

Parshat Bamidbar: Everyone Counts

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The beginning of Parshat Bamidbar discusses the count of the Jewish people, "Take a census of the entire assembly of the children of Israel according to their families, according to their father's households, by number of their names every male according to their headcount." The verse seems to contradict itself. On one hand, the count is by number and on the other hand it is by name. A number signifies a part of a larger group, and a name represents individuality.

Every Jew must see himself as part of a unified whole, while also recognizing his uniqueness. This relates to the vision of Avraham Avinu in which Hashem promised him that his descendants would be like the sand and stars. Each grain of sand alone is not worth much. However, when they join together they can comprise an important entity. Our worth begins as a part of a larger group. Rashi teaches us in Shemot that we are compared to the stars, which Hashem brings in and out by their name and number. Certainly Hashem loves us as a nation, and He also loves each one of us as an individual. Each of us has a distinct mission, which makes us irreplaceable.

After we initiate a child into the *brit* of Avraham, he can then be counted as a member of *Klal Yisrael*. At that very moment he receives a name highlighting his unique-

ness. This dichotomy is what the Jewish nation is about. We are part of a whole and we need to function within that framework. At the same time we must recognize the inherent greatness within each person. The parsha teaches us this balance that is the essence of Judaism. It is no coincidence that Parshat Bamidbar often falls out before *Shavuot*. Before accepting the Torah, we must understand that Hashem cares about each one of us as an individual who is also part of a nation. The greatness of *Klal Yisrael* is that the individual and the community work in tandem.

The Me'rosh Tzurim notes that even though the Torah is careful about every word, the Torah relates multiple accounts of the counting of the Jewish people. This teaches us about Hashem's love for us. The Lekach V'halibuv points out that every Jew is a star with a great light burning within him and Hashem loves each one of us no matter what level we're at. Hashem never gives up on any of us. Every Jew is part of the *am segula* (chosen nation). Sefer Bamidbar is called Sefer Hapekudim, The Book of Counting, to highlight Hashem's love for each individual member of *Klal Yisrael*. We must appreciate ourselves and every Jew, and focus to see their goodness and beauty.

The Midrash says, had Reuven known what the Torah would say about him when he tried to save Yosef he would have put him Yosef on his shoulders. Had Aharon known what would

be written about him when he greeted Moshe with a happy heart, he would have gone out to greet him with a big parade. It was not about honor, the Chidushei Harim explains. Had they known the power of an individual's actions, had they seen the greatness within themselves, they would have acted differently. This is the lesson of Parshat Bamidbar. Hashem says, "*Se'u et rosh kol adat Bnei Yisrael*." *S'eu* means lift up. The Torah is telling us that the counting was meant to teach *Am Yisrael* on a collective and individual level how beloved they are in the eyes of Hashem. When a person is told and knows he is loved, he feels valued and this gives him strength.

The Sefat Emes notes that every person has a place where they are meant to "encamp," their own unique way in which they are meant to bring the glory of heaven into this world. Each one of us has an indispensable place in Hashem's puzzle in this world. Rabbi Tatz speaks about this paradoxical duality in which each part is at the same time nothing and everything. Nothing because it's only a part and without the rest of the system it's utterly useless, and everything because when all the rest of the systems are in place it becomes vital and critical. We achieve our uniqueness precisely when we fit into a larger order while recognizing that no one else can fulfill our particular mission.

Make It Count 46

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshie Nissenabum

The 46th day of the *omer* represents the attribute of *netzach sheb'malchut*. The Tannaim Shemaya and Avtalyon personified this *middah*. *Netzach sheb'malchut* is the responsibility of the leader to ensure the success of his subjects. An employee's

success is his manager's success just as a student's success is his teacher's success. Avtalyon taught, "Wise men, be careful with your words," because you are a leader. Shmaya taught, "Love work and despise your position of authority." Do not use it to rule over people or to subjugate them. Use it to build

their potential.

On this day, instead of focusing on oneself, let us look around at others who might need us and help them shine, so that we view their success as our success.

Shavuot – Part I

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In the beginning of Parshat Emor Hashem speaks to Moshe. “*Daber el ha’kohanim v’amarta aleihem*. Speak to the *kohanim* and say to them.” Why the double language? Rashi explains that it teaches us that the adult *kohanim* have a responsibility to teach their younger counterparts the laws pertaining to *kahuna*, such as not coming in contact with the dead. The Midrash gives us another explanation. Man has an inborn evil inclination. It’s not natural for him to do the will of Hashem. That is why people need to be commanded twice. However, angels automatically do Hashem’s will. They know what to do when they receive one command.

However, if this is true, then the Torah should use this double phrasing for all *mitzvot*. What does the double language here teach us and how is it connected to *Shavuot*?

The Ohr Gedalyahu relates a story from the Gemara. A group of young children who were just beginning to learn the *aleph bet* were once asked to explain the meaning of the Hebrew letters. When the children got to the letter *mem* they said there were two, an open and closed *mem*. An open *mem* stands for a *maamar patuach*, an open saying, while a closed *mem* stands for a *maamar satum*, a closed saying. Rashi explains that one indicates the revealed *Torah* and the other the hidden *Torah*. The Maharsha further extrapolates that the closed *mem* refers to the hidden saying of *Bereishit*, the first of the ten sayings with which Hashem created the world. The other nine sayings, which are revealed, signify the open *mem*. Understanding how Hashem created the world out of nothing is something that is concealed and completely beyond our grasp. It is easier for us to relate to things that are already formed and shaped.

The Ohr Gedalyahu further teaches that when Hashem created the world, He said, “Let there

be light... Let there be heavens...” and his saying created reality because that is the nature of the utterings of Hashem. In our world, when we say we want to do something, we must endure an entire process before we reach our goal. But for Hashem, His word comes into existence right away. Just as Hashem created something physical when He spoke, so too when He gave us the positive and negative commandments he created a reality. When Hashem told the *kohanim* not to become contaminated by the dead, he created within them a reality that makes this natural.

There is a spiritual potential within them that keeps them away from impurity. However, the body doesn’t let this spiritual power express itself fully, just as the soul doesn’t express itself fully. All this is to allow for free choice. The job of the *kohen* is to activate that potential to an extent that it would be impossible to violate Hashem’s commandment.

When Hashem commanded us not to speak *lashon hara*, He instilled within us the potential not to do so. Our job is to activate this potential to the extent that it becomes impossible for us to hear or speak *lashon hara*. When someone would tell *lashon hara* to the Chofetz Chaim, he physically didn’t hear it. The investment in doing the will of Hashem brings it from potential to actuality. When a person feels a temptation to speak badly about others and instead he studies the laws, thinks about how to improve, says no again and again, he activates the potential within him so that it becomes possible.

All Jewish people share a basic level of holiness. But then there are differences based on several different levels and status. Hashem gave varying potentials to different Jews. Therefore, they were given different *mitzvot*, because the commandments activate the potential within each of us. The *kohanim* have a special level of holiness. By telling us about

the laws that apply to them, the Torah teaches us the basic concept that Hashem gives each of us *mitzvot* related to our own level of holiness. In Tehilim the verse says, “*Imrot Hashem amarot tahorot*. The sayings of Hashem are pure sayings.” Hashem’s words create holiness within us. What is true for the *kohanim* is true for all of us. When Hashem gave us the *mitzvot*, He first created a potential and then taught us how to activate it. The Gra explains, when we say a blessing we say, “*Asher kedishanu b’mitzvotav*, who sanctified us with his commandments.” This refers to the potential He created within us. We can develop and activate it through the *mitzvot*. This is true about every saying of Hashem. When a person activates a *mitzvah* to a very high degree he can influence and affect others to in turn develop their potential. Life generates life.

The 613 *mitzvot* are divided in two groups, 248 positive and 365 negative *mitzvot*. These correspond to the 248 limbs and 365 sinews of the body. The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that there are 613 aspects to our spiritual potential. Each one was created when Hashem gave us a particular *mitzvah* because *mitzvot* are the medium to activate our potential. Just as one can’t turn on a car the same way one turns on a microwave, every *mitzvah* has a different potential and is activated differently. In turn, each *mitzva* has the ability to develop a different aspect of ourselves. Only when we keep the whole Torah can we become perfect beings, as all of our inner essence is activated and we achieve our full potential. When Hashem uttered the Ten Commandments, which encompass the whole Torah, He created within us a spiritual potential that has 613 aspects to it. Along with this He gave us the guidelines how to activate them. The negative *mitzvot* teach us how not to ruin that potential and the positive commandments tell us how to develop it.