



# Ohr Somayach Light Lines

Published by OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL • Jerusalem, Israel

29 Iyar 5759 • May 15, 1999 • Parshat Bamidbar • No. 38

## Light Insight

### *The Good Book*

**T**his week we start reading the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers. Bamidbar means “In the desert.” The Sages point out that Mount Sinai itself, where the Torah was given to the Jewish People, is in the desert. What importance does the desert have to the Torah that one fifth of it should be called “the Book of the Desert”, and that the whole Torah should have been transmitted to mankind in the desert?

The desert is the archetype of desolation, the antithesis of life and activity. The symbol of civilization, of the flow and vitality of life, is the city. A city consists of houses, and the houses,

stones.

The letters of the alef-beis are like stones. Just as each stone by itself is devoid of life, but when combined together into a house the stones comprise a setting of life and vitality, so to the letters of a word: By themselves they radiate no light or life, but built into words and sentences, sayings and utterances, they radiate the light of intellect that infuses life into man; that leads him and guides him.

“With the word of G-d, the heavens were made.” The entire world was created with the combination of the letters of the Hebrew aleph-beis. The letters and the words are spread out and dispersed over the whole face of the earth.

We have a choice. If, through these letters and words, we recognize G-d in the world; if they

are like beads of a necklace revealing the Godly thread that weaves the world into One, then the world is no longer a desolate wasteland, but a populous city vibrant with life and purpose.

However, if we fail to comprehend the writing of the Divine Hand, if we make no effort to assemble the letters of existence into words and sentences, then the world remains a desolate wilderness.

Picture two people reading the same book. One reads with insight and understanding; the other spews forth a jumble of letters and words without grasp or comprehension. The first reader kindles the light of wisdom that is in the words; he brings them to life. The second leaves behind him a trail of dead stones. The world is a large book. Fortunate is he who learns to read and understand it.

[www.ifyouarelookingforinterestinginformativeanddownrightgoodliterature  
andinformationonthousandsofJewishandcontemporarytopicsvisitourwebsite.org](http://www.ifyouarelookingforinterestinginformativeanddownrightgoodliteratureandinformationonthousandsofJewishandcontemporarytopicsvisitourwebsite.org)

## THE OHR SOMAYACH WEB SITE

[www.ohrnet.org](http://www.ohrnet.org) • [www.ohr.org.il](http://www.ohr.org.il) • [www.ohrsomayach.org](http://www.ohrsomayach.org)

## The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

### *The Funeral*

About five years ago my grandfather David, obm, passed away. Although I missed the funeral, as I was studying in Israel and could not return, I was told the following story at the *shiva* (7 day mourning period):

At the funeral, my grandfather's brother-in-law, a tremendously pious man, announced that the deceased specifically requested in his will that there should be short eulogies. He therefore urged all those delivering eulogies to make them as short as pos-

sible. Everyone adhered to the request and made their respective eulogies brief; everyone, that is, except for the brother-in-law himself!

Between every eulogy, he spoke at length, ignoring

his own plea to keep things short. The funeral ended up taking much longer than a normal funeral, and many people left murmuring about the brother-in-law and the *chutzpah* he had displayed: Not only did he not practice what he preached, but he also blatantly ignored the wishes of the deceased!

Afterwards, my father and uncle asked him to explain his behavior, knowing he must have had a good reason. His answer was astonishing: While the first eulogy was being delivered — this was after he had made the announcement to keep

things short — he, the brother-in-law, was told by the burial society that the caretakers of the cemetery take a lunch break between one o'clock and three o'clock in the afternoon. Being that the funeral had started close to noon, plus the fact that the cemetery was a 40 minute drive, it would have been impossible to make it there before one o'clock! The body would be waiting at the cemetery to be buried for an hour and a half. So, because of *kavod hamait* — respect due the deceased — he decided to lengthen the funeral as much as possible in order that the body not be in a state of disgrace! He felt that the respect due the deceased was more important than what people would say about him!

PS - They arrived at the cemetery just as the caretakers came back from their lunch break!

## Response Line

**Rivka Weiss asked:**

*Dear Rabbi,  
Is there anything wrong with making a wish and then throwing a coin into a wishing well?*

Dear Rivka,

There are a number of possible scenarios. In the first one, a coin is thrown into a fountain or the like, but it will eventually be retrieved by someone and given to charity. In this case it would be permitted for a Jew to throw the coin and make a wish, provided of course that the wish is directed to G-d, asking Him to fulfill

the wish. (Asking another force or power to grant a wish is tantamount to idol wor-

ship).

The Talmud states that it is permitted for a Jew to give charity and ask that such and such happen, because even if he is not granted his request from G-d he will not regret having given charity.

In the second scenario, the money is being thrown into a well, where it is irretrievable. I asked Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, a renowned Jewish legal authority, and he told me that it would be forbidden in this case because it would be a waste of the coin, which violates the prohibition of *baal tashchit* — wasting.

The second scenario reminds me of a joke I once heard. Three men, one of whom was a Jew, were standing around the grave of a friend. According to the local custom, all the friends threw money into the grave so that the deceased would have money in the Hereafter. The grave was filled and the friends went off to have a drink in memory of their dear friend.

While sipping their respective beverages, one of the friends announces, "I threw in five hundred dollars!" The next friend, proudly exclaims, "I threw in a thousand dollars!" Looking meditatively into the distance, the Jewish friend says, "I removed the five hundred and the thousand dollars, and I left a check for twenty-five hundred."