



# Likkutei Sichos

Volume 23 | Bamidbar | Sichah 1

## Everybody Counts

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## 1.

### SUMMONED FOR IMPORTANT MATTERS

The verse states,<sup>1</sup> “These were the summoned ones {*kru’ei*} of the congregation, the princes of the tribes of their fathers; they are the heads of the thousands of Israel.” Rashi comments on the words, “these were the summoned ones of the congregation,” and explains that “they were summoned for every important congregational matter.”

We find two schools of thought among the commentators regarding Rashi’s intent:

- a) Rashi wishes to negate the suggestion that “the summoned ones of the congregation” should be interpreted to mean that these princes were the ones who summoned the nation (to assemble). {In other words, the verse should be translated: “These were the *ones who summoned* the congregation....”} This interpretation is untenable, as this role was not the reason that the princes were esteemed.<sup>2</sup>
- b) The expression, “the summoned ones of the congregation” {may have} implied that the princes were summoned by the nation. It would be improper to say that the princes were the ones summoned, “called (or ordered) by the congregation {to assembled},” as if the nation had authority over the princes.<sup>3</sup>

Rashi, therefore, explains that the {correct} interpretation is that “they were summoned for every important congregational matter” — they were actually summoned (and possibly even by the congregation), though only in an “advisory and trouble-shooting role” for any important matter faced by the congregation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:16

<sup>2</sup> See *Devek Tov* and *Sifsei Chachamim*, ad loc.

<sup>3</sup> R. Eliyahu Mizrahi, ad loc.; see also *Gur Aryeh*, ad loc.

## 2.

### DIFFICULTIES

However, it is difficult to read either of the above two explanations into Rashi:

According to the first explanation, that Rashi comes to negate a mistaken **translation** of the **word** *kru'ei* {"they summoned" instead of "they were summoned"} — Rashi would have needed to cite {in his caption} only the word *kru'ei*, and then explain "they are the ones summoned" (or something in that vein).

[Additionally: If Rashi's intention was to preclude a third possible interpretation — that "*kru'ei*" means that the princes summoned and assembled the congregation, and this (role of summoning the congregation) does convey their importance, and therefore {to negate the depiction of importance just mentioned, and clarify which one we are referring to} Rashi, in his commentary, gives an alternative explanation of their importance: "they were summoned for every important congregational matter" — it would remain unclear: Why would Rashi negate such an interpretation? It is a description that does convey their distinction, and seems to fit the context well, in line with them summoning the congregation to assemble so that the people could be counted.

We must {therefore} say that the only reason for Rashi not to interpret the verse as meaning that the princes **summoned** the congregation, is not (so much) because of the **substance** of such an interpretation, but rather, because this interpretation would be at odds with the {correct} semantic meaning of the word *kru'ei*: "*kru'ei*" means that they were summoned {by others}, not that they summoned the congregation.

So, it is not understood: {If this third interpretation was the one Rashi's commentary intended to negate} why would Rashi need to negate something that was self-understood?]

The second explanation also presents a difficulty: Being summoned does not necessarily imply that those summoned are of lower stature (by the fact that they are summoned) by those summoning. Why would Rashi need to negate this interpretation? It could very well be that they were summoned and approached {by the congregation} because of their prominence.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.

#### THE SAME PRINCES

On the next verse, “Moshe and Aharon took these men, who had been designated by their names,” Rashi comments on the words, “these men,” and explains {that this refers to} “these twelve princes.” He then references the words, “who had been designated,” and explains that {they were designated} “by their names to him {Moshe}, here.”

The commentators<sup>5</sup> explain {Rashi’s intention} that the elaborate wording — “Moshe and Aharon took *these men...*,” instead of “Moshe and Aharon took *them*,” or the like (considering these princes were already the subject of discussion) — gives room for the presumption that these {men being taken now} were **other** men (and not the twelve princes listed **previously**) and {the qualification} “who were designated by their names,” means that these were other men who Hashem had *previously* pointed out **to Moshe Rabbeinu** “elsewhere.”

Rashi negates this interpretation by saying that the intent of {the verse} is “these twelve princes,” and “designated by their names” refers (not to men listed elsewhere, rather) “{those designated by their names} **to him, here**” (to Moshe, then and there).

However, it is very difficult to say<sup>6</sup> that if not for Rashi’s explanation, one would assume that amid a lengthy discussion about the twelve princes, the verse would state, “They took **these** men” as a

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<sup>4</sup> Note *Ibn Ezra* and *Avi Ezri* on *Ibn Ezra*, ad loc.

<sup>5</sup> See *Mizrachi*; *Devek Tov*; *Sifsei Chachamim*; et al.

<sup>6</sup> See *Sefer Hazikaron* and *Shem Efraim*, ad loc.

reference to some **other** men, instead of “these” {in reference to} the abovementioned men who had been {just been} instructed by Hashem. Furthermore, {even if one could accept this interpretation, how would it make sense that} the verse would never have actually explicitly informed us who these people are, only referring to them by a **hint** — “these men, who had been designated by their names,” without actually {explicitly} saying whom the discussion is about. Would Rashi have to negate such an interpretation?!

#### 4.

##### NOT SIMPLE MEN

Other commentators<sup>7</sup> learn that Rashi’s intention {here} is not to negate the presumption that the verse refers to other men, but rather, to explain the proper way of understanding the text:

The phrase “Moshe and Aharon took **these men**” {could be understood to be} insinuating that these were simply “men,” not taken {specifically} because they were the princes. Rashi forestalls such an understanding by telling us they were “these twelve princes” — they were taken {in consideration of their rank} as princes.

About this {explanation}, we need to clarify why the verse says, “the men”<sup>8</sup> (and not {explicitly} “the princes”), such that we have to rely on Rashi to clarify that they were taken in consideration of their rank as “the twelve princes”?!

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<sup>7</sup> *Gur Aryeh* on Rashi, ad loc.

<sup>8</sup> Note, however, Rashi on *Bamidbar* 13:3, “**Whenever** אִשִּׁינָא {the term translated as *men* here} is used in Scripture, it denotes importance.”

## 5.

WE KNOW WHO THEY ARE

This will all be understood after prefacing with several other questions that arise when elucidating the verses:<sup>9</sup>

a) The two verses “These are the ones summoned...” and “Moshe and Aharon took...” are ostensibly entirely superfluous:

Regarding the first verse: It was already stated at the beginning of the narrative, “with you should be a man from each tribe, a man who is head of his father's house.” What is the purpose of the verse here (once again) describing {their rank} (and at such length)?

Furthermore, it is unclear what the second verse teaches us: Obviously, Moshe and Aharon would have followed Hashem's instruction to collaborate with the princes when counting the Jews. After recording a command to Moshe, in most cases the Torah does not record that Moshe actually fulfilled Hashem's command, because this is self-understood.<sup>10</sup>

Even if (for whatever reason) the verse wanted to record Moshe and Aharon's actual fulfilment of Hashem's commands, it would have been sufficient to say, “Moshe and Aharon did so,”<sup>11</sup> or at most, “Moshe and Aharon took these men.” What necessity is there {for the verse} to continue, “who were designated by their names,” as if we needed to identify {once again} who was taken.

b) The sequence of Hashem and Moshe's dialogue is baffling: {First} it says,<sup>12</sup> “With you there shall be a man from each tribe...” after

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<sup>9</sup> Many of these {questions} are asked by the commentators of the Torah, though Rashi seems, at first glance, not to answer them at all. This is despite all {these questions} being difficult even in the simple reading of the text {which is Rashi's medium}.

<sup>10</sup> Especially since, anyway, the Torah does say (*Bamidbar* 1:19, see as well verse 49), “as Hashem commanded Moshe, so did he count them in the Sinai desert.”

<sup>11</sup> As {the verse} does further on *Bamidbar* 1:54, 2:34.

<sup>12</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:4.

which Hashem said,<sup>13</sup> “These are the names of the men who shall stand with you: From Reuven...,” and then Hashem proceeded to individually enumerate the names of each tribe’s prince.

Considering that this directive was given “on the first day of second month, in the second year,” that is, on the first day of the month of Iyar, a full month after the *Mishkan* was erected {on the first of Nissan},<sup>14</sup> when these self-same princes had offered sacrifices to inaugurate the altar,<sup>15</sup> why did Hashem now append {to His instructions}, “These are the names of the men...” as if He is {only now} revealing and informing Moshe of the names of princes, when they were already known to Moshe?<sup>16</sup>

[These verses {beginning with} “These are the names of the men...” are not {just} information given by the text (in which case it would be readily understood why {the Torah} saw fit to apprise us of their names, since the names of the princes have not yet been mentioned in the Torah and will only be listed in *parshas Nasso*), but are part of Hashem’s dialogue with Moshe — {as seen from the direct phrasing:} “These are the names of the men who shall **stand with you...**”].<sup>17</sup>

## 6.

### COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

To forestall these {two} questions, Rashi comments: “The summoned ones of the congregation — {this refers to} those who were summoned for every important congregational matter”: This was a **newly** designated role for the princes, a role in which they had not served previously.

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<sup>13</sup> *Bamidbar* 1:5.

<sup>14</sup> See beg. of our *parshah* and Rashi, ad loc.

<sup>15</sup> As spelled out in *Bamidbar* 7:2, 7:10 ff.

<sup>16</sup> Even though the five-year-old {Rashi’s target audience } has not yet learned *parshas Nasso*, nevertheless, Rashi has already informed us previously, in *parshas Vayakhel* (35:27) about the princes’ donations {offered} at the inauguration of the *Mizbeach*.

<sup>17</sup> *Maskil L’Dovid* explains on the comment of Rashi “who had been designated by their names” that “Hashem purposely enumerated them here to tell him they must be taken in the order their names are listed...,” though in Rashi there is no hint to this at all, not even a mention of **order**.

This is in continuation of Rashi's previous comment: On the verse, "With you they shall be a man from each tribe," Rashi explains, "When you count them, there should be a prince from each tribe with you." Rashi is obviously clarifying that the princes' role in collaborating with Moshe and Aharon in the census of the Jewish people was not by having each prince take part in just **his tribe's** census. Rather, **all** the princes took part in the counting of each and every tribe.<sup>18</sup>

[And Rashi infers this from the verse's wording, "with you, **they shall be**," instead of stating (as an addendum to the wording of the previous verse), "you shall count them by their legions, you, Aharon and the princes," or the like, as various commentators explain.<sup>19</sup>]

Clarification is needed: What relevance did the prince of one tribe have to the census of another tribe (over whom he was not the prince)?

Moshe and Aharon {both} were the leaders of **all** Jews (Moshe as the redeemer and leader, and Aharon as the *Kohen Gadol* — for **all** Jews). Therefore, they were charged with counting **all** the tribes of Yisrael.

However, the role of the princes was limited to only the individual tribe that they each governed. So it would be reasonable for each prince to participate in administering his own tribe's census, {either} to accord honour to the prince, or for the prince to confirm the identity of each member of his tribe. (Some doubt may have arisen as to a Jew's tribal lineage, which the prince could sort out.)<sup>20</sup> —

But what special link does any **one** prince share with any of the **other** tribes of Israel that could justify the requirement for him to take part in administering their census?

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<sup>18</sup> One cannot say that Rashi wishes to explain that only Moshe and Aharon did the counting, and that the princes were there simply to "be with you" — in your company — while Moshe and Aharon counted (as a number of commentators do explain — see *Maharik*; et al). For it would have been sufficient for the verse (in continuation of, and concluding, the previous verse) to state, "and with you there shall be a man from each tribe" as discussed by the *Maskil L'Dovid*, ad loc. (and see *Bamidbar* 1:44 {where Moshe, Aharon and the princes are listed together}).

<sup>19</sup> *Maskil L'Dovid* on Rashi.

<sup>20</sup> As quoted by *Abarbenel*, *Seforno*, ad loc. (1:4); et al; see *Kli Yakar*, *ibid.* (end).



It was about this that Hashem spoke of “the summoned ones of the congregation”: Hashem had now appointed them to a new position. Besides each one’s role as prince of his tribe, they were {now collectively} to be “summoned for every important congregational matter.” They would {each} relate to, and have a bond with, the **entire** congregation and with all Jews (not just the members of their tribe).

## 7.

### HEADS OF THOUSANDS

In light of the above, we can also understand the description given for the princes in the verse, “the princes of the tribes of their fathers; **they are the heads of the thousands of Israel.**” Seemingly, {this is out of place, as} **presently**, the only relevant {description} is that they are “princes of the tribes of their fathers.” Why does the verse continue and emphasise that they were “the heads of the thousands of Israel”?

Rather, Scripture here wishes to underline their **general** greatness, how they are “**the heads of the thousands of Israel.**” Thus, they are worthy of being the “summoned ones for the congregation,” and of taking part in the census of all Jews.

[This explanation will be more appealing when considering the interpretation of “the heads of the thousands of Israel” to mean the heads of the “leaders of **thousands**”:<sup>21</sup> The total number of members in each tribe also included some hundreds, etc., over and above the {round number of} “thousands”<sup>22</sup> {in the tribe}. In order to make up a round thousand, so that a “leader of one thousand” may be appointed, the remaining hundreds, etc., of the various tribes needed to be joined.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See *Ibn Ezra*, ad loc.; *Abarbanel*; et al.

<sup>22</sup> In the census of our *parshah*, this was the case for each tribe, as explained in the verses (1:21, et passim). Rashi’s commentary on *Ki Sisa* (*Shemos* 30:16) implies that this was true of the census taken after the sin of the Golden Calf. Further elaboration is beyond our scope.

<sup>23</sup> It would be unreasonable to say (on the level of *pshat*) that the remaining hundreds of each tribe did not have leaders-of-thousands. Moreover, and of primary importance, this {idea that there were leaders-of-thousands for the remaining hundreds of each tribe} is **supported** by Rashi’s commentary on *Shemos* 18:11 (from *Sanhedrin* 18a): “Leaders of thousands — there were six hundred such leaders for the six-hundred thousand men....”

Accordingly, the authority of the princes as the princes over the leaders of thousands included not only the members of **their own tribes**, but some {members of} other tribes as well].

## 8.

### A NEW ROLE

Now it is also clear why Hashem recorded the names of all the princes — because, as was learned **previously** {in the Torah}, Hashem designates (and gives the necessary abilities to) a person by calling their name. As Scripture says,<sup>24</sup><sup>[OBJ]</sup> “See, **I have called by name, Betzalel...** and I have imbued him with the spirit of Hashem....”

Similarly, in our case: When Hashem called the names of all the princes (to Moshe),<sup>25</sup> this appointed the princes to a new role that they had not served in until then. They became the “*summoned ones of the congregation* — summoned for every important congregational matter” (by the **entire** congregation, as discussed).

The second verse — “Moshe and Aharon took these men who had been designated by their names” — is also understood: Since a new designation, with specific capabilities given to the princes from Hashem, was generated at that juncture, they needed to be “taken” anew, as “ones summoned for the congregation” (besides their prior appointment as princes of the tribes).

And this is the meaning of Rashi’s comment, “*these men*—these twelve princes who had been designated by their names to him, here.” This is not to be read as two separate glosses by Rashi, but rather, it is one continuum.<sup>26</sup> Rashi is quoting the verse and interpolating his commentary: “***these men*** — these twelve princes — **who had been designated by their names** — to him here.”

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<sup>24</sup> *Shemos* 31:2 ff; Moshe recounted this when giving over the command to the Jews (*Shemos* 35:30).

<sup>25</sup> Note *Yerios Shlomo*, loc. cit. (*Sifsei Chachamim* in the name of the *Maharshal*); *Shach* on the Torah, *Bamidbar* 1:3 (end), 1:17.

<sup>26</sup> In the first two prints and several manuscripts of Rashi, there is no period (or space) that would mark a new gloss.

With this, his explanation is different (than the understanding of the commentators mentioned above), negating {the interpretation} that this refers to **other men**. Rather, Rashi explains the details of them being taken by Moshe and Aharon: {Rashi tells us that} these are the same twelve princes as **in the past**, but they were taken now for their **new** role (as well), by being designated by their names **to him, here**, despite them already being known previously in their role as **princes**.

That is why the verse says, “Moshe and Aharon took these **men**” {and not “these princes”} because the princes being “taken by Moshe and Aharon” to count the Jews together with them, was not (just) since they were the princes of the tribes, connected with their respective tribes.<sup>27</sup> Rather, the princes were {selected by Moshe and Aharon simply in the capacity of} “**these men**,” designated men — the summoned ones for the congregation (as well) — distinguished from the rest of the congregation.

## 9.

### COMMUNAL OR TRIBAL?

Not everything is entirely smooth: In end, why would each prince be required to participate in administering the census to all tribes, requiring a new designation for them — the summoned ones of the congregation — so that they would be affiliated with (not only **their** individual tribe, but with) the entire congregation? Seemingly, whichever way we look at it {there is no need for this}:

If the main consideration was the **communal** quality of the census, which incorporated all Jews into one {collective}, and which would lead to the expectation that the census be administered by someone affiliated with the entire {nation} **as a whole** — it would have been sufficient (as was done for the **previous** censuses) for Moshe alone to have administered this census. (At most, Aharon, the *Kohen Gadol*, could have participated, as well).

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<sup>27</sup> Which already would require him to take part in administering his tribe’s census.

And if the focus was on each tribe individually, {suggested by} the separate census of each tribe (to know the total number of Jews “by families, to their fathers' houses”), and therefore, the participation of the princes of tribes was necessary (as discussed) — then, it is irrelevant to {point out} **in this matter** {of the census} that the princes had a connection with the entire community!

## 10.

### TWO TYPES OF COUNT

The explanation: The concept of counting is (in Rashi's words<sup>28</sup>) — “**to demonstrate their preciousness...**” {a way} to convey the affection {of Hashem} for the Jews. The *Shelah*<sup>29</sup> explains that when counted, the Jews become a “significant entity” (enumerable), and therefore, they can never be assimilated.<sup>30</sup>

This can take two forms:<sup>31</sup>

The purpose of the previous censuses, in which all Jews were tallied into one total (without breaking them down into tribes), was to “demonstrate” (reveal) the virtue and preciousness of Jews that is beyond division. This virtue derives from the essential soul of every Jew, where there are no differences between one Jew and another.

The purpose of the census in our *parshah*<sup>32</sup> was **also** to reveal (“demonstrate”) the **individual** virtues of Jews, since there are many differences between Jews (the specific virtues of any single Jew differ from those of another Jew).

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<sup>28</sup> On the beg. of *parshas Bamidbar*. {The source seems to be Rashi on **Shemos** 1:1.}

<sup>29</sup> *Shelah*, 347a (end), ff.; explained in *Maamar Tzohar Ta'aseh* 5673 (in *Hemshech* 5672); *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1019 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Beitzah* 3b; *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 110, par. 1; The Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 447, par. 20.

<sup>31</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 8, p.3 ff.

<sup>32</sup> Possibly here (and as well in *parshas Pinchas*) there were two counts: once census of each tribe individually and one of everyone together; especially based on the *Arizal*'s explanation, in his *Likkutei Torah* on our *parshah*, of the biblical phrase, “the sons of Naftali” (instead of “**for the sons**,” as is written regarding all the other the tribes).

Each tribe was, therefore, counted separately, for {just as} each tribe had its own distinct lifestyles, Torah learning methodology, livelihood, etc. — as seen in the blessing given by Yaakov {to his sons} (and as interpreted by Rashi in his commentary on that passage),<sup>33</sup> they are {also}, understandably, distinct in their service of Hashem. {It can be said} that there are twelve general archetypical paths of serving Hashem, along the lines of which all Jews can be subdivided<sup>34</sup> (“Reuven” {represents} service in the way of “*reu*,” seeing {clarity}; “Shimon” {represents the service of} “*shemiah*,” hearing,<sup>35</sup> etc.).

## 11.

JUST ONE

Nonetheless, in this census, **every** Jew was counted as **one** — not more and not less. This illustrated (as discussed many times<sup>36</sup>) how in this census, there was an aspect concerning which all Jews were equal despite being divided and counted by families, according to their fathers’ houses.

It follows that within this {census} can be found paradoxical elements: Despite the census being associated with the individual ranks of Jews —

— within which distinctions exist: those possessing a higher rank (such as, “the leaders of your tribes”)<sup>37</sup> are more important than with a lower rank (your woodchoppers and water-carriers, and so forth). Consequently, this would, seemingly, discount the possibility of counting everyone equally (attributing each with the same importance).

— nevertheless, each Jew was (also) considered equal to all other Jews.

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<sup>33</sup> {*Bereishis* ch. 49.}

<sup>34</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 6, p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Torah Or*, “*Vayechi*” (beg.); et al.

<sup>36</sup> See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 8, p. 3 ff., and sources there.

<sup>37</sup> {The stations mentioned in parenthesis are paraphrasing *Devarim* 29:9-10.}

We can posit the following explanation of the **conjunction** of these two ideas: When the Jews are **counted** in consideration of their individual virtues, this is to elicit not (only) the virtue of each Jew (or tribe) **as an individual**, but also all the individual virtues together {combined to} constitute a **single “complete body.”**<sup>38</sup> From **this** perspective — that every individual virtue supplements the whole — there is no distinction {of separate ranks}.<sup>39</sup> Just as for the “whole body” to be {considered} whole, it needs the special functions of the head and brain; so, too, the body needs the special functions of the feet. Every Jew was, therefore, counted (equally) as a single individual — because in making up a whole, all parts are **equal**.

This also explains why {all} the princes of the tribes needed to participate in administering the census of all Jews (being the “ones summoned for the congregation” — “the ones summoned for every important **congregational** matter”): When taking the census of each tribe, one needed to sense that it was not (only) a separate census (of separate bodies). Rather, the individual {tribal} enumeration was taken also as part of the general {national} enumeration.

— Based on a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Bamidbar*, 5736 (1976)

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<sup>38</sup> As is done when counting {the individuals make up a whole}, for which reason, after recording each tribe individually, the Torah repeats and records the sum of all Jews (1:45–46).

<sup>39</sup> See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Nitzavim*” (beg.); *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1141 ff; *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 23, p. 56 ff.