

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Bamidbar**

**פרשת במדבר**

**June 11, 2016**

**ה' בסיון תשע"ו**

Torah Reading: *Bamidbar* (Numbers) 1:1-4:20

In this *parasha*, Moshe conducts a census of the Israelites and the Levites, and he sets up the structure of the wilderness encampment; Hashem describes the unique duties of the Kehati family from where the *cohanim* (priests) come.

The Torah contains many hidden messages. Some of these messages appear in the names used in the Torah. Every Biblical name is rife with meaning. As a matter of fact, some children are given names specifically to send messages to *Bnei Yisrael*. For example, the prophet Hoshea named his daughter לא רוחמה – *Lo-Ruchama* (No Mercy) and one of his sons לא עמי – *Lo-Ammi* (Not My Nation), as indications of Hashem's displeasure with the nation's actions. The children's names were later changed to רוחמה – *Ruchama*, and עמי – *Ammi*, to indicate God's principle of second chances.

Yeshayahu named his son שאר ישוב – *She'ar Yashuv* (The Rest Will Return) and his daughter חפצי-בה – *Chephtzi-Ba* (My Desire is in Her), as a message of hope from God to the Jewish People. (Nathaniel Hawthorne was aware of this when he named a particular character in *The House of the Seven Gables*.)

We can be relatively certain that some names mentioned in the Torah are not the actual names of the people. For example, next week in *Megillat Rut*, the Book of Ruth, we will read about the two sons of Naomi, מחלון – *Machlon*, and חליון –

*Chilyon*. We know Naomi to have been a wonderful kind woman. Would she really have named her sons “Disease” and “Destruction,” which is what the names *Machlon* and *Chilyon* translate to? Even the Midrash believes these could not have been their actual names. In a tongue-in-cheek comment, the Midrash says that their names were actually יואש – *Yoash* and שרף – *Saraf* (Despair and Conflagration).

The names of the *nisi'im* (princes) of the *shevatim* (tribes) in this *parasha* shed light on the *zeitgeist* within the *Bnei Yisrael* as they were setting up camp. Names alluding to the connection between the people and Hashem abound. אליצור – *Elitzur* (My God is a Rock), שדיאור – *Sh'dayur* (God is Light), שלומיאל – *Shlumiel* (My Peace is God), צורישדדי – *Tzurishaddai* (God is my Rock), נתנאל – *Netanel* (God has given me), אלישמע – *Elishama* (My God heard), גמליאל – *Gamliel* (God has done good things for me). Were these the real given names of the *nisi'im*? Very possibly, but whether or not these were their actual given names, we get a very clear sense of what the nation was thinking and feeling as the people came into the wilderness to begin to set up their system of encampment.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- What does your Hebrew name mean? How does this name fit your life?
- Where do the names אדם – *Adam* and חוה – *Chava* come from? (Hint: look in the first 3 chapters of *Bereshit*.) What do they mean according to the Torah?
- What is your favorite Hebrew name? Why?