

## A Redemptive Religious Aesthetic

### Community Counting

(1) במדבר א:ב

שָׂאוּ אֶת-רֵאשׁ כָּל-עֵדֹת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת כָּל-זָכָר  
לְגִלְגָּלְתָּם:

#### 1) Numbers 1:2

"Lift the heads [count/take a census] of all of the Israelite congregation by their families, by their ancestral houses, with the number of names of every male by their circles."

#### 2) *Living Waters: The Mei HaShiloach* trans. Betsalel Philip Edwards, pp. 267-268

"'Raise' [lift] signifies elevation. By means of counting the number of all the tribes, each individual will experience elevation, and a special significance will be seen in each one. This is as it is written (Hoshea, 2:1), 'And the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.' . . .

This is the meaning of 'and the number of the children of Israel,' that every one will be absolutely necessary. The greatness of the blessed God is seen in the entire community of Israel as a whole, and if just one member of that community is missing then the mixture will be deficient. It is as if the image of the king were made up of a mosaic of many small parts, and if just one of the parts were missing, then the picture of the king would be lacking. So at the time when each member of Israel is counted, then [God] is the greatness in all of Israel, for each one of Israel is a portion of the blessed God. This is as it is written (*Devarim*, 32:9), 'for [God's] nation is a portion of God.' Each individual possesses one of the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be [God], and at the time when that individual is counted, then the blessed God [Godself] is present in that attribute which [the individual] possesses, and clearly whatever is being counted is at that time the greatest of all. This is how each member of Israel has a special state of elevation."

### Making a Memorable Mosaic

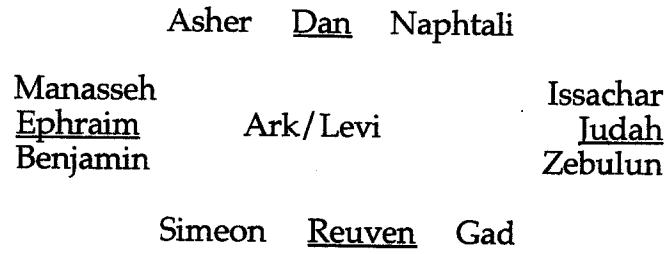
(3) במדבר ב:ב

אִישׁ עַל-דָּגְלוֹ בְּאֵתֶת לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם יַחֲנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנֶּגֶד סָבִיב לְאֹהֶל-מוֹעֵד יַחֲנוּ:

#### 3) Numbers 2:2

*Each by his standard with the signs of their ancestral house, the Israelites shall camp opposite, around the Tent of Meeting.*

4) Chart of Tribal Positions based on Numbers 2:3-31 [underlined appear first in lists]



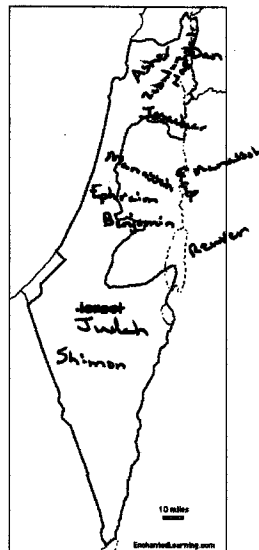
5) מדרש רבה במדבר פרשה ב סימן ח

לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם . . . הַיֶּאֱכָר צוּם אֵלָא אִמְר לְהֵם בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה יִשְׁכַּר וְזְבוּלֹן יִטְעֹנוּ מִטְתִּי מִן הַמְזָרַח רְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן וְגַד יִטְעֹנוּ מִטְתִּי מִן הַדְּרוֹם אִפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה וּבְנֵימִין יִטְעֹנוּ מִן הַמְעַרְב דָּן אֲשֶׁר וּנְפְתָלִי יִטְעֹנוּ מִן הַצְּפוֹן יוֹסֵף אֵל יִטְעֵן שֶׁהוּא מֶלֶךְ וְאַתֶּם צְרִיכִין לְחַלֵּק לוֹ כְּבוֹד לְוֵי אֵל יִטְעֵן לְמָה שֶׁהוּא טוֹעֵן אֶת הָאָרוֹן וּמִי שֶׁהוּא טוֹעֵן אָרוֹנוֹ שֶׁל חַי הָעוֹלָמִים אֵינוֹ טוֹעֵן אָרוֹנוֹ שֶׁל מֵת וְאֵם עֲשִׂיתֶם וְטְעַנְתֶּם אֶת מִטְתִּי כֶּשֶׁם שְׂצוּיֹתִי אֲתַכֶּם הָאֵל־לְהִים עֵתִיד לְהַשְׁרֹת אֶתְכֶם דְּגָלִים . . .

5) Midrash Rabbah Numbers 2:8

*By their ancestral homes . . .* How did he [Jacob] command them? Rather he said to them: "My children--Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun--will carry my casket from the east. Reuven and Shimon and Gad will carry my coffin from the south. Ephraim and Manasseh and Benjamin will carry from the west. Dan, Asher, and Naphtali will carry from the north. Yosef shall not carry because he is a king and you need to pay honor for him. Levi shall not carry. Why? Because he is the one who carries the Ark. The one who carries the Ark of the Life of All Worlds is not the one who carries the ark of the dead. If you do [this] and carry my coffin as I commanded you, God, in the future, will cause you to cast [camp by] standards. . . .

6) "Map" of Tribal Settlement of Israel



## The Artist and the Community

7) George Steiner, *Real Presences*, p. 10

"The archaic Greek belief that memory is the mother of the Muses expresses a fundamental insight into the nature of the arts and of the mind.

The issues here are political and social in the strongest sense. A cultivation of trained, shared remembrance sets a society in natural touch with its own past. What matters even more, it safeguards the core of individuality. What is committed to memory and susceptible of recall constitutes the ballast of the self. The pressures of political exaction, the detergent tide of social conformity, cannot tear it from us."

8) *Living Waters: The Mei HaShiloach* trans. Betsalel Philip Edwards, p. 269

"The matter of counting relates to what is said in the Gemara (*Berachot*, 58a), "one man's mind is not similar to another's." The blessed God allotted to each one goodness and life, and one is not similar to his fellow. Therefore it is said, "count [literally, "raise"] the head," or to stand each one in his proper place. By means of this he will be in his place, prominent and elevated. . . . "And a man of each tribe shall be with you," for the prince of the tribe knows the proper place of each one in his tribe. If he were to exchange one man's place for another's, then the condition of the tribe would not be complete. This may be likened to one who plants a garden in an intricate order, where if one planting is missing or exchanged for another, then it will be recognized that the garden is not complete. And Israel is called (*Yeshaya*, 61:3), the planting of God in which [God] is glorified."

9) Abraham J. Heschel, *Man is Not Alone*, pp. 218-219

"The fact is that we do not turn to art in order to gratify, but in order to foster interests and feelings. A work of art introduces us to emotions which we have never cherished before. It is boring unless we are surprised by it. Great works produce rather than satisfy needs by giving the world fresh craving. By expressing things we were not even aware of, works of art inspire new ends, unanticipated visions.

...  
It is not the blind need for self-expression that is the secret of a creative personality. Only he who has nothing to say boasts of his urge for self-expression. There must be something to be expressed, an emotion, a vision, an end, which produces the need for expressing it. The end is the basic number, the need is but the coefficient."

## 10) ברכות דף סג.ב

ועוד פתח רבי יהודה בכבוד תורה ודרש: (דברים כ"ז) הסכת ושמע ישראל היום הזה נהיית לעם. וכי אותו היום נתנה תורה לישראל? והלא אותו יום סוף ארבעים שנה היה! אלא ללמדך: שחביבה תורה על לומדיה בכל יום ויום כיום שנתנה מהר סיני.

10) Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Brachot, 63b

And again opened Rabi Yehuda, in honoring Torah, and explicated: (Deut. 27:9) "Silence! Hear, O Israel! Today you have become the people [of Adonai your God]." Was it that same day that Torah was given to Israel? Was not that same day at the end of forty years?! Rather, [it comes] to teach you: that Torah is as beloved, to those who study it, on each and every day as the day it was given from Mt. Sinai.

11) רש"י במדבר א:ב

לגלגלתם. על ידי שקלים "בקע לגלגלת".

11) Rashi, commenting on Numbers 1:2

*By their circles.* By means of shekels, "half [a shekel] a head" [Ex. 38:26 refers to a census taken by half-shekel contribution].

## 12) סנהדרין דף לז.א

לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי, ללמדך שכל המאבד נפש אחת מישראל - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו איבד עולם מלא, וכל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל - מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו קיים עולם מלא. . . . ולהגיד גדולתו של הקדוש ברוך הוא, שאדם טובע כמה מטבעות בחותם אחד - כולן דומין זה לזה, ומלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון - ואין אחד מהן דומה לחבירו. לפיכך כל אחד ואחד חייב לומר: בשבילי נברא העולם.

12) Talmud Bavli, Masekhet Sanhedrin, 37a

Therefore humanity was created individually, to teach you that one who causes the loss of one soul from Israel--on him the writing rises up [to say] it is as if he lost a world full. And all those who establish one soul from Israel--on him the writing rises up [to say] it is as if he established a world full. . . . To tell you the greatness of the Holy One Blessed be God. For a human mints many coins from the same die--all are similar one to another. The King of King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be God, strikes each human in the die of the first human--and not one of them is similar to its fellow. Therefore each and everyone is obligated to say: for me was the world created.

## Aesthetic Politics as Redemptive Religion

13) Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, p. 224.

"... for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. To an ever greater degree the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility. From a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the 'authentic' print makes no sense. But the instant the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applicable to artistic production, the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice--politics."

(14) במדבר ג

מד וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: מִה קַח אֶת-הַלְוִיִּים תַּחַת כָּל-בְּכוֹר בְּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּרִיית  
 הַלְוִיִּים תַּחַת בְּרִייתָם וְהָיוּ-לִי הַלְוִיִּים אֲנִי ה': מו וְאֵת פְּדֻיֵי הַשְּׁלֵשָׁה וְהַשְּׁבַעִים וְהַמֵּאֲתָיִם  
 הָעֲדֻפִּים עַל-הַלְוִיִּים מִבְּכוֹר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: מז וְלִקְחֹת חֲמִשָּׁת חֲמִשָּׁת שֶׁקֶלִים לְגִלְגֹּלֶת בְּשֶׁקֶל  
 הַקֹּדֶשׁ תִּקַּח עֶשְׂרִים גֶּרָה הַשֶּׁקֶל: מח וְנִתְּתָה הַכֶּסֶף לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו פְּדֻיֵי הָעֲדֻפִּים בָּהֶם:

14) Numbers 3:44-48

Adonai spoke to Moses saying: "Take the Levites in place of all the first-born among the Israelites, and the cattle of the Levites in place of their cattle; and the Levites shall be Mine. I am Adonai. And the redemption of the two hundred seventy-three who are left over above the Levites from the first-born of the Israelites, you shall take--five shekels each per head, by the shekel of the holy [the sanctuary weight], the shekel [weight] is twenty *gerah*. You shall give the money to Aaron and to his sons, the redemption of those who are left over among them."

# Bemidbar @ the DC Beit Midrash

Monday, May 26, 2003; 25 Iyyar 5763; Memorial Day

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Welcome to the DC Beit Midrash!

The *Chumash* (Five Books of Moses) is divided into 54 portions, which Jews read sequentially each week in services. This Shabbat, we will be reading *Parshat Bemidbar* from the book of *Bemidbar* (Numbers). Tonight, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study of this portion. The voices of both past and contemporary interpreters will inform our discussion. Below you will find a summary of this week's *Torah* portion, along with brief biographies of the commentators cited. The presentation will be followed by *chevruta* (paired) study on a subject of your choice.

## ***This week's parsha (Torah portion): Bemidbar, Bemidbar (Numbers), 1:1- 4:20***

Bemidbar begins with a census of the adult men of each tribe, and a description of the order of the Israelite camp by tribes. The descendants of Levi are not included with the others, as they are responsible for the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), and thus have a special status within the nation. Within the tribe of Levi, the family of Kehath has certain unique duties pertaining to the vessels in the *Mishkan*. The portion concludes with detailed instructions for the family of Kehath.

(Excerpted from [www.kolel.org/pages/5760/bemidbar.html](http://www.kolel.org/pages/5760/bemidbar.html))

## ***This week's sources:***

### **Midrash Tanchuma (c. 400 CE)**

*Midrash* comes from a Hebrew root which means "to search out, to investigate." Thus, this is a Jewish method of exegesis, which sought to discover deeper meanings in the text beyond the literal one. Since the rabbis greatly venerated every letter of the Hebrew Scriptures as of Divine origin, every detail was seen to be significant. Sometimes *Midrash* is used with the legal portions of the Torah (*halacha*) and sometimes it is used with the non-legal portions (*aggadah*), such as stories about the main protagonists in the Bible. Different *Midrashim* were written down at different times, over a period of almost a thousand years, from 300-1200 CE. *Midrash Tanchuma* is a collection of *aggadic Midrashim* said to have been compiled by Rabbi Tanchuma (427-475 CE). Many of the *Midrashim* begin with the words, "Yelamedenu rabbenu (Let our teacher instruct us)."

(Adapted from Harvey Fields, *A Torah Commentary for Our Times*, 201)

### **Sanhedrin, Berachot**

### **Talmud Bavli (c. 500)**

The Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*) is a compilation of discussions on the *Mishna*, which had been going on some three hundred years already at the time they were written down. The Talmud's discussions are recorded in a consistent format; a law from the *Mishna* is cited, which is followed by rabbinic deliberations on its meaning (known as "*Gemara*").

*Masekhet Sanhedrin* deals with laws of capital punishment: those crimes punishable by death and the ways these sentences are carried out. Considerable space is devoted to the composition of the various courts and to judicial procedure. The *aggadic* sections contain a broad discussion of the question of a person's place in the World to Come and other fundamental tenets of the faith. *Masekhet Berachot* (Blessings) is, in most traditions, the first tractate of the Talmud. It contains laws of reciting the *Shema*, the Amidah prayer, Grace after Meals, blessings for various kinds of food and fragrances, blessings for various occasions and things seen.

(Adapted from Steinsaltz, *Talmud Reference Guide*, p. 38, 43).

### **Rabbi Mordechai Yosef of Ishitza (1800-1854)**

Born in Poland to a rabbinic family, Rabbi Yosef was a student of Reb Simcha Bunem of Pshiske. It was from Reb Bunem that he received the wellsprings of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the *Hassidic* movement. He was born in Tomashov, Poland in 1800 to family of Rabbis, teachers and judges in their communities reaching all the way back to Rashi. He was small in stature, often in poor health, and died at the age of 54. His entire life was spent in the house of study.

The teachings of Mordechai Yosef of Ishitza are really a continuation of the Baal Shem Tov, focusing on how the one seeking God can know God's will in all that he does based on the study of the Torah. The central thesis of *Living Waters—The Mei HaShiloach* is that everything that humans receive is given directly from God. It is then the work of a man in the world to develop a mind that is conscious of this reality. Another issue of central importance is the journey of each soul on its quest for *birrur*, or spiritual clarification.

(Excerpted from [www.yhol.org.il/features/edwards.htm](http://www.yhol.org.il/features/edwards.htm))

### **Walter Benjamin (1892-1940)**

Born to a wealthy Jewish family, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) became one of the most influential Marxist literary and cultural critics of the 20th century. His writings played a key role in the development of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Walter

(over)

Benjamin is perhaps best known for his essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction), published in 1934, in which he explored the consequences of how technological reproductions of artworks could cause them to lose their uniqueness.

Knowing that his fate at the hands of the Nazis would not be pleasant, Benjamin sought to immigrate to the United States. He hoped to flee through France and Spain, but while waiting for a visa he realized that he would soon be handed over to the Gestapo, so he took an overdose of morphine and died.

(Excerpted from [atheism.about.com/library/glossary/aesthetics](http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/aesthetics))

### **Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972)**

Abraham Joshua Heschel was a European-born scholar and philosopher. He received a classical Jewish education, and a doctorate in Berlin. With the rise of the Nazis, Heschel was deported to Poland and eventually made his way to the U.S. by way of England. In the United States, Rabbi Heschel taught at the Hebrew Union College beginning in 1940, and he joined the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1945 as professor of Jewish ethics and philosophy.

Heschel's works attempt to penetrate and illuminate the reality underlying religion and the living dynamic between God and Man through understanding Jewish text and experience. His approach to the challenges of modernity was composed not only of the rhetoric of philosophy, but was also brought to action through his involvement in the civil rights movement and other areas of social activism.

(Excerpted from [learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/sources/ajheschel.shtml](http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/sources/ajheschel.shtml))

### **George Steiner (1929- )**

Professor George Steiner was born in Paris on April 23, 1929. His family moved to the United States in 1940 and he was educated at the Universities of Paris, Chicago, Harvard, Oxford and Cambridge. He was a member of the editorial staff at *The Economist* in London during the 1950s before beginning an academic career as a fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton University in 1956. He currently holds professorships at the University of Oxford, Harvard University, and Cambridge University.

Since the late fifties, Steiner has written about Russian literature and Greek tragedy, twentieth-century totalitarian politics and the immense global pressures warring against the powers of language. He has explored literary criticism and music in the rousing rhetoric of his essays and lectures, and has written an interestingly thought-provoking body of short fiction. During the past ten years he has trod somewhat gingerly into the domain of theology. With the book *Real Presences* (1989), Steiner claims that words can evoke the spiritual, i.e. real, presence. Steiner is a regular contributor of reviews and articles to journals and newspapers including the *New Yorker* and *The Guardian*.

(Adapted from Daniel Hahn, [www.contemporarywriters.com](http://www.contemporarywriters.com))

### **Charles Taylor (1931- )**

Charles Taylor is a Canadian philosopher, educated at Oxford, who is currently teaching and writing at McGill University in Montreal. Taylor has been closely identified with the Quebecois controversy in the province, writing and politicking for the self-determination of the Quebecois and going so far as to run against Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in one election.

The focus of Taylor's mature works has been the formation of the human identity. Taylor's early work, including a mammoth study of Hegel (1975) has helped to shape and define this inquiry. Taylor's work on Hegel emphasized the need for a modern-day reexamination of the importance of German romanticism and expressivism in our cultural milieu, which has moved past mere worship of science and technology and reliance on analysis in philosophy.

(Excerpted from [www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/1643/taylor.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/1643/taylor.html))

### ***This week's teacher:***

#### **Rabbi Jeremy Winaker**

**[rabbi.winaker@adasisrael.org](mailto:rabbi.winaker@adasisrael.org)**

Jeremy Winaker, Assistant Rabbi, joined the rabbinic staff at Adas Israel in 2002, after being ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He has worked extensively with youth at Ramah Darom for the five years since its opening; with "The Curriculum Initiative," serving as an advisor to Jewish students in both independent and boarding schools; and in various family service and teaching positions. Rabbi Winaker will be channeling his interest in social action, for which he received an award at JTS, into Adas Israel's TOMIM Council and its affiliates' activities. Rabbi Winaker earned his B.A. with Honors from Swarthmore College. He enjoys cooking, reading, and movies.

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Wanna sponsor food? [Ariellabock@hotmail.com](mailto:Ariellabock@hotmail.com)

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