



BAMIDBAR

LEADERSHIP LESSONS: PERSONAL, LOCAL, AND GLOBAL

A Multifaceted Discussion on Leadership

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Bamidbar

In the Sinai Desert, G d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (twenty to sixty years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary, replacing the firstborn, whose number they approximated, and who were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel “ransom” to redeem themselves.

Each time the people break camp, the three Levite clans dismantle and transport the Sanctuary, and reassemble it at the center of the next encampment. They then erect their own tents around it: the Kehat family, who carries the Sanctuary’s vessels—the ark, the menorah, etc., in their specially designed coverings—on their shoulders, camp to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transport its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary’s entranceway, to its east, are the tents of

Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons.

Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camp in four groups of three tribes each. To the east are Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400), and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300), and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200), and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500), and Naphtali (53,400). This formation is kept also while traveling, each tribe with its own nasi (prince or leader) and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem.

TEXT 1A

Talmud, Berachot 4b

שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל . . . וְאַתֶּם יְהוּ
אִישׁ אִישׁ לְמֶטָה, אִישׁ רֹאשׁ לְבֵית אָבִתּוֹ הוּא.

Take the sum of the entire congregation of
the Children of Israel. . . . With you there
shall be one man from each tribe, the one
who is head of his father's house.

TEXT 1B

Numbers 1:16

אַלֶּה קְרוּאֵי הָעֵדָה וְשִׂאֵי מִטּוֹת אֲבוֹתָם.

These people were summoned by the nation,
the princes of their paternal tribes.

TEXT 2

Rabbi Yonatan

Eybeschütz, Tiferet

Yehonasan, Numbers 1:16

נראה לפרש דלא נבחרו מפי משה כמו שהיה ראוי,
כמו שנאמר: "ואתה תחזה".

אלא דאם כן יאמרו ישראל: מה אהני לן הנשיאים?
המה יסכימו עם משה ודאי בכל דבר.

ולכך אמר "קרואי העדה", כי העדה נתרצו בהם.

G-d instructed Moses, “And you should choose teachers and judges” (Exodus 18:21). Nevertheless, Moses did not select the princes, though that would have been appropriate.

This was so the people would not say, “How will these leaders benefit us? They will certainly side with Moses on every matter.”

Thus, the Torah describes them as “summoned by the nation” (Numbers 1:16) for the nation chose them, not Moses.

The need to select homegrown leaders that can rule with integrity places a huge burden on the leaders. On one hand, leaders must be homegrown to be familiar with the people and their problems—to earn local trust. On the other hand, being homegrown makes it difficult to be unbending and impartial toward all, friend and foe alike.



TEXT 3A

*Rabbi Shlomo Efraim of
Luntshitz, Keli Yakar,
Numbers 1:4*

מדקאמר "איש איש למטה", מה חזר ואמר "איש
ראש לבית אבותיו הוא"?

וקרוב לומר . . . שלא היה מחניף לשבטו שנקראו
עמו, אלא היה דן אותם . . . כאחד מן שאר שבטים
. . .

לכל השבט היה כאיש גבורתו לנהוג עליהם נשיאתו
ברמה. ולא זו לכל השבט הרחוקים קצת ממנו, אלא
אפילו היה ראש לבית אבותיו. הקרובים אליו
ביותר, גם להם היה לראש — לנהוג נשיאות
עליהם.

If the passage states, “one man for each
tribe,” is it not redundant to tell us that each
was “head of his father’s house” (Numbers
1:4)?

This tells us that . . . the princes did not
extend preferential treatment to their
tribesmen, rather they ruled over them . . . as
they would over any other tribe. . . .

Moreover, they were not just firm with
distant tribal members who they barely knew
but also with their father’s household—their
closest relatives.

TEXT 3B

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi

Yehudah Berlin, Haamek

Davar, Numbers 1:16

דהנשיאים היו כבר בהסכמת השבט שהוא ראוי
להיות להם לראש, וכאן הקדוש ברוך הוא הסכים
על ידם ומנה אותם בדבר ה' . . .

ולמדנו מזה שגם עדת ישראל לא בחרו בראש מצד
עשרו והנהגת המשרה בטוב לבד, כי אם שהיו גם
כן מצויינים בתורה ויראת ה' עד שראויים היו
להיות ראשים, ולעמוד לפני ה' בראש השבט.

The tribes had already chosen their leaders.
At this point, G-d endorsed their choices and
ratified the leaders as Divine appointees. . . .

This tells us that the leaders were not
chosen solely on account of their wealth and
leadership qualities. They were also chosen
for their brilliant Torah scholarship and their
fear of Heaven. They were worthy of standing
before G-d at the helm of their respective
tribes.

TEXT 4

Rashi, Numbers 7:2

שהיו שוטרים עליהם במצרים והיו מוכים עליהם.

They were the Jewish overseers in Egypt who were beaten for the sake of the Jewish slaves that they oversaw.



The princes were wealthy and powerful. But they also excelled in Torah study and fear of Heaven. They were paragons of virtue. Powerful, but not arrogant. Wealthy, but not aloof.

TEXT 5

Numbers 1:17

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶת הָאֲנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר נִקְּבוּ
בְּשֵׁמֹת.

Thus, Moses and Aaron took these men who were indicated by names.

TEXT 6A

Numbers 1:18

וְזָאת כָּל הָעֵדָה הַקָּהִילוּ בְּאַחַד לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי, וַיִּתְּנֵיָדוּ
עַל מִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם.

The entire nation assembled on the first day of the second month and declared their pedigrees according to their families and according to their fathers' houses.

TEXT 6B

Rashi, ad loc.

הביאו ספרי יחוסיהם ועידי חזקת לידתם, כל אחד
ואחד, להתייחס על השבט.

They brought the records of their pedigrees
and witnesses of their birth claims, so that
each could trace their genealogy to a tribe.

TEXT 6C

*Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno,
Numbers 1:4*

והטעם שיהיו אתכם הוא שכל אחד מהם ראש לבית
אבותיו, ולא יכחד ממנו יחס כל אחד ואחד.

The tribal princes must be at your side
because each is the head of his father's
home, and the pedigree of their tribesmen
will be familiar to them.

TEXT 6D

*Rabbi Moshe Sofer,
Chatam Sofer Al HaTorah,
Numbers 1:4*

ונראה לי שהיו ישראל נמנים למלך מצרים לידע
כמה עבדים רומסי חומר יש, כדרך כל עבדי המלך
נמנים ונכתבים בלידתם בשמם ושם אבותם.

ואלו השוטרים היו משגיחים על ככה. ועל כן אמר
הקדוש ברוך הוא שיקח אותן האנשים איש איש
למטה במספר מפקד בני ישראל, כי אך הם יוכלו
להעיד, ולהם נמסר ספר עדות לידתם בסבלות
מצרים.

A suggestion: The Egyptian authorities kept records of their slaves to know the size of their available workforce. Government bureaucrats typically include names and family information in these records.

G-d instructed Moses to involve the princes in the census because they, as the Jewish foremen, managed these records in Egypt. Therefore, only they could testify to each person's pedigree, and only they had access to these Egyptian records.

TEXT 7A

Rashi, Numbers 1:4

כשתפקדו אותם יהיו עמכם נשיא כל שבט ושבט.

When you count them, the prince of each tribe should be with you.



This tells us that each prince had a national role to play beyond the role he played for his tribe.

TEXT 7B

*Rabbi Samson Raphael
Hirsch, Numbers 1:42*

Out of the assembled mass of the nation, [the tribesmen of Simeon] stepped to the tribe of Simeon as belonging to him.

[This was repeated for the other tribes] so that after eleven tribes had been counted, the rest—those who had not been counted—remained by themselves as forming the twelfth tribe. And there was no necessity for them to step up to be recognized as such.

On one hand, you are a member of the Jewish nation, and on the other hand, you have particular tribal and individual attributes.



TEXT 8

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
23, p. 7*

ויש לומר די הסברה פון צירוף שניהם יחד:

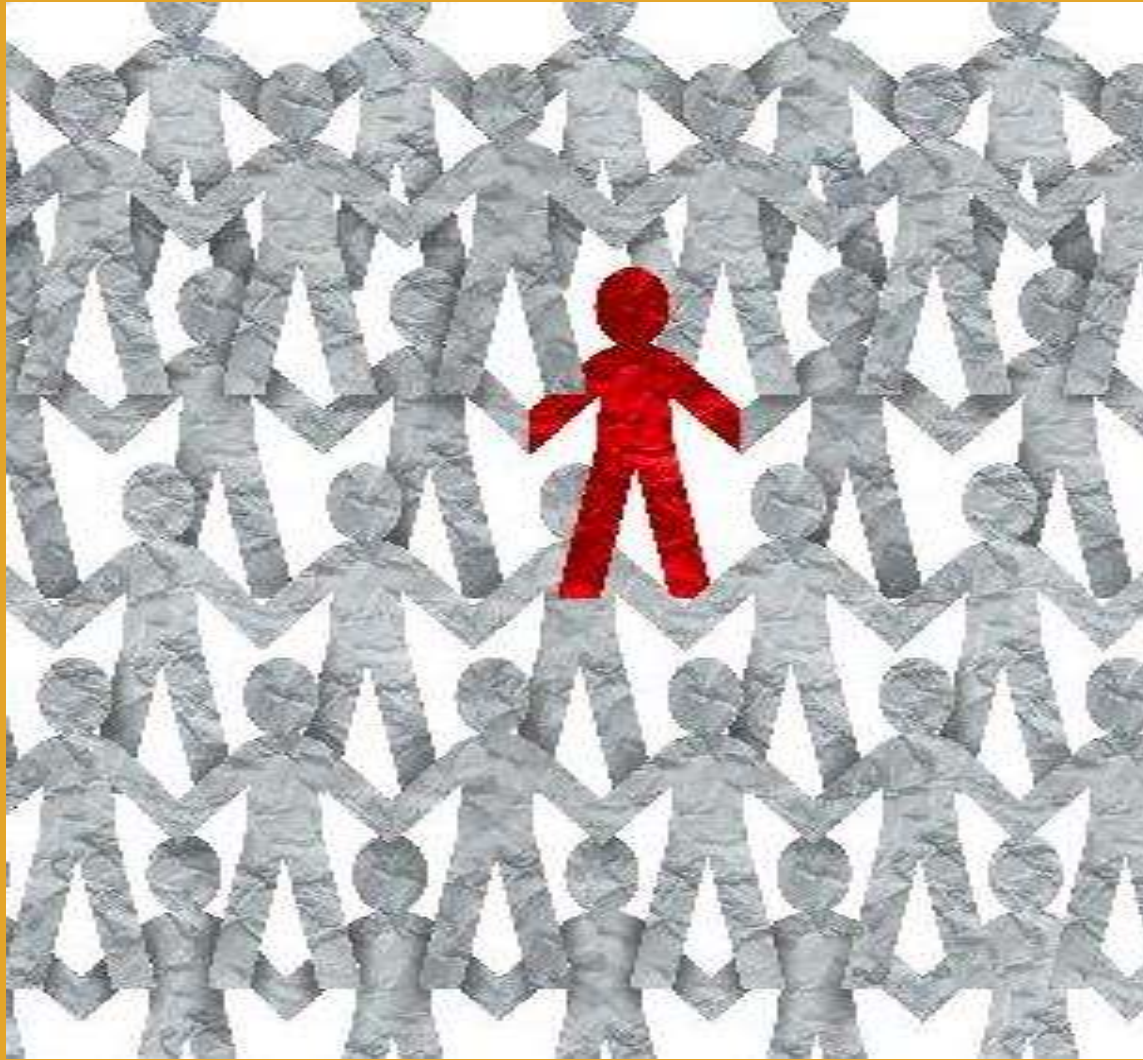
דאס וואס מען ציילט אידן מצד זייערע מעלות
פרטיות, איז דאס ניט (נאר) בכדי ארויסצוברענגען
די מעלה פון יעדן אידן (אדער שבט) פאר זיך
אליין, נאר — ווי די אלע מעלות פרטיות צוזאמען
שטעלן מיט זיך צונויף איין קומה שלימה.

וואס אין דעם ענין — וואס יעדע מעלה פרטית איז
משלים דעם כלל — איז ניטא קיין התחלקות:
פונקט ווי די "קומה שלימה" מוז אנקומען צו מעלת
הראש והמוח כדי דערגרייכן איר שלימות, אזוי מוז
זי אנקומען צו מעלת הרגל. און דערפאר ווערט
יעדערער געציילט (גלייך) אלס איינער — ווייל
אין משלים זיין דעם כלל זיינען אלע גלייך.

The reason both dimensions can be combined:

We count every Jew's (or tribe's) individual strengths not just to highlight their uniqueness but also because this kaleidoscope of many unique talents constitutes a single complete nation.

With respect to this point—that each unique skill completes the collective—all people, irrespective of particular skill, are equal. Just as a body requires a brain to be complete, so does it require a leg. This is why everyone is counted (equally) as one. With respect to completing the collective, all are equal.



When you see yourself
as an individual, you
can rate your value
against others.

When you see yourself
as part of a nation, you
are all in it together.

TEXT 9

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei Sichot
23, p. 5*

על פי זה איז אויך פארשטאנדיק פארוואס דער אויבערשטער האט דא אויסגערעכנט די נעמען פון אלע נשיאים — ווייל, ווי מען האט שוין געלערנט פריער, איז דער אויבערשטער ממנה (און גיט די נויטיגע צו דעם כחות), דורך קריאה בשם, ווי עס שטייט "ראה קראתי בשם בצלאל גו' ואמלא אותו רוח אלקים גו'" (שמות לא, ב–ג).

ועל דרך זה בנידון דידן: דורך דעם וואס דער אויבערשטער האט קורא געווען די שמות הנשיאים . . . האט דאס גע'פועל'ט אין זיי א מינוי וענין חדש וואס איז בא זיי פריער ניט געווען. זיי זיינען געווארן "קראי העדה" — נקראים לכל דבר חשיבות שבעדה" (פון דער גאנצער עדה) . . .

און דערמיט ווערט אויך פארשטאנדיק דער צווייטער פסוק דא "ויקח משה ואהרן את האנשים האלה אשר נקבו בשמות" (במדבר א, יז): וויבאלד ס'איז דעמאלט נתחדש געווארן א מינוי ונתינת כוח מיוחד פון אויבערשטן צו די נשיאים, האט געדארפט אויך זיין מחדש "ויקח", אלס "קראי העדה" (נוסף על המינוי פריער אלס נשיאי השבטים).

This explains why G-d named all the princes again. We learned earlier the notion that G-d appoints and empowers people by proclaiming their name, as it is written, "See, I have called Bezalel by name, . . . and I have imbued him with the spirit of G-d" (Exodus 31:2–3).

A similar phenomenon occurred in our case. By identifying each prince by name, G-d appointed them to a new position that they did not enjoy before. They now became leaders that the nation would call upon for every important matter.

This also explains why "Moses and Aaron took those who were indicated by name" (Numbers 1:17). Inasmuch as they were appointed to a new position—to be called upon by the nation for all important matters, in addition to their former positions as tribal princes—they needed to be drafted [by name] anew.

KEY POINTS

1. Local populations must have the final say on the appointment of their leaders.
2. In addition to leadership skills, leaders must be people of integrity and moral values.
3. The primary duty of local leaders is to provide for the needs of their constituents.
4. Nevertheless, local leaders must inculcate a sense of duty and responsibility into the entire nation.
5. They do this by formulating policies that benefit not only their constituents but also the entire nation.

