

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Bemidbar	19 May 2018	5 Sivan 5778	Num. 1:1-4:20	Hos. 1:10-2:20	Matt 4:1-17

Numbers 1:1-4:20

There are 54 Torah parasha (Torah portion) in a year. During the leap month, there are 56 *parashot* (portions) in a year. There are 187 chapters, 5845 verses, 81,404 words, and 304,805 letters in the original language of the Torah. The Torah has answers to every question in life, whether in business, personal relationship, how to be *tzadik* (righteous), how to seek Him, what HaShem is thinking, what He likes and dislikes. Someone who does not study the Torah cannot be a *tzadik*.

We begin with the fourth book known as Bamidbar, in English Bible it is known as Numbers. Last week, we ended Vayikra (Leviticus) which explained the instructions for the sacrifices, and how to deal with uncleanness. The Bamidbar is now focused on the Tabernacle, i.e. how to travel, who are the caretakers, and their duties, how to behave, how to protect and carry its furnishings, etc.

The Israelites remained in the wilderness of Mount Sinai for better part of a year to receive the Torah. As we know, the Torah does not present them in chronological, but in the order necessary to teach.

The 24 chapters of Leviticus begins with “And Hashem spoke to Moses,” who received all or most of instructions in the Tent of Meeting. Last week’s Torah portion contained the laws regarding the sabbatical year and the jubilee. Now, the text (Numbers) indicates that it is returning to an utterance spoken in the Tent of Meeting. From here on, all the Divine utterance occurred in the Tent of Meeting. From this point forward, after the Tabernacle was erected and, Hashem called Moses and spoke to him in the Tent of Meeting and nowhere else.

This week’s Torah portion is called “*bamidbar*” which means “in the wilderness.” The Talmud explains “the gift of the Torah came out of the wilderness.”¹ This portion is always read before Shavuot which alludes to a hidden level of understanding. When we think of “desert, or wilderness”, our thoughts lead to barren, untamed, and inhospitable place. King David said in Psalms 63:1-2, “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. O God, Thou art my God, earnestly will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and weary land, where no water is.”²

The world without Torah is a *midbar* (wilderness), a barren wasteland. It is a world without moral laws quickened to chaos and destruction as we have studied in the Book of Genesis before Noah’s flood. In other words, the world without the Torah was a wilderness as described in Genesis 1:2, a world of “*tohu vavohu*”³. So, “in the desert” is a metaphor for the lack of Divine revelation in creation.

The world with Torah becomes Bikkurim, a blossoming and fruitful paradise. Shavuot is identified with the mitzvah of Bikkurim which began when a farmer in Israel would go out to his field and find budding fruit, and tie a reed around them, verbally declaring them “first fruits.” This applied

¹ BT, Nedarim 55

² KJV, Psalms 63:1-2

³ “astonishingly empty”

only to the seven species: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates.⁴ The first fruits were brought to the Temple from Shavuot, which the Torah calls “the harvest festival, the first fruits of your work,” until Chanukah. Thus, this world with the Torah can become *gan eden*.

In verse 2, Hashem commands Moshe for another census. This is the third time He commanded Moshe, the very first in Exodus 12:37 when the Israelites left Egypt, and the second census in Exodus 30:11-16 after the sin of the Golden Calf. Hashem knows every single hair on our head. Yet does He not know how many Israelites are in the camp? The answer is if you love someone, would you not want to see the person again and again? For this reason, He wants to count again and again to remind Him how deeply He loves them.

It also describes how Moshe should count. And he gives specific instructions, “Take a census...[by] the numbers of their names,” not by head or a half-shekel. For if, Moshe to count the head of Israelites, then there would be a plague upon them as King David did in the First Chronicles 21 and the Second Samuel 24 who counted the people. Therefore, Hashem instructs Moshe to count the names according to their families, by their fathers’ house to show this was Hashem’s commandment and the Israelites would not receive any retribution for taking census.

The Levites were not counted in the census as they are responsible for the Tabernacle and did not serve in the army. The Levites were counted in the first census as they have not been chosen to serve Hashem yet. And few weeks later, “in the second year, on the twentieth day of the second month, the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle.”⁵ On this day, Moshe asked his father-in-law, Yethro to join him.

Now, Moshe was concerned that the Levites were not counted. Thus Hashem says, “Number the children of Lewi after the house of their father, by their families: every male from a month old and upward shall you number them.”⁶ The Scripture list three sons of Aharon, but it does not list any chieftains like the other tribes. Because Hashem is the Chieftain as said, “I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel.”⁷

Now, the sages teach that the three censuses equaled three stages of manifestation of Divine consciousness: 1. The Divine consciousness inspired us to follow Hashem into the desert, but it did not change us fundamentally; 2. By Hashem “dwelling” in us, our Divine soul became manifest enough to affect the way we think and feel. However, this was not the result of any self-refinement, rather it was “imposed” by Hashem; 3. We can now do self-refinement that our Divine soul would become and remain an intrinsic part of our lives.⁸

The Torah is teaching us how to behave. We learned that the Torah was given to us on Mount Sinai which was the lowest of the mountains.⁹ Thus the meaning of “in the Sinai desert” that we should be as lowly as Mount Sinai was lowly.

⁴ Deuteronomy 8:8

⁵ Numbers 10:11

⁶ Numbers 3:15

⁷ Numbers 3:12

⁸ Chumash Bemidbar, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, p. 7

⁹ Megillah 29a

However, if we are too modest or lowly, it can lead into depression and despair which can be an obstacle to properly serving Hashem. Therefore, the Torah teaches us to be always be happy, even though the Torah does not specifically spell out 'be happy', we find "Rejoice evermore,"¹⁰ and "Rejoice in Hashem always, I say again, Rejoice"¹¹ in the Renewed Covenant. Because we know that the Shekinah will not dwell on those who are sad. So, it is important to maintain a balance of humility and happiness through personal exodus.

The Zohar teaches the world was incomplete until the patriarchs came: Avraham, Isaac, and Jacob who represents *Chesed* (Kindness), *Gevurah* (Severity), and *Tif'eret* (Beauty). Avraham was grasping the tottering world with his right hand; then Isaac, with his left hand; and finally Jacob supported the world completely.¹² However, the world did not attain the perfection until the Torah was given to the Israelites and the Tabernacle built. So, the census, while it was counted for the military purpose on this physical world, it also counted for the people who would fulfill the commands of Torah spiritually. Furthermore, the Israelites were recognized as *Tif'eret* and the Levites were *Shekinah*. Rabbi Abba explains that 'the desert of Sinai' alludes to *Tif'eret* while the Tent of Meeting represents *Shekinah*.

When the Israelites travelled, it is the responsibility of Levites to erect and dismantle the Tabernacle. And any non-Levites who approaches and tries to do this will be put to death. As we have seen in the Second Samuel chapter 6, Uzzah died when he touched the Ark.

Now, we know that the Torah is the instrument through which Hashem's blessings flow, and we are to activate and use this vessel for His blessings continue to flow. The Hebrew word for 'tribe' is '*shevet*'. It also means 'branch'. The branches force its life-force in the trunk into its fruit. This is necessary as no fruit grows directly from the trunk.

When people are all mixed together, it is easy to get a garbled message (*lashon hara*). Each tribe has its unique attribute to fulfill the Divine mission on this earth as we all have different characters and personality. Only when these different capabilities are properly defined as having separate campsites for each tribe; and organized they can function properly. If we know who and what we are, then it is much easier 'to fulfill the Divine mission.' So, the separation is a prerequisite for harmony and unity. If not, the result would be like Uzzah. While his intention may be noble, he forgot that it was His Shekinah that carried him and the Ark.

Hashem made us different to see if we can get along and tolerate each other despite the difference we all have. Why? So that, we can be united even though we are different. Therefore, when the Israelites received Torah, they all become one person as we have become one in the Torah.

How did Israelites know when to proceed in their journey? A beam of light would come forth from one of the clouds, and they would journey to the direction of the light. When Hashem wanted the Israelites to camp, the light (Shekinah) would rest above the Tabernacle that was in the center of the formation.

¹⁰ First Thessalonians 5:16

¹¹ Philippians 4:4

¹² Zohar 1:86b

Each tribe had their own flags to identify each leading prince and the position of each tribe. The first tribe to lead the journey was from the tribe of Judah as seen below.

Tribe's Name	Stone	Color	Symbol	Reference
Reuben	Ruby	Red	Mandrake	Gen. 30:14
Simeon	Chrysolite	Green	Shechem	Gen. 34:25
Levi	Sardonyx	White, black, red	Urim and Tummim	Deut. 33:8
Judah	Turquoise	Sky blue	Lion	Gen. 49:9
Issachar	Sapphire	Blue-black like sapphire	Sun and Moon	Gen. 49:14
Zebulun	Opal	White	Ship	Gen. 49:13
Dan	Jacinth	Sapphire	Serpent	Gen. 49:17
Gad	Agate	Blend of black and white (grey?)	A camp of tents	Gen. 49:19
Naphtali	Amethyst	Not very deep red	A hind	Gen. 49:21
Asher	Beryl	Aquamarine	Olive tree	Gen. 49:20
Joseph	Onyx / Malachite	Green / black	A symbol of Egypt for Ephraim and Manasshesh	
Ephraim	Onyx / Malachite	Green / black	Bullock	Deut. 33:17
Manasshesh	Onyx / Malachite	Green / black	Wild ox	Deut. 33:17; applies to Gideon who came from this tribe
Benjamin	Jasper	All twelve stones	Wolf	Gen. 49:27

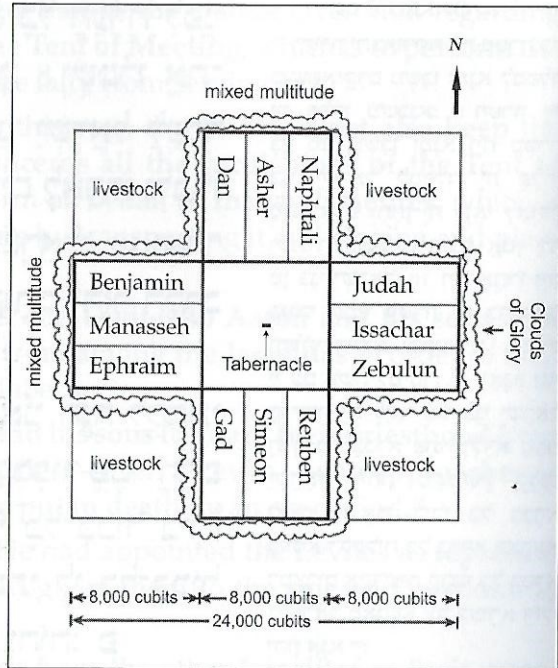
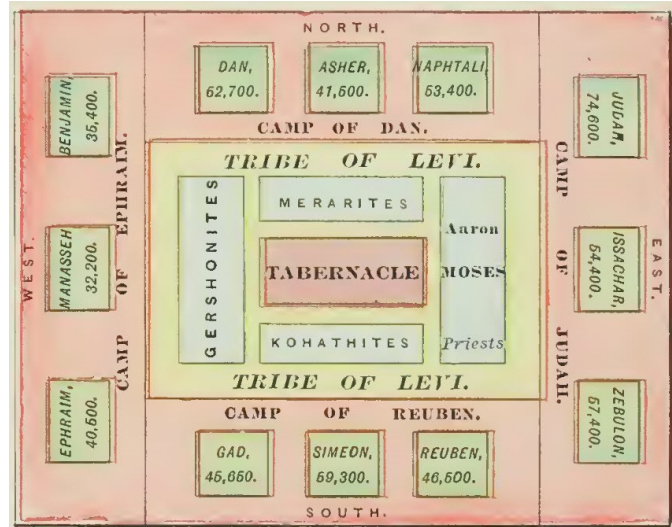
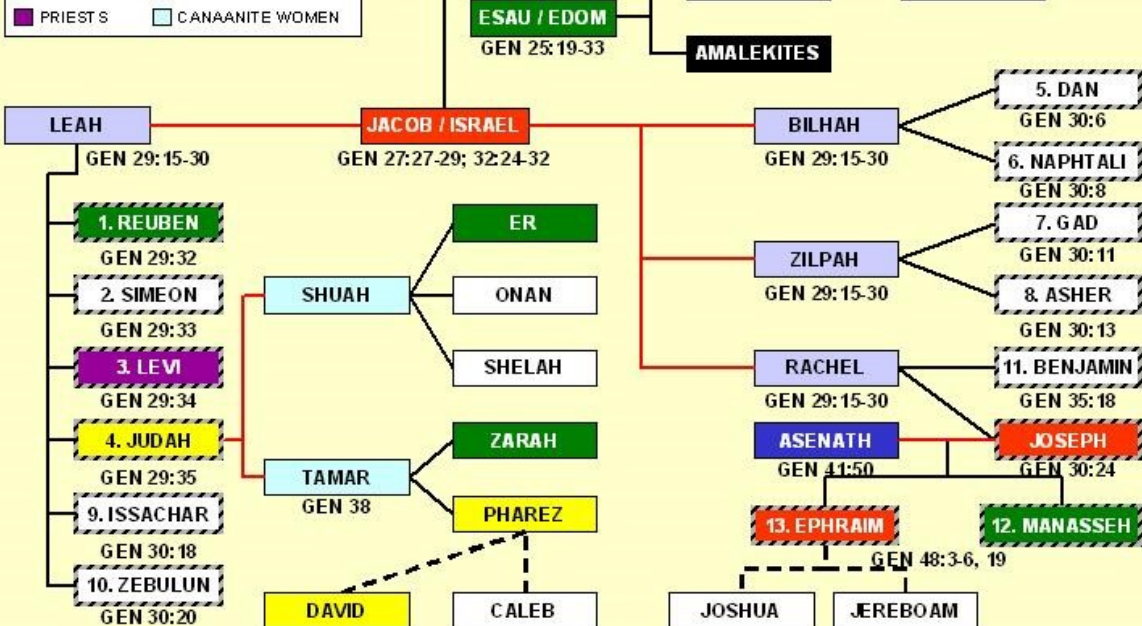


Figure 2. The Camp

It is interesting that the sons of Leah, with the exception of Reuben and Simeon, their camps are on the east side. And Benjamin, a son of Rachel, and two adopted sons, Manasseh and Ephraim camps are on the west side. Reuben and Simeon are mixed with Bilhah and Zilpah.



ABRAHAM'S SEED



In the Song at the Sea, the Tabernacle was referred to as “The Sanctuary that Your hands have established.”¹³ The Scripture list three ways of Hashem’s Hand. The phrase “Your hands” alludes to three basic ways Hashem acts in this world.¹⁴

Clan	Part of Tabernacle	Hand of Hashem	Significance	Allusion	Yocheved’s children
Gershon גרשון	Netting and veils	“Great hand”	Kindness (<i>chesed</i>)	Final nun	Aaron
Merari מררי	Walls and pillars	“Strong hand”	Strength (<i>gevurah</i>)	Name means “bitterness”	Miriam
Kehat קהת	Vessels and screen	“Uplifted hand”	Beauty (<i>tiferet</i>)	Carried vessels on shoulders	Moses

The “Great hand”¹⁵ signifies Hashem’s kindness which is the source of His beneficence.

The “Strong hand”¹⁶ signifies Hashem’s strength or severity.

The “Uplifted hand”¹⁷ signifies Hashem’s beauty.

The services performed by these clans has spiritual meanings:¹⁸

- Gershon alludes to final “*nun*” depicts Hashem’s bestowal of beneficence to the lowest levels, which is motivated by kindness.
- Merari, whose name is related to the word for “bitterness,” personified the “strong hand” that metes out punishment.
- Kehat personified the “uplifted hand” since his clan carried (or “uplifted”) the ark and the tablets on their shoulders.

Yocheved’s (יכבד 4+2+20+6+10) numerical value is 42, which is 3x14, 14 being the numerical value of “*yad*” (hand), alluding to the three “hands” that she bore.

- Moses (who received Torah and is therefore associated with *da’at* (knowledge), which is in turn aligned with *tiferet* (beauty)) resembled Kehat,
- Aaron (the man of kindness) resembled Gershon,
- Miriam (whose name means “bitterness”) resembled Merari.

¹³ Exodus 15:17

¹⁴ Chumash Bemidbar, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, p. 16

¹⁵ Exodus 14:31

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 7:19

¹⁷ Exodus 14:8

¹⁸ Chumash Bemidbar, The Lubavitcher Rebbe, p. 16