Parshas Bamidbar - The Love Between Hashem and בני ישראל

Hashem spoke to Moshe..... take a census of all of בני ישראל:	וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה..... שְׂאוּ אֶת־רֹאשׁ כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל (במדבר א, א)
Because they were beloved to him, He counts them again and again: when they left מצרים, when many of them fell after the חטא העגל He counted them to ascertain the number of those left; when he was about to make His Shechinah live amongst them, for on the first day of Nisan the Mishkan was erected and shortly afterwards, on the first day of Iyar, He counted them.	רש"י: וידבר. במדבר סיני באחד לחדש וגו'. מִתּוֹךְ חִבָּתָן לְפָנָיו מוֹנֶה אוֹתָם כָּל שָׁעָה — כְּשֶׁיָּצְאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם מָנָן, וּכְשֶׁנָּפְלוּ בָּעֵגֶל מָנָן לֵידַע מִנְיַן הַנּוֹתָרִים, כְּשֶׁבָּא לְהַשְׁרוֹת שְׁכִינָתוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם מָנָם, בְּאֶחָד בְּנִיסָן הוּקַם הַמִּשְׁכָּן וּבְאֶחָד בְּאִיָּר מָנָם:

Instructions For Teaching This Lesson:

Present to your class the everlasting loving relationship between us and Hashem.

Step 1:

Teach the students how the counting of בני ישראל in the מדבר shows Hashem's immense love for us.

Step 2:

Explain to the students how special and holy the דגלים were and how close of a relationship we had with Hashem in the מדבר.

Step 3:

Discuss with the students how much sweeter a relationship with Hashem is than anything else in this world.

Step 4:

Show the students the different פסוקים that compare our relationship with Hashem to the relationship between a חתן and כלה.

Step 5:

Tell your students the משל from Portraits of Prayer 2

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Imagine a child who has a piggy bank. Every day when he comes home from school, he runs to his piggybank and dumps out all of the coins. Then he counts his money. He does this day after day. Why does he count his coins every single day? Does he not remember how many he had yesterday? Does he have a bad memory?
Of course, he knows how much is in his piggy bank! So.... then why is he counting his money every day? He's counting it because he is so proud of his money. He loves his money. Each time he counts it, he gets a new feeling of pride and satisfaction that he has that money.
So too, throughout the תורה, Hashem counts us because He loves us so much!

<u>במדבר ב, ב</u>
אִישׁ עַל־דִּגְלוֹ בְּאֹתֹת לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם יַחֲנוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנֶּגֶד סָבִיב לְאֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד יַחֲנוּ׃

This week's parsha talks about the encampments of בני ישראל around the משכן. This was a very special setup. Each שבט had its specific spot that Hashem commanded. This was the same setup that Yaakov had commanded the שבטים to stand in when they would carry his ארון to ארץ ישראל after he died. On each side (north, south, east and west), there were three שבטים. Each side had a special flag/banner that represented those שבטים. The משכן, where the שכינה rested, was in the middle. It was a very special spiritual arrangement.

The באר מרים was a rock that gave water to בני ישראל in the מדבר. Whenever בני ישראל prepared to camp, the twelve נשיאים arose and sang a song of praise to Hashem. That caused the water to flow from the rock. The water flowed in streams that surrounded the camp of the משכן and separated each שבט and even each family. The water caused grass and trees to spring up at the riverbanks. The trees grew delicious fruits, which had the taste of Olam Haba. (פקודי - end of ילקוט שמעוני)

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The מדרש says that at מתן תורה, Bnei Yisrael saw in רוח הקדש that the שכינה came down on הר סיני accompanied by 22,000 chariots of מלאכים that were close to the שכינה plus additional chariots surrounding them. The מלאכים were grouped around the שכינה in four different groups with different flags. בני ישראל were so inspired by this and exclaimed, "If only we could be organized under דגלים - flags with the שכינה in our midst!" Hashem granted their request. (במדבר רבה ב,ב)

<u>שיר השירים ז, א</u>
שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשּׁוּלַמִּית שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנֶחֱזֶה־בָּךְ מַה־תֶּחֱזוּ בַּשּׁוּלַמִּית כִּמְחֹלַת הַמַּחֲנָיִם:

<u>במדבר רבה ב, ד</u>
אוֹמְרִים לָהֶם הָאֻמּוֹת (שיר השירים ז, א): שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי הַשּׁוּלַמִּית, הִדָּבְקוּ לָנוּ, בּוֹאוּ אֶצְלֵנוּ וְאָנוּ עוֹשִׂין אֶתְכֶם שַׁלְטוֹנִים, הֶגְמוֹנִים, דֻּכָּסִין, אִפָּרְכִין, אִסְטְרַטְלִיטִין. (שיר השירים ז, א): שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנֶחֱזֶה בָּךְ, וְאֵין נֶחֱזֶה אֶלָּא שְׁרָרָה, שֶׁכֵּן אָמַר יִתְרוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה (שמות יח, כא): וְאַתָּה תֶּחֱזֶה וגו'. שׁוּבִי שׁוּבִי וְנֶחֱזֶה בָּךְ, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹמְרִים (שיר השירים ז, א): מַה תֶּחֱזוּ בַּשּׁוּלַמִּית, מַה גְּדֻלָּה אַתֶּם נוֹתְנִים לָנוּ, שֶׁמָּא (שיר השירים ז, א): כִּמְחֹלַת הַמַּחֲנָיִם, שֶׁמָּא יְכוֹלִים אַתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹת לָנוּ כַּגְּדֻלָּה. שֶׁעָשָׂה הָאֱלֹקִים בַּמִּדְבָּר, דֶּגֶל מַחֲנֵה יְהוּדָה, דֶּגֶל מַחֲנֵה רְאוּבֵן, דֶּגֶל מַחֲנֵה דָן, דֶּגֶל מַחֲנֵה אֶפְרַיִם, יְכוֹלִים אַתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹת לָנוּ כָּךְ. מַה תֶּחֱזוּ בַּשּׁוּלַמִּית, מַה גְּדֻלָּה אַתֶּם נוֹתְנִים לָנוּ שֶׁמָּא כִּמְחֹלַת הַמַּחֲנָיִם, שֶׁמָּא יְכוֹלִים אַתֶּם לִתֵּן לָנוּ כַּגְּדֻלָּה שֶׁעָשָׂה לָנוּ הָאֱלֹקִים בַּמִּדְבָּר, שֶׁהָיִינוּ חוֹטְאִים וְהוּא מוֹחֵל לָנוּ

The four repetitions of the word שובי represents the four kingdoms that ruled over בני ישראל. Throughout our גלות, the nations of the world try to dissuade בני ישראל from following Hashem and say to us, "Come and join us and we will make you into our rulers, officers, and leaders."
בני ישראל respond, "What greatness do you have to offer us? Are you able to give us the greatness that we experienced in the camps with the דגלים around Hashem in the מדבר? There is nothing that you can offer us that is even close to that special holy experience where we lived with the שכינה in our midst and basked in its glory."

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The גמרא (Shabbos 31b) discusses the מלאכה of סותר. The אב מלאכה of סותר is destroying to rebuild. One opinion holds that it is destroying to rebuild in the same place.
We know that all the מלאכות of Shabbos are work that was done for the משכן. The מלאכה of סותר was done when the משכן was taken apart to move to the next resting place in the מדבר. How can anyone say that the root of סותר only applies if it will be rebuilt in that same place if the משכן was rebuilt in a different place?
The גמרא answers "על פי ה' יחנו ועל פי ה' יסעו" - "By the word of Hashem, they camped and by the word of Hashem, they traveled". Because they only camped and traveled by the word of Hashem, it was considered the same place.

R' Naftali Trop offers a beautiful explanation. He draws a comparison to a woman traveling with her infant, holding the infant tightly in her arms throughout the journey. If someone would ask the infant where he was, and he could talk, he would say, "In Mommy's arms." Ten miles later, if someone would ask him again where he was, he would again say, "In Mommy's arms." Wherever he is geographically, whether in a pleasant place or a scary place, it is all the same to him. As far as he's concerned, he is in his mother's arms. Nothing else matters.
So too בני ישראל in the מדבר. It was like we were being carried by Hashem.

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תהילים יט, יא
הַנֶּחֱמָדִים מִזָּהָב וּמִפַּז רָב וּמְתוּקִים מִדְּבַשׁ וְנֹפֶת צוּפִים:

The תורה is more pleasant than gold,
than much fine gold;
sweeter than honey,
than drippings of the comb.

רדק:
ומתוקים מדבש ונפת צופים: כי הדבש הוא המאכל שיערב לאדם יותר משאר המאכלים; ואף על פי כן אם יוסיף לאכל ממנו יזיק לו ויקיאנו, והמאכל יועיל לו לפי שעה; ולא כן החכמה, כי כל מה שיוסיף בה תועילנו ותועיל לו לעולם. ולפי שאמר הנחמדים: ולמי הם נחמדים ומתוקים? למשכילים וליראי ה', לפיכך אמר:

Honey is the sweetest of all foods, but, if a person eats too much he will get nauseous. The wisdom of תורה is not like that. It is so sweet and the more one acquires, the better it is.

In ידיד נפש, we express our intense love and yearning for Hashem:
יערב לו ידידותיך. מנפת צוף וכל טעם:
Our friendship with Hashem will be sweeter than the drippings of the honeycomb.

The same concept applies here. Honey is the sweetest delicacy yet, its taste lingers for only a brief while, and too much of it can cause discomfort. Hashem's friendship, however, endures forever and one can never get too much of it. The more one becomes close to Hashem, the better it is for him. For there is no truer enjoyment or greater delight in this world than being close to Hashem.
שֶׁזֶּהוּ הַתַּעֲנוּג הָאֱמִתִּי וְהָעִדּוּן הַגָּדוֹל מִכָּל הָעִדּוּנִים שֶׁיְּכוֹלִים לְהִמָּצֵא. (מסילת ישרים)

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Throughout תנ"ך, it is written over and over again that Hashem is referred to as the חתן and בני ישראל are referred to as His כלה. This shows the tremendous love that Hashem has for us and that we have for Him.

<u>הושע ב, כא</u>

וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי בְּצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים:

And I will bind/betroth you to Me forever (like a חתן and a כלה):
I will bind you to Me with righteousness and justice,
And with goodness and mercy,

When men put on תפילין, they say this פסוק. Just like they are binding the תפילין on their arms, we are bound to Hashem forever.

In לכה דודי, it describes בני ישראל's longing for the גאולה. Though we were oppressed by the other nations throughout the גלות, we know that:

וְהָיוּ לִמְשִׁסָּה שֹׁסָיִךְ. וְרָחֲקוּ כָּל מְבַלְּעָיִךְ. יָשִׂישׂ עָלַיִךְ אֱלֹקַיִךְ. כִּמְשׂוֹשׂ חָתָן עַל כַּלָּה:

Our oppressors will be downtrodden. Those who enjoyed hurting us will be punished. And as for us, we will see tremendous ישועות when משיח comes and ירושלים is rebuilt. And Hashem will rejoice over us as a חתן rejoices over his כלה.

When the כותל was recaptured by כלל ישראל with extraordinary נסים during the six day war, the soldiers stood with great emotion at the כותל. With tears streaming down their faces, they sang ישיש עליך אלקיך כמשוש חתן על כלה.

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שמות יט, יז
וַיּוֹצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹקִים מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּתְיַצְּבוּ בְּתַחְתִּית הָהָר:
Moshe led the people out of the camp toward Hashem, and they took their places at the foot of the mountain.

רשי:
לקראת האלקים. מַגִּיד שֶׁהַשְּׁכִינָה יָצְאָה לִקְרָאתָם כְּחָתָן הַיּוֹצֵא לִקְרַאת כַּלָּה, וְזֶהוּ שֶׁאָמַר ה' מִסִּינַי בָּא (דברים ל"ג), וְלֹא נֶאֱמַר לְסִינַי בָּא (מכילתא):
This (the word לקראת, “to meet”, which is used when two people are approaching one another) tells us that the Shechina was going forth to meet them, as a groom who goes forth to meet his bride.

ירמיהו לא, ג
מֵרָחֹוק ה' נִרְאָה לִי וְאַהֲבַת עוֹלָם אֲהַבְתִּיךְ עַל־כֵּן מְשַׁכְתִּיךְ חָסֶד:
Hashem appeared to me long ago and He said, “With an everlasting love I have loved you; Therefore I have brought you close to me with loving kindness.”

Sometimes in גלות, we feel that Hashem has hidden His face from us. But Hashem says, “No, My love for you is forever.” Hashem will bring us out of גלות and rebuild our glory which will last forever.

ישעיה נד, י
כִּי הֶהָרִים יָמוּשׁוּ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תְּמוטֶינָה וְחַסְדִּי מֵאִתֵּךְ לֹא־יָמוּשׁ וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תָמוּט אָמַר מְרַחֲמֵךְ ה':
For the mountains may move and the hills be shaken, but My loyalty shall never move from you, nor My covenant of friendship be shaken—said ה'

רדק: כי ההרים ימושו. ההרים והגבעות הם הדברים הקיימים אשר בארץ ואעפ"י כן פעמים ימושו ותמוטנה ברעש הארץ אבל חסדי ובריתי אתך הוא יותר קיים שלא ימוש לעולם ויש לפרש ההרים והגבעות משל על שרי עכו"ם:
Although the mountains and earth are permanent things on earth, they can still be destroyed by earthquakes. However, Hashem’s חסד and agreement of friendship with us is more enduring and can never be destroyed!

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Every one of the חמישה חומשי תורה begins with Hashem's love for us.

<u>בראשית</u>

רשי: בְּשְׁבִיל הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִּקְרֵאת רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ (משלי ח'), וּבְשְׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ רֵאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתוֹ (ירמיה ב');

Look how much Hashem loves us! He created the whole world for us!

<u>שמות</u>

רשי: אַע"פִּ שֶׁמָּנָן בְּחַיֵּיהֶם בִּשְׁמוֹתָם, חָזַר וּמָנָם בְּמִיתָתָם, לְהוֹדִיעַ חִבָּתָם, שֶׁנִּמְשְׁלוּ לְכוֹכָבִים, שֶׁמּוֹצִיאָם וּמַכְנִיסָם בְּמִסְפַּר וּבִשְׁמוֹתָם

Hashem counts us again because He loves us!

<u>ויקרא</u>

רשי: לְכָל דִּבְּרוֹת וּלְכָל אֲמִירוֹת וּלְכָל צִוּוּיִים קָדְמָה קְרִיאָה, לְשׁוֹן חִבָּה

When Hashem spoke to משה רבינו, the representative of בני ישראל, it was always with love.

<u>במדבר</u>

רשי: מִתּוֹךְ חִבָּתָן לְפָנָיו מוֹנֶה אוֹתָם כָּל שָׁעָה

Hashem counts us again and again because He loves us!

<u>דברים</u>

רשי: לְפִיכָךְ סָתַם אֶת הַדְּבָרִים וְהִזְכִּירָם בְּרֶמֶז מִפְּנֵי כְּבוֹדָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל

Hashem wrote בני ישראל's sins in a רמז - hint out of כבוד for בני ישראל.

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משל:

From Portraits of Prayer 2 by Rabbi Eliezer L. Abish

Two fellows who shared similar personalities and got along well with each other decided to go into business together. The partnership worked out well for many years. Unfortunately though, as time went by and the business grew and expanded, the former friends found themselves arguing with each other quite a bit.
Eventually, one of the partners couldn't stand the constant bickering and asked his Rav how to proceed. Should he sell out his half of the business or should he stick it out and try to make it work? The man admitted that the partners would never have gone into business with each other had they known that their relationship would deteriorate to this state. On the other hand, now that the partnership was a done deal, the situation wasn't bad enough to end the relationship. They resolved to remain together and work it out.

This is not the case with the relationship between us and Hashem. One can worry that Hashem chose us as a nation years ago and isn't going to break that relationship once it is in motion, however, ח"ו Hashem would not choose it now knowing our sins. This is totally untrue. "ובנו בחרת" - Hashem chose us then as a nation. And "הבוחר בעמו" - Hashem continues to choose us in the present tense every day! "באהבה" - With love!!