

Parashat Bemidbar: Loving As God Loves

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Bemidbar 1:1	
וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינִי בְּאֶהָל מוֹעֵד בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִית לִצְאָתָם מִמִּצְרָיִם מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:	On the first day of the second month, in the second year following the exodus from the land of Egypt, יהוה spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, saying:

1. God's Love and the Census

Bemidbar Rabbah on Bemidbar 1:1	
דָּבָר אַחֵר, וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינִי. אָמַר לוֹ (בְּמִדְבַּר א, ב): שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ, אָמַר הַקְדּוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא חֲבַבְתִּי בְרִיָּה יוֹתֵר מִכֶּם, לָכֵן נִתַּנְתִּי לָכֶם תְּלוּי רֹאשׁ, וְדַמִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי, שְׂכָשֶׁם שִׁישׁ לִי תְלוּי רֹאשׁ עַל כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם, שְׂנֵאָמַר (דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים א כט, יא): לָךְ ה' הַגְדִּלָה, כָּךְ לָכֶם עָשִׂיתִי לְהִיּוֹת לָכֶם תְּלוּי רֹאשׁ, לָכֵן נֵאָמַר: שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ, לְקִיָּים מֶה שְׂנֵאָמַר (תְּהִלִּים קמח, יד): וַיִּרָם קֶרֶן לְעֵמּוֹ, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר (דְּבָרִים כח, א): וְנִתְּנָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ עֲלֵינוּ עַל כָּל גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ.	Another matter: "The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai" – He said to him: "Take a census [se'u et rosh]" (Numbers 1:2). The Holy One blessed be He said to Israel: I was not fond of any creature more than you; therefore I accorded you preeminence [telui rosh] and likened you to Me. Just as I have preeminence over all mankind, as it is stated: "Yours, Lord, is the greatness [...and the preeminence over every head [vehamithnaseh lekhol lerosh]]" (I Chronicles 29:11), so, I accorded you preeminence. That is why it is stated: Se'u et rosh, to realize what is stated: "He raised a horn for His people" (Psalms 148:14). Likewise, it says: "The Lord your God will place you uppermost over all the nations of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:1).

Rashi on Bemidbar 1:1	
וידבר. במדבר סיני באחד לחדש וגו'. מתוך חבתן לפניו מונה אותם כל שעה — כשיצאו ממצרים מנאן, וכשנפלו בעגל מנאן לידע מנין הנותנים, כשבא להשרות שכינתו עליהם מנאם, באחד בניסן הוקם המשכן ובאחד באיר מנאם:	וגו' - וידבר. במדבר סיני באחד לחדש וגו' - Because they were dear to him, He counts them every now and then: when they went forth from Egypt He counted them (Exodus 12:37), when many of them fell in consequence of their having worshipped the golden calf He counted them to ascertain the number of those left (cf. Rashi Exodus 30:16); when he was about to make His Shechinah dwell amongst them (i. e. when He commanded them to make a Tabernacle), He again took their census; for on the first day of Nisan the Tabernacle was erected (Exodus 40:2) and shortly afterwards, on the first day of Iyar, He counted them.

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

Seforno on Bemidbar 1:2	
<p>במספר שמות. כי היה אז כל אחד מאותו הדור נחשב בשמו המורה על צורתו האישית למעלתו על דרך ואדעך בשם ולא כן קרה לדור באי הארץ ובכן לא נמנו במספר שמות ולא נזכרו זולתי ראשי המשפחות ומספר האישים. ועם זה הודיע שהיתה הכונה שאותם האישים בעצמם יחיו ויירשו הארץ ולא יפקד מהם איש:</p>	<p>במספר שמות, at that time, the names of the individuals reflected their specific individuality in recognition of their individual virtues. References to names reflecting an individual's virtues are found earlier when God said to Moses that He would ואדעך בשם, "I have singled you out by name;" the generation which eventually entered the Holy Land was not described as being counted as being of military age. At this point, the count of the Israelites assumed that the very people being counted would each enter the Holy Land unless some sin occurred, which would interfere with this lofty vision.</p>

Sefer Shnei Lukhot Ha-Brit, Torah She'Bikhtav- Bemidbar 25	
<p>במדבר סיני, זה ספר נקרא חומש הפקודים, על שם המנין שנמנו ישראל. נשמע מזה שדבר המנין הזה הוא חשוב ואין לו ביטול עולמית. ורבותינו ז"ל אמרו (עי' רש"י במדבר א, א) שהמנין הזה היה כדי להשרות השכינה בישראל. על כן אני אומר שפרשה זו בפרטית היא נגד מחנה שכינה, ומחנה שכינה שלמטה מכון נגד שלמעלה, כמו שאמרו רבותינו ז"ל (ב"ר ד, יג) מקדש שלמטה מכון נגד שלמעלה:</p>	<p>במדבר סיני. This book is called חומש הפקודים, the book of those who have been numbered, because of the census the people of Israel underwent. This count will never become irrelevant (else we would not read about it annually after over three thousand years). Our sages say that the purpose of the census was to ensure that the Divine Presence, would take up permanent residence amongst the Jewish people. I believe that this Parshah and all its details refer to the מחנה כהונה. The מחנה כהונה on earth is, of course, "opposite" of the מחנה שכינה in the Celestial Region (Bamidbar Rabbah 4,13).</p>

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, <i>Torah Gems</i> , Parashat Bemidbar
<p>When instructing Moses, our Teacher, to count the children of Israel, the Divine words were carefully chosen to avoid misinterpretation of the symbolism of the desert. "Elevate the heads of the entire congregation of Israel." Every individual should be aware that he is capable of being elevated and can reach the greatest heights. In the last Parasha of Vayikra, we learn of the mitzvah of taking off every tenth cattle and designating it as holy. However, when it comes to counting the children of Israel, we must know that every individual is sacred</p>

2. Loving as God Loves

Lenn E. Goodman, <i>On Justice: An Essay in Jewish Philosophy</i> , 27
<p>Value, I assume, is intrinsic in all being, not merely in subjects or in objects of desire. Value, in fact, is identical with the being of things, dynamically considered—that, is with regard for their projects and potentials. It follows that justice amounts to giving beings their deserts and that deserts are the claims of beings, their positive self-affirmation, as scaled against those of other beings.</p>

Rabbi Shai Held, <i>Judaism Is About Love</i> , 92
<p>When we love, we don't just acknowledge the other's separateness; we also embrace and celebrate their uniqueness. In this sense, our love reflects God's. In creating us, God allows us—wants us—to be other than God...God loves us not as generic examples of the human species but as unique, distinctive individuals. In loving others in all their uniqueness, then, we take a step toward loving as God loves.</p>