

LOVE COUNTS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Bamidbar

Love Counts

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Today's Learning:
Rosh Hashanah 1:8-9
O.C. 555:2-557:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shekalim 10
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Terumot 22

It is a longstanding custom to read Parashat Bemidbar on the Shabbat preceding Shavuot. The reason for this is as follows:

The Gemara (Megillah 31b) states that Parashat Bechukotai (last week's parashah) should be read before Shavuot because Shavuot is a New Year's Day and day of judgment - on Shavuot G-d

determines the success of the year's fruit harvest. Accordingly, we wish to "dispense with the year's curses as the year ends." (Parashat Bechukotai contains curses on those who abandon the mitzvot.) However, in order not to enter Shavuot with the curses on our minds, we separate them by one week by reading Bemidbar. (Tosfot Megillah 31b.)

Why is Shavuot the day when Hashem determines the fruit harvest? R' Tzadok Hakohen z"l (died 1900) explains that before Adam sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, he was surrounded by abundant fruit trees that had been planted by G-d's own "hands." After his sin, he was cursed that he would have to work the ground to earn his food. However, when Bnei Yisrael received the Torah, they (temporarily) returned to the spiritual level that Adam had before his sin, and thus Shavuot is a propitious time to judge the fruit harvest favorably. (Pri Tzaddik: Vayikra p.209)

R' Moshe of Kobrin z"l (late 18th century) offers another explanation: The Torah (Devarim 20:19) refers to man as a "tree of the field." Man is judged for the fruit harvest on Shavuot based on how he accepts the Torah on this holiday. (Torat Avot)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, . . . 'Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael . . .'" (1:1-2)

Rashi comments: "Because of G-d's love for the Jewish people, He counts them repeatedly. Here, He counted them in honor of His resting His Shechinah among them in the Tabernacle." [In chronological order, this parashah belongs earlier in the Torah, shortly after the dedication of the Mishkan.]

R' Raphael Baruch Sorotzkin z"l (1917-1979; Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe) observes that this may be understood in light of the Talmudic teaching that the first ten men who come to davening receive reward equal to the combined rewards of all the other men who come. Why? The commentary Maharsha explains that it is these ten men who cause the Shechinah to rest on the congregation; therefore, they deserve special reward.

The Shechinah rested on the Mishkan in the merit of all the Jewish people. In order to emphasize this, Hashem counted Bnei Yisrael after the Mishkan's dedication.

(Ha'Binah Ve'haberachah)

"You hafkaid / shall appoint the Levites over the Tabernacle of the Testimony . . ." (1:50)

R' Yaakov ben Asher z"l (14th century; the Ba'al Ha'turim) notes that the word "hafkaid" appears in only one other place in Tanach - in Tehilim (109:6), "Hafkaid / Appoint a wicked man over him." This, writes the Ba'al Ha'turim, alludes to Chazal's teaching that no one becomes an officer below unless he is considered a wicked person Above. (Here, the Levi'im were appointed officers over the

Tabernacle.)

This is a wondrous statement, writes R' Moshe Yechiel Halevi Epstein z"l (1890-1971; the Ozhrover Rebbe). It certainly cannot be taken literally!

He explains: The Gemara (Niddah 30b) teaches that before a baby is born, his soul is made to take an oath, "Even if the whole world tells you that you are a tzaddik, view yourself as if you are a rasha." This is a way to protect oneself from haughtiness. This is what the Ba'al Ha'turim means as well: "G-d does not wish to appoint a person to a position of authority below unless he considers himself to be wicked in the eyes of Heaven."

(Be'er Moshe)

"Behold! I have taken the Levites from the midst of Bnei Yisrael . . ." (3:12)

R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld z"l (rabbi of the Edah Ha'charedit in Yerushalayim; died 1932) notes that whenever the Torah speaks of the fact that the Levi'im were counted separately from the other tribes, it also says that they were taken "from the midst" of Bnei Yisrael. The Torah wishes to emphasize that, despite being different in some ways, the Levi'im remain an integral part of the Jewish people.

R' Sonnenfeld notes that this is alluded to in the very words "Levi'im" and "Yisrael". "Yisrael" is spelled: "Yud, sin, raish, aleph, lamed." If the names of each of those letters is written out, and we take the middle letter (for example, "Yud" = "Yud, vav, dalet") "from the midst" of each of those "words", we have the letters of the word "Levi'im."

(Chochmat Chaim)

Pirkei Avot

Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said, "Once I was walking on the road, when a certain man met me. He greeted me and I returned his greeting. He said to me, 'Rabbi, from what place are you?' I said to him, 'I am from a great city of scholars and soferim.' He said to me, 'Rabbi, would you be willing to live with us in our place? I would give you thousands of golden dinars, precious stones and pearls.' I replied, 'Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah.'" (Chapter 6)

R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (died 1982) comments: If our Sages use a story to teach a particular lesson, we must examine what we can learn from the story that we would not have known if the story's moral had simply been stated as an imperative - e.g., "One should always dwell in a place of Torah!" Rambam, too, chooses sometimes to cite a story rather than to simply state the halachah (see for example, Hil. De'ot 7:13), and there must be a reason.

What does this story teach? First, it teaches that "Dwell only in a place of Torah" is not merely an abstract ideal. It is a something that every person can realize. Who was Rabbi Yose ben Kisma? The Gemara teaches that he was deeply involved in the secular world and was on good terms with many Roman noblemen. Despite having one foot planted solidly in the Roman world, he chose to live only in a community that was noted for its Torah scholars.

This story teaches some incidental lessons as well. They include:

- (1) Rabbi Yose ben Kisma taught the above lesson when he was on the road. Even the road is a place where Torah lessons can be learned.
- (2) Rabbi Yose ben Kisma met an anonymous person, not noted for any particular good traits. Nevertheless, the meeting was pleasant. "He greeted me and I returned his greeting."
- (3) Rabbi Yose ben Kisma said, "I am from a great city of scholars and soferim." Every great city must have scholars - sages who specialize in the Torah Sh'be'al'peh -- and soferim, sages who specialize in the Torah Sh'bichtav.

One additional point: Was Rabbi Yose ben Kisma's answer meant to disassociate himself completely from the man he met and from the man's town? Certainly not! says R' Kook. We say in the prayers that follow the Torah reading on Monday and Thursday, "May it be the will of our Father Who is in heaven to preserve among us the sages of Israel . . . in all their dwelling places." Even when the sages are in their dwelling places, not in our towns or neighborhoods, it is incumbent upon us to view them as being among us.

(Kinyan Torah)

R' Shmuel Shmelke Guntzler z"l

R' Guntzler was born in Satorljaujhely, Hungary (known to the Jews as "Uhel") on 7 Cheshvan 5595 / 1834. When he was about six, he was blessed by the rabbi of Uhel, R' Moshe Teitelbaum (the Yismach Moshe) that he would grow into a "tall tree." Young Shmuel studied under his brother-in-law, R' Avraham Laib Hakohen, the future rabbi of Beregszasz, and before his marriage was awarded the title "Moreinu." (In Hungarian yeshivot, this title was often given to young scholars who had excelled in their studies but had not yet been ordained as rabbis.)

R' Guntzler married Rivka Fradel Kahana and moved to her hometown, Oyber-Visheve (Viseul de Sus, today in Romania), where he spent the rest of his life. Beginning in 1866, R' Guntzler served as rabbi of Oyber-Visheve. He passed away on 5 Iyar 5671 / 1911. The following year, his grandson published some of R' Guntzler's Torah commentaries and derashot in Meishiv Nefesh.

R' Guntzler related that he once traveled to Tarnopol for a joyous occasion, and he visited the town's rabbi, R' Yosef Babad (author of Minchat Chinuch) to ask that sage to test him and grant him

ordination. R' Babad responded that it was his practice not to grant semichah to anyone. "However," he said, "come back tomorrow morning and enjoy the Talmud lecture."

When R' Guntzler arrived the next morning, R' Babad welcomed him and invited him to give the lecture. (They were studying the fifth folio of Tractate Makkot.) R' Guntzler agreed, and he engaged the assembled scholars in a heated discussion for two hours while R' Babad paced back and forth listening silently. R' Guntzler said that so lively was the debate that by the end of the session his clothes were dripping with perspiration. When the lecture ended, R' Babad took R' Guntzler into his study and ordained him.

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