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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

Where Heaven Kissed Earth

by Binyamin L. Jolkovsky

As a youngster, I was greeted at my Jewish day school by a poster of an ancient map detail depicting Jerusalem as the world's center. The drawing, of course, was geographically inaccurate, but its message was a powerful one to generations of impressionable children living as a minority in a country that the Framers envisioned as the "new Jerusalem."

Years later, as a rabbinic candidate studying in the Holy City, the idea of Jerusalem's centrality took on a far more tangible meaning. It was the summer of 1989, and my father called me with a request. Distant, non-Orthodox cousins, he said, would be in town shortly. Would I be willing to forego my vacation to act as their tour guide? "Certainly," I said. It sounded exciting.

Though we lived only a few hours away by plane, it was halfway around the world, in Jerusalem, that our two very different worlds would first interface.

Marcel, a college professor, had grown up in an observant home and attended a modern Orthodox day school. He, his wife and their daughter were living a more secular lifestyle in California. Aspiring to be the consummate host, I immediately sought out places that I reasoned the family would find of interest.

We met a few days later at the now defunct LaRomme Hotel. When the conversation began to lag, I whipped out my list of sites, times and prices. I began to read proudly: "Israel Museum, Center One Shopping Mall..." but Marcel soon grabbed my hand and smiled. "We've been in the country for over a week. It's been an endless parade of museums, restaurants, kibbutzim and the like. We came to Jerusalem to see Jerusalem, not more of American exports and not more Western culture." It was a response I had not counted on.

For the next several days, a yeshiva-mate, Avrumi Sitko, and I took the cousins on a tour of Jerusalem-as seen through the eyes of "ultra-Orthodox" locals. We traveled simply, by foot and, when necessary, bus, tuning our senses to the vibes of the city and the small details lost on large, fast-paced tour groups. We visited the holy sites and shared a Sabbath meal at the home of a famous rabbi, where all were impressed with our host's accessibility and humanity. We joined the joyous dancing as a new Torah scroll was paraded through Jerusalem's labyrinthine alleys. We watched Chasidic children pray and play and, to top it off, took a shopping spree in Mea Shearim.

Though Marcel's wife's clothing undoubtedly violated protocol of the religious neighborhood, she was not stoned, spat at or cursed, as she had been forewarned in America by some secular Israeli friends, yordim, who had given up life in the Land of Milk and Honey for the Country of Steak and Money.

Weeks later, I received a parcel from my cousins containing several photos and a letter. Of their three weeks in Israel, the note read, it was the time we spent together in Jerusalem-sans the glitzy nightlife and more earthly distractions-that was the most memorable. It was the one stitch of their trip that made them forget they were tourists and reminded them they were Jews. Indeed, the experience helped solidify their understanding of why Jerusalem, despite Jewry's seemingly infinite exiles, has always remained central in the Jew's life. It is the reason, I suspect, why someone, somewhere created that ancient map detail of my childhood.

Jerusalem is Jerusalem only because it remains Jerusalem-center of the universe or, as the Talmud describes it, the place where Heaven first kissed Earth. *© 1994 Binyamin L. Jolkovsky & jewishworldreview.com*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Jerusalem, Earthly and Heavenly

There is no way for a body to survive once its heart has been broken asunder. A number of years ago I visited San Diego, California to deliver a lecture at a local synagogue. On the next day, I prevailed upon my friend and colleague, the rabbi of the synagogue to accompany me across the US-Mexican border to visit Tijuana. Ignoring the advice of the rabbi that the visit was not worth the time I insisted in doing so anyway. The rabbi was right. Tijuana was vastly disappointing. But on the way back, crossing into the United States from Mexico an incident occurred that has remained stamped in my memory ever since.

The burly Mexican American customs officer at the border examined my passport and paused. He then

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asked me in awe and wonderment: "Do you really live in Jerusalem?" When I answered affirmatively he looked at me and said: "How blessed you must be to be able to live in Jerusalem."

It was a moment of transcendent revelation to me. Truly, I should feel fortunate and blessed to live in Jerusalem. The customs officer confirmed a truism to me that, like other truisms in life, I sometimes tend not to remember and concentrate on.

I live in a very special place at a very special time. I have an opportunity granted to me that was denied to generations of my more worthy ancestors. I should savor and appreciate this opportunity and not treat it in a cavalier or mundane fashion. The Jewish past has an opportunity to currently live with and through me. There is responsibility carried with this opportunity.

The Talmud asks: "Why are the hot springs baths of Tiberias not located in Jerusalem?" Why are the great and tasty fruits of the Ginossar area not grown in Jerusalem?"

The Talmud responds: "So that no one should ascend to Jerusalem for the sweet fruits or for the hot baths. Rather, one ascends to Jerusalem for the sake of Jerusalem itself."

Jerusalem is its own attraction. It does not rely upon natural wonders, outstanding weather or unusual surroundings for its attraction. It is holy, mysterious, the soul of Jewish history and longing. The rabbis taught us that there is a heavenly Jerusalem perched over the earthly Jerusalem. In order to truly appreciate the earthly Jerusalem one must also be able to glimpse the heavenly Jerusalem as well.

To see Jerusalem as a piece of real estate, a place on the map, is not to see it at all, let alone appreciate its role in Judaism and Jewish life and thought. The driving force behind Zionism, even its most secular format, was the hunger of the Jewish people for Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the emotional battery that charged all of the movement of the return to Zion by Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries. The earthly Jerusalem with all of its wonders and problems, greatness and shortcomings, is a product of seeing the heavenly Jerusalem with eyes of tears and hope.

Nehemiah built the walls of Jerusalem at the beginning of the Second Temple period with one hand on the sword and the second one on the building locks. But Midrash records that his eyes were always looking heavenward at the heavenly Jerusalem.

The capital's diplomatic fate is a hot topic of conversation these days. The people who claim to represent our best interests regarding the city apparently only see the earthly Jerusalem. In their practicality they have become wildly impractical. There is no way for a body to survive once its heart has been broken asunder.

There has never been a Jewish power in our history that contemplated willingly ceding Jerusalem or any part of it to others, especially to sworn enemies who denigrate our faith and question our right to exist. It is the complete disregard, whether out of ignorance or ideology, of the heavenly Jerusalem that brings one to compromise the very existence of the earthly Jerusalem, a Jerusalem that we should feel so blessed and appreciative to control.

A friend of mine summed up the matter when he told me this story about his aged father who had just come to Israel on aliya in his eightieth year. The son settled the father in a very comfortable senior citizen residence in the coastal part of the country. But after two months the father insisted on relocating to Jerusalem. He said: "I have not waited for 80 years to finally come to the Land of Israel and not to live in Jerusalem."

We see the traffic jams, the torn-up streets, the problems of living in a metropolis that is still developing. That is the earthly Jerusalem. But the heavenly Jerusalem resonates in our souls and hearts and that is what makes life in the earthly Jerusalem so meaningful and important.

How can it be otherwise? *© 2007 aish.com and Rabbi B. Wein. Rabbi Berel Wein, the Founder and Director of The Destiny Foundation has, for over 20 years, been identified with the popularization of Jewish history through lectures worldwide, his more than 1000 audiotapes, books, seminars, educational tours and, most recently dramatic and documentary films.*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's parsha, Bamidbar is always read on the Shabbat prior to the Shavuot holiday. This year is no different. Rabbi Isaiah Halevy Horowitz, author of the Shnei Luhot Habrit, suggests that this Torah reading teaches us important lessons about the holiday.

Parshat Bamidbar presents the names and leaders of each of the tribes of Israel. It can be suggested that the delineation of the leaders of each tribe is linked to Shavuot as it promotes the idea that the heads of the community should be paragons or teachers of Torah.

The parsha also describes the way that the Jews encamped around the Tabernacle. Rav Umberto Cassuto echoes the similarity to Shavuot as he calls the Tabernacle a "walking-Sinai." We simulated Sinai as we

wandered through the desert, constantly reliving the experience of revelation.

Bamidbar begins by telling us that G-d spoke to Moshe in Midbar Sinai. Rabbi Nachman Cohen in 'A Time for All Things,' maintains that the confluence of Bamidbar and Shavuot is "to underscore the great significance of the Torah having been given in the desert-no man's land." Rabbi Cohen points out that the location of the vast expanse of the wilderness is significant for it teaches us that the Torah is not "the exclusive property of given individuals." Living a desert existence makes us feel vulnerable. Giving the Torah in the desert also teaches that" Torah can only be acquired if a person humbles himself."

A talk from one of my dear colleagues, Rabbi Yosef Kanefsky, inspired a final idea. Perhaps the key relationship between Bamidbar and Shavuot is "counting." Not only does our portion deal with the census-the counting-of the Jewish people, but the Torah, when mentioning Shavuot, stresses the counting of days between the holidays of Passover and Shavuot. In the words of the Torah, "seven weeks shall you count." (Leviticus, 23:15) This teaches that as important as the holiday of Shavuot may be, equally important is the count toward the holiday.

An important lesson emerges. Whenever we are engaged in a particular project, whether we are working toward a professional goal or striving to achieve in our personal lives, it is important to reflect and to evaluate how much time has already been spent on the endeavor and what is the time required to achieve its realization.

Evaluating forces us to consider the gift of every moment we have. Rabbi Joseph Lookstein points out that we must not only realize what the years have done to us, but what we have done with our years.

Hence the confluence of Bamidbar and Shavuot. Bamidbar teaches the significance of each person and Shavuot teaches the importance of every moment for the individual. In the words of the Psalmist, "Teach us to number our days." (Psalms, 90:12)

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"This is the amount [of people] counted by Moshe and Aharon and the twelve leaders of Israel." "And the total amount of the Children of Israel, by tribe, was of the men who were twenty years and older, all eligible to go to war for Israel." "And the total amount was 603,550." These three consecutive verses (Bamidbar 1:44-46) could have been combined into a single verse ("This is the total number of men twenty and older, counted by Moshe, Aharon and the Tribal leaders, by tribe: 603,550"), or, at the very least, into two verses. Based on the Ramban (1:45), the Kesav Sofer explains why the expression of being counted ("pekudim") is stated three times in these three verses.

The Ramban provides three different reasons for this census: #1) Since it was done "by name" (1:2), it gave everyone the opportunity to meet Moshe and Aharon face to face and grow from their personal meeting with these great and holy leaders, while allowing Moshe and Aharon to meet them one at a time and beseech G-d to help them based on their personal needs. The Kesav Sofer says that this is implied by the verse telling us that "they were counted by Moshe and Aharon" (1:44). #2) Just as every king has to know how many soldiers he has before going to war, since G-d operates via natural means and the nation was preparing to conquer the Promised Land (had they not sinned with the spies), those eligible for the army were counted, i.e. "all who go out to battle" (1:45). #3) By taking this census and demonstrating how large the nation had become, they would become more fully aware of G-d's kindness to them, for they had been just "70 souls" when they went down to Egypt and now they were "as numerous as the stars of the heavens" (Devarim 10:22). This aspect correlates to the third verse, which gives the actual number of men at least twenty years old. By separating them into three verses, each with its own introduction regarding the "counting," all three of these reasons for the census are highlighted.

The Ramban, when giving the third reason (in the Kesav Sofer's order; it is the second reason given by the Ramban), puts it in a question form. "I don't know why [G-d] commanded that they know the actual number [of people counted]; perhaps it was to inform them of His kindness towards them, for their ancestors descended to Egypt with 70 souls, and now they are like the sands of the sea, so many and so many twenty years old and above." It wasn't (just) for us to recognize how large the nation had become in a little over 200 years, but for them to become aware of it (consistent with the other two reasons being applicable to that generation). How did they know how few there had been two centuries earlier? Was there only an oral tradition regarding the nation's beginnings? Would having this tradition be enough to get them to contrast it with the current reality and bring about mass appreciation of G-d's kindness to them? Furthermore, why does the Ramban almost quote the verse in Devarim, but switch the metaphor from "stars in the heavens" to "[grains of] sand by the sea"?

When the nation accepted the Torah from G-d, there was a contract agreed to, written down by Moshe, and read to the nation. There are numerous approaches as to precisely what was in this contract (see www.RabbiDMK.posterous.com/Parashas-Mishpatim-5770). Rashi (Shemos 22:7) says it was the text of the Torah from the beginning (Beraishis) until the giving of the Torah (the point in the narrative that was,

at that point, the "present") as well as the commandments they had been given at Marah (shortly before getting to Mt. Sinai; according to many, these commandments make up the bulk of Parashas Mishpatim). Even if the Ramban disagrees with Rashi regarding the contents of this "contract" (very possible, even likely, as the Ramban is of the opinion that this contract was agreed to after the "Ten Commandments," whereas Rashi says the contract was agreed to beforehand), it would seem that he agrees that this part of the text of the Torah was given to the nation at Sinai (the rest of the document was given to the nation at Arvos Moav, shortly before Moshe's death; see Devarim 31:9).

Although G-d's kindness to the nation regarding its growth from "70 souls" to over 600,000 warrior-age men (plus women and children) is summed up nicely in the verse in Devarim (almost) quoted by the Ramban, it can be suggested that the Ramban purposely didn't quote it exactly because it was part of the Torah that the nation did not receive yet. Instead, he used another metaphor, one that was contained in the part of the Torah they had already been given (Beraishis 22:17 and 32:12); even if the metaphor used in Devarim is employed there as well. [That the family consisted of "70 souls" when it joined Yosef in Egypt is mentioned twice in the part of the Torah given to the nation at Matan Torah; Beraishis 46:27 and Shemos 1:5.)

If the nation already had this part of the document to study (besides learning about the mitzvos they now had to keep, including Seder Nezikin), it would be common knowledge, constantly reinforced via textual study, that there were only 70 members of the family when they went down to Egypt. Therefore, after having studied this text for close to eleven months (from the beginning of Sivan, 2448 until the beginning of Iyar 2449), when the census revealed that there were now over 600,000 males above the age of twenty, it made quite an impression. © *2010 Rabbi D. Kramer*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Count the heads of the entire witness-congregation of Israel" (Numbers 1:2) The Book of Numbers opens with a most optimistic picture of a nation poised for redemption. The Israelites have been freed from Egypt with great miracles and wonders. They have received the Revelation at Sinai which provides them with a moral and ethical constitution for a soon-to-be established sovereign state along with a faith commitment which establishes their mission to the world. The nation is now structured into twelve uniquely endowed and individually directed tribes who are united around the Sanctuary. Physical and spiritual defenses are organized with a standing army for military might, and the tribe of Levi is dedicated to teaching Torah and arranging the sacrificial service. Everything seems ready for the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land of Israel!

Instead, what follows is total degeneration. The Israelites become involved in petty squabbles and tiresome complaints, the reconnaissance mission advises against entering Israel (Numbers 13: 27-29), Korah, Datan and Aviram stage a rebellion against Moses, and a prince of one of the tribes publicly fornicates with a Midianite woman. The result is that the entire generation that left Egypt is condemned to die in the wilderness, and only Moses' successor, Joshua, and the new generation which has been born in the desert may live in the Promised Land. What happened and why? How can a nation so committed to becoming a "kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) lose their idealistic sense of purpose and "gang up" against the very person who was their great liberator and lawgiver?

This fourth Book of the Bible is called "Numbers," or "Pikudim" in Hebrew, after the two censuses, or population counts, which are taken between its covers. Indeed, our Book opens with a command to count the Israelites, stipulating as follows:

"Count the heads of the entire witness-congregation of the children of Israel, in accordance with their families, with their household parents, with the number of names of each male body, from twenty years of age and above, everyone eligible for army conscription..." (Numbers 1:2, 3).

These are the details required for the census at the beginning of our weekly portion, when the Israelites are still imbued with a sense of mission and "manifest destiny" and when they still expect to wage a war for the liberation of the land of Israel.

Twenty-five chapters later, however, after the scouts' refusal to conquer Israel, after the various rebellions against Moses culminating in Prince Zimri ben Sadon's shameful public adultery with the Midianite in the presence of Moses himself, a second census is ordered. But you will notice that the identification of each Israelite for the purpose of this census is radically different from the way it was in the previous one:

"Count the heads of the entire witness-congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years of age and above, with their household parents, everyone eligible for army conscription..." (Numbers 26: 2).

The first count included "the families [providing everyone's tribal affiliation harking back to Jacob, Isaac and Abraham], the household parents, and the individual personal names." The second time, the tribal affiliation and the personal names of each were excluded, providing only the names of the household parents of each individual!

These significant omissions may help to explain the degeneration of the Israelites, which is why the Midrash names this the Book of the Censuses - Sefer Pikudim. In the first census, taken during the heyday of

the generation of the exodus, each individual Israelite felt connected to his tribal parent, to his Biblical patriarchs and matriarchs, but by the time of the second census, that connection was woefully gone. Each individual only related to their immediate biological parents.

The Book of Exodus, our birth as a nation, is built upon the foundations set out in Book of Genesis: our origins as a very special family. The patriarchs and matriarchs were originally chosen by G-d because of their commitment to "compassionate righteousness and moral justice," traits and ideals which they were to "command their children and their households after them" (Gen.18:19). This unique Hebraic culture was to be nurtured, and expressed in the Land of Israel, which is the very "body," the physical matrix, of our eternal covenant with G-d. The towering personalities of the Book of Genesis develop, falter, repair, sacrifice, persevere and ultimately prevail on these twin altars of commitment to land and law, to righteousness and Israel. They set the foundations for the continuity of an eternal nation through whom the entire world will eventually be blessed at the time of ultimate redemption.

"Yichus," lineage or pedigree, has little to do with privilege and special rights, but it has everything to do with responsibility and ancestral empowerment. Grandfather Jacob-Israel blesses his grandchildren, the sons of Joseph, that "they shall be called by his name and the name of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac" (Gen. 48:16). This does not only mean naming them Abe, Ike and Jackie, but, much more importantly it means linking them to the ideals, values, and commitments of their patriarchs and matriarchs. It also means endowing and empowering them with the eternal promise they received from G-d that their seed would inherit the Land of Israel and would eventually succeed in conveying to the world the message and blessing of Divine morality and peace.

Tragically, the desert generation lost its connection to the Book of Genesis, with the mission and empowerment, with the dream and the promise, of the patriarchs and matriarchs of their family. As a consequence, the second census no longer connects them as the tribal children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This loss of connectedness to their forebears results in a disconnect from the G-d of the patriarchs as well, from the promise and the covenant of that G-d, from faith in their ability to carry out the unique message and mission of Israel. That generation lost faith in itself, declaring: "We were like grasshoppers in our own eyes and so we were in their eyes" (Numbers 13: 33). In this way, they lost the courage to conquer the land.

By disconnecting from their past, they lost their future. They did not even merit individual names, names which could only be counted if they were linked with the proud names of the founders of Jewish eternity. Are we in Israel not struck with a similar disconnect today?

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CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

How are we to understand the differential roles of men and women within Judaism? On the one hand, Jewish identity is conferred by women, not men. The child of a Jewish mother is Jewish; the child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother is not. Some (nonorthodox) scholars have sought to date this from the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and their campaign against intermarriage. In fact, though, it goes back to the very first Jewish child, Isaac. Abraham already had a child, Ishmael, by Sarah's handmaid, (the Egyptian) Hagar. Yet G-d was insistent that only Sarah's son would continue the covenant. Maternity, not paternity, was the decisive factor.

On the other hand, status is conferred by men. At the very beginning of Bamidbar, there is a census (hence its English name, the Book of Numbers): "Take a census of the whole Israelite community by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head." The men are counted, the women not. In this case the reason is obvious, as the next verse makes clear: "You and Aaron shall record them by their groups, from the age of twenty years up, all those in Israel who are able to bear arms." The census with which Bamidbar begins was to count those able to do military duty. Historically, men fight; women protect. War is a male pursuit.

But other forms of status also pass through the male line. A king is succeeded by his son. A Cohen is one whose father is a Cohen. A Levi is one whose father is a Levi. Family heritages are governed by paternity. That is implicit in the phrase "by the clans of its ancestral houses, listing the names, every male, head by head". One great counterexample occurs later on in the book of Bamidbar (ch. 27) in the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, whose claim to inherit their father's share in the land of Israel (since he had no sons) is vindicated by G-d himself. Yet in general in Judaism, identity is maternal, inheritance paternal.

It is with trepidation that one takes up the subject of gender differentiation. A stray remark on the subject cost the head of Harvard University, Professor Larry Summers, his job. The person he was quoting, Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, in his book The Blank Slate, quotes a (female) colleague as saying, "Look, I know that males and females are not identical. I see it in my kids, I see it in myself, I know about the research. I can't explain it, but when I read claims about sex differences, steam comes out of my ears."

Despite the passion, perhaps even because of it, it is worth reviewing the Jewish tradition and its twin-track approach. R. Barukh Halevi Epstein (Tosefet Berakhah to Num. 1:2), makes the linguistic

observation-based on midrashic and aggadic sources- that the two words ben, son, and bat, daughter, are both shorter forms of other words. Ben comes from the word boneh, a builder ("Call them not your sons but your builders"). Bat is a compacted form of the word bayit, a home. Men build buildings; women build homes. (He adds that the word ummah, a nation, comes from the word eim, a mother. National as well as personal identity is maternal).

Recent research has thrown scientific light on our understanding of gender differences. Steven Pinker himself (The Blank Slate, pp.337-371) summarises the evidence. In all cultures, men are more aggressive and more prone to physical violence than women. In all cultures, roles are distributed on the basis of sex differences: women tend to have greater responsibility for child rearing, while men tend to occupy most leadership positions in the public and political realm. There are, of course, notable exceptions, but the pattern is sufficiently universal to refute the idea that gender differences are "constructed"-products of culture and convention rather than biology.

In The Essential Difference, Simon Baron-Cohen, professor of psychology and psychiatry at Cambridge University, argues that the female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy; the male brain for system-building. Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to another person as a person, through sensitivity and emotional intelligence. System-building is the drive to analyse, explore and explain phenomena by discovering the rules that govern them. To empathise, you need a degree of attachment; to systematize, you need a measure of detachment. "Whilst the natural way to understand and predict the nature of events and objects is to systematise, the natural way to understand a person is to empathise."

Carol Gilligan, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School, argued in her In a Different Voice that men and women characteristically engage in different kinds of moral reasoning. Men tend to think more in terms of justice, rights and abstract principles; women more in terms of compassion, nurturing and peacemaking. She speaks of "two modes of judging, two different constructions of the moral domain-one traditionally associated with masculinity and the public world of social power, the other with femininity and the privacy of domestic interchange" (p. 69).

These and other studies have been popularised in the title of a best-seller: Men are from Mars, women from Venus. The Torah reflects these differences. Sarah and Rebecca both seem to understand better than their husbands which child will continue the covenant (Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau). Tanakh contains many vignettes of "strong" women. In my Haggadah I tell the story of the "six women" of the Exodus who played key roles in the story of redemption: Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Pharaoh's daughter and Zipporah. And there are many other female heroes in the pages of Tanakh: Hannah, Deborah, Ruth and Esther among them. What characterises these women is their emotional-spiritual intelligence and the moral courage that comes from it.

There are only two cases known to me in Tanakh where the word "Torah" is conjoined with an abstract noun. One occurs in Malachi's description of the ideal priest: "The law of truth (torat emet) was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin." (Malachi 2:6)

The other is the Book of Proverbs' famous description of the "woman of strength" (eshet chayil): "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the law of lovingkindness (torat chessed) is on her tongue." (Prov. 31:26)

The difference between the dispassionate search for truth (torat emet) and the passionate drive to lovingkindness (torat chessed) is precisely what Baron-Cohen and Carol Gilligan track in their research.

Hence the Torah's distinction between the public, social, political arena and the personal dimension of identity and relationships. Status and position within a hierarchy-areas in which the Torah privileges the male- are quintessentially social. They belong to the public domain. They are the gladiatorial arena in which the fight for power and glory takes place. What is unusual in the Torah, and what has always been Judaism's greatest strength, is its emphasis on the other, the personal, domain-where love, compassion and mercy are the covenantal virtues.

Hence the religious centrality and dignity of home and family within Judaism. I have called this the primacy of the personal over the political. That is why, while social status follows the father, personal identity follows the mother. In a public dialogue I had with Steven Pinker, he made the point that the Torah's understanding of male-female differences is compelling, and supported by contemporary science. Carol Gilligan, near the end of her book, makes the following sharp observation: "The moral domain is... enlarged by the inclusion of responsibility and care in relationships. And the underlying epistemology correspondingly shifts from the Greek ideal of knowledge as a correspondence between mind and form to the Biblical conception of knowing as a process of human relationship." (In a Different Voice, p. 173)

So: when you want to know the strength of an army, as in the beginning of Bamidbar, count the men. But when you want to know the strength of a civilization, look to women. For it is their emotional intelligence that defends the personal against the political, the power of relationships against relationships of power.

Lady Jakobovits z"l

Lady Amelie Jakobovits, known affectionately to Anglo-Jewry as Lady J, was an extraordinarily vivid figure of seemingly inexhaustible energy and

effervescence. A Holocaust survivor and the daughter of Rabbi Elie Munk, she married Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits while still a teenager. Together they formed a formidable and inseparable team, as he became Chief Rabbi of Ireland, then rabbi of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue in New York, and then Chief Rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth. After his death in 1999 she emerged as a leader in her own right, speaking and lecturing throughout the world.

She had warmth, charm, wit and deeply felt faith. She was constantly active, visiting the sick, comforting the bereaved, supporting the many Jewish and medical causes of which she was president or patron. She believed passionately in the sanctity of the family, and remained close to her six children and more than a hundred grand-and great-grandchildren. She was a larger-than-life figure, widely known and loved. We will miss her deeply. *© 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Counting That Counts!

The command is clear. Count the Jews. Sefer Bamidbar, the Book of Numbers begins with a simple command. "And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they came out from the land of Egypt, saying, Lift the head of all the congregation of the people of Israel, by families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of names, every male by their heads."

Hashem is commanding Moshe to count the people yet the word "count" in Hebrew is s'oou which actually means "lift up." The entire expression goes one step further. "S'oou es rosh" Lift up the head." It's a curious expression for the command, "count." In what way are we raising a head?

Rick Beyer, a wonderful historian whose "Greatest Stories Never Told" series never fails to astonish, bewilder and stupefy me, relates the following quirk of history and, in my opinion, clear expression of Divine Providence.

On a sweltering afternoon in 1842, Henry Shoemaker was toiling hard. He was a hired hand on a farm in Indiana's DeKalb County and something was nagging him. It took a while to realize what it was, but before dusk it suddenly dawned upon him. It was Election Day, and he had forgotten to vote. He had personally promised his vote to one of the candidates running for state representative, a Democrat named Madison Marsh.

It seems that Shoemaker was a man of his word, because he did not shirk his responsibility nor his personal promise to Mr. Marsh. The polling place was 12 long miles away in Kendallville. But he stopped what he was doing, saddled up a horse and headed off to cast his ballot.

Indeed, Shoemaker was pretty late and when he got to the polling place, there was a bit of confusion. They had run out of official tickets with a roster of all the names of the candidates Shoemaker wanted to vote for. So he took out his knife and made a hodgepodge of names that were left from other ticket rosters in order to cast his vote. He folded them all together, and put them in the ballot box.

In a story reminiscent to the Bush-Gore debacle, the inspector at the polling place threw out Shoemaker's improvised ticket. Madison Marsh and his opponent Enos Beall, a candidate of the Whig party, wound up dead even at 360 votes apiece. Marsh promptly appealed the decision to throw out Shoemaker's vote.

After numerous hearings and lengthy testimony, the vote was allowed. So Madison Marsh was elected... by one vote-the vote of Henry Shoemaker.

Now in the long course of American history, the vote of Henry Shoemaker, even the election of Madison Marsh to State Representative in Indiana would be meaningless. But it wasn't. You see at that time, US Senators were elected by state legislators. In January of 1843, Marsh and his fellow Indiana lawmakers convened for just such an election. This too was a very close race. After much maneuvering, Marsh changed his vote on the 6th ballot, thus electing Democrat Edward Hannegan to the United States Senate... by one vote-the vote of Madison Marsh.

Three years later, relations with Mexico had badly deteriorated and a sharply divided US Senate was debating whether or not to declare war. The Democrats were in the majority, and they had decided to all vote together as a unit. They were the majority and thus whichever way they would decide would ultimately decide the fate of the Mexican American War and the future annexation of the State of Texas and the eventual States of California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. The Democrats were basically deadlocked.

One Senator, Edward Hannegan, had to make the call. He voted for war and thus did the Democrat caucus. What followed was a United States declaration of war, an invasion of Mexico and a victory, resulting in the annexation of Texas and the ensuing growth of Southwestern United States. All because of one vote-the vote of Edward Hannegan.

Sometimes it is hard to imagine your impact. Sometimes we ask do I count? Hashem tells Moshe to count the people. But we are not just numbers. The command is manifest with the words, "Lift up their heads!" Because when Hashem asks you to count individuals he does not want them to be just numbers. Hashem wants to count them as individuals. Their actions, their voices, their ideas and their votes mean something. Lift up their heads. Each person is considered an individual who can impact on an entire

world. Because when you "lift up their heads", they count! *© 2010 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Bamidbar-literally meaning "in the desert"-in most years, precedes the holiday of Shavuot which will occur in that very coming week. There is an obvious logic to this order of things since the revelation and acceptance of Torah by the Jewish people occurred in the desert of Sinai.

There are many interpretations and insights offered as to the choice of the desert to be the locality of the granting of the Torah. An idea that has struck me is that in the ancient world, deserts were not territorial properties of nations. Egypt did not own or control the Sinai desert. Only Bedouin nomads inhabited the space and they were not numerous in number or major players in the diplomatic scene of the times.

The granting of the Torah in the desert of Sinai signaled its universal extra-territorial status. Even though the Land of Israel occupies a special and central role in the Torah and in Jewish life and has many commandments that are capable of being followed and observed only there, and the Land of Israel imparts a special quality to all of the commandments performed there, nevertheless the Jewish people existed for thousands of years in very far-flung places in the world, and were bound together by their Torah commandments, values and traditions.

The Torah was granted to us in a desert, in a place of no particular sovereignty, language, culture or government. The Torah, in its general sense, has no limitations of space or time. It represents the Eternal and therefore takes on all of the characteristics of its Creator, Who is unlimited in space and time.

What makes a desert a desert is the lack of rain and water. As Israel has proven with its own Negev desert, water irrigation can push back the desert's grip. However, all deserts have particular oases and water holes. These are of immense value simply because there is no other source of water in the desert. An oasis or water hole in a country much rained upon attracts little of any attention or worth.

The Torah foresaw that throughout Jewish history Jews would find themselves at times living in a spiritual desert. Immorality, licentiousness and decadence would reign in the general society. The righteous would be mocked and the wicked would be popularized and exalted. The spiritual desert, its emptiness and jadedness cannot slake our inner thirst for immortality and connection to our Creator.

And the Torah, given and nurtured in the desert would then be recognized as the ultimate oasis of life giving water. The Torah is always symbolized as being water in the words of the prophets and in the Talmud. The prophet implores us that "you who are thirsty [for G-dliness and spirituality in your lives] go forth to fetch the water [of the Torah.]" Perhaps only one who is wandering and suffering in the desert can truly appreciate the oasis and water hole. Our times demand our presence at the oasis that only the Torah provides for us. *© 2010 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Bamidbar begins with the third official count of the Jewish nation. The term used in the Torah is that we should "count the heads" (1:2) of all the households, but the Hebrew word "Se-u" could also mean, "lift the heads". Why would the Torah use such ambiguous language? Also, why were they to be counted according to their households, which had never been done in the past? Rashi informs us that prior to the census each Jew was required to produce a book of their lineage. The Midrash adds that producing this book was also required to be able to receive the Torah. Why is receiving the Torah dependent upon having this book of lineage?

Rabbi Zweig explains that surpassing the expectations that have been defined by one's social upbringing is what gives a person a sense of accomplishment. If a person is able to identify their lineage, they might learn that their ancestors were people who took responsibility for themselves and had honorable standards. For the rest of the world, the very act of taking responsibility is in itself an elevating sense of accomplishment. However, behaving responsibly is not considered an accomplishment for G-d's chosen nation. Jews are EXPECTED to behave differently than animals, to act responsibly, for our forefathers have set a standard that makes anything less unacceptable. This explains why households were important enough to be counted. The Ramban (Nachmanides) enforces the lesson of our Parsha by explaining the use of the Torah's language: The alternative meaning of "lifting" of the heads can also be a positive, but only if the body and its actions are lifted with it. Our heads and minds can lift us to greatness, so long as we have our actions to take us there! *© 2010 Rabbi S. Ressler & Lelamed, Inc.*

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