

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

COUNTING PEOPLE WITH DIGNITY is the lesson of "Ki-Tisa" (Ex. 30: 11-16). This phrase literally means "when you lift" the people's head; in context, this implies an approach of respect in taking a census: "In order to show high regard for the people of Israel while counting them, let each person present before the Lord a monetary substitute (half a shekel) to be counted instead." Judaism treats each and every person as a unique individual, a distinctive human entity born in Divine image — a whole universe. People must never be considered, as so often they are, as just pegs or minute parts of a larger group, be it a social polity (the state) or an ecclesiastic body (the Church). No one is to be held — even in jest and gesture — as merely an object or number. Torah's way of counting people both reflects and upholds their human dignity: It avoids a routine and direct count of "heads" or "bodies" — as a herd of sheep; rather it prescribes a respectful and circumventive method of counting their symbolic, representative items. In Judaism, one person by himself is viewed as ultimately significant and sacred: his life no less precious than the lives of many; destroying it no less atrocious and protecting it no less urgent. The individual is a complete human entity, independently of his group; his human rights no more violable than society's and his human dignity no less valuable. Being human transcends numbers.

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 17:
KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11-34:35; Numbers 19
HAFTARAH: Ezekiel 36:16-38

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES OF DIVINE LOVE, as revealed in God's providence, are implied in Exodus 34:6-7, according to the Talmud (RH 17b): (1-2) **Hashem Hashem**, God's name representing compassion is twice repeated, for His love steadily prevails both before and after one has failed. (3) **El**, God's name standing for justice also indicates mercy, for even in His rule of law He maintains His love. (4) **Rahum** points to God's parental love ("rehem" is womb), for He affectionately prevents His children from falling. (5) **ve-Hanum** refers to His gracious giving, for He helps the fallen. (6) **Erekh-Apaim** means divine forbearance, for He refrains from hasty punishment and awaits humanity's improvement. (7) **ve-Rav-Hesed** means that His love is abundant, surpassing humanity's merits. (8) **ve-Emet** adds that His love is reinforced with truth; He is faithful to carry out His promises. (9) **Notzer...**: He remembers humanity's good deeds even to the thousandth generation. (10-11-12) **Noseh...**: He forgives all three levels of human fault: **Avon**, iniquity by corruption; **Pesha**, transgression by rebellion; **Hata'a**, errors by negligence. (13) **va-Nakeh**: He acquits all who amend their ways. These 13 divine qualities ("midot"—measures) are set forth as models for us, pointing to God as source and inspiration for our ethical conduct.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

FREEDOM AND LAW: Freedom is being free within the law, not free from the law. Freedom is predicated on the law and is not sustained outside or above it. Guarded by the law, freedom flourishes; without the law, it perishes.

Freedom from the rule of law is slavery under the tyranny of oppression or anarchy. Freedom allows autonomous living, not licentious behavior. Freedom which dethrones justice promotes the reign of terror and decadence.

The Exodus was a crucial step toward Israel's liberation; but only by their acceptance of the Tablets did they become a truly free nation. This idea is expressed in a Midrashic linkage of two Hebrew words, *harut* (inscribed law) and *herut* (freedom). The Decalogue was "engraved" (*harut*) on the Tablets (Exodus 32:16). Torah's mention of this ancient form of codification, carving the law on stone, suggests that the Divine Words were entrenched forever within the fabric of reality. This enduring quality of the law (*harut*), is at the core of viable freedom (*herut*): No freedom (*herut*) without just and stable law (*harut*).

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

FREEDOM AND LAW: Freedom does not mean being "free" of the restrictions of moral rules and divine direction. This "freedom" from the rule of law is slavery under tyranny of anarchy. The Exodus from Egypt was a crucial step towards Israel's liberation, but only the people's acceptance of the Tablets made them a free nation.

This idea is midrashically expressed by the play of two Hebrew words: *herut*, meaning freedom, and *harut*, implying engraved legislation. Torah states (Exodus 32:16) that the divine words, in concrete script and brief formulation, were "engraved" on the Tablets of the Decalogue. This description of the ancient form of codification by incision conjures the imagery of absoluteness — the fixing forever of a categorical imperative. This term for codification (*harut*), paradoxically, is the essence of true freedom (*herut*): No freedom without divine law.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

LAW AND FREEDOM: Torah has been revealed in a precise, concrete form (Ex. 32:16): Ten basic rules engraved on stone tablets. The Hebrew for engraved (*harut*) sounds like "*herut*"—freedom. This fixed, incisive form of codifying law has become in Judaism a symbol of freedom. Torah, while incised on the tablets, is truly the essence of freedom (Ethics of the Fathers 6:2).

In contrast to theologies which view "law" as lowly, smacking of legalism, harshness and lack of "love" — Judaism reveals the highest respect for law. It upholds the idea of just and duly legislated law as essential for moral and spiritual integrity. Disrespect for law leads to disregard for human responsibility. Only through "*harut*" — divinely engraved Law, can there be "*Herut*" — true freedom!

Candlelight time 7:07 Sabbath ends 8:01

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 9:

KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11-34:35

HAFTARAH: I Kings 18:1-39

PURIM - Friday, March 8

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

..PROPHET AND PRIEST represent two types of leadership. The prophet is concerned with the formation and projection of ideas; the priest, with their concrete implementation. Representing the Divine call, the prophet speaks in extreme and ultimate terms. Envisioning perfection, he protests any fault and demands absolute rightness. The priest, expressing the human condition, is more receptive to man's limitations and fallibilities; dealing with immediate reality, he often must compromise. Moses, the archetype of the prophet, is portrayed by the maxim: "Let justice cut through the mountain!"; Aaron, the archetype of the priest—as pursuing and promoting love and peace, tendering the rule of justice with compassion and forbearance. Both the prophet and the priest are martyrs: The prophet must sacrifice his attachment to reality; the priest, his adherence to ideals. Aaron, in his compliance and participation in the Golden Calf orgy (Ex. 32:1-6), and Moses, breaking the two tablets in outraged protestation (19), both display courageous leadership. The combined impact of both—the prophet with his enduring message and the priest with his practical attitude—enables society to prevail.

Candlelight time 6:57 Sabbath ends 7:52

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 1:

KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11-34:35; Numbers 19

HAFTARAH: Ezekiel 36:16-38

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE DECALOGUE (Ten Words; aseret hadevarim) was revealed in two stages: the oral and the written. First the oral: in dramatic splendor the Words were audibly proclaimed and envisioned (on Shavuot). Then the written: 40 days latter (on the 17th of Tamuz), the Words, inscribed on two stone tablets, were brought down by Moses from the mountain to the people. But even before their delivery these tablets were broken. Moses, facing the Golden Calf orgy (Ex. 32:19), "became enraged, hurled the tablets from his hands, and shattered them at the foot of the mountain." Stones are breakable; the Words are enduring. A new set of tablets was given on the 10th of Tishrei (Yom Kippur). This recurrent gift of Torah is also a symbol of Divine concern and forbearance. Thus Yom Kippur emerges as a Day of Forgiveness (TB Ta'anit 30b). In contrast to the first, the second set of tablets was delivered discreetly and quietly, without pomp and showiness; therefore, unlike the first, it was kept intact. The lesson: "How good and stable is noble modesty ('tzni'ut')."

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

"MAKE UP YOUR MIND!" is the prophetic demand vividly dramatized in Elijah's rhetorical question (I Kings 18:21): "Till when will you leap around between the two thresholds?" There are moments when decision is imperative. If two doors are before you, you cannot go through unless you pick one of them as a passageway. Jumping and moving to-and-fro between the two "thresholds" (the Hebrew here also means "contemplations") will not do. To move forward, exit or enter, you must make a choice, one door or the other. It is so, even if the two doors lead to the same destination; certainly when they lead to different directions: "If the Lord is God, follow Him; if Baal, follow him." Modern outlook favors compromise and synthesis. The "liberal" mind tends to reconcile various systems of thought, patching up differences and pointing to sameness. Hence the claim that all systems are relative and interchangeable; all religions are essentially identical, equally true or false; all moral codes are equally viable and mutable. The result: alienation, assimilation, loss of identity and roots. Fusion breeds confusion. To leap around between many worlds is to be left with none. If you want to advance, rather than limp through life — make up your mind!

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, Feb. 25:
KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11-34:35; Numbers 19:1-22
HAFTARAH: Kings I 18:1-39

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE BREAKING OF THE TABLETS BY MOSES (Exodus 32:19) points to both Moses' fallibility and the Tablets' destructibility. In Judaism, no mortal being is deified and no material items eternalized. Only the Divine Word -- not any of its messengers or conveyors -- is infallible and indestructible.

Moses, father of all prophets, is but human: He leads, acts, achieves, errs with his total humanness. The Tablets, conveying the loftiest expression of the Divine Will, are merely stones, tools. They are breakable. God alone, not any of His spokesmen, is worshipped. Tablets and temples may decay and be destroyed. Only His Word endures forever!

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

MOSES HOLDING THE TABLETS is powerfully depicted in Michelangelo's colossal sculpture at St. Peter's in Rome. In this classic masterpiece, the Jewish law giver is alarmingly represented with two horns protruding from his forehead. This is a grave misinterpretation of the Scriptures. The Torah (Exodus 34:29-35) states that when Moses descended from Mt. Sinai, holding in his hands the two tablets, he was unaware that his face was radiant with rays of light. This light was reflective of Moses' face-to-face encounter with the Divine. Noticing this supernal light shining forth from Moses' face, the people were reluctant to approach him. Thus, in his genuine modesty, Moses veiled his face while in the people's presence.

The unfortunate representation of Moses with real "horns" derives from the Vulgate, the Latin

AND JEWISH NEWS / FEBRUARY 28, 1997

version of the Bible used by the Church. There the Hebrew verb for beaming with rays of light (*karan*) is recklessly translated as if referring virtually to physical "horns" (*karan* connotes both "horn" and "ray").

The breaking of the tablets by Moses (Exodus 32:19) points to both Moses' fallibility and the tablets' destructibility. In Judaism, no mortal being is deified and no material item eternalized. The Divine word alone is deemed infallible and indestructible.

Moses, father of all prophets, is human. He leads, acts, achieves, errs with his total humanness. The tablets, conveying the loftiest expression of the Divine will, are merely stones, tools. They are breakable. God alone, not any of God's spokesmen, is worshipped. Tablets and temples may decay and be destroyed. Only God's word endures forever!

Scriptural reading for Saturday morning, March 12:
KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11-34:35; Numbers 19:1-22
HAFTARAH: Ezekiel 36:16-38

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MOSES' BREAKING OF THE TABLETS (Ex. 32:19) is evaluated by the talmudic rabbis with both disapproval and praise. Critics claim Moses acted impulsively and violently; he lost his temper. Laudators insist Moses acted deliberately and heroically; he knew what he was doing. Scripture yields both views: "Moses' anger erupted; he threw the Tablets out of his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain." First, a sudden burst of fury; then, two conscious acts: casting away (vay-yashlekh) and smashing to pieces (va-yeshab-ber). Moses' anger is decried: Would that he heeded the rule of the Wise (Kohelet 7:9): "Be not quick to get angry, for anger is nourished in the bosom of fools." Other rabbis, however, admire his iconoclastic rage: Moses' breaking of the Tablets, in face of a straying people, was an act of courage and edification. He dramatized an eternal lesson — tablets (like Temples) are merely stones. When their message is ignored they are destructible. They must never be substituted for the everliving message.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE TEMPLE AND SHABBAT: Concluding the laws of the Temple, its initial structure and construction in the Desert, Torah insists (Ex. 31:13): "*Nevertheless, you must keep My Sabbaths!*" This means: Even while you are building the Temple, while you are fully immersed in your heroic efforts and noble dedication to the Temple's establishment and maintenance, *still* (akh), you must keep Shabbat!

The Temple is man-made; but Shabbat is primordially sanctified by God since Creation: All Sabbath days are His ("*My Sabbaths!*"). The sacred institution of Shabbat must not be compromised for the sake of having a Temple. Symbolically, all the patterns of creative activity employed in the Temple – 39 archetypes of creative work (*Avot melakhot*) – are, by definition, those forbidden on Shabbat.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

FEBRUARY 25, 1994 33

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ESTHER IS A TRAGIC HEROINE and her story a paradigm of Jewish degradation in exile. She was "taken" into the royal palace against her will (Esther 2:8;16). Intimidated by fear of a capricious death, she was kept there to serve as queen – a degrading and dangerous role (4:11). In fact, she was a hostage – kidnapped, incarcerated and raped at whim by her king. She tried, at first, to conceal her noble Jewish origin to diminish her chances to be "elected" (2:10;20; Rashi). While in the palace, she declined the available beauty treatments, hoping to avoid being selected as "queen" (2:15; Vilna Gaon).

She failed. Her indomitable beauty shone through her agony, and the lustful king picked her to be his mate. Thus, she "won" her unwanted crown.

Then came the time for her to save her people. By using her feminine charm, she was instrumental in averting Haman's genocidal scheme. But even in her climactic plea before the king, she spoke with disturbing submission (7:4):

For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, massacred and exterminated! Had we only been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent!

When Rav (3rd century, head of the Sura Academy in Babylon) would read this verse, he would cry bitterly. For Esther's words echo the ultimate curse of the people's exile (Deuteronomy 28:68): "There you will sell yourselves to your enemies as male and female slaves; but none will buy!"

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

ANOINTING OIL: A sacred balm, especially and expertly blended, composed of choice spices and olive oil (Ex. 30:25) was used in biblical days in the formal appointment of spiritual and political leaders: they were literally anointed with this holy substance. Echoing this common custom, enthronement of a king is referred to in the Bible, and a duly enthroned king is "anointed" (Heb., "mashiah"). This is the origin and meaning of the term messiah in English as well as *cristos* in Greek. Verbally rooted in the "anointing" phraseology, the Messianic idea in Judaism entertains a much broader scope: it is concerned not with revering a specific "anointed" figure, but with the earnest yearnings of the people for ultimate redemption from oppression in this world. Any leader who could succeed in doing what would be considered a true Messiah, with or without the anointing oil.

Candlelight time 5:48 Sabbath ends 6:42

Scriptural reading for Saturday, Feb. 21:

KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11-34-35

HAFTARAH: I Kings 18:1-39

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

MOSES HAD NO "HORNS!" The skin of Moses' face was strikingly radiant. Describing this phenomenon Torah uses the verb *karan* (from *keren*, horn or ray): (Ex. 34:29): "The skin of his face gave off rays ('horns') of light." Moses' face was shining, luminous, beaming, radiant—reflecting his inner light of spirituality and wisdom, his innate sanctity. The Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate, saying "his face sent out horns of light" may have misled the medieval artists, among them the great Michaelangelo, into depicting Moses with real horns protruding from his forehead. Moses' "horns" were rays of light.

Candlelight time 6:11 Sabbath ends 7:05

Scriptural reading for Saturday, March 13:

KEE TISSA: Exodus 30:11, 34:35; Number 19

HAFTARAH: Ezekiel 36:16-38