

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Bamidbar

29 Iyar, 5780 – May 23, 2020

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi
Parshas Bamidbar**

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Rashi in His Own Words**

במדבר א', א': וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית לְצֵאתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:
רש"י ד"ה וידבר. במדבר סיני באחד לחודש: וגו' מתוך חיבתן לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה, כשיצאו ממצרים מנאן, וכשנפלו בעגל מנאן לידע מנין הנותרים. כשבא להשרות שכינתו עליהן מנאן. באחד בניסן הוקם המשכן, ובאחד באייר מנאם:

Bamidbar 1:1: The Lord spoke to Moshe 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 ...

Rashi Heading: The Lord spoke... in the Sinai Desert... on the first of the month: ... Because they, (the Jewish people), were precious to Him, He counted them often¹. When they left Egypt, He counted them²; when (many Jews) fell because (of the sin) of the golden calf, He counted them to know the number of survivors³; when He came to cause His Divine Presence to rest among them⁴, He counted them. On the first of Nissan, the Mishkan was erected, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them.

Synopsis

This is an unusual Rashi Sichah, in that the entire explanation which the Rebbe gives is based on the deeper secrets of the Torah rather than Peshat. I felt that this is appropriate because of the proximity of this Torah portion to Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah when all Jews received a prophetic vision.

This week's Torah portion, Bamidbar, is the beginning of the fourth book of the Torah. It is always read before the festival of Shavuot. The portion begins with a census of the Jewish people. Rashi explains that the reason for this is "because they, (the Jewish people), were precious to Him. He counted them often." Rashi lists other occasions that the Almighty counted the Jews, and then tells us that "on the first of Nissan, the Mishkan was erected, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them." This is the census that we are presently discussing.

The Rebbe begins by asking the following. The reason for counting something precious is to ascertain how many you have. However, Hashem certainly knows how many Jews there are! Why was there a need to count us?

1 The original Hebrew words used in Rashi are כל שעה, which literally mean "every hour."

2. Parshas Bo, Shemos 12:37.

3. Parshas Ki Siso, Shemos 32:28

4. This refers to the building of the Tabernacle.

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The Rebbe goes on to explain that the nature of counting is that each object is counted equally. Both the greatest object and the object with the least significance are each counted as one, no more and no less. Each Jew has areas in which he excels over and above others. Counting emphasizes the unity and the equality of all Jews, which stems from the essence of the Jew. In this area, each of us is equal. However, the essence of the Jew is hidden; it is too high to be revealed under normal circumstances. Hashem counted us to reveal the “spark of Jewishness,” the essence of the soul of each Jew. This helps us to maintain our connection to G-d under all circumstances.

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Bamidbar, is also the beginning of the fourth book of the Torah. It discusses the counting of the Jewish people, which took place after the erection of the Mishkan. The Mishkan was erected on the first of Nissan the year after we left Egypt, and the Mishkan was erected on the first of Iyar, one month later. Rashi explains that the reason for counting the Jews frequently. He writes that it is because they are so precious. He goes on to delineate other occasions on which the Jews were counted; when we left Egypt, and after many Jews fell during the sin of the Golden Calf. At that time, He counted us to know how many survivors there were.

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

The reason for counting a precious object often is to know exactly how many, or how much of it you have. How can this possibly apply to G-d? He knows how many Jews there are!

This census was related to the building of the Tabernacle – Mishkan, as Rashi writes, “when He came to rest His Divine Presence among them. He counted them.” Rashi goes on to tell us exactly when this took place; “on the first day of the second month, in the second year after the exodus from the land of Egypt.” The Mishkan was complete an entire month earlier, on the first day of the first month, Nissan. Why were the Jews not counted sooner? What was the reason for waiting an entire month?

This is the only census where we are told that⁵ “you shall count them ... you and Aharon.” Aharon was not involved in any other census. When the Jews left Egypt, the Torah does not tell us who performed the census. After many Jews fell due to the sin of the Golden Calf, only Moshe was told to count them. Only here, the counting which took place after the completion of the Mishkan do we find that Aharon took part. Why?

Why does Rashi say that Hashem counts the Jews often, literally every hour? Granted, from the time we left Egypt until this census, which was on “the first day of the second month, in the second year after the exodus

5. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 1:3.

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from the land of Egypt,” Hashem counted us three times. This was a period of slightly over a year. However, the next time we would be counted was 38 years later, during the fortieth and final year in the wilderness. The Midrash tells us that until the present, the Jews have only been counted nine times; the tenth census will take place when Moshiach comes. How can this be called counting us often? Rashi’s words that He counts us every hour do not seem at all applicable.

The Explanation and the Deeper Lesson from Rashi

Counting has a unique characteristic. When someone counts a group of objects, each one, great and small alike, is counted as one. This tells us that when counting the Jewish Nation because of how precious each Jew is, the *individual* greatness of each Jew was not being counted. Each Jew is different, with strong areas and areas in which he is not particularly strong. One person is greater in Torah study, while another in the performance of Mitzvos. Among those whose expertise is in Torah study, some are greater in one area of the Torah, and others excel in another. There are those who excel in the quality of their understanding of the Torah, and those who have learned a greater quantity. The same is true of Mitzvos; there are Jews who are greater in the performance of Tzedokah, and those who excel in other Mitzvos.

What is being counted is the common denominator between all Jews. What is being referred to here is the essence of the soul. In that respect, all Jews are equal. There is an essential connection between every Jew with Hashem. However, this level of the soul is not clothed within the body. It is too high, too great to be revealed. That is the reason for counting the Jews, to reveal this level which transcends both intellect and emotion⁶. We see that earlier in the Torah, in the first instance that Rashi mentions that⁷ the reason for counting the Jews is because each Jew is so precious, Rashi uses the words “to make known how precious they are.” The meaning of this is that the entire point of the census is to reveal their greatness, i.e., the essence of their souls.

Based on this, we can also understand why Rashi says that Hashem counts us “often, every hour.” The point is that the *effect* of counting us is felt every hour. Our connection to Hashem is constant, every hour. If either an individual, or the evil-inclination tries to “force” a Jew to sin, his spark of Jewishness, the essence of his soul will not allow him to break his connection with Hashem. The “light of G-d,” meaning the essence of his soul “is above time, and controls and rules him⁸.”

6. Based on this we can understand the importance of a census. The fact is that this entire book of the Torah is referred to by the Sages (Talmud Yoma 68, b) as the “Chumash of Counting – חומש הפקודים.” (Translator’s note: it is also by Divine Providence that the English name of this book is Numbers.)

7. Parshas Shemos, Shemos 1:1.

8. Tanya Chapter 25, Page 31, b.

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That is what is meant by counting the Jews “every hour.” Every Jew is affected by his “spark of Jewishness” always, in a manner which transcends time. Even if a Jew is forced to transgress Hashem’s command for a brief time, even if he knows that he can rectify his transgression by doing Teshuvah, it makes no difference. By virtue of his nature, a Jew would rather be executed than transgress G-d’s word. Since the Jew’s connection with Hashem transcends time, there is no difference between sinning for a short time or a long time.

This also explains the three examples of Hashem counting the Jews; when the Jews left Egypt after the sin of the Golden Calf (before the building of the Mishkan) and after the erection of the Mishkan.

There are three possible ways in which the essence of the soul can affect a Jew:

1. The Jew will momentarily be inspired to give up his life rather than bow down to an idol. However, after the threat has passed, he returns to his same old self. His inner powers, his intellect, and emotion have not been affected.
2. The revelation of his inner spark of Jewishness has a lasting effect upon him, upon his intellect and emotion. However, he feels that he is being controlled, led by a higher power that is separate from him.
3. This revelation affects him totally, to the extent that his inner powers, his intellect and emotion both change. He does not remain the same person he was before the revelation.

When the Jews left Egypt, the essence of G-d was revealed to the essence of the Jewish soul. This awakened within the Jew the faith to “blindly” follow Moshe into the wilderness. This, however, had no effect on our inner powers. Prior to the building of the Mishkan, the Jews were commanded⁹, “They shall make a Sanctuary for me, and I will dwell within them.” At this point, the counting of the Jews, meaning the revelation of the soul, had to be on a far deeper level. It had to prepare us for G-d to rest within us. Finally, when the Mishkan was erected, the revelation had to be on a yet deeper level. We were already performing the service in the Mishkan. We were drawing G-d down within us. Thus the “spark of Jewishness” totally affected us and changed everything about us.

Based on this, we can understand why the census took place one month after the erection of the Mishkan, on the first of Iyar, and why Aharon had to be involved this time in counting the Jews. The difference between Nissan, the first month, and Iyar, the second month, is as follows. Nissan represents a Divine revelation; in other words, G-d revealed Himself to us from above. This was true even though we did not deserve his revelation. Iyar, on the other hand, represents our work, counting the Omer, elevating each part of ourselves to be ready to receive

9. Parshas Terumah, Shemos 25:8. Note that it says “within them,” rather than “within it.” From this the Sages derive that Hashem rests within each and every Jew.

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the Torah¹⁰. In other words, this is our reaching up from below. The same is true of the difference between Moshe and Aharon. Moshe's service was to draw G-dly light from above to the Jewish people. Aharon's service was to raise the Jewish people from below to above. The census after the Mishkan was finished, was not just to allow the revelation of the essence of the soul from above, but rather to enable Jews to use this revelation as well. We became permeated with this light to the extent that it affected our entire being. In other words, it had to combine the Divine service, which is initiated from Above, with that which we initiate on our own. Therefore, it had to include both Moshe and Aharon, and it had to be in the second month to include both aspects of Divine service.

The Connection between Bamidbar and Shavuot

Jews kept Mitzvos for centuries before the Torah was given. This being the case, what did the giving of the Torah accomplish?

Prior to the giving of the Torah, the physical and spiritual were two separate worlds. Therefore, performing a Mitzvah with an object did not sanctify it in any way. As soon as the Mitzvah was complete, the physical object with which it was performed retained no holiness. However, at the time of the giving of the Torah, Hashem Himself, Who is neither limited by physical nor spiritual, descended upon Mount Sinai. Moshe, from below, ascended the mountain. At that point, our fulfillment of Mitzvos developed the ability to draw down G-dliness into the objects with which we performed them. For example, the wool from which Tzitzis are made became holy. We combined Divine service, which reaches from above to below, with that which reaches from below to above. It is, therefore, appropriate to read of the counting of the Jewish people after the completion of the Mishkan on the first day of the second month as a preparation to receiving the Torah.

(Compiled from talks given on Shabbos Parshas Bamidbar 5725 - 5726)

I hope that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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10. In fact, Iyar is the only month of the calendar of which each day is connected to the same Mitzvah, namely the counting of the Omer.

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