Torah Talk --Parshat Bamidbar
May 23, 2020
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Etz Hayim p.769　　　　　　**Numbers 1:1-3**

וַיְדַבֵּ֨ר ׳ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֧ה בְּמִדְבַּ֣ר סִינַ֗י בְּאֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵ֛ד בְּאֶחָד֩ לַחֹ֨דֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִ֜י בַּשָּׁנָ֣ה הַשֵּׁנִ֗ית לְצֵאתָ֛ם מֵאֶ֥רֶץ מִצְרַ֖יִם לֵאמֹֽר: שְׂא֗וּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ֙ כָּל־עֲדַ֣ת בְּנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם לְבֵ֣ית אֲבֹתָ֑ם בְּמִסְפַּ֣ר שֵׁמ֔וֹת כָּל־זָכָ֖ר לְגֻלְגְּלֹתָֽם: מִבֶּ֨ן עֶשְׂרִ֤ים שָׁנָה֙ וָמַ֔עְלָה כָּל־יֹצֵ֥א צָבָ֖א בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל תִּפְקְד֥וּ אֹתָ֛ם לְצִבְאֹתָ֖ם אַתָּ֥ה וְאַהֲרֹֽן:

On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, saying: Take a census of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head. You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms.

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Rashi on Numbers 1:1　"Out of God's love for them, he counted them often" "Because they (the Israelites) are precious before Him, He counts them all the time; when they went out of Egypt He counted them (Shemot 12:37), and when they fell because of the sin of the golden calf, He counted them to know the number of those who remained when He came to cause His Presence to rest upon them He counted them. (Midrash Rabbah)

Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah [II.19] describes a man who has all his favorite treasures (pearls) in a beautiful box. He loves them so much that he opens the box repeatedly just to take out his treasures, examine them, and count them again and again to make sure that they are all there. So, too, does the Eternal count and recount those that are dear and treasured.(Nums,R:4:2)

Hadar.org　Yitzhak Bronstein: "Rashi's claim that the origin of the census is in love is reflected in textual clues throughout the parshah. That the census is important to the Torah's narrative is apparent from the sheer amount of space devoted to it (54 verses!). Moreover, this census is not only an administrative task, but is undertaken at the command of HaShem, as is emphasized in the final verse of the opening chapter.

1:54　"The Israelites did accordingly; just as God commanded Moses, so they did."

Conducting a census through love calls for seeing each individual as not only a number or subject, but as a unique personality in relationship with other people. This element is what gets captured in the 54 verses of our parashah's census. . ."

Etz Hayim p. 773 **Numbers 1:45-49**

וַיִּהְי֣וּ כׇל־פְּקוּדֵ֣י בְנֵֽי־יִשְׂרָאֵ֗ל לְבֵ֣ית אֲבֹתָ֑ם מִבֶּ֨ן עֶשְׂרִ֤ים שָׁנָה֙ וָמַ֔עְלָה כׇּל־יֹצֵ֥א צָבָ֖א בְּיִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃ וַיִּהְיוּ֙ כׇּל־הַפְּקֻדִ֔ים שֵׁשׁ־מֵא֥וֹת אֶ֖לֶף וּשְׁלֹ֣שֶׁת אֲלָפִ֑ים וַחֲמֵ֥שׁ מֵא֖וֹת וַחֲמִשִּֽׁים׃ וְהַלְוִיִּ֖ם לְמַטֵּ֣ה אֲבֹתָ֑ם לֹ֥א הׇתְפׇּקְד֖וּ בְּתוֹכָֽם׃ וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֥ה לֵּאמֹֽר׃ אַ֣ךְ אֶת־מַטֵּ֤ה לֵוִי֙ לֹ֣א תִפְקֹ֔ד וְאֶת־רֹאשָׁ֖ם לֹ֣א תִשָּׂ֑א בְּת֖וֹךְ בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל׃

All the Israelites, aged twenty years and over, enrolled by ancestral houses, all those in Israel who were able to bear arms—all who were enrolled came to 603,550. The Levites, however, were not recorded among them by their ancestral tribe. For the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: Do not on any account enroll the tribe of Levi or take a census of them with the Israelites.

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Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev connects the final total of 603,550 Israelites to a tradition that there are 603,550 letters in the Torah. Just as the absence of one letter renders a Torah Scroll unfit for use, the loss of even on Jew prevents Israel from fulfilling its divine mission.

"What we have here is a juxtaposition of the individual and the collective. There is a total number of Israelites, but it is made up of individuals with names, relationships, and histories. The Slonimer Rebbe (*Netivot Shalom*), in his commentary on Numbers, notes that the number of the Israelites—603,550—is equal to the number of words in the Torah. Just as the Torah is a unity made up of individual words, the People of Israel is a unity made up of individuals. Remove even a word and the Torah is incomplete. Remove even one person, Israel cannot receive the Torah. This, he suggests, is why in most years, as in this year, Parashat Bemidbar is read on the Shabbat immediately preceding Shavuot. This census is meant to remind us that the act of *kabbalat haTorah* (receiving the Torah) is an individual one, performed collectively in community; or stated conversely, a collective act performed by individuals. The fulfillment of the Torah, the Slonimer tells us, can only be accomplished when *Kelal Yisra'el (the whole community of the people Israel)* acts in unity."

Rabbi Leonard A. Sharzer, Associate Director for Bioethics Emeritis,
Finkelstein Institute of Religious and Social Studies, June 2019

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וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֥ה לֵּאמֹֽר: וַאֲנִ֞י הִנֵּ֧ה לָקַ֣חְתִּי אֶת־הַלְוִיִּ֗ם מִתּוֹךְ֙ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל תַּ֣חַת כָּל־בְּכ֥וֹר פֶּ֛טֶר
רֶ֖חֶם מִבְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל וְהָ֥יוּ לִ֖י הַלְוִיִּֽם: כִּ֣י לִי֮ כָּל־בְּכוֹר֒ בְּיוֹם֩ הַכֹּתִ֨י כָל־בְּכ֜וֹר בְּאֶ֣רֶץ מִצְרַ֗יִם הִקְדַּ֣שְׁתִּי לִ֤י
כָל־בְּכוֹר֙ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל מֵאָדָ֖ם עַד־בְּהֵמָ֑ה לִ֥י יִהְי֖וּ אֲנִ֥י יְהֹוָֽה: (ס) וַיְדַבֵּ֤ר יְהֹוָה֙ אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֔ה בְּמִדְבַּ֥ר סִינַ֖י
לֵאמֹֽר: פְּקֹד֙ אֶת־בְּנֵ֣י לֵוִ֔י לְבֵ֥ית אֲבֹתָ֖ם לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֑ם כָּל־זָכָ֛ר מִבֶּן־חֹ֥דֶשׁ וָמַ֖עְלָה תִּפְקְדֵֽם:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: I hereby take the Levites from among the Israelites in place of all the first-born, the first issue of the womb among the Israelites: the Levites shall be Mine. For every first-born is Mine: at the time that I smote every first-born in the land of Egypt, I consecrated every first-born in Israel, man and beast, to Myself, to be Mine, the LORD's. The LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying: Record the Levites by ancestral house and by clan; record every male among them from the age of one month up.

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וַיֹּ֨אמֶר יְהֹוָ֜ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֗ה פְּקֹ֨ד כָּל־בְּכֹ֤ר זָכָר֙ לִבְנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל מִבֶּן־חֹ֖דֶשׁ וָמָ֑עְלָה וְשָׂ֕א אֵ֖ת מִסְפַּ֥ר שְׁמֹתָֽם:
וְלָקַחְתָּ֙ אֶת־הַלְוִיִּ֥ם לִי֙ אֲנִ֣י יְהֹוָ֔ה תַּ֥חַת כָּל־בְּכֹ֖ר בִּבְנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל וְאֵת֙ בֶּהֱמַ֣ת הַלְוִיִּ֔ם תַּ֣חַת כָּל־בְּכ֔וֹר בְּבֶהֱמַ֖ת
בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: וַיִּפְקֹ֣ד מֹשֶׁ֔ה כַּאֲשֶׁ֛ר צִוָּ֥ה יְהֹוָ֖ה אֹת֑וֹ אֶת־כָּל־בְּכ֖וֹר בִּבְנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: וַיְהִי֩ כָל־בְּכ֨וֹר זָכָ֜ר
בְּמִסְפַּ֥ר שֵׁמֹ֛ת מִבֶּן־חֹ֥דֶשׁ וָמַ֖עְלָה לִפְקֻדֵיהֶ֑ם שְׁנַ֤יִם וְעֶשְׂרִים֙ אֶ֔לֶף שְׁלֹשָׁ֥ה וְשִׁבְעִ֖ים וּמָאתָֽיִם: (פ)
וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֖ה לֵּאמֹֽר: קַ֣ח אֶת־הַלְוִיִּ֗ם תַּ֤חַת כָּל־בְּכוֹר֙ בִּבְנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל וְאֶת־בֶּהֱמַ֥ת הַלְוִיִּ֖ם תַּ֣חַת
בְּהֶמְתָּ֑ם וְהָֽיוּ־לִ֥י הַלְוִיִּ֖ם אֲנִ֥י ה: וְאֵת֙ פְּדוּיֵ֣י הַשְּׁלֹשָׁ֔ה וְהַשִּׁבְעִ֖ים וְהַמָּאתָ֑יִם הָעֹֽדְפִים֙ עַל־הַלְוִיִּ֔ם מִבְּכ֖וֹר
בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵֽל: וְלָקַחְתָּ֗ חֲמֵ֧שֶׁת חֲמֵ֛שֶׁת שְׁקָלִ֖ים לַגֻּלְגֹּ֑לֶת בְּשֶׁ֤קֶל הַקֹּ֙דֶשׁ֙ תִּקָּ֔ח עֶשְׂרִ֥ים גֵּרָ֖ה הַשָּֽׁקֶל: וְנָתַתָּ֣ה
הַכֶּ֗סֶף לְאַהֲרֹ֖ן וּלְבָנָ֑יו פְּדוּיֵ֖י הָעֹדְפִ֥ים בָּהֶֽם:

The LORD said to Moses: Record every first-born male of the Israelite people from the age of one month up, and make a list of their names; and take the Levites for Me, the LORD, in place of every first-born among the Israelite people, and the cattle of the Levites in place of every first-born among the cattle of the Israelites. So Moses recorded all the first-born among the Israelites, as the LORD had commanded him. All the first-born males as listed by name, recorded from the age of one month up, came to 22,273. The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Take the Levites in place of all the first-born among the Israelite people, and the cattle of the Levites in place of their cattle; and the Levites shall be Mine, the LORD's. And as the redemption price of the 273 Israelite first-born over and above the number of the Levites, take five shekels per head—take this by the sanctuary weight,

twenty gerahs to the shekel, and give the money to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for those who are in excess.

Rashi on Numbers 1:49: The King's legion is worthy of being counted separately. Another interpretation; the Holy One blessed is He, foresaw that a decree would arise against all those who were counted from the age of 20 and about to die in the desert. He therefore said, "Let these Levites not be included, for they are mine since they did not sin with the golden calf".

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Etz Hayim p. 782   **Numbers 4:1-4**

וַיְדַבֵּ֣ר 'ה אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֥ה וְאֶֽל־אַהֲרֹ֖ן לֵאמֹֽר: נָשֹׂ֗א אֶת־רֹאשׁ֙ בְּנֵ֣י קְהָ֔ת מִתּ֖וֹךְ בְּנֵ֣י לֵוִ֑י לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָ֖ם לְבֵ֥ית אֲבֹתָֽם: מִבֶּ֨ן שְׁלֹשִׁ֤ים שָׁנָה֙ וָמַ֔עְלָה וְעַ֖ד בֶּן־חֲמִשִּׁ֣ים שָׁנָ֑ה כָּל־בָּא֙ לַצָּבָ֔א לַעֲשׂ֥וֹת מְלָאכָ֖ה בְּאֹ֥הֶל מוֹעֵֽד: זֹ֛את עֲבֹדַ֥ת בְּנֵי־קְהָ֖ת בְּאֹ֣הֶל מוֹעֵ֑ד קֹ֖דֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִֽׁים:

The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: Take a [separate] census of the Kohathites among the Levites, by the clans of their ancestral house, from the age of thirty years up to the age of fifty, all who are subject to service, to perform tasks for the Tent of Meeting. This is the responsibility of the Kohathites in the Tent of Meeting: the most sacred objects.

Nehama Leibowitz: In the 13th century, the great Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Nachmanides) looked for the moral and spiritual messages in the Torah. The 20th century scholar, Nehama Leibowitz, cites three meanings Nachmanides gleaned from the elaborate description of the census.

"First, Nachmanides reminds us that when Jacob and his sons settled in Egypt, there were only 70 of them. In diligently counting those who left Egypt in the Exodus, our ancestors see the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to make his descendants as many as the sands of the sea. If we fast-forward to today, we might be inspired to see the large numbers of contemporary Jewish communities as indicative of our ongoing relationship with God.

Next, Nachmanides refers to the midrash (B'midbar Rabbah) noting that God wanted Moses to number the people in a way that would honor each of them as individuals. . . . it suggests we count each person as he (or she) steps forward to receive honor and be recognized as a unique soul. We do this today when we inquire about each other's loved ones and take the time to hear their names, interests and appreciate their individuality. Our ancestors' primary concern in this section of Torah is for protection during their wilderness journey. In a different way, we can look at the people around us and ask who helps us walk through the wilderness of life, and in what ways do we support each other? Each one deserves to be honored as an individual, contributing to the success of the whole.

Nachmanides' final point is military strategy. Our ancestors need to know how many fighters they had in order to appropriately plan battles.The literal application of this lesson is a vital concern for today's brave men and women serving in the armed forces, just as their well-being ought to be of concern to all of us. **However,** scratch the surface of people's lives and we find B'midbar can be a metaphor for many types of personal battles. As we work to build meaningful, successful lives, we are also living with addiction, illness, poverty, prejudice and other realities that can obstruct our journey. B'midbar reminds us that preparing for battle is part of our plan to move forward, assess who and what we have around us, take names and numbers and build a team that is committed to our success."

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Nehama Leibowitz, Studies in Bamidbar, "The Second Roll-Call of Israel"
(Jerusalem: Joint Authority for Jewish Zionist Education, 1991)

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Yitzhak Bronstein: The lesson of the BeMidbar census is that human life cannot ever be reduced to numbers.   While it is true that large groups of people may need to be counted at times--*inevitably* resulting in a loss of individual humanity--there are things we can do to preserve as much humanity as possible in the process.   For example, the process can be done with love and care, as the first Rashi in the parashah highlights.   We can account for familial and tribal relationships, and not just for bodies.   It can be done in a way which signals--to both the counters and to the ones being counted--that each person is created in the image of the Divine, and not merely a number."

https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/we-are-each-pearls-impossibility-counting#source-8185