

Bamidbar 5776

June 10, 2016

A Taste of Torah

It's the Relationship that Counts

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

Joseph Stalin, one of the greatest butchers in human history, once commented, "One death is a tragedy; one million is a statistic." He ought to know. But his words ring true even today, as people fret, scream and agonize over an animal killed to save a child's life but pay little attention to the unspeakable suffering and needless deaths of countless humans throughout the world. Emotionally, people tend to react strongly to the experience of an individual with whom they can identify rather than to the destruction of faceless masses.

Let's see what the Torah teaches us about relating to multitudes of people.

This week marks the start of Sefer Bamidbar, also known as *Sefer Hapekudim*, or, in English, the Book of Numbers. This title is given due to the Divine order to count the Jewish People at the outset of the book. Rashi (Bamidbar 1:1) points out that the Jewish People are counted numerous times in the Torah. He explains that because Hashem loves the Jewish People so dearly, He constantly has them counted. Here, says Rashi, one month after the erection of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) had just begun to reside among Bnai Yisrael, and so Hashem wanted them counted again.

While we can understand that counting something shows its importance, there are many other ways to show affection and love. Why is a census the method employed by Hashem to show His affection for His People?

The Akeidas Yitzchak (Rabbi Yitzchak ben Moshe Arama; c. 1420 - 1494) explains that when something requires completion and perfection, each part of the item is vital. The fact that every piece is tallied is not merely a means

of displaying its importance; each part must be accounted for to ensure the perfection of the item in its entirety. The careful calculation is thus a sign of even the most minute section of the item.

Furthermore, continues the Akeidas Yitzchak, by counting every member of Bnai Yisrael, every Jew is given a status as a unique, important individual, instead of just being a part of the whole. The Jewish People were charged with being "a kingdom of priests" (Shemos 19:6), and the elevation to that station was facilitated by being counted, one by one.

I believe we can take the insight of the Akeidas Yitzchak a step further with the words of the Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto; 1707-1746) in his *Sefer Ha'Ikarrim*, where he explains that while Hashem created the world with both animals and humans, His oversight on members of the Animal Kingdom is merely to ensure survival of the species; He does not create any relationship with the individual animals. (This is true for inanimate objects and plant life, as well.) When He created Adam, it was with the intent that He take care of every single person based on his or her needs; Adam was to have a personal relationship with His Creator.

The counting commanded by Hashem is thus the realization of His plan for humanity; that every single individual is important, no matter how many people there are. Even one person missing ruins the entirety of the Jewish People.

This also explains why Hashem wanted the Jewish People counted specifically as He rested His *Shechina* in the *Mishkan*. The connection Hashem wished to create with Bnai Yisrael was not one of a King dealing with the needs of a populace, but that of building a unique relationship with every single Jew. The

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Stories For The Soul

Everyone Counts

Rabbi Aharon Kotler (1891-1962) fled Europe for Kobe, Japan in the early years of World War II. On April 10th, 1941, two days before Passover, he and his family docked in San Francisco. He arrived via train at Penn Station on April 21st.

Many people came to greet this Torah giant at Penn Station. He spoke immediately and informed the audience that he had left students in three different places; in Kobe, Japan; in Shanghai, China; and also in Siberia. "I did not come to this country to save myself," he declared. "I came so that, with your help, we could save our brethren and the centers of Torah learning. Only you, the Jews of America, are able to help them. Do it now; save them!"

Rav Aharon immediately threw himself into rescue work, becoming the president of the Vaad Hatzalah, an umbrella group of Orthodox groups working to save Jews from the inferno that was Europe.

Rav Aharon would work with anyone who could provide assistance in getting Jews out of Europe. (There is, in fact, a story of him using the services of an organized crime boss to get Jews out of Europe and into America!) This included leaders of other streams of Jews, even those who vehemently denied the basic tenets of Judaism. At one point, he was criticized for working together with the leader of one such movement. Rav Aharon responded forcefully, "I would work with the Pope himself if it would save even the fingernail of one Jewish child!"

In this week's parsha, Hashem commands Moshe to count the Jewish People. Rashi comments that because of Hashem's great love for the Jewish People, He constantly counts them - because every single Jew is precious in His eyes.

Kollel Happenings

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: When Yom Tov is on Motzoei Shabbos, we insert a *Havdalah* formula into our prayers, beginning “*Vatodi’enu*.” Aside from the difference in wording from the usual Motzoei Shabbos prayer inserted into *Shemone Esrei*, “*Ata Chonantanu*,” what is unique about the Yom Tov variation?

A: The Gemara (Pesachim 103b) teaches

that all *Havdalah* formulas must contain between three and seven examples of *havdalos*, or separations. Tosafos (ibid. 104a) explain that due to the special occasion (Yom Tov), we deviate from the usual and list seven, the maximum allowed.

This week's question: What shape were the *Luchos* (Tablets) given at Mt. Sinai?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rambam Part IV

The Rambam and his family stayed in Eretz Yisrael for a short time, departing for Egypt in 1166 for unknown reasons. During their stay in Eretz Yisrael, they were treated like royalty. The Jewish community of Acco (Acre), the largest in Eretz Yisrael at the time, begged them to stay, to no avail.

The Rambam and his family settled in Fostat, Egypt, which had a large Jewish community.

The Torah forbids Jews from returning to Egypt. Though there are numerous halachic opinions regarding under what conditions this prohibition applies, it is said that the Rambam would sign his letters, “Moshe ben Maimon, who every day violates three negative commandments of the Torah”

(referring to the three times the Torah forbids seeing or returning to Egypt). There is much skepticism regarding this legend, as no letters from the Rambam still in existence bear those words. Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) and others state that the entire story is false.

The Rambam had a brother, Dovid, who was a merchant, and the Rambam would invest with him. The profits supported the Rambam and his family, allowing the Rambam to devote his time to Torah study.

This arrangement continued after the Maimon family settled in Fostat. However, great changes were on the horizon for the Rambam.

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census was intended to make His plan a reality.

As we stand on the cusp of the holiday of Shavuot, when we relive the Giving of the Torah, it is worthwhile to note that this occurred at Mt. Sinai, as well. Our Sages comment that when the Torah describes the arrival of Bnai Yisrael at Sinai, it refers to them in the singular, for they camped at the mountain “as one man, with one heart.” This stupendous achievement, the total unity of the Jewish People, was not merely a nice perk as they readied themselves to

receive the Torah; it was a prerequisite. Even one person missing from the totality of the Jewish People would have rendered them undeserving and unable to receive the Torah. Every single person is imperative, significant and vital to the totality of the Jewish Nation, and even one missing is a tragedy for all of us. As we prepare for Shavuot, let's take a few moments to recognize that no matter how numerous we may be, no one should be relegated or reduced to a mere statistic.

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