

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Bamidbar

29 Iyar, 5786 – May 16, 2026

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

Likkutei Sichos Volume 8, Pages 1 – 7

Rashi in His Own Words

במדבר א', א': וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד בְּאֶחָד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית לְצֵאתְכֶם 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, Moshe erected the Mishkan, and on the first of Iyar, He counted them.

Synopsis

This is an unusual Rashi Sichah in that the entire explanation the Rebbe gives is based on the deeper secrets of the Torah. I felt that this was appropriate for explaining this Sichah here. This Parsha is read immediately before 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 and is always read before the festival of Shavuot. The portion begins with a census of the Jewish people. Rashi explains this: "Because they (the Jewish people) were precious to Him, He counted them often." Rashi lists other occasions when the Almighty counted the Jews, and then says, "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 explains that the nature of counting is that each object is counted equally. Both the most significant 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 beyond others. Counting emphasizes the unity and equality of all Jews, stemming from the essence of the Jew. In this area, each of us is equal. However, the nature 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 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 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 why the Jews are frequently counted. He writes that it is because they are so precious. Rashi delineates 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

Counting a precious object often means knowing 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 cause His Divine Presence to rest among them, He counted them." Rashi tells 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 completed 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, at the counting that 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 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 thirty-eight years later, during the fortieth and final year in the wilderness.

5. Our Parshah, Bamidbar 1:3.

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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 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, is counted as one. This tells us that when one counts the Jewish Nation because of how precious each Jew is, the *individual* greatness of each Jew is not being counted. Each Jew is different, with strong and weak areas. One person is more outstanding in Torah study, while the other is more outstanding 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. Some excel in the quality of their understanding of the Torah, and others have learned a greater quantity. The same is true of Mitzvos; some excel in the performance of Tzedokah, and others 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 and Hashem. However, this soul level is not clothed within the body and is too high and too great to be revealed. By counting the Jews, we reveal this level of transcending intellect and emotion⁶. We see that earlier in the Torah, in the first instance, Rashi mentions that⁷ the reason for counting the Jews is that everyone is so precious. Rashi uses the words "to make known how precious they are." The point of the census is to reveal their greatness, i.e., the essence of their souls.

We can also understand why Rashi says 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 and his soul's essence 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."

That is what is meant by counting the Jews "every hour." Every Jew is constantly affected by their "spark of Jewishness" in a manner that transcends time. Even if a Jew is forced to transgress Hashem's command for a brief time, it makes no difference, even if he knows that he can rectify his transgression by doing Teshuvah. A

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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Jew would prefer to be executed rather than transgress G-d's word by virtue of his nature. Since the Jew's connection with Hashem transcends time, there is no difference between sinning for a short or long time.

This also explains the three examples of Hashem counting the Jews: 1.) when the Jews left Egypt, 2.) after the sin of the Golden Calf (before the building of the Mishkan), and 3.) 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 old self. His inner powers, his intellect, and his emotions have not been affected.
2. The revelation of his inner spark of Jewishness has a lasting effect on his intellect and emotions. However, he feels he is being controlled and led by a higher power separate from him.
3. This revelation affects him completely, to the point that his inner powers, intellect, and emotions 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 the Jew's faith to "blindly" follow Moshe into the wilderness. This, however, did not affect our inner powers. Before 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 more profound. We were already performing the service in the Mishkan and drawing G-d down within us. Thus, the "spark of Jewishness" 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 in counting the Jews this time. 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, although we were not worthy of his revelation.

On the other hand, Iyar represents our work, counting the Omer, elevating each part of ourselves to be ready to receive 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, and Aharon's service was to raise the Jewish people from below to above. After the Mishkan was finished, the census

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.

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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was not just to allow the revelation of the essence of the soul from above. It also enabled Jews to use this revelation. 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 initiated from Above with what we create. Therefore, it had to include both Moshe and Aharon and be in the second month to incorporate both aspects of Divine service.

The Connection between Bamidbar and Shavuos

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

Before Hashem gave us the Torah, the physical and spiritual worlds were separate. Therefore, performing a Mitzvah with an object did not sanctify it. As soon as the Mitzvah was complete, the material thing with which it was performed retained no holiness. However, at the time of the giving of the Torah, Hashem Himself descended upon Mount Sinai. He is neither limited by physical nor spiritual. Moshe ascended the mountain from below. 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 goes from below to above. Therefore, reading about the counting of the Jewish people after completing the Mishkan on the first day of the second month is appropriate. This serves as a preparation for receiving the Torah.

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

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

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in health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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