

The months of *Iyar* and *Sivan* usher in the summer. The desert creeps north and west, edging out into the green spaces in this country. During these past years it seems that the days when the summer would begin at the end of *Sivan* or even *Tammuz*, peaking only in the month of *Av*, are over. Lately the seasons have become more extreme: the winters colder and the summers hotter (much like the desert days and nights). The summers seem longer; the heat waves more frequent, more intense, more thunderous. And yet, perhaps it is not the climate at all that has changed, but us – who have grown older, less tolerant?

The Book of Numbers (ספר במדבר) opens with the census of the people of Israel:

”וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי, בְּאַהֲל מוֹעֵד : בְּאַהֲל לַחֲדָשׁ הַשְּׁנִי בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִי...”

And GOD spoke unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year...

The desert dryness of the month of *Iyar* (the second month of the year according to the Torah) is filled with numbers – much like the obsession with numbers by those unsure of themselves and their property.

(*Rabbi Nir*) This reminds of my days in basic training in the *Golani* unit. Unsure, lacking in self-confidence and unsettled, I numbered all my personal effects and continuously confirmed that they were with me: (1) beret, (2) dog tag, (3) army ID, (4) captivity papers, (5) keys, (6) wallet etc.

(*Rabbi Kinneret*) I had a similar experience in the first Gulf War (January, 1991). When the war broke out, we felt that we were targets on a firing range. Bari was called up to the army reserves by emergency order. I was pregnant and alone with three small children. The situation was totally out of control. We found ourselves counting everything: every Scud missile that fell, every Patriot anti-missile that was launched in retaliation; we counted the days from the start of the war and I counted my children constantly.

Repetitive counting seemingly calms paralyzing fear and confusion - restoring order and control where none exists.

The Book of Numbers (במדבר), offering just such a counting – orderly, complete, and somewhat obsessive – begs the question: who is not calm? The nation? Moses? Perhaps God? Whose self-confidence needs to be bolstered when faced with the

dry and boring desert, but also the opportunity to give birth to a new creation? Whose serotonin levels are off the scale?

We would love to see God turn this into a scene from the Israeli television show *In Treatment*. We see God (the therapist) bringing Moses (the responsible adult) and the people of Israel (the teenage youth) into a safe space (the desert) to encourage them to come to terms with the new and changing reality; suggesting they embark on a course of behavior therapy. God recognizes the difficulties facing the "responsible adult" as well as his confusion as his charges began to mature and show signs of classic teenage rebellion. God attempts to force Moses and the people to understand the tremendous power of the polarizing experience of the birth of the individual within the whole...

[...] "ואתה ואהרן ואתכם יהיו, איש איש למטה, איש ראש לבית-אבותיו, הוא. ואלה שמות האנשים, אשר יעמדו אתכם"

...even you and Aaron. And with you there shall be a man of every tribe, every one head of his fathers' house. And these are the names of the men that shall stand with you

...as well as the creation of the whole from its important individual parts.

...אלה פקודי בני-ישראל, לבית אבתם. כל-פקודי המחנות, לצבאתם--שש-מאות אלף ושלשת אלפים, וחמש מאות וחמשים

And all those that were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' houses...all that were able to go forth to war in Israel; ...were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty

God tells Moses to explain this to the people, or in other words, introduce them to "togetherness".

"...וזאת הירושה שלך אלה אבותיך, ואלה אימהות שלך אלה תולדותיך, אתה ממשיך שרשרת מרובת שנים" (מאיר אריאל)

...And this is your inheritance and these are your fathers, your mothers and your history; you are part of a centuries-long chain... (Israeli songwriter Meir Ariel).

...while still sending them this message:

"משהו נגמר ילד, משהו מתחיל נער והכל נמשך. נסגרת דלת ילד, נפתח שער נער ואתה נמתח" [שם],

One thing ends my boy; something else begins my lad, and life goes on. One door closes my boy, another gate opens my lad and you are pulled along...

The poet Yehuda Amichai expresses it beautifully when he writes:

*Searching for a goat or a son
Has always been the beginning
Of a new religion in these mountains.*

The beauty of the Book of Numbers lies in its language— ancient and yet modern at the same time – testament to both a very old cultural work as well as a new creation. Hidden deep within it is the secret upon which we base our lives, the secret of belonging to a family, to a home, to a tribe, to a nation. The minyan (counting/quorum of ten) is yet another example of the connection between the individual and society, emphasizing on the one hand the belonging of the individual to the whole, and on the other hand the greatness of each individual person. We at YOZMA have embraced this model since our community's founding over ten years ago.

The *Masorah* (traditional text of bible) attempts to weave a societal patchwork quilt sewn from individual pieces that do not sacrifice their independent characteristics by becoming part of a greater whole. In fact, the individual differences become all that much clearer when placed together.

The proposal brought up at the end of the weekly portion:

וְחָיו וְלֹא יָמָתוּ, בְּגִשְׁתָּם, אֶת [אל] קִדְש־הַקְּדוֹשִׁים [במדבר ד, יט]

...that they may live, and not die, when they approach unto the most holy things

...is the offer of life that God chooses as closing advice to patients at the end of the treatment session. With these words, God's patients are sent on their way – calmer, more mature and better equipped for the long and hot journey awaiting them.

With wishes for a pleasant (and warm) summer as you continue along the hot journey,

Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon

Rabbi Nir Barkin