

How to Keep Irrigated Through Life's Wilderness

Numbers, Chapter One

1. The L-rd spoke to Moses in the Sinai Desert, in the Tent of Meeting on the first day of the second month, in the second year after the exodus from the land of Egypt, saying.
2. Raise the head of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by families following their fathers' houses; a head count of every male according to the number of their names.
3. From twenty years old and upwards, all who are fit to go out to the army in Israel, you shall count them by their legions you and Aaron.

And G-d spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai (1:1)

Mechilta D'Rashbi

The Torah was given to the people of Israel in the ownerless desert. For if it were given in the Land of Israel, the residents of the Land of Israel would say, "It is ours"; and if it were given in some other place, the residents of that place would say, "It is ours." Therefore it was given in the wilderness, so that anyone who wishes to acquire it may acquire it.

In the desert

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

The silent desolation of the desert is a metaphor for the lack of Divine revelation in creation. Yet, despite its spiritual silence, the mute world can be taught to express the Divinity hidden within it. This is alluded to by the fact that the word for desert (midbar) is related to the word for "speaks" (medaber). We need to cultivate the barren desert, enabling it to express its Divine source and the purpose of its creation.

Raise the head of all the congregation of the children of Israel (1:2)

Rashi

Because of G-d's great love for his people, He counts them all the time. When they departed from Egypt, He counted them. And when they fell at the sin of the Golden Calf, He counted them to determine the number of those who remained. And here when He came to rest His Divine Presence upon them, He counted them.

Chassidic Masters

A census expresses two paradoxical truths. On the one hand, it implies that each individual is significant. On the other hand, a head-count is the ultimate equalizer: each member of the community, from the greatest to the lowliest, counts for no less and no more than "one." G-d repeatedly commands Moses to count the Jewish people to emphasize both their individual worth--the fact that no single person's contribution is dispensable--as well as their inherent equality.

Talmud, Beitzah 3b; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 110:1

An entity which is counted can never be nullified.

[Under certain circumstances, certain food items are "nullified" when mixed with a quantity sixty times their volume. For example, if some milk drops fall into a meat soup, the entire mixture becomes forbidden. If, however, the volume of the meat mixture is sixty times that of the milk, then the milk is considered nullified and nonexistent. However, an object that is sold solely by unit is considered "prominent" and cannot be nullified. An example of this is: if whole eggs of a non-kosher bird become mixed with kosher

בְּמִדְבַּר פָּרָק א

א. וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר
סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד
לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִי



לְצִאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:

ב. שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם
לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם בְּמִסְפָּר שְׁמוֹת כָּל זָכָר לְגִלְגֻלְתָּם:

ג. מִבֶּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְנִמְעָלָה כָּל יֵצֵא צָבָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

תִּפְקְדוּ אֹתָם לְצַבְּאָתָם אֹתָהּ וְאֶהְרֶן:

eggs, it is not *batel b'rov*—“nullified by the majority”—since eggs are sold by count (e.g., by the dozen) rather than by weight or volume.]

You and Aaron (1:3)

Nachmonides

Each member of the nation benefited from the personal attention of Moses and Aaron and the census was a great opportunity for every Jew to come before them, tell them his name and to be counted as an individual of personal worth.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Usually a census will be conducted by unemployed or unskilled individuals. G-d delegated the task to the most prestigious dignitaries to signify how important He considers the Jewish people.

From the age of twenty and upward, all who are fit to serve in the army of Israel, you shall count them (1:3)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

Moses' census included only those who were “from the age of twenty and upwards.” The fifth chapter of Ethics of the Fathers includes an outline of the phases of a person's education and life: “At five years of age, the study of Scripture; at ten, the study of mishnah; at thirteen, the obligation to observe the mitzvot; at fifteen, the study of Talmud; at eighteen, marriage; at twenty begins the pursuit [of a livelihood]; at thirty, one attains strength; at forty, understanding; at fifty, one can give counsel...” The first twenty years of a person's life represent those periods in which he focuses almost exclusively on his individual growth: the acquisition of knowledge and wisdom and his moral and spiritual development. “Twenty” represents the point at which he ventures out to the world and begins to concern himself with the material involvements of life. A period of intense self-development and spiritual self-enrichment is a necessary preparation to life, but it must not be seen as an end in itself. The purpose of the “pre-twenty” times and aspects of a person's life is for the sake of the “pursuit” which must follow: that he or she go out into the world and apply his personal attainments to the development and sanctification of the material reality. One who does not graduate to the “post-twenty” phase of life cannot count himself as a member of the “army of Israel.”

SUMMARY

- Self Esteem = making you count, raises you up; YOU matter to G-d
- Raising up another is so important that it was delegated to the highest dignitaries and the count was done by Moshe and Aharon.
- When we realize the importance of our individual roles we are empowered to tackle our “midbar” (midbar=desert, i.e. periods of spiritual or emotional desolation, barrenness and challenge). The “Midbar” can then be transformed into “midaber” (midaber=one who speaks, i.e. an expression or communication of spiritual growth)
- The goal of our lives is to “go out into the world” by making a spiritual impact on our environment. When we do so, we become a representative of the “army of Israel”. In order to “fight in an army”, we need the prior spiritual enrichment and self development, as well as the awareness of how much we “count” and are loved by G-d.

