

THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL
TAL Founder & Director

UNITY IN NUMBERS!

What does a number mean to you? Technically a number is a mathematical object used to count and measure. Yet we use numbers to represent important times in our lives, to role dice in a game or even play a lucky lottery. This week we enter the fourth book of the Torah Bamidbar. Our Sages know this book as Sefer Hapikudim – the book of Numbers.

On first thought we understand the book is so called after the beginning of our Parsha which deals with a population census that is taken of the Jewish people at the time. Yet when we think of it, why is a whole book named after such a one-off event? Wouldn't it have been better for our sages to keep the name as the book of Bamidbar, especially seeing as most of the book deals with occurrences in the wilderness?

Furthermore, on inspection the Torah states: "Take a census.... according to their fathers' house, BY NUMBER OF THE NAMES, every male according to their head count." (Bamidbar 1:2).

The expression "Bmispar Sheimot" [by number of the names] seems contradictory. What does it really mean? The term "number" and "names" are almost mutually exclusive. When we talk about numbers, we imply anonymity. The word "names" has the exact opposite connotation. A name gives a person singularity and a quality of being special - more than just a number!

Which is it - was the census concerned with the overall numbers (the "Klal") or was the

census interested in the individual names (the "Prat")?

Have you ever been in a synagogue searching for a Minyan? When people arrive in the synagogue the Shliach Tsibur has to wait till there are ten men. The Halacha is that he may not count these people directly.

Rav Mordechai Gifter zt'l, explains that numbers by their very definition are finite. Stating a number, one quantifies an item such that the quantity is no more and no less than the number stated. A human being, by his very definition, is not finite in this sense. He has a soul and strengths, and characteristics. He has unlimited potential to grow and expand his capabilities. Trying to put a number on an individual limits him and restricts his ability to reach untold heights. Therefore, when we speak of a "Minyan" we are not speaking of a "mispar" [a number]. We cannot just "count" Jews. When we enumerate people and treat them as numbers, we in effect say they are defined and limited. This is certainly not the way Hashem wants us to view the Jewish people.

Thus, when there is a census of the people, the aim is to work out the number, but they are not counted by numbers, rather they are counted through names. Each name represents an individuality, an unlocked potential – each person has a separate task in life. The end number is the sum of all the physical bodies, but it in no way measures the awesome infinite power of all their souls.

Getting the Jewish people to unite nowadays isn't easy.

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KIDS ZONE
Quiz

This newsletter contains Divrei Torah and may contain Sheimot - Please dispose of accordingly

But let's think about it 3335 years ago, when the Jews left Egypt. How easy was it for them to unite?

The Midrash states that when the time was right to leave Egypt Hashem gathered the Jews from all over Egypt. They all set out and followed Moshe into the wilderness. Imagine, a people that had been scattered across a vast land, there were no technological communications, and yet they all went following one leader into the wilderness.

Forty-nine days later they stood at Har Sinai – and they encamped united - Kelsh Echad Belev Echad. Millions of people, a whole nation, and within 49 days they had achieved unity! What is the secret to this unity?

Chazal explain that Moshe had already told them that the whole purpose of Yetsiat Mitsrayim was Taavdun...Al Hahar Hazeh – receiving the Torah. The people had a goal, they were excited and had a goal to work towards. They united behind this goal,

and worked on themselves for 49 days each day improving their characters and unity, until they were able to completely unite to receive the Torah. The Torah could only be received by a united people!

Similarly, we find in this weeks Parsha. Moshe was worried. Each tribe had a different flag, each tribe had a different Avoda (work) set out for them. How would they all be able to integrate? Perhaps some of the tribes would complain about their flag and tasks?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explained that Hashem reassured Moshe, and told him so long as they are encamped around the Mishkan all will work well. So long as we are unified in our ideology, we understand the important things in life and set these as the centre of our attention – the Holy Presence of Hashem – then we will be successful.

The Netsiv explains that book of Numbers, is so called, because it begins with a census and ends with a

census. The census at the beginning refers to a census shortly after leaving Egypt. A nation that had received the Torah, built the Mishkan and was ready to start their voyage. It was a show of how we value each Jew individually, yet at the same time, how we value the whole nation as a united entity. It is only through unity that we can have the Mishkan and Hashem's presence within us. The census at the end refers, a generation later, to a newborn nation, about to enter Israel. The message being sent to them is clear. To inherit the land of Israel, there must be unity. A count of the people is taken, each exists on their individual level, yet each must know the centre piece must be Holiness.

Am Yisrael are a successful nation when we are united.

Let us focus on our heritage, focus on our individual goals and unite in His service to merit the coming of Mashiach Bimhera Byamenu Amen. Shabbat Shalom



RABBI DAVID BAADANI

Director - TAL Chazanut Program

PARSHAT BAMIDBAR

Parashat Bamidbar is always read close to Shavuot, together with the sixth chapter of Pirkei Avot, where Chazal say about Torah:

“ומגדלתו ומרוממתו על כל המעשים”
“It elevates a person above all things.”

What does that really mean?

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler explains something astonishing. A human being can do an act with such sincerity, with such truth, that it becomes almost as if Hashem Himself is present in the act.

Chazal say that one who writes a Sefer Torah is considered “as if he received it from Sinai.” Rav Dessler

explains that when a person performs a mitzvah with אמת, with even a little bit of pure intention, he draws holiness into the world.

Sometimes we think the opposite. We look at ourselves honestly and say: “My motives are mixed. I’m not perfect. So what value do my mitzvot really have?”

But Torah does not demand perfection before action.

Hashem does not want us to become angels. He is looking for sincerity.

Even a small point of אמת, a tiny spark of לשמה, is infinitely precious.

A person may give charity with many motives mixed in, habit, guilt, honor, but somewhere inside there is also a real desire to help another Jew. That small inner truth is eternal. It connects the action to something higher than the world itself.

Perhaps this is also why the parashah begins with counting the Jewish people. Every Jew counts because every soul contains that inner point of truth that can never be extinguished.

The world tells us that only greatness matters. Torah tells us that even one genuine moment matters forever:

- One honest prayer.
- One hidden act of kindness.
- One mitzvah done quietly and sincerely.

Maybe this is what Chazal mean when they say Torah “elevates” a person. Not that we stop being human, but that Hashem gave human beings the ability to bring His presence into the world, even through one small act done with sincerity.



RABBI DANNY FISHER

Director - TAL Boys After School Programs

HASHEM LOVES US

At the beginning of this week's sedra, Bamidbar, Hashem counts the Jewish People in the second year of their stay in the Midbar. Rashi explains that because of Hashem's love for us, He counts us at every opportunity: when we left Mitzrayim, after many died following the Eigel, and again when the Shechinah came to dwell among us with the setting up of the Mishkan.

The love between Hashem and the Jewish People is so great that He constantly counts us.

Avraham Avinu was promised that his descendants would be as numerous as

the stars in the sky. There is something unique and beautiful about our comparison to the stars.

There is a fascinating Gemara Berachos 32: After the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, the Jewish People feared that Hashem had abandoned them. Hashem responded by telling them to look at the countless stars in the heavens – all of it was created for their sake.

The Gemara says:

"The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Israel: My daughter, I created twelve constellations in the firmament, and for each and every constellation I created thirty armies, and for each and every army I created thirty legions, and for each and every legion I created thirty

infantry division leaders, and for each and every infantry division leader I created thirty military camp leaders, and for each and every military camp leader I created thirty leaders of forts, and on each and every leader of a fort I hung 365,000 stars corresponding to the days of the solar year. And all of them I created only for your sake; and you say: 'The Lord has forsaken me and the Lord has forgotten me?'"

Every so often, it is important to pause and think about all the kindness Hashem does for us – both as individuals and as the Jewish People as a whole.

And to remember:
Hashem loves us.

Have a wonderful Shabbos.



HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Phrase "Titkabal Selotana U'ba'utana" in Kaddish

The Hazzan recites a special Kaddish after the Amida (or the repetition of the Amida) known as Kaddish Titkabal. Following the basic Kaddish text (which ends with "Da'amiran Be'alma"), the Hazzan adds a request that the congregation's prayers should be accepted along with those of the entire Jewish Nation: "Titkabal Selotana U'ba'utana Im Selot'hon U'ba'ut'hon De'chol Bet Yisrael..."

The Hazzan mentions the prayers of the entire nation in fulfillment of the Gemara's teaching in Masechet Berachot (30a) that when a person prays, he should pray not as a lone individual, but rather as part of the entire nation. A person himself may not be worthy of having his prayers accepted, but when he joins with all Am Yisrael, he accesses the collective merit of the nation, including the merits of the great Sadikim, and this helps

ensure the acceptance of his prayers. We therefore ask not only that G-d accept our prayers, but also that He accept the prayers of the entire Jewish Nation.

We can perhaps gain further insight into the expression "Selotana U'ba'utana" – literally, "our prayers and our requests" – from the Targum Onkelos translation to a verse in Parashat Vayehi (Bereshit 48:22). Yaakov Abinu recalls how he seized the city of Shechem from his enemies "Be'harbi U'b'kashti" – "with my sword and with my bow." Targum Onkelos, interestingly enough, translates these words as "Bi'sloti U'b'ba'uti" – "with my prayer and with my request." It was clear to Yaakov that although he waged war, his success in vanquishing the enemy resulted not from his weapons, but rather from his prayers to G-d. It is also significant that Yaakov viewed Tefila as his "ammunition," as

the weapons with which he defeated those who threatened him. Exploring Oneklos' translation more closely, the "sword" and the "bow" are used here as metaphors for two kinds of prayer – "Seloti" and "Ba'uti."

The commentators explain that whereas a sword is used in close combat, when the enemy is right in front of the soldier, the bow is used to target enemies stationed at a distance. Correspondingly, then, "Selotana" and "Ba'utana" refer to two different kinds of Tefila. Sometimes we pray like a sword – to address an immediate need, such in the case of an illness. Other times, however, we pray in the form of a bow – beseeching G-d to protect us from distant threat, from future dangers. When the Hazzan recites, "Titkabal Selotana U'ba'utana," he asks that all our prayers should be mercifully accepted – our prayers for our immediate needs, as well as our prayers for the future.



WEEKLY PARSHA OVERVIEW

Parshat Bamidbar

The Book of Bamidbar – "In the desert" – begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to take a census of all men over age twenty – old enough for service. The count reveals just over 600,000. The levi'im are counted separately later on because their service will be unique. They will be responsible for transporting the Mishkan and its furnishings, and assembling them when the nation encamps. The 12 Tribes of Israel, each with its banner, are arranged around the Mishkan in four sections: east, south, west and north. Since Levi is singled out,

the tribe of Yosef is split into two tribes, Efraim and Menashe, so there will be four groups of three. When the nation travels, they march in a formation similar to the way they camp.

A formal transfer is made between the first-born and the levi'im, whereby the levi'im take over the role the first-born would have had serving in the Mishkan if not for the sin of the golden calf. The transfer is made using all the 22,000 surveyed levi'im from one month old and up. Only levi'im between 30 and 50 will work in the Mishkan. The remaining first-born sons are redeemed with silver,

similar to the way we redeem our first-born today. The sons of Levi are divided into the three main families of Gershon, Kehat and Merari (besides the kohanim – the special division from Kehat's family). The family of Kehat carried the Menorah, the Table, the Altar and the Holy Ark. Because of their utmost sanctity, the Ark and the Altar are covered only by Aharon and his sons, before the levi'im prepare them for travel.

Rabbi Sinclair,
Seasonsofthemoon.com

Q

1. Why were the Jewish People counted so frequently?
2. What documents did the people bring when they were counted?
3. What determined the color of the tribal flags?
4. What is the difference between an "ot" and a "degel"?
5. How do we see that the Jews in the time of Moshe observed techum Shabbat - the prohibition against traveling more than 2,000 amot on Shabbat?

A

1. 1:1 - They are very dear to G-d.
2. 1:18 - They brought birth records.
3. 2:2 - Each tribe's flag was the color of that tribe's stone in the breastplate of the kohen gadol.
4. 2:2 - An "ot" is a flag, i.e. a colored cloth that hangs from a flagpole. A degel is a flagpole.
5. 2:2 - G-d commanded them to camp no more than 2,000 amot from the Ohel Moed. Had they camped farther, it would have been forbidden for them to go to the Ohel Moed on Shabbat.

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