

Even Numbers Are Odd

PARSHA INSIGHTS - BAMIDBAR (5760)

ARE THE NUMBERS “ROUNDED OFF?”

“All who were numbered of the *Levi'im* [those of the tribe of Levi], whom Moshe and Aharon counted at the commandment of Hashem by their families, every male from a month old and upward, were TWENTY-TWO THOUSAND” (3:39). This *parsha* [Torah portion] deals with the census of *Bnai Yisroel* [the Children of Israel]. There were several reasons for the population count, but we will not delve deeply into them today. Instead, let us explore one aspect of the procedure employed by Moshe and Aharon. Were the numbers of *Bnai Yisroel* counted right down to the individual, or were the totals rounded off to the nearest tenth?

Here are the totals for each *shaivet* [tribe or division of Jews] contained in our *parsha*, taken from *Perek Alef* [chapter 1]:

Reuven	46,500.
Shimon	59,300.
Gad	45,650.
Yehuda	74,600.
Yissachar	54,400.
Zevulun	57,400.
Efraim	40,500.
Menashe	32,200.
Binyamin	35,400.
Dan	62,700.
Asher	41,500.
Naftali	53,400.



You can see why this fourth *sefer* [book] of the Torah, *Bamidbar*, is referred to as “*Chumash Hapikudim*” - the Book of Numbers. This is the way it begins!

Remember, *Shaivet* Levi was numbered separately, and their total was 22,000, as mentioned above.

If you look closely at all the figures, you notice that each ONES PLACE (the last digit of each number) is a zero. In most cases, the tens place is also zero, the exception being the *Shaivet* Gad - 45,650. Was EVERY Jewish male from twenty and up being counted, or were the numbers rounded to the nearest ten? Perhaps Gad actually summed up to 45,653, or 45,658, or something similar, and 45,650 was the sum rounded to a multiple of ten. Is it possible that the numbers were truly so even? The same question applies to the rest. For example, was Dan precisely 62,700, or maybe this was rounded down from 62,704? What about *Shaivet* Levi? Their total was recorded as 22,000, without any ones place, tens place, OR hundreds place! What is the explanation?

Much can be said about this; Rav Zalman Sorotzkin zooms in on the matter from the following angle. Not only in our *parsha*, but in *Parshas Pinchas* as well, the last digit of each number is zero. In other words, all the numbers stop at hundreds and tens. How could it be that the population of Jews in each division was so even? It must be that in fact, the numbers of *Bnai Yisroel* were NOT actually this even. Rather, the Torah simply rounded off to the nearest ten. But how can we have the audacity to say that some Jews were not counted in the census? What is the reason to round numbers in this situation?

Rav Sorotzkin cites the *Abarbanel* for clarification. The census was to know the count of “*yotz'ai tzava*” [the men able to go to war] (stated in our *parsha*, 1:3). In an army, there are various units of soldiers with commanders over them. These branches of fighting men come in different sizes. What is the minimum size of a military division? *Abarbanel* points out that in general, a small unit consists of no fewer than ten men. Consequently, no group smaller than ten was counted. Notice that Naftali, for example, totaled 53,400 in the census. Technically, though, there might have been 53,406 men in that *shaivet*. The “extra” six, however, could not be numbered, since there is no such thing as an army officer who manages six men. Thus, the number was recorded as 53,400. Rav Sorotzkin quotes the *Abarbanel*: **It is likely that the way they arrived at each total number was by counting the “*sarai asaros*”, officers who managed groups of ten men each. As a result, all the figures were rounded off to the nearest ten.**

Despite what has been developed, observes Rav Sorotzkin, we cannot say this about the *Levi'im*. Later in our *parsha*, the *Levi'im* helped redeem the first born of *Bnai Yisroel* (end of *Perek Gimmel* [chapter 3]). There had to be EXACT numbers for this to occur, since each Levi was to replace a single first born in performing the *avoda* [holy service] in the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle]. In fact, we finally encounter a number with a ones place, in 3:43. All the first born males, from one month old and upward, totaled 22,273. Remember, the *Levi'im* totaled 22,000 even. This number HAS TO be precise, just as the number of the first born, 22,273, was exact. That is why the Torah makes an issue of the fact that the sum of the first born exceeded that of the *Levi'im* by 273. Yes, those sums were not rounded off at all, since they were for a different purpose. The *Levi'im's* census was not for the same objective as that of the rest of *Bnai Yisroel*, and the census of the first born was connected to that of *Shaivet Levi*. Each Levi took over the *avoda* of a *bechor* [first born male], so the Torah obviously wrote exact figures for the populations of those two groups.

The exchange of *Levi'im* for the first born is an extensive discussion on its own, including the way Moshe dealt with the extra 273 *bechoros* [firstborn sons]. Maybe we will talk about it at a later date. We have learned today that the profound wisdom of the Torah must be approached with great care and precision. There are specific reasons for everything contained within its holy words. When it comes to the "Book of Numbers", *Sefer Bamidbar*, we have discovered that every number counts.

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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