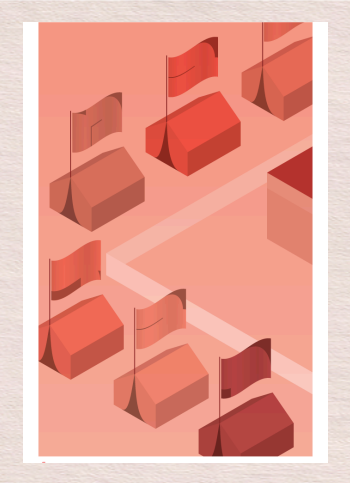
# Bamidbar: Bamidbar (Numbers)

## What's it all about?

**God instructs Moses to conduct a census** of the twelve tribes of Israel, and 603,550 men of military draft age, or 20-to-60-years-old, are counted. The tribe of Levi is counted separately, numbering 22,300 males and appointed to serve in the Sanctuary, replacing the firstborns who had lost this privilege with the Sin of the Golden Calf. The Parsha delivers a detailed description of the division of labor among the three Levite clans, as well as a breakdown of each tribe, informing us that each had its own leader and its own flag.



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"Take a census of the entire community of the Israelites by families, by their paternal houses, by the number of their names, a head count of every male."

# **Take** a deeper dive

This week, we begin the Torah's fourth book, the Book of Numbers. But its Hebrew name is different: Sefer Bamidbar, or the Book of Being in the Desert. Why the discrepancy?

The great Nachmanides asked a similar question, and delivered a beautiful explanation. **The desert, he explained, is a holy, mystical place**, which is why spiritual seekers, from the prophets of old to today's Burning Man enthusiasts, have found themselves heading to the wilderness in search of revelations. But the Israelites' job—and ours—isn't merely to stay in the sacred no-man's-land; their job—and ours—is **to make it to the Promised Land**, win it over, and establish a just society based on the Torah's laws.

And that takes… work. Which is why God commands a major census, instructing the tribes to take stock of their military-aged men and organize for action. It's a reminder that creation is always a partnership, and that while God always does His share, we should get serious, responsible, and organized about doing ours.

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