



*"Be the adult you needed as a  
child." (R' Meir Simcha Sportiug)*

# GROWTH

At The

## SHABBAT TABLE

### PARSHAT MATOT – MAS'EI

#### Statistically Speaking

A major chunk of Parshat Matot (Bamidbar ch. 31) discusses the miraculous battle against Midian – wherein a thousand Jews from each tribe (totaling only 12,000) conquered the mighty nation – and afterwards outlines the division of the spoils (the surviving people and all the animals). After their victory, Hashem commanded Moshe to split all the loot so that half would go to those who actually went out to fight, and the other half to the remainder of Am Yisrael. Those who undertook battle, who received the first half of all the 'treasure', were commanded to separate 1 out of every 500 (0.2%) as a "tribute to Hashem" (which would go to the Kohanim). The rest of the Jews, who had received the other half, were to give 1 from every 50 (2%); these allocations would be distributed among the Levites, "the guardians of the charge of Hashem's Tabernacle" (31:30). The Torah reports: "Moshe and Elazar HaKohen did as Hashem had commanded Moshe."

The Torah then goes on to provide a lengthy, detailed breakdown of each individual species among the bounty, listing how many were among the first half's taking as well as enumerating the number of each variety given to the Kohanim. Then, it records the amount of each individual species' within the spoils that went to the rest of Bnei Yisrael (the 2<sup>nd</sup> half), and finally concludes: "Moshe took from the half of the Children of Israel the 1 drawn from the 50" (31:47), but this time doesn't specify the numbers, unlike its narration of the 1<sup>st</sup> half's contribution.

This entire chapter begs for questions. Firstly, why was the Torah compelled to give a specified breakdown of all these figures? It could have saved a lot of ink having just written: "Moshe and Elazar HaKohen did as Hashem had commanded Moshe." Of what practicality is it for us to know precisely how much spoils they received? And by the very least, wouldn't a total summation suffice? Why does the exact number of slaves, cattle, donkeys, and flock concern us? Moreover, even if, for whatever reason, it was absolutely necessary for the Torah to provide a detailed outline of all the spoils, it appears quite superfluous to then delineate everything else, as they could have been deduced through mathematical calculation. If we were just given the records of the plunder that went to the soldiers, we could then figure out that the rest of the nation were awarded that same amount, since we know that it was split between the two groups *in half*. We could then calculate the appropriate portions that each group donated by just following the respective ratios (0.2% for first group and 2% for second group). Furthermore, since the Torah ended up specifying how many of each species were given to the Kohanim from the group of soldiers (despite the fact that we could have done the math ourselves), why then did it mysteriously omit the same computation for the 2% that the rest of the nation had to contribute to the Levites? Ironically enough, Rashi, who devoted his life to providing commentary to explain the simplest reading of the texts, doesn't address any of this! How are we to understand all this?

The Ramban explains that the Torah felt it necessary to detail what comprised each group's half as well as what went to the Kohanim afterwards in order to inform us of a spectacular miracle – that from the moment that they had collected the large amount of spoils until

they had counted, divided, and actually separated portions from them, not one captured person or animal among them died.

However, this answer still leaves us scratching our heads. What was the point of such a miracle? If it was just to prevent financial loss, since when does G-d perform such types of open miracles? Further, this doesn't explain the Torah's omission of listing the second group's contribution to the Levites...

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, of blessed memory, offered a fascinating insight. The *pasuk* (31:29) regarding the Kohanim's portion reads: "You shall take it from their half." Since the previous verse had already contained the command to separate a portion respective to the ratio, this verse is deemed repetitive and therefore is in the position to expound upon an underlying principle: that the donated portion had to be taken *from the entire half*. In other words, there couldn't have been a remainder; everything had to divide evenly. The first group needed to have the perfect amount of slaves, cattle, donkeys, and flock to divide by 0.2%, and the second group required just the right amount of each variety to divide by 2%. They couldn't merely estimate. Otherwise, the Divine directive of apportioning all the spoils would not have been complete. Now, what are the chances of getting such a precise figure? Of course, it's highly unlikely, and so the Torah outlines how much went to the soldier's half and how much they had separated for the Kohanim, to display the statistical anomaly due to G-d's miraculous ways. As fascinating as it was, it wasn't an open miracle that defied nature (like Avraham not burning in a furnace, etc.); it was just statistically unfavorable. As for the need to mention the second half, the Torah, in doing so, actually testifies to another unbelievable miracle that took place. Although the ratios all worked out perfectly, it didn't take much to mess it up. If just one animal would die, it would all be over. It must have taken them a significant amount of time to account for every single being of each species, let alone divide and apportion it, which only makes it more natural for there to have been some casualties. Yet, there were none, as evident from the fact that when the Torah listed the second half that went to the nation, the numbers were identical to those of the first half! It turns out that the Torah's "repetitive" narration was actually one that hinted to two awesome wonders orchestrated by G-d. Once they were alluded to, there was no need to detail what the second group separated; for that, a calculator would suffice...

*The practical relevance of all this to our lives may never have been more pertinent. We learn from here how powerfully beloved a mitzvah is in Hashem's eyes, and how He performs unbelievable phenomena just for us to be able to carry out His will in its completion – not just preventing setbacks at the actual time of the mitzvah but even working miracles well before it to ensure our success! Many times, we may be trying our hardest to do the right thing, but the enormous challenges we face drag us down and strip us of our spirit. We must never despair; rather, exude confidence that Hashem is rooting for us and may be flipping the world upside down just for you to succeed...*