

This Week in Torah *B'Midbar*

As Jews, we are referred to as the people of the Book. There is no question that we value learning. In our daily liturgy, we read in the *V'ahavta* prayer an excerpt from Deuteronomy that we are supposed to “teach [God’s words] diligently to our children.” In the Talmud, we read that the “study of Torah is equal to all the *mitzvot* because it leads to them all.” The Zionist leader Ahad Ha’Am wrote: “Learning! Learning! Learning! That is the key to our survival.” Thus, rabbis and sages will emphasize this point whenever there is a chance.

As the first *Aliyah* of this week’s *sedra* comes to an end, we read Numbers 1:19—“As God had commanded Moses, so he recorded them in the wilderness of Sinai.” A simple line, one can say. God ordered Moses to do something, Moses did it. But the proverbial question is “why?” There are two dimensions—practical and spiritual... or communal vs. individual. The RaSHBaM [Samuel ben Meir, who was RaSHI’s grandson] lived in France from 1065-1158. He wrote that this was essential communal inventory control. Know who was there, arrange them by clan, and repeat this before/after moments of transitions/battles. It had military significance in order to know and access an army as the Israelites prepared for the conquest of Canaan. This was practical and essential from a community perspective—know who is with you and what they can bring to communal goals.

Yet, the Chasidic masters approached it differently. They had a more mystical approach. They taught their disciples that every soul was a letter of the Torah. And every soul had a divine spark within that could be emancipated to create a sense of *tikkun olam*, world repair, if they studied and lived by the words. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak saw this verse as a way of showing the human imprint on Torah—the fusion of the Divine Will mixed with the human ability for action. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sodilkov wrote that Torah as a living entity did not cease with the revelation at Sinai. It continued to unfold beyond the written Bible and encompasses the Oral Tradition of the Talmud as well. In fact, in his book *Degel Menacheh Efraim*, he wrote that every generation adds to the Torah thru their ability to interpret God’s words, the rabbinic heritage, and their own sense of

understanding as they apply it to the living of their days. Thus, revelation never ceases as it continues to this day when each of us continue to learn and live by Torah.

In 1976, Rabbi Dr. Eugene Borowitz wrote a “Centenary Perspective” which was his reflection of where the Reform Jewish movement was as a theological movement. He wrote of Torah: “Torah results from the relationship between God and the Jewish people. The records of our earliest confrontations are uniquely important to us. Lawgivers and prophets, historians and poets gave us a heritage whose study is a religious imperative and whose practice is our chief means to holiness. Rabbis and teachers, philosophers and mystics, gifted Jews in every age amplified the Torah tradition. For millennia, the creation of Torah has not ceased and Jewish creativity in our time is adding to the chain of tradition.”

Torah is constantly unfolding. The Divine Voice of Revelation is always present. We can hear. We can learn. We can live by this voice as it has been recorded thru-out the ages. We do so as we remember Ahad Ha'am's words – “Learning! Learning! Learning! That is the key to our survival.”