

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON PARSHAS BAMIDBAR - 5757

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drasha@torah.org COUNTED OUT -- DRASHA PARSHAS BAMIDBAR
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The Book of Numbers begins just that way - with many numbers. It counts the Jews who were in the desert and assigns unique divisions for each of the tribes. Every tribe has its own flag and position among the great camp of Israel. They are strategically placed around the Mishkan, and grouped accordingly. This division is somewhat troubling. Why isn't there a concept of a great melting pot under one flag? Moreover, the singling out of the tribe of Levi raises more questions. "Bring the tribe of Levi close and have them stand before Ahron and they shall serve him (Leviticus 3:6). The Torah relates the specific tasks of the descendants of Levi and also warns the stranger, the ordinary Israelite, against attempting to join in those tasks. Why is there further division in the ranks of Jews? Why can't the Israelite do the task of the Kohen, and the Kohen the task of the Levi, and the Levi the task of the Israelite?

The great Arturo Toscanini was conducting Beethoven's Symphony #3 back in the late 1930s with the NBC Symphony orchestra. The outdoor concert was held at City University's Lewisson Stadium and was well attended. The famed trumpeter, Harry Glanz, was going to play the offstage trumpet, an integral part of the production of this piece.

People had flocked to hear the great trumpeter under the baton of the even more accomplished Toscanini. Glanz positioned himself in a corner about 50 feet behind the stage ready to blast his notes upon cue. As the recital led up to that moment Toscanini held his baton high, waiting to hear the sharp blasts of Glanz's horn. They never came. All he saw was a burly security guard wrestling with the hapless musician on the grass behind the stage.

The guard was pointing to the stage. "You fool!" he was shouting, "what do you think you're doing blowing that horn back here? Don't you see there's a concert going on up there?"

Not everybody who wants to can be up on the stage. In the concert of the Almighty, every player has his designated position that makes the symphony much more beautiful. I have a friend who travels the United States and stops for minyanim all across the country. "Often," he exclaims, "when they ask, 'Is there a Kohen in the house?' I have the urge to go up there and pretend that I am a Kohen. I always wanted to know what it's like being called up first!"

Fortunately, he, like most of us, understands that every person in the nation of Israel, whether man or woman has a unique role to play. Sometimes roles are played from the inside, sometimes from the outside, nevertheless, the offstage trumpeters are just as vital as the onstage ones. And if we rush the stage to perform out of sync, we can ruin the beautiful harmony of a carefully orchestrated concert.

The Israelite has the mitzvos that the Kohen cannot perform. He may visit the dying and assist in the burial of any deceased. It is the Israelite who gives the tithes and supports the poor. The Kohen and Levi inherit no land from which they could perform myriad commandments. True, the Israelite cannot serve in the Temple, but his trumpeting may resound as loud as his brother's. As long as he plays it in the right position. Good Shabbos

Dedicated by Bernard and Tova Fuchs in memory of Chana Mindel Fuchs Mordechai Kamenetzky - Yeshiva of South Shore

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Congregation House of Jacob-Mikveh Israel 1613 92nd Ave. SW Calgary, AB, T2V 5C9 Dvar Torah: Bamidbar-Shavuot 5757 Rabbi Moshe Shulman
BANNERS: JUDAISM WITH PRIDE

"Hashem spoke to Moses and Aaron saying: Each man according to his banner and sign, according to one's father's house, shall Israel camp, the camp surrounding the Tent of Meeting." (Num. 2:1-2)

The entire camp of Israel organized by banners, or flags: the banner of Judah in the east, of Shimon in the south, Dan in the north, and Ephraim in the west. In the middle - the camp of the Levites, and in the centre of it all - the Tabernacle, the Torah, the prophecy, the spiritual locus of the people.

Just imagine what it must have been like to live with such a structure and order: each tribe knowing its place, its role, its relationship to the others, its responsibilities in protecting the people. Most importantly, every tribe, every family, every person was centered around the Mishkan, drawing strength from it, protecting the Torah, living by the Torah. Truly a beautiful sight.

It was this beautiful sight that the wicked Bilam saw when he praised the people "How goodly are thy tents O Jacob, thy dwelling places O Israel."

The Midrash describes this beauty, symbolized through the banners, "Each man according to his flag," "Ish Al diglo"

"G'd loved the people with a special love, therefore He gave them banners - like the ministering angels, so that they should be distinguished!" (BM"R 2:3)

In explanation, our Sages tell us that when our forefathers stood at Mount Sinai, as we celebrate on Shavuot, 22,000 ministering angels descended upon them, organized into ranks by banners and flags, to which our people responded in envy: ha'levai kach anu na'asim degalim ke'motam, "Would that we too could have such banners". And the Almighty responded: "Each man according to his banner, Ish al diglo". The Almighty saw their sincere desire for these banners, and instructed Moses accordingly.

These are very beautiful words, even poetic, but very strange! At the foot of Mount Sinai the Jewish people accepted the Torah. And in addition they yearned for the "banners" held by the ministering angels? Banners - to be distinguished? Why do the angels need banners? And why to be distinguished? What was so beautiful about Israel's desire to be so "structured"?

What does it all mean?

Angels are beings which have one purpose and one purpose only: to do G'd's bidding, to carry out His decree, administer His will. They are the "army" of the Almighty. Unlike human beings, they lack choice, they lack doubt, they lack temptation. Their banner, their identity card, is the singular purpose of doing G-d's Will. Their very existence is a testimony to their absolute loyalty to the Almighty. Their banner of loyalty to their Master/Creator knows no defeat, can never be raised to HALF MAST! It flies high and it flies forever.

When we stood at Mount Sinai we accepted the Torah unconditionally. We too yearned to express our undying devotion and loyalty to the Almighty. We too yearned to be able to accept and live by the Torah without temptation, without distraction, with that same clarity of purpose and unwavering loyalty as the angels themselves. We saw their model, and we yearned for that same banner, the banner of commitment to Torah, so that we too could raise our banners above all else.

What a lofty goal. What a beautiful expression of pride in Torah! Oh yes,

The Almighty responded: "Give them the banners. But understand," He said, "that you are not the angels. You live in a real world with real distractions, and real temptations. Keeping the banner of Torah flying high for you is not quite as easy as it is for the angels. You need something to anchor that banner, so that it never fall!"

Surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they camp," "Saviv le'ohel mo'ed yachanu." Your banner must be encamped around the Tabernacle, drawing its stability and its strength from the study of the Torah which emanates from that structure. That's the key. As long as our lives revolve around the Sanctuary, around the Torah, its values, its Mitzvot, then our banner shall remain aloft.

We live in that world of temptation and distraction. We live in a world which constantly tries to bring down our banner, and raise up its own in its stead. We live in that world in which for one to raise the banner of Torah true Judaism one has to have the strength to go against the tide, against the peer-pressure, to be the one to stand out and say: I believe in Torah, and I am proud of it!

All too often we end up burying our heads in the sand, embarrassed by our Judaism. We often apologise for who and what we are: "I'm sorry I can't be more accommodating, you see I'm Jewish, and I have a Torah, and I really am sorry that it doesn't comply with what you expect of me."

What's even worse is that we often apologise, not to the world, but to ourselves, and our fellow Jews! We apologise for being Orthodox, for maintaining standards in which we believe, but which may be uncomfortable for others.

In the davening every morning we say a prayer that G'd should protect us from this pitfall:

"Open our eyes to your Torah, and our hearts to your Commandments, unify our hearts to love and fear your name, and may we never know shame or embarrassment or failure because of this - forever!"

We should never be ashamed of our Judaism - on the contrary!

ðWE CAN NEVER APOLOGISE FOR WHO AND WHAT WE ARE.

ðWe are proud of being Orthodox Jews. ðWe are proud of defending Torah true Judaism. ðWe are proud of embracing the world, yet anchoring it in the values and practices of a G'd given Torah.

We must understand that the banner of Judaism cannot be raised to half mast! With pride, with strength, and with joy we must stand up for our beliefs.

mj-ravtorah@shamash.org June 05, 1997 bamidbar.97 Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Parshas Bamidbar (Shiur date: 6/1/76)

The Ramban (1:45) asks what was the purpose in Moshe counting Bnay Yisrael at this time? The Ramban offers two explanations, The first is that the Torah constantly shows the kindness of Hashem in how He took a small group of 70 people and transformed them into a mighty nation. We must acknowledge and appreciate the Chasdei Hashem. The Ramban offers a second reason: it was important for each Jew to pass before Moshe and Aharon so that they should garner a Zechus Vchayim, merit and life, in that Moshe and Aharon would pray for them and they would be blessed and would continue to grow in population and strength without any negative aspects, as the Shekalim they were to give would act as the ransom, or Kofer, for them.

The Rav explained the Ramban: there are 2 purposes or goals associated with the act of counting. In the first case, one simply wishes to know the total amount of an item. For example, one wishes to know how much money he has in his pocket. He has no interest in the individual coins or bills, it is the desire or need to reach his goal, the knowledge of how much money he has, that spurs him to count. Another example is the counting of the Omer, where the ultimate goal of counting 50 days is to arrive at the fiftieth day when the Shtay Halechem were brought. The counting of each day, in and of itself, is not important. However it is necessary to count each day in order to arrive at the final goal.

The second type of counting is of a completely opposite nature: where one desires to savor each individual item that is counted. The ultimate goal is to recognize and appreciate each individual, and not to be concerned with the total number.

How was it possible for Moshe to know each individual? After all there were 600,000 men above the age of 20? How could he possibly know their families also! We can readily understand how Moshe was able to gather the elders of the people according to the command of Hashem, since they were a small number and they were the ones who helped him to lead the people from exile. But how could he know all the people?

When Bnay Yisrael made the golden calf, Hashem tells Moshe to go down because his people have sinned. Moshe responds "Lama Yecheh Apcha B'amecha", why should You become angry with Your nation. Moshe is saying that these are not his people because he does not know each and everyone personally. They are Hashem's people, as He knows each one. After the breaking of the first Luchos, Moshe was transformed from a Shaliach Lholacha, an agent of the sender, delivering a message from Hashem to His people, into the Rabban Shel Yisrael, teacher of Israel responsible for transmitting Torah Shbeal Peh, which was now separated from Torah Shebichtav. A simple messenger need not know each and every person who is the target of the message, it is sufficient that the sender of the message knows each one.

Now that Moshe became Rabban Shel Yisrael, he had to learn about the life of each of his students. A rebbe must know his students. After he has gotten to know each one individually, he will be familiar with each situation, and when the need should arise he will be in a position to more effectively pray for that person. Moshe could no longer say "Lama Yecheh Apcha B'amecha", they were now his people, each and every one of them, and he was responsible for their welfare and well being.

This is what the Ramban means when he says that each person would pass before Moshe, the Adon Haneviim, and Aharon. They counted the people by going from house to house, and in the process learning about each family, how they lived, their problems and their joys. For the leader must know all his people. The Gemara (Berachos 28a) notes this as well, when it describes the rebuke given to Rabban Gamliel who expressed shock upon seeing the squalid living conditions of Rabbi Yehoshua. As the leader of his generation, it was incumbent upon him to learn about the lives of his people and students. Only through this understanding of their needs, can Moshe and Aharon, and any other leader truly be capable of praying for and interceding on behalf of his people.

[Last year's] Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT"L on Parshas Bamidbar

The Gemara in Megilla (31b) states that Ezra established the practice of reading from the Torah the Berachos and Kelallos from Toras Kohanim (Parshas Bechukosay) before Shavuot and the Berachos and Kelallos from Sefer Devarim (Parshas Ki Tavo) prior to Rosh Hashana. Tosfos in Megilla asks that our custom is to read Bamidbar prior to Shavuot and Parshas Nitzavim prior to Rosh Hashana, which contradicts the custom mentioned in the Gemara. Tosfos answers that Chazal wanted to place some distance between the festive atmosphere of Yom Tov and the Tochacha, hence they put a gap of a week between them.

The Rav noted that the Berachos and Kelallos of Ki Tavo really conclude in the following Parsha, Parshas Nitzavim. The Kelallos in both Toras Kohanim and Devarim conclude with words of consolation. In Toras Kohanim, both the Kelallos and the Nechama are contained within Parshas Bechukosay. In Mishne Torah, the enumeration of the Kelallos continues in Parshas Nitzavim and the Tochacha concludes with the promise that Bnay Yisrael will return to Hashem after they have suffered through the exile described in Ki Tavo-Nitzavim. Since the reading of Parshas Nitzavim precedes Rosh Hashana, the statement in the Gemara regarding the reading of the Berachos and Kelallos in Mishne Torah is readily understood.

The Rav clarified the connection between Bamidbar and Shavuot. Apparently there is some aspect in Parshas Bamidbar that is relevant to the

holiday of Shavuot, and the receipt of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The central theme and halacha described in Bamidbar is the setup of the various camps and degrees of separation based on Kedusha. The various camps can be viewed as concentric circles with the Machane Shechina which included the Mishkan and the Holy of Holies at the center and the Machane Leviim surrounding the Mishkan and the Machane Yisrael surrounding the Machane Leviim.

The Rambam (Hilchos Beis Habechira 7:11) describes the 3 camps in the desert as the blueprint to be used when establishing the environment around the Beis Hamikdash, past and future (Uknegdan Ldoros). He mentions the Machane Shechina which includes the Mikdash and the Holy of Holies, Machane Leviya which includes the Temple mount area and the Machane Yisrael which includes the rest of the City of Jerusalem.

The Rav explained the Rambam as emphasizing the concept of Machane as it relates to Ldoros. Yerushalayim is not only a city like other cities, it also has the special status and Kedusha of Machane Yisrael, just like the Machane Yisrael had in the desert. The same is true for the Har Habayis as being a continuation of the Kedushas Machane Leviya and the Mikdash itself as the continuation of the Kedushas Machane Shechina. It is the aspect of Machane that defines and establishes the Kedusha of these 3 places. Without the perpetuity of the concept of Machane there would be no Kedushas Mikdash. The Rav derived this from the language used by the Rambam, for example the Rambam does not say that Yerushalayim has similar sanctification to that of Machane Yisrael in the desert. Instead he says that the Machane concept is perpetual.

The Rav explained the concept of perpetual Machane. The central Machane, Machane Shechina was the source of Kedusha which emanated to the surrounding Machanos. The Machane Leviya was closest to the Machane Shechina, hence its level of Kedusha was greater than Machane Yisrael, which was further removed. These virtual Machanos extended to the Beis Hamikdash. The Beis Hamikdash itself, including the Holy of Holies and the sanctuary, was the virtual Machane Shechina. The Har Habayis, including the courtyard of the Mikdash was the virtual Machane Leviya. Yerushalayim was the virtual Machane Yisrael. The Kedushas Yerushalayim derived from its role as a Machane in the context of Kedushas Mikdash, not because it was a city in Eretz Yisrael. In all cases the theme of Kedusha Machanos was that the closer the Machane was to the center, Hashraas Shechina, the greater its level of Kedusha.

This main focus of Parshas Bamidbar is the description of the various levels of Kedusha for the different Machanos. What is the connection of the Parsha to Shavuot? The Rav explained that Mount Sinai at the time of Kabbalas Hatorah had the status of Mikdash. It was the first Mikdash for Bnai Yisrael. There were 3 distinct levels of permission that applied to approaching Mount Sinai: at the center, on the top of the mountain, was Hashem and Moshe (Machane Shechina). The second Machane included Aharon and the 70 elders (Machane Leviya). The third Machane consisted of the rest of Bnai Yisrael who remained below, surrounding the mountain (Machane Yisrael). Before we can understand and appreciate Kabbalas Hatorah, we have to understand the concept of Kedushas Mikdash, that it consists of 3 Machanos or Mechitzos, where the members of each group were restricted from entering the next higher level Machane (level of Kedusha). That is why Hashem emphasized that Moshe should clearly demarcate the boundaries of the Mountain, to ensure that the people do not breach their Machane, their level of Kedusha. Parshas Bamidbar explains the various degrees of Kedushas Machanos and is therefore read before Shavuot.

The Rav added an additional connection between the Mikdash and the Kedushas Machanos. The Gemara raises the question if the Mishkan was taken apart in order to travel (i.e. there was no Mikdash extant while they traveled in the desert) how was the Kedusha of the Lechem Hapanim maintained (i.e. without a Mikdash how could there be Lechem Hapanim)? The Gemara answers that the Kedushas Mikdash remained in effect even though it was taken apart while they traveled. The entire entourage that included the 4 groups of Bnai Yisrael surrounding the Machane Leviya and the (disassembled) Machane Shechina retained their respective status of

Kedushas Machane. The Kedusha was not dependent on the Mikdash being stationary. This was different than the Kedushas Beis Hamikdash, which has a Kedushas Makom associated with a specific location.

This concept of a "transient Mikdash" with no fixed place described in Parshas Bamidbar has been fundamental to the ability of the Jew to survive in Galus for so many years without a functional Beis Hamikdash. Even though we no longer have the Kedushas Mechitza of a Beis Hamikdash that we can see and enter, the Jew has never lost the Mikdash from the standpoint of Kedushas Machane. The notion of a "traveling Beis Hamikdash", a Machane, has accompanied us from place to place throughout our history.

The Bris Avos obligated Bnai Yisrael to keep the Mitzvos of Hashem in return for being given Eretz Yisrael. The Bris at Mount Sinai was different in that it had no dependency on Eretz Yisrael. The Jew accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai to keep the Mitzvos of Hashem no matter where he may be. Hashem said to Bnai Yisrael that they shall be a kingdom of Priests and a holy nation for everything belongs to Hashem. The Kedushas Machane can be found anywhere the Jew may find himself: "Vatem Tihyu Li Mamleches Kohanim Vgoy Kadosh... Ki Li Kal Haaretz".

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* TORAH WEEKLY * Ohr Somayach
Zeide's Coat-Tails

"And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai" (1:1) The Janowska Road camp was just another way to kill Jews. The Nazis were building a road across Poland, but no one knew its primary purpose -- to finish off the road, or to finish off the Jews. At any rate, the latter purpose was certainly moving at a quicker pace. One night the Allies bombed the road. The emaciated Jews huddled in their bunks as hundreds of tons of TNT exploded all around them. Miraculously, the air-raid injured nobody. The road, however, was a different story. It looked more like the surface of the moon, with craters the size of pock-marks all the way up to a giant yawning abyss. The Nazis wanted to have a little 'fun.' Shouting and screaming, they ordered all the Jews out of the hut. In the freezing Polish winter, they made them run on the double in bare feet down to the road, to the biggest crater. "You Jews need some exercise! You pitiful specimens! One by one you will jump across this bomb crater. If you make it, you can go back to your beds; but if you fall into the crater, you will be machine-gunned to death before you can crawl out. I'm sure you'll agree that this should make for an interesting evening's entertainment." The stillness of the night was punctuated by the brittle crackle of machine-gun fire and the last cries of a holy Jew taking his leave of this world. In that silent queue of destiny, stood a giant of the soul -- the Bluzhever Rebbe, zatzal. And behind him, there was a young fellow who had lost his faith through the torment of war. The young man said to the Bluzhever "Why should we entertain these sadist pigs. When it's my turn, I'm not going to jump. Let them shoot me where I stand. I'm not going to entertain them. I'm not going to perform for them like a dog!" Quietly, the Bluzhever replied: "My friend. What a precious gift the Creator has given to us! We have been given the ultimate gift -- the gift of life. However, He gave it to us on a condition: That we should not send it back to Him. Rather, He Himself will come and take it back from us. "Every second of our life is precious. While it is still in our power to carry on living, we must hold on to life with all our might. If we jump and we make it to the other side, we will have honored the gift that He gave us. And if we jump and we fail, we will arrive in the next world just a few short seconds later than if we had

refused to jump." The moment of truth had arrived. The Bluzhever stood on the mouth of the abyss. Summoning what little strength was left in his frail body, he closed his eyes. It seemed to the young man that a smile came over the Bluzhever's angelic face -- as though he had recognized an old long-lost friend. The Bluzhever took a few steps back and then leapt into the darkness. The Bluzhever opened his eyes. He was on the other side. Seconds later, the young man landed next to him. "How did you possibly have the strength to make it across?" said the young man. "Just before I jumped," said the Bluzhever, "I saw a vision of my zeide. In front of him was his father and his zeide and all the holy Jews through the ages back to Moshe Rabbeinu, to Avraham Avinu. All those Jews who kept our holy Torah even when it cost them their lives. I saw my zeide jumping across the crater in front of me. I stretched out my hands and grabbed onto his coat-tails. And he pulled me across." The two remained in silence for some moments. Finally, the Bluzhever said. "May I ask you a question?" The young man nodded. "I understand how I made it across. But how did you manage to jump so far?" The young man paused before he replied. "I was hanging on to your coat-tails" he said.

From where does this power to hang on to the coat-tails of our forefathers come? The Torah was given in Fire, in Water, and in the Desert. Through Avraham Avinu we received the Torah in Fire. Avraham went through the fiery furnace of Ur Kasdim rather than deny Hashem. He is the father of the Jewish People. The progenitor. At the Reed Sea, the Jewish People as a nation passed an ordeal by Water. The Egyptians army was poised to drive them into the sea. At God's command the entire nation jumped into the water, and the sea parted. And if you'll say that this was merely a moment of bravado, then look at a third event that sealed their capacity for self-sacrifice: They followed Moshe into the vastness of the wilderness, without food, without water, with nothing more than the promise of miracle food from Above, and no more companionship than snakes and scorpions. It was these three ordeals, in Fire, in Water and in the Desert, which anchored in the spiritual genes of the Jewish People the capacity for self-sacrifice and the love of the Torah which, to this day, has allowed us to reach out and hang on to our holy Torah and our faith.

By hanging on to the coat-tails of our zeides. Midrash Rabbah; Rabbi Meir Shapiro in Mayana Shel Torah; Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

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* PARSHA Q&A * Ohr Somayach

Bonus QUESTION: "Take the Levites in place of every first-born amongst the Israelites.. And as for the redemption of the 273 first-born exceeding the amount of Levites. take five shekels per person. and give the money to Aharon and to his sons as redemption for those extra ones among them." (3:45-48) The above verse commands that each firstborn be redeemed in one of two ways: He must either be redeemed by means of a levi, or he must give five shekalim to a kohen. Later (Bamidbar 18:16) the Torah commands that the firstborn throughout the generations redeem themselves in only one way: By giving five shekalim to a kohen. Why did the Torah allow the first generation of levi'im to redeem the firstborn Israelites, whereas later generations of levi'im are not able to do so?

ANSWER: In that first generation, the firstborn were redeemed by transferring their holiness to the levi'im. Thereafter, that holiness was 'inherited' by the children of the levi'im. Since levi'im are 'born holy', they are not available to redeem future firstborn. (Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh)

I Did Not Know That! Every tribe had it's own flag, and each tribe's flag had a picture on it. Reuven's flag pictured a man and wild flowers (dudaim), Shimon's flag the city of Shechem, Levi's flag the breastplate of the Kohen Gadol, Yehuda's flag a lion, Yissachar's flag the sun and moon, Zevulun's a ship, Dan's a serpent, Naftali's a deer, Gad's an eagle, Asher's an olive tree, Efraim's an ox, Menashe's a r'eim (type of wild ox) and Binyamin's a wolf. Midrash Rabba, Ibn Ezra

The Draft Age 1:45 The Reason for Counting 2:2 The Organization of the Camp 3:14 The Levi'im 4:16 The Role of Elazar ben Aaron Ibn Ezra 1:19 Organization of the Camp Sforno Introduction to Bamidbar Written and Compiled by Rabbi Reuven Subar General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman Production Design: Lev Seltzer Ohr Somayach International

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM) PARASHAT BEMIDBAR SICHACH OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A NAME AND NUMBER

Summarized by Danny Orenbuch

"Count the heads of the entire congregation of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to the households, by the number of the names of all the males by their poll..." (Bemidbar 1:2) "Each person according to his flag, by the insignia of the households will Bnei Yisrael camp." (ibid. 2:2)

The census described here is not only by families and households, but also "by the number of the names" - each person is counted explicitly by name.

A person who lives in the midst of a large population, within a system where he is only a "brick in the wall," faces a twofold existential problem. Firstly, he feels at times that he is nothing more than a tiny component within a huge system, devoid of any uniqueness or individual character. At the same time, he is sometimes prone to feelings of frustration at his position in society, believing that the functions which he performs are not suited to him and do not lead him in the direction of his destiny.

In contrast to man is the angel, whose entire function in the world is a certain particular destiny and whose actions and destiny are by definition one and the same.

"At the time when God revealed Himself on Har Sinai, two hundred and twenty thousand angels accompanied Him, as it says (Tehillim 68:18): 'The chariots of God are twice ten thousand, thousands upon thousands,' and all were in formation with flags, as it is written, 'distinguished ('dagul' - literally, 'bearing a flag') among ten thousand' (Shir Ha-Shirim 5:10). When Israel saw how the angels were in formation with flags, they began to desire flags for themselves. They said, 'If only we were in flag formation like them....' God said to them, 'You desire flags' - immediately God announced them (the flags) to Israel, and said: 'Moshe, go and make them into flag formation as they desire.'" (Bemidbar Rabba 2:3)

What was it about the angels and the flags according to which they were arranged which so attracted Bnei Yisrael? They witnessed the wonderful unity of purpose and action which exists among the angels, and this is what they desired.

"Each person according to his flag, by insignia' - ...Bnei Yisrael were holy and glorious in their formation by tribal flags, and all the other nations looked at them in wonder: 'Who is this that is appearing?' (Shir

HaShirim 6:10). The nations of the world said to them, 'Return, return O Shulamit' (ibid. 7:1) - cleave to us, come to us and we will make you our rulers, leaders, dukes, governors..."

The nations of the world, as depicted in the above imagery from Shir Ha-Shirim, call out to Knesset Yisrael and invite them to become their rulers and dukes, but the People of Israel don't see this as their purpose and destiny, and don't believe that this is what will bring them ultimate happiness.

A person can be rich - a duke, a king - but nevertheless at times feel frustrated and despairing because he sees no ultimate purpose to his life. On the other hand, another person may be less rich but profoundly convinced that his sphere of activity allows him self-realization and achievement of his destiny.

Therefore God requires that the counting of Bnei Yisrael be conducted in all three ways: a numerical count in order to know the physical number of people; a count "by the number of names" - to know who each individual is, to learn about his essence and uniqueness; and a count of "each person according to his flag" - each in accordance with his role in society and his destiny within it.

(Originally delivered Leil Shabbat Parashat Bemidbar 5752. Translated by

Recommended Reading List Ramban Introduction to Bamidbar 1:3

Kaeren Fish.)
