

## Shabbat Parashat B'midbar The Meaning of a Name

This week begins the reading of the book of *B'midbar*/Numbers, the fourth book of Torah. The first large section of the reading is dedicated to the performance of a national census. Its purpose was to collect an account of the males of military age: twenty years old and above. In order to conduct the census, tribal heads were appointed to supervise the counting within each tribe. These “deputies” are listed by name near the very beginning of the *parasha*.

While going over the text of this week’s reading, it would be very easy to glance over the names of the tribal heads, considering them to be of minimal importance to the overall content of the *parasha*. However, if one looks closely at the names and makes an attempt to understand what they mean, one will discover some beautiful messages embedded within them. Take these for example:

*Elitzur*: My God is a rock  
*Sh'lumi'el*: God is my peace/wholeness  
*Natan'el*: Gift from God  
*Eli'ar*: God is my father  
*Elishama*: My God who heard  
*Avidan*: My father the judge  
*Ahi'ezer*: My brother my helper

These names can inspire a person to reflect on the idea of the power and significance built into one’s own name(s). Many, if not most of us, have been named in honor or in memory of someone. If not, then our parents chose our names with a specific intent and meaning in mind. Consider the following questions:

- How many times a day do we write or say our names without even a second thought?
- Have we taken the opportunity to learn all that we can about the people for whom we are named or the reasons behind our parents’ selection of our names?
- Have we spent the time to explain to our own children why they are named the way that they are?
- Do our children know our Hebrew names (they will need to eventually for their Bar or Bat Mitzvah) and for whom we might be named?

The warm sound, deep meaning, and/or other bearers of our names serve as standards for which those who named us expect us to reach or as wishes for our future. If we take the time and make the effort to consider, even from time to time, the depth of meaning that is built into our identities through our names, then we will likely not only be bringing deeper meaning, spirituality, and direction into our lives, but we will also be living up to the goals and dreams that our parents had and have for us. Around our Shabbat tables this week, take the time to talk about our names, where they come from, what they mean, and what kind of influence for positive change they can have on our lives. It will prove to be a connecting experience for everyone present.

If there are any questions about what a name might mean, you can feel free either to consult the internet (before or after Shabbat, of course) or to call me in my office 604-736-7307 ext. 4303 for interpretation assistance.

Shabbat Shalom!