

BAMIDBAR "HIGHEST COMMON DENOMINATOR"

What makes us who we are?

Human beings are so complex we wouldn't know where to begin finding the answer. Yes, we all do have a vague idea of our faculties and talents; however it is what lies beneath the surface that eludes us.

As Jews this question is even more compelling, certainly when we look at the range of diversity of which our people are comprised. This is true not just on the surface, with regard to the way people look or behave, but also with regard to their values and beliefs. To the extent that we sometimes wonder, what really connects the Jewish people standing at the polar ends of observance and affiliation.

In the beginning of the book of numbers which we read this week we are told about the census of the Jewish people in the desert that G-d instructed Moses to conduct. When counting people we are assigning each and every individual with a mere number. This seems to strip away all that which makes us unique as human beings. Why then does G-d perform a census of his people and what message is he sending to us by doing so.

We have all heard of the concept called the "lowest common denominator". It is the base part within us which is the same in every individual. In the popular sense of the term this phrase however has negative connotations.

There is also a part within us that could be termed the "highest common denominator". This part inside of us is both our essence – the point at which we connect with G-d - which informs and guides all of our thinking and behaviour and at the same time it is what fundamentally unites us with our fellow man.

This is the timeless message that G-d is conveying to every Jewish individual no matter their background or affiliation. G-d wants to awaken that part within us, that makes us who we are more than anything else. It is this essence that completely overshadows everything we might have achieved. It is also the common denominator that connects and unites us with every Jewish person.

So when we next meet another Jew, whether they are strangers, family or friends. Let us focus, not on the "lowest common denominator" but on the "highest common denominator". The common part that exist within each and every Jew. The part within us that both connects us with G-d and his people simultaneously. The part that is otherwise known as *Neshamah* (Soul).

By Yosef Vogel

25th May 2012

5th Sivan

Bamidbar

Shabbat Begins: 20.46 pm

Shabbat Ends: 22.03 pm