

Parshas Bamidbar

This week's Parsha is Bamidbar, which begins the fourth book of Chumash. In the Parsha, the Jews are counted across all families and divisions, as Rashi explains, to show Hashem's love for the Jews because a sign of love is to count continuously something that you love.

In 1:49, it is stated that the tribe of Levi is not counted with the rest of the Jews. Instead, they are counted separately. Rashi explains that this is because Hashem foresaw a decree of death against the 20-year-old and above people from the rest of the Jews for their participation in the sin of the Eigel and the Meraglim. However, the tribe of Levi, having abstained from these acts, was not punished. This unique status of the tribe of Levi, counted separately, is a testament to their righteousness and a further display of Hashem's love.

One may ask if Hashem "foresaw" the death, wouldn't that have removed the free will and free choice of the other Jews, especially, according to Rashi, it seems this counting with a separated tribe of Levi, is before the sin of Meraglim took place. Wouldn't it stand to reason that the basis for Rashi's explanation is only on the sin of the Eigel? A simple answer is that the punishment for the spies is connected to the sin of the Eigel. Since Rashi knew that the Meraglim and the Eigel were connected, he drew on the Mepharshim to offer this as the explanation for the separation of the Leviim.

Ibn Ezra explains that this was just a simple commandment by Hashem, offering seemingly no connection to abstinence from sin. Chizkuni offers a different angle, which is logical, and that is since Levi served in the Mishkan and Beis Hamikdash, and they didn't go to the army. They were counted technically from 30 days and older; it's a simple reason not to be mixed in the army going, 20 years old and above counting, as with the rest of the Jews. It would be through the census, as it's not the same age and demographic.

All the above Pirushim bring about an important concept. Regarding Hashem's foreseeing, because Hashem is all-knowing and there is no time and place, Atzmus of Hashem is in all time, before, after and now. Therefore, all possible outcomes of any action are plausible and possible in the constraints of time and circumstance that bind and limit the world we live and act in. Through the Torah, Hashem tells us how to make the right choices, but sometimes we interpret things differently, and unfortunately, we distance ourselves from Hashem. Rashi bases his explanation on Bamidbar Rabbah and the Gemara, which connects the Eigel to the Meraglim, meaning the Jews had to cross a further line before the wrath of Hashem was fully revealed because, at any point, we could not have committed the act. A plausible alternative outcome could have resulted. This is distinct from the explanation by Avi Ezer, who quotes Pesachim 6b, who says there is no chronology in the Torah. Therefore, this counting has nothing to do with the timing of the various sins and establishing Levi as a holier tribe. But if you read more deeply into Rashi, he wouldn't have

offered the connection between the Meraglim and the Eigel if he relied on the Pesachim 6b principle. Still, we are not satisfied then with the answer.

Rashi's explanation further underscores the role of the Torah in guiding our actions. It reminds us that because Hashem is not bound by time, all outcomes of our actions, which are bound by time, place, and circumstance, are known by Hashem. This leads us to the crucial understanding that we must use the Torah to stay on the right path and act accordingly, even with the ebb and flow of the soul and actions of us Jews. This is not that Hashem's "foreseeing" removes our free choice and free will; instead, one of the outcomes that can happen is one where the Jews sin (corroborated by the fact that in hindsight, we know that did happen), and the Leviim didn't. In chronology, we know this Parsha took place in the second year of the Jews' journey, which means the Eigel already happened, and the Leviim didn't sin. So, in a world where that happened, the future outcome could have been where the Meraglim would happen (which we know did). Rashi, drawing on Bamidbar Rabbah, explicitly states the connection between the two events because Hashem was patient on whether the Jews would sin again, meaning there was a chance that the Jews would not have committed the sin of the Meraglim. Which is what Rashi is trying to tell us.

Rashi reminds us that Hashem is in control, the Torah is our guide, and we can always return to our Father in Heaven. In case this explanation is too difficult to understand, the other Pirushim don't offer the more complex explanation because

even in a simple logical manner (such as Chizkuni's explanation), it wasn't a separation for special behaviour; instead, it was because the census was different in demographics, age, and purpose, and therefore they had to be counted separately. To draw a metaphor from something, the Lubavitch Rebbe responded to someone who asked how he stood for so long, giving out dollars. The Rebbe answered that when counting diamonds, you don't lose fervour. All the Jews were and are special, but the tribes were like different currencies. The 12 main tribes (splitting Yosef into Ephraim and Menashe) were like one currency, and the tribe of Levi was a different currency. Still valuable, still money, still counted, but a different line item in the tally.

In conclusion, we can use Rashi and the other Perushim to help elucidate the importance of the Torah and of us as treasures of Hashem. We remain close to Hashem by keeping the Torah and following its ways. Ultimately, this leads us to the final redemption, where we will eliminate our enemies, with everlasting peace in Israel and for Jews in the rest of the world.

Good Shabbos!