

In this week's *Parashah*, approximately thirty nine years after the census at the beginning of *Sefer Bemidbar*, *Bnei Yisrael* are counted once again. *Rashi z"l* explains: When *Bnei Yisrael* were taken out of Egypt and given over to Moshe's care, they were counted. Now that the time is nearing for Moshe to die and return his flock to its Owner, he counted them again. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Tzvi Abba Gorelick z"l (*Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshiva Gedolah Zichron Moshe in South Fallsburg, N.Y.; died 2010) adds another dimension to *Rashi's* explanation: R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that all of the Jewish People share only 600,000 different faces; *Hashem* did not create more faces than that. (This may be one reason why we are sometimes certain we have met someone before even though we are, in fact, meeting him for the first time.) These 600,000 different faces reflect a like number of *De'ot* / different ways of looking at things. Collectively, these *De'ot* encompass all possible understandings of the Torah. This is why *Hashem* did not give the Torah to the Patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov--He wanted to wait until the Jewish People numbered 600,000, for only then would the Giving of the Torah be complete.

As we learn at the beginning of *Pirkei Avot*, Moshe was the first link in the transmission of the Torah, and he transmitted it to Yehoshua; indeed, the latter's appointment as Moshe's successor takes place in our *Parashah*. Therefore, writes R' Gorelick, Moshe counted the nation, confirming that just as he received 600,000 people into his care and taught them the Torah, so he would be handing over a like number of people to Yehoshua for him to teach. (*Pirkei Mikra*)

Shabbat

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) writes: Our Sages relate that the Torah asked *Hashem*, "When *Bnei Yisrael* enter the Land of Israel, this one will run to tend his olives and this one will run to tend his vineyard; what will become of me?" *Hashem* answered, "*Shabbat* will be your mate." We learn similarly in the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, "*Shabbat* and the festivals were given to *Yisrael* only so that they could engage in Torah study."

The idea is, explains the *Chafetz Chaim*, that all week we are busy with our jobs and with our businesses, and we may not have time to set aside for Torah study. On *Shabbat*, however, we are free of work and we can engage in studying Torah properly. This why the *Gemara* (*Gittin* 38b) teaches that one of the reasons homeowners lose their assets is that they schedule their *Shabbat* meals at the same time that Torah classes are taking place. The *Chafetz Chaim* explains that this refers to the classes that commonly take place on *Shabbat* afternoon after everyone has napped; one should not have his *Seudah* then, but rather earlier or later, so he can attend the classes taking place at *Shul*. This, continues the *Chafetz Chaim*, is an open rebuke to those who spend that part of the day walking in the streets. If the *Shabbat* meal, which is a *Mitzvah*, may not be held at that hour because one is thereby neglecting Torah study, certainly taking a walk or holding idle conversations is not proper at that time.

He continues: We read (*Mishlei* 3:6), "In all your ways know Him, and He will smooth your paths." No matter what a person is doing, including working or engaging in business, his intent should be so that he will have sustenance that will allow him to serve *Hashem* through Torah study and the performance of *Mitzvot*. If a person works all week with this intention, *Hashem* will view his ways as if they are straight and perfect (*i.e.*, "He will smooth your paths"), and the person will be rewarded for everything he did as if he was engaged in serving *Hashem*. This is conditioned, however, on his actually running to learn when he does have the time--especially on *Shabbat*, when he is free of work. (*Shem Olam* ch.5)

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“Moshe and Elazar the *Kohen* spoke to them in the plains of Moav, by the Jordan, near Yericho, saying, ‘From twenty years of age and above, as Hashem had commanded Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael*, who were coming out of the land of Egypt’.” (26:3-4)

R’ Shlomo Kluger *z”l* (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains: When *Bnei Yisrael* were counted thirty nine years earlier, Moshe was commanded to count only those between the ages of 20 and 60. The tribe of Levi was excluded from that census because, says *Midrash Rabbah*, Hashem saw that all those who were included were destined to die in the desert, and Hashem did not want the tribe of Levi, which did not sin with the Spies, to be included in that decree.

R’ Kluger continues: When Moshe announced again (in our *Parashah*) that he would count everyone between the ages of 20 and 60, this new generation might have feared that it, like the previous generation that was counted, would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. After all, the *Levi'im*, who were not included in the decree of death, were counted from the age of one month, not 20 years! Why then did Moshe count this new generation from the age of 20? The answer is that he did so only in order to not embarrass the previous generation unnecessarily by distinguishing between it and the new generation--much as a person bringing an *Olah* offering slaughters it in the same place in the *Bet Hamikdash* as a person bringing a sin offering in order to spare the latter embarrassment--*i.e.* so an observer will not know what offering the person is bringing.

This, then, is the meaning of our verses, concludes R’ Kluger: “Moshe and Elazar the *Kohen* spoke to them in the plains of Moav, by the Jordan, near Yericho”--*i.e.*, on the border of *Eretz Yisrael*, so they would not think that they will not enter the Land--“saying, ‘From twenty years of age and above.’ Why? “As Hashem had commanded Moshe and *Bnei Yisrael*, who were coming out of the land of Egypt”--*i.e.*, in order to appear no different than the earlier generation. (*Chochmat Ha”Torah*)

“Moshe spoke to Hashem, saying, ‘May Hashem, *Elokim* of the spirits (literally, “winds”) of all flesh, appoint a man over the assembly; who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall take them out and bring them in; and let the assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd’.” (27:15-17)

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 97a) teaches, “In the generation in which *Mashiach* will come, the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog.” R’ Gedaliah Silverstone *z”l* (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) explains: A dog usually walks in front of its master, even when it does not know where they are going. Then, when they reach an intersection, the dog looks behind it to see which way its master is preparing to turn. The same thing will be true of our so-called leaders in the days before *Mashiach* will arrive, writes R’ Silverstone. Though they will walk in front, they will constantly look behind them to see if the people--and especially the boards of their synagogues--are pleased with the path they are taking. – *Continued in box on facing page* –

“Pinchas, son of Elazar, son of Aharon the *Kohen*, turned back My wrath from upon *Bnei Yisrael*, when he zealously avenged Me in their midst, so I did not consume *Bnei Yisrael* in My vengeance.” (25:11)

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap *z”l* (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim’s Sha’arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes: Pinchas did have any interest in being divisive. To the contrary, specifically because of his great love for *Yisrael* and his desire to turn back Hashem’s anger, he avenged Hashem “in their midst” (*i.e.*, he never lost sight of the fact that he was part of them). He also never lost sight of the inner character of the Jewish People as a *Mamlechet Kohanim* / kingdom of priests, and he therefore merited to receive the *Kehunah* / priesthood for himself and his descendants.

(*Mei Marom: Nimukei Mikraot*)

From the same work:

“Therefore, say, ‘Behold! I give him My covenant of peace.’”

Midrash Rabbah comments: “Justice demands that he receive his reward.”

R’ Charlap explains: Our Sages say that Hashem wanted to create the world with the Attribute of Justice, but He knew such a world could not survive, so He tempered it with the Attribute of Mercy. However, the *Midrash* is teaching us, Pinchas’ self-sacrifice raised him to such a high level that even the Attribute of Justice demanded that he receive his reward.

“And it shall be for him and his offspring after him a covenant of eternal *Kehunah* / priesthood, because he took vengeance for his *Elokim*, and he atoned for *Bnei Yisrael*.” (25:13)

Rashi z”l explains: Although the *Kehunah* had already been given to Aharon’s descendants (and Pinchas was Aharon’s grandson), it was given only to Aharon and his sons who were anointed together with him, and also to their offspring who would be born after they were anointed. But Pinchas, who was born before that and was not anointed, did not attain the status of *Kehunah* until now. [Until here from *Rashi*]

How was becoming a *Kohen* a fitting reward for what Pinchas did? R’ Yehonatan Eybeschutz *z”l* (rabbi, *Rosh Yeshiva*, and prolific author; Central Europe; 1690-1764) explains: Since Pinchas atoned for *Bnei Yisrael* and “turned back My wrath from upon *Bnei Yisrael*,” it is a fitting reward that his descendants serve in the *Bet Hamikdash* and bring atonement to future generations of the Jewish People. (*Tiferet Yehonatan*)

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R’ Silverstone adds that he saw our verses explained similarly (in a *Sefer* that he identifies only by its initials: *Bet-Yud*): A true spiritual leader is someone who goes out before the congregation and comes in before them, *i.e.*, he leads the people as he sees fit based on what the Torah commands. He is not someone who looks at his congregation and sees which way the “wind is blowing” and which way they want to go. (*Bet Meir* III #7)