

COUNTING DELIGHT

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Take a census of the entire Congregation of the Children of Israel, according to their families, by the houses of their fathers..." [1:2]

Rashi explains why a new count is taken here: "because they are so precious before him, he counts them continuously." This comes from a longer passage in the Medrash Rabbah [Bamidbar 2:19]:

"Come and see how precious is Israel before the Holy One, for behold, the Holy One, Blessed be He, wrote an account of Israel four times according to their encampments, twice individually and twice in summation, and further he counted each encampment (or flag) in summation and individually, in order to demonstrate how precious they are before Him. For they were His armies, and He wanted to count them continuously, like a person who has a fortune which is very precious to him, who counts it and goes back and counts it again many times, in order to know its account, and who rejoices in it with every single accounting. Just the same, the Holy One, Blessed be He, rejoiced to remember the account of Israel..."

The Medrash compares G-d rejoicing over Israel to a miser rejoicing over his wealth or a child over his baseball cards, who takes them out and goes over them again and again -- looking both at the numbers and at each one. Only the Medrash could make such a comparison, and the Medrash does: He delights in counting every Jew.

If G-d is counting us constantly, imagine His pain and sorrow when He finishes, and there are fewer than there were before. Imagine the reaction of the child who finds that several of his cards somehow became wet and moldy, or the miser who finds that a bag is missing! And the problem is not just that people are, "after 120", passing away -- but they are leaving. Jews are finding nothing in being part of the Jewish people!

If we are truly His 'armies', if we truly care about what is dear to Him, then we, too, must feel that pain. "Outreach" is not reserved for a few professionals. Outreach happens every time you invite a friend to join you at synagogue, at a Shabbos meal, at a Jewish event.

The holiday of Shavuot comes next week. This is the holiday of Receipt of the Torah, when the entire Nation of Israel gathered around the mountain "as one man with one heart." It is not enough for us to go only for ourselves -- we must bring our friends and neighbors too.