



# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bamidbar

Parshat Bamidbar

Sivan 5781 / May 2021

## Revisiting My Bar Mitzvah

By Philip Fried

It is with the greatest pleasure and humility that I offer a *dvar Torah* on this anniversary of my *Bar Mitzvah parsha*. My original *vort* (a *phsetel*) was in Yiddish; I will spare the readers and proceed in English.

We are now starting the fourth book of the *Chumash*, *Bamidbar*, aka Numbers. Why is it called Numbers? We will leave this question unanswered for now and proceed with *Bamidbar*.

“*Hashem* spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai,” This first *pasuk* of *Bamidbar* sets the tone for the fourth book. The great Rav, Meir Shapiro, creator of the *Daf Yomi*, and *Rosh Yeshiva* of *Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin*, spoke to his students about this *pasuk*. *Chazal* state in the *Midrash Raba* that the Torah was given to *Bnei Yisrael* with three things. These three things are fire, water, and wilderness. Fire alludes to the self-sacrifice of *Avraham Avinu*, who was cast into the furnace because of his belief in *Hashem*. Water alludes to the bravery of *Nachson ben Aminadav*, who was the first to jump into the *Yam Suf* to sanctify *Hashem*’s name. The last of the three, wilderness, *midbar*, alludes to the self-sacrifice of our ancestors who traveled in the desert for forty years supported by their faith in *Hashem*.

I visited the *Yeshiva Chachmei Lublin* twice, once with our esteemed Rabbi Morgenstern. I have *davened* there, and I have read from the Torah in that holy place. Sadly it has become part of the wilderness which, was once a thriving Jewish community. Yet we continue to strive and hopefully thrive in our personal wilderness, supported by our faith in *Hashem*.

Now back to our original question: why is *Sefer Bamidbar* called the Book of Numbers? Is it a misnomer? There is a lot of counting going on, census taking, etc. Rabbi David Forhman, of

*Chazal state in the Midrash Raba that the Torah was given to Bnei Yisrael with three things: fire, water, and wilderness. Fire alludes to the self-sacrifice of Avraham Avinu ... Water alludes to the bravery of Nachson ben Aminadav, who was the first to jump into the Yam Suf ... Wilderness, midbar, alludes to the self-sacrifice of our ancestors who traveled in the desert for forty years.*

Aleph Beta explains that there are two words in this *parsha* for counting, *nasha* and *pokad*. *Nasha* translates as count and also to lift. *Pokad* means to count and also to entrust. Are they related? With *nasha*, we join together and create a community, and in turn, we lift ourselves up. With *pokad*, we count ourselves, and we entrust ourselves with doing good deeds and tending to community needs.

The topic of the fourth book of the Torah is *Am Yisrael*. According to *Rashi*, *Hashem* counts us frequently because he loves us, so it is fitting that *Bamidbar* starts with a census. Chazal teach that the word *Yisrael* can be understood as an acronym for *yaas shishim riboh oteyout latorah*; there are six hundred thousand letters in the *Torah* — and we understand that each letter in the *Torah* represents every Jewish person. We are a diverse community with our roots in the wilderness, whether in Eastern Europe, the Middle East, South America, or wherever our families originated. During the pandemic, we learned to cope with our family and friends in the wilderness and make the best of a challenging situation. Here in Scarsdale, we came together; and we all counted making our *kehilah* special. It's what we do.

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Aria and I and our family have been privileged to call this *shul* our spiritual home for almost thirty years. We are now enjoying being grandparents, and we look forward to welcoming our children and grandchildren into the community.

**Philip** and Aria Fried moved into the community in 1992 with two small children. They liked it so much — both the community and the children — that they proceeded to have four more children. They are excited and looking forward to having their children and grand children move into the community in the next month or two.

*Want to write or dedicate a Parsha essay?  
Please contact Steve Smith at [stevenjsmith@yahoo.com](mailto:stevenjsmith@yahoo.com)*

**The Collective Conversation** is a project of the Young Israel of Scarsdale and the YIS Living Torah Fund

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