

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Bamidbar
May 23, 2020 *** 29 Iyar, 5780

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Bamidbar in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2121/jewish/Bamidbar-in-a-Nutshell.htm

In the Sinai Desert, G-d says to conduct a census of the twelve tribes of Israel. Moses counts 603,550 men of draftable age (20 to 60 years); the tribe of Levi, numbering 22,300 males age one month and older, is counted separately. The Levites are to serve in the Sanctuary. They replace the firstborn, whose number they approximated, since they were disqualified when they participated in the worshipping of the Golden Calf. The 273 firstborn who lacked a Levite to replace them had to pay a five-shekel “ransom” to redeem themselves.

When the people broke camp, the three Levite clans dismantled and transported the Sanctuary, and reassembled it at the center of the next encampment. They then erected their own tents around it: the Kohathites, who carried the Sanctuary’s vessels (the Ark, menorah, etc.) in their specially designed coverings on their shoulders, camped to its south; the Gershonites, in charge of its tapestries and roof coverings, to its west; and the families of Merari, who transported its wall panels and pillars, to its north. Before the Sanctuary’s entranceway, to its east, were the tents of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons. Beyond the Levite circle, the twelve tribes camped in four groups of three tribes each. To the east were Judah (pop. 74,600), Issachar (54,400) and Zebulun (57,400); to the south, Reuben (46,500), Simeon (59,300) and Gad (45,650); to the west, Ephraim (40,500), Manasseh (32,200) and Benjamin (35,400); and to the north, Dan (62,700), Asher (41,500) and Naphtali (53,400). This formation was kept also while traveling. Each tribe had its own nassi (prince or leader), and its own flag with its tribal color and emblem.

Haftarah in a Nutshell – Hosea 2: 1-22

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/895213/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah begins with the words, "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea [shore], which can be neither measured nor counted." An appropriate reading for the first Torah reading of the Book of Numbers. Hosea first prophesies about the eventual reunification of the houses of Judah and Israel. During the Messianic Era, these two perennial antagonists will make peace and appoint a single leader. Hosea then rebukes the Jewish people for their infidelity, abandoning their "husband," G-d, and engaging in adulterous affairs with pagan deities. He describes the punishments they will suffer because of this unfaithfulness.

Eventually, though, Hosea reassures the Jews that they will repent, and G-d will accept them back wholeheartedly. The haftorah concludes with the moving words: "And I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Egalitarian Society, Jewish Style (Bamidbar 5780) By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
<http://rabbisacks.org/bamidbar-5780/>

The parsha of Bamidbar is generally read on the Shabbat before Shavuot, z'man matan torateinu, "the time of the giving of our law," the revelation at Sinai. So the Sages, believing that nothing is coincidental, searched for some connection between the two. To find one is not easy. There is nothing in the parsha about the giving of the Torah. Instead it is about a census of the Israelites. Nor is its setting helpful. We are told at the beginning that the events about to be described took place in "the wilderness of Sinai," whereas when the Torah speaks about the great revelation, it talks about "Mount Sinai." One is a general region, the other a specific mountain within that region. Nor are the Israelites at this stage walking towards Mount Sinai. To the contrary, they are preparing to leave. They are about to begin the second part of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land.

The Sages did, nonetheless, make a connection, and it is a surprising one:

"And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness" (Numbers 1:1). Why the Sinai Wilderness? From here the Sages taught that the Torah was given through three things: fire, water, and wilderness. How do we know it was given through fire? From Exodus 19:18: "And Mount Sinai was all in smoke as God had come down upon it in fire." How do we know it was given through water? As it says in Judges 5:4, "The heavens dripped and the clouds dripped water [at Sinai]." How do we know it was given through wilderness? [As it says above,] "And God spoke to Moses in the Sinai Wilderness." And why was the Torah given through these three things? Just as [fire, water, and wilderness] are free to all the inhabitants of the world, so too are the words of Torah free to them, as it says in Isaiah 55:1, "Oh, all who are thirsty, come for water... even if you have no money." [1]

The Midrash takes three words associated with Sinai – fire (that was blazing on the mountain just before the revelation), water (based on a phrase in the Song of Deborah) and wilderness (as at the beginning of our parsha, and also in Exodus 19:1, 2), and it connects them by saying that "they are free to all the inhabitants of the world."

This is not the association most of us would make. Fire is associated with heat, warmth, energy. Water is associated with quenching thirst and making things grow. Wilderness is the space between: neither starting point nor destination, the place where you need signposts and a sense of direction. All three would therefore make good metaphors for the Torah. It warms. It energises. It satisfies spiritual thirst. It gives direction. Yet that is not the approach taken by the Sages. What mattered to them is that all three are free.

Staying for a moment with the comparison of Torah and the wilderness, there were surely other significant analogies that might have been made. The wilderness is a place of silence where you can hear the voice of God. The wilderness is a place away from the distractions of towns and cities, fields and farms, where you can focus on the presence of God. The wilderness is a place where you realise how vulnerable you are: you feel like sheep in need of a shepherd. The wilderness is a place where it is easy to get lost, and you need some equivalent of a Google-maps-of-the-soul. The wilderness is a place where you feel your isolation and you reach out to a force beyond you. Even the Hebrew name for wilderness, midbar, comes from the same root as “word” (davar) and “to speak” (d-b-r). Yet these were not the connections the Sages of the Midrash made. Why not? The Sages understood that something profound was born at Mount Sinai, and this has distinguished Jewish life ever since. It was the democratisation of knowledge. Literacy and knowledge of the law was no longer to be confined to a priestly elite. For the first time in history everyone was to have access to knowledge, education and literacy. “The law that Moses gave us is the possession of the assembly of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4) – the whole assembly, not a privileged group within it.

The symbol of this was the revelation at Mount Sinai, the only time in history when God revealed Himself not only to a Prophet but to an entire people, who three times signalled their consent to the commands and the covenant. In the penultimate command that Moses gave to the people, known as Hakhel, he gave the following instruction:

“At the end of every seven years, in the Sabbatical year, during the Festival of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place He will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.” (Deut. 31:10-13)

Again, the whole people, not an elite or subset within it. This is echoed in the famous verse from Isaiah 54:13, “And all your children shall be learned of the Lord and great shall be the peace of your children.” This was and remains the unique feature of the Torah as the written constitution of the Jewish people as a nation under the sovereignty of God. Everyone is expected not merely to keep the law but to know it. Jews became a nation of constitutional lawyers.

There were two further key moments in the history of this development. The first was when Ezra and Nehemiah gathered the people, after the Babylonian exile, to the Water Gate in Jerusalem, on Rosh Hashanah, and read the Torah to them, placing Levites throughout the crowd to explain to people what was being said and what it meant, a defining moment in Jewish history that took the form not of a battle but of a massive adult education programme (Neh. 8). Ezra and Nehemiah realised that the most significant battles in ensuring the Jewish future were cultural, not military. This was one of the most transformative insights in history.

The second was the extraordinary creation, in the first century, of the world’s first system of universal compulsory education. Here is how the Talmud describes the process,

culminating in the work of Joshua ben Gamla, a High Priest in the last days of the Second Temple:

Truly the name of that man is to be blessed, namely Joshua ben Gamla, for but for him the Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all . . . They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. [They did so] but if the teacher punished them they used to rebel and leave the school. Eventually, Joshua b. Gamla came and ordained that teachers of young children should be appointed in each district and each town, and that children should enter school at the age of six or seven.[2]

Universal compulsory education did not exist in England – at that time the world’s leading imperial power – until 1870, a difference of 18 centuries. At roughly the same time as Joshua ben Gamla, in the first century C.E., Josephus could write:

Should any one of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.[3]

We now understand the connection the Sages made between the wilderness and the giving of the Torah: it was open to everyone, and it was free. Neither lack of money nor of aristocratic birth could stop you from learning Torah and acquiring distinction in a community in which scholarship was considered the highest achievement.

With three crowns was Israel crowned: the crown of Torah, the crown of Priesthood and the crown of Kingship. The crown of Priesthood was conferred on Aaron ... The crown of kingship was conferred on David ... But the crown of Torah is for all Israel ... Whoever desires it, let them come and take it.[4]

I believe that this is one of Judaism’s most profound ideas: whatever you seek to create in the world, start with education. If you want to create a just and compassionate society, start with education. If you want to create a society of equal dignity, ensure that education is free and equal to all. That is the message the Sages took from the fact that we read Bamidbar before Shavuot, the festival that recalls that when God gave our ancestors the Torah, He gave it to all of them equally.[1] Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7. [2] Baba Batra, 21a. [3] Contra Apionem, ii, 177-78. [4] Maimonides, Hilchot Talmud Torah, 3:1

[Our Sacred Partnerships by Mychal Springer](http://www.jtsa.edu/our-sacred-partnerships-5780)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/our-sacred-partnerships-5780>

The Midrash teaches us that God destroyed the world several times before creating our world (Bereishit Rabbah 3:7 and 9:2). Famously, after the flood, God establishes a covenant with Noah, Noah’s sons, and all living things. God says: “I will maintain My covenant [beriti] with you: never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen. 9:11). When we read this verse in light of the midrash, we understand that God came very close to destroying the world again, but managed to enact a symbolic destruction, providing some people and some of the living creatures with a way to survive. This covenant is the vehicle for keeping humanity and all of creation connected with the divine even when rupture looms

as a possibility.

In this week's Torah and haftarah portions, the specter of rupture looms repeatedly. First, we are reminded of the deaths of Aaron's two older sons, Nadav and Avihu. Though they had entered into a sacred pact to serve God in the intimacy of God's holiest places, they got it wrong—they "offered alien fire before the Lord" (Num. 3:4)—and died as a result. Their missing the mark led to their deaths and a transfer of the sacred role from the older to the younger sons. Similarly, our parashah then recounts the undoing of the sacred place held by the firstborn sons, chosen to be dedicated to God when they were saved from the tenth plague, the plague of the slaying of the firstborn. While God simply asserts that Moses should substitute the Levites for the firstborn sons (Num. 3:41), we must notice that, once again, a special relationship of service has been abrogated and a new group has replaced the original one.

Finally, in the haftarah, Hosea tells the story of Israel the unfaithful, through the vehicle of Gomer, his harlot-wife. While there is much in this haftarah to suggest that rupture is imminent, the haftarah ends with the words of a covenant renewed:

And I will espouse you forever:

I will espouse you with righteousness and justice,

And with goodness and mercy (*hesed verahamim*),

And I will espouse you with faithfulness (*be'emunah*);

Then you shall be devoted (*veyada'at*) to the Lord. (Hos. 2:21–22)

Growing up, I always felt deeply confident that God's covenant with the Jewish people was inviolable. No matter what we did, God would always be connected to us, bound up in our fate. I have always found this promise tremendously reassuring. But when I read these texts, I start to feel an anxiety that the possibilities of rupture are real. The power of Hosea's words is precisely the knowledge that the binding of God and Israel cannot be taken for granted. We cannot read the verses I have quoted without having an awareness of the danger of that covenant being dissolved. Surely the naming of Gomer's son makes the reality of the severing of relationship very clear. "Then He said, 'Name him Lo-ammi [not my people]; for you are not My people and I will not be your [God]'" (Hos. 1:9).

Given that Hosea's story focuses on the relationship between God and Israel through the paradigm of marriage, the haftarah quite naturally leads me to think about the reality of covenant in terms of divorce. The Jewish wedding incorporates the possibility of the rupture of the marriage, by way of either divorce or death, through the vehicle of the ketubah. The ketubah's original purpose was to protect the woman in case of divorce or death. One might ask: Why must the specter of separation enter into the joy of the wedding day? While that desire to flee from reality is understandable, I find it heartening that Judaism does not indulge us in this way. Even on the day when we commit ourselves to our beloved, we must acknowledge that the union cannot rest on the reassurance that the covenant is permanent. We must make provisions for proper treatment of one another even in worst-case scenarios. It is only when we make room for those possibilities that we can make the difficult choices that will enable us to live in right relationship. Only when I know that divorce is real can I stop and listen to my partner when he or she is frustrated with the same fight we've had over and over. Only when I

know that death is real can I make choices about how to live in the face of overwhelming limitations. A marriage that cannot envision that the marriage itself is a fragile arrangement is not a marriage that can be challenged to make difficult choices when crises emerge.

So I return to the verse from Hosea, "And I will espouse you forever." How does that espousal work? Judaism guides us in making this process concrete. Every day (except Shabbat), when Jews wrap tefillin (phylacteries), we say these verses as we wrap. The wrapping and reciting become a meditation about recommitting ourselves to the hard work of being espoused. I cannot be passive. I must act. So I affirm, "I will espouse you with righteousness and justice." There's a promise in there that my actions will lead to just desserts. So then I say, "And with goodness and mercy (hesed verahamim)." These attributes reassure me that even though I must focus on what I can do, the reality that follows my actions is tied up in God's boundless love and mercy, the boundless love and mercy of the other. Even when I err, rupture is not decidedly what follows. So then I say, "And I will espouse you with faithfulness." This faithfulness, emunah, draws on the idea of trust and steadfastness. When we live with a balance of all these attributes, then we can be faithfully bound to one another and to God. This sense of balance enables us to say "veyadat et Adonai," which I would translate as "then you shall know God."

The sacred partnership with another human being echoes our sacred partnership with God. When we know another person in loving relationship, and respect that we cannot take that relationship for granted, then we become motivated to make the choices that keep the relationship vital. We must do the same in our relationship with the Divine.

(Mychal Springer is an Adjunct Instructor of Professional and Pastoral Skills at JTS. This commentary was first published in 5771)

What is Bamidbar by Gabriel Gendler

<http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1102506082947&ca=80669906-9050-4ea8-a763-4792a03ce7cb>

What happens in the fourth book of the Torah? Even when I was young I could tell you that Bereishit tells the story of the patriarchs and their families, starting from the creation of the world and ending in Egypt. At the same time I thought that Shmot was about the Exodus and the revelation at Mount Sinai, and it wasn't long before I worked out that there was a second half describing the creation of the mishkan. As a teenager I picked up two more pieces of folk knowledge: Devarim is a long speech by Moshe in which a great deal of the Torah gets repeated, and Vayikra is a book of law focused on the priesthood and sanctity.

I still don't know what Bamidbar is about. Its narrative unfolds over thirty-nine years, but all but the first and last of them come and go unremembered. What we do hear about fits no pattern: we don't experience a rhythm like in Vayikra, or a rhetorical structure like in Devarim, or narrative arcs like in Bereishit and Shemot. The incidents of the spies, Korach and the rock, various wars and plagues, a census here and there, instructions for marching, a list of campsites and dedication offerings, an indecipherable poem and a copper snake are interspersed with miscellaneous laws relating to the kohanim and levi'im, land, the menorah, pots, pans and a very strange purification process involving a cow. This is to say nothing of a comedy saga with an almost Shakespearean flavour in

which the narrative jumps away from B'nei Yisrael uniquely in the whole Torah and follows a wizard called Bilam for one enormous paragraph.

As I try to wrap my head around this jumble every year, I find myself coming back to the name of the book, which means something like "in the wilderness". Thirty-eight years of uninterrupted quiet certainly remind me of moments of complete peace camping in the Negev desert, feeling my smallness against the expanse around me. The chaos of the narrative also feels wilderness-like; the book is bound to feel jolting when the months and years of quiet waiting, the ropes that bind each event smoothly to the next, cannot be captured by words. Even the appearance of Bilam might make sense if we imagine our narrator, sitting as ever in the midst of Am Yisrael, gazing at the horizon and seeing on a distant mountain top two strange human figures and a donkey.

Bamidbar Rabba, the great aggadic midrash on our new book, comments on the opening words, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe in the wilderness of Sinai".

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי - אֲלֵא כָּל מִי שֶׁאִינוֹ עוֹשֶׂה עֲצֻמוֹ כְּמִדְבַר, הַפֶּקֶר, אִינוֹ יְכוּל לְקַנּוֹת אֶת הַחֲכָמָה וְהַתּוֹרָה, לְכַר נְאֻמָּה: בְּמִדְבַר סִינַי.

Anyone who doesn't make themselves ownerless like the wilderness is unable to acquire the wisdom and the Torah. Therefore it is said "In the wilderness of Sinai".

After four hundred years of slavery, Bnei Yisrael needed time and space to become a nation of Torah, of halakhah and of social responsibility. And every year as we progress through the eerie quiet, the echoing paragraphs and the dream sequences of Sefer Bamidbar we are given an opportunity to think about who we want to be when we emerge from our cocoons. How much more so this year. *(Gabriel Gendler is a Conservative Yeshiva Student 2018-20)*

D'var Haftarah: God's Redemptive Healing by Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein

<http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1102506082947&ca=80669906-9050-4ea8-a763-4792a03ce7cb>

Jonathan's friendship with David was legendary. He was willing to remain by the side of his friend through triumph and tragedy. He stood up for David when King Saul, his father, set himself up against him. He was even willing to relinquish his future as king because he thought his friend, David, would make a more effective king.

The sages characterized the relationship between Jonathan and David in the following Mishnah: "Whenever love depends on some selfish end, when the end passes away, the love passes away; but if it does not depend on some selfish end, it will never pass away. Which love depended on a selfish end? This was the love of Amnon and Tamar. And which did not depend on a selfish end? This was the love of David and Jonathan. (Avot 5:16)

Amnon's love for Tamar was founded on his own selfish obsession for his sister. (see 2 Samuel 13) When his perversion was satisfied, he hated her. Jonathan, however, knew that David stood between him and the throne. Still, he genuinely loved David. Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (Spain, North Africa 14th-15th century) delineated the significance of this mishnah: "Anyone who establishes a friendship for access to power, money, or sexual relations; when these ends are not attainable, the friendship ceases...love that is not dependent on selfish ends is true love of the other person since there is no intended end." (Magen Avot - abridged and adapted translation) This Mishnah

makes it clear that Amnon's love for Tamar was wrong because it manifested itself by treating a person as if she was an object rather than a person while Jonathan's love for David, was based on treating the other as a person rather than as a thing. Of course, the two relationships found in this Mishnah represent ideal typologies, one bad and the other good. Real relationships fall somewhere in between these two diametrically opposite models. (see Rabbi Chaim Hirshensohn, *Eleh Divrei Habrit*, part 3, p. 93) People both love and "use" the people in their lives, but it is important to be aware of the possibility of how depraved or exalted the relationships between two people can be in order to raise up the relationships in life to the highest degree that is humanly possible. *(This commentary comes from the Conservative Yeshiva Archives)*

Bamidbar by Shaul Rosenblatt

<https://mailchi.mp/96b934732df7/weekly-davar-ki-sissa-2577709?e=e0f2ca6c0d>

This portion contains the census of the Jewish people – 600,000 men of army age, around 2.5 million souls in all. It also describes the passing of spiritual leadership from firstborn to Levite. The firstborn lost their position as a result of their involvement with the Golden Calf – now the formal transfer of power occurs.

I want to diverge a little from the portion this week and pose a question that arose in a discussion I was having with a colleague.

The question is as follows: the Torah has a commandment, likely its most famous, to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. I have always understood that to mean that Torah was commanding an emotion (how you can oblige a feeling is a question for another time!).

I.e. it commands its adherents to experience the feeling of love for other human beings.

Now, granted, a feeling of love will bring actions of love. So, if I love someone, I will almost certainly be kind to them, give to them, support them, not judge them harshly, be forgiving etc. So, once you command love, by extension, you command behaviour.

However, this colleague of mine was suggesting something further. He was suggesting that Torah commands not only that we love, but also that we ensure that those whom we love also FEEL loved.

My understanding, although I'm now reconsidering, was always that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink. I can love someone with a deep and passionate commitment, but that does not mean that they will necessarily feel loved. Children can sometimes feel unloved by parents even though that's clearly not the case. I have always seen it that it's my job to love, but whether or not others feel loved is their own business, not mine.

Like I say, my colleague was suggesting differently and, whilst not convinced, I'm minimally sympathetic.

Let me take it out of a Torah commandment for a moment and put it into marriage to make it a bit more relatable. I feel that it is my job as a husband to love my wife. I see that as an ongoing responsibility in the marriage. But do I have the ability, and hence perhaps the obligation, to make her feel loved as well?

On the one hand, it seems to me that the feelings of another human being are not mine to control. So, if my wife is upset or feeling unloved, despite me being very loving, then that's her problem, not mine. But I also have a nagging inner voice saying to me, 'Shaul,

isn't that just a kop out? It's a great excuse – you can't make her feel loved, so if she feels unloved that's not your business? Maybe you're just conveniently washing your hands of responsibility?' Hmmmm, that rings true on some level – and so I'm reconsidering. There's a part of me that somehow feels that I do have an ability not just to love, but to make her feel loved also and that's what's on my mind. Happy for any and all comments and I hope to come back next week with more clarity.

Bamidbar by Rabbi Michael Katz

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God tells Moses to take a census of the Israelites (thus the English name of the book, "Numbers"). The Hebrew command is Se'u et ha-rosh" -literally, "take up the heads". (Even in English we sometimes say "take a head count.") .

The Hebrew word se'u could be understood this way: Look up, let me see your face, so I know who I am counting. On our congregational trips to Israel, every time we got back on the bus we had to count off to make sure everyone was there. But hearing just a number wasn't enough; it was important for everyone to lift up their head above the high-backed seats so we could see them, and make certain that they were with us. The first lesson of the census is: Show your face! Woody Allen, in one of his movies, said: "Eighty percent of life is showing up." More often than not, all you have to do is "be there." You don't have to prepare or perform- just show up, and you can probably get by.

But another meaning of se'u (Lift up your head) is: Pay attention! It's possible to show up, and be present, but not have a clue what's going on. I can't help but think of people looking down at their cell phones, oblivious to all that is transpiring around them, and walking into walls, or ignoring people who are talking to them. In recent years we've heard a lot about "mindfulness" - Being present in the moment. Taking everything in. Showing awareness. The second lesson of the census is: Look up and listen!

And then there's a third meaning of the word _se'u_ Hold your head up high. Be proud of who you are. It's one thing to wear a kippah while in synagogue; I admire the Sikh boy who wears a turban or the Muslim girl with a hijab- while attending public school. I wonder if we Jews are sometimes too afraid, or ashamed to let the world know who we are. The third lesson of the census is : Be proud of who you are.

Se'u et ha-rosh It's not just so we can know how many people we have before us. It's three critical life-lessons: Show up. Pay attention. Be proud. *(Rabbi Katz is the Rabbi at Temple Beth Torah in Westbury, NY)*

Another from Rabbi Sacks:

Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted (thought for the day)

<http://rabbisacks.org/lifting-others-we-ourselves-are-lifted-thought-for-the-day/>

This is Mental Health Awareness Week [in the UK], and its theme this year is kindness. Next week is the Jewish festival of Shavuot, Pentecost, when we read the biblical book of Ruth, whose theme is kindness. These two things coming together during this time of isolation made me see the book with new eyes and realise what a contemporary text it is though it tells of events more than 3000 years ago.

It begins with a couple and their two sons forced to leave home because of famine. They go to a foreign country where their two sons marry local women. Then tragedy strikes. All

three men die. The woman, whose name is Naomi, is left a childless widow, the most vulnerable of all positions in the ancient world because there was no one to look after you.

She goes back home but is so changed that her former neighbours hardly recognise her. Can this be Naomi? They ask. Don't call me Naomi, she replies – the word means pleasant. Call me Mara, bitter.

That is how the book begins: with bereavement, isolation and depression. Yet it ends in joy. Naomi now has a grandson. Her daughter-in-law Ruth and relative Boaz have married and had a child. This is no mere child. In the last line of the book, we discover that he is the grandfather of David, Israel's greatest king and author of much of the book of Psalms.

What transforms Naomi's life from bitterness to happiness is described by the Hebrew word *chessed*. When, in the early 1530s, William Tyndale was translating the Bible into English for the first time, he realised that there was no English equivalent for *chessed*, so he invented one, the word *lovingkindness*. Two people's *lovingkindness*, Ruth and Boaz, rescued Naomi from depression and gave her back her joy. That is the power of *chessed*, love as deed.

One of the enduring memories of the coronavirus period will be the extraordinary acts of kindness it evoked, from friends, neighbours, and strangers, those who helped us, kept in touch with us, or simply smiled at us. When fate was cruel to us, we were kind to one another. Human goodness emerged when we needed it most. And Mental Health Awareness Week reminds us that some need it more than most.

Kindness redeems fate from tragedy and the wonderful thing is that it doesn't matter whether we are the giver or the recipient. Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted.

Memorial Day Message:

Remembering for a Purpose by Rabbi Cheryl Peretz

<https://www.aju.edu/ziegler-school-rabbinic-studies/our-torah/back-issues/remembering-purpose>

The year was 1868. General John Logan issued General Order No. 11 calling for a national day of remembrance for Civil War dead. May 30 of that year was the day designated for this observance. Flowers were placed on the graves of the fallen soldiers of both the Union and Confederate Armies. From this, Memorial Day was eventually instituted as a national day of observance.

The first Jewish chaplain ever appointed to the Marine Corps, Rabbi Roland B. Gittelsohn, delivered a powerful sermon after the fighting at Iwo Jima. Though the original intent was for him to share his words during a dedication memorial service for all those lost, the biased protest of a few led to three separate religious services. For his congregation of seventy, Rabbi Gittelsohn delivered the message he had originally written for the combined service:

Here lie men who loved America because their ancestors generations ago helped in her founding, and other men who loved her with equal passion because they themselves or their own fathers escaped from oppression to her blessed shores. Here lie officers and men, Negroes and whites, rich men and poor . . . together. Here are Protestants, Catholics and Jews together. Here no man prefers another because of his faith or

despises him because of his color. Here there are no quotas of how many from each group are admitted or allowed. Among these men, there is no discrimination. No prejudices. No hatred. Theirs is the highest and purest democracy...

Whosoever of us lifts his hand in hate against a brother, or who thinks himself superior to those who happen to be in the minority, makes of this ceremony and the bloody sacrifice it commemorates, an empty, hollow mockery. To this, then, as our solemn duty, sacred duty do we the living now dedicate ourselves: to the right of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, of white men and Negroes alike, to enjoy the democracy for which all of them have here paid the price ...

We here solemnly swear that this shall not be in vain. Out of this and from the suffering and sorrow of those who mourn this will come, we promise, the birth of a new freedom for the sons of men everywhere.

For Jews, memory has long been a source of focus and inspiration. As historian Yosef Yerushalmi and others have pointed out, the biblical appeal to remember (which appears 169 times throughout the Bible) has little to do with the past. Rather, it is a religious imperative to act, to grab hold of the story and make it our own. When the Torah says yizkor (remember), it is most often about the future not the past. The prayer of Yizkor invites us to bring to mind someone who lived, to remember what they taught us so that we can pledge anew to act in ways that honor those lessons and values.

As Americans, we celebrate liberty and freedom. The independence we treasure is a result of hard fought battles at the sacrifice of many who put themselves on the frontline to protect that sovereignty. Hundreds of thousands of Americans – men, women, wives, husbands, children, friends, partners, siblings - have given the ultimate sacrifice of their lives while defending our liberties.

No matter the debate of a given war, military action, or humanitarian effort, we owe it to those who lost their lives to remember and to continue their legacy as articulated by Rabbi Gittelsohn – to work side by side with people of different regions, races, color, and ideology, to uphold the rights of all people, and to rid ourselves of hatred and bigotry in fighting for the democracy that defines this land.

In this year that finds so many of us staying at home, the real meaning of Memorial Day invites our contemplation - to remember, reflect, and recommit to defending our land so that the day will come when we will no longer add new names to those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf.

Sometimes, the words of children say it best, so in closing, I share these words of Luke, a third grader from Connecticut:

Remember the brave soldiers who gave their lives

For our freedom,

God Bless them all these courageous

Men and women.

They fought on land,

Others at sea,

Sacrificing their lives for

You and me.

Schools and offices respect these heroes

*From the past,
By flying our beautiful flag
At half-mast.*

*As you watch the parade and hear
The trumpets play,
Please think about what we celebrate on
Memorial Day.*

AMEN!

(Rabbi Cheryl Peretz, is the Associate Dean of the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, where she also received her ordination)

Yahrtzeits

Marty Fine remembers his mother Edith Joan Fine (Yehudit bat Mordecai v'Esther) on Sunday May 24th (Sivan 1).

Stan Klughaupt remembers his mother Elaine Klughaupt (Elka) on Monday May 25th (Sivan 2).

Mike Schatzberg remembers his mother Marion Schatzberg on Wednesday May 27th (Sivan 4).

Neal Fox remembers his mother Jeanette Fox (Hannah) on Friday May 29th (Sivan 6).

Upcoming Events at Kol Rina

Community Tikkun Leil Shavuot, Thursday Evening, May 28

Many local synagogues will be participating in a traditional night of learning to celebrate our receiving of the Torah on Mount Sinai. Maariv will begin at 7:30 PM, followed by study sessions throughout the evening. Zoom links to come.

Kol Rina Shavuot Service, Friday, May 29

Our yom tov service will begin at 10 AM and will include Yizkor. Watch this space for further information and Zoom link. There will be NO Friday afternoon/ Kabbalat Shabbat service that day.

Brunch-and-Learn, Sunday, May 31

Kol Rina is excited to welcome Judah Cohen, Professor of Music and Jewish Studies at Indiana University, who will speak to us on "How Jewish Summer Camp Changed Synagogue Music." Details and Zoom link to follow.