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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **BAMIDBAR** - 5768

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Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 30, will be **day 41, which is 5 weeks and 6 days of the omer.**

TorahWeb.org" <torahweb@torahweb.org> date May 29, 2008 11:07 AM subject Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Guarding the Beis HaMikdash - A Model for Yiras Hashem

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky Guarding the Beis HaMikdash - A Model for Yiras Hashem

An elaborate system for guarding the mishkan (shemiras haMikdash) is described in parshas Bamidbar. This was not a temporary institution, but rather was an eternal mitzvah also fulfilled throughout the period of the Beis HaMikdash. There is a halachic dispute concerning the nature of this mitzvah. Some emphasize the practical nature of this mitzvah. Given that unauthorized entry into the Beis HaMikdash is a serious prohibition, the Torah requires the Kohanim and Leviim to stand guard, thereby physically preventing such entry. This formulation has its sources in parshas Bamidbar where the phrase "vehazar hakoreiv yumas - the stranger who enters the Mishkan is punished with death (at the hand of Heaven)" apparently is the reason for shemiras haMikdash. Others suggest that shemiras haMikdash is not only to prevent unauthorized entry, but also to create an aura surrounding the Beis HaMikdash. A king's palace is surrounded by guards not merely to protect the king, but also to enhance the feeling of awe surrounding the area.

These two approaches reverberate beyond the realm of Mikdash. The mitzvah of morah Mikdash (fear and awe concerning the Beis HaMikdash) is emphasized several times in the Torah, and the continuous mitzvah of yiras Hashem is intensified when we enter the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal use two phrases regarding the mitzvah of yiras Hashem: "yiras shomayim - the fear of Heaven" and "yiras cheit - the fear of sin". What is the difference between the two?

The rishonim differentiate between "yiras haonesh - fear of punishment" and "yiras haromemus - awe of the majesty of Hashem". Yiras haonesh is a

function of the direct cause and effect relationship between sin and punishment, and this is what Chazal refer to as yiras hacheit. Sin is something to fear because of the negative consequences to the sinner. Yiras haromemus is not fear of cheit's aftermath, but rather an all-encompassing sense that Hashem in His glory is always watching us, thus rendering sin unthinkable. These two aspects of yiras Hashem correspond to the two approaches to shemiras haMikdash. Shemiras haMikdash as a deterrent to unauthorized entry is an expression of yiras cheit, and the role of the guardians of the Beis Hamikdash is to prevent this cheit. Shemiras haMikdash as a way to instill awe of Hashem's presence seeks to enhance our yiras haromemus.

Yiras shomayim vyiras cheit apply everywhere, yet in the Beis Hamikdash there is an added dimension to these mitzvos. Why is the Beis Hamikdash the place of our greatest expression of yiras shomayim vyiras cheit? Immediately following mattan Torah Hashem explains to Bnei Yisroel why maamad Har Sinai was accompanied by intense "multimedia" effects. While the Torah could have been given without thunder and lightning and the sound of the shofar, these awe-inspiring effects were necessary to enable Bnei Yisroel to attain yiras shomayim. The Ramban in the beginning of Parshas Terumah comments that the role of the Mishkan and subsequently the Beis Hamikdash was to be the continuation of the maamad Har Sinai experience. The Shechinah present at Har Sinai would eventually dwell permanently in the Beis Hamikdash, where Bnei Yisroel could attain yiras shomayim veyiras cheit just as they did at HarSinai.

May we merit fulfilling the mitzvah of shemiras haMikdash in our day, thereby recreating the Har Sinai experience and enabling us to have a proper yiras shomayim veyiras cheit. Copyright © 2008 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved. -- Audio - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/audio> Video - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/video> Divrei Torah - <http://www.torahweb.org/dtArchive.html> Shiurim of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l - <http://www.torahweb.org/ravSet.html> Palm Pilot TorahWeb - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/palm>

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bamidbar Inbox Reply Reply to all Forward Print Add Rabbi to Contacts list Delete this message Report phishing Show original Message text garbled? Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> to ravfrand show details May 17 To sponsor an edition of the Rabbi Frand e-mail list, go to <https://www.capalon.com/secure/torah/listDedicate.php?class1=35>. - "RavFrand" List - **Rabbi Frand on Parshas Bamidbar**

The Power Of Group Identification: Both Positive and Negative
Parshas Bamidbar begins with a census of the Tribes of Israel. At the end of the census, the Torah informs us that the total number of population who went out to the army was 603,550 [Bamidbar 1:46]. Then, the next pasuk [verse] says, "The Levites according to their fathers' tribe were not counted among them." [pasuk 47] It is most strange then, that immediately following this statement the Torah again states: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take their census among the Children of Israel.'" [Bamidbar 1:48-49]

What is this second exhortation not to count the Levites teaching us? We already know that they were not counted from the immediately preceding narration! Why then does the pasuk reiterate that they were not to be counted?

Rashi informs us why the Levites are singled out for special treatment here. Rashi states that this census had an ominous future. Anyone included in the census at the start of Parshas Bamidbar (from 20 years and above) would be included in the forthcoming decree in Parshas Shlach that the entire generation would die in the wilderness. Foreseeing this, the Almighty did not want the Tribe of Levi to be included in this census: "They are Mine because they did not err in connection with the (Golden) Calf."

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: What does being counted have to do with anything -- if they did not sin with the Golden Calf, they were not deserving of death regardless of whether they would be counted or not?

We see from here, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says, that if there is a decree on a community, there may be individuals who should not otherwise be punished with the same punishment, who in fact will be held responsible and suffer that same fate by virtue of their being part of the community, despite the fact that they are not individually guilty.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz then address one of the most difficult questions that has perplexed our generation and the generation that preceded ours -- why did all the people, May the Almighty spare us, who died in the holocaust have to die and suffer, despite the fact that many among them were G-d fearing and righteous individuals? There is no real answer to this question. But Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz suggests a partial answer that they were in fact not guilty, but for some reason, there was a decree of death on the European Jewish community -- and when there is such a decree on a community, innocent people are sometimes caught up in the decree.

Therefore, had the Levites been included in the counting of Klal Yisrael, and there was subsequently a decree on those enumerated as part of Klal Yisrael to be eradicated, the Levites would have had to suffer that same fate. To protect them, so to speak, the Almighty said: "Don't count the Levites." For this reason it is repeated. The Torah is stressing to us that being part of a community is a double-edged sword.

On the other hand, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says: If this works against us, it certainly works in our favor as well. Miraculously, and for some inexplicable reason, there is only one Yeshiva of the Yeshivas that existed before World War II that made it out of Europe, almost totally intact -- the Mirer Yeshiva. In this life, we will never know why it was that the Almighty ordained that this should happen. But the point of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was that anyone who included themselves in that community was spared by virtue of their having been part of that community.

When one speaks to students of the Mirer Yeshiva who went through that ordeal, they emphasize that their teachers always told them they have to stay together. There was a question on one Simchas Torah whether they should be allowed to return home. They were directed by the Yeshiva administration "We have to stick together because the only way we are going to make it out of here is if we are going to remain together." They all went through Europe and through Siberia and Japan and Shanghai together.

There was a merit for that community to be saved and anyone who was a part of that community was spared, regardless of whether or not on an individual level they were any better than people who, G-d spare us, were killed in the holocaust. Their individual merit is academic, they benefited from the "psak din" [Divine decree] on the Mir Yeshiva that they should be spared.

Being part of a Tzibur [community] can save a person, even though he is unworthy. On the other hand, being part of a Tzibur can sometimes doom a person even though he may not be guilty. The lesson here is the power of being part of a Tzibur.

Current Events -- Rabbi Frand's Personal Thoughts on the Silver Anniversary

[Editor's Note: This next section departs from our normal practice of presenting Rabbi Frand's parsha material based on shiurim recorded approximately 6 years ago. The comments below were delivered very recently -- May 10, 2007 -- at the conclusion of Rabbi Frand's regular Thursday night shiur. We thank Morris Smith and the entire staff of the Torah Conferencing Network for providing us with the technical ability to transcribe and transmit this "time sensitive material" to the Project Genesis audience in a timely fashion. We join with Rabbi Frand's students, fans, and friends everywhere in wishing him a Mazal Tov on the Silver Anniversary of his weekly Thursday night shiur and cite in this connection the pasuk "One who loves silver, will not be satisfied with silver." [Koheles

5:9] May he and the dissemination of his shiurim and lectures go from "strength to strength." -- DT] -----

My friends, if you will indulge me for a few moments, I would like to share some very personal sentiments. I have thought long and hard about whether I should bring this up, but in the end I decided I should, even though I am doing it with some discomfort.

Tonight marks 25 years almost to the day that I am delivering the Thursday night shiur. I began delivering this class on Parshas Bamidbar in a third floor classroom of the Agudah building 28 Iyar 5742 (May 20, 1982). There were 12 people present that evening. As the crowd grew larger, we moved to a larger room downstairs. Later, we had to move again to the Beis Medrash next door. Finally, we moved to the present Beis Keneses sanctuary.

My hesitation to bring this up is that it may appear that I am tooting my own horn or pounding my chest in pride. The truth of the matter is, I can sincerely say that my primary motive for sharing this is that I have a tremendous gratitude that I have been able to do this for the last 25 years. I think some expressions of thanks are in order.

First of all, I would like to thank the members of the Baltimore community who have attended my shiur for the last 25 years. Anyone who has ever given a shiur or lecture knows that if you don't have a crowd -- especially an enthusiastic crowd -- it is just not the same. I have been blessed for all these years with a very enthusiastic crowd.

I want to publicly thank Kehillas Agudas Yisrael of Baltimore who has been my host in all these venues throughout this time. I particularly want to thank the Moreh D'Asra, Rav Moshe Heinemann for giving me this opportunity. We take it for granted here, but it is not an every city occurrence that a Rabbi lets some other Rabbi enter his pulpit every single week as though it is his own pulpit. This stems from Rav Heinemann's sterling character (midos) and his attitude of "expanding the scope of Torah and glorifying it." He has a "live and let live attitude" and shows no trace of jealousy. I hope the word gets back to him that I have a tremendous sense of hakaras hatov [gratitude] for his being the gracious host that he is. I consider it a personal honor when Rabbi Heinemann attends my Teshuva lecture during the time of the Yomim Noraim.

I also want to thank, as a recent addition, the Torah Conferencing Network which makes this shiur available live throughout the United States and even internationally. My thanks go to Mr. Morris Smith and the entire staff of the Torah Conferencing Network for all that they have done for the TCN effort. I want to thank Mr. Avrohom Klugman who comes here every Thursday night and sets up. He is the unsung hero behind our telecast.

I want to thank my colleagues in Yeshivas Ner Israel. I do not necessarily have the prolific knowledge that it appears I have. I receive a lot of help. When I don't understand something or I need a source, I can go to my colleagues in the Yeshiva or for that matter to my network of friends who always share their sources very generously with me. I particularly want to thank my dear and long time friend, Rabbi Shragi Neuberger who almost without fail calls me Wednesday afternoon and asks "Nu, do you have a topic already?" Sometimes it is already 5:30 or 6:00 pm and I have to admit that I don't have a topic and am at a loss for what to talk about. He takes the time to graciously provide me with source material.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank the Ribono shel Olam who has given me the tremendous zechus [merit] to do this. During the High Holidays, we say in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer, "Inscribe us in the Book of Merits". What does this mean? Either a person has the merit or he doesn't have the merit. We would think that "Merits" are not like "Life" or "Prosperity" or "Health" that one turns to the Almighty to request. One needs to earn merits on his own!

I once heard an explanation that we are asking the Ribon shel Olam to give us the OPPORTUNITY to do zechusim [meritorious deeds]. Many people just do not have the opportunity to do zechusim. That is why I

thank the Ribbono shel Olam that He has given me the zechus to spread the teachings of Torah over these many years.

How does one thank the Ribono shel Olam? Again, I thought long and hard about this. I looked into this question halachically and discussed it with others. The way one thanks the Ribono shel Olam is by reciting the She'hechyanu blessing. I am not one for melodrama or grandstanding, but I have consulted with many people on this matter and I would like to make a She'hechyanu this evening and I would like to recite it with Shem U'Malchus [mentioning G-d's Name and Kingship to give it the status of a bona fide bracha].

To that end, I went today and purchased a horned melon imported from New Zealand. I am also wearing a new suit. Even though (based on the ruling of my Rosh Yeshiva), I do not generally make a She'hechyanu on a new suit, but taking the combination of the new fruit, the new suit, and the special occasion, I am going to make a She'hechyanu. For good measure, I brought with me a bottle of shnaps. Even though I do not promote drinking and am not a drinker myself, I have very small shot glasses and I invite everyone after Ma'ariv to come and have a l'chayim with me.

"Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 550, - Opening Cans on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Good Shabbos!

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Shma Koleinu

Parshas Bamidbar ♦ Volume 10, Issue 24 ♦ 29 Iyar 5766 ♦ May 27, 2006

Hashem's Sefirah

Moshe Shulman

In the beginning of Parshas Bamidbar the Torah says: "Vayidaber Hashem el Moshe, B'Midbar Sinai, B'Ohel Moed, B'Echad LaChodesh HaSheini, BaShana HaSheinis L'Tzeisam MeiEretz Mitzrayim Leimor..." "Hashem said to Moshe in the Sinai Desert in the Tent of Meeting, in the beginning of the second month (Iyar) of the second year, saying: Count B'nei Yisrael..."

The Torah seems to go out of its way to tell the exact time and place in which Moshe was commanded to count B'nei Yisrael. Why does the Torah do this? In contrast, when the Torah records Hashem commanding Moshe to count B'nei Yisrael in Parshas Ki Sisa, the Torah does not tell us the exact time and place.

Rashi notes that the reason Hashem counts us so often is because he loves us so much. When we left Mitzraim, he counted us. When many people died after the sin of the Eigel, Hashem counted us. In Bamidbar we were counted when we had just built the Mishkan, where Hashem was to rest his Shechina.

It is understandable that B'nei Yisrael were counted after they left Mitzraim to see the number who left, and after the sin of the Eigel to see how many Jews remained. But why were B'nei Yisrael counted in the Midbar, after the Mishkan was built?

I would like to present an idea formulated by Avi Mori. The counting of B'nei Yisrael after the sin of the Eigel was completely different than the counting of B'nei Yisrael after the Mishkan was built. After the Eigel, Hashem counted us to see how many survivors there were. Here in Bamidbar, Hashem counted us to show that every Jew is important. This explains why in Bamidbar the Torah says "Si'oo es Rosh Kol Adas B'nei Yisrael..." as opposed to the Posuk in Ki Sisa: "Ki Sisa es Rosh B'nei Yisrael..." The reason why Moshe was commanded here to count all members of B'nei Yisrael is that the purpose of this counting is to show that each Jew is important.

This would explain why the Torah told us where and when Moshe was commanded to count B'nei Yisrael only here in Bamidbar, and not in Parshas Ki Sisa. The day of the counting - the first day of Iyar - is very significant. As Malbim explains, on Rosh Chodesh Nisan the Mishkan was dedicated, and this dedication ceremony lasted twelve days. Only a few days later, B'nei Yisrael celebrated Pesach. They had so much Kedusha infused in them during this period, that indeed every Jew had a special sanctity and a special importance. Hashem shows this importance by counting each Jew. This is also why the Torah says that Moshe received the commandment to count B'nei Yisrael in the Ohel Moeid. Hashem was just there with B'nei Yisrael for the past month and therefore Hashem showed the importance of each member of K'lal Yisrael by counting them there. May we all merit to be worthy of Hashem's counting.

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/sg4h-001.html>

A Distant Relative? from Stories My Grandfather Told Me Volume 4 -- Bamidbar Memorable Tales based on the Weekly Sidrah

By Zev Greenwald

A Distant Relative?

Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' house (Bamidbar 1:2).

R' Yosef Zundel of Salant's devotion to the poor and oppressed knew no limits. He did not refrain from trying to solve anyone's problem, nor did he rest until his labor bore fruit. No obstacle was able to stand in his way for long when he was determined to help his fellow man.

Though R' Yosef Zundel himself lived in poverty, his home was open to any person who came for help. No one left his house empty-handed. R' Yosef Zundel would constantly squeeze his own household's limited budget in order to give money to the poor. And if he had no money at all on hand, he would try to get some from others, pushing on until he was able to help the person in need.

There was a certain Torah scholar in Salant whose daughter had reached marriageable age, but he had no funds with which to marry her off. In distress, he turned to R' Yosef Zundel.

"My daughter is of marriageable age," he said, "but I have nothing. I don't know where I'll find the money to marry her off! I do have a relative in Kovno -- a wealthy and G-d-fearing Jew. But he has turned his back on me, having no desire to give me the money I need. Again and again I've sent him letters asking for help, but he never answers me!"

R' Yosef Zundel asked for the relative's name, then asked the talmid chacham to wait several days.

"I mustn't delay even for a moment," R' Yosef Zundel told himself. "Our Sages, may their memories be blessed, said, 'When a mitzvah is at hand, don't put it off!'"

Immediately, he put on his overcoat and set out for Kovno.

Upon his arrival in the town, he went immediately to the rich man's home. He spoke pleasantly to him, asking him persuasively not to turn his back on his relative, but to help him so that he might marry off his daughter.

"That man in Salant is a distant relative," the rich man objected. "It's been years since we met. I see no need to help him with such generous financial support!"

"Forgive me if I ask a question," R' Yosef Zundel said. "But are you careful to daven every day?"

Astonished and affronted, the man asked, "Do you think I don't daven every day?"

"Heaven forbid that I should suspect you!" replied R' Yosef Zundel placatingly. "So, please, do me a favor. Tell me how the Shemoneh Esrei begins."

The rich man's curiosity was piqued. Eager to learn the point of R' Yosef Zundel's questions, he said, "Every child knows that the Shemoneh Esrei starts with the words, 'Baruch attah Hashem Elokeinu v' Elokei avoseinu, Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v' Elokei Yaakov --'"

R' Yosef Zundel stopped him. "Can your honor tell me how much time has passed since the days of our patriarchs?"

"Yes," the other man said impatiently. "Since the days of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, about three thousand years have passed."

"Three thousand years -- And, despite all that time, you refer to them three times a day and ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in the merit of these 'distant relatives,' to crown your efforts with success, to give you children, wealth, and all good things. But when I come to ask you for help for your relative, who is still alive today, you say that he is only a 'distant relative.'"

R' Yosef Zundel's simple but eloquent words pierced the rich man's heart. He promised to offer his Salant relative the aid he needed to marry off his daughter.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - 5766]

<http://www.chiefrabbi.org/tt-index.html>

Bemidbar

The Personal v The Political

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.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha

BAMIDBAR

Friday, May 30, 2008

It is interesting to note that the count of the Jewish people in the desert that appears in this week’s parsha is a count of each of the tribes of Israel individually - with the entire population of the Jewish people divided into four separate groupings, and the kohanim and Levites forming another separate grouping completely. Why all of this particularism? Why is the Torah not contented to give a single population figure for the entire Jewish nation?

I believe that the underlying message here is the reinforcement of the Torah’s view of the Jewish people and in fact of all of humankind, as many different individuals and never as a monolithic whole. In fact, this is the origin of the Torah’s opinion that one should never count people individually in a direct and personal fashion. No two people are alike and no two people are bound to hold exactly like opinions.

There are groupings and tribes that make up the Jewish people today and throughout all of Jewish history. This realization should make for a more tolerant and less bitterly divisive Jewish society. The Torah is therefore determined to treat the count of the Jewish people as a count of individuals instead of as a count of a large group or whole nation. It wishes us to realize that the Jewish people really are made up of so many different components and differing individuals and personalities and the Torah demands of us a maturity to deal with this omnipresent situation of the human condition.

Another point that strikes me about this week’s parsha is the relative smallness of today’s Jewish population relative to the total count that appears in this week’s parsha. The numbers that appear in the parsha indicate a total population of about three million people - old, young, men and women. Three millennia later the Jewish people worldwide appear to constitute approximately fifteen million people. Natural growth alone over such a long period of time should provide us with a much more numerous Jewish people. Yet the Torah itself predicted that the Jewish people would always be the smallest in numbers of all peoples.

Exile, pogroms, assimilation, conversions and the Holocaust have all taken a depressing toll on our numbers. Yet in spite of our lack of numbers we have never lost our influence and effect on world society and civilization. The Torah teaches us that numbers are necessary - there can be no Judaism without live Jews - but numbers are not everything. It is noted that the Torah already indicated in the desert that population growth is problematic with the Jewish people.

During the forty years in the desert the Jewish population did not increase. The count at the end of the forty years eerily remained similar to the count in this week’s parsha. Individuals matter greatly. That is only one of the many contributions of the Jewish people to the human story.

Shabat shalom.
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Bamidbar

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1) The Midrash teaches us that the Torah was given through three media: wilderness; fire; and water. We will focus on the medium of wilderness and the lessons to be derived herein. Interestingly, Klal Yisrael was commanded in numerous mitzvos while they were in the Sinai desert, prior to entering Eretz Yisrael. While it was not unique to be commanded to perform mitzvos in the wilderness, it does seem unusual that some of these mitzvos did not apply until the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael. This is especially true of mitzvos ha’tluyos ba’eretz, mitzvos that are dependent on the land. The mitzvos to select a king, build the Bais Hamikdash, and destroy the nation of Amalek were commanded to them as they were about to enter the land. According to the Tanna D’bei Rabbi Yishmael, they were not obliged to carry out these mitzvos until after the land had been captured, divided and settled. If this is the case, why was it necessary to be commanded concerning these mitzvos while the nation was still traveling in the wilderness? Why impose mitzvos that will not take effect until quite some time later?

Horav Sholom Yosef Elyashiv, Shlita, explains that this is the significance of midbar, wilderness. The desert is a dangerous place. In fact, a human being cannot exist in the desert unless by miracle. It is an arid place which

is populated by creatures that are inhospitable to human interaction. It is a place that is fraught with danger; yet, Hashem chose to give us the Torah there. Why? Furthermore, the actual giving of the Torah was done through a miraculous phenomenon in which fire and water coalesced, as the heavens gave forth water and the mountains were steaming with flame and smoke. Why was it given in such a manner? Would it not have been more effective had they waited until the nation reached the land and was settled, calm and relaxed?

No! The only way for Moshe Rabbeinu to inspire the people to accept the Torah unequivocally was through this awe-inspiring mysterium tremendum. Had he waited until they were settled in Eretz Yisrael, the inspiration would not have catalyzed a change within them. This is why the Rambam renders that the obligation to study Torah applied to everyone, regardless of his financial situation, his physical condition, or his emotional circumstance, i.e., in intense pain. The Torah was not given to us when we were in a relaxed position, so that we would understand that Torah is to be studied at all times, under all conditions, amidst every circumstance. Torah transcends the parameters of this world, and we must rise up to embrace it.

We today are, for the most part, beneficiaries of a Torah education facilitated by remnants of a world of Torah that was: the Torah world of Pre-World War II Europe. The survivors of the European yeshivos struggled through years of misery and pain, maintaining their regimen of Torah study under the most brutal and trying conditions, coming to this country with the goal of transplanting the seeds of Torah on American soil. They succeeded, and Torah flourishes in the United States as a result of their superhuman efforts.

The largest block of yeshivah students were the students of the Mirror Yeshivah, whose unyielding dedication to Torah gave them the ability to cope with suffocating humidity and burning heat in Shanghai as they continued their Torah study in the yeshivah they had established there. All this took place under the guidance and inspiration of the venerable Mashgiach, Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, whose uncompromising spirit energized the students, imbuing them with the ability to cope with misery and pain. Constantly reiterating that Torah is the elixir of life, he encouraged them to persevere.

In the words of a student, as cited by Rabbi Yitzchak Kasnett in his biography of the Mashgiach, Reb Chatzkel, "The Mashgiach breathed the spirit of life within us and revived us with his words of encouragement, his care, his concern, and his indomitable spirit. He infected us with the will to strive and accomplish. The more diligence a talmid exhibited, the more others tried to emulate his efforts, until the entire yeshivah was in a state of elevated inspiration." Shanghai was the crucible that tempered the spirit of these scholars, preparing them to become the Torah luminaries of our generation.

This was not enough. They suffered and they persevered, but it still was not enough. The Mashgiach encouraged them to go one step further. Despite the searing heat and debilitating humidity, he asked them to wear their hats and jackets while learning - at least, when humanly possible. His reasoning was that the greater mesiras nefesh, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice, on their part, the greater the merit that they created for those suffering in Europe. It was not enough to learn; one had to empathize with the pain of others.

In the Purim story, we find Mordechai wearing sackcloth standing outside the palace. Mordechai instructed Hasach to inform Esther that she must go to the king and speak on behalf of the Jewish nation. Why did Mordechai send a message through an intermediary? Why did he himself not go to Esther? If the reason is that he was wearing sackcloth, he easily could have removed his sackcloth.

Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, explains that Mordechai sought to teach us the importance of empathy. Mordechai's preoccupation with Klal Yisrael's pain and peril was of greater significance than all of Esther's efforts before the king. The primary source of an individual's success lies in his ability to identify with the needs of Klal Yisrael.

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

Parashas Bamidbar is usually read on the Shabbos preceding the Festival of Shavu'ous. Moshe Rabbeinu is instructed by Hashem to count the Jewish People. The Torah uses the words se'u es rosh, which literally means, "lift up the head," to describe the taking of the census. Rabbeinu Bachya elaborates on this unusual choice of words. He explains that Klal Yisrael's distinction is only through their observance of Torah. This is what elevates them. Hence, the word se'u, lift up, which has a dual connotation. It can mean that the people should be elevated to an exalted level, or it can literally mean that their heads should be raised/removed from their bodies. This is similar to the term Yosef used when he informed the royal baker of his impending execution. The term implies that if the people are worthy, they will be uplifted. If, Heaven forbid, they are not, they could be in store for great suffering.

The commentators reiterated the idea that Klal Yisrael's reason for exalting is only the spiritual uplift that they receive as a result of their commitment to the Torah. We take the Torah for granted. Educational institutions abound where Torah is taught by qualified rebbeim under circumstances conducive to learning. This environment certainly increases Torah knowledge. I think, however, that Klal Yisrael's distinction is not simply due to our erudition. It goes much farther and deeper. It is based upon our love of Torah, our understanding of its sweetness to the point that we taste it with every fibre of our being. One individual in whom this emotion was palpable was the Rosh Hayeshivah of Telshe, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl. Watching him interact with his students during a shiur, lecture, was an experience to be cherished. The love that he manifested for the Torah was not only seen, it was sensed and felt by everyone in the room. In contrast, when the Rosh Hayeshivah was ill and unable to learn with his usual vigor, the misery and pain that he experienced was similarly sensed and felt by everyone.

Rav Gifter imparted this love of Torah to his students and to all those who relished his word. In a letter that he sent to an eighth-grade rebbe, he writes: "Praiseworthy is his honor's lot, to have merited to become a teacher of Torah to the youth of Hashem's nation, thereby becoming a member in that exalted group of which Hashem Yisborach stands at the helm: As it says in the morning Bircas HaTorah, Ha'melamed Torah l'amo Yisrael, 'Who teaches Torah to His people, Yisrael.'

"A primary ingredient in a student's spiritual development is the love for Torah and the cognition of its value which his teachers imparted to him. It is worthwhile for the rebbe to relate stories of gedolim, Torah luminaries, in all generations, for this is greatly beneficial for acquiring love and fear of Hashem. I am in the habit of relating the following episode:

"When Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl, founder and rav of Telshe, was rav of Kelm, he once walked by a bais ha'medrash and overheard a student ask his friend a question relating to the Talmud. Rav 'Leizer' was so excited that he jumped through the window in his desire to answer the question! He would often say concerning himself, Ich bin mit Torah vi a shikur mit branfun, 'I am with Torah like a drunkard is with whiskey.' In other words, the Rosh Hayeshivah's love and desire for Torah was so compelling that he had no control over himself when the opportunity to learn presented itself.

"Likewise, similar incidents are recorded concerning the great Torah luminaries of previous generations. This awareness stimulates one's love of Hashem and pure awe of Him, which flows from the love one has for the Torah. It is only through love of Torah that one can attain love of Hashem, as Chazal have said in the Yerushalmi Chagigah 1:7, 'If only they would have forsaken Me and safeguarded My Torah, for its light would have returned them to the good path.'"

While there are many that love Torah and love to excel in Torah, what about those who have not been gifted with a prodigious mind? Are they to be excluded from the ranks of Torah achievers, simply because they lack the ability to comprehend on a level that ensures growth and erudition? The Steipler Rav, zl, addresses this question and explains that anyone who

invests great effort in the study of Torah will merit *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance, and grow into a *gadol*, Torah giant, commensurate with his diligence. Accomplishment in Torah has nothing to do with acumen. Torah is Divinely authored and, thus, the very fact that we even begin to understand it is only due to the reality that Hashem grants us the ability to comprehend. He grants achievement to those who sincerely seek it - not merely to those who have a superior mind. The Steipler relates a story found in the *Sefer Chut HaMeshulash*, a biography of the three great *gedolim*: Chasam Sofer, K'sav Sofer and Rav Akiva Eiger.

In Dresnitz, a teenager of about sixteen or seventeen presented himself before the Chasam Sofer, claiming that he desired to study Torah and that his soul yearned for it. When the *yeshiva* students who were present heard this, they laughed, wondering how someone who had heretofore had no knowledge whatsoever of Torah could achieve erudition in such complex material as Talmud. Hearing this, the Chasam Sofer immediately chastised them, "Why do you laugh? Whoever desires to study Torah may come and learn."

The Chasam Sofer took the boy under his wing and instructed his students to take turns studying with him at different intervals. The new student presented a number of challenges in the learning process: Aside from the fact that his background was basically nil, he was also extremely slow to comprehend and his retention was even worse. He would learn a *Mishnah* one hundred times and, by the next day, quickly forget it. It was as if he had never learned it! Nonetheless, his craving for the Torah never waned. He kept up the pace, pushing harder until he was granted the gift of Torah knowledge from Hashem. His progress was slow, but steady. As his diligence continued, so did his success, until his efforts bore spiritual fruit. He became an outstanding scholar and was appointed *dayan*, judge, in the city of Mattersdorf, the domain of the Chasam Sofer. His success continued as he later became Rav in Shleiming and then Av Bais Din, Head of the Rabbinical Court, of Neizotz. His Torah knowledge was exceptional, as was his piety. Cited numerous times in the works of the Chasam Sofer, he is an indication of Torah achievement through desire, diligence and love of Torah.

But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take a census of them among the *Bnei Yisrael*. (1:49)

Rashi explains that Shevet Levi's exalted status mandated that they be counted separately. In an alternative explanation, Hashem knew that all those who were included in the general census would perish in the wilderness. He wanted to exclude them from this collective fate in order to acknowledge their fidelity to Him during the sin of the Golden Calf. This statement is enigmatic. Actually, most of the Jewish People had not sinned at all. Nonetheless, they were all counted in the census. Why could not the tribe of Levi likewise be included in the census? It is not as if they were the only Jews who had not sinned. The sin of the Golden Calf was executed by a small minority of rabble rousers.

Furthermore, the Torah informs us that three-thousand Jews died as a result of the Golden Calf. The Midrash makes a fascinating statement concerning their punishment. It first cites the *pasuk* in *Shemos* 21:37 regarding payment for stealing livestock. If the thief sells or slaughters an ox, he is fined by having to pay five times the value of the ox: "He shall pay five cattle in place of the ox." The Gaon m'Vilna explains why the Midrash quotes this *pasuk* in connection to the Golden Calf. One of the figures etched on the Heavenly Chariot is the image of an ox. When Klal Yisrael sinned with a calf, they created a spiritual blemish in the Heavenly image of the ox. Essentially, only one out of every thousand men sinned, totaling six-hundred men who were involved in the Golden Calf. The Midrash is "asking" if only six-hundred sinned, why were three-thousand punished? It replies to this question by explaining that by blemishing the Heavenly ox, they became guilty to the level that they were required to repay five times the amount, which is five times six-hundred men, or three thousand men! This makes the original question stronger, since only six-

hundred men had sinned. Why, then, did Shevet Levi receive the distinction of being saved from death when most of Klal Yisrael was innocent?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, derives a powerful lesson from this. Yes, the majority of the Jewish People did not sin, and the individuals who actually sinned were punished. The only group that remained distinct, however, separating themselves collectively from the sinners, were the members of Shevet Levi. Most of the Jews did not sin, but they also did not disenfranchise themselves as a group from the sinners. The tribe of Levi did. That is why they were saved from death. They, as a group, were different. They stood together, isolated from the sinners. Shevet Levi were an organization unto themselves. This is why they were not counted with the rest of the nation. If they were to be counted with everyone else, then they would have had to die in the wilderness because they were a part of the nation--just like everyone else. Hashem wanted them separate, distinct, above, away from everyone else. This teaches us the overriding significance of a group of Jews who band together to divorce themselves collectively from those who choose to live a life of abandon.

Those who encamped before the *Mishkan* to the front, before the *Ohel Moed* to the east, were Moshe and Aharon, guardians of the charge of the Sanctuary. (3:38)

The Midrash *Tanchuma*, as cited by Rashi, comments, "Fortunate is a *tzaddik*, righteous person, and fortunate is his neighbor." Because the tribes of Yehudah, Issachar and Zevulun encamped on the east near Moshe, who was engaged in Torah study, they became great in Torah." Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl, sees a profound lesson in this Midrash. The mere fact that these tribes lived in Moshe Rabbeinu's proximity made an unusual difference in their lives. They became *gedolei Torah*. In fact, the Maharal states in his *Gur Arye*, that they achieved a status of *gadlus*, greatness and proficiency in Torah, equal to Moshe! All this was achieved despite the fact that Moshe did not teach them. He just lived near them.

We derive from here the prodigious effect and the outstanding influence of viewing an *adam gadol*, great man. These tribes did not interact with Moshe any more than any other tribe did. Yet, they achieved an enormous plateau in Torah erudition. Why? Because they had the unique opportunity to gaze at Moshe and that, in itself, influenced their lives. It imbued them with a will, a desire, a striving for greatness. Just by looking at him!

In the Talmud *Eiruvin* 13b, Rabbi declares, "The only reason that I am keener than my colleagues is that I saw but the back of Rabbi Meir. Had I had a frontal view of him, I would have been keener still, as it says in *Yeshayah* 30:20, "And your eyes will behold your teacher." We see from Chazal that a gaze, a look, a view, has a powerful impact upon a person. It is an impression that becomes indelibly engraved in our hearts and minds, which motivates us to strive higher and plumb deeper into the profundities of the Torah.

In addition, in the *Tanchuma* on *Parashas Vayeishev*, we find the following comment: When Yosef was confronted with the wife of Potiphar, he almost capitulated to her blandishments, so great was her ability to entice him. He did not give in, because, at the very last moment, he saw an image of his father, the saintly Patriarch, Yaakov. Here was an individual whose righteousness was unsurpassed, who had spent time studying Torah with his father. Yet, the years of study and asceticism were not able to protect him in his moment of need. It was when he saw the image of his father that he was able to overcome his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, and be saved from the clutches of this would-be adulteress.

Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, zl, once said that from simply looking at the *Chofetz Chaim* one could readily recognize the many things he had merited. Horav Shmuel Greineman, zl, reiterated these same words, applying them to his saintly brother-in-law, the *Chazon Ish*, zl. One merely had to gaze at his virtuous features, radiating wisdom, purity and kindness, to see that one who studies Torah *lishmah*, for its/Hashem's sake alone, possesses qualities that are beyond description.

Va'ani Tefillah V'hu rachum yechaper avon. v'hirbah l'hashiv apo v'lo yair kol chamaso.

The pasuk of V'hu rachum is recited thrice daily in Tefillas Shacharis: In the Hodu prayer, in Yehi kavod; and U'Va l'Tzion Goel. The Yesod Yosef explains that there are thirteen words in this pasuk. When it is multiplied by three, we have a total of thirty-nine words. We, thus, allude to our request of Hashem: please atone for those sins for which we have incurred the punishment of malkus, thirty-nine lashes. May our heartfelt prayers be regarded as if we have already experienced the punishment. Alternatively, the thirteen words correspond with the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. We hope that in their merit, Hashem will wipe away our sins.

In the pasuk, we note the words used to describe anger: apo and chamaso. The Malbim distinguishes between the two. Apo is a reference to external anger, while chamaso denotes internal rage which is concealed. One seethes with cheimah, while one demonstrates his af. If the two forms of anger ever combine, such as we find in Devarim 9:19, "For I terrified of the wrath and blazing anger with which Hashem has been provoked against you to destroy you."

We now understand the sequence of the pasuk. When the kaas ha'chitzoni, external anger, apo, is provoked, Hashem, in His infinite mercy, holds it back, and, therefore, chamaso, the internal anger, is not even aroused. If the external anger would have been allowed to flame, there would be no way to stifle His inner anger.

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INNERNET MAGAZINE <http://innernet.org.il> May 2008

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"SHMITA AND THE CYCLE OF SEVEN"

by Rabbi Menachem Genack

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This year, the Jewish year 5768, is a Shmita year, also known as the Sabbatical year. The Torah (Leviticus ch. 25) commands that the land "rest" during the Shmita year, and all that grows in the land of Israel is endowed with special holiness. Even in modern times amongst the religious community in Israel, all produce is open to the public and is to be eaten in accordance with the laws of Shmita.

The cycle of seven is deeply imbedded in the Jewish calendar. In days (Shabbat), weeks (the holiday of Shavuot), years (Shmita), and seven cycles of seven (the Jubilee year), the number seven frames our "time-consciousness," directing our thought to the fundamental principle that G-d is the creator of all reality and all the world is his dominion.

In each of these holidays, man relinquishes, to a degree, his control and domain over nature and the land, thereby proclaiming that the land and all creation is God's and He grants man its use. Ultimately everything is God's possession including man himself.

* * *

PATTERN OF SEVENS

By refraining from work on Shabbat, the Jew makes the statement that creation belongs not to man but to God. He, thereby, gives up part of his dominant role which the Torah endowed him with in the commandment to conquer and subdue nature (Genesis 1:28). Yet concomitantly, he achieves a sense of freedom both for himself and his household and also the beginning of the notion of social justice: "Your male and female servants will then be able to rest just as you do" (Deut. 4:14).

In the cycle of seven weeks, which culminates with Shavuot, man subjugates his own will to that of G-d by accepting the Torah. Shavuot commemorates that day at Sinai when the Jewish people entered into the Covenant with G-d and co-extensive with accepting the yoke of Torah. Our Rabbis interpret the expression "the words of G-d were engraved on the tablets" (Exodus 32:16) as follows: "Do not read 'engraved' ('charut') but read 'freedom' ('cheirut)" (Talmud - Avot 6:2).

By accepting the yoke of Torah, the Jew achieves an "existential" freedom and the ability not to be crushed by the onerous forces of history and nature.

In the cycle of seven years, again, man gives up certain of his powers, rights, and prerogatives. Man acknowledges that the land belongs to God; and that G-d only bequeaths it to man. Here again, the notion of freedom and social justice emerges. Within the cycle of seven, though not linked to the Shmita year, Jewish bondsmen go free. Also, all that grows in the Shmita year is accessible to the poor and outstanding loans are cancelled by the Shmita year.

* * *

THE JUBILEE YEAR

The Jubilee year is the equivalent of the laws of Shmita. In addition, all lands sold in Israel in the preceding years return to their original owners at Jubilee, emphasizing, again, that no one can acquire all the lands. This redistribution of wealth ensures that every Jew retains possession of the ultimate source of economic wealth and freedom, the land.

During the Jubilee year, all Jewish slaves are freed. The statement quoted on the Liberty Bell, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land and onto its inhabitants thereof," is the statement made in the Torah with reference to the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:10). Jubilee is the year of freedom, and is not simply an expression of eliminating the external pressures of subjugation, but rather, additionally, establishing a positive environment of freedom, which makes life on earth worth living.

These cycles of seven culminate in the jubilee year when we return to our ultimate source. According to Nachmanides in his commentary on the Torah, the etymology of the word "yovel" (jubilee) comes from the word "yuval" -- to be brought back to the source. It is the confluence of these two seemingly diametrically opposed ideas that man is a subject and that all creation belongs to God, and the concept of freedom and social justice proclaimed during the Jubilee year that uniquely marks the Jewish concept of freedom. The irony of Jewish freedom is that it is only achieved by the recognition of our total dependence on and servitude to God.

In Western thought, freedom is defined by the ability of man to independently make his own choices. However, the Jewish concept of freedom which emerges from this progression from Shabbat to Jubilee, is that ultimate freedom is man's ability to fulfill his potential as a creation of God, by fulfilling the laws of the Torah. He, thereby, becomes a transcendent being, not chained to time and place. Freedom is an in-depth experience, not a superficial one dependent on circumstance. Therefore, by fulfilling God's will, man who is created in the image of God, acts as a free agent.

* * *

SLAVERY VS. FREEDOM

In the introduction to the Passover Haggadah we read, "This year we are here, next year we will be in Israel. This year we are slaves, next year we will be free men."

The reason this serves as an introduction to the Haggadah is that the author of Haggadah was bothered by a fundamental problem in terms of the meaningfulness of the entire Seder night. At the Seder, we proclaim by word and deed that we are free. We recline, and drink four cups of wine like kings. Yet, the harsh reality of Jewish life for the past two millennia has been that the Jews have been subjected, enslaved and imperiled for most of that period. How, therefore, is it meaningful within that historical context to have a Seder? How was it possible to celebrate a Seder in the Warsaw Ghetto, or Treblinka or Auschwitz when the external environment cried out

that we were bereft of freedom and dignity? How can we, with integrity, make the statement that we are free men?

The answer given by the Haggadah is "this year we are slaves, next year we'll be free" -- that, though because of our external circumstances we are now enslaved, ultimately we will be redeemed and in control of our own destiny. Therefore we are free men and women.

Who is the freer person, a person who finds himself incarcerated but knows that within a day he will be free, or the person who is free, soon to be imprisoned? The Jew, though externally enslaved, is existentially free. The freedom every Jew enjoys is a function of a historical time-consciousness which transcends the bitter, historical reality in which he finds himself. That is the proclamation of Shmita and Jubilee. It is this internal freedom, despite external obstacles, which is the wellspring of the Jews' eternal ability for constant renewal.

It is a sense of freedom that is deeply rooted in our vision of hope and faith. The Shmita year is the harbinger of the renewal of the land and the redemption of our people.

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **BAMIDBAR** - 5768

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Tonight, the evening of Friday, May 30, will be **day 41, which is 5 weeks and 6 days of the omer.**

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky Guarding the Beis HaMikdash - A Model for Yiras Hashem

An elaborate system for guarding the mishkan (shemiras haMikdash) is described in parshas Bamidbar. This was not a temporary institution, but rather was an eternal mitzvah also fulfilled throughout the period of the Beis HaMikdash. There is a halachic dispute concerning the nature of this mitzvah. Some emphasize the practical nature of this mitzvah. Given that unauthorized entry into the Beis HaMikdash is a serious prohibition, the Torah requires the Kohanim and Leviim to stand guard, thereby physically preventing such entry. This formulation has its sources in parshas Bamidbar where the phrase "vehazar hakoreiv yumas - the stranger who enters the Mishkan is punished with death (at the hand of Heaven)" apparently is the reason for shemiras haMikdash. Others suggest that shemiras haMikdash is not only to prevent unauthorized entry, but also to create an aura surrounding the Beis HaMikdash. A king's palace is surrounded by guards not merely to protect the king, but also to enhance the feeling of awe surrounding the area.

These two approaches reverberate beyond the realm of Mikdash. The mitzvah of morah Mikdash (fear and awe concerning the Beis HaMikdash) is emphasized several times in the Torah, and the continuous mitzvah of yiras Hashem is intensified when we enter the Beis HaMikdash. Chazal use two phrases regarding the mitzvah of yiras Hashem: "yiras shomayim - the fear of Heaven" and "yiras cheit - the fear of sin". What is the difference between the two?

The rishonim differentiate between "yiras haonesh - fear of punishment" and "yiras haromemus - awe of the majesty of Hashem". Yiras haonesh is a

function of the direct cause and effect relationship between sin and punishment, and this is what Chazal refer to as yiras hacheit. Sin is something to fear because of the negative consequences to the sinner. Yiras haromemus is not fear of cheit's aftermath, but rather an all-encompassing sense that Hashem in His glory is always watching us, thus rendering sin unthinkable. These two aspects of yiras Hashem correspond to the two approaches to shemiras haMikdash. Shemiras haMikdash as a deterrent to unauthorized entry is an expression of yiras cheit, and the role of the guardians of the Beis Hamikdash is to prevent this cheit. Shemiras haMikdash as a way to instill awe of Hashem's presence seeks to enhance our yiras haromemus.

Yiras shomayim vyiras cheit apply everywhere, yet in the Beis Hamikdash there is an added dimension to these mitzvos. Why is the Beis Hamikdash the place of our greatest expression of yiras shomayim vyiras cheit? Immediately following mattan Torah Hashem explains to Bnei Yisroel why maamad Har Sinai was accompanied by intense "multimedia" effects. While the Torah could have been given without thunder and lightning and the sound of the shofar, these awe-inspiring effects were necessary to enable Bnei Yisroel to attain yiras shomayim. The Ramban in the beginning of Parshas Terumah comments that the role of the Mishkan and subsequently the Beis Hamikdash was to be the continuation of the maamad Har Sinai experience. The Shechinah present at Har Sinai would eventually dwell permanently in the Beis Hamikdash, where Bnei Yisroel could attain yiras shomayim veyiras cheit just as they did at HarSinai.

May we merit fulfilling the mitzvah of shemiras haMikdash in our day, thereby recreating the Har Sinai experience and enabling us to have a proper yiras shomayim veyiras cheit. Copyright © 2008 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved. -- Audio - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/audio> Video - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/video> Divrei Torah - <http://www.torahweb.org/dtArchive.html> Shiurim of Rav Soloveitchik zt"l - <http://www.torahweb.org/ravSet.html> Palm Pilot TorahWeb - <http://www.TorahWeb.org/palm>

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The Power Of Group Identification: Both Positive and Negative
Parshas Bamidbar begins with a census of the Tribes of Israel. At the end of the census, the Torah informs us that the total number of population who went out to the army was 603,550 [Bamidbar 1:46]. Then, the next pasuk [verse] says, "The Levites according to their fathers' tribe were not counted among them." [pasuk 47] It is most strange then, that immediately following this statement the Torah again states: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, 'But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take their census among the Children of Israel.'" [Bamidbar 1:48-49]

What is this second exhortation not to count the Levites teaching us? We already know that they were not counted from the immediately preceding narration! Why then does the pasuk reiterate that they were not to be counted?

Rashi informs us why the Levites are singled out for special treatment here. Rashi states that this census had an ominous future. Anyone included in the census at the start of Parshas Bamidbar (from 20 years and above) would be included in the forthcoming decree in Parshas Shlach that the entire generation would die in the wilderness. Foreseeing this, the Almighty did not want the Tribe of Levi to be included in this census: "They are Mine because they did not err in connection with the (Golden) Calf."

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks: What does being counted have to do with anything -- if they did not sin with the Golden Calf, they were not deserving of death regardless of whether they would be counted or not?

We see from here, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says, that if there is a decree on a community, there may be individuals who should not otherwise be punished with the same punishment, who in fact will be held responsible and suffer that same fate by virtue of their being part of the community, despite the fact that they are not individually guilty.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz then address one of the most difficult questions that has perplexed our generation and the generation that preceded ours -- why did all the people, May the Almighty spare us, who died in the holocaust have to die and suffer, despite the fact that many among them were G-d fearing and righteous individuals? There is no real answer to this question. But Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz suggests a partial answer that they were in fact not guilty, but for some reason, there was a decree of death on the European Jewish community -- and when there is such a decree on a community, innocent people are sometimes caught up in the decree.

Therefore, had the Levites been included in the counting of Klal Yisrael, and there was subsequently a decree on those enumerated as part of Klal Yisrael to be eradicated, the Levites would have had to suffer that same fate. To protect them, so to speak, the Almighty said: "Don't count the Levites." For this reason it is repeated. The Torah is stressing to us that being part of a community is a double-edged sword.

On the other hand, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz says: If this works against us, it certainly works in our favor as well. Miraculously, and for some inexplicable reason, there is only one Yeshiva of the Yeshivas that existed before World War II that made it out of Europe, almost totally intact -- the Mirer Yeshiva. In this life, we will never know why it was that the Almighty ordained that this should happen. But the point of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz was that anyone who included themselves in that community was spared by virtue of their having been part of that community.

When one speaks to students of the Mirer Yeshiva who went through that ordeal, they emphasize that their teachers always told them they have to stay together. There was a question on one Simchas Torah whether they should be allowed to return home. They were directed by the Yeshiva administration "We have to stick together because the only way we are going to make it out of here is if we are going to remain together." They all went through Europe and through Siberia and Japan and Shanghai together.

There was a merit for that community to be saved and anyone who was a part of that community was spared, regardless of whether or not on an individual level they were any better than people who, G-d spare us, were killed in the holocaust. Their individual merit is academic, they benefited from the "psak din" [Divine decree] on the Mir Yeshiva that they should be spared.

Being part of a Tzibur [community] can save a person, even though he is unworthy. On the other hand, being part of a Tzibur can sometimes doom a person even though he may not be guilty. The lesson here is the power of being part of a Tzibur.

Current Events -- Rabbi Frand's Personal Thoughts on the Silver Anniversary

[Editor's Note: This next section departs from our normal practice of presenting Rabbi Frand's parsha material based on shiurim recorded approximately 6 years ago. The comments below were delivered very recently -- May 10, 2007 -- at the conclusion of Rabbi Frand's regular Thursday night shiur. We thank Morris Smith and the entire staff of the Torah Conferencing Network for providing us with the technical ability to transcribe and transmit this "time sensitive material" to the Project Genesis audience in a timely fashion. We join with Rabbi Frand's students, fans, and friends everywhere in wishing him a Mazal Tov on the Silver Anniversary of his weekly Thursday night shiur and cite in this connection the pasuk "One who loves silver, will not be satisfied with silver." [Koheles

5:9] May he and the dissemination of his shiurim and lectures go from "strength to strength." -- DT] -----

My friends, if you will indulge me for a few moments, I would like to share some very personal sentiments. I have thought long and hard about whether I should bring this up, but in the end I decided I should, even though I am doing it with some discomfort.

Tonight marks 25 years almost to the day that I am delivering the Thursday night shiur. I began delivering this class on Parshas Bamidbar in a third floor classroom of the Agudah building 28 Iyar 5742 (May 20, 1982). There were 12 people present that evening. As the crowd grew larger, we moved to a larger room downstairs. Later, we had to move again to the Beis Medrash next door. Finally, we moved to the present Beis Keneses sanctuary.

My hesitation to bring this up is that it may appear that I am tooting my own horn or pounding my chest in pride. The truth of the matter is, I can sincerely say that my primary motive for sharing this is that I have a tremendous gratitude that I have been able to do this for the last 25 years. I think some expressions of thanks are in order.

First of all, I would like to thank the members of the Baltimore community who have attended my shiur for the last 25 years. Anyone who has ever given a shiur or lecture knows that if you don't have a crowd -- especially an enthusiastic crowd -- it is just not the same. I have been blessed for all these years with a very enthusiastic crowd.

I want to publicly thank Kehillas Agudas Yisrael of Baltimore who has been my host in all these venues throughout this time. I particularly want to thank the Moreh D'Asra, Rav Moshe Heinemann for giving me this opportunity. We take it for granted here, but it is not an every city occurrence that a Rabbi lets some other Rabbi enter his pulpit every single week as though it is his own pulpit. This stems from Rav Heinemann's sterling character (midos) and his attitude of "expanding the scope of Torah and glorifying it." He has a "live and let live attitude" and shows no trace of jealousy. I hope the word gets back to him that I have a tremendous sense of hakaras hatov [gratitude] for his being the gracious host that he is. I consider it a personal honor when Rabbi Heinemann attends my Teshuva lecture during the time of the Yomim Noraim.

I also want to thank, as a recent addition, the Torah Conferencing Network which makes this shiur available live throughout the United States and even internationally. My thanks go to Mr. Morris Smith and the entire staff of the Torah Conferencing Network for all that they have done for the TCN effort. I want to thank Mr. Avrohom Klugman who comes here every Thursday night and sets up. He is the unsung hero behind our telecast.

I want to thank my colleagues in Yeshivas Ner Israel. I do not necessarily have the prolific knowledge that it appears I have. I receive a lot of help. When I don't understand something or I need a source, I can go to my colleagues in the Yeshiva or for that matter to my network of friends who always share their sources very generously with me. I particularly want to thank my dear and long time friend, Rabbi Shragi Neuberger who almost without fail calls me Wednesday afternoon and asks "Nu, do you have a topic already?" Sometimes it is already 5:30 or 6:00 pm and I have to admit that I don't have a topic and am at a loss for what to talk about. He takes the time to graciously provide me with source material.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank the Ribono shel Olam who has given me the tremendous zechus [merit] to do this. During the High Holidays, we say in the Avinu Malkeinu prayer, "Inscribe us in the Book of Merits". What does this mean? Either a person has the merit or he doesn't have the merit. We would think that "Merits" are not like "Life" or "Prosperity" or "Health" that one turns to the Almighty to request. One needs to earn merits on his own!

I once heard an explanation that we are asking the Ribon shel Olam to give us the OPPORTUNITY to do zechusim [meritorious deeds]. Many people just do not have the opportunity to do zechusim. That is why I

thank the Ribbono shel Olam that He has given me the zechus to spread the teachings of Torah over these many years.

How does one thank the Ribono shel Olam? Again, I thought long and hard about this. I looked into this question halachically and discussed it with others. The way one thanks the Ribono shel Olam is by reciting the She'hechyanu blessing. I am not one for melodrama or grandstanding, but I have consulted with many people on this matter and I would like to make a She'hechyanu this evening and I would like to recite it with Shem U'Malchus [mentioning G-d's Name and Kingship to give it the status of a bona fide bracha].

To that end, I went today and purchased a horned melon imported from New Zealand. I am also wearing a new suit. Even though (based on the ruling of my Rosh Yeshiva), I do not generally make a She'hechyanu on a new suit, but taking the combination of the new fruit, the new suit, and the special occasion, I am going to make a She'hechyanu. For good measure, I brought with me a bottle of shnaps. Even though I do not promote drinking and am not a drinker myself, I have very small shot glasses and I invite everyone after Ma'ariv to come and have a l'chayim with me.

"Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season."

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, WA DavidATwersky@aol.com
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These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 550, - Opening Cans on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Good Shabbos!

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Shma Koleinu

Parshas Bamidbar ♦ Volume 10, Issue 24 ♦ 29 Iyar 5766 ♦ May 27, 2006

Hashem's Sefirah

Moshe Shulman

In the beginning of Parshas Bamidbar the Torah says: "Vayidaber Hashem el Moshe, B'Midbar Sinai, B'Ohel Moed, B'Echad LaChodesh HaSheini, BaShana HaSheinis L'Tzeisam MeiEretz Mitzrayim Leimor..." "Hashem said to Moshe in the Sinai Desert in the Tent of Meeting, in the beginning of the second month (Iyar) of the second year, saying: Count B'nei Yisrael..."

The Torah seems to go out of its way to tell the exact time and place in which Moshe was commanded to count B'nei Yisrael. Why does the Torah do this? In contrast, when the Torah records Hashem commanding Moshe to count B'nei Yisrael in Parshas Ki Sisa, the Torah does not tell us the exact time and place.

Rashi notes that the reason Hashem counts us so often is because he loves us so much. When we left Mitzraim, he counted us. When many people died after the sin of the Eigel, Hashem counted us. In Bamidbar we were counted when we had just built the Mishkan, where Hashem was to rest his Shechina.

It is understandable that B'nei Yisrael were counted after they left Mitzraim to see the number who left, and after the sin of the Eigel to see how many Jews remained. But why were B'nei Yisrael counted in the Midbar, after the Mishkan was built?

I would like to present an idea formulated by Avi Mori. The counting of B'nei Yisrael after the sin of the Eigel was completely different than the counting of B'nei Yisrael after the Mishkan was built. After the Eigel, Hashem counted us to see how many survivors there were. Here in Bamidbar, Hashem counted us to show that every Jew is important. This explains why in Bamidbar the Torah says "Si'oo es Rosh Kol Adas B'nei Yisrael..." as opposed to the Posuk in Ki Sisa: "Ki Sisa es Rosh B'nei Yisrael..." The reason why Moshe was commanded here to count all members of B'nei Yisrael is that the purpose of this counting is to show that each Jew is important.

This would explain why the Torah told us where and when Moshe was commanded to count B'nei Yisrael only here in Bamidbar, and not in Parshas Ki Sisa. The day of the counting - the first day of Iyar - is very significant. As Malbim explains, on Rosh Chodesh Nisan the Mishkan was dedicated, and this dedication ceremony lasted twelve days. Only a few days later, B'nei Yisrael celebrated Pesach. They had so much Kedusha infused in them during this period, that indeed every Jew had a special sanctity and a special importance. Hashem shows this importance by counting each Jew. This is also why the Torah says that Moshe received the commandment to count B'nei Yisrael in the Ohel Moeid. Hashem was just there with B'nei Yisrael for the past month and therefore Hashem showed the importance of each member of K'lal Yisrael by counting them there. May we all merit to be worthy of Hashem's counting.

<http://www.artscroll.com/Chapters/sg4h-001.html>

A Distant Relative? from Stories My Grandfather Told Me Volume 4 -- Bamidbar Memorable Tales based on the Weekly Sidrah

By Zev Greenwald

A Distant Relative?

Take a census of the entire assembly of the Children of Israel according to their families, according to their fathers' house (Bamidbar 1:2).

R' Yosef Zundel of Salant's devotion to the poor and oppressed knew no limits. He did not refrain from trying to solve anyone's problem, nor did he rest until his labor bore fruit. No obstacle was able to stand in his way for long when he was determined to help his fellow man.

Though R' Yosef Zundel himself lived in poverty, his home was open to any person who came for help. No one left his house empty-handed. R' Yosef Zundel would constantly squeeze his own household's limited budget in order to give money to the poor. And if he had no money at all on hand, he would try to get some from others, pushing on until he was able to help the person in need.

There was a certain Torah scholar in Salant whose daughter had reached marriageable age, but he had no funds with which to marry her off. In distress, he turned to R' Yosef Zundel.

"My daughter is of marriageable age," he said, "but I have nothing. I don't know where I'll find the money to marry her off! I do have a relative in Kovno -- a wealthy and G-d-fearing Jew. But he has turned his back on me, having no desire to give me the money I need. Again and again I've sent him letters asking for help, but he never answers me!"

R' Yosef Zundel asked for the relative's name, then asked the talmid chacham to wait several days.

"I mustn't delay even for a moment," R' Yosef Zundel told himself. "Our Sages, may their memories be blessed, said, 'When a mitzvah is at hand, don't put it off!'"

Immediately, he put on his overcoat and set out for Kovno.

Upon his arrival in the town, he went immediately to the rich man's home. He spoke pleasantly to him, asking him persuasively not to turn his back on his relative, but to help him so that he might marry off his daughter.

"That man in Salant is a distant relative," the rich man objected. "It's been years since we met. I see no need to help him with such generous financial support!"

"Forgive me if I ask a question," R' Yosef Zundel said. "But are you careful to daven every day?"

Astonished and affronted, the man asked, "Do you think I don't daven every day?"

"Heaven forbid that I should suspect you!" replied R' Yosef Zundel placatingly. "So, please, do me a favor. Tell me how the Shemoneh Esrei begins."

The rich man's curiosity was piqued. Eager to learn the point of R' Yosef Zundel's questions, he said, "Every child knows that the Shemoneh Esrei starts with the words, 'Baruch attah Hashem Elokeinu v' Elokei avoseinu, Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v' Elokei Yaakov --'"

R' Yosef Zundel stopped him. "Can your honor tell me how much time has passed since the days of our patriarchs?"

"Yes," the other man said impatiently. "Since the days of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, about three thousand years have passed."

"Three thousand years -- And, despite all that time, you refer to them three times a day and ask Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in the merit of these 'distant relatives,' to crown your efforts with success, to give you children, wealth, and all good things. But when I come to ask you for help for your relative, who is still alive today, you say that he is only a 'distant relative.'"

R' Yosef Zundel's simple but eloquent words pierced the rich man's heart. He promised to offer his Salant relative the aid he needed to marry off his daughter.

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Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

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Bemidbar

The Personal v The Political

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.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha

BAMIDBAR

Friday, May 30, 2008

It is interesting to note that the count of the Jewish people in the desert that appears in this week’s parsha is a count of each of the tribes of Israel individually - with the entire population of the Jewish people divided into four separate groupings, and the kohanim and Levites forming another separate grouping completely. Why all of this particularism? Why is the Torah not contented to give a single population figure for the entire Jewish nation?

I believe that the underlying message here is the reinforcement of the Torah’s view of the Jewish people and in fact of all of humankind, as many different individuals and never as a monolithic whole. In fact, this is the origin of the Torah’s opinion that one should never count people individually in a direct and personal fashion. No two people are alike and no two people are bound to hold exactly like opinions.

There are groupings and tribes that make up the Jewish people today and throughout all of Jewish history. This realization should make for a more tolerant and less bitterly divisive Jewish society. The Torah is therefore determined to treat the count of the Jewish people as a count of individuals instead of as a count of a large group or whole nation. It wishes us to realize that the Jewish people really are made up of so many different components and differing individuals and personalities and the Torah demands of us a maturity to deal with this omnipresent situation of the human condition.

Another point that strikes me about this week’s parsha is the relative smallness of today’s Jewish population relative to the total count that appears in this week’s parsha. The numbers that appear in the parsha indicate a total population of about three million people - old, young, men and women. Three millennia later the Jewish people worldwide appear to constitute approximately fifteen million people. Natural growth alone over such a long period of time should provide us with a much more numerous Jewish people. Yet the Torah itself predicted that the Jewish people would always be the smallest in numbers of all peoples.

Exile, pogroms, assimilation, conversions and the Holocaust have all taken a depressing toll on our numbers. Yet in spite of our lack of numbers we have never lost our influence and effect on world society and civilization. The Torah teaches us that numbers are necessary - there can be no Judaism without live Jews - but numbers are not everything. It is noted that the Torah already indicated in the desert that population growth is problematic with the Jewish people.

During the forty years in the desert the Jewish population did not increase. The count at the end of the forty years eerily remained similar to the count in this week’s parsha. Individuals matter greatly. That is only one of the many contributions of the Jewish people to the human story.

Shabat shalom.
Rabbi Berel Wein

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Bamidbar

PARSHAS BAMIDBAR Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1) The Midrash teaches us that the Torah was given through three media: wilderness; fire; and water. We will focus on the medium of wilderness and the lessons to be derived herein. Interestingly, Klal Yisrael was commanded in numerous mitzvos while they were in the Sinai desert, prior to entering Eretz Yisrael. While it was not unique to be commanded to perform mitzvos in the wilderness, it does seem unusual that some of these mitzvos did not apply until the Jews entered Eretz Yisrael. This is especially true of mitzvos ha’tluyos ba’eretz, mitzvos that are dependent on the land. The mitzvos to select a king, build the Bais Hamikdash, and destroy the nation of Amalek were commanded to them as they were about to enter the land. According to the Tanna D’bei Rabbi Yishmael, they were not obliged to carry out these mitzvos until after the land had been captured, divided and settled. If this is the case, why was it necessary to be commanded concerning these mitzvos while the nation was still traveling in the wilderness? Why impose mitzvos that will not take effect until quite some time later?

Horav Sholom Yosef Elyashiv, Shlita, explains that this is the significance of midbar, wilderness. The desert is a dangerous place. In fact, a human being cannot exist in the desert unless by miracle. It is an arid place which

is populated by creatures that are inhospitable to human interaction. It is a place that is fraught with danger; yet, Hashem chose to give us the Torah there. Why? Furthermore, the actual giving of the Torah was done through a miraculous phenomenon in which fire and water coalesced, as the heavens gave forth water and the mountains were steaming with flame and smoke. Why was it given in such a manner? Would it not have been more effective had they waited until the nation reached the land and was settled, calm and relaxed?

No! The only way for Moshe Rabbeinu to inspire the people to accept the Torah unequivocally was through this awe-inspiring mysterium tremendum. Had he waited until they were settled in Eretz Yisrael, the inspiration would not have catalyzed a change within them. This is why the Rambam renders that the obligation to study Torah applied to everyone, regardless of his financial situation, his physical condition, or his emotional circumstance, i.e., in intense pain. The Torah was not given to us when we were in a relaxed position, so that we would understand that Torah is to be studied at all times, under all conditions, amidst every circumstance. Torah transcends the parameters of this world, and we must rise up to embrace it.

We today are, for the most part, beneficiaries of a Torah education facilitated by remnants of a world of Torah that was: the Torah world of Pre-World War II Europe. The survivors of the European yeshivos struggled through years of misery and pain, maintaining their regimen of Torah study under the most brutal and trying conditions, coming to this country with the goal of transplanting the seeds of Torah on American soil. They succeeded, and Torah flourishes in the United States as a result of their superhuman efforts.

The largest block of yeshiva students were the students of the Mirror Yeshiva, whose unyielding dedication to Torah gave them the ability to cope with suffocating humidity and burning heat in Shanghai as they continued their Torah study in the yeshiva they had established there. All this took place under the guidance and inspiration of the venerable Mashgiach, Horav Yechezkel Levenstein, zl, whose uncompromising spirit energized the students, imbuing them with the ability to cope with misery and pain. Constantly reiterating that Torah is the elixir of life, he encouraged them to persevere.

In the words of a student, as cited by Rabbi Yitzchak Kasnett in his biography of the Mashgiach, Reb Chatzkel, "The Mashgiach breathed the spirit of life within us and revived us with his words of encouragement, his care, his concern, and his indomitable spirit. He infected us with the will to strive and accomplish. The more diligence a talmid exhibited, the more others tried to emulate his efforts, until the entire yeshiva was in a state of elevated inspiration." Shanghai was the crucible that tempered the spirit of these scholars, preparing them to become the Torah luminaries of our generation.

This was not enough. They suffered and they persevered, but it still was not enough. The Mashgiach encouraged them to go one step further. Despite the searing heat and debilitating humidity, he asked them to wear their hats and jackets while learning - at least, when humanly possible. His reasoning was that the greater mesiras nefesh, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice, on their part, the greater the merit that they created for those suffering in Europe. It was not enough to learn; one had to empathize with the pain of others.

In the Purim story, we find Mordechai wearing sackcloth standing outside the palace. Mordechai instructed Hasach to inform Esther that she must go to the king and speak on behalf of the Jewish nation. Why did Mordechai send a message through an intermediary? Why did he himself not go to Esther? If the reason is that he was wearing sackcloth, he easily could have removed his sackcloth.

Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, explains that Mordechai sought to teach us the importance of empathy. Mordechai's preoccupation with Klal Yisrael's pain and peril was of greater significance than all of Esther's efforts before the king. The primary source of an individual's success lies in his ability to identify with the needs of Klal Yisrael.

Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai. (1:1)

Parashas Bamidbar is usually read on the Shabbos preceding the Festival of Shavuus. Moshe Rabbeinu is instructed by Hashem to count the Jewish People. The Torah uses the words se'u es rosh, which literally means, "lift up the head," to describe the taking of the census. Rabbeinu Bachya elaborates on this unusual choice of words. He explains that Klal Yisrael's distinction is only through their observance of Torah. This is what elevates them. Hence, the word se'u, lift up, which has a dual connotation. It can mean that the people should be elevated to an exalted level, or it can literally mean that their heads should be raised/removed from their bodies. This is similar to the term Yosef used when he informed the royal baker of his impending execution. The term implies that if the people are worthy, they will be uplifted. If, Heaven forbid, they are not, they could be in store for great suffering.

The commentators reiterated the idea that Klal Yisrael's reason for exalting is only the spiritual uplift that they receive as a result of their commitment to the Torah. We take the Torah for granted. Educational institutions abound where Torah is taught by qualified rebbeim under circumstances conducive to learning. This environment certainly increases Torah knowledge. I think, however, that Klal Yisrael's distinction is not simply due to our erudition. It goes much farther and deeper. It is based upon our love of Torah, our understanding of its sweetness to the point that we taste it with every fibre of our being. One individual in whom this emotion was palpable was the Rosh Hayeshiva of Telshe, Horav Mordechai Gifter, zl. Watching him interact with his students during a shiur, lecture, was an experience to be cherished. The love that he manifested for the Torah was not only seen, it was sensed and felt by everyone in the room. In contrast, when the Rosh Hayeshiva was ill and unable to learn with his usual vigor, the misery and pain that he experienced was similarly sensed and felt by everyone.

Rav Gifter imparted this love of Torah to his students and to all those who relished his word. In a letter that he sent to an eighth-grade rebbe, he writes: "Praiseworthy is his honor's lot, to have merited to become a teacher of Torah to the youth of Hashem's nation, thereby becoming a member in that exalted group of which Hashem Yisborach stands at the helm: As it says in the morning Bircas HaTorah, Ha'melamed Torah l'amo Yisrael, 'Who teaches Torah to His people, Yisrael.'

"A primary ingredient in a student's spiritual development is the love for Torah and the cognition of its value which his teachers imparted to him. It is worthwhile for the rebbe to relate stories of gedolim, Torah luminaries, in all generations, for this is greatly beneficial for acquiring love and fear of Hashem. I am in the habit of relating the following episode:

"When Horav Eliezer Gordon, zl, founder and rav of Telshe, was rav of Kelm, he once walked by a bais ha'medrash and overheard a student ask his friend a question relating to the Talmud. Rav 'Leizer' was so excited that he jumped through the window in his desire to answer the question! He would often say concerning himself, Ich bin mit Torah vi a shikur mit branfun, 'I am with Torah like a drunkard is with whiskey.' In other words, the Rosh Hayeshiva's love and desire for Torah was so compelling that he had no control over himself when the opportunity to learn presented itself.

"Likewise, similar incidents are recorded concerning the great Torah luminaries of previous generations. This awareness stimulates one's love of Hashem and pure awe of Him, which flows from the love one has for the Torah. It is only through love of Torah that one can attain love of Hashem, as Chazal have said in the Yerushalmi Chagigah 1:7, 'If only they would have forsaken Me and safeguarded My Torah, for its light would have returned them to the good path.'"

While there are many that love Torah and love to excel in Torah, what about those who have not been gifted with a prodigious mind? Are they to be excluded from the ranks of Torah achievers, simply because they lack the ability to comprehend on a level that ensures growth and erudition? The Steipler Rav, zl, addresses this question and explains that anyone who

invests great effort in the study of Torah will merit *siyata diShmaya*, Divine assistance, and grow into a *gadol*, Torah giant, commensurate with his diligence. Accomplishment in Torah has nothing to do with acumen. Torah is Divinely authored and, thus, the very fact that we even begin to understand it is only due to the reality that Hashem grants us the ability to comprehend. He grants achievement to those who sincerely seek it - not merely to those who have a superior mind. The Steipler relates a story found in the *Sefer Chut HaMeshulash*, a biography of the three great *gedolim*: Chasam Sofer, K'sav Sofer and Rav Akiva Eiger.

In Dresnitz, a teenager of about sixteen or seventeen presented himself before the Chasam Sofer, claiming that he desired to study Torah and that his soul yearned for it. When the *yeshiva* students who were present heard this, they laughed, wondering how someone who had heretofore had no knowledge whatsoever of Torah could achieve erudition in such complex material as Talmud. Hearing this, the Chasam Sofer immediately chastised them, "Why do you laugh? Whoever desires to study Torah may come and learn."

The Chasam Sofer took the boy under his wing and instructed his students to take turns studying with him at different intervals. The new student presented a number of challenges in the learning process: Aside from the fact that his background was basically nil, he was also extremely slow to comprehend and his retention was even worse. He would learn a *Mishnah* one hundred times and, by the next day, quickly forget it. It was as if he had never learned it! Nonetheless, his craving for the Torah never waned. He kept up the pace, pushing harder until he was granted the gift of Torah knowledge from Hashem. His progress was slow, but steady. As his diligence continued, so did his success, until his efforts bore spiritual fruit. He became an outstanding scholar and was appointed *dayan*, judge, in the city of Mattersdorf, the domain of the Chasam Sofer. His success continued as he later became Rav in Shleiming and then Av Bais Din, Head of the Rabbinical Court, of Neizotz. His Torah knowledge was exceptional, as was his piety. Cited numerous times in the works of the Chasam Sofer, he is an indication of Torah achievement through desire, diligence and love of Torah.

But you shall not count the tribe of Levi, and you shall not take a census of them among the Bnei Yisrael. (1:49)

Rashi explains that Shevet Levi's exalted status mandated that they be counted separately. In an alternative explanation, Hashem knew that all those who were included in the general census would perish in the wilderness. He wanted to exclude them from this collective fate in order to acknowledge their fidelity to Him during the sin of the Golden Calf. This statement is enigmatic. Actually, most of the Jewish People had not sinned at all. Nonetheless, they were all counted in the census. Why could not the tribe of Levi likewise be included in the census? It is not as if they were the only Jews who had not sinned. The sin of the Golden Calf was executed by a small minority of rabble rousers.

Furthermore, the Torah informs us that three-thousand Jews died as a result of the Golden Calf. The Midrash makes a fascinating statement concerning their punishment. It first cites the *pasuk* in *Shemos* 21:37 regarding payment for stealing livestock. If the thief sells or slaughters an ox, he is fined by having to pay five times the value of the ox: "He shall pay five cattle in place of the ox." The Gaon m'Vilna explains why the Midrash quotes this *pasuk* in connection to the Golden Calf. One of the figures etched on the Heavenly Chariot is the image of an ox. When Klal Yisrael sinned with a calf, they created a spiritual blemish in the Heavenly image of the ox. Essentially, only one out of every thousand men sinned, totaling six-hundred men who were involved in the Golden Calf. The Midrash is "asking" if only six-hundred sinned, why were three-thousand punished? It replies to this question by explaining that by blemishing the Heavenly ox, they became guilty to the level that they were required to repay five times the amount, which is five times six-hundred men, or three thousand men! This makes the original question stronger, since only six-

hundred men had sinned. Why, then, did Shevet Levi receive the distinction of being saved from death when most of Klal Yisrael was innocent?

Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, derives a powerful lesson from this. Yes, the majority of the Jewish People did not sin, and the individuals who actually sinned were punished. The only group that remained distinct, however, separating themselves collectively from the sinners, were the members of Shevet Levi. Most of the Jews did not sin, but they also did not disenfranchise themselves as a group from the sinners. The tribe of Levi did. That is why they were saved from death. They, as a group, were different. They stood together, isolated from the sinners. Shevet Levi were an organization unto themselves. This is why they were not counted with the rest of the nation. If they were to be counted with everyone else, then they would have had to die in the wilderness because they were a part of the nation--just like everyone else. Hashem wanted them separate, distinct, above, away from everyone else. This teaches us the overriding significance of a group of Jews who band together to divorce themselves collectively from those who choose to live a life of abandon.

Those who encamped before the Mishkan to the front, before the Ohel Moed to the east, were Moshe and Aharon, guardians of the charge of the Sanctuary. (3:38)

The Midrash *Tanchuma*, as cited by Rashi, comments, "Fortunate is a *tzaddik*, righteous person, and fortunate is his neighbor." Because the tribes of Yehudah, Issachar and Zevulun encamped on the east near Moshe, who was engaged in Torah study, they became great in Torah." Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl, sees a profound lesson in this Midrash. The mere fact that these tribes lived in Moshe Rabbeinu's proximity made an unusual difference in their lives. They became *gedolei Torah*. In fact, the Maharal states in his *Gur Arye*, that they achieved a status of *gadlus*, greatness and proficiency in Torah, equal to Moshe! All this was achieved despite the fact that Moshe did not teach them. He just lived near them.

We derive from here the prodigious effect and the outstanding influence of viewing an *adam gadol*, great man. These tribes did not interact with Moshe any more than any other tribe did. Yet, they achieved an enormous plateau in Torah erudition. Why? Because they had the unique opportunity to gaze at Moshe and that, in itself, influenced their lives. It imbued them with a will, a desire, a striving for greatness. Just by looking at him!

In the Talmud *Eiruvin* 13b, Rabbi declares, "The only reason that I am keener than my colleagues is that I saw but the back of Rabbi Meir. Had I had a frontal view of him, I would have been keener still, as it says in *Yeshayah* 30:20, "And your eyes will behold your teacher." We see from Chazal that a gaze, a look, a view, has a powerful impact upon a person. It is an impression that becomes indelibly engraved in our hearts and minds, which motivates us to strive higher and plumb deeper into the profundities of the Torah.

In addition, in the *Tanchuma* on *Parashas Vayeishev*, we find the following comment: When Yosef was confronted with the wife of Potiphar, he almost capitulated to her blandishments, so great was her ability to entice him. He did not give in, because, at the very last moment, he saw an image of his father, the saintly Patriarch, Yaakov. Here was an individual whose righteousness was unsurpassed, who had spent time studying Torah with his father. Yet, the years of study and asceticism were not able to protect him in his moment of need. It was when he saw the image of his father that he was able to overcome his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, and be saved from the clutches of this would-be adulteress.

Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, zl, once said that from simply looking at the *Chofetz Chaim* one could readily recognize the many things he had merited. Horav Shmuel Greineman, zl, reiterated these same words, applying them to his saintly brother-in-law, the *Chazon Ish*, zl. One merely had to gaze at his virtuous features, radiating wisdom, purity and kindness, to see that one who studies Torah *lishmah*, for its/Hashem's sake alone, possesses qualities that are beyond description.

Va'ani Tefillah V'hu rachum yechaper avon. v'hirbah l'hashiv apo v'lo yair kol chamaso.

The pasuk of V'hu rachum is recited thrice daily in Tefillas Shacharis: In the Hodu prayer, in Yehi kavod; and U'Va l'Tzion Goel. The Yesod Yosef explains that there are thirteen words in this pasuk. When it is multiplied by three, we have a total of thirty-nine words. We, thus, allude to our request of Hashem: please atone for those sins for which we have incurred the punishment of malkus, thirty-nine lashes. May our heartfelt prayers be regarded as if we have already experienced the punishment. Alternatively, the thirteen words correspond with the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. We hope that in their merit, Hashem will wipe away our sins.

In the pasuk, we note the words used to describe anger: apo and chamaso. The Malbim distinguishes between the two. Apo is a reference to external anger, while chamaso denotes internal rage which is concealed. One seethes with cheimah, while one demonstrates his af. If the two forms of anger ever combine, such as we find in Devarim 9:19, "For I terrified of the wrath and blazing anger with which Hashem has been provoked against you to destroy you."

We now understand the sequence of the pasuk. When the kaas ha'chitzoni, external anger, apo, is provoked, Hashem, in His infinite mercy, holds it back, and, therefore, chamaso, the internal anger, is not even aroused. If the external anger would have been allowed to flame, there would be no way to stifle His inner anger.

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INNERNET MAGAZINE <http://innernet.org.il> May 2008

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"SHMITA AND THE CYCLE OF SEVEN"

by Rabbi Menachem Genack

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This year, the Jewish year 5768, is a Shmita year, also known as the Sabbatical year. The Torah (Leviticus ch. 25) commands that the land "rest" during the Shmita year, and all that grows in the land of Israel is endowed with special holiness. Even in modern times amongst the religious community in Israel, all produce is open to the public and is to be eaten in accordance with the laws of Shmita.

The cycle of seven is deeply imbedded in the Jewish calendar. In days (Shabbat), weeks (the holiday of Shavuot), years (Shmita), and seven cycles of seven (the Jubilee year), the number seven frames our "time-consciousness," directing our thought to the fundamental principle that G-d is the creator of all reality and all the world is his dominion.

In each of these holidays, man relinquishes, to a degree, his control and domain over nature and the land, thereby proclaiming that the land and all creation is God's and He grants man its use. Ultimately everything is God's possession including man himself.

* * *

PATTERN OF SEVENS

By refraining from work on Shabbat, the Jew makes the statement that creation belongs not to man but to God. He, thereby, gives up part of his dominant role which the Torah endowed him with in the commandment to conquer and subdue nature (Genesis 1:28). Yet concomitantly, he achieves a sense of freedom both for himself and his household and also the beginning of the notion of social justice: "Your male and female servants will then be able to rest just as you do" (Deut. 4:14).

In the cycle of seven weeks, which culminates with Shavuot, man subjugates his own will to that of G-d by accepting the Torah. Shavuot commemorates that day at Sinai when the Jewish people entered into the Covenant with G-d and co-extensive with accepting the yoke of Torah. Our Rabbis interpret the expression "the words of G-d were engraved on the tablets" (Exodus 32:16) as follows: "Do not read 'engraved' ('charut') but read 'freedom' ('cheirut)" (Talmud - Avot 6:2).

By accepting the yoke of Torah, the Jew achieves an "existential" freedom and the ability not to be crushed by the onerous forces of history and nature.

In the cycle of seven years, again, man gives up certain of his powers, rights, and prerogatives. Man acknowledges that the land belongs to God; and that G-d only bequeaths it to man. Here again, the notion of freedom and social justice emerges. Within the cycle of seven, though not linked to the Shmita year, Jewish bondsmen go free. Also, all that grows in the Shmita year is accessible to the poor and outstanding loans are cancelled by the Shmita year.

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THE JUBILEE YEAR

The Jubilee year is the equivalent of the laws of Shmita. In addition, all lands sold in Israel in the preceding years return to their original owners at Jubilee, emphasizing, again, that no one can acquire all the lands. This redistribution of wealth ensures that every Jew retains possession of the ultimate source of economic wealth and freedom, the land.

During the Jubilee year, all Jewish slaves are freed. The statement quoted on the Liberty Bell, "Proclaim liberty throughout the land and onto its inhabitants thereof," is the statement made in the Torah with reference to the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:10). Jubilee is the year of freedom, and is not simply an expression of eliminating the external pressures of subjugation, but rather, additionally, establishing a positive environment of freedom, which makes life on earth worth living.

These cycles of seven culminate in the jubilee year when we return to our ultimate source. According to Nachmanides in his commentary on the Torah, the etymology of the word "yovel" (jubilee) comes from the word "yuval" -- to be brought back to the source. It is the confluence of these two seemingly diametrically opposed ideas that man is a subject and that all creation belongs to God, and the concept of freedom and social justice proclaimed during the Jubilee year that uniquely marks the Jewish concept of freedom. The irony of Jewish freedom is that it is only achieved by the recognition of our total dependence on and servitude to God.

In Western thought, freedom is defined by the ability of man to independently make his own choices. However, the Jewish concept of freedom which emerges from this progression from Shabbat to Jubilee, is that ultimate freedom is man's ability to fulfill his potential as a creation of God, by fulfilling the laws of the Torah. He, thereby, becomes a transcendent being, not chained to time and place. Freedom is an in-depth experience, not a superficial one dependent on circumstance. Therefore, by fulfilling God's will, man who is created in the image of God, acts as a free agent.

* * *

SLAVERY VS. FREEDOM

In the introduction to the Passover Haggadah we read, "This year we are here, next year we will be in Israel. This year we are slaves, next year we will be free men."

The reason this serves as an introduction to the Haggadah is that the author of Haggadah was bothered by a fundamental problem in terms of the meaningfulness of the entire Seder night. At the Seder, we proclaim by word and deed that we are free. We recline, and drink four cups of wine like kings. Yet, the harsh reality of Jewish life for the past two millennia has been that the Jews have been subjected, enslaved and imperiled for most of that period. How, therefore, is it meaningful within that historical context to have a Seder? How was it possible to celebrate a Seder in the Warsaw Ghetto, or Treblinka or Auschwitz when the external environment cried out

that we were bereft of freedom and dignity? How can we, with integrity, make the statement that we are free men?

The answer given by the Haggadah is "this year we are slaves, next year we'll be free" -- that, though because of our external circumstances we are now enslaved, ultimately we will be redeemed and in control of our own destiny. Therefore we are free men and women.

Who is the freer person, a person who finds himself incarcerated but knows that within a day he will be free, or the person who is free, soon to be imprisoned? The Jew, though externally enslaved, is existentially free. The freedom every Jew enjoys is a function of a historical time-consciousness which transcends the bitter, historical reality in which he finds himself. That is the proclamation of Shmita and Jubilee. It is this internal freedom, despite external obstacles, which is the wellspring of the Jews' eternal ability for constant renewal.

It is a sense of freedom that is deeply rooted in our vision of hope and faith. The Shmita year is the harbinger of the renewal of the land and the redemption of our people.

Article reprinted with permission from Jewish Action (Holidays 1986), published by the Orthodox Union <http://www.ou.org>

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