



# GEULAS YISRAEL

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## Pinchas: A Backward River

The nickname for Sefer Bamidbar is Chumash HaPekudim, the Book of the Censuses. The sefer begins with a census in Parshat Bamidbar and concludes with a second census in Pinchas. Of course, these two censuses could not have been more different. The first took place in the second year after Yetziat Mitzrayim and was intended to count soldiers and prepare for what was expected to be an immediate entry into Eretz Yisrael. The people were brimming with hope, optimism, and anticipation as they prepared to march into the land that had been promised to them centuries earlier.

### THE GENERATION THAT NEVER ARRIVED

The second census of Pinchas is a more somber counting. History has been rebooted, and a new generation now stands poised to enter Israel. This second census served a dual purpose. Once again, it was meant to register all capable soldiers in preparation for the eventual wars of conquest. It was also intended to determine who would inherit the land. For this

reason, the population was counted by families and not merely by shevatim. Presumably, families would want to receive adjacent parcels of land in order to remain together and preserve family continuity. The earlier census was purely military, whereas this census was intended to facilitate the allocation of land in the new settlement of Israel.

As the Torah itself records after the counting:

לְאֵלֶּה תִּחְלַק הָאָרֶץ בְּנִחְלָה בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת

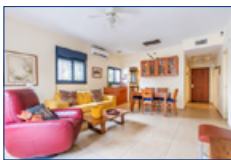
“To these shall the land be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names.”

Facing the entry into Israel and the eventual allocation of lands, surely there was joy, but also a tinge of sorrow. The original generation, meant to inherit the land, was no longer with us. The generation to whom Hashem had promised, “And I will bring you to the land,” was no longer there. They had perished in the desert, never living to see the fulfillment of that promise. Even amid the excitement, there must have been a measure of melancholy as we prepared to inherit a land that should have passed through an earlier generation.

### MORE THAN AN INHERITANCE

The Torah sought to ensure that this new generation did not view the land as theirs alone. The inheritance would be structured in a way that preserved the memory of those who never arrived. For this reason, the Torah

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consistently refers to the inheritance as a nachalah rather than merely a yerushah:

לְאֵלֶּה תִּחְלַק הָאָרֶץ בְּנַחֲלָה בְּמִסְפַּר שְׁמוֹת

“To these shall the land be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names.”

לְרַב תְּרַבֶּה נַחֲלָתוֹ וְלִמְעוֹט תִּמְעָיֵט נַחֲלָתוֹ אִישׁ לְפִי פְקָדָיו יִתֵּן נַחֲלָתוֹ

“To the larger group you shall increase its inheritance, and to the smaller group you shall decrease its inheritance; each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were counted.”

אִךְ בְּגוּרָל יִחְלַק אֶת הָאָרֶץ לְשְׁמוֹת מִסוֹת אֲבֹתָם יִנְחֵלוּ

“However, the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of their ancestral tribes.”

עַל פִּי הַגּוּרָל תִּחְלַק נַחֲלָתוֹ בֵּין רַב לִמְעוֹט

“According to the lot, shall its inheritance be divided, between the many and the few.”

Within the span of just four pesukim, the Torah repeats the word nachalah six times. A nachalah is more than an inheritance. The word evokes a river or stream, a *nachal*, that flows from an earlier source. The current generation about to enter Israel stood *downstream*, receiving waters that had begun their journey long before they arrived. The land was being given to them, but it had first been promised to their parents and grandparents.

### INHERITING THROUGH THE PREVIOUS GENERATION

Unlike a river, however, the original allocation and inheritance of Eretz Yisrael flowed backward before it flowed forward. A river moves in only one direction. Gravity carries water downstream. This river of inheritance first flowed backward to an earlier generation before continuing forward to the next.

The first inheritance in halachic history,

the allocation of Eretz Yisrael, functioned in a highly unusual manner. Rather than passing directly to the generation that entered the land, it first flowed backward to the generation that had left Egypt. Each member of the new generation that entered Israel received a portion in the land. However, those portions were legally attributed, or “sent back,” to their fathers’ generation, the generation of Yetziat Mitzrayim. Only after the parcels of land had reverted to the previous generation did the inheritance pass forward once again to the children who actually settled Israel. This was not merely a legal gimmick. It had a profound impact on how the land itself was allocated.

Consider two branches of the same family. One branch had nine adult children who entered Eretz Yisrael, while the other had only one. Under a straightforward system, the first branch would receive nine portions of land and the second branch would receive one.

That is not what happened. The ten descendants together initially received ten portions. Those portions then reverted to their common ancestor, who had left Egypt but died in the desert. At that point, the land was divided equally between his two family branches. Each branch received five portions. The branch with nine children now shared five portions among nine heirs, while the branch with one child inherited five portions alone.

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As a result, inheritance was not determined solely by the number of people who entered the land. The allocation first flowed backward to the previous generation and only then forward once again to the generation that settled Israel.

This was the only inheritance in history that first moved backward before moving forward. It flowed upstream to a previous generation before returning downstream to the next. It was, in a sense, a backward-flowing river.

This reverse inheritance acknowledged the sacrifice and courage of the pioneering generation that endured slavery in Mitzrayim and followed Hashem into the wilderness. They had suffered terribly in Egypt, and overlooking their role in this journey would have been morally insensitive, especially given their tragic fate in the anonymous sands of the desert. Their suffering in Egypt, their courage at the Yam Suf, and their encounter at Sinai all helped pave the way for the eventual arrival in Israel. By routing the allocation of the land through the previous generation, the Torah paid tribute to their accomplishments while preserving the memory of a generation that never lived to see the fulfillment of its dream.

### STANDING DOWNSTREAM

This first inheritance scheme in Eretz Yisrael, this backward-flowing river, epitomizes our broader responsibilities in modern-day Israel. We have been granted the extraordinary privilege of returning to our homeland. Generations dreamed of this opportunity but passed from the world before attaining it. We did not receive this land solely through our own merits. We received it because of the faith, sacrifice, and perseverance of those who stood upstream before us.

Standing downstream carries

responsibilities. The responsibility to maintain faith even during the difficult periods we are experiencing. The responsibility not to allow this strong river to splinter into narrow rivulets of division and discord. The responsibility to make difficult decisions not only through the lens of immediate needs, but with an awareness of the history that brought us here and the obligations that history imposes.

Most importantly, those responsibilities require ensuring that the river continues to flow. We are not standing on its banks as spectators. We are standing within the current of Jewish history itself. Waters are flowing toward us from generations that came before, and they will continue flowing long after we are gone. Our task is to preserve the strength and direction of that current so that future generations may travel farther than we did and reach places we cannot yet imagine. Many of our challenges will not be solved quickly. Some may take generations to resolve. But life in Israel is lived within a river, not within a moment. Recognizing that should provide both perspective and patience.

We are not standing on its banks as spectators. We are standing within the current of Jewish history itself. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: [mtaraginbooks.com](http://mtaraginbooks.com).

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