

Shabbat Parashat B'midbar
The Torah of Oprah Winfrey
"You are Enough!"
"You Count!"
"You are Worthy!"

One of the biggest items of news in the media world this year has been the fact that after twenty-five years on television, Oprah Winfrey was ending the run of her show. Lost in a fog of Vancouver Canucks playoff hockey and the very quickly approaching end of the school year, I had forgotten that the Oprah show finale was airing this week and, unbeknownst to me, my wife had set the PVR to record the incredible end of show celebrations and finale. After watching Game 6 of Tampa Bay versus Boston on Wednesday night, we sat up to watch the three shows that ended twenty-five years of The Oprah Winfrey Show. In those three hours, I was amazed by the number of profound lessons that Oprah Winfrey was able to summarize from her many years on the air and to re-teach to her adoring audience of millions of viewers in 150 countries around the world. Oprah often told her viewers that had she not gone into television, she likely would have become a school teacher. Well, the word TORAH is literally translated to mean "THE TEACHING." So, the lessons that Oprah has shared can indeed be called a Torah of their own, many of which tie in beautifully with lessons from this week's *parasha*/weekly Torah portion, *parashat B'midbar*.

"You are Enough!"
"You Count!"
"You are Worthy!"

In this week's *parasha*, the children of Israel are being prepared by God and Moses to leave Mount Sinai, after almost eighteen months of being camped there, and journey to the Land of Israel. Before they could leave, preparations had to be made and organization undertaken. One aspect of this process was a precise census taking (don't forget to fill out your Canadian census form!), making sure that each and every Israelite was accounted for. The Israelites were indeed a newborn nation of millions. However, one of the lessons of the census is that each and every individual is important, special, and has a role to play in the community and in the world. Oprah is famous for repeating the three statements that I have quoted from her above. From her classroom in her studio, she has always worked to make others feel heard, understood, valued, and empowered to hear their calling, act on it, and make their own difference in the world. As the Torah teaches, each human being is made in the holy image of God and is equal to one another. If each of us truly accepts this reality, then we will all indeed embody the truth of being "enough," "worthy," and "counting."

Oprah Winfrey was born in the back woods of Mississippi where opportunities for African American women were incredibly limited. However, by the force of her self-confidence, will, and vision - combined with the gift of the grace of God's help and

guidance along the way (which she repeatedly credits when talking about her career and accomplishments) - Oprah Winfrey made herself into who she has become: one of the most influential individuals on this earth. And she uses her platform NOT for self-aggrandizement, but for *tikkun olam*, for the repairing of the world in so many important ways. If Oprah Winfrey can do it, each and every one of us can do it. As Oprah explained in her finale, the change that each of us makes will range from small to great. However, the change is what matters, not its scope or size.

In the twenty-five years of her show, I probably watched no more than 20 total episodes. After having watched the final three, I am left to wonder what I missed by not having attended more of Oprah Winfrey's classes. She was and is a teacher and role model for millions and she has left quite the hole to be filled by her show no longer being on the air. However, if we can remember her lessons and act upon them, the legacy of The Oprah Winfrey Show will last long beyond its now completed twenty-five years.

Yish'ar Koheikh/May your strength be firm, Oprah! Mazal tov on an incredible run!

Shabbat Shalom!