

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“BEMIDBAR’ (in the desert), the fourth of the five books of Torah, deals with Israel’s wandering in the Sinai desert. There, in an ownerless terrain, unclaimed by any particular people, the Torah was given. This indicates that the Torah belongs to all mankind (Mekhilta, Ex. 19:2): “For had the Torah been given in the Land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: ‘You have no share in it.’ But now that it was given in the desert, publicly and openly, in a place of ‘hefker’ (open to all), everyone who wishes to accept the Torah is welcome to do so.” The Song of the Well (Nu. 21:18) says: “Out of the desert came the Gift.” The gift of Torah—elaborates Rava (Babylonian sage; c 350 CE) — is granted to and cherished by people with a “desert” attitude; who are humbly and graciously open to other human beings. They do not claim exclusiveness nor boast supremacy of self-righteousness (Nedarim 55b). Both the Torah and its adherents are open to humanity.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

B'MIDBAR - in the Wilderness of Sinai, on an ownerless terrain, the Torah was given, indicating that Torah belongs to all mankind: "The Torah was given - say the Rabbis - publicly and openly, in a place of "hefker" (open to all), to welcome everyone wishing to accept it." From the Song of the Well (Nu. 21:18): "Out of the desert came the Gift." The gift of Torah is granted to, and cherished by, people with a "desert" attitude, who are humbly and graciously open to other human beings (Nedarim 55b). The "midbar" (desert) theme symbolizes Torah's universalism: Its teachings, as well as adherents, are open to humanity.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

46 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JUNE 6, 1997

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS: The fourth book of Torah, *Bemidbar*, is also known as *Humah Ha-Pikudim* (The Book of Census or Numbers). The counting of the people is a dominant theme of the book as well as its starting point (Nu.1:2). This act of human census is regarded in the Torah as a precariously delicate matter. Why the reluctance in Judaism to directly and openly count people? Let me count three reasons: One, to curb the tendency to rely on number or quantity. Jewish history shows that Jewish continuity, survival and victory depend mainly on quality rather than quantity, on human ingenuity and adequate preparedness rather than massiveness, on reliance on Divine Providence rather than on large numbers of people or artifacts of war.

A second reason is to encourage modesty and discretion. In a hostile, imperfect world, like ours, publicizing numbers of achievements and, moreover, bragging about them, is mostly harmful, causing envy, resentment and counteraction.

A third reason is to reinforce the Jewish concept that people are not numbers, but sacred individuals. They must not be treated as objects, digits or cattle. The ultimate value of one person is infinite. The right of one single person to life and security, in Jewish law, is as valid as the right of a group. To sacrifice one individual in order to save many is not permitted.

How, then, can you count them without losing sight of their ultimate significance? Torah's phrase for taking census, "uplift the head" (Numbers 1:2), is taken by the sages to mean: Elevate the importance of each individual; count them reverently. Thus, counting people in Jewish life is done indirectly to maintain the ultimate dignity of each single person.

Thought of the Week

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THE FOURTH BOOK OF TORAH starts with an intriguing play on words: Its first word, "va-yedaber" (He spoke), echoes its fourth word "be-midbar" (in the desert of), both stemming from the same emphatic root-word "daber," which connotes both eloquent oratory and aggressive conquest. These two vigorous meanings are linked together by their underlying idea of leadership ("Dabar" is a leader), expressed either in a spiritual sense, by verbal persuasion and conviction (hence, "Daber" is to speak), or in a physical sense, in violent destruction and devastation; hence, "midbar" is a desolate, barren place. The Fourth Book of Torah (known in English as Numbers) is currently called in Hebrew by its fourth word, "Bemidbar." In earlier sources, however, it is sometimes called by its very first word, "Vayedaber." Whereas the former describes the place of revelation, the Sinai Desert, the latter points to the act of revelation, God speaking to Moses. The contrasts between the two related words is striking: Even in a place of waste and want in the "midbar" of Sinai, there is the Divine Word, "va-yedabber," bringing order and structure, meaning and growth to a world of nihilism and confusion. "Mi-midbar Mattana" (Nu. 21:18)—from the midst of utter desolation emerges the gift of Torah.

Scriptural reading for Saturday, May 26:

..BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20

..HAFTARAH: I Samuel 20:18-42

....Rosh Hodesh Sivan Sunday, May 27

....Memorial Day Monday, May 28

Shavuot, Friday and Saturday, June 1 and 2

Candlelight time 8:32, Sabbath ends 9:26

Scriptural Reading for Saturday
morning, May 29:

Erev Shavuot: B'MIDBAR

Numbers 1:1-4:20

HAFTARAH: Hosea, 2:1-22

Shavuot: Sunday and Monday,
May 30 and 31

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: The fourth of the five books of Torah is introduced on the Shabbat preceding Shavuot. Its name, B'midbar, from the opening phrase of the book, refers to the wilderness of Sinai. There, in an ownerless terrain unclaimed by any particular people, the Torah was given. We are taught, thereby, that Torah belongs to all mankind. "For had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: 'You have no share in it.' But now that it was given in the wilderness, publicly and openly, in a place of "hefker" (open for all), every one who will accept the Torah is welcome to do so." (Mechilta on Ex. 19:2).

In the Song of the Well (Ps. 21:18) there is the verse "u'mimidbar matana," meaning "Out of the desert came the Gift." The gift of Torah, elaborates Rava, (Babylonian sage, c.350 C.E.), is granted to, and cherished by men with a "desert" attitude, who are humbly and graciously open to other human being, who do not claim exclusiveness nor do they boast supremacy or self-righteousness. (Nedarim 55b). Thus, the "midbar" theme symbolizes Torah's universalism. Its teachings as well as adherents are freely open to humanity.

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

WHY WAS THE TORAH GIVEN in the desert and not in the land of Israel? The rabbinic answer is: "Had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: 'You have no share in it!' The Torah was given in a democratic fashion (*demos*) – in a public, ownerless domain (the Sinai Desert) – in order to demonstrate its universality. Whoever wishes to receive the Torah is welcome to come and receive it" (*Mikhilta de-Rabbi*

Ishmael, on Exodus 19:2).

Another Talmudic interpretation sees in the *midbar* (desert) a symbol of humility and non-presumptuousness. The Torah was given in the desert to teach us that it is given only to those who deport themselves, metaphorically speaking, like a "desert," namely, with no trace of arrogance and boastfulness. A true scholar of Torah is distinguished by modesty. Only such a person earns the gift of Torah (Talmud *Eruvin* 54a; *Nedarim* 55a).

Friday, June 5, 1992

IGHT OF WEEK

BY RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

WHY WAS THE TORAH GIVEN IN THE DESERT, and not in the land of Israel? The Rabbinic answer is: "Had the Torah been given in the land of Israel, the Israelites could have said to the nations of the world: 'You have no share in it!' The Torah was given in a democratic fashion (*dimos*) – in a public, ownerless domain (the Sinai desert) – in order to demonstrate its universality; that it is open to all: Whoever wishes to receive the Torah is welcome to come and receive it!"

(*Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, on Exodus 19:2).

Another Talmudic interpretation sees in the desert (*midbar*) a symbol of humility and non-presumptuousness. The Torah was given in the desert to teach us that this sacred scroll is given only to those who deport themselves, metaphorically speaking, like a "desert," namely, with no trace of arrogance and boastfulness. A true scholar of Torah is distinguished by modesty. Only such a person earns the gift of Torah (Talmud *Eruvin* 54a; *Nedarim* 55a).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE SINAI DESERT is classified in ancient Jewish sources as an extraterritorial domain. The desert is ownerless; belonging to no particular people, it is open to all.

This perception of the Sinai may explain modern Israel's readiness to give it up for the sake of peace on the unequivocal condition that it become and stay a demilitarized zone. Unlike any other territory in Israel, this desert is not considered part of biblical Eretz Yisrael. If so, why was the divine Torah given to Israel in the Sinai rather than in the land of Israel?

This was done purposely, claim our Sages (Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, on Exodus 20:2) to illustrate Torah's universality. Torah belongs to all humanity. It is open to all.

Candlelight time 8:26 Sabbath ends 9:20

Scriptural reading for Saturday, May 22:

BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20

HAFTARAH: I Samuel 20:18-42

Rosh Hodesh Sivan Sunday, May 23

Thought of the Week

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This was done purposely, claim our Sages (Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, on Exodus 20:2) to illustrate Torah's universality. Torah belongs to all humanity. It is open to all.

Candlelight time 8:26 Sabbath ends 9:20

Scriptural reading for Saturday, May 22:

BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20

HAFTARAH: I Samuel 20:18-42

Rosh Hodesh Sivan Sunday, May 23

Candlelight time 8:21 Sabbath ends 9:15

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, May 17:

BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20

HAFTARAH: Hosea 2:1-22

Rosh Hodesh Sivan, Friday, May 16

Shavuot: Wednesday and Thursday, May 21 and 22

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

PETAH TIKVAH, a city in Israel's coastal plain (founded 1878), means "Opening of Hope" and is derived from Hosea's prophecy. Portraying Israel's future restoration as a dramatic re-enactment of the original entry of the people from the desert to the promised land, but with a renewed spirit of love and loyalty, the prophet, referring to Israel as the betrothed woman of God, conveys this divine plan (2:16-17): "Therefore, behold, I will allure her; I will lead her to the desert and speak to her tenderly; I will grant her, from there, her vineyards, transforming "Emek Achor" into "Petah Tikvah." "Emek Achor" means "Valley of Disgrace," in the vicinity of Jericho. There the first act of disobedience, plunder of the consecrated spoil, was committed after the people's entry into the Land. This shame will be erased and replaced by renewed expectation, promises the prophet, during the future entry of the people from their "desert" of exile to their land of promise. The first settled spot, which symbolized trouble and disloyalty (Achor), will turn into a new beginning of aspiration and hope (Tikvah). This prophetic spirit of great renewal guided the first settlers in the late 19th century, even before the official Zionism of Herzl, who were moved to spread out outside the walls of Jerusalem and establish Jewish presence throughout the Jewish homeland. Their first colony was befittingly named: Petah Tikvah.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"SPEAKING TO A PERSON'S HEART" is a biblical idiom for appeal and persuasion, touching a person's feelings, winning his will. So does Hosea describe the romantic seduction of a woman by her lover (2:16-17): "Behold, I will allure her — (1) lead her into the desert; (2) speak to her heart; (3) then give her the vineyards!" This three-fold scene is an allegory for God's espousal of Israel. First the, Exodus, God leading Israel "into the desert." Second, the Revelation of Torah, God speaking to Israel's "heart." Third, the inheritance of the Land, God giving Israel "the vineyards."

The central stage in any love experience — between man and woman or between God and people — is the tender communication between the lovers. Torah is thus perceived as an everlasting expression of God's love for Israel — "speaking to the heart" of every individual.

Candlelight time 8:29 Sabbath ends 9:34
Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, May 25:
BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20
HAFTARAH: Hosea 2:1-22
Shavuot - Sunday and Monday, May 26 and 27
Yizkor on Monday, May 27

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

“SPEAKING TO A PERSON’S HEART” is a biblical idiom for speaking with appeal and conviction, touching the person’s feelings and winning his will. Prophet Hosea thus describes the seduction of a woman by her lover (2:16-17): “Behold, I will allure her: (a) lead her into the desert; (b) speak to her heart; (c) then give her the vineyards!” This threefold seduction scene is an allegory for God’s espousal of Israel: First comes the Exodus, “leading her into the desert;” then, the Revelation of Torah, “speaking to her heart;” and finally, the gift of the Land, “giving her the vineyards.”

The central stage, in romantic love as well as celestial, is the tender communication between the lovers. Torah is preceived in Judaism as an everlasting expression of God’s love – God “speaking to a person’s heart.”

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE VIRTUES OF ENDURING LOVE between man and woman are illustrated in the prophetic proposal of marriage between God and Israel (Hosea 2:21-11): "I betroth you to Me forever. I betroth you to Me in rightness and justness, in kindness and tenderness. I betroth you to Me in faithfulness; thus you cling to the Lord." The first phrase, "rightness and justness" ("zedek u-mishpat"), points to the stability and integrity of a legal-moral commitment. "Living together" is commonly "lying together," which is an entrapment without security. The second pair, "kindness-tenderness" ("hesed ve-ra-hamim"), points to the depth of an emotional-devotional intimacy: the lovers' care and compassion for each other. "Hesed" is more than duty triggered; it involves gentleness and thoughtfulness that flow from within. "Rahamim" is not plain "mercy," patronizing and demeaning; it is (from "rehem," womb) a natural, organic urge to nourish and shield, as a mother her baby. The last virtue "faithfulness" ("emuna") is the crown of all: mutual trust and fidelity. This does not mean "no secrets." Remaining forever an individual, each spouse is entitled to privacy and discreteness. To confide is a privilege, not a duty. True fidelity means "no suspiciousness," which is nourished by all other virtues of enduring love.

Scriptural reading for Saturday, June 10:

BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1-4:20

HAFTARAH: Hosea 2:1-22

First day of Shavuot, Sunday, June 11

Yizkor, Monday, June 12

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MAN AND WOMAN ("ish," "Isha") are the biblical names for the partners in marriage. There is no term in Hebrew for "wife" (one who weaves); and the legal term for "husband" ("ba'al") is considered derogatory (cf. Hosea 2:18). In Scripture, a man calls his spouse "ishti" ("my woman"); a woman calls her spouse "ishi" ("my man"), never 'ba'ali' ('my husband'). The common terms "husband" and "wife" reflect a cultural climate of a heathen, hunting society. So too is the custom of the bridegroom carrying his bride over the threshold: he is re-enforcing, often unknowingly, a barbaric attitude to his newly acquired women, as if she is a piece of booty and game. Torah teaches otherwise. The married couple, man and woman, are two independent persons. Legal and sanctified matrimony is no license for dominance and submission. The dignity and privacy of each partner must be mutually and fully respected. Man has no right to force himself on his woman, even after marriage. The woman in the Song of Songs (4:16) invites her man: "Let my lover come to his garden." On this the Midrash remarks: "Torah teaches proper behavior: the bridegroom should not enter the love chamber (hupah) until the bride gives him permission."

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MAN AND WOMAN, not husband and wife, is the way a married couple in Biblical days would refer to each other: the woman called her spouse "ishi" (my man) and the man his spouse "ishti" (my woman). There is no word in the Hebrew language for wife. There is, however, a word for husband, "baal" (master, owner); but no woman in the Hebrew Bible ever refers to her man as "baali." To the woman he is always "ishi" (my man). By this name "ishi"—and not "baali"—God prefers to be called by His betrothed people, Israel, according to Hosea. The love relationship between God and His people is portrayed in biblical symbolism in terms of human matrimony. This ideal love is based on mutuality and equality, not possessiveness and subordination. God to His people—as a man to his beloved woman—wishes to be perceived in a spirit of endearment as an equal partner.

Candlelight time 8:33 Sabbath ends 9:27

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, May 30:

BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20

HAFTARAH: Hosea 2:1-22

Yom Yerushalayim (anniversary of reunification of Jerusalem in 1967) Monday, June 1

May 29, 1981

MAN AND WOMAN, not husband and wife, is the way a married couple in Biblical days would refer to each other: the woman called her spouse "ishi" (my man) and the man his spouse "ishti" (my woman). There is no word in the Hebrew language for wife. There is, however, a word for husband, "baal" (master, owner); but no woman in the Hebrew Bible ever refers to her man as "baali" (my husband). To the woman he is always "ishi" (my man). By this name "ishi" -- and not "baali" -- God prefers to be called by His betrothed people of Israel in the promised future of their reconciliation, according to Hosea (2:18). The love relationship between God and His people is portrayed in Biblical symbolism in terms of human matrimony, God the male lover and Israel the female beloved. This ideal love is based on mutuality and equality, not possessiveness and subordination. The term "baal" (suggestive of sexual cohabitation) also evokes a disconcerting association with the Canaanite pagan god by the same name; therefore repugnant and unmentionable. God to His people -- as a man to his beloved woman -- wishes to be perceived in a spirit of endearment as an equal partner: ISHI.

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, May 21:
BEMIDBAR: Numbers 1:1-4:20
HAFTARAH: Hosea 2:1-22
Shavuot - Monday and Tuesday, May 23 and 24
(Yizkor services on May 24)

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

EMUNAT CHACHAMIM, "faithfulness of scholars," is a virtue of true scholars (Avot 6:6) They seek the truth. They thoroughly examine and verify what they learn and ascertain and clarify what they teach. They are "faithful" (exact and precise) in study. This spirit of earnest and critical inquiry is basic to Torah. It permeates and enlivens the whole body of its literature. Talmud is eternal challenge. This is "emunat Chachamim" which is the soul of our living Oral Tradition and source of its authority. Torah's claim is based on our firm assurance that its "trustees" - Torah scholars - are indeed "faithful." Because of their "emuna" - namely, their characteristic, intellectual and moral integrity - we trust and adhere to their legacy. Their "emuna" lends authenticity to their Torah. "Emunat chachamim" is certainly not, as wrongly assumed, "faith in scholars." True Torah scholars never rely on mere "faith" on "inspiration," but rather on reason and verification. Therefore they are reliable.

MAY 20, 1977

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

TABLE AND ALTAR were among the holy vessels in the ancient Temple. The table is a symbol of wealth and success; the altar, of sacrifice and giving. After the Temple's destruction (70 C.E.), however, its ritual was abolished but its symbolism continued to endure and mold Jewish thought and values.

Equating the common table at home used for food with the holy altar of the Temple, the Talmud (TB Berakhot 55a) says that both have the power to affect atonement: When the table at home is used in sanctity and equity: When the food is *kasher* ("fit" ritually and morally; pre-

pared by dietary rules and obtained by honest means); prayers are recited and words of Torah exchanged around the table – and most importantly, when the needy are invited to partake and enjoy – then the table is sacred and atones as the altar. So remarks Targum Yerushalmi (Exodus 40:6):

When the prosperous spread a table for the poor, it becomes an altar and brings appeasement and forgiveness.

Thus, the table, which symbolizes wealth and success, is linked with the altar, which symbolizes sacrifice and giving.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TRUE LOVE is symbolically portrayed by the Prophet Hosea (8th century BCE) as the essence of the unique relationship between God and His people Israel. This is destined to be wholly revealed and reaffirmed in the day of Israel's redemption (2:18): "When that day comes - so is the Lord's message - you (Israel) will call Me 'my Ish' (man), and no more will you call Me 'my Ba'al' (husband, master)." "Ish" is a dignified term for "man." It complements its counterpart "isha" for "woman." Thus, the terms "ish-isha" for the partners in wedlock suggest true love, a respectful relationship of equal partners, not a domineering bond of master and subject. The term "ba'al" for the male spouse is, therefore, unfit. It denotes subordination rather than cooperation. The ideal level of human love, of mutual affection and endearment, is highly esteemed by prophecy as a suitable model for the Divine love between God and His people. Unlike pagan gods which are worshipped as tyrannical masters (note the name "Ba'al" for the Canaanite deity), the God of Israel emerges as a partner in a love bond of utmost, reciprocal affection and devotion (21-22): "I will betroth you to Me forever. I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, justice, lovingkindness and compassion, I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. So will you cling to the Lord!"

RABBI ZVI YEHOVA

COUNTING PEOPLE is apparently a delicate and complicated issue in Torah's perspective (Numbers 1:2). Why the apprehension and reluctance in Judaism to openly count people?

1. Jewish history shows that victory depends more on quality than quantity; on Divine providence, rather than huge numbers of people; and artifacts of war.

2. Publicizing numbers or achievements, and/or bragging about them, is harmful, causing envy and resentment. Rabbinic sources express this metaphorically as "evil eye," the "envious eye" of those who begrudgingly look at your success with jealousy and resentment and may actually cause you harm.

3. People are not numbers, but sacred individuals, each counted as a whole world. Torah's phrase for taking census, "uplift the head" (Numbers 1:2), is taken by the sages to mean: Elevate the importance of each individual; count them reverently. Thus, counting people in Jewish life is done indirectly, by circumvention, to maintain the ultimate dignity of each single person.



June 5, 1981

AMEN -- a Hebrew word which is now a part of universal liturgy -- means "certainly, truly," and is used as a confirmatory expression, in the sense of "so be it," to give assent and approval to a solemn statement, a curse, a blessing, a prayer, or a declaration. The word "amen" is related to "emet" (truth) and "emuna" (faith, conviction). By responding Amen with proper intention and concentration to a prayer, a person is considered as if he himself recited the prayer. Then, he who "listens" is like he who "recites." Moreover, the Sages assert, "Greater is the one who responds Amen than the one who makes the benediction." By confirming and identifying with the benediction, a person renders it stronger and more effective. The same is true in the negative sense concerning false and defamatory statements: He who accepts and approves them is more vicious and corrupt than he who makes them.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

COUNTING PEOPLE is a sensitive issue in Torah's world view. People are not numbers; they should not be treated as objects or cattle. As we count people, we must not ignore their infinite value. Torah's idiom for taking census is "uplift the head" (Numbers 1:2). This is taken by the sages to mean: Elevate the importance of each individual; enhance their dignity; count them reverently. Thus, counting people in Jewish life is done indirectly to signify the absolute importance of each single person. In Jewish law, a single person's right to life and security is as valid as the right of a group. We do not sacrifice one individual in order to save many. For one human being is invaluable – "a whole universe."

"Speaking to a person's heart" is a biblical id-

iom for speaking with appeal and conviction, touching the person's feelings and winning the person's will. Prophet Hosea thus describes the seduction of a woman by her lover (2:16-17): "Behold, I will allure her: (a) lead her into the desert; (b) speak to her heart; (c) then give her the vineyards!" This threefold seduction is an allegory for God's espousal of Israel. First comes the Exodus, "leading her into the desert." Then comes Revelation of Torah, "speaking to her heart." Finally comes the gift of the land, "giving her the vineyards."

The central stage in romantic, as well as celestial, love is the tender communication between the lovers. Torah is perceived as an everlasting expression of God's love – God "speaking to a person's heart."

THOUGHT OF THE

MAY 13, 1994

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

COUNTING PEOPLE is a delicate issue in Torah's perspective. People are not numbers; they must not be treated as objects or cattle. How, then, can you count them without losing sight of their ultimate significance? Torah's phrase for taking census, "uplift the head" (Numbers 1:2), is taken by the sages to mean: Elevate the importance of each individual; count each reverently. Thus, counting people in Jewish life is done indirectly, by circumvention, to maintain the ultimate dignity of the individual.

People are not assessed by quantity. The ultimate value of one person is infinite: The right of one single person to his life and security, in Jewish law, is as valid as the right of a group. We do not sacrifice one individual to save many. One human being is invaluablely significant: "A whole universe."

Friday, June 2, 1989

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st and third Fridays each month,
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WORLD NEWS

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

COUNTING PEOPLE (Nu. 1:2): Why the reluctance in Judaism to directly and openly count people? Three reasons are offered:

(1) To curb the tendency to rely on numbers, on quantity. Jewish history shows that victory depends mainly on quality more than quantity, on divine providence rather than large numbers of people and artifacts of war.

(2) To encourage modesty and discreteness. Publicizing numbers or achievements and bragging about them is harmful, causing envy, resentment and counteraction in a hostile, imperfect world like ours. This reason is often referred to, metaphorically, as "evil eye."

(3) To impress the Jewish concept that people are not numbers but sacred individuals, each counted as a whole world.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

COUNTING PEOPLE is a delicate issue in Torah's perspective. People are not numbers; they must not be treated as objects or cattle. As we count them for valid reasons (ritual, social, economical, military, etc.), we must not ignore their ultimate significance. Torah's idiom for taking census is "uplift the head" (Numbers 1:2). This is taken by the Sages to mean: Elevate the importance of each individual; count them reverent and indirectly, by circumvention. In Jewish law, the right of one single person to life and security is as valid as the right of a group. We do not sacrifice one individual in order to save many. One human being is incalculably precious; not just a "member" of a social entity, but – "a whole universe."

BIRKAT KOHANIM (the Priestly Blessing; Numbers 6:22-27):

May Hashem bless you and watch over you;

44 CLEVELAND JEWISH NEWS / JUNE 1, 2001

May Hashem radiate light of Divine care "face" toward you, and be gracious to you:

May Hashem uplift Divine care "face" toward you, and grant you Shalom.

Daily proclaimed in Hebrew by the *kohanim* (priests) in the ancient Temple, this threefold blessing begins and ends with biblically common greetings. Its beginning "May Hashem bless you" served as social greeting in biblical times (Ruth 2:4), and *Shalom* continues to serve to this day as an all-inclusive greeting in Hebrew.

Each of the blessing's three lines starts with a propitious verb relating to blessedness, illumination, and elevation. The idea of Divine care is expressed by the Hebrew metaphor of "God's face" (*panim*). This imagery conveys the idea of God "facing" humanity, illuminating, revealing God's divine care and protection.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

COUNTING PEOPLE, the Torah's way, is dignified; it respects man's uniqueness and individuality, impressing the idea that people are not numbers. Treated as human beings, not objects or herds, they must not be counted lightly but reverently. Torah's expression for taking census is "uplift the head;" (Nu.1;2), meaning to elevate the importance of each individual. A man's intrinsic value is infinitely significant; it can never be determined by numbers. Jewish law insists that the right of one to his life and security is as valid as the right of the many. Immeasurably valuable, every person is regarded as a "whole world."