

Parshas Bamidbar

This week's Parsha Bamidbar is the first Parsha of the 4th book. While it encompasses the sojourns of the Jews in the desert, the book is translated into English as numbers because the Parsha begins with counting the Jews. We know, and Rashi on the first Posuk states, that Hashem counts us to show his love for us. Although we belong to the collective nation, we are also seen as individual parts of the collective and loved. Here it is specifically about the love Hashem shows us (as opposed to a census after an event), perhaps a reason why the Torah tells us multiple locations where this took place (Hashem spoke in the tent of meeting, in the wilderness of Sinai) that is Hashem's Shechinah rested in this place and protected us. The wilderness can be desolate, endless, and chaotic, yet Hashem shrouded us in His love and counted us. Ramban says explicitly that the location is mentioned to tell us that they didn't travel from there until they were counted. It is brought down in the Mepharshim that the giving of the Torah was the "marriage" between the Jews and Hashem, bound by the Torah contract. Parshas Bamidbar, which begins in the second year, i.e., after the honeymoon year, when the Jews needed to carry on their travels. Hashem then tells us how much he loves us before we leave, as a Husband reassures his new wife as life begins for them.

Ibn Ezra comments here, quoting his explanation on Ki Sisa (Shemos 30:12), that Seu, written in posuk 2, is like Ki Sisa, which is to lift. It means, here, take a census, but Ibn Ezra's explanation also implies that the head is raised through the census. That is, by being counted, one's head is lifted; that

is, they matter. While it is possible to believe that you don't matter, there are very few questions one can ask themselves to quickly learn that they are unique and one in the world (purely based on statistics- such as how many people with my name are born at the time place and date that I was etc.). But more so, when Hashem counts us, He shows that our Neshama and Guf matter, and we are lifted.

The Gemara in Sotah 37b says two opinions on the words spoken at Sinai versus in the tent of meeting. Rabbi Yishmael says the general rules were said at Har Sinai, whereas the specifics were in the 'tent of meeting.' Rabbi Akiva says that general and specific laws were told at Sinai, but they were repeated at the tent of meeting. Therefore, the details of where the words were spoken reflect the idea that everything is from HaShem, whether they are repeated. This repetition also reflects the message of love. The reiteration is a message before going out into the world, and in the remaining journeys, we are still connected as we were at Sinai when the words were first spoken.

The location, therefore, is also a significant anecdote. If the Torah had said Hashem spoke from the tent of meeting or in the desert of Sinai, we would have known this contextually. Both are said to highlight that the Torah is given to the Jews and not in a specific place that can claim ownership over it (Mechilta D'Rashbi from Chabad.org) because it is accessible by anyone who wants to acquire it. The Torah is truth and can permeate all facets of our lives and the world around us, and it protects us, as Hashem did for us in the desert (and regularly does). One can reason that the letters daled beis and raish (forming the word speak) in the word Bamidbar has connotations of the idea that Torah is

permeable to the entire world, much like no one owns the desert/wilderness and the desert is endless. The spoken word of the Torah is endless (my take on the words of Piska D'Rav Kahana from Chabad.org). Also, desolate and wild places (a metaphor) can be filled with Torah by speaking the words of the Torah. The antidote to a wilderness is to speak Torah. Parshas Bamidbar generally comes before the holiday of Shavuot, where we receive the Torah. This Parsha serves as a reminder that we are loved and matter individually and collectively and that the Torah is permeable and as endless as a desert. But most importantly Torah is the antidote for desolation and wildness; it is our protection.

Good Shabbos