Arizal, as established by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi. It was first published in New York in 1945.

Bestow peace, goodness, and blessing, life, graciousness, kindness, and mercy upon us and upon all Your people, Israel. *Bless us, our Father, all of us as one*, with the light of Your countenance. For by the light of Your countenance You gave us, L-rd, our G-d, the Torah of life and loving-kindness, righteousness, blessing, mercy, life, and peace. May it be favorable in Your eyes to bless Your people, Israel, at all times and at every moment with Your peace [emphasis added].

## TEXT 5

MISHNAH TRACTATE UKTZIN, 3:12

לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא כלי מחזיק ברכה לישראל, אלא השלום. שנאמר "ה' עוז לעמו יתן, ה' יברך את עמו בשלום".

The Holy One, Blessed be He, found no vessel that could contain blessing for Israel save that of peace, as it is stated, "G-d will give strength unto His people; G-d will bless His people with peace."

### *It's About the Soul*

## TEXT 6

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI, TANYA, LIKUTEI AMARAM 32

בְּשִׁגָּם שְׂכוּלָן [כל הנשמות של כל האנשים] מתאימות, ואב אחד לכולנה, ולכן נקראו כל ישראל אחים ממש, מצד שורש נפשם בה' אחד, רק שהגופים מחולקים.

It is possible, inasmuch as our souls are all paired one with the other, with one parent. Thus, all Jews are called "siblings" by virtue of the root of their soul in the one G-d. It is only the bodies that are distinct.

### Mishnah

The first authoritative work of Jewish law that was codified in writing. The Mishnah contains the oral traditions that were passed down from teacher to student; it supplements, clarifies, and systematizes the commandments of the Torah. Due to the continual persecution of the Jewish people, it became increasingly difficult to guarantee that these traditions would not be forgotten. Rabbi Yehudah Hanassi therefore redacted the Mishnah at the end of the 2nd century. It serves as the foundation for the Talmud.

### Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (Alter Rebbe) 1745–1812

Chasidic rebbe, halachic authority, and founder of the Chabad movement. The Alter Rebbe was born in Liozna, Belarus, and was among the principal students of the Magid of Mezeritch. His numerous works include the *Tanya*, an early classic containing the fundamentals of Chabad Chasidism; and *Shulchan Aruch HaRav*, an expanded and reworked code of Jewish law.

## II. TRIBALISM AND INDIVIDUALITY

### *The Equality of Sodom*

#### TEXT 7

MIDRASH AGADAH (BUBER EDITION), BEREISHIT (GENESIS), VAYERA 18:20

כשהיה עני נכנס לשם והיה רוצה לצאת משם, מיד היו משכיבים במטה קטנה, והיו חותכין רגליו, מה שהיו יוצאות מאותה המטה שהיא קצרה. ואם היה קצר היו משכיבים אותו במטה ארוכה והיו אוחזין אותו מראשו ועד רגליו, והיו מותחין אותו, כדי שיבא גופו שלם כמו המטה, והיו עושין כן עד שממיתין אותו.

When a pauper would enter Sodom and thereafter wish to leave, they would immediately lay him down in a short bed. The portion of his legs that would extend over the edge of the bed would be cut off. If the person was short, they would lie him down in a long bed, hold him down, and stretch him out until his body filled the bed.

They would do this until he died.



## Tribal Request

# TEXT 8

BAMIDBAR (NUMBERS) 2:2-3; 10; 17-18; 25; 32

אִישׁ עַל דָּגְלוֹ בְּאוֹתוֹת לְבֵית אָבִתָּם יַחֲנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִנֶּגֶד סָבִיב  
לְאוֹהֶל מוֹעֵד יַחֲנוּ:

וְהַחֲנִים קִדְמָה מִזְרָחָה דָּגֵל מַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה לְצַבְאָתָם, וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי  
יְהוּדָה נַחֲשֹׁן בֶּן עֲמִינָדָב:

דָּגֵל מַחֲנֵה רְאוּבֵן תִּימָנָה לְצַבְאָתָם, וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן אֶלִּיצִיזֹר  
בֶּן שְׂדִיאוּר:

וְנֹסַע אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד מַחֲנֵה הַלְוִיִּם בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּחֲנֹת, כְּאֲשֶׁר יַחֲנוּ כֵן יִסְעוּ,  
אִישׁ עַל יָדוֹ לְדֹגְלֵיהֶם:

דָּגֵל מַחֲנֵה אֶפְרַיִם לְצַבְאָתָם יִמָּה, וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי אֶפְרַיִם אֶלִּישַׁמֶּע  
בֶּן עֲמִיחֹד:

דָּגֵל מַחֲנֵה דָן צִפְנָה לְצַבְאָתָם, וְנָשִׂיא לְבְנֵי דָן אַחִיעֶזֶר בֶּן עֲמִישַׁדִּי:

אֵלָה פְּקוּדֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבֵית אָבִתָּם, כָּל פְּקוּדֵי הַמַּחֲנֹת לְצַבְאָתָם  
שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת אָלֶף וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפִים וַחֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת וַחֲמִשִּׁים:

The Children of Israel shall encamp, each man by his division, with the flagstaff of their father's house; some distance from the Tent of Meeting they shall encamp.

Those camping in front, to the east, were the legions under the division of the camp of Judah. The prince of the children of Judah was Nahshon the son of Aminadab. . . .

The legions under the division of the camp of Reuben were to the south. The prince of the children of Reuben was Elitzur the son of Shedeur. . . .

Then the Tent of Meeting shall set out, [with] the Levite camp in the center of the other camps. Just as they camp, so shall they travel, each man in his place, by their divisions.

The legions under the division of the camp of Ephraim were to the west. The prince of the children of Ephraim was Elishama the son of Amihud. . . .

The legions under the division of the camp of Dan were to the north. The prince of the children of Dan was Ahi'ezer the son of Amishadai. . . .

These are the numbers of the Israelites according to their fathers' houses. The total number of legions of the camps was 603,550.

“We Want Our Tribes!”

## TEXT 9

MIDRASH BAMIDBAR RABAH, 2:3

בשעה שנגלה הקדוש ברוך הוא על הר סיני, ירדו עמו כ"ב רבבות  
[220,000] של מלאכים... והיו כולם עשויים דגלים דגלים... כיון  
שראו אותן ישראל שהם עשויים דגלים דגלים, התחילו מתאווים  
לדגלים, אמרו הלואי כך אנו נעשים דגלים כמותן!  
אמר להם הקדוש ברוך הוא: מה נתאוויתם לעשות דגלים? חייכם  
שאני ממלא משאלותיכם! מיד הודיע הקדוש ברוך הוא אותם  
לישראל, ואמר למשה: לך עשה אותם דגלים כמו שנתאוו.

### *Bamidbar Rabah*

An exegetical commentary on the first 7 chapters of the book of Numbers and a homiletic commentary on the rest of the book. The first part of *Bamidbar Rabah* is notable for its inclusion of esoteric material; the second half is essentially identical to *Midrash Tanchuma* on the book of Numbers. It was first printed in Constantinople in 1512, together with 4 other Midrashic works on the other 4 books of the Pentateuch.

When G-d appeared to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai, twenty-two thousand angels accompanied Him . . . all under the banner of different flags. . . . When the Jews saw that they were grouped under different flags, they were roused with a desire for flags as well, stating, “We wish we could make flags like that!”

G-d exclaimed, “You want flags?! By My life, your request will be fulfilled!”

Immediately, G-d informed the Jewish people of the command and told Moses to instruct the Jewish people to make flags as they wished.

# TEXT 10

RABBI KALONYMOS KALMAN EPSTEIN, MA'OR VESHEMESH, AD LOC.

שראו המלאכים נעשים דגלים, שלא נכנס אחד בתחום חברו - לא מיכאל נכנס בתחום גבריאל וכו', רק כל אחד עמד על מקומו, ומשם השיגו כל אחד כפי שכלו. כך נתאוו ישראל ואמרו: הלואי אנו עושים כך שלא ידחוק אדם את חברו ליכנס לפנים ממדריגתו הראוי לו!

ואמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: עשה להם כך! כלומה, הואיל שנתאוויתם לדגלים שלא יכנס אחד בתחומו של חברו, רק כל אחד ירצה לקבל כפי הכנתו - עשה להם כך; מחנה לויים לחוד, מחנה ישראל לחוד, כל אחד על דגלו. אלו מן המזרח ואלו מן הדרום וכו', שלא יכנס כל אחד רק אצל הדומה לו, שכל השבטים של הדגלים היו שייכים זה לזה, כל דגל ודגל לפי הראוי לו.

**Rabbi Kalonymos  
Kalman Halevi Epstein  
1751–1823**

A native of Cracow, Poland, he was a disciple of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizensk, the Seer of Lublin, and other great Chasidic leaders. He authored a Chasidic classic titled *Ma'or Vashemesh*, first published in 1842.

The Jews saw the angels under their flags, namely that no angel intruded into her colleagues' lane—Michael doesn't intrude into Gabriel's lane, etc.—rather, every angel stays in his lane and perceives G-dliness accordingly. The Jews wished for the same thing, stating, "If only we would do the same thing! If only no one would push another to try and reach past the appropriate level for them!"

G-d said to Moses, "Do it for them!" In other words, inasmuch as you wanted flags, namely that no one intrude into the next person's lane, rather every person should receive what's appropriate to their level of readiness—do it! The Levites will be in one group, the rest of the Jews in another—each one in their own group: some on the east, others on the south. Everyone will associate with their own likeness, for the tribes that camped under one flag were associated with one another.

*Not Just Tribes***TEXT 11**

MISHLEI (PROVERBS) 22:6

חֲנֹךְ לְנֶעֶר עַל פִּי דְרָכּוֹ, גַּם פִּי יִזְקֶקִין לֹא יִסּוּר מִמֶּנָּה:

Train a child according to his way; even when he grows old,  
he will not turn away from it.

***Midrash Mishlei***

A rabbinic commentary on the Book of Proverbs. Midrash is the designation of a particular genre of rabbinic literature. The term "Midrash" is derived from the root d-r-sh, which means "to search," "to examine," and "to investigate." This particular Midrash provides textual exegeses and develops and illustrates the principles of the Book of Proverbs.

# TEXT 12

PIRKEI AVOT (ETHICS OF THE FATHERS) 5:12

ארבע מידות בתלמידים:

מהר לשמוע ומהר לאבד, יצא שכרו בהפסדו;

קשה לשמוע וקשה לאבד, יצא הפסדו בשכרו;

מהר לשמוע וקשה לאבד, זה חלק טוב;

קשה לשמוע ומהר לאבד, זה חלק רע.

## *Ethics of the Fathers* (*Pirkei Avot*)

A 6-chapter work on Jewish ethics that is studied widely by Jewish communities, especially during the summer. The first 5 chapters are from the Mishnah, tractate Avot. Avot differs from the rest of the Mishnah in that it does not focus on legal subjects; it is a collection of the sages' wisdom on topics related to character development, ethics, healthy living, piety, and the study of Torah.

There are four types of disciples:

quick to comprehend and quick to forget: his gain disappears in his loss;

slow to comprehend and slow to forget: his loss disappears in his gain;

quick to comprehend and slow to forget: he is a wise man;

slow to comprehend and quick to forget, this is an evil portion.

# TEXT 13

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI, INTRODUCTION TO TANYA

והנה אף בהלכות איסור והיתר הנגלות לנו ולבנינו, מצאנו ראינו מחלוקת תנאים ואמוראים מן הקצה אל הקצה ממש, ואלו ואלו דברי אלקים חיים . . . על שם מקור החיים לנשמות ישראל, הנחלקות דרך כלל לשלושה קוין: ימין ושמאל ואמצע, שהם חסד וגבורה וכו'. ונשמות ששרשן ממדת חסד, הנהגתן גם כן להטות כלפי חסד להקל כו' כנודע.

וכל שכן וקל וחומר בהנסתרות לה' אלקינו, דאינון דחילו ורחימו דבמוחא ולבא דכל חד וחד לפום שיעורא דיליה, לפום מאי דמשער בליביה.

Even in the case of the laws governing things prohibited and permitted, which have been revealed to us and to our children, we find differences of opinion among *tanaim* and *amoraim* from one extreme to the other. Yet “These as well as these are the words of the living G-d,” . . . a reference to the source of life for the souls of Israel, which are generally divided into three categories—right, left, and center, namely, *chesed* [kindness], *gevurah* [discipline], etc. Accordingly, those souls that stem from the category of kindness are likewise inclined toward kindness in the leniency of their decisions and so forth, as is known.

[If diversity of legal opinions are subject to the source of one’s soul, then] there will certainly be diversity with those matters that are more private, namely the emotions of love and fear of G-d, every person according to how they estimate it in their own heart.

# TEXT 14

RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL MORGENSTERN OF KOTZK

אם אני הוא אני ואתה הוא אתה, בגלל שאני לא אתה ואתה לא  
אני – אז אני לא אני, ואתה לא אתה.  
אבל, אם אני הוא אני ואתה הוא אתה, כי אני הוא אני ואתה הוא  
אתה – אז אני הוא אני ואתה הוא אתה!

If I am I because I am I, and you are you because you are you, then I am I and you are you.

But if I am I because you are you, and you are you because I am I, then I am not I and you are not you!

## Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern 1787–1859

Chasidic rabbi and leader. Born near Lublin, Poland, Rabbi Menachem Mendel went on to succeed the Chozeh (Seer) of Lublin and Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Peshischa as a Chasidic rebbe in Kotsk. His teachings, some of which are gathered in *Ohel Torah* and *Emet Ve'emunah*, are well-known in the Chasidic world for their sharpness.



### III. WE ALL COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER

*Different Limbs, Same Body*

## TEXT 15

RABBI SHNEUR ZALMAN OF LIADI, LIKUTEI TORAH, NITZAVIM 44A

הנה כל ישראל הם קומה אחת שלימה . . . לפי שיש בכל אחד ואחד בחינות ומדרגות מה שאין בחבירו וכולם צריכין זה לזה. ונמצא שיש יתרון ומעלה בכל אחד ואחד שגבוה מחבירו, וחבירו צריך לו.

וכמשל האדם שהוא בעל קומה בראש ורגלים, שאף שרגלים הם סוף המדרגה ולמטה והראש הוא העליון ומעולה ממנו, מכל מקום, הרי בבחינה אחת יש יתרון ומעלה להרגלים שצריך להלך בהם, וגם הם מעמידי הגוף והראש! . . . ונמצא שאין שלימות להראש בלתי הרגלים - כך הנה כל ישראל קומה אחת שלימה.

ונמצא, אפילו מי שמחשב בדעתו שהוא בחי' "ראש" לגבי חבירו, הרי אין לו שלימות בלי חבירו; וימצא חסרון בנפשו מה שחבירו משלימו. ועל ידי זה יהיה בטל ושפל רוח לגבי חבירו.

Every Jew is part of one large body . . . for every Jew possesses a certain quality that no one else does, and together, they all complement each other. It turns out that everyone possesses a certain quality that places them at an advantage over the next person, and in that respect, the next person needs them.

Take the human body, for example, with its respective parts—the head all the way to the feet. Yes, the feet are the lowest part and the head is far superior, yet in a certain respect, the feet have the distinction that the head needs them to go anywhere. What's more, the feet literally uphold

the entire body, including the head! . . . It turns out that the head is incomplete without the feet.

The same is with the body of the Jewish people.

It turns out that even for the person who thinks they are a “head” relative to their counterpart, the reality is that they are lacking without the other person; there is a hole in their soul that the other person fills. Realizing that ought to humiliate and subdue them in the face of their counterpart.

## Mitzvot on Many Levels

## TEXT 16

RABBI YOSEF YITZCHAK SCHNEERSOHN, SEFER HASICHOT 5704, PP. 154–155

בשעת די נשמה איז יורד מלמעלה אויף להתלבש בגוף, האט זי איר שליחות, נאר מען דארף זען ניט צו זיין פון די נשמות הטועות.

אזוי ווי מען דערציילט בשם הוד כ"ק רבינו הזקן, א סיפור פון א גביר מיט זיין בעל עגלה. אמאליגע גבירים בעלי עסקים פלעגן פארען נאך סחורה נאר אין א געוויסען זמן אין יאר, און די איבעריגע צייט פלעגן זיי עוסק זיך אין תורה.

מאכט זיך אמאל אז דער גביר מיט זיין בעל עגלה זיינען אנגעקומען פרייטאג נאך האלבען טאג אין א שטאט. דער גביר איז געגאנגען זיך טובל זיין לכבוד שבת, אנגעטאן די בגדי שבת און געגאנגען אין שוהל. גייענדיג אין גאס האט ער געזען ווי א גרויסער וואגען איז אריין אין בלאטע, דארף ער דאך מקיים זיין "עזוב תעזוב", איז ער צוגעגאנגען ארויסהעלפען, און זייענדיג ניט שייכות צו אזעלכע ארבעט האט ער זיך אין גאנצען פארשמירט און פארשמוציגט, מזיק געווען זיך און געווארען א בעל מום, און איז געקומען אין שוהל אריין דאוונען א פארשמוציגטער און א צו'מזיק'טער.

דער בעל עגלה איז נאכ'ן מרחץ געגאנגען אין שוהל. אנגעקומען פרי אין שוהל האט ער געזאגט דערווייל תהלים. טרעפנדיג פיל אורחים ארימעלייט פון דער פרעמד וואס זיינען געקומען אין שוהל, האט ער זיי געבעטען צו זיך אויף שבת, ביז ער האט גענומען צו זיך א צען אורחים.

נאך קבלת שבת, ווען דער גבאי און דער שמש האבען געוואלט פארטיילען די אנגעקומענע אורחים צווישען די בעלי בתים פון שטאט, האבען אלע אורחים געזאגט אז זיי האבען שוין וואו צו עסען.

נאכ'ן דאוונען איז דער גביר גייט אהיים אויף זיין אכסניה א צו'מזיק'טער, און דער בעל עגלה פירט מיט זיך צען אורחים צום עסען. דער גביר האט מקיים געווען די מצוה פון "עזוב תעזוב" און דער בעל עגלה די מצוה פון הכנסת אורחים.

**Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn**  
(Rayatz, Frieddiker Rebbe, Previous Rebbe)  
1880–1950

Chasidic rebbe, prolific writer, and Jewish activist. Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, the sixth leader of the Chabad movement, actively promoted Jewish religious practice in Soviet Russia and was arrested for these activities. After his release from prison and exile, he settled in Warsaw, Poland, from where he fled Nazi occupation and arrived in New York in 1940. Settling in Brooklyn, Rabbi Schneersohn worked to revitalize American Jewish life. His son-in-law, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, succeeded him as the leader of the Chabad movement.

נאך הונדערט און צוואנציג יאר, ווען זייער דין איז געקומען פאר  
דעם בית דין של מעלה, האט מען גע'פסק'נט אז דער בעל עגלה  
דארף אראפגיין למטה מקיים זיין "עזוב תעזוב" און דער גביר  
הכנסת אורחים.

יעדער האט זיך דיין שליחות, נאר מען דארף וויסען וואס איז די  
שליחות מען זאל ניט פארבייטען מיט'ן אנדערענס שליחות...  
אבער מצד דעם כח המשלח זיינען אלע גלייך.

When the soul descends from on high to integrate into a physical body, it has a particular mission, and we must be careful not to end up as one of the "wandering souls."

The Alter Rebbe told a story [to illustrate the concept of a "wandering soul"] of a wealthy man and his wagon driver. Back in the day, pious wealthy merchants would only travel on business during certain seasons, using the rest of the time to study Torah.

It happened once that a certain wealthy man arrived with his wagon driver to a city Friday afternoon before Shabbat. The wealthy man went to the *mikveh* [ritual bath] in honor of Shabbat, dressed in his Shabbat finery, and made his way to the synagogue. On the way, he saw a large wagon stuck in the mud on the road. Aware of the mitzvah to aid a stranded traveler, he went to go and help the hapless wagon driver. Not used to such heavy labor, he got completely filthy and worn out, hurting and maiming himself in the process. Eventually, he hobbled into the synagogue to pray, filthy and hurt.

The wagon driver also went to the synagogue after washing up for Shabbat. Arriving early, he passed the time reciting Psalms. He met a few poor travelers and invited them over

to eat the Shabbat meal with him, racking up a guest list of ten people.

After davening, when the *gabai* of the synagogue wished to split up the guests between the various members of the community, all the travelers explained that they already had where to go [to the wagon driver].

So it happened that after the prayers, the wealthy man went home to his host, maimed and bruised, while the wagon driver took ten guests home. The wealthy man fulfilled the mitzvah of aiding travelers while the wagon driver fulfilled the mitzvah of inviting guests.

After one hundred and twenty years, when both protagonists arrived at the heavenly court, it was ruled that the wagon driver must return to this world to fulfill the mitzvah of aiding travelers, and the wealthy man would have to return to fulfill the mitzvah of inviting guests.

Everyone has their unique mission. We must know what that mission is so as not to mistakenly switch it with someone else's. . . .

But from the perspective of G-d, who assigns each mission, they are all the same.

*Back to Sinai***TEXT 17**

THE REBBE, RABBI MENACHEM MENDEL SCHNEERSON,  
LIKUTEI SICHOT 23, PP. 250–251

שכל הילדים והילדות מבן חודש ומעלה – ואפילו רכים יותר – יתלוו להוריהם לשמיעת קריאת התורה בכלל, ובפרט בשעת קריאת עשרת הדברות בחג השבועות, במקום קדוש, בציבור ובמעמד כמה עשירות מישראל, בהקדמת ברכה לפני הקריאה ואחריה – הרי זה בדיוק כמעמד נתינת התורה בהר סיני.

All children from the age of one month, even tiny infants, should accompany their parents to hear the Torah being read, particularly the Ten Commandments on Shavuot. They should do so in a holy place, with a congregation of many tens of people, with a blessing prior and following the reading. This replicates the scene of the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**  
**1902–1994**

The towering Jewish leader of the 20th century, known as “the Lubavitcher Rebbe,” or simply as “the Rebbe.” Born in southern Ukraine, the Rebbe escaped Nazi-occupied Europe, arriving in the U.S. in June 1941. The Rebbe inspired and guided the revival of traditional Judaism after the European devastation, impacting virtually every Jewish community the world over. The Rebbe often emphasized that the performance of just one additional good deed could usher in the era of Mashiach. The Rebbe’s scholarly talks and writings have been printed in more than 200 volumes.

# TEXT 18

NACHMANIDES, PIRUSH HARAMBAN, SHEMOT (EXODUS) 20:2

ונאמרו כל הדברות כולן בלשון יחיד . . . להזהיר כי כל יחיד מהם  
ייענש על המצוות, כי עם כל אחד ידבר ולכל אחד יצווה, שלא  
יחשבו כי אחר הרוב ילך והיחיד ינצל עמהם.

All the commandments were stated in singular language . . . to give warning that every individual is personally responsible for the *mitzvot* and will be punished accordingly. No one should think that punishment will only be meted out communally [when the majority sins] and that individuals will get away with sin.

**Rabbi Moshe  
ben Nachman  
(Nachmanides,  
Ramban)  
1194–1270**

Scholar, philosopher, author, and physician. Nachmanides was born in Spain and served as leader of Iberian Jewry. In 1263, he was summoned by King James of Aragon to a public disputation with Pablo Cristiani, a Jewish apostate. Though Nachmanides was the clear victor of the debate, he had to flee Spain because of the resulting persecution. He moved to Israel and helped reestablish communal life in Jerusalem. He authored a classic commentary on the Pentateuch and a commentary on the Talmud.

