

## INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

*Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.*

### במדבר סיני באהל מועד

**"In the wilderness in the tent of the meeting..." (1:1)**

The words במדבר סיני are numerically equal to the word בשלום – 378. The *Mechilta* states in *Parshat Yitro* that when *Bnei Yisrael* came to *Har Sinai*, all the tribes were united as one man, with one heart. In this merit, they were worthy of *Matan Torah*. Since we read *Bamidbar* on the *Shabbat* prior to *Shavuot*, it is appropriate that we make peace among one another before receiving the Torah. (Chidah)

### שאו את ראש כל עדת בני ישראל...במספר שמות

**"Take a census of the entire assembly of the Jewish people...by number of the names..." (1:2)**

In this *Parsha*, Hashem commands *Moshe* to count the Jewish people. Obviously, Hashem was not taking an inventory of the Jews. Their exact number was and is always known to Him. What, then, was the purpose of this counting?

The *Rishonim* suggest different answers to this question. *Ramban* writes that Hashem told *Moshe* to count the Jews so that *Bnei Yisrael* would appreciate how much their numbers had grown. From a mere seventy souls upon arriving in Egypt, they had grown to over 600,000 males between the ages of 20 and 60!

*Kli Yakar* and *Seforno* explain the counting in a different light. They suggest that counting a group by "number" is impersonal. Therefore, Hashem counted the Jews by their "names," to show that each one is special, each one is worthy. Every member of the Jewish nation is accorded personal Divine providence, for he is beloved and unique. This, they explain, is the meaning of the phrase "by number of the names." (A Torah Thought for the Day)

### כאשר יחנו כן יסעו

**"As they encamp, so they shall go forward..." (2:17)**

While the meaning is fairly simple, the writers of *mussar* find in this phrase a valuable lesson in Jewish life. They explain, "exactly as you act in your home, environment and community, by going to *Minyan* and *Torah* classes, visiting the sick and practicing *chesed*, so should you act when traveling away from home." How often good observant Jews let down their guard somewhat and

lower their standards while on vacation or during travel when away from home! As *Rav Yitzchak Yehudah Trunk* points out, this may be another way of understanding the phrase in *Kriat Shema*, “when sitting in your home and when going on the road” – may you be as punctilious in your observances when going on the road as you are in your home. (*Great Torah Lights*)

**וימת נדב ואביהוא לפני ה' בהקרבתם אש זרה לפני ה' במדבר סיני**  
**“And Nadav and Avihu died before Hashem when they offered an alien fire before hashem in the wilderness of Sinai...” (3:4)**

The Torah tells us that *Nadav and Avihu*, the sons of *Aharon*, died before Hashem, which means that only Hashem knew why they died. If so, the mere fact that they had brought the “alien fire” was not sufficient reason to cause their death.

The reason is that the two young *Kohanim* had spoken against *Moshe* and *Aharon*: “*When will these two old men die so that we can take over leadership of the generation?*” (*Sanhedrin* 52a). This shows that they felt they could relate more effectively than their elders to the needs and the thinking of the younger generation.

In punishment, Hashem brought about their deaths in a manner and for a reason that everyone could see and understand, the offering of the alien fire, which represented a new and unauthorized forms of service. There was poetic justice in this, in that their subversive outlook was truly an *alien fire*, in contrast to the “*ewish dat*,” fire of religion (*Devarim* 33:2), with which *Moshe* kindled the soul of the people until his very last day. (*Kol Dodi*)

**פקד את בני לוי...מבן חדש ומעלה תפקדם**  
**“Count the sons of Levi...from one month of age and up you shall count them...” (3:15)**

As is apparent from the text, the Levites were counted twice: once when they were a month old, when they were considered the “keepers of the watch” of the Sanctuary, and again, when they reached the age of thirty, when they would begin to perform the service in the *Mishkan*. From this we can learn the necessary preparation to become a Torah scholar, a calling which is comparable to that of the Levites, as portrayed by the *Rambam (Hilchot Shemittah)*. The lesson here is that *chinuch* must commence at birth, as we find that the mother of *R' Yehoshua ben Chananiah* wheeled his cradle into the *Beis Medrash* so that he could absorb the sounds of Torah study. Nonetheless, one may not rely on this early training, but must make sure that when the child matures, he is constantly observed to make sure that he continues in the ways of the Torah. It is for this reason that the thirty-year-old Levites are counted again. (*R' Moshe Feinstein*)

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