

Parshas Bamidbar

This week's Parsha, Bamidbar, is the first Parsha of the 4th book of the Chumashim. Bamidbar means "in the (Sinai) desert," and it recounts the Jews' travels in the desert, the hearing of more mitzvos, and the use of the Mishkan. This Parsha lists all the tribes, their leaders, and their numbers. The Jews are counted again, and the words other than the names, the specific location, and the amount are all the same. Because the counting of the Jews is an act of affection, Hashem loves to count his people (Rashi on Shemos 1:1 and here 1:1), every aspect of the Jews was counted in great detail.

By also counting and organizing the army of the Jews, every person had a purpose, as outlined by Hashem, and the organizational structure was established so that those roles are not to be questioned. In a simple sense, it is the easiest way to ensure continuity and that all goals will be met when there is a designated party to do the job. For example, the failure of execution stems from a lack of leadership: telling people what jobs to do and maintaining that hierarchy; if left to their own devices, no one would step up and get a job done.

Midrash explains that the importance of highlighting the "desert" part is that the Torah was given in an ownerless area, i.e., a desert, so that no one can claim it specifically for themselves. i.e. if it were given in Israel, those living there would claim ownership and not share it with the world. Unlike the Torah as it was given,

even though it is ours, we share it with the world by performing Mitzvos and shedding light through that, and anyone can acquire it (Mechilta D'Rashbi). The Alter Rebbe comments similarly that Midbar, from the word Midaber (to speak), that the Torah was said in a desert, which is endless, so to speak, like the Torah. The Alter Rebbe, drawing on the teachings of his master, the Maggid of Mezeritch, develops the connection between midbar (desert) and dibur (speech) in his opening discourses on Parshas Bamidbar (Likkutei Torah, Bamidbar 1a ff.), where the desert becomes the place where divine speech reaches into the worlds of thought, speech, and action.

This Parsha is also a foray into the purpose and the evidence for the indigeneity of the Jews. Since the Torah was given in the desert, staving off claims of ownership means that the claims we see today from antisemites are of the same cloth. The people of the world try to lay claim to us, our culture, our heritage, our truth, all things the Torah says would happen. This means that when we read this Parsha, we recount our purpose, that we are all counted for a purpose, and that the Torah is the truth, and can be acquired by anyone, and this will happen, as we continue to perform our Mitzvos and the 'desert' that is the world, all truth will be revealed, and Mashiach will be here for everyone to see, and know that Hashem is the master of the universe, and the Torah and all its books are true.

Good Shabbos