

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Chana Necha bas Yakov.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR

Making it Count

And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the desert of Sinai [...] saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of Bnei Yisroel..." (1:1-2)

The fourth book of the Chumash, known as *Sefer Bamidbar* (literally, book of being "in the desert"), opens with Hashem asking Moshe to undertake a comprehensive counting of the Jewish people. Our sages, therefore, refer to it as "The Book of Counting" (see *Mishna Yoma* 68b and Rashi ad loc). In fact, even in English we don't translate it literally (i.e. "In the Desert"), rather the fourth book of the Torah has come to be known as "Numbers."

This is odd for a number of reasons; first, what is so significant about this counting that the event has come to define the entire *sefer*? In other words, *Sefer Bamidbar* spans a period of forty years, how is it that an event that took place at the beginning of the forty years comes to define the entire volume?

Second, the whole concept of a census seems problematic. We have a steadfast rule regarding quantifying objects: Rabbi Yitzchak said, "We only find blessings by things that are concealed from the eye" (See *Baba Metzia* 42a and Rashi ad loc). Once objects become quantified they are no longer subject to specific blessings from Hashem (this is very different from the secular philosophy of "count your blessings"). The Zohar (*Bamidbar* 117b) ask, if this is true, then why does Hashem want us to take a census?

Furthermore, why are things that have been counted no longer subject to blessings from above?

We find a very interesting principle of Jewish law: If someone loses money, the rule is "finders keepers." This is not true by other possessions – only for money. The Talmud (*Baba Metzia* 21b) explains the reason for this as "a person is always checking his pocket (and making sure that his money is there)." Therefore, if someone finds money, one can assume that the person who lost the money is aware of his loss and has given up hope of ever getting it back, thereby relinquishing his ownership. However, what is behind the psychology of a person always checking on his money?

Most assets that a person owns have already been actualized to some kind of use (jewelry, cars, art, etc.); they have intrinsic value and therefore add some measure of pleasure to the owner. By their very nature, a person has a sense of ownership over these objects; they are his to enjoy. On the other hand, money and monetary instruments (e.g. stocks, etc.) are merely tools to acquire what he wants. Money has no intrinsic value as an object; its only value lies in its potential. This makes it hard to feel like you have anything. The reason a person is constantly checking on his wallet (or stock portfolio for that matter) is to feel connected and a sense of ownership.

The very act of quantifying something is to count what **you** have. Once a person has done that, the object leaves the domain of God's blessing and enters the domain of the owner; it is therefore no



longer subject to a blessing from Hashem. The only exception to this universal rule is when Hashem Himself wants to make an accounting. Rashi (1:1) explains that Hashem counts the Jewish people as an expression of His deep love for us. By counting us, Hashem is showing His desire to be connected to us. It is fascinating to note that the word that Rashi uses for love is "*chiba*," which is derived from the word "*chav* – responsibility."

In other words, true love is taking responsibility for the object of your affection. A true love relationship requires you to be a giver. This means making sure your beloved is well taken care of (obviously, the other party has to respond in kind for it to be a relationship and not some kind of self-sacrificing martyrdom).

This is why our sages chose the name the "Book of Counting" for the desert experience. This fourth volume of the Torah is replete with story after story of Hashem's steadfast love and support for the Jewish people throughout the sometimes tumultuous experience of forty years in the desert. By counting us at the beginning of this experience, Hashem is telling us that he will take care of us – because he loves us.

Patrilineal Descent?

These are the children of Aharon and Moshe [...] And these are the names of the sons of Aaron; Nadav the firstborn, and Avihu, Eleazar, and Itamar (3:1-2).

Rashi (as loc) points out a rather glaring inconsistency in the verses; although the Torah explicitly mentioned that it was about to list the children of both Aharon and Moshe, the Torah only records the names of Aharon's children. Rashi goes on to explain that from here the Talmud derives the axiom; "whoever teaches Torah to his friend's child, it is considered as if he gave birth to them" (*Sanhedrin* 19b).

This principle needs clarification. What does it mean that if you teach someone Torah it is as if you gave birth to him? Chazal don't exaggerate or take poetic license; perhaps you taught them some information or gave them some life skills, but how is this akin to giving birth to someone? Additionally, Moshe taught Torah to all of Bnei Yisroel; why are the children of Aharon singled out? This principle should apply to anyone who was at Mount Sinai.

The next Rashi on the verse provides us

with a clue: *On the day Hashem spoke to Moshe* (3:1), this teaches us that "they became his children because he taught them what he had heard from the mouth of the Almighty" (Rashi ad loc). Why does Rashi essentially repeat what he already told us in his previous comment?

Rashi is bothered by the words "*on that day.*" What specific day is being referred to? If we look at the last verse in next week's *parsha*, we find a very interesting concept: Hashem communicated to Moshe by talking to himself and Moshe merely listened. This seems a little odd; throughout the Torah we find that Hashem spoke directly to Moshe. What is being added here?

The answer is that Moshe heard Hashem studying Torah aloud. Hashem wasn't giving a speech for Moshe to listen to. Hashem was teaching Moshe how to analyze the Torah through His studying it aloud.

This is what Moshe taught the children of Aharon. He didn't merely give them information on what they should and should not do. Moshe taught them the skills in the analysis of Torah. These skills allow one to have insights into the Torah that are wholly their own. In other words, this skill allows one to create one's own Torah. This transforms the Torah from merely being information to being a tool from which one is able to transform one's self through the study of Torah.

What happens when a person is born? A person achieves a separate identity from his parents. While inside the mother, there is a shared identity. Once born a person has an independence and separate life mission. This is what Moshe achieved by giving the sons of Aharon the skills of Torah analysis. They now had their own individual portion within the Torah – their own identity and that it is why Moshe is credited in giving birth to them.

Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, we talk about the *shevatim*, their camp setup, and some of their processes and procedure for moving throughout the desert. Interestingly, the Well of Miriam, aside from providing Bnei Yisroel with vital water, actually played a role in the organization and placement of the camp as Bnei Yisroel moved through the desert.

So, our crack team of *Did You Know* researchers explored what is known about Miriam's well and compiled a list of facts:

1. The well would halt at the site where the Mishkan was to be set up, exactly at the entrance to the courtyard, near the tent of Moshe, so that when, subsequently, the twelve pillars of the Mishkan were set up, they would be situated around the well (*Me'em Lo'ez Bamidbar* 20).
2. With the onset of the song of the Leviim - as described in *Parshas Chukas* (21:17) - the

water in the well would rise. It then formed a number of streams. One of these would branch off to flow inward to the four corners of the Mishkan enclosure, and outward to the terminal points of the whole camp (*ibid*). Others branched off into the direction of the other *shevatim*, until a stream encircled each tribe. As a result, each *shevet* knew the boundaries of its territory (*ibid*).

3. Moreover, these streams didn't contain only water. They were filled with every delicacy of Gan Eden (*Yalkut Shemoni*, end of *Pekudei*).
4. It seems from a Medrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 22) that this well could cure diseases.
5. Interestingly, the Gemara (*Shabbos* 35a) actually names the location of the well. It says it's in the Mediterranean Sea, and if you go to the top of Mt. Carmel, you can see the circle shaped rock. *Vayikra Rabbah* (22) says it was Mt. Yeshimon, and in the Kineret. It's important to note that this

large rock is probably floating in the Mediterranean sea (because if it reaches the bottom it'd be around 3,000 feet tall) or just normal in the Kineret, as it's depth is around 85 feet.

6. There is a famous story brought down in *Nagid U'metzaveh* by R' Yaakov Tzemach (written about sixty years after the Arizal's death), that the Arizal took his most famous student, R' Chaim Vital, on a boat out on the Kineret, and using landmarks on the shore, located the Well of Miriam. He then lowered a cup into the depths for R' Chaim to drink in order for him to be able to study the hidden Kabbalistic secrets of the Torah.
7. Rashi (*Chukas* 21:16) says that to show Bnei Yisroel the miracle that Hashem performed (killing the armies that were going to ambush them) the well brought up all of the dead bodies so that everyone would see and know what Hashem did for Bnei Yisroel.



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