

The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center

6701 Old Pimlico Road

Baltimore, MD 21209

www.chabadshul.org



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Bamidbar — Shavuot

4 Sivan, 5781

Is G-d Just Treating Me Like a Number?

The funny thing about customer service is that it often doesn't serve the customer. "To them I'm not a person, just an account number," customers often complain. And there is nothing quite so cold as being treated like a number.

Strikingly, the fourth book of the Torah, Bamidbar, is referred to as the Book of Numbers. At the beginning of the book, a year after the Jews left Egypt, G-d instructs Moses to conduct a census of Israel, the firstborns and the Levites. And at the end of the book, in Year 40 of wandering in the desert, G-d once again instructs Moses to count the people. Hence the name "Book of Numbers," or in Hebrew, Chumash ha-Pekudim.

Why all this counting? The commentaries explain that counting expresses G-d's love and care for His nation. That seems counterintuitive. A census just gives you a bunch of numbers for each tribe and group, nothing personal. How is that loving and caring?

The standard Hebrew word for counting is *cheshbon* or *minyan*. But throughout the Torah a different word, *pekudim*, is used. This word and its derivatives are used in many different ways throughout the Torah and Prophets. Among them are:

1. **To remember**, as in "G-d remembered (*pakad*) Sarah . . . and Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son to Abraham," or in G-d's promise to take the Jewish people out of Egypt: "G-d will surely remember you (*pakod yifkod*) and bring you out of this land."
2. **To be missed**, as in the famous *haftorah* about David and Jonathan: "David's place was missing (*vayipakeid*)."
3. **To assign**, as in the responsibilities of the Levites: "And the assignment of (*pekudat*) the Merari family."
4. **Destiny**, as in Korach's rebellion: "And the destiny (*pekudat*) of all men will be brought upon them."
5. **Accounting**, as when Moses gives an accounting for all the donations to construct the Tabernacle: "This is the accounting (*pekudei*) of the Tabernacle."
6. **To command** (in Modern Hebrew).

Why so many usages for this word? I believe there is one unifying definition: "to take notice." When G-d remembers Sarah, He takes notice of her and blesses her with a child. When G-d takes notice of the Jewish people, He sends Moses to take them out of Egypt. When David is absent from King Saul's table, his absence is noticed. The Levites are noted for their assignment and special role in the Tabernacle. The same goes for a command—you are taking notice of the person you are commanding.

When G-d instructs Moses to count the Jewish nation, G-d says *pekod*, not *meneh*. G-d doesn't simply want a number to put into his spreadsheet. G-d wants Moses to take notice of every single Jew. Because G-d loves and cares for every individual. No one gets overlooked.

Chumash ha-Pekudim—a whole book of G-d taking notice of the Jewish people. What great love

(by Rabbi Sholom Raichik from www.chabad.org)

Our Family, Our Torah

Sefer Vayikra, which we finished last week, ends with the verse: "These are the commandments Hashem commanded Moshe to [teach] Bnei Yisrael on Har Sinai." Sefer Bemidbar, which we begin this week, opens with a census of the families of Bnei Yisrael. Midrash Yalkut Shimoni explains that these passages are related: The nations of the world complained that they were not given the Torah, and Hashem responded, "Bring Me your family trees!" What does this Midrash mean?

R' Shmuel Shmelke Guntzler z"l (1834-1911; rabbi of Oyber-Visheve, Hungary for 45 years) explains: We say in the Pesach Haggadah, "If He had brought us to Har Sinai and not given us the Torah, it would have sufficed for us." What would have been accomplished by bringing us to Har Sinai and not giving us the Torah? Commentaries explain: We do not mean, "If He had not commanded us to perform the Mitzvot." Rather, "Given us the Torah" in this context refers to Hashem's placing the Torah in our hands, meaning that Torah scholars can interpret the Torah, and their interpretations and Halachic rulings "become" G-d's Torah. Indeed, even a prophet or a Bat Kol / Heavenly voice cannot overrule a Halachic ruling arrived at using the tools of Torah study.

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How could Hashem give His beloved treasure, the Torah, to us to interpret? R' Guntzler explains: Hashem did not give the Torah to the Patriarchs or to Yaakov's sons; rather, say our Sages, He waited until Bnei Yisrael numbered 600,000. The Gemara (Berachot 58a) explains that, among 600,000 Jews, no two think exactly alike. Also, say our Sages, the Torah has 600,000 letters. In fact, the Torah has only 304,805 letters. But, what the Sages mean is that every Jew who was present at Har Sinai represents some aspect of the Torah. Collectively, the 600,000 who were present at Har Sinai had in their minds every possible legitimate Torah interpretation that would ever be offered; thus, our interpretations of the Torah – as long as they follow the rules set down by our Sages – were themselves given at Sinai. Notably, adds R' Guntzler, the Gematria of "Sinai" also is 600,000.

In this light, we can understand the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni with which we began. The census in our Parashah, which was taken not long after the Giving of the Torah, confirms that Bnei Yisrael numbered 600,000 people and that they were all genealogically from the same nation; meaning that they could represent the entirety of Torah. Said Hashem to the nations that demanded the Torah: Can you demonstrate the same? (Meishiv Nefesh)

(by Rabbi Shlomo Katz from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)



Rabbi Kaplan is holding a weekly Thursday evening (8:30pm) online shiur on the Shaar HaBitachon section of Chovos Halivavos. Shaar HaBitachon has been effective in giving strength and encouragement to people facing difficult and challenging situations in everyday life. What a perfect topic, presented by a gifted teacher, for these times. This online shiur is open to anyone who would like to attend and can be joined at: <https://cutt.ly/join-shiur>

Dr. and Mr. Gertner
are sponsoring a Kiddush after davening this Shabbat
in honor of the
1st birthday
of their son
Judah Lev.



Yahrzeits This Week:

Joseph Zakar	4 Sivan - Friday night / Shabbat	for father	Emanuel ben Shabsi
Binyomin Gutman	7 Sivan - Monday night / Tuesday-Shavuot	for brother	Dovid ben Avraham
Marsha Blumberg	8 Sivan - Tuesday night / Wednesday	for father	Nathan Brenner

DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

Friday, 5/14 — 3 Sivan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Shabbat Candles — 7:54 p.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.

Shabbat, 5/15 — 4 Sivan

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:25 a.m.
Berachot Gemora Shiur — 6:40 p.m.
Minchah — 7:40 p.m.
Ma'ariv — 8:58 p.m.

Sunday — Erev Shavuot, 5/16— 5 Sivan

Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.
Candles 7:56 p.m.
Mincha — 7:56 p.m.
Ma'ariv — 9:00 p.m.

Monday — Shavuot, 5/17 — 6 Sivan

Shacharit — 5:00 a.m. and 9:30 a.m.
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:25 a.m.
Minchah — 8:00 p.m.
Candles — 9:05 p.m.
Ma'ariv — 9:05 p.m.

Tuesday — Shavuot, 5/18 — 7 Sivan

Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.
Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:24 a.m.
Yiskor — after 10:45 a.m.
Minchah — 8:00 p.m.
Ma'ariv — 9:05 p.m.

Wednesday, 5/19 — 8 Sivan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:00 p.m.

Thursday, 5/20 — 9 Sivan

Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:00

Friday, 5/21 — 10 Sivan

Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
Shabbat Candles — 8:01 p.m.
Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.