

HOW TO USE

Use this discussion guide to explore how fostering belonging, connection, and community can help reduce isolation and prevent elder abuse.

IN THIS STUDY

01 Do I Count?

02 Bamidbar—In The Desert

03 Counting as Elder Abuse Prevention

04 Final Thoughts

"Each was counted.
Each still counts."



SEIVAH
SACRED AGING

Parashat Bamidbar: "What Does it Mean to Be Counted?"

Contributing Author: Henriette J Content-Tavor, Creative Adult Programming Director, Valley of the Sun JCC, and Sacred Spaces Seivah Advisory Council Member.

— Do I Count?

A few years ago, I walked into a large event where I didn't know many people. You know that feeling—everyone seems to belong, conversations are already flowing, and you're just standing there. Then someone walked up to me, smiled, and said my name.

Not "Hi," not "Can I help you?"—but my name.

And at that moment, everything shifted. I wasn't invisible anymore. I wasn't just part of the crowd.

I was seen.

That's exactly where Parashat Bamidbar begins. God tells Moshe to take a census of the Israelites. But the Torah doesn't just say "count them." It says:

בְּמִסְפַּר שֵׁמוֹת

(b'mis-par sheh-mot)

"by the number of their names." (Numbers 1:2)

Not numbers alone—names.

Rashi explains that God counts the people repeatedly because they are beloved. Think about the significance of the act of counting. When we count something again and again, it is not only because we want to know that nothing is missing. It is also because it is precious to us. We pay attention to what we treasure. We return to it. We want to know it is there.

God's counting is an expression of love. **Each person matters. Each person is known. Each person counts.**



SACRED SPACES

DISCUSSION

- 1 Share a time when you felt seen or recognized. What made that experience meaningful?
- 2 Why do you think the Torah emphasizes counting people by name rather than simply reporting a total number?
- 3 What does it mean to be "counted" in a community? How is that different from simply being present?

— Bamidbar—In The Desert

The census takes place in the desert—the last place you'd expect structure. It is empty, isolating, and disorienting.

Yet in that very place:

- Each tribe has a place.
- Each group has a banner.
- Every person is counted.

This reminds us that when life feels uncertain or unsettled, we need reminders that we belong.

We all experience moments that feel like a desert:

- Times of transition.
- Uncertainty.
- Loss or change.
- Seasons when our routines and relationships shift.

Many older adults face challenges that can create similar feelings of isolation or invisibility. Changes in health, mobility, family circumstances, employment, caregiving responsibilities, or social connections can leave people feeling disconnected from community life. This can also increase vulnerability to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and other forms of mistreatment.

Parashat Bamidbar reminds us that healthy communities do more than include people—**they notice them**. They recognize when someone is missing. They create places where people belong.

"Each was counted.
Each still counts."

01 Do I Count?

02 Bamidbar—In The Desert

03 Counting as Elder Abuse Prevention

04 Final Thoughts

DISCUSSION

- 1 How can aging sometimes make it harder for people to feel seen, connected, or valued?
- 2 What are some signs that someone may be becoming disconnected from community life?

— Counting as Elder Abuse Prevention

Jewish tradition teaches that every person is created b'tzelem Elohim, in the image of God.

Treating people with dignity means more than acknowledging their presence.

It means recognizing their value, listening to their experiences, and maintaining meaningful relationships.

Strong relationships can help reduce isolation and create opportunities to notice when something may be wrong.

A conversation, phone call, visit, or simple check-in can communicate that someone matters and is not alone.

For Jewish organizations, being a community where people are counted means asking more than who attends. It means asking who participates, who leads, whose voices are heard, and who may be missing.

Do we notice when someone is standing alone?

Do we take the extra moment to learn a name?

**Do we create spaces where people feel counted—
not just included, but known?**

"Each was counted.
Each still counts."

01 Do I Count?

02 Bamidbar—In The Desert

03 Counting as Elder Abuse Prevention

04 Final Thoughts

DISCUSSION

- 1 What role can relationships play in helping us recognize when someone may need support?
- 2 In what ways are older adults currently engaged in our programs, leadership, volunteer opportunities, and workforce?
- 3 What responsibilities do community members have when they are concerned about an older adult's well-being?

Final Thoughts

Parashat Bamidbar teaches that every person counts.

The Torah does not count a crowd; it counts individuals, each with a name and a place in the community.

By noticing, including, and supporting one another, we help create communities where dignity is protected, belonging is strengthened, and older adults can live with safety, respect, and connection.

"Each was counted. Each still counts."

For Jewish organizations, being a community where people are counted means asking more than who attends. It means asking who participates, who leads, whose voices are heard, and who may be missing.



SACRED SPACES · SEIVAH · SACRED AGING · JEWISHSACREDSAPACES.ORG



**"Each was counted.
Each still counts."**