



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Beha'alotcha / פרשת בהעלתך

The Beating Heart at the Center

After spending much ink describing the ordering of the Jewish camp in the desert, this week's parsha describes the nation's protocol for traveling. The divine cloud would arise, signaling God's desire that they begin to travel. Immediately, the camp headed by Yehuda would begin to move, followed by that of Reuven, Ephraim and finally Dan. During this process, the Torah emphasizes that the members of Kehat would carry the vessels of the Mishkan in the middle of the people – parallel to where it was situated during the encampment.

While each of these details is surely significant, I would like to focus on the placement of the holy vessels during the times of encampment and travel. Why is it important for the Torah to elaborately tell us that the Mishkan and the vessels were situated in the center of the camp?

One apparent reason is that the physical structure of the camp indicates priorities of values. No matter which tribe a person was from, the center of the camp was God's home in the form of the Mishkan. This feature was so important that it was important to be a constant, no matter if the people were stationary or traveling.

While this is a beautiful idea, its relevance can be challenging in the post-desert reality. Once the Jewish people entered the Land of Israel, God's eternal home became Yerushalayim. God could have organized the people to live in an orderly fashion around Yerushalayim in the way that He had them live in the desert. However, this was not the case. Yerushalayim is not geographically the center point of the country,¹ and the Jewish people are not orderly camped around it. In what way, then, is the encampment in the desert relevant for future generations?

¹ Even though there is a midrash (Tanchuma Kedoshim siman 10) that states Yerushalayim is in the center of the Land of Israel.



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The answer, perhaps, is that the Jewish people's encampment in the desert reflects a consciousness, perspective and value system that is eternally true. Even as people live far from Yerushalayim, it still must be at the center of their hearts and minds. The structure of the encampment in the desert functioned as a training ground for a consciousness that is supposed to exist even when people's lives do not seem to be ordered around God's home.

Perhaps it is for this reason that the Beit HaMikdash and Yerushalayim are referred to as "the heart" of the nation and the world.² The heart is a central organ which literally pumps life into the rest of the body. The heart's centrality exists no matter if a person is stationary or moving. It is constantly beating – and is discernable by a person, as long as one is attentive to listen to it.

Yerushalayim is our national heart. No matter where a person is, it is the central organ that pumps life into us. Even if a person physically and geographically does not have Yerushalayim at the center of his existence, nonetheless, it is beating at the center all the time. It is our responsibility to live with the consciousness of the Jews in the desert and attune ourselves to the centrality of Yerushalayim.

² Zohar parshat Shelach. For the precise formulation, see <http://www.bmoriah.org.il/project.asp?projectID=149>. See also Eicha Rabbah, Petichta siman 16 that "your heart" refers to the Beit HaMikdash.