

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Pinchas
July 30, 2016

פרשת פנחס
כ"ד בתמוז תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 25:10-30:1

In this *parasha*, Hashem gives Pinchas, the grandson of Aharon, a covenant of peace; Hashem explains to Moshe the distribution of the Land of Israel to male heirs in their respective tribes; the daughters of Tzelophchad petition to inherit their father's portion; and Moshe appoints Yehoshua (Joshua) as his successor.

This *parasha* also contains a second census of all males from 20 years of age and up. According to the text (26:1-4),

א וַיְהִי, אַחֲרֵי הַמִּגַּדָּה; וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, וְאֶל אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן-אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן לֵאמֹר. ב שָׂאוּ אֶת-רֹאשׁ כָּל-עֵדֻת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, מִבְּנֵי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה-- לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם: כָּל-יֹצֵא צָבָא, בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל. ג וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה וְאֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן, אֲתָם-- בְּעֶרְבַת מוֹאָב: עַל-יַרְדֵּן יְרֵחוֹ, לֵאמֹר. ד מִבְּנֵי עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה, וּמַעְלָה, כָּאִשֹּׁר צִוָּה ה' אֶת-מֹשֶׁה וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַיּוֹצֵאִים מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם.

1 And it came to pass after the plague, that Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Elazar the son of Aharon the priest, saying: **2** 'Take the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' houses, all that are able to go forth to war in Yisrael.' **3** And Moshe and Elazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moav by the Yarden at Yericho, saying: **4** '[Take the sum of the people,] from twenty years old and upward, as Hashem commanded Moshe and the children of Israel, that came forth out of the land of Egypt.'

As is so often the case in the Torah, both a practical reason and a philosophical reason stand behind this census.

The practical reason relates to the many losses in the ranks of the Bnei Yisrael from the time of the first census, about 40 years prior. People died of natural causes, and many others passed as a result of one of the series of plagues which struck the nation in response to its rebelliousness. Two cases in point include the plague mentioned in last week's *parasha*, *Parashat Balak*, which killed 24,000 people because they serve the idol, Peor, and the almost 15,000 who died in *Parashat Korach*, which we read 3 weeks ago, as a result of Korach's rebellion against Moshe's leadership and the subsequent death of Korach and his followers. Moshe needed to know how many soldiers were now available to help conquer the Land of Israel once the people entered it. The 40-year-old census would have done no good in this count.

There is also a philosophical reason for the second census. The "old" generation, those who had left Egypt, were now appropriately being supplanted by the "new" generation, those who were born in the wilderness or who were merely children at the time of the exodus. The first generation had experienced enslavement and probably still suffered from the vestiges of the slave mentality. The members of the next generation were born and raised as free people, capable of entering the Land of Israel and creating an autonomous nation. Holding another census offered a tangible demarcation between the old and the new. It was important for the Bnei Yisrael to experience the "passing of the mantle" to the younger generation.

This transition can also be seen in the different phraseology of Moshe's repetition of the Ten Commandments in *Parashat Va'etchanan* in the book of *Devarim* (Deuteronomy), compared to the first occurrence of the Ten Commandments in the book of *Shemot* (Exodus). Ibn Ezra (14th Century Spain) specifically notes the differences which would make the new phraseology more comprehensible and palatable to the new generation.

As Moshe's star fades, Yehoshua's rises, together with the star of the generation which will enter *Eretz Yisrael*.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Think of your grandparents, your parents, and yourself. How are you different in terms of your clothing, your music, your technology, or other things? How are you the same?
- What advantages are there to being younger? What advantages are there to being older?
- Name something that parents could teach their children. Name something that children could teach their parents.