

**Parshas Bamidbar in a Nutshell**  
(Numbers 1:1–4:20)

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary. They replace the firstborn, whose number they approximated, since they were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel "ransom" to redeem themselves.

When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary's vessels (the Ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north.

*(continued next column)*



At the core of each person — regardless of who he thinks he is and how much he has achieved — lies a spark of G-d. That is who we really are. When we shed all externals, this soul is the essence of our being.

– The Rebbe

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Before the Sanctuary's entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem. ❖

*Bulletin  
This week's Bulletin  
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**Halachic Zmanim**  
Shabbos, May 15, 2021  
Daylight Savings Time  
Earliest Tallis ..... 4:32 AM  
Latest Morning Shema ..... 9:13 AM  
Earliest Mincha (Gedola).. 1:30 PM  
Plag Hamincha ..... 6:41 PM  
Earliest Evening Shema .... 8:39 PM

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**Shabbos Schedule**

**Erev Shabbos – May 14 / Sivan 3**

Candle Lighting ..... 7:49 pm

Mincha ..... 7:30 pm

**Shabbos Day – May 15 / Sivan 4**

Shacharis..... 10:00 am\*

Torah Reading..... 10:50 am

Rabbi Drasha..... 11:15 am

Mincha ..... 7:55 pm

Rabbi's Drasha ..... 8:15 pm

Shabbos Ends..... 8:55 pm

*\*Latest morning Shema is now 9:13 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

**Erev Shevuos – May 16 / Sivan 5**

Candle Lighting ..... 7:51 pm

Mincha ..... 7:55 pm

**Shevuos Day #1 – May 17 / Sivan 6**

Shacharis..... 10:00 am\*

Ten Commandments ..... 10:50 am

Mincha ..... 7:55 pm

Candle Lighting ..... after 8:57 pm

**Shevuos Day #2 – May 18 / Sivan 7**

Shacharis..... 10:00 am\*

Torah Reading..... 10:50 am

Yizkor ..... 11:15 am

Mincha ..... 7:55 pm

Yom Tov ends ..... 8:58 pm

# Chassidic Masters

## Powerful Insights From the Rebbe

*Compiled by Mordechai Rubin*

### 1. The Infinite Spark

Parshas Bamidbar -- and indeed the entire book of Bamidbar -- is filled with 'countings.'

When a census is taken, the count will include scholars and boors, professionals and vagabonds, philanthropists and misers, saints and criminals. Yet each counts for no more and no less than one in the total number. The count reflects only the one quality they all share equally: the fact that each is an individual human being.

As G-d sees it, the soul of man is a spark of His own fire—a spark with the potential to reflect the infinite goodness and perfection of its source. Human life is the endeavor to realize what is implicit in this spark. Indeed, a person may lead a full, accomplished and righteous life, and barely scratch the surface of the infinitude of his or her soul. Another person may blunder for a lifetime in darkness and iniquity, and then, in a moment of self-discovery, fan their divine spark into roaring flame.

So when G-d instructs that we be counted, it is an expression of our highest common denominator. On the divine census sheet, our differences are transcended to reveal the simple fact of our being—a fact which expresses what is best in us, and from which stems all that is good in us. ❖

### 2. Why Was the Torah Given in a Desert?

Every year, the Torah portion Bamidbar, "in the desert," is read before the holiday of Shavuot. This sequence is intentional, highlighting the fact that the Torah was given in such a barren setting, this teaches us the following lessons:

A desert has no owner. By giving the Torah in the desert, G-d showed that no one person or tribe can control it; every Jew has an equal claim.

To approach the Torah, we must make ourselves ownerless by stepping beyond our individual personalities. The Torah reflects G-d's infinity, transcending our understanding. To relate to this infinity, we must transcend our personal selves.

The desert is barren and desolate. Thus when our ancestors received the Torah, they had to depend on G-d for food, water, and clothing. Yet far from worrying, they received the Torah with loving trust. Similarly, instead of giving primacy to our material concerns, we should consider the Torah our priority, and remain confident that G-d will provide us with our needs as He provided for our ancestors.

The barrenness of the desert can also be understood as a metaphor for feelings of spiritual barrenness and emptiness. Even when a person sees himself as an arid wasteland, he need not despair. For precisely in such an environment, G-d reached out to our people and gave them the Torah. ❖

### 3. The Third Counting

The census described in this week's Torah portion was the third of three countings.

The first census was on the Israelites' departure from Egypt, and it aroused their spirit of self-sacrifice to the extent that they were willing to follow G-d into an unsown and barren wilderness.

The second was prior to the building of the Tabernacle. It reached further outward to the intellect and emotions of the Israelites, because they were preparing themselves for the work that was to bring the Shechinah—G-d's Presence—into their very midst. But still the impetus came from outside: it was G-d's command that set them to their work, not any inner compunction.

The third census took place after the service of the Tabernacle, when the Israelites, by their own actions, had invited G-d into their midst.

This begs the question: Why was there a one month gap in between the completion of the Tabernacle (in Nissan) and this census (in Iyar)?

Nissan is the month of Pesach, the time when we acknowledge the revelation that comes from above—it was not the merit of the Israelites that caused G-d to take them out of Egypt, but G-d's mercy and kindness alone.

*(Continued next page)*

## Powerful Insights From the Rebbe *(continued)*

But Iyar is the month of the Omer, the time of special sacrifices; and by sacrifice we bring about the “revelation that comes from below,” that answers to our merit and not merely to G-d’s grace.

At this third census, Israel finally reached the state where their own actions were permeated with the soul’s awareness. Now and only now could they bring about the “revelation that comes from below.” ❖

### All About Shavuos

The holiday of Shavuos is a two-day holiday, beginning at sundown following the 5th of Sivan and lasting until nightfall of the 7th of Sivan (May 16–18, 2021). In Israel it is a one-day holiday, ending at nightfall of the 6th of Sivan.

#### What Shavuot Commemorates

The word Shavuos (or Shavuot) means “weeks.” It celebrates the completion of the seven-week Omer counting period between Passover and Shavuos. The Torah was given by G-d to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai on Shavuos more than 3,300 years ago. Every year on the holiday of Shavuos we renew our acceptance of G-d’s gift, and G-d “re-gives” the Torah.

The giving of the Torah was a far-reaching spiritual event—one that touched the essence of the Jewish soul for all times. Our sages have compared it to a wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. Shavuos also means “oaths,” for on this day G-d swore eternal devotion to us, and we in turn pledged everlasting loyalty to Him.

In ancient times, two wheat loaves would be offered in the Holy Temple on Shavuos. It was also at this time that people would begin to bring bikkurim, their first and choicest fruits, to thank G-d for Israel’s bounty.

#### How Is Shavuos Celebrated?

- Women and girls light holiday candles to usher in the holiday, on both the first and second evenings of the holidays.
- It is customary to stay up all night learning Torah on the first night of Shavuos.
- All men, women and children should go to the synagogue to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments on the first day of Shavuos.
- As on other holidays, special meals are eaten, and no “work” may be performed.
- It is customary to eat dairy foods on Shavuos. Menus range from traditional cheese blintzes to quiches, casseroles and more.
- On the second day of Shavuos, the Yizkor memorial service is recited.
- Some communities read the Book of Ruth during morning services, as King David—whose passing occurred on this day—was a descendant of Ruth the Moabite.
- Some have the custom to decorate their homes (and synagogues) with flowers and sweet-smelling plants in advance of Shavuos.

## Haftorah for Parshas Bamidbar in a Nutshell

*Hosea 2:1-22*

This week's haftorah begins with the words, "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea [shore], which can be neither measured nor counted." An appropriate reading for the first Torah reading of the Book of Numbers.

Hosea first prophesies about the eventual reunification of the houses of Judah and Israel. During the Messianic Era, these two perennial antagonists will make peace and appoint a single leader. Hosea then rebukes the Jewish people for their infidelity, abandoning their "husband," G-d, and engaging in adulterous affairs with pagan deities. He describes the punishments they will suffer because of this unfaithfulness.

Eventually, though, Hosea reassures the Jews that they will repent, and G-d will accept them back wholeheartedly. The haftorah concludes with the moving words: "And I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy." ❖

## From Our Sages

### ***G-d spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai (Numbers 1:1)***

*Fire, water and desert—by these we established our commitment to the Torah.*

*The first Jew, Abraham, was cast into a fiery furnace for his loyalty to the way of G-d. And lest one say that this was an extraordinary act by an extraordinary individual, at the shores of the Red Sea an entire people plunged into the sea's waters when the divine command to "move forward!" issued forth. And lest one say that this was a spur-of-the-moment heroism, for forty years the people of Israel followed G-d through the barren, hostile desert, trusting in Him to provide for them and protect them. As the prophet Jeremiah declaims, "I remember the kindness of your youth, your bridal love, your following after Me in the desert, in an unsown land."*

*-- (Rabbi Meir Shapira of Lublin)*

### ***When the camp journeys on, Aaron and his sons shall come and take down the dividing curtain [of the Sanctuary] and cover the Ark of Testimony with it. They shall place upon it a covering of tachash hide, and spread over it a garment wholly of blue wool (Numbers 4:5-6)***

*Like the Ark, the soul of man is encased within three coverings: 1) it is overlaid with a selfish and materialistic character (what Chassidism calls "the animal soul"); 2) it is embedded within a physical body; 3) it is placed in a physical world which obscures and distorts the divine reality.*

*As long as the Ark stood in its place in the Holy of Holies, it had no need for coverings. But when the time came for it to journey on, G-d commanded that it be "swallowed up" by its threefold vestment. The same applies to the soul. A "spark of G-dliness," the soul is perfect and complete unto itself. But to journey on—to advance further in the infinite journey toward union with its Infinite Source—it must undergo on a "descent for the sake of ascent." It must be subjected to the threefold concealment of human nature, physicality and worldliness, to discover in the lowliest reaches of creation the key for even greater connection with G-d.*

*-- (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

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