


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש


Friday 10 May 2013 - 1 Sivan 5773
Sedra Bamidbar - Shavuot

LOVE YOUR FELLOW

ACCORDING TO RABBI AKIVA, THE GREAT PRINCIPLE OF JUDAISM IS ‘LOVE YOUR FELLOW as yourself’¹. A similar idea was expressed a century earlier by the great Sage, Hillel. When asked to sum up the whole of Jewish teaching ‘while I stand on one foot’ he replied: ‘that which you do not like, do not do to others. This is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and study!’²

The Sedra³ this week, which begins the fourth Book of the Torah, is often read on the Shabbat before the festival of Shavuot (beginning Tuesday night, 14 May), which celebrates the giving of the Torah at Sinai. If the great principle of the Torah is the theme of loving one’s fellow, we might expect to find this idea in the Sedra as well. After all, Shabbat is a preparation for the days of the week ahead, which include the Giving of the Torah.

However, when we examine the Sedra we find that it largely consists of a census of the Jewish people who were together with Moses in the Sinai desert. This was based on counting the totals of half-shekel coins which each person had donated towards the building of the Sanctuary. The numbers of the Jewish people are given tribe by tribe in great detail. Later sections of the Book also contain similar

	In Memory of Mrs Esther Morgenstein ע"ה Yahrzeit 2nd Day Shavuot Dedicated by her Grandchildren ש"י
---	---

lists of numbers of the population, and for this reason the entire fourth Book of the Torah is termed in English the Book of Numbers⁴.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that the idea of counting the Jewish people itself expresses the theme of love of one's fellow⁵.

Each person is an individual, different from others. Yet when people are being counted, each person is simply "one". The most highly talented, distinguished individual is "one" and somebody who might feel himself to be just a very simple and plain person with no special qualities is also "one".

A common problem in human relationships is the feeling (perhaps unconscious) that we are worth more than another. *We* are valuable and significant, while the other is hardly relevant. Consequently, what does he matter to me? Further, how could I possibly help him?

Here, explains the Rebbe, the Torah comes to teach us that each person is simply "one". We are no more significant than anyone else. Further, we recognise that since we are only "one" we need that other person in order that we can join together. Recognising that each of us is just "one" also helps us see how similar we actually are to each other - and we then soon find ways that we can help that other person as well.

This helps us understand how our Sedra is a preparation for Shavuot and the Giving of the Torah. The theme of love of one's fellow is also expressed on the first day of Sivan (Friday 10 May), which commemorates the day the Jewish people, led by Moses, first came to Mount Sinai. This day is mentioned in the Torah reading for Shavuot, as the day the Jewish people came to Sinai and camped by the Mountain. The word 'camped' is in the singular, rather than the plural. Rashi tells us that despite earlier squabbles, the Jewish people suddenly felt united together: "like one person with one heart"⁶. This indeed was the essential preparation for the wonderful event a few days later, the Giving of the Torah, which has as its central principle: "love your fellow as yourself".

1. Rashi to Leviticus 19:18. 2. Shabbat 31a. 3. Numbers 1:1-4:20. 4. The Sages too use a similar term: *Chumash HaPikkudim*, which literally means Book of Counting. 5. See *Likkutei Sichot*, vol.2 pp.684-5. 6. See Rashi to Exodus 19:1.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care
SPONSORED BY DR REUVEN JOEL



SEDRA BEMIDBAR

COUNTING PRECIOUS ITEMS

Daniella waved goodbye to the last few friends who were leaving her house. Daniella's whole class had just been at her home for a fabulous birthday party, with games, crafts and yummy pizza!

"Whew!" she said as she plopped down on the couch, "that certainly was exciting! Can I have another birthday tomorrow, mom?" she asked, grinning.

Mrs Wineberg laughed, "Why don't you open your presents now instead?"

"Good idea!" Daniella went over to the table and brought all the boxes and packages to the couch. "Wow, I got quite a few pieces of jewellery! These girls know me too well – everyone knows that I looove jewellery."

"Well, that's great then! Let's have a look," Mrs Wineberg joined Daniella on the couch and oohed and aahed over the necklaces, bracelets and earrings.

"Let me count how many..." Daniella silently counted the different items, examining each one admiringly. She made a mental note in her mind, to write very warm thank you letters. *They're such great classmates, she thought, I'm so lucky!* "Twelve pieces altogether! Wow, my friends are so nice!" she exclaimed. "You really like jewellery, don't you?" Mrs Wineberg said.

"Yeah, I'm a real girly girl!" Daniella giggled.

“You know, you just reminded me of something,” Mrs Wineberg said, “you just did something that is actually mentioned in this week’s Sedra Bamidbar. Know what it is?”

“Ooh, we learnt Sedra today. I should know this one... where does it mention jewellery in the Sedra?”

“Oh, no,” Mrs Wineberg laughed, “It doesn’t mention jewellery. But it mentions something about counting...”

“Oh! Of course! G-d counted the Jewish people. It says it right at the beginning of the Sedra. G-d told Moses to take a census of the Jewish people.”

“That’s right. Don’t you think it’s strange that He counted them now? He had already counted them just a year previously when they came out of Egypt. Why count them again?”

“Because...umm because...wait, my teacher did mention this...” Daniella leaned her head back to remember. “Oh, was it something to do with because G-d loved them or something...”

“You’re right on track!” Mrs Wineberg replied, “He counted the Jewish people many times in the Torah, because He loved them. And when someone loves something and is attached to it, they keep counting it. For example, if someone had a sack of diamonds, they would make sure to count all the diamonds because they are so precious. As you just did. You wanted to count all your jewellery because it’s something you care about.”

“That’s cool. I just did something that’s in the Sedra!”

“Well, why don’t you help me clear up now?” Mrs Wineberg asked with a twinkle in her eye, “and if you really like washing dishes, I’ll let you count every dish you wash!”

The look of mock horror on Daniella’s face had them both laughing, as they began clearing up from the party.

***Torah teachings are holy –
please treat this page with care***