

Dear Chavraya,

As we sat around the JP Licks learning table, nearing the end of our weekly Torah journey, one of our number sighed deeply and said, "it is about an ideal world, it seems so far from reality..." Of faith and melancholy, it was a reflection born of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Bamidbar*, the first portion of the fourth book, *Sefer Bamidbar*. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch speaks of the fourth book as resuming the factual narrative, the telling of Israel's desert journey, showing us "the relationship of the nation of Israel, as it actually is, to the ideal of its calling as outlined in the Third Book." Speaking to each one's responsibility, Rabbi Hirsch teaches, "an outline is presented of the ideal to be translated into reality by every individual member of the nation as well as by the nation as a whole."

A dual interplay is drawn out through Rabbi Hirsch's words, that between the ideal and the real, and between the individual and the community. These are the critical tensions that lie at the heart of that wistful lament that rose from around the learning table. As represented by the *Mishkan*, the desert sanctuary at the center of the Torah's third book, *Vayikra*, represents an ideal vision of the world as it might be, one so distant from the world as it is. Toward making a necessarily human bridge between the ideal and the real, *Parashat Bamidbar* begins with a census. In the way that counting the Omer each day from Pesach to Shavuous is to remind us that each day counts, so the census reminds even more importantly that each person counts.

Coming before Shavuos, before we come to Sinai, to be challenged yet again to truly receive the Torah, the Slonimer Rebbe teaches that this *parasha* offers a reminder that unity is the essence of Torah and of the preparation to receive Torah, means and ends becoming as one. It is as though to say, live the ideal if you would make it real. The Slonimer looks to the Torah's description of each of the tribes camped in formation around the Mishkan. Not only of each tribe, but of each individual within each tribe, we are told of how they camped, *ish al diglo/each one with their own banner*. Moving from the census, this becomes further teaching in this *parasha* of the importance of the individual, of every single one. As we are about to become a people at Sinai, we are reminded that the individual, even when serving the greater good, is not to be subsumed to the whole. Each one's uniqueness is to be honored, each one to have their own place and calling among the people.

Emphasizing his signature theme, that every person has their own unique task and purpose in this world, their own *yi'ud v'tafkid*, the Slonimer speaks to each of us and warns that others may try to deny our own place and calling. One who would deny another's place is identified with the *Yetzer Horah/the evil inclination*. So the Slonimer writes, *the Yetzer Horah is so difficult, standing before a person as though they don't have a purpose in this world/k'ilu she'ayn lo tachlis b'olamo*. Only when the holiness of every person is recognized, shall we begin to see the world as it might be emerge.

As we approach Shavuos and seek to embrace the unity of Sinai, questions come from the mountaintop, pulsating among the words of Torah. What does it

mean to speak of unity in such a fractured world...? Standing on a precipice wherever we stand, how to reach across the divide...? The answer begins with each of us, each of us a precious link between the ideal and the real. We are each reflected in the name given to what is perhaps the least known special day in the Jewish calendar, *Yom Ha'm'yuchas/the Day of Connection*. This Shabbos is *Yom Ha'm'yuchas*, the day between Rosh Chodesh Sivan and the three days of preparation for receiving the Torah. While this little known special day in the calendar does not always fall on Shabbos, in a very deep way every Shabbos is *Yom Ha'm'yuchas*, a day of connection. Representing the ideal toward which we strive, Shabbos represents a link between the ideal and the real, between the world as we know it and the world as it might be. And so for each of us, each one as a link between the ideal and the real, each one as the answer to words deeply sighed, "it is about an ideal world."

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor