

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Bamidbar for your Shabbos Table

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Everyone Counts

Parshas Bamidbar begins with the census that was taken of *Benei Yisrael* at Mount Sinai. The Ramban (1:45) addresses the question as to the need to know the number of people in the nation. Why was it important to count all the members of *Benei Yisrael*?

The Ramban first suggests that the census might have been required להודיעם חסדו עליהם, כי בשבעים נפש ירדו אבותיהם – to show God's kindness, turning the family of seventy people into a large nation. *Benei Yisrael* were counted so that they would appreciate the fact that they grew into such a large multitude from humble beginnings.

But the Ramban then presents a second answer:

הבא לפני אב הנביאים ואחיו קדוש ה', והוא נודע אליהם בשמו, יהיה לו בדבר הזה זכות וחיים, כי בא בסוד העם ובכתב בני ישראל...לכולם זכות במספר שימנו לפני משה ואהרן, כי ישימו עליהם עינים לטובה, יבקשו עליהם רחמים...

The Ramban explains that there was immense benefit for every member of the nation to come before Moshe and Aharon, tell them his name, and receive their blessing. By coming before Moshe and Aharon to be counted, the person sensed that בא בסוד העם ובכתב בני ישראל, he is an important member of the nation. Moshe and Aharon looked upon him and gave him a blessing, conveying the critical message that he counts, that he matters, that he's important, that he can make a difference and have an impact.

Hashem could have very easily just told Moshe the number of people in the nation. But the goal wasn't this information – the goal was the process, the exercise of each person coming before Moshe and Aharon and being told that he counts, that he is an indispensable part of *Am Yisrael*.

Rav Shlomo Wolbe suggests that this might be the

reason why Parshas Bamidbar is always read on the Shabbos before Shavuos. Before we can receive the Torah, we must recognize our value and worth, that we matter, that we have something to accomplish. It is only when we understand that we count, that we are needed, that we have an important contribution to make as part of *Am Yisrael*, that we can accept the Torah and take on our mission.

The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos tells that when Moshe Rabbeinu ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, the angels in the heavens tried to interfere, arguing that the Torah should not be given to mortals. Hashem instructed Moshe to respond to the angels and explain to them why *Benei Yisrael* deserved the Torah. Rav Yechezkel Weinfeld *shelita* notes that although it was Hashem's decision to give us the Torah, He wanted Moshe to refute the angels' arguments. We would have expected that Hashem, who was giving the Torah to *Am Yisrael*, would be the one to explain why He felt they were deserving of the Torah. But instead, He specifically told Moshe to respond to the angels. The reason, Rav Weinfeld explains, is because we need to confidently believe that we deserve the Torah in order to receive it. We must believe that we count, that we have potential, that we have the ability to study and practice the Torah and live according to its precepts. This is a critical prerequisite for accepting the Torah. Therefore, it was Moshe, and not God, who had to respond to the angels and clearly explain why we are worthy of receiving the Torah.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

A Leader's Primary Responsibility

The Gemara in Maseches Sota (13b) comments that when Moshe Rabbeinu passed away, a בת קול (heavenly voice) announced throughout the entire camp, וימת משה, "Moshe, the great scribe of Israel, died!" – ספרא רבא דישראל

The Maharsha brings two explanations for why Moshe Rabbeinu is referred to here as ספרא. One is that Moshe was the first סופר, the first scribe, as he wrote the first *Sefer Torah*. Hashem dictated the text, and Moshe wrote the words on parchment, producing the first *Sefer Torah*, and thus becoming the first סופר.

The second explanation brought by the Maharsha is that the word ספרא here means not “scribe,” but rather “counter.” Moshe was called the ספרא רבה דישראל because he conducted two censuses, counting *Benei Yisrael* both at Mount Sinai, as we read here in Parshas Bamidbar, and a second time toward the end of his life, in *Arvos Moav*, as we read in Parshas Pinchas.

Why would this role – counting the people – be considered such a significant achievement that this is how Moshe is called when his death is announced?

Perhaps the Gemara here is teaching us that a leader’s most important responsibility is to “count” every one of his constituents, to make each and every one of them recognize that he matters, that he is needed. Moshe, of course, was singularly great in many different respects. He was the prophet who perceived God more clearly than any other prophet. He received the Torah from God, and masterfully taught it to us. He was unparalleled in his devotion to the people, intervening on their behalf with endless self-sacrifice. He was the humblest of all men. But his most important quality was that he was ספרא רבה, he ensured that each and every person appreciated his own value and worth. He made it clear that everyone counted.

The renowned educator Rabbi Daniel Kalish recently remarked that he once had a conversation with a certain prominent *rav*, who proudly spoke about the numerous talks he had given to teens. In just the past year, this *rav* said, he spoke to some 3,000 teenagers.

Recalling this conversation, Rabbi Kalish remarked, “I would have been much more impressed if he would have said that he had **listened** to 3,000 teenagers. Young people need to be listened to, to feel that they are heard, much more than they need to be spoken to.”

The most important job of an educator is to be a ספרא רבה, to make it clear to his charges that each and every of them counts, and this requires patiently and respectfully listening to them, allowing them to be heard, and letting them know that they are important.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

עשה את שלך – Putting in the Effort

The tribe of Levi was counted separately from the rest of the nation, and, whereas the rest of *Benei Yisrael* were counted from the age of twenty, the *Leviyim* were counted from the age of one month.

The Midrash, cited by Rashi (3:16), noted the logistical problem that this posed. Moshe turned to God and asked, “How am I supposed to go into all their homes, and into all their tents, to know the number of their infants?” If even the young children were being counted, this meant that Moshe needed to go into every home to check how many children were there. Clearly, this was not practical.

The Midrash tells that Hashem replied to Moshe, עשה את שלך ואני אעשה את שלי – “You do yours, and I’ll do Mine.” Moshe went to every Levite home, stood outside the door, and a voice from heaven announced to Moshe how many children were in the home. The Midrash explains on this basis why the Torah says that Moshe counted the *Leviyim* ‘על פי ה’ – “by the word of God.” Quite literally, the Midrash states, this counting was done by God’s words, as God told Moshe the number of children in each family in the tribe of Levi.

Rav Yisrael Meir Druk raises the question of why it was necessary for Moshe to go to each tent. If he in any event needed God to tell him how many young *Leviyim* lived in each tent, so why didn’t he just stay home and receive the information there? What purpose was served by going to each home?

Rav Druk explained that the Midrash here is teaching us about the importance of *hishtadlus*, of taking initiative and investing effort. Of course, we believe that our successes and achievements depend solely on Hashem, that nothing we do could ever succeed without His assistance. Nevertheless, Hashem created the world in such a way that we need to put in the work. Our *parnasa* is in His hands, but we cannot spend our days lying on the couch and expect Hashem to take care of our bills. Whatever it is that we need to get done, we must invest as much effort as we can, and trust that Hashem will fill in the blanks, that He will step in to do what we are incapable of doing. As the famous Mishna in *Avos* (2:16) teaches us, ולא לא עליך המלאכה לגמור, ואתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה – “You are not obliged to complete the work, but neither are you free to refrain from it.” We have to do our best, and then rely on Hashem for the rest.

The Midrash relates that when Pharaoh’s daughter saw a basket with an infant floating in the river, she couldn’t reach it. She extended her arm, and then a miracle occurred, and her arm grew long enough to take the basket. This description aptly captures the message of *hishtadlus*. Our “arms” aren’t always going to be “long” enough to achieve all that we want to achieve. But this does not mean that we shouldn’t try. We must extend our “arm” as far as it can go, put in the work and effort, and ask that Hashem step in to extend our “arm” even further so we can reach our goals.