

Parsha Bamidbar Today is The Day May 23, 2020, Rabbi Ma'ayan Sands

"The LORD has done it this very day;

let us rejoice today and be glad." — Psalm 118:24 (Tomorrow, May 24, 2020 we begin the month of Sivan. We will chant a short Hallel which includes this line from Psalm 118)

The singer, Johnny Rivers wrote a song "Secret Agent man", in which there is a line which says: "They've taken away your name and given you a number." Every time I read *parshat bamidbar*, that line comes to mind. I don't like the image of being known by a number. Furthermore, I know there is some superstition about counting people because both Rick's Russian grandmother and my Russian grandparents, when they needed to count, pointed and said "Not one, Not two..." So, today I've decided to share a story with you that will not include counting or numbers but will help us celebrate the today, this day, that God has given us. "We will rejoice and be glad in it." (psalm 118)

The story is about a woman. I know her only as Mrs. Jones. She has a rare and remarkably positive outlook on life; one worthy of sharing and emulating; especially these days when there is so much in our lives over which we have so little control.

Mrs. Jones was 92 years old. She was moving into a nursing home where she would spend the rest of her life. After waiting patiently in the lobby, she was told that her room was ready. An attendant escorted Mrs. Jones to her room. As she slowly edged her walker toward the elevator, he described the room to her. "I love it!" she exclaimed with the enthusiasm of a child who had just received the most wonderful birthday gift. "But Mrs. Jones, you haven't even seen it yet!" the man replied. "That has nothing to do with it," she said.

The elderly woman continued: "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not, doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged... it's how I arrange my mind. I've already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. Each day is a gift, and as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day."

For some people, this kind of attitude may take a lifetime to master. Others will pass through

this world without ever knowing the kind of joy that this perspective can bring. But we can choose to move into this frame of mind today – no matter how old or young we may be, no matter how rich or poor, no matter what our circumstances. And we can share and spread our positive attitude with everyone we meet (virtually or otherwise).

Translated literally from the original Hebrew, the verse in psalm 118 reads: “*This is the day the LORD has made, let us rejoice and be glad on it.*” It is part of the Hallel service which we sang today. While this is part of a group of psalms traditionally recited on holidays, the sages teach that this verse applies to every single day of our lives. Every day when we wake up, we have to look at “*this very day*” as The Day. Every day is the day that “*the LORD has made.*” God has created everything in this day exactly as it should be. We must “*rejoice and be glad on it*” because it is created and lovingly given to us by the Creator of all living things. **Today** is God’s gift to us!

Every day of our lives can be filled with joy. It's not about how the things in our lives are arranged, or what happens *around* or *to* us. We’ve been reminded in a very dramatic way lately, that “arranging our lives” is not always in our control. It's about how we arrange our lives *in our minds*; about “having already decided to love it!” It's a decision, actually, that is built into Jewish prayer practice. Upon arising in the morning, we acknowledge God’s presence, compassion, and the many things for which we are grateful. *Modah ani lifanecha*, “I am grateful to you [God] for restoring my soul to me” is a prayer traditionally said, before our feet even hit the floor each morning. Each day is a gift and “as long as our eyes open, we will focus on the new day.” There is an invisible enemy ravaging our lives throughout the world. When we can muster an attitude of hope, we will feel better for it. We can treasure our good health when we have it and we can aim to live every day with the understanding that it is the very best day of our lives!