



Parshas Bamidbar, the uniqueness of you!

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

This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of Shaul Ben Berta, Sasson Bezalel Ben Batia and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Tova Basha. May they have a complete and speedy recovery.

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. Now the Jewish people are ready to travel through the desert to the promised land.

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 traveled 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: As the previous paragraph explained that the Jewish people traveled in a precise configuration throughout the desert. Why did G-d have the Jewish people travel by tribe only? Wasn't He worried that this can potentially lead to strife, hostility, and contention?!

Furthermore, the Torah writes that each tribe had a unique flag and banner that they carried in the desert. Why wasn't there one flag and banner for the entire Jewish people?

The Abarbanel (*Rav Yitzchak Ben Yeudah Abarbanel, a 14th-century Spanish commentary*) explains one reason behind the formation, war. Since they were entering the desert, they are vulnerable to being attacked by the many nations that surrounded it. So they were commanded to travel in an arrangement that would protect the holiest part of the encampment, the Mishkan.

If they were attacked and ambushed, the pattern they traveled in would defend the Mishkan, woman, and children. The flags and banners were carried to help stay organized and coordinated on the battlefield, so each set of tribes could focus their combat zone. Thus, the Mishkan would be entirely protected from all sides.

The Rabbienu Bachya (*Rav Bachya Ben Asher, a famous Spanish commentary from the 12th century*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes why they were told to travel by tribe because each tribe had unique characteristics that differentiated them. Therefore, they traveled separately. But since the center of the whole formation was the Mishkan with G-d's holy presence, their uniqueness and individuality merged in the service of G-d.

The Ramban (*Rav Moshe Ben Nachman, a famous 11th century Kabbalist, and commentary*) adds that the design of the flags and banners of each tribe was uniquely connected to the nature of the tribe. For example, the tribe of Yeudah had a lion on its banners, signifying the kingship they were given.

The Rabbienu Bachya explains that the purpose of the formation was to show the Jewish nation that G-d values individuality and uniqueness. To remind us that each tribe has a special and unparalleled purpose within the nation as a whole.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe takes this a step further. He writes that when Moshe was told to count the Jewish people, the Torah uses a rather unusual term. The Pasuk says (1:3), “Seu Es Rosh Kol Adas Bnei Yisroel- Count each person of the Jewish nation.” However, words can also be translated to mean “Lift up the heads of the Jewish nation.” The Rebbe explains that Hashem is telling every person that they have a unique gift and singular purpose that only they can accomplish. When you lift yourself up, you complete the Jewish nation.

In our daily life, it is imperative that we stay together and be united despite all differences. We need to appreciate and value the characteristic differences that make us individuals. The Jewish nation is inherently connected; thus, the Jewish people’s physical and spiritual future lies in every Jewish person’s hands.

This lesson is ever more prevalent as we quickly approach the holiday of Shavous when we receive the Torah again. The Torah has many topics that can be studied in various different ways. But all of them have the same Mitzvah of learning Torah.

“Being irreplaceable means being different.”

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*