



Parshas Bamidbar & Shavuos, step up and be counted

This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of HaRav Amitai Ben Shoshanna, Leah Mintche Bas Gittel, and Shaul Ben Berta.

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

The Sefer of Bamidbar takes up the story as we left at the end of Sefer Shemos. The Jewish people traveled from Egypt to Mt. Sinai, where they received the Torah and committed the sin of the Golden Calf. After obtaining forgiveness from G-d through Moshe's prayer, they built a Mishkan. They inaugurated it on the first of Nissan, almost one year since their exodus from Egypt. The Jewish people are now ready to travel to the promised land through the desert.

Our Parsha begins with Hashem commanding Moshe to count every Jewish man from 20 to 60. The number totaled 603,550, excluding the tribe of Levi. They were counted separately and from just one month old totaling 22,000.

Hashem then tells Moshe the arrangement that the Jewish people will be in as they travel throughout the desert. The Mishkan was at the center of the formation; on the east side were the tribes of Yehuda, Issachar, and Zevulun. On the south side, the tribes of Reuven, Shimon, and Gad. On the west side, the tribes of Ephraim, Manash, and Benyamin. On the north side the tribes of Dan, Asher, and Naftali.

However, a question comes to mind: Our Parsha begins with the Jewish people being counted once again. Besides the question of why the nation is being counted yet again? Our Parsha is always read on the Shabbos before Shavous. What is the significance of our Parsha that must be emphasized before the holiday of Shavous?!

The Chizkuni (*Rav Chezekiah ben Manoah, a French Rabbi from the 13th century*) answers these questions by looking at the 5th and 6th words of our Parsha. The Pasuk states, "*G-d spoke to Moshe in the **Sinai desert.***" Meaning the Jewish people have not traveled since receiving the Torah on Mt. Sinai.

The Chizkuni explains that G-d wanted them to be counted and put in a formation because the nation was about travel. This is similar to a King or General who counts their troops before battle. Since they are still in the Sinai desert, we read this Parsha right before receiving the Torah anew.

However, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks of blessed memory gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that the Jewish people's nature and spirit changed ever since they entered the Sinai desert.

The Pasuk in Yisro states (*Shemos 19:2*) וַיִּסְעוּ מִרְפִּידִים וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנּוּ בְּמִדְבַּר וַיִּחַן-יְשׁוּעַם יִשְׂרָאֵל לַגֹּדֶד - **They** traveled from Rephidim and came to Sinai desert, **they** encamped in the desert. *The Jewish people camped next to the mountain.* The words referring to the nation are plural terms, "**they** traveled, **they** came, **they** encamped." Yet immediately following is a singular term for camping, "וַיַּחֲנּוּ - and **HE** camped."

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) writes that before entering the Sinai desert, the nation was divided and detached from each other. However, when they arrived in the desert, the Jewish people were remarkably united, one person and one heart.

Rabbi Sacks explains that although the Jewish people were counted before, this time was different. The giving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai enabled holiness and spirituality to be embedded in the physical world.

Each Jewish man and woman were individually empowered to fulfill and accomplish their G-dly potential. And when people who are independently motivated come together, they are unstoppable. Because each person watches the other's blind spot and consequently forms an invincible barrier around each other. This counting was a rallying cry for each person to step up and assume their role in G-d's vision for the world.

The lesson for our spiritual and physical lives is evident and the same. When we recognize the uniqueness of our soul and its mission on earth, we begin to surround ourselves with similarly enlightened people. They motivate us to keep going through tough times, and we encourage them to press on during challenging moments. As a result, we are constantly made aware of our potential and the road leading to it.

"The unity of the Jews, like that of Torah, is the counterpart of the unity of G- d.

To destroy one is to compromise the others."

-Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of blessed memory

May we merit to receive the Torah this Shavous with Moshiach Tsidkenu!

Have a meaningful Shabbos and joyous Shavous,

Rabbi Sholom Yemini