
THE WEISS EDITION

במדבר

Bamidbar



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Light points

FROM THE TEACHINGS OF
THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE ON THE
WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

Lightpoints

לזכרון ולעילוי נשמת

הרה"ח הרה"ת הרה"ג ישעיהו זושא

ב"ר אברהם דוד ע"ה ווילהעלם

נלב"ע ביום ד' שבט התשפ"ב

תנצב"ה

במדבר

Bamidbar

1:2 | א:ב

שָׁאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם

Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses.

The Differences We Have in Common

The census taken in the beginning of the Book of Bamidbar seems paradoxical. On the one hand, a tally of the entire nation, in which each person counts as no more and no less than *one*, means that each person is counted and valued equally. A count of this nature highlights the qualities that are common to every person in the census.

On the other hand, the Torah states that Bnei Yisrael were counted “by their families, by their fathers’ houses.” As Rashi explains¹ (and as is apparent from the Torah’s accounting of

1. Bamidbar 1:2.

each tribe separately), the members of each tribe were counted individually, and then the sum total of all the tribes was tallied. Counting each tribe individually implies that each tribe represents a unique unit whose qualities *differ* from the others, warranting an individual census.

The conflicting features of this count—its emphasis on the distinct qualities of each individual tribe, but at the same time every individual being of equal value, symbolizing the similarity of all members of Bnei Yisrael—are not actually a contradiction.

The Torah's emphasis on the distinctiveness of each tribe (some thriving in Torah study, others in business, etc.,² corresponding to each tribe's unique path in the service of G-d) is not to highlight their differences, but to express how all their unique features *equally* contribute to the beautiful tapestry that is the Jewish nation. The tribes were therefore first counted separately, and then the totals were combined, with each person holding equal value in the sum total, to teach us that the unique qualities each Jew brings to the table are equally crucial to the nation as a whole.

—*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 23, pp. 6-7

2. See Bereishis 49:3-27.

 3:8 | ח:ג

וְשָׁמְרוּ אֶת כָּל כְּלֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת
 בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְעַבֵּד אֶת עַבְדַּת הַמִּשְׁכָּן

*They shall guard all the vessels of the Ohel Moed,
 the charge of Bnei Yisrael, to perform the service of
 the Mishkan.*

You Must Be a Levi Too

The Rambam writes that the extraordinary sanctity that G-d conferred upon the tribe of Levi is not exclusive to biological descendants of that tribe. Rather, “any individual whose spirit motivates him and whose wisdom guides him to set himself apart and stand before G-d to serve Him and worship Him... behold, that person is sanctified...”³

One might assume, however, that the ability to “be sanctified” to serve G-d, to genuinely and entirely devote oneself to carrying out the Divine mission of making this entire world a “dwelling place” for Him—i.e., the very purpose of Creation—is not for everybody. After all, the Rambam describes the person who can achieve this sanctity as an individual “whose spirit motivates him and whose wisdom guides him.” If I am not yet at that level of inspiration and understanding, who is to say that I can be “sanctified like a Levi,” to truly devote myself exclusively to the service of G-d?

The Torah removes this doubt when it says, “They shall guard all the vessels of the Ohel Moed, the charge of Bnei Yisrael, to perform the service of the Mishkan,”⁴ which means,

3. Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah V’Yovel 13:13.

4. Bamidbar 3:8.

as Rashi explains, that although this service is actually the duty of Bnei Yisrael, “the *Levi'im* serve in their stead, as their agents.”

One of the principles of the laws of agency is that one cannot commission an agent to act as his legal proxy if the commissioner himself is not legally allowed to perform that task.⁵ But the Torah states that the Levites' responsibility to sing in the Mishkan, and to transport it from place to place when Bnei Yisrael traveled, were in essence “the charge of Bnei Yisrael”—the responsibility of the entire Jewish nation. It is only that “the *Levi'im* serve in their stead, as their agents.” Since one can empower the Levi to act as his proxy only if he can potentially do the service himself, evidently every Jew has the innate ability “to stand before G-d to serve Him.”⁶

Accordingly, though the actual service in the Temple has been delegated to the tribe of Levi, the Levi-like ability to wholly devote oneself to bringing about the Divine purpose of creation is still within reach of every single Jew.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 13, p. 15*

5. See Talmud, Kiddushin 23b.

6. Devarim 10:8.

 3:29 | ג:כט

מִשְׁפְּחֹת בְּנֵי קֵהָת יִחַנּוּ עַל יַרְדֵּי הַמִּשְׁכָּן תִּימֵנָה

The families of the sons of Kehas shall camp to the south side of the Mishkan.

Choose Your Neighbors Carefully

The families comprising the tribe of Levi camped on all four sides of the Mishkan. Around them, the other twelve tribes camped, three tribes on each side. Rashi notes that the tribe of Reuven was particularly influenced by the Levite family of Kehas (of which the rebellious Korach was a member), next to whom they camped. In Rashi's words:

Woe is to the wicked and woe is to his neighbor. This is why Dasan, Aviram and two hundred and fifty others (of the tribe of Reuven) were smitten along with Korach and his band: they were drawn with them into the dispute.

The Midrash makes a similar observation, saying, “Woe to the wicked, and woe to his neighbors!... Korach’s neighbors in the south were lost along with him in his rebellion.”⁷ But unlike Rashi, who emphasizes that many Reuvenites *joined* Korach’s rebellion, the Midrash implies that they were merely punished alongside him. In other words, according to the Midrash, the effects of a wicked neighbor are definite but limited. An evil person could cause his innocent neighbor

7. Tanchuma, Bamidbar 12.

to be punished alongside him by association, or at most to be dragged along to participate in his criminal acts, but he does not necessarily cause the innocent neighbor to become an evil person himself.

Concerning a good neighbor, however, even the Midrash agrees that the benefits are more than incidental. As our Sages taught, “any quality is more powerful when it is used for good than when it is used for evil.”⁸ Thus, the Midrash observes that “Moshe, along with Aharon and his sons, encamped in the east, and next to them were Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun. On this basis it was said: ‘How fortunate is the righteous, and how fortunate are his neighbors!’ This refers to these three tribes, who were adjacent to Moshe and Aharon, and who became great in Torah.” These tribes were impacted by their close proximity to the righteous in a meaningful and life-altering way; in the words of the Midrash, the tribes of Yehudah, Yissachar and Zevulun themselves “became great in Torah.”

— *Likkutei Sichos, vol. 33, pp. 10-15*

8. Sotah 11a.

 4:5-6 | ו-ה:ד

וּבֹא אֶהְרֹן וּבָנָיו בְּנִסְעַת הַמִּחֲנֶה וְהוֹרְדוּ
 אֶת פְּרֻכַת הַמָּסָךְ וְכִסּוּ בָהּ אֶת אֲרֹן הָעֵדוּת:
 וְנָתְנוּ עָלָיו כֶּסוּי עוֹר תַּחֲשׁוּ וּפְרָשׁוּ בְּגָד
 כְּלִיל תְּכֵלֶת מִלְמַעְלָה

*When the camp is about to travel,
 Aharon and his sons shall come and take down
 the dividing curtain, and they shall cover the Ark of
 the Testimony with it. They shall place upon it a
 covering of tachash skin, and on top of that they shall
 spread a cloth of pure blue wool.*

Hide and Go

One of the tasks of the Kohanim was to prepare the vessels of the Mishkan for travel by covering them with specially designated covers and sacks. The Aron, says the Torah, was wrapped in three distinct coverings. First, they draped the *paroches* (the dividing curtain that hung before the Kodesh Hakodashim) over it. Over that, they placed a covering of *tachash* skin. Lastly, the Aron and all its coverings were placed in a blue woolen sack.

Like the Aron in transit, the holy soul imbued in every Jew—“a veritable part of G-d Above”⁹—is subjected in this world to numerous layers of concealment and suppression. The soul strives to live an exclusively G-dly life, yet its physical body has a never ending list of needs and demands that must be met. In addition, the G-dly soul is competing against the

9. Tanya, chapter 2.

“animal soul”—our natural tendencies based on ego and lust. If that weren’t enough, the Jew is surrounded by unholy outside influences that obscure his perspective of right and wrong, placing yet another obstacle in the way of his G-dly soul’s goal.

Considering all the disadvantages that the G-dly soul faces, one begins to wonder: what purpose is there to this virtually impossible task?

The Torah answers this question with its description of how the Aron traveled. When Bnei Yisrael camped, the Aron stood in the Mishkan in all its glory. Yet no less than three coverings concealed it when it was time to *travel*, to advance and ascend toward its ultimate home in the Promised Land. Similarly, the blockages that our G-dly souls encounter are actually opportunities for us to climb and soar in our union with G-d. As such, we must never despair over our challenges, but instead view them as a way to attain an even greater degree of G-dliness than we have ever enjoyed before.

—*Likkutei Sichos, vol. 8, pp. 18–20*



לעילוי נשמת
ר' אהרן בן ר' יעקב ע"ה
לאסקי

אוד מוצל מאש
מוקיר התורה ולומדיה
נלב"ע בשיבה טובה
כ"ט אייר
ער"ח סיון ה'תשס"ח
תנצב"ה

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