

## A LESSON FROM THE PARASHA

### Numbers

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If anyone would open up an article or listen to the news about our current pandemic, they would be inundated with numbers and statistics. How many current cases are there? How many new ones? How many have died? Is the death rate going down? Additionally, we have currently hit the ten-year mark where the US constitution mandates that we take a national census. How many people have been born? How many have passed on? How big has my state grown? How many more people have moved to the US? These numbers are critically important, as they will dictate to the respective governments how to plan and execute plans for the future that will affect all of us. However, there is also an element to all these numbers and statistics that numbs and desensitizes ourselves to the individual. When we look at and study numbers and figures as plots on a curve, we miss the importance of what is behind each number.

We all know that *Sefer Bamidbar* is called the *Book of Numbers*, presumably due to the census of the Jewish people taken at the beginning of it and towards the end. Really, however, the first census that was taken occurred in the book of *Bereishis*. When we look at all of these numbers and counting, we see an important pattern emerging with a tremendous lesson the Torah is teaching us. The first counting occurred shortly after Rochel *Imeinu* passed away and Reuven, in his hastiness, erroneously moved his father's bed into his mother's tent. There the Torah counts each of the *shevatim*, mentioning each one by name. The next time a counting of the Jewish people occurs is when Yaakov and his family embark on their journey to *Mitzrayim*, their very first exile. There again, the Torah mentions each of the names of the 70 people who

went down, but this time, all individuals are tied to their respective tribes, which are, in turn, tied to their respective mother, the wives of Yaakov. The next official census comes in our *parasha*, where individuals are counted among their families, which are then grouped into their tribe, which are then counted among the whole of the Jewish people. We see a pattern emerging where the total numbers aren't merely counted, but rather, they are broken down into tribes, families, and then the individual. The Torah is teaching us that when we look at a national census, the sum total is not the only important number to look at it; there are tribes, families within the tribes, and then the named individuals themselves, no matter who they are or what they've done. They are part of a bigger, beautiful picture made of many pieces such that if even one were missing, the picture would be incomplete.

As we follow the news and numbers, it is important to keep in mind that each affected individual, and G-d forbid, death is not just a part of a figure. Each individual is a father/mother, son/daughter, sister/brother, aunt/uncle, etc., part of a bigger picture of a family who are all affected in their own; each family lives in a state which is also affected; each state is part of a county which is affected as well. If we can regain this perspective, we can commiserate more with those affected, helping us to be more empathetic and ultimately increasing our sense of unity and attachment to everyone around us. When we are part of a unit, our spiritual power multiplies many times over, giving us the strength and merit to, with the help of Hashem, overcome our current situation to eventually become a much stronger nation than we were before! 🕊

## A TIMELY HALACHA

RABBI CHAIM HEINEMANN

There is a well-known custom for men to stay up all Shavous night learning Torah (*M.B. O.C. 480:1* in the name of the *Zohar*). The *Poskim* debate whether one who remains awake the entire night is required to recite *Bircas haTorah* the next morning or not. Some authorities (refer to *Magen Avraham 47:12* and *Chai Adom 9:9*) do not require it, since they hold that the previous day's blessings are still valid. In their view, unless a major interruption – such as a night's sleep – occurs, yesterday's blessings remain in effect. Others maintain that this *bracha* was instituted to be recited every day regardless of whether or not one slept, similar to all other *Birchos Hashachar* which are said in the morning, whether one slept or not. Accordingly, a new *bracha* should be recited even if one did not go to sleep (*Aruch Hashulchan 47:28*). According to the *Mishna Brurah (47:23)*, this issue remains unresolved. Therefore, it is advisable and customary to do one of the following:

- Listen to the *bracha* from someone else who had a proper night's sleep (*M.B. 47:12*). The one who recites the *bracha* should have in mind to exempt the listener and the listener should have in mind to be exempt. After responding *amen*, the listener should say a few *pesukim* afterwards (*M.B. 47:28*).
- Sleep during the day (Erev Shavous) for at least a half hour on a bed. As long as he did not learn immediately after Maariv, he may

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