

Torah On One Foot

Rabbi Matthew Berger



Numbers

The Psalmist writes, “Teach us to count our days rightly, that we may obtain a wise heart” (90:12). Numbers abound in the Torah. God is One. There are two tablets of Torah. Judaism started with three patriarchs and four matriarchs. There are five books of the Torah. This week, we begin reading fourth book of the Torah. While the Hebrew name of the book is *B'midbar*, “in the desert,” it is commonly known as Numbers. Because the first four chapters are dedicated with the census or numbering of the Israelites, just one month after they were freed from Egypt.

In Numbers, the number forty takes center stage. The Israelites wandered forty years in the Sinai Desert and camped in forty locations. The length of a generation is approximately forty years. Moses remained on the top of Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights. It is also said that Moses spent forty years in Pharaoh’s palace, forty years in Midian, and forty as a leader of Israel. The scouts were sent on a mission to Israel for forty days. Caleb, one of the twelve scouts, was forty years old at the time. The number forty is also connected to wisdom. In Ethics of the Fathers, we learn that, “at forty years of age, one attains insight” (5:21).

As we begin our exploration of the fourth book of Torah, let us learn to “number our days” and embrace the journey of life.