

## **Bamidbar - Rabbi Lerner - May 5, 2013**

This sefer is called Sefer Hapikudim, which can be translated as Book of the Countings, because of two overt census of the people in this sefer - in this parsha and in Pinchas.

1:1-3: *And Hashem spoke to Moshe in Midbar Sinai, in the Ohel Moed, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after their exodus from Mitzrayim saying 'Take a census of the entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael according to their families, according to their fathers' household, by the number of their names, every male according to their head count. From twenty years of age and up...* **Rashi**: because of the tremendous love God felt for His people, He is counting them all the time - when we left Egypt He counted us in Nisan of the first year; after we fell at the sin of the Egel He counted us to see how many survived - this was in Tamuz; and when He wanted His shechina to dwell amongst us, He counted us - He counted us after the Mishkan was erected here on Rosh Chodesh Iyar; there were three different counts.

**Gur Aryeh**: the first count was not as obvious, in parshas Bo - there was no specific command to count the people. The second count we see in Pikudai 38:26 where the Torah tells us exactly how many half shekels were counted - 603,550. The third count which is in our parsha we see in 1:46 - 603,550 people. This is the same exact number, and it occurs many months after the second count. The **Maharshal** is bothered by Rashi's making his comment about God counting the people out of love for us on the first pasuk which does not deal with the census - why doesn't Rashi make his comment on the second pasuk where you have the actual command to count the people? The **Gur Aryeh** says that the reason is because of God's love of the people - He is counting them all of the time - He counted them three different times in about one year - after we left Egypt, after the sin of the Egel, and now on Rosh Chodesh Iyar, two weeks after the anniversary of leaving Egypt. Rashi is pointing out that God usually never ties a mitzvah to a time - the Torah almost never pinpoints a date, and when it does, it is to teach us an important lesson. We have some dates pointed out in the Torah, such as when Hashem gave Moshe the mitzvah of blessing the new moon in parshas Bo. There are specific reasons when the time is pointed out - here it teaches us that God counted us three times in just a single year. This count was made by Moshe and Aharon, who went from tent to tent, counting the people. They had to see the face of each person - it was a personal count, with the two of them meeting each and every Jew and forming a relationship with them - it showed God's great love of the people. Why was this count on Rosh Chodesh Iyar instead of Rosh Chodesh Nissan, when the shechina descended? This earlier date would have made all three counts within one year. There is a halachah - when a new person moves into a community, it takes 30 days to establish residency - we see this with the responsibility to pay real estate taxes, we see it with mezuzah - both require a month of residency; the same thing applies to Hashem, who just moved into a new neighborhood; the relationship is not permanent until a month has passed.

**Malbim**: how could the numbers not change? There must have been some people who were 19½ who turned 20 by the second or third counts? **Rashi** says in Ki Sisa that to define a year for the sake of counting it doesn't go by their birth date - it goes by what their age was in Tishrai - the age you are on Rosh Hashanah is what counted for the year - there was no discrepancy between the numbers because they counted the people by their age in Tishrai, only two months after the sin of the Egel. Another interpretation: in the first count, Levi was included - but not in the second and third counts; therefore, the new people turning 20 in the second count were balanced by not counting Levi's men.

**Kli Yakar**: the count took place in the Ohel Moed. This reason for this count was for the shechina dwelling amongst the people, after waiting the an additional month for Hashem to establish permanence. He dwells amongst us rather than the heavens to show His tremendous love for us. This counting is tied to the Mishkan.

**Rav Baruch Simon**: we always read the parsha of Bamidbar right before Shvuos. Counting us is a sign of love, and it is tied in to the giving of the Torah - Hashem's loves us because we accepted the Torah. The **Shaarei Simchah** (Rav Sofer) says that we want this semichus, this connection of the counting to Shvuos because God loves us since we accepted the Torah on Shvuos - The **Medrish Tanchuma** says that the pasuk we say every day - *Lo Asa Chain Lechal Goy, UMishpatim Bal Yada'um Halelukah* - the counting of the Jews is unique - God only counts us, showing our importance; the other nations of the world are not counted because they are not interested in accepting His laws and commands - they aren't interested in keeping all of God's laws. Bamidbar Rabah has the most commentary on any parsha here with Bamidbar because it is close to Shvuos, close to our accepting the Torah. When the command was given to count us, it says in 1:2 *Se'uh es Rosh* - it means lift up the head of each Jew for counting; the midrash says this phrase can be good or bad - it can mean something bad, as when an executioner lifts off the head of a prisoner, as we saw with the story of Yosef - Hashem restored the wine butler to his job - he lifted up his head and restored him to his position; for the baker his head was lifted off, severed from his body. The lifting of the head can be great, meaning given recognition; but it can also be deadly. When one is given recognition by Hashem, you are being scrutinized more closely - there is greater potential for greatness, but also disaster if we do not measure up to what is expected of us - we count more, and everything we do can be an incredible Kiddush Hashem but also a Chilul Hashem. The lifting of the head is a double edged sword. This is the difference also between us and the angels - we can make choices, we have free will to decide to be good or bad - this gives us advantages over the angels; when Moshe ascended to the heavens, the angels were upset that he was there to get the Torah - Moshe tells them that the Torah says to honor one's parents, which an angel can't do; that you should respect one another and not covet what your neighbor has, which an angel never has to be wary of - Moshe pointed out that the Torah was clearly written for people, not angels.

**Rav Simon**: the **Beis Halevi** says that there was a deeper disagreement in terms of the Torah - there is Torah Shebiksav and Ba'al Peh. The written Torah is precise; Torah Sheba'alpeh records many machlokes, disagreements between rabbanim. The point of the Torah is for us to derive all kinds of lessons; we have tremendous power to darshen Torah, and we come to different conclusions; authority is given into our hands to decide on Halachah; the Torah was given to us for us to darshen out the Torah, and the way we decide is how we keep the Torah. There is the famous example of the acceptability of an unusual oven, where Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurkanus could not sway the other rabbis towards his position, and even after calling on nature to reverse itself, with miracles that included a Bas Kol that agreed with him, the Rabbis answered Lo Bashamayim Hi - the Torah is not in the heavens anymore - even Hashem cannot decide what the Torah means, and we go after the majority of what the Rabbis here say. The Bais Halevi says this is what the disagreement was all about - the angels were willing to let the Jews have the Torah, but they felt that God should be the final arbiter of its interpretation, and which position is right and wrong - God should be the final determinant of the Torah's meaning; but we see that God gave the Torah to us completely, with complete authority over it - we control Torah Sheba'alpeh - that is how much God loves us, allowing us to control Torah and define Judaism. We are so precious in God's eyes, that he trusts this power to us, even when objectively we are making a mistake. This is part of lifting us up - we have been given the absolute control to define the Torah, with God relinquishing His control.