

Dedicated to the sacred memory of my mother, Yitte bat Shlomo, A'H.  
She was taken from us on the 7<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, Issru Chag, 65 years ago. (It was the second day of Shavu'ot in Chutz La'Aretz) *Te'hei Nafsha Tzrura Bitzror Ha'chayim*

Gemara Megilla (31b) states "Ezra established that Bnei Yisrael should read the Tochacha (curses) of Torat Kohanim (Parshat Bechukotai) prior to Shavu'ot. We interject one parasha, parashat Bamidbar, between the admonition and the Yom Tov.. What connection is there between Bamidbar and Shavu'ot? The fact that chazal designated it to be read before Shavu'ot, means that there must be a message for Shavu'ot in Bamidbar..

There is a tradition from the Gaonim of "MINU VE'ATZRU", minu meaning COUNT, and atzru meaning atzeret- observe the yom tov of Shavuot which is called ATZERET. From here it is clear that Bamidbar's position before Shavuot has significance. Minu-:"count" can refer to Sefirat HaOmer, or Bamidbar, the parsha in which Bnei Yisrael are counted, and here lies the message. Most nations of the world have the custom of taking a census. This custom dates back thousands of years. When a king wanted to know the vastness of his empire, he would take a census. There is one major difference between the secular institution of census and the Mitzvah of "SE'UH ET ROSH KOL ADAT BNEI YISRAEL" (Count the people of Israel)

In the secular world, the underlying theme of the census is that the individual, the YACHID, means nothing; he is but a number. Only the masses are important; only the total nation collectively is meaningful. Only statistical facts are to be gleaned from a census- the average income, output, the health situation, etc. The individual does not count. Interesting is that in our parasha, the Torah has a unique expression when calling for a census, namely, "LIFT THE HEADS OF ALL BNEI YISRAEL". Why the strange expression of LIFTING THE HEADS when it simply means to count the people?

We find a parallel theme in Parshat Vayeishev (Bereishit 40:19). When Yosef was asked by pharaoh's jailed butler and baker to interpret their dreams, he said to both "In three days Pharaoh will lift your head". Although their fates would be completely dissimilar, the butler would be reinstated, and the baker would be hanged. Yet Yosef began with "lift your head" for both?

Rav Soloveitchik suggested, that the term "lifting heads" means "to be remembered". Usually, those thrown in jail would be forgotten from the memory of the king for many years until he decided to investigate their crime. So when Yosef told them that in three days they will be remembered, this was an opportunity for freedom, (or death).

Moshe Rabbeinu was the Manhig of Klal Yisrael. HaShem commanded him, together with his brother Aharon, to personally count every Jew. It was not sufficient to send out census takers to obtain the statistics; Moshe had to do it all by himself. HaShem wanted that Moshe personally meet each of the 600,000 Jews. Moshe had the Herculean task of

knowing each Jew. The Ramban explains that each person would pass before Moshe and Aharon. They counted people by going from house to house, and in the process, learned about each family; how they lived, their problems and their joys. For the leader must know all his people. This kind of a census gave the people a tremendous uplifting, for they will have a personal audience with the Manhig of Yisrael. This gave them status and a feeling of importance. “Se’uh Et Rosh Bnei Yisrael”- Lift their head and raise their spirit

So too on Yom Tov Shavu’ot, when we read the Aseret Hadibrot, we find that the Commandments are all written in the singular form, LO YI’HI’YEH, LO TISSA, KABED ET, etc., they are all addressed to the individual. They are meant for the masses, the entire Klal Yisrael, but they are addressed to each and everyone individually. The lesson is that every individual Jew is important. Every individual is considered in Judaism to be an entire world, KOL HAM’KAYEIM NEFESH ACHAT BEYISRAEL K’ILU KIYEIM OLAM MALEH (Sanhedrin 37a).

So Parshat Bamidbar and Shavuot compliment each other, and both reinforce the idea how important we are to HaShem, both as a tzibbur (community) and as individuals. May we always be deserving of HaShem’s attention to us, with our “heads lifted.” With pride and dignity.

Shabbat Shalom, and Chag Samei’ach from Yerushalayim  
Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

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