

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 7 #38, July 17, 2020; Matos Masei 5780

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Eitan and Dita Cooper and family as they begin their second year at Beth Shalom. Mazel-Tov to Rabbanite Dasi Fruchter and the South Philadelphia Shitiebel as they begin their second year serving their community.

The double parsha Matot - Masei this Shabbat concludes Sefer Bemidbar. We always read Devarim during the Nine Days, on the Shabbat before Tisha B'Av. This schedule also means that we always conclude Sefer Bemidbar during the Three Weeks.

Sefer Bemidbar opens with great hope. B'Nai Yisrael prepare to leave the base of Har Sinai, where they had been since preparing to receive the Aseret Dibrot (Ten Commandments; Shemot ch. 20). These preparations continue through chapter 10 of Bemidbar. Immediately, with neither transition nor warning, some in the group start mumbling and complaining. From the beginning of chapter 11, almost everything goes wrong. We have the sins of gluttony over quail meat, Miriam's lashon horah, Korach's rebellion, and the misrepresentations of the Meraglim. As if the Torah were giving up on the generation of the Exodus, we have a 38 year gap, and the Torah resumes with events of the 40th year. The 40th year has both positive and negative events. The primary positive event is that all the adults who survive the sin at Baal Peor and plague of the snakes survive to enter the land and receive permanent portions in the division of the land. The primary negative events are the sin at Baal Peor, death of Miriam and Aharon, and impending death of Moshe.

Masei recounts the 42 stops that B'Nai Yisrael made during the 40 years in the Midbar. The Magen Avraham states that these 42 stops allude to the mystical 42 letter name of God and that therefore the entire recitation of these stops (49 verses) should be read without pause. Following this tradition means overriding the markings that divide these 49 verses into the first two aliyot. Rabbi David Fohrman observes that the Torah only mentions three events during this recitation: no water at Refidim; Aharon's death at Har HaHor in the 40th year; and the king of Arad's learning of their approach from his location in the south of Canaan. Of all the events over 40 years, why does the Torah focus on these three?

Rabbi Fohrman discusses the three events from the travelogue in Masei. At Refidim, the people learn that God, who used Moshe's staff to bring plagues on the Egyptians, was willing to use the same staff to save the Jews. Learning that God cared for all the Jews was an important step in convincing the people to trust in and seek a direct relationship with Hashem. When the people watch Aharon and Moshe walk together up Har HaHor, where Aharon dies in front of the people, they learn that Aharon and Moshe are humans, not gods. In Chukat, we read that the king of Arad initiates a war against Israel. The people make a vow to Hashem to consecrate the cities to God if He will help them win the war. This event is critical, because it shows that the generation about to enter the land recognize that their power comes from God and that He will protect them when they ask and trust Him. More than anything else, learning to trust in Hashem is what enabled our ancestors to be able to defeat larger and more powerful nations and earn the right to live in Israel.

A student of military history learns that an expert in military science can generally explain the history of wars – why one side won and the other lost. The one place where military history fails is explaining how Israel defeated the Arabs in the various wars since 1948. The same analysis exists when scientists try to explain why the Jews have survived for more than 3500 years. As many other civilizations have come and gone, the tiny nation of Jews has survived and outlasted every other nation. We Jews (and members of some other religious groups) understand that the hand of God is responsible for the survival of our people. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, started teaching me 50 years ago how to find proof of the existence of God by observing these sorts of miracles in the world. These are the sort of lessons that we need to teach to our children and grandchildren, to continue the bond that ties us together to generations past and future. With this belief, we too can continue to exist, at a minimum in the hearts of our families and friends, even after we are gone.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Parshas Matos: Leadership Lessons

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2019

Parshas Matos begins with the laws of vows. The Torah tells us, “Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel, saying, ‘This is the thing that Hashem has commanded. If a man makes a vow to or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not violate his word...’” The Torah then discusses how a person must honor his word, or properly nullify his vow.

Interestingly, Moshe did not teach these laws himself to the Jewish people, but he told the rashei hamatos, the heads of the tribes, to teach them. Why is that?

After Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt”l, escaped Europe and took a temporary position in Seattle, he became a Rav in Toronto. The congregants, mostly of Polish descent, had some customs which differed from Rav Yaakov’s Lithuanian heritage. They would slightly hint to him that they would appreciate if he would adopt some of their customs. Once, after noticing that he did not wear a gartel (traditional belt worn by Chasidic Jews during prayers), they left one on his seat!

When he was asked as to why he did not wear Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin as was the minhag of chassidim, he answered that it was not the custom of Lithuanian Rabbanim.

“But the Chofetz Chaim wore Rabbeinu Tam!” they countered.

“The Chofetz Chaim only put on Rabbeinu Tam later in life when he was 90 years old,” replied Rav Yaakov.

Indeed when Rav Yaakov turned 90, he suddenly began to wear Rabbeinu Tam.

According to reliable sources, it was not because that was the age that the Chofetz Chaim wore them, rather, because he had implied that when talking to his Toronto baalei batim.

My grandfather, Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l, explained as follows. Moshe is teaching the leaders an important principle. A person's word is gold. He must honor it and keep his resolution, come what may. But who is able to teach this by example? Only a leader who practices this in real life.

A leader must keep his word. Moshe told the leaders of the tribes, that they must set an example to their constituents. The only way to teach integrity is by practicing it. A leader must do more than just lead. He must be able to practice what he preaches. Only then, can he genuinely impart these lessons to his disciples.

Good Shabbos!

Masei: Looking Back to Move Forward

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2020

After forty years of wandering through the wilderness, the Children of Israel arrive at the Plains of Moab. The Promised Land is so close they can almost taste it, and most of Parashat Masei is devoted to what awaits them on the other side of the Jordan. Yet with all this looking forward, Masei opens with a significant look backward: "These are the journeys of the Children of Israel who went forth out of the land of Egypt," followed by forty-eight verses listing the places they travelled to in the wilderness (Bamidbar, 33:1-49). What is the point? Why look back now?

To begin answering these questions, let's consider for a moment what it would mean if the list of stops was not included. The message would have been clear: All those years wandering in the desert were a black hole; they had no value. It was a period of wandering without direction or destination, of marking time until the older generation died out. All those years could have been covered by a single verse that read: "Thirty-eight years later..."

To some degree this is the case; had there been events of any broad significance during those intervening years they would certainly have been recorded for posterity. But that does not mean that these years were meaningless. There were certainly moments of profound significance for the individuals involved: growing up, falling in love, getting married, the birth of a son or daughter, watching one's children grow up, dealing with hardship and struggle, growing intellectually and spirituality, and celebrating successes and grappling with failures. The people would have no doubt invested these events with due weight at the time of their occurrence, but now that they are ready to enter the land of Canaan, how will they think of the past decades? Will they be a big blur? Will the people feel that the time was wasted and best forgotten? Or will they pause to remember and reflect on those years, to identify the important moments, seeing them as milestones, markers of important stages in their personal journeys?

This is what Moshe is reminding them to do. He reminds them to step back, remember what occurred, and recall where they have been, for naming those places turns events into milestones and wandering into a journey. This is true in our lives as well. Many of us have vivid memories of the early years of our lives: stories from when we were growing up, getting married, getting our first job, having our first child. And then, somewhere around our early thirties, things start to blur; the decades fly by. If we were to tell our story, it would sound much like the story of the Exodus: profound, transformative moments at the beginning and then "thirty-eight years later..."

The Torah is telling us that there is a way to change this narrative. If we take the time to mark our milestones, the blur will come into focus. We can shape the narrative of our lives. We can determine if we will see our life as a wandering or as a journey. We may not always be able to articulate exactly what value there was in arriving at certain stops along the way, but this was true for the Israelites as well. The Torah simply names most of the places, giving no indication of their significance. This is partly because their import was personal rather than national, and as such, it differed from person to person. But it is also because their significance may not have been fully understood or easily articulated, yet they were significant.

In reflecting, we may feel that sometimes we were moving backward, not forward. So it was with the Israelites. Some of their stops took them backward, towards Egypt, yet they were stops in the journey nonetheless. By naming these stops we make a statement. We assert that they do have meaning, even if we do not understand what that meaning is. By naming them, we assert that our going back was part of our path of eventually going forward. By naming them, we make them part of our story, part of our journey. When does this naming take place? When these events are occurring, or only after, when we step back and look at the trajectory of our lives?

In Parashat Masei, the latter seems to be the case. The verse tells us that “Moshe wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of God,” indicating that this writing down occurred only at the end of the forty years in the wilderness (33:2). Orah Hayyim, however, disagrees and sees this verse as saying that the journeys were written down as they occurred. There is no question that we are better off if we are able to take note of the special moments in our lives when they happen. Writing in a diary or putting pictures in an album and supplying a caption – for the younger generation, read: blogging or uploading a photo from your iPhone to your Facebook timeline – are ways to save those moments for the future, but these activities also assign weight and significance to them in the present. These are ways to tell our story as we are living it.

But we are not always able to do this. When life seems purposeless, we might ask ourselves: Why bother noting these moments at all? If our personal or professional life is in shambles, if we are in physical or mental pain, or if we are just wandering purposelessly or aimlessly, we will not see ourselves on a journey; we will see ourselves as lost. This, perhaps, was also the experience of the Children of Israel. For thirty-eight years they wandered from place to place with no clear destination and with no ability to direct their own movements. God told them when to move, and God told them when to stay. They were powerless, at the mercy of forces beyond their control.

At such times in our lives, it may still be possible to gain some control, if not by changing our circumstances then at least by changing how we frame, relate to, and react to these circumstances. If we can “write down our journeys” at these moments we will have accomplished a great deal. But sometimes this is an unrealistic expectation. Sometimes we might have to suffer through this period of wandering. At these times what we can do is persevere, persevere so that when we come out on the other side, when our thirty-eight years in the wilderness finally comes to an end, we can at least reflect and assess. At this juncture it will be critical to name those way stations, asserting that there was value and meaning to the places we have been, that they are part of how we got to where we are even if a full understanding of their purpose and necessity still eludes us.

This connects to another ambiguity in the text. The verse states that Moshe wrote down their journeys according to the word of God. What was according to the word of God, their journeys or the writing down? Ibn Ezra says the former; Ramban says the latter. This is often the very ambiguity that we struggle with. Sometimes we can embrace the belief that our current journey is directed by God. In those moments we will be able to mark our journey as we are living it. At other times, however, this belief will be very distant from us, and we will only be able to feel connected to a larger system of meaning when we have emerged on the other side and are able to look back and reflect.

If we can at least record our milestones at the end of the journey, then we will have come a long way. Our hardships and struggles will become life lessons and periods of growth, and we will have made these periods into our own personal Torah. As Sefat Emet comments, it is in the writing down of these events that we declare them to be of lasting value, that we transform all of these dangerous, difficult journeys into an integral part of God’s Torah.

Shabbat Shalom!

Parshas Maasei -- Do you know your Alef Bais? by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2014 Teach 613

The daughters of Tzelafchad were getting on in their years. All five women were remarkably righteous, but not yet married. Somehow they were not able to find suitable alef baishusbands.

But when they approached Moshe for help they had something else in mind. Their father passed away in the desert, leaving no sons behind. Normally the Land would be split among the sons. Their request was that since there were no sons, his portion in the Land should go to them, his daughters.

Moshe posed the question to G-d and relayed the response. The daughters of Tzelafchad were to be given the portion of their father in the Land, but they were obligated to choose husbands from their father’s tribe. In this way, the inheritance that was given to them would not be removed from their father’s tribe when they get married.

Remarkably, as soon as these women were told that they must choose husbands from a specific tribe, they immediately found husbands and got married. All five- who had such a hard time finding husbands- manage to find soul mates! Mazal Tov! But it gives us much to think about. Why suddenly, when G-d placed this massive constraint upon them limiting them to the men of only one out of twelve tribes, did things suddenly work out.

The Torah is teaching us a powerful lesson about mitzvos. Mitzvos don't constrain, they guide. By telling these righteous women that their soul mates were not to be found among the other tribes, G-d narrowed their search and helped them fulfill their destiny. The fact that they had no other options made it possible for them to discover what G-d wanted of them.

A number of years ago in England, a young man got engaged to the woman of his choice. At the engagement party the grandfather was making small talk with the relatives and he found out that the woman had been previously married and divorced. Normally there would be no issue, but the grandfather knew that as a family of kohanim, the young man was not permitted to marry a woman who had been divorced. The grandfather approached his grandson and pleaded with him to seek the counsel of a Rabbi to discuss the challenge that was before him.

The young man and woman were shaken by the information. With time they did their research and were convinced that there was indeed a religious problem with their getting married. They approached a Rabbi for guidance as to how to handle the situation.

The Rabbi listened closely to their story and to their research. He then said. "You know, every young couple who gets married is convinced that they are meant for each other. Normally we assume that to be correct. They get married and have a blessed life together. But occasionally G-d, in his kindness, informs us that the union is not a good one. As much as you love and respect one another, only G-d can see ten and twenty years into the future. To be told that a union is forbidden is not constraining; it is guiding. G-d is telling you that although you seem to get along, the union does not have His blessing."

Sometimes knowing that "it is not a valid option" spells salvation in clarifying which legitimate options are open to us.

During the Israeli War of Independence there was a city under siege, surrounded by a significant number of enemy troops. The defenders thought that they would be overrun shortly, and in desperation they radioed Central Command for assistance. At first there was no response to their request, as there were so many similar areas pleading for reinforcements. Eventually, however, a message was radioed to them. It went, "Alef Bais; Alef Bais."

The defenders understood the message. "Alef Bais," was code for "Ain Bireira- there is no choice." There are no other options. There are no reinforcements to be had. We have no choice but to do our best.

The Arab commander who intercepted the message, however, thought that "Alef Bais" stood for Atom Bomb, and he promptly withdrew his troops.

The code "Alef Bais" has a different meaning to every person. Through it a person finds salvation and fulfillment. A person is defined by that which causes him to say, "That is simply not an option."

During the holocaust there was a girl in a labor / death camp who was assigned to peel potatoes for the Nazi officer's meals. Realizing that the peels could be a lifesaver for her sisters in the labor camp, she would regularly smuggle the potato peels out to the Jewish barracks, instead of discarding them. All went well until someone informed on her.

She was in her barracks waking up in the morning when the news was whispered to her that the Nazis had been informed of her deed. She trembled as she walked out to roll call, knowing that she would be pulled from the line and punished. "But what would the punishment be? she wondered. When she saw a horse lined up in front, waiting, she knew. The Nazis would tie the accused to the back of a horse and gallop through the camp. If the accused survived the ordeal they would allow her to live. The young woman asked for some pins. "Pins?" her friends asked her. "Yes, pins," the courageous girl repeated.

Realizing what would happen to her, she asked her friends to help her pin her dress to her skin, "So that during the ordeal my dress shouldn't slide in a way that does not befit a Jewish girl." Her friends helped her through the painful process of affixing the pins to protect her from that which to her was "simply not an option."

To read “Alef Bais” is a skill that we all acquire. But to really understand “Alef Bais” is a skill that takes a lifetime. What is it that for you is simply not an option? Let that awareness guide you to the fulfillment of your destiny.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

The Long Journey--Thoughts for Matot-Masei

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

It is said that when Alexander the Great reached the peak of his career by conquering the entire known world—he broke down and cried.

One explanation for his crying is that he realized that there were no more battles for him to undertake. His best achievements were in the past. He had climbed to the top and had nowhere else to go. He cried in frustration.

Another explanation is that he realized that his tremendous accomplishment really amounted to very little. Earth is a speck in the universe; even if one were to rule the entire earth, there was a vast universe over which he did not rule. Moreover, humans are mortal; whatever we accomplish, however impressive, is short lived. In a thousand years or a million years—who will know or care what we’ve done? What difference will it have made? Thus, Alexander cried at the sheer vanity of life, the ultimate emptiness of his life’s deeds.

How can we live happy and productive lives—and not break down crying like Alexander did? This week’s Torah portion offers some guidance.

Parashat Masei records each of the stopping places of the Israelites during their 40 year trek in the wilderness. The Midrash explains that this detailed account reflects God’s loving concern for the children of Israel. It is compared to a king who had taken his ailing child to a distant place in order to be cured. On the return journey, the king would stop at each resting place and remind his child: this is where we found shelter; this is where we cooled off at an oasis; this is where you had a head ache. Each place evoked memories and created a deeper bond between the king and his child.

But the recounting of past stopping places was not a mere experience of nostalgia. Rather, it was coupled with the knowledge that we are now going home, that we are looking forward to a bright future with new challenges and opportunities.

The Israelites, in meticulously reviewing their past travels, were also anticipating their entry into the Promised Land.

Jewish tradition teaches us to review our past and to recount our historical achievements: but it teaches us to do so without breaking down and crying as did Alexander the Great. Judaism imbues us with a sense that every day has meaning, that we can grow and attain something new and better. Life is not a rut or a routine; we are not trapped or locked in one place. No matter how much we have accomplished, we have not reached the end of our possibilities. There is a Promised Land ahead.

We do not succumb to the frustration or despair that confronted Alexander the Great, because we have a different orientation to the meaning of life. We are not here to achieve egotistical goals such as fame and power, but to serve God and humanity. Greatness is not measured by the number of lines one receives in history books, but by the myriad small deeds of kindness and charity and goodness that we have performed, by our positive impact on family, friends, and society.

The detailed description of the Israelites’ travels in the wilderness reminds us of the importance of the past stages of our lives. It also serves to call our attention to the future, to the Promised Land, to the goals not yet attained. Just as we are strengthened by our past, we are energized by the hopes for our future.

* Jewishideas.org.

Thoughts on Anti-Semitism

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

The ancient and so-far uncured disease of “anti-Semitism” is reflected in Megillat Esther. Haman tells the king: “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; and their laws are diverse from those of every people; neither keep they the king’s laws; therefore it profits not the king to let them be.” (Esther 3:8). Haman’s description of the situation is insidious and hateful. It slanders the Jewish people who, although they follow their own religious laws, also are law-abiding people who follow the king’s laws.

The disease of anti-Semitism has persisted through the generations and continues today, with all its false accusations, paranoia and dangerous consequences. How are we to cope with this deep-seated irrationalism? How are we to explain this to our children and grandchildren?

* * *

Each generation of Jewish parents and grandparents seems to face the same dilemma. We teach our children and grandchildren that all humans are created in the image of God; that we should respect and assist others; that love of God necessarily entails love of God’s creations.

Yet, these right and proper teachings are challenged by the realities which our children and grandchildren witness with their own eyes. They see thousands of missiles shot at Israel by Hamas terrorists with the aim of killing as many Jews as possible. They see throngs of Palestinians cheering as missiles are launched to murder Jews. They hear the rantings of the President of Iran who calls for the annihilation of Israel. They read of anti-Semitic diatribes and attacks by anti-Semites throughout the world. They see the large number of countries at the United Nations who consistently vote against Israel, who consistently side with those who would destroy Israel. They know of the so-called humanitarian groups and journalists who seem to find fault only with Israel, but rarely, if ever, with the vicious enemies of Israel.

We Jewish parents and grandparents constantly teach our young generations about love of God, love of humanity, the sanctity of human life. Yet, there are so many millions of fellow human beings who are saturated with hatred, who engage in murderous activities against us. And there are so many millions of others who are complicit with the evils of anti-Semitism by their neutrality or silence.

How can we teach of love in a world filled with hatred? How can we teach that all humans are created in the image of God, when so many humans are actively trying to murder us? How can we preach the goodness of humankind, when so much of humankind is engaged in violence?

For thousands of years, our people have weathered the storms of persecution. In spite of the senseless hatred and violence perpetrated against us in so many lands, the Jewish people are still here to tell our story. Our enemies always disappear; we always survive. That is an iron law of history. And that bothers the anti-Semites greatly.

Why do anti-Semites give us such a hard time? Why do people who do not even know us express hatred and malevolence toward us? Why do Israel’s enemies persist in demonizing the Jewish State, rather than finding a way to co-exist peacefully and happily?

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Jews represent an infinitesimal fraction of the world’s population. Yet, so much negative energy is directed against us! I suppose we should feel complimented to receive so much attention!

Our enemies are astounded and troubled by the fact that such a tiny Jewish people has been able to accomplish so much. We gave the world Moses, King David, Isaiah and Queen Esther. Our Bible is venerated by Christianity and Islam and has been a major influence for human civilization. Our sages have produced an unmatched legacy of literature dedicated to righteousness, ethics and law. For thousands of years, our communities have striven to maintain the highest ideals of our tradition.

Jews have distinguished themselves for service to humanity far out of proportion to our numbers. Our enemies resent our persistent commitment to excellence: generations of Jewish doctors and teachers, social workers and scientists, artists and philanthropists, business people and diplomats. They resent the incredibly high proportion of Jewish Nobel Prize winners and other world-class intellectuals and writers.

Some hate us because they see in us a highly educated, highly idealistic, highly charitable group. In contrast to their much larger groups, we are an annoying paradigm. The enemies of Israel do not understand how a tiny Jewish State has become a world leader in science and technology, agriculture and industry. How can such a small State, constantly embattled and boycotted by much of the Arab world, be so amazingly successful in so many ways? How is it that only Israel of all countries in the Middle East has been able to maintain a vibrant and dynamic democracy, a society that gives so much freedom to all its citizens?

Our enemies solve their dilemma by denying or belittling Jewish virtues, or by blaming us for preventing their own advancement. When they cannot come to grips with their own shortcomings, they look for a scapegoat: and we are a convenient target since we are so small and yet so visible. If anything, their anti-Semitism is a blatant admission of their own failings and weaknesses. Those who devote themselves to hatred thereby undermine their own humanity.

The Jewish people are persistent in believing in the ultimate goodness of humanity. In spite of all our enemies and all their hatred, we remain eternally optimistic. We believe that reason and benevolence will prevail. We work to make society better and to alleviate suffering. We believe that even wicked human beings can be redeemed through love and compassion. We can point to many millions of people who think kindly and warmly toward Jews and toward the Jewish State. The good people far outnumber the anti-Semites.

When we come under fire from anti-Semites, we call on our collective historic memory to give us strength. We have survived the millennia due to the incredible courage and fortitude of our forebears. We are the children of the prophets who taught justice, righteousness and love to the world. Our teachings are right: the world simply hasn't absorbed them as yet.

How can we teach of love in a world filled with hatred? How can we teach that all humans are created in the image of God, when so many humans are actively trying to murder us? How can we preach the goodness of humankind, when so much of humankind is engaged in violence?

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We teach these things because they are true, and because they are the ideas and ideals that can best bring fulfillment to humanity. In spite of so much hatred and evil in the world, the Jews teach love and righteousness.

The day will come when hatred and bigotry will disappear from humanity. In the meanwhile, we must stay strong, courageous and faithful to our tradition. And to our collective Jewish memory.

* Jewishideas.org.

Parshas Pinchas By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

After forty years of wandering in the desert, the Jewish nation finally prepared to enter the land of Israel. Yet, it appeared that some tribes were once again weakening in their resolve to cross into the land of Canaan. The tribes of Reuven and Gad asked for their tribal portions to be east of the Jordan River and that Moshe not cross them through the Jordan River. Moshe responded by sharply rebuking them for their request and chastising them for starting the process all over again, risking the destruction of another generation.

The Sforno (ibid. 32:6) tells us that Moshe's rebuke ran even deeper. Moshe challenged that their entire request was only a ruse to weaken the hearts of the people. How could they possibly expect that they would be allowed to settle while the rest of the nation went on to continue the battle for the conquest of Canaan? They certainly knew their request would be rejected. Why then did they ask? It could only be to show others that they were afraid to enter Canaan and weaken the

nation's resolve. (The tribes of Gad and Reuven were responding directly to this challenge when they responded to Moshe that they would settle their families and then lead the battles for the conquest of Canaan.)

If we could imagine for a moment the scene when the leaders of the tribes of Gad and Reuven stood before Moshe, Elazar Hakohein and the other leaders of the nation. They had spent forty years traveling in the desert waiting for the day when they could finally enter the promised land. They had left Egypt, accepted the Torah and become G-d's nation, but were still waiting to establish their society and to enter the promised land. An entire generation had been born and raised in the barren wasteland, growing up with the knowledge that they were held in limbo unable to fulfill their destiny. We can only but imagine the shock that must have run through them upon hearing the request.

Moshe's response in this context seems verbose. He tells them in detail of the failure of the first attempt to enter the land of Canaan. How the spies travelled through the land and returned with their evil report, weakening the nation's resolve. He recounts how Hashem swore that their generation would perish in the desert and how they wandered in the desert for forty years. Surely these details were ones they all knew only too well. They had lived and were currently living with the repercussions of this story. Why did Moshe need to spell out the details of the story? Would it not have sufficed for Moshe to say to them "We have waited forty years to get to this day! How can you start this again now?"

Rav Yitzchak Blazer writes in his composition Sha'arei Ohr that part of the gift of free will is that we do not innately respond emotionally to the obvious. Morally compelling concepts will only move us if we choose to focus on them, to pay attention to the thoughts and actually think about the concepts. As the Mesillas Yesharim says in his introduction, the well known and obvious concepts are the most forgotten and overlooked.

Recognizing the depth of their error, Moshe understood that these tribes were overlooking the obvious. Were he to merely remind them of it in a general sense, they would continue to be unmoved and determined in their position. To awaken them to their error, Moshe had to focus their minds. He had to list the details of the story to lead them to truly consider the past. Only then could they begin to appreciate its moral significance.

Moshe's response guides us in our own paths in life. No matter how fundamental and obvious the concept, we must take the time to reflect if we want it to become and to remain the way we live. If we fail to reflect, we can live in a holding pattern for forty years and still forget what we are waiting for. We must make a daily effort to study and reflect on who we are and who we want to be. For it is only by reviewing and reflecting on Torah and on our goals, that it will become not only how we want to live, but indeed who we truly are.

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Victimhood Vs. Gaslighting

By Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Have you ever heard of the term "gaslighting"?

Think of it as "reverse victimhood." In a regular victimhood mentality, you believe that your life depends completely on something or someone else. You are a victim of circumstance, society, or another person and you are powerless to change it.

But to be gaslighted means the opposite. It means you believe that everything that happens in your life is your fault. If something goes bad, always blame yourself no matter what. This term comes from Patrick Hamilton's 1938 play "Gas Light" most recently adapted into a 1944 film starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Berman.

Going too far in victimhood or gaslighting leads to destruction and chaos. If you always think you're a victim, you can end up doing anything you want no matter how evil because at the end of the day, it's not your fault. You are like this because of society or your upbringing.

But too far in the other direction leads to psychological abuse and self-destruction. In the play, the husband subtly manipulates the wife into thinking she is losing her sanity. If someone truly is the source of evil in their world then others can control them or worse, people could harm themselves because everything that goes wrong is their fault.

Ideally we should keep a balance and recognize there are some things which we can control and other things which we cannot. Let's say you want to teach your children something and you've been unsuccessful in the past. You could say "it's all my fault" and aggressively try to hammer the lesson home or you could say "It's not my fault. It's society." and do nothing. Perhaps a better way is to find a balance. One day be a little more aggressive and the next day focus on letting the child be and leaving it in God's hands.

This is the logic of Shabbos. We work hard to change the world six days a week and then we take a step back and allow the world to be. Otherwise, we risk falling off the gaslighting cliff. But too much Shabbos would have us become lethargic and close us off from recognizing the power we do have to change the world.

Need a prayer to help find this balance? Look to the prayer on p. 314 in the Artscroll Siddur right before Lecha Dodi. The Ana Bekoach. See the tiny letters on its side? Those are the initials of each of the words on the line. The acronym of the entire prayer is the 42 Letter Name of God.

How do we interpret the 42 Letter Name? Look at the beginning of Parshat Masei p. 918 in the Stone Chumash where it lists the various places the Jews camped out in their forty year sojourn. From Raamses in Verse 3 to the Jordan by the Plains of Moav in verse 49 we count a total of 42 places. Rabbi Avraham Gombiner (1633-1683) in his commentary on the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Law) says that the Torah Reader should be careful to not pause in the middle of recounting these places because they too are a reference to God's 42 Letter Name. That means we can compare the places on Israel's journey to the lines of Ana Bikoach.

We can't do it all right now so let's just do the first two lines. The first line (six Hebrew words) of Ana Bikoach translates to "Please God use your strength, your right hand to release our bonds." This seems to be more on the "victim" side of things. We cannot give ourselves freedom so we ask God to do it. This pairs well with the first six places from Ramses to Elim (Verse 9) which covers Israel's journey from Egypt all the way to right before the Sea of Reeds. Here the Jews prayed for God to release them fully from the bonds of Egypt and God did so by splitting the sea.

The next 6 places listed in Masei go up to Sinai where the Jews received the Torah, the guiding light that continues to animate and empower our nation everyday. It's not enough to throw off the bonds of slavery, there needs to be a positive mission that empowers the people so they can find true freedom. As our Sages say, "Only those who study Torah can be called free". This prayer for self empowerment we find in the second line of Ana Bikoach. "Accept the prayer of nation. Cause us to become strong and Awesomely Pure." It's almost like each line responds off each other and balances each other out.

We're all on this continuum of letting ourselves be in God's hands and finding the power within ourselves. From accepting our dependence on God and crying out to him to realizing that we have the power to do what we need to do. In God's 42 Letter Name we find the prayer we need and the precedents of our forefather's inner journeys through the desert. Now we can understand why we recite it before Shabbos starts. Like we said before, Shabbos balances us out. So we say this prayer of balance before we welcome the Shabbos Queen.
Shabbat Shalom,

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Rav Kook Torah

Massei: The Merit of Building the Land of Israel

The Ramban (Nachmanides, 1194-1270) understood this verse as the Biblical source for the mitzvah to settle and build up the Land of Israel:

"You shall take possession of the Land and settle it; for I have given you the Land to possess it"
(Num. 33:53)

The following remarkable story was told by Mr. Yigal Gal-Ezer, who served as Israel's vice state comptroller. In his younger days, Gal-Ezer would often visit Rav Kook's home in order to be inspired by his holy presence.

The Yemenite Visitor

During one of my visits, I found the rabbi in his study, absorbed in a complex Talmudic topic. Suddenly I heard a hesitant knocking at the door. The door opened partially, and a Yemenite Jew — slight of stature, with streaks of white in his beard and long peiyot — entered the room.

The guest closed the door behind him and stood in the doorway, his back to the door. He lowered his head to the floor, afraid to look at the rabbi directly.

Rav Kook raised his eyes from his Talmud and looked at the man kindly. "Come closer, my son." With a gentle voice, the rabbi tried to instill confidence in the visitor.

With slow steps, the man drew near to the rabbi's desk. He remained standing, head down.

"What is disturbing you, my son?"

"Honored rabbi," the Yemenite said. "I came to ask the rabbi an important question."

"Ask, my son, ask."

"For twenty-five years, I have performed backbreaking labor, from morning to evening. I weeded plots of land so that orchards could be planted. I planted saplings, dug up stones from fields, excavated foundations for buildings in Eretz Yisrael. I spent all my strength in exhausting manual labor. And yet I barely earn enough to support my family."

Embarrassed, the Yemenite lowered his voice. "I would like to ask: is it permissible for me to immigrate to America? Perhaps there my fortune will shine and I will be able to properly support my family...." The visitor finished his short speech and remained standing in silence.

For several minutes, Rav Kook sat, deep in thought. Abruptly, he stood up, pointed to his chair and commanded the man, "Sit."

The visitor became filled with trepidation. "Honored Rabbi," he stammered. "It is improper that a stranger should sit on your chair."

"Sit," the rabbi repeated.

With short, reluctant steps, the Yemenite walked around the desk until he came to the rabbi's chair. He slowly lowered himself into the seat.

The Dream

As soon as he sat down, his head dropped to the desk and he fell into a deep sleep. A short while later, he woke, startled.

"What happened when you slept?" asked the Rav.

"I dreamt that I had passed on to the next world," he reported. "My soul ascended to heaven. When I reached heaven's gates, there was an angel standing at the entrance who directed me to the heavenly court. There I saw scales — scales of justice."

The Yemenite laborer continued his account. "Suddenly, carriages drawn by horses rushed in front of me. The carriages were loaded with packages. Some of the packages were small, some were medium-sized, and some were large. The angels began unloading the packages, and they placed them on one side of the scales. That side of the scales plunged downwards due to the weight, until it nearly reached the ground."

"What is the meaning of these packages?" I asked the angel standing before me.

"These, o mortal, are your sins and faults from your days on earth. Everything is accounted for," he replied. My spirits fell.

Then other carriages arrived. These carriages were loaded with dirt, rocks, stones, and sand. As the angels loaded them on the other side of the scales, it began to lift up — slightly — the side of sins and transgressions.

“What is the meaning of these bundles of dirt?” I asked.

“These are the stones, rocks, and dirt which your hands labored to remove from the ground of the Holy Land. They have come to speak in your defense, for your part in the mitzvah of yishuv ha’aretz, settling the Land of Israel.”

“Trembling, I stared at the side of merits. I saw it dipping lower and lower, lifting the opposite side. Finally the side of merits ceased moving. It stopped as it outweighed the sins — but just barely.”

“You see, my son,” Rav Kook told the man gently. “You have received your answer from heaven.”

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Malachim Kivnei Adam, pp. 321-322.)

Matot: Twelve Sticks*

Moses spoke to the heads of the matot (“tribes”) . . . Numbers 30:2

The stick, it can be said, is a piece of a tree that has paid the price of leaving home. Indeed, one would hardly recognize it as the tender green shoot who departed the mother tree: its supple spine has stiffened into a column of inflexibility, its porous skin has hardened into a core-deep hardness. The springy bough has become, well, a stick.

The stick, it can also be said, is one who has reaped the rewards of leaving home. The tender shoot has gained backbone and stature. It has learned to stand its ground—no longer is it swayed by every passing wind and breeze. Its spell out in the cold has toughened it, made it a force to be reckoned with. The malleable sprig has solidified into the formidable staff.

Exile

The Torah has two names for the tribes of Israel: shevatim and matot. A shevet is a “branch” or “switch”; mateh means “stick” and “staff.”

Both names express the idea that the tribes of Israel are limbs of the “tree of life,” offshoots of the supreme Source of all life and being. But each represents a different state in the Jew’s relationship to his or her roots. The shevet bespeaks a state of manifest connection to one’s source: the branch is still fastened to the tree, or at least still has its life-juices coursing through its veins. The shevet is the Jew in a state of visible connection to his G d, sustained by an open divine involvement in his or her life.

The mateh is a shevet who has been uprooted from its tree. The mateh is the Jew in galut, a “child banished from his father’s table”¹ to wander the cold and alien roads of exile. Deprived of its supernal moorings, the mateh is compelled to develop its own resistance to the storms of life, to look to its own frail heart for the strength to hold its own, far from the ancestral home.

The Torah Reading of Matot

There is a section of the Torah (Numbers 30:2–32:42) that carries the name Matot, as its opening verse describes Moses’ instruction to the “heads of the tribes” (rashei ha-matot) of Israel.

It is significant that in the Tribes of Israel are referred to here as matot, and that the entire Torah portion is so named. This Torah section is always read during the “Three Weeks” from 17 Tammuz to 9 Av, during which we mourn and re-experience the destruction of the Holy Temple and the onset of our exile.

Every stick yearns to return to its tree, yearns for the day that it will once again be a fresh and vital branch, united with its siblings and nourished by its progenitor. When that day comes, it will bring with it its hard-earned solidity, the mateh-maturity it gained sticking it out in the lone and rootless environment of galut.²

FOOTNOTES:

1. Talmud, Berachot 3a.

2. Based on Likkutei Sichot, vol. 18, pp. 382–384.

* From an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson; translation/adaptation by Yanki Tauber. Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com. © Chabad 2020.

Matot - Masei: These Are the Journeys

By Rabbi M. Wisniefsky*

These are the [42] journeys of the Israelites who left Egypt, organized by tribal troops, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. (Bemidbar 33:1)

These are the journeys: The Baal Shem Tov taught that these 42 journeys correspond to the 42 spiritual journeys that we make throughout our life. We begin from birth, just as the exodus from Egypt is both the Jewish people's national birth and an allegory for every individual birth, the liberation of the fetus from the confines of the womb into the freedom of the outside world where it can develop and become independent. The final journey is to the spiritual Promised Land, the afterlife.

Although some of the intervening journeys in the Israelite's trek through the desert were accompanied by setbacks, all the stations on our spiritual journey through life are meant to be holy and positive. If we choose good over evil, we will indeed live out these phases of life in the way G-d intends. If, like the generation of the desert, we make some wrong choices, we will experience them as temporary setbacks.

Although at every step in the journey of life, we strive to make the right choices, we should also recognize that even setbacks can be transformed into positive, growth experiences.

– **Kehot's Chumash Bemidbar**

*** An Insight from the Rebbe**

Gut Shabbos,
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Volume 26, Issue 37

Shabbat Parashat Matot-Masei

5780 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Priorities

The Israelites were almost within sight of the Promised Land. They had successfully waged their first battles. They had just won a victory over the Midianites. There is a new tone to the narrative. We no longer hear the querulous complaints that had been the bass note of so much of the wilderness years.

We know why. That undertone was the sound of the generation, born in slavery, that had left Egypt. By now, almost forty years have passed. The second generation, born in freedom and toughened by conditions in the desert, have a more purposeful feel about them. Battle-ried, they no longer doubt their ability, with God's help, to fight and win.

Yet it is at just this point that a problem arises, different in kind from those that had gone before. The people as a whole now have their attention focused on the destination: the land west of the river Jordan, the place that even the spies had confirmed to be "flowing with milk and honey" (Num. 13:27).

The members of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, though, begin to have different thoughts. Seeing that the land through which they were travelling was ideal for raising cattle, they decide that they would prefer to stay there, to the east of the Jordan, and propose this to Moses. Unsurprisingly, he is angry at the suggestion: "Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, 'Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here? Why would you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the Lord has given them?'" (Num. 32:6-7). He reminds them of the disastrous consequences of the earlier discouragement on the part of the spies. The whole nation will suffer. This decision would show not only that they are ambivalent about God's gift of the land but also that they have learned nothing from history.

The tribes do not argue with his claim. They accept its validity, but they point out that his concern is not incompatible with their objectives. They suggest a compromise:

Then they came up to him and said, "We would like to build sheepfolds for our flocks and towns for our children. But we will then arm ourselves and go as an advance guard

before the Israelites until we have established them in their home. Meanwhile our children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance. We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan." (Num. 32:16-19)

We are willing, in other words, to join the rest of the Israelites in the battles that lie ahead. Not only this, but we are prepared to be the nation's advance guard, in the forefront of the battle. We are not afraid of combat, nor are we trying to evade our responsibilities to our people as a whole. It is simply that we wish to raise cattle, and for this, the land to the east of the Jordan is ideal. Warning them of the seriousness of their undertaking, Moses agrees. If they keep their word, they will be allowed to settle east of the Jordan. And so, indeed, it happened (Josh. 22:1-5).

That is the story on the surface. But as so often in the Torah, there are subtexts as well as texts. One in particular was noticed by the Sages, with their sensitivity to nuance and detail. Listen carefully to what the Reubenites and Gadites said: "Then they came up to him and said, 'We would like to build sheepfolds for our flocks and towns for our children.'" Moses replied: "Build towns for your children, and sheepfolds for your flocks, but do what you have promised" (Num. 32:24).

The ordering of the nouns is crucial. The men of Reuben and Gad put property before people: they spoke of their flocks first, their children second.[1] Moses reversed the order, putting special emphasis on the children. As Rashi notes:

They paid more regard to their property than to their sons and daughters, because they mentioned their cattle before the children. Moses said to them: "Not so. Make the main thing primary and the subordinate thing secondary. First build cities for your children, and only then, folds for your flocks." (Commentary to Num. 32:16)

A Midrash[2] makes the same point by way of an ingenious interpretation of a verse in Ecclesiastes: "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left" (Eccl. 10:2). The Midrash identifies "right" with Torah and life: "He brought the fire of a religion to them from his right hand" (Deut. 33:2). "Left," by contrast, refers to worldly goods: Long life is in her right

hand; In her left hand are riches and honour. (Prov. 3:16)

Hence, infers the Midrash, the men of Reuben and Gad put "riches and honour" before faith and posterity. Moses hints to them that their priorities are wrong. The Midrash continues: "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said to them: 'Seeing that you have shown greater love for your cattle than for human souls, by your life, there will be no blessing in it.'"

This turned out to be not a minor incident in the wilderness long ago, but rather, a consistent pattern throughout much of Jewish history. The fate of Jewish communities, for the most part, was determined by a single factor: their decision, or lack of decision, to put children and their education first. Already in the first century, Josephus was able to write: "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] The Rabbis ruled that "any town that lacks children at school is to be excommunicated" (Shabbat 119b). Already in the first century, the Jewish community in Israel had established a network of schools at which attendance was compulsory (Bava Batra 21a) – the first such system in history.

The pattern persisted throughout the Middle Ages. In twelfth-century France a Christian scholar noted: "A Jew, however poor, if he has ten sons, will put them all to letters, not for gain as the Christians do, but for the understanding of God's law – and not only his sons, but his daughters too." [4]

In 1432, at the height of Christian persecution of Jews in Spain, a synod was convened at Valladolid to institute a system of taxation to fund Jewish education for all. [5] In 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War, the first thing Jewish communities in Europe did to re-establish Jewish life was to re-organise the educational system. In their classic study of the shtetl, the small townships of Eastern Europe, Zborowski and Herzog write this about the typical Jewish family:

The most important item in the family budget is the tuition fee that must be paid each term to the teacher of the younger boys' school. Parents will bend in the sky to educate their son. The mother, who has charge of household accounts, will cut the family food costs to the limit if necessary, in order to pay for her son's

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By Lily & Saadia Greenberg
on the occasion of the yahrzeit of Lily's father,
Salomon Nadel, a"h,
(Shlomo Zalman ben Pinchas HaKohen)

schooling. If the worst comes to the worst, she will pawn her cherished pearls in order to pay for the school term. The boy must study, the boy must become a good Jew – for her the two are synonymous.[6]

In 1849, when Samson Raphael Hirsch became Rabbi in Frankfurt, he insisted that the community create a school before building a synagogue. After the Holocaust, the few surviving yeshiva heads and chassidic leaders concentrated on encouraging their followers to have children and build schools.[7]

It is hard to think of any other religion or civilisation that has so predicated its very existence on putting children and their education first. There have been Jewish communities in the past that were affluent and built magnificent synagogues – Alexandria in the first centuries of the Common Era is an example. Yet because they did not put children first, they contributed little to the Jewish story. They flourished briefly, then disappeared.

Moses' implied rebuke to the tribes of Reuben and Gad is not a minor historical detail but a fundamental statement of Jewish priorities. Property is secondary, children primary. Civilisations that value the young stay young. Those that invest in the future have a future. It is not what we own that gives us a share in eternity, but those to whom we give birth and the effort we make to ensure that they carry our faith and way of life into the next generation.

[1] Note also the parallel between the decision of the leaders of Reuben and Gad and that of Lot, in Genesis 13:10–13. Lot too made his choice of dwelling place based on economic considerations – the prosperity of Sodom and the cities of the plain – without considering the impact the environment would have on his children.

[2] Numbers Rabbah 22:9.

[3] Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, ii, 177–178.

[4] Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), 78.

[5] Salo Baron, *The Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945), 2:171–173.

[6] Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life Is with People: The Culture of the Shtetl* (New York: Schocken, 1974), 87.

[7] My book on this subject is Jonathan Sacks, *Will We Have Jewish Grandchildren?* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1994).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

What unites Jews throughout the world as one nation and one people? What is the most critical factor responsible for our amazing persistence as a unique historical entity, despite our having been scattered throughout the globe and subject to persecution and pogrom, despite our having been chased from pillar to post? What idea and ideal have prevented us from falling prey to assimilation, from disappearing into the sands of time as just another grain of sand, indistinguishable from the other grains, simply being “a part of” rather being “set apart from”? Why have we insisted upon Jewish

exclusivity, Jewish separatism, Jewish apartness?

Our biblical portion of Matot makes a distinction between two technical terms which it doesn't quite define: “If a man makes a vow [neder] to dedicate an object to the Lord, or takes an oath [shevua] to prohibit himself from partaking of a certain food or from participating in a certain activity, he must not desecrate his word” (Numbers 30:3). My revered teacher and mentor Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik defines a vow as pertaining to an object (a person is on a diet, and he vows that henceforth bread will become for him as prohibited as bacon), and an oath as pertaining to a subject (the person himself will no longer eat bread).

In the first instance of a vow, the emphasis is on the object, the bread, the “heftza” in the second instance of oath, the emphasis is on the subject, the person, the “gavra”.

In the Talmudic school of Brisker methodology, much of the world may be divided between gavra and heftza, subject and object; indeed, in most instances a human being, especially if he is born to be free ought be seen as a “subject.” However, if a person is enslaved, he ipso facto has been turned into an “object,” having been denied his fundamental freedom of choice.

This distinction can serve us well in attempting to answer our opening philosophical query about what sets Jews apart and makes us unique. But, first, a personal experience of significance: At the end of the Yom Kippur War, while on an El Al airplane on the way to Israel, I was shocked to discover news about an acquaintance of mine, who had lost his first family in Auschwitz, remarried and had two sons on the West Side of Manhattan, had moved to Israel and lost his eldest boy in the Six Day War—I discovered that he had now lost his only remaining son in the Yom Kippur War.

I made a condolence call as soon as I got off the plane. My disconsolate friend was sitting on the floor with his wife, surrounded by would-be comforters; no one, however, said a word, so that the atmosphere was tense with a heavy silence which shouted upwards to heaven in tear-filled protest. As I quietly intoned the condolence formula: “May the Place [Makom, a synonym for God] comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem”, my friend looked up. “Why does the blessing use the word Makom and not Elokim or Hashem?” He didn't wait for a reply, but himself offered the answer. “When I lost my first family in the Holocaust, an atrocity which I suffered as a passive victim of monstrous Nazi fascist-racists, I could not even mourn properly and I could not be comforted; it all seemed so absurd and meaningless.

Likutei Divrei Torah

“Now, however, although I am devastated and unable to speak to my comforters, I nevertheless do feel comforted.

“The place comforts me; the fact that my second set of children were killed because they chose to live in Israel which, is indeed a dangerous war zone, because they chose to realize our destiny which is Jerusalem, because they chose to guarantee Jewish future by risking their own present lives. Both sets of children were sacred sacrifices, but the first set were passive objects whereas the second were dynamic subjects who actively fought for our Jewish future!

Yes, the place comforts me...”

Allow me to interpret this distraught but wise father's words on the basis of yet another insight from Rav Soloveichik. In Kol Dodi Dofek, my rebbe distinguishes between the Holocaust experience in which the Jews were united by a common fate (goral) foisted upon them from without, from a largely sinister gentile world cooperating enthusiastically with the “final solution” of Nazi Germans—and the Sinai experience, in which the Jews were united by a common destiny (yi'ud) which they accepted upon themselves, pledging to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers to convey God's message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice to the world. It is this sense of destiny which brought us to Israel and compels us to fight against tyranny and terrorism.

At this time, we remember the three pure and holy sacrificial Jewish victims of six years ago—Gil-Ad Shaer, Eyal Yifrah and Naftali Fraenkel who were captured and mercilessly murdered outside Alon Shvut in Gush Etzion. Tragically an innocent Palestinian boy, Muhammad Abu Khdeir, was cruelly murdered at the hands of misguided and evil Jewish teenagers. The Gush lies geographically between Hebron—where God initially chose Abraham and made him the father of a multitude of nations including Ishmael because he was teaching his descendants God's path of compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Gen. 18:18-19)—and Jerusalem, where Jewish and world history will culminate in the rebuilding of a Holy Temple from whence Zion's message of a Torah of peace and redemption will be accepted by all the nations of the globe. Now too, the “place” (makom) comforts us in our period of national rebirth—among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersch Weinreb

Honesty and Integrity: very so often, I come across a sentence of another person's writing which expresses one of my own thoughts in a language far superior to my own. Over the years, I have contemplated and written about the concepts of “honesty” and “integrity” and the difference between the two.

But never was I able to articulate their precise definitions and the difference between them as cogently and as concisely as in the following passage from Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*: "Integrity includes but goes beyond honesty. Honesty is... conforming our words to reality. Integrity is conforming reality to our words—in other words, keeping promises and fulfilling expectations. This requires an integrated character, a oneness, primarily with self but also with life."

Honesty for Covey, and I for one heartily agree, is the virtue describing reality exactly as it is, of telling the truth. In this day and age, when there is so much confusion as to whether or not there even is such a thing as truth, it is refreshing to see the place of honesty restored to the list of important human virtues.

For Judaism, truth, *emet*, is more than just a virtue. It is one of the three fundamental principles, along with justice and peace, upon which the world stands. In the words of the Talmud, "The signature of the Holy One, Blessed be He, is truth."

So rare is the man of truth that legend has the aged Diogenes searching for him with lanterns. But as rare as the trait of honesty is, the trait of integrity is even more difficult to find.

Integrity is the ability not only to say what you mean, but to mean what you say. Following Covey, it is the quality of conforming one's actions to one's words, of reliably following through on one's commitment. It is more than the ability to make things happen. It is making your own promises happen!

This week's Torah portion, Parshat Matot (Numbers 30:1-32:42), opens with a lengthy and intricate discussion of the concepts of "the vow." Biblical teachings insist that the words we express must be taken very seriously; indeed, we are taught that our words are sacred. Once a person, man or woman, young or old, simpleton or scholar, utters a commitment, he or she is duty-bound to honor that commitment. "Motza sefatecha tishmor ve'asita, that which your lips express must be honored and performed."

As helpful as is Covey's succinct definition of "integrity," it is also deceptively simple. There is so much more that we need to know about integrity. And about "honesty," for that matter.

For one thing, honesty and integrity are not just descriptors of individual persons' characters. Rather, they are social values, which ideally should define the essence of human communities and entire societies. From a Jewish perspective, "honesty" and "integrity" cannot be restricted to individual paragons of virtue, saints and holy men, but must become universal cultural norms.

This is why the laws of vows, unlike all the other laws of the Torah, are explicitly given to *rashei hamatot*, the chieftains of the tribes. It is to emphasize that the sanctity of speech is not just a goal for a few spiritually-gifted individuals. It must be enunciated as one of the essential mores of the entire tribe.

The Talmud relates the story of an immortal community, a legendary village that knew not death. This was because no one there ever lied. This idyllic existence came to an abrupt end, however, when a young person, eager to protect the privacy of his parent, told an inquiring visitor that his parent was not home. A harmless and well-intentioned remark, common to us all. A white lie, perhaps, but a lie nevertheless, and one which ruined forever the eternal life of that fabled village.

Yet another lesson about keeping our word is taught in the opening verses of this week's Torah portion (Numbers 30:1-17). Sometimes, we overextend ourselves and make promises that we cannot possibly keep. In moments of extreme urgency, or sublime inspiration, we are wont to express commitments that are beyond our capacity to fulfill.

Can a vow thus expressed be annulled? The Torah, ever practical, answers "yes," and describes some of the procedures designed to release a person from his or her vows. The Talmud, in an entire tractate devoted to this topic, specifies the circumstances and conditions under which such a release can be obtained.

Most well-known among the "ceremonies" releasing us from our personal vows and promises is the Kol Nidrei prayer which ushers in our most hallowed day, Yom Kippur. Not really a prayer in the ordinary sense, Kol Nidrei is a statement in which we declare our past vows null and void. This custom is experienced by many as strange and as an offense to the value of integrity. But I personally have always found that it reinforces the role of integrity in my life and in the lives of all of us who live in the "real world."

During the entire year, you and I make many commitments and resolutions. With the noblest of motives, we promise things to our loved ones, verbally establish objectives to improve the world around us, or simply vow to lose weight, stop smoking, or start exercising.

As the year wears on, situations change, priorities shift, and we ourselves become different. At least one time each year, on Yom Kippur, we realize how unrealistic we were and that we erred in our assessment of what we could accomplish. And so, we ask that the Almighty release us from these impossible and often no longer relevant commitments, and begin with Divine help a new slate, hoping that the next time we make a promise, it will be one that we will be able to keep.

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Judaism teaches us the primary importance of keeping our word. But it does not lose sight of our human frailties and limitations and recognizes that often it is not moral failure that explains our lack of integrity, but simple human weakness, hopefully rare and surely forgiven by God.

Integrity is a cherished value for the society at large. The acknowledgement of human limitations in maintaining integrity must be accepted. These are two important and timely lessons from this week's Torah portion.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky: Eretz Yisrael, Beis Hamikdash and the Center of Torah

A primary theme of the parshiyos of Matos and Masei is the significance of Eretz Yisrael. Parshas Matos concludes with the commitment of bnei Gad and bnei Reuven to accompany the rest of the Jewish People into Eretz Yisrael. Parshas Masei deals with the obligation to eradicate idolatry from Eretz Yisrael and the obligation to establish cities for Levi'im as well as *arei miklat* - cities of refuge to protect someone who killed unintentionally. The parsha ends with the conclusion of the story of the daughter of Tzafchad and how it would impact on the division of Eretz Yisrael. The boundaries of Eretz Yisrael are delineated in Parshas Masei and there are many halachic ramifications of these borders. In the sugya concerning the halachic boundaries of Eretz Yisrael, the Rishonim explain that there are different aspects of Eretz Yisrael and the borders of Eretz Yisrael are not necessarily the same for these different aspects. One particular dimension of Eretz Yisrael is especially significant as Tisha B'Av approaches.

The Mishna in *Maseches Kelim* describes the various levels of *kedusha* that are dependent on location, the highest of which is the *Kodesh Hakodashim*. Each location has its own unique halachos that differentiate it from the other areas. The mishna highlights the halachos of the Heichal, the Azara and other parts of the Beis Hamikdash, and Yerushalayim. The final *kedusha* mentioned is *kedushas Eretz Yisrael*. In describing the halachos that distinguish Eretz Yisrael from *chutz la'aretz*, the mishna does not make any mention of the obvious mitzvos such as *terumos*, *ma'asros* and *shmeita*. Rather, the mishna mentions the mitzvos of the omer and the *shteihalechem* - the two loaves offered on Shavuos that must come from grain that grew in Eretz Yisrael. The commentators explain that the mishna is not addressing the unique status of Eretz Yisrael concerning agriculture mitzvos. Rather, the theme of the mishna is the sanctity of the Beis Hamikdash, and Eretz Yisrael is the broadest area which is imbued with *kedushas Hamikdash*. It is for this reason that certain *korbanos*, such as the omer and the *shteihalechem*, must originate in Eretz Yisrael.

There are several halachos relating to Torah study and authority that are linked to Eretz

Yisrael. The authentic semicha that began when Moshe conferred semicha upon Yehoshua enables one to serve as a judge in all cases of Torah law. This semicha, which can only be granted in Eretz Yisrael, was conferred upon qualified individuals until the period of the Amoraim, at which time it ended because Eretz Yisrael was no longer the center of Torah. Similarly, the laws that govern declaring Rosh Chodesh via witnesses testifying in beis din that they saw the new moon are only practiced in Eretz Yisrael. At the same time that semicha ended, the declaration of Rosh Chodesh in beis din ceased and a different process, involving a set calendar, took its place. These two halochos of semicha and kiddush hachodesh that are dependent on Eretz Yisrael are not related to agriculture. Rather, these laws that are dependent on Torah study and the authority of Torah scholars that emanates from the Beis Hamikdash. The Ramban explains that the Beis Hamikdash is the continuation of Har Sinai and as such it is the ultimate source for all Torah study and authority. The kedushas Hamikdash which Eretz Yisrael has allows it to serve as the source for Torah, and thus as the location where semicha can be conferred, and also as the exclusive locale wherein Rosh Chodesh can be declared via witnesses.

As we commemorate the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash we also mourn the loss of Eretz Yisrael as the source of Torah. As we have been blessed to witness the tremendous growth of Torah in Eretz Yisrael in recent years, we continue to dream of the day when the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt. On that day Eretz Yisrael will regain its glory as the broadest area imbued with the kedusha of the Beis Hamikdash. Eretz Yisrael will once again be the center for talmud Torah and we will merit to see the word of Hashem go forth from Yerushalayim.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

A Divine Kiss - hey journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. Aaron the Kohen ascended Mount Hor (Al-Pi) according to HASHEM's bidding and died there, on the first day of the fifth month in the 40th year of the Children of Israel's exodus from Egypt. (Bamidbar 33:37-38)

According to HASHEM's bidding: (Al-Pi HASHEM ...lit., by the mouth of HASHEM) This teaches us that he died by the [Divine] kiss. — [B.B. 17a] – Rashi

The phrase Al Pi ...by the mouth of HASHEM is to be taken literally, Rashi explains, and therefore we learn that Aaron died by the kiss of HASHEM. Moshe and Miriam also passed from this world in the same way. It must be reserved for the best of the best. What does it mean to die by the "kiss of death" from HASHEM? How might one merit such a lofty departure?

The Talmud in tractate Brochos tells us that there are 903 forms of death. It's based on a verse in Tehillim (68:21) – "V-L'HASHEM... L'maves Totzaot"- means, "Through HASHEM are the many avenues of death." The numerical value of the word TOTZAOT is 903. Hence the 903 ways of literally "going out".

The Talmud goes on to explain that the lightest and easiest form of death is this "kiss of death" and the most severe is a form of choking called "askara". The "kiss of death" the Gemora says, is like pulling a hair out of milk and the "askara" is like separating a tangle of wool and thorns or like pulling ropes through the narrow hole of a boat. One is easy and the other is strenuous and arduous.

About this one of my teachers asked, 38 years ago, I remember, "Since when is hair compared to the soul and milk compared to the body? Essav was hairy and hair is typically symbolic of materialism while milk is pure, white, and nourishing and more representative of the soul!" Then he said, "That's exactly right! For the extra righteous person, the body is a miniature impediment like a hair and once that slight covering is removed like a hair from milk, the Tzadik's Neshama is fully exposed, is opened up to the Ohr Ain Sof... The Endless Light of HASHEM in the next world!"

Since he was longing to cleave to HASHEM even while strolling in the darkness of this world he is naturally drawn into the arms of his Creator like a child waiting to be picked up from Kindergarten class by his mother. The parent just peaks inside the door and the child goes running into his mother's welcoming arms. Such is the "kiss of death" Al- Pi by the mouth of HASHEM. HASHEM comes close to the Tzadik and automatically his Neshama is drawn automatically and easily back to its spiritual source.

Askara is the experience of those souls that are mired in the world of temptation and material indulgence. I recall witnessing on 47th street in Manhattan a very intense scene. A van had parked briefly in a forbidden zone to make a quick delivery. By the time he came out, the Department of Transportation, not unlike the Malach HaMaves- the angel of death, already had his van hooked up to the lift.

The poor driver tried to appeal to the humanity and emotions of the tow truck driver but there was no such human heart to be found. He spread his body across the windshield of his van screaming and refusing to let go. Eventually he was forced to yield. It was sad. Neil Sedaka sang so many years ago, "Breaking up is hard to do!" He probably didn't know how profoundly true his words really are.

The Neshama that is in entrapped in this world and has not learned to wean himself from the

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physical and to acquire an appetite for ultimate truth is in for a struggling time when the van or the car or the house or the body he so greatly associated with is towed away. To the Tzadik it was a hair, but to him, it's all of him!

How does one merit this lighter form of death? I have a theory! It is written in this same Parsha Masei at the very beginning, "Moshe recorded their starting points for their journeys according to the word- (Al Pi HASHEM) of HASHEM, and these were their journeys with their starting points.

If one lives his life Al Pi HASHEM – by the word of HASHEM then he can hope to merit to depart this world Al –Pi HASHEM, by the mouth of HASHEM, with a Divine Kiss!

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

The Cities of Refuge (*Arei Miklat*) (35:9-34): The Meaning of the Term

Rav Elchanan Samet

I. A place set aside for the flight of an inadvertent killer in four *parashot* in the Torah

In four different contexts, the Torah discusses the establishment of a place to which a person who inadvertently killed another person can flee:

1. In *Parashat Mishpatim*, at the beginning of the laws of damages:

Shemot 21:12: He who smites a man, so that he dies, shall surely be put to death. 13: And if a man lie not in wait, but God cause it to come to hand; then I will appoint you a place to where he may flee. 14: And if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbor, to slay him with guile, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

2. In *Parashat Masei* we find the longest and most detailed passage (*Bamidbar* 35:9-34) that will be discussed in this study. The passage dealing with the cities of refuge appears here as part of a series of commands given to Moshe in Arvot Moav in anticipation of Israel's entry into the land and the eventual settlement in it. At the beginning of chapter 35, there appears the command to give the Levites special cities for them to live in throughout the country, and in this context the six cities of refuge are mentioned for the first time:

Bamidbar 35:6: And the cities that you shall give to the Levites, they shall be the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee there; and beside them you shall give forty and two cities.

Immediately after this command, there appears the command to establish the six cities of refuge. At this point they are not discussed as cities given to the Levites, but exclusively in relation to their role as a place of refuge for inadvertent killers.

3. In *Parashat Va'etchanan* the Torah relates: *Devarim* 4:41: Then Moshe separated three cities beyond the Jordan toward the sun-rising;

42: that the manslayer might flee there, he that slays his neighbor unawares and hated him not in time past; and that fleeing to one of these cities he might live.

The names and geographical location of these cities are provided in the next verse.

These three verses constitute a **narrative** divide between Moshe's first great oration (in chapters

1-4) and his second series of orations (beginning in chapter 5).

According to Rashi, Ramban, and Seforno, Moshe's action served an educational purpose: "After finishing the introduction to his explanation of the Torah [= in the oration in chapters 1-4], he separated the cities, to show Israel how important is the matter of observing the *mitzvot*, for he took care to observe part of a positive precept" (Seforno). According to the Rashbam, it was important to introduce this short story about Moshe's action in order to understand one of the *mitzvot* included in his oration concerning the *mitzvot*, which begins immediately afterwards in chapter 5, as will be explained below.

4. In *Parashat Shofetim* (*Devarim* 11:1-13), Moshe repeats some of the matters discussed in the passage dealing with the cities of refuge in the book of *Bemidbar*, but he omits others.

The main novelty in this *parasha* lies in the command to divide the borders of the land into three and establish cities of refuge at equal distances, and also to prepare roads leading to those cities:

Devarim 19:6: Lest the avenger of blood pursue the manslayer, while his heart is hot, and overtake him, **because the way is long**, and smite him mortally; whereas he was not deserving of death, inasmuch as he hated him not in time past.

In this *parasha*, Moshe commands only: "You shall separate three cities for you in the midst of your land, which the Lord your God gives you to possess it" (v. 2) – that is to say, in the land of Canaan west of the Jordan. Only in the future: "And if the Lord your God enlarge your border, as He has sworn to your fathers, and give you all the land which He had promised to give to your fathers... then shall you add three cities for you, besides these three" (vv. 8-9). What about the three on the east bank of the Jordan?

According to the Rashbam (in his commentary to 4:41), the story concerning Moshe's separation of these cities in *Devarim* chapter 4, before the beginning of his oration concerning the *mitzvot*, is intended to answer this question: "The three cities which the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded him in *Eleh Masei* to establish on the [east] bank of the Jordan are not mentioned there [= in *Parashat Shofetim*], and Moshe did not command Israel [about them]. Therefore, it is written here

[= in *Devarim* chap. 4] that Moshe already separated them, and therefore he did not command Israel [about them]."

The common denominator of all four of these contexts is the emphasis placed on the fact that the cities designated to serve as a refuge for killers provide asylum only to one who killed inadvertently. The three halakhic passages (as opposed to the narrative passage) emphasize that a deliberate killer who fled to one of the cities should be removed from there and punished with the death penalty.¹

II. Miklat ("Refuge") – The guide word in our *parasha* – The passage appearing in the book of *Bemidbar* is uniquely different in style from all of its parallels in the Torah: In it and only in it do we find the word *miklat*. The absence of this word is striking in the two contexts in the book of *Devarim* where these cities are discussed. (In *Sefer Shemot*, reference is made to "a place to where he may flee," and therefore the absence of the word *miklat* is less noticeable.)

The presence of this word in our *parasha* is very prominent; it is found ten times as a guide word.

The first five instances of the word are found in the first half of the passage (vv. 9-21), in the section that opens this half (in vv. 10-15). In this section, the *mitzva* is given to set aside six cities to which the inadvertent killer may flee.

The word *miklat* appears here in two different roles. The first role is to serve as an adjective describing the word "city," which appears before it: Thus, in verses 11, 13, and 14, in the repeated phrase: "and they shall be cities of refuge (to you)." The other role is to indicate the purpose of these cities, and here the word is connected to the letter *lamed*, which denotes purpose: "And the cities shall be to you **for refuge** (*le-miklat*) from the avenger" (v. 12); "shall these six cities be **for refuge** (*le-miklat*), that everyone that kills any person through error may flee there" (v. 15)

The next five instances of the word *miklat* appear in the second half of the passage (vv. 22-34), and they appear in each of the three sections of which it is comprised (22-25; 26-28; 29-34). After a definition is given as to who the inadvertent killer is who may flee to the city of refuge (in vv. 22-24), this city is referred to in each of its five appearances as "his city of refuge" – that is, the city of refuge of the inadvertent killer.

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Since in this half we are dealing specifically with a killer who killed inadvertently and fled to a particular city, the word "city" (*ir*) appears always in the singular (whereas in the first half, it appears always in the plural) and with a pronominal suffix that associates the city with the inadvertent killer – "his refuge."

What, then, is the meaning of the word *miklat*? Modern Hebrew speakers have no difficulty understanding this word: Almost every house in Israel has an underground shelter called a *miklat*. Thus, the word *miklat* means a place of protection and shelter.

This meaning emerges from Targum Onkelos, who translates *miklat* as *shezavuta*, "rescue," and this is the way the word appears to have been understood by many commentators, even if this is not stated explicitly.

But from where do we know this? This explanation is based on the context in which the word appears several times in our *parasha* in connection with the killer's fleeing to these cities and away from the avenger of blood (especially in v. 12, where it is stated: "for refuge from the avenger," but also in vv. 15, 25-26).

But this does not suffice. The early biblical commentators and grammarians explained the meaning of the words of the Bible in two complementary ways: They examined the etymology of the word and tried to infer its meaning from that, and they also examined all the instances of the word in Scripture in different contexts, so that the explanation of the word in one place is supported by its appearance in other places in which it is found in different contexts.

Where, then, does the word *miklat* appear in other places in Scripture? It appears only in our *parasha* and in two other places in Scripture that are directly dependent upon our *parasha*!² In other words, the word *miklat* is found in Scripture in only one context, a fact that raises uncertainty about any explanation of the word based on that context.³

Elsewhere, we have noted that certain literary units in the Bible enjoy stylistic uniqueness. A certain word appears in them multiple times, but is found nowhere else, or else it is exceedingly rare in other places. The appearance of that word in that literary unit – where it usually serves as a guide word – "paints" the unit in a unique linguistic shade and gives the word enhanced

¹ In this way, among others, the protection afforded by the cities of refuge is fundamentally different from the protection of places of asylum recognized by other peoples in the ancient world:

Places of refuge were recognized by other peoples. We have evidence of such places in ancient times from Egypt, Syria, Greece, and pre-Islamic Arabia. In general, these refuges do not distinguish between innocent and guilty, between inadvertent and deliberate [offenses], but rather offer absolute protection to all who enter their gates... The refuges of these nations were temples... and among the Arabs also the tent of the prince or any distinguished person, and so too his grave. The rule was: Anyone who harms the protected person is regarded as having harmed the owner of the house. Regarding these concepts, Biblical law effected a fundamental upheaval. (Moshe Greenberg, *Encyclopedia Mikra'it*, vol. VI, p. 387)

See also Nechama Leibowitz's remarks in her "Studies in *Devarim*," *Parashat Shofetim*, p. 192.

² In *Yehoshua* 22:2-6, we find God's command to fulfill what is stated in our *parasha*: "Assign you the cities of refuge, whereof I spoke to you by the hand of Moshe," and that command includes the main laws found in our *parasha*. Verses 7-9 describe the fulfillment of that command and list the names of the six cities of refuge on the two sides of the Jordan. It should be noted that at the end of that chapter, we find another name for the cities of refuge: "These were the appointed cities (*arei ha-mu'ada*) for all the children of Israel" (v. 9).

In I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 6:39 and on, a list is provided of the cities that were given to the priests and the Levites, among which are mentioned Chevron and Shechem as cities of refuge. (Other cities of refuge are mentioned there, but they are not identified as such).

³ In the book of *Tehillim*, there are several synonyms for places of protection: *machaseh*, *tzur*, *ohel*, *metzuda*, *sukka*, and others, but the word *miklat* does not appear there.

importance, and sometimes critical importance, for understanding the entire literary unit. But this is the problem: Because of the rarity of the word, its meaning is not always clear-cut. Sometimes it is difficult to explain the word based on the literary unit itself, without the help of its appearances in other, varied contexts.⁴

This, indeed, is the situation regarding the passage dealing with the cities of refuge.

Let us then ignore the word in its form of *miklat* and focus on the meaning of the root *kof-lamed-tet* in Hebrew. Is this root found in Scripture? In fact, it appears in only one other place that is not in the context of the *arei miklat*, which we will discuss in the next section. But before we do that, we will turn our attention to the root *kof-lamed-tet* in Rabbinic Hebrew.

The root *kof-lamed-tet*, which is common in Rabbinic Hebrew and also in Aramaic, means "to gather, to contain, to receive within." Like the word *miklat* in the sense of a place of protection, the root *kof-lamed-tet* in the sense of containment has made its way into Modern Hebrew. From it were derived terms such as *basis kelita u-miyun*, "absorption base," *miklat radio*, "radio receiver," and others. This meaning has no necessary connection to rescue and protection.

If we explain the phrase *ir miklat* in accordance with the meaning of the word *miklat* in Rabbinic Hebrew, it would mean the "city into which was gathered an inadvertent killer, who is now contained within it." A hint to this meaning may perhaps be found in the passage dealing with the cities of refuge in the book of *Yehoshua* (20:4): "... And he [the inadvertent killer] shall stand at the entrance of the city and declare his cause in

the ears of the elders of that city, and they shall take him into the city to them and give him a place, that he may dwell among them." It is possible that this is the way the term *ir miklat* was understood by *Chazal*, who derived from the noun *miklat* the verb *koletet* in relation to this city, apparently in the sense of "receives within it."⁵

This explanation, according to which *ir miklat* does not mean "a city of refuge," raises the question of what the word *miklat* adds to these cities, to the point that it is so prominently featured in our *parasha* as a guide word. This was noted by the author of the *Metzudot Zion* commentary to *Yehoshua* 20:2, who writes: "Because it takes in killers, as it is not the way of other cities to allow killers to live in them."

We have no assurance, however, that Rabbinic Hebrew can serve as a proof as to the meaning of the word *miklat* in Biblical Hebrew: "The language of the Torah is distinct, as is the language of the Sages" (*Avoda Zara* 58b). It is possible that these are two different words from two different layers of the Hebrew language.

III. A bullock that is *kalut* and the *arei miklat*

We stated above that the root *kof-lamed-tet* appears one time in Scripture not in the context of cities of refuge. We refer to *Vayikra* 22:23, a verse included in a list of physical blemishes that disqualify an animal from being brought as an offering on the altar: Either a bullock or a lamb that is *saru'a* or *kalut*, that may you offer for a freewill-offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted.

The problem is that the two blemishes mentioned in this verse have been interpreted by

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the commentators in different ways. It seems that *kalut* is *saru'a's* partner and is connected to it. What, then, is *saru'a*? We will explain these two blemishes in the wake of the words of the Ibn Ezra. The blemish of *saru'a* is mentioned in the list of blemishes that disqualify a priest from performing the service (*Vayikra* 21:18):

For whatever man has a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that is *charum* or *saru'a*.

There the Ibn Ezra explains: *Charum* – the opposite of *saru'a*; *charum* is derived from *cherem*. *Saru'a* – from the root *mehistare'a*.

The Ibn Ezra alludes to *Yeshayahu* 28:20: "For the bed is too short for a man to stretch himself (*mehistare'a*), and the covering too narrow when he gathers himself up" – the bed upon which the person lies is too short for him to stretch his limbs out upon it. According to this, the word *saru'a* denotes an extended limb, as Rashi writes: "One of whose limbs [i.e. one of a pair] is larger than the other." Alternatively, the Ibn Ezra may mean that **all** of his limbs are larger than normal – that is to say, he is a giant.

Regarding the blemishes of animals (23:23), the Ibn Ezra explains: *Saru'a* – like the first one; *ve-kalut* – its opposite, **and it has the same sense as *ir miklat***.

We see, then, that the word *kalut* means that "one of its limbs is smaller than the other" (the opposite of *saru'a* as that term was understood by Rashi, although Rashi himself does not explain *kalut* in this manner), or perhaps that **all** of its limbs are smaller than normal (i.e. a dwarf). In fact, in Arabic the word *kulat* means "dwarf."⁶

It turns out, then, that the root *kof-lamed-tet* in

⁴ We discussed this phenomenon in our study of *Parashat Shelach*, first series, section 3. In that same study, we discuss the root *taf-vav-resh*, which appears twelve times as a guide word in the story of the people who were sent to scout out the land. The interpretation of this root is the key to understanding the entire story, but there is a certain difficulty owing to the limited instances of the word in other contexts.

⁵ a. For example: "Not until three cities were selected in the Land of Israel did the [first] three cities beyond the Jordan receive [*koletot*] fugitives... until all six could receive [*koletot*] fugitives" (*Makkot* 2:4); "Just as the city receives [*koletet*] fugitives, so does its boundary receive [*kolet*] fugitives" (*Makkot* 2:7).

b. The root *kof-lamed-tet* in Rabbinic Hebrew is used also in the sense of rescue and protection, as the root was translated by Onkelos. For example: "Great is charity... whoever gives it is praised, and he saves [*kolet*] himself from the punishment of Gehinnom" (*Seder Eliyahu Zuta* I, p. 164 in ed. Ish-Shalom). It does not say here that Gehinnom does not receive him, but rather that the charity-giver *kolet atzmo* – meaning, he saves himself. It is possible that this is also the meaning of *Makkot* 2:7: "Just as the city rescues [*koletet*] fugitives, so does its boundary rescue [*kolet*] fugitives."

⁶ a. So we find in the HAVA Dictionary (an Arabic-English dictionary for classical Arabic). Yehoshua Blau, *Milon Le-Tekstim Arviyim-Yehudiyim Mi-Yemei Ha-Beinayim* (Jerusalem, 2006, p. 562), s.v. *kilit*, brings the meaning "short." This is based on the book of roots of the tenth-century Karaite grammarian David ben Avraham Alfasi (*Ketav G'ama Al-Alfat*), which translates *saru'a ve-kalut* as *mesavsav ve-kilit*, which Blau re-translates as *mitrachev ve-katzar*, "widened and short." This is like the explanation of the Ibn Ezra.

Ben Yehuda, in his dictionary, s.v., *kalut* (I), cites such a usage in the book *Shevilei Olam* of R. Shimshon Bloch (Zhovkva, 5588). Tur-Sinai (ibid. note 2) notes that some modern scholars equate the Biblical term *kalut* with *kolat* in Arabic in the sense of dwarf or pigmy, and that this is a reasonable understanding.

b. If "either a bullock or a lamb that is *saru'a* or *kalut*" refers to a giant and a dwarf, we can understand what appears to be the plain sense of the verse – that these are blemishes that are less serious than the others, and therefore "you may offer them for a freewill-offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted." The giant and the dwarf are irregular, but no particular organ or limb is deformed. *Chazal*, however, did not explain *saru'a* and *kalut* in this manner (see below), and they similarly did not explain this law that "you may offer them for a freewill-offering" in its plain sense (see Rashi).

c. *Chazal* explained the blemish of *kalut* based on the meaning of the root in Rabbinic Hebrew: enclosed, connected. Thus, they explained in the *Sifra* and in tractate *Bekhorot* (40a) that its hoof is similar to that of an ass – connected and closed. Rashi explains the words accordingly. (According to this, *saru'a* and *kalut* are not opposites.)

d. It is possible that there is a connection between the meaning of the root *kof-lamed-tet* in Rabbinic Hebrew (to be gathered, received) and its meaning in Arabic (dwarf): A dwarf is gathered into himself.

Scripture denotes miniaturization or constriction, at least according to the Ibn Ezra and in light of the word's meaning in Arabic.

The Ibn Ezra connects the word *kalut* to the term *ir miklat*. According to this, *ir miklat* should be understood to mean "a city that constricts, makes smaller." What does it make smaller? The area in which the inadvertent killer may live. According to this explanation as well, the term *ir miklat* does not mean "city of refuge."

This proposed interpretation of *ir miklat* disconnects the meaning of the inadvertent killer's residence in this city from the existence of the avenger of blood. Even without this danger, the killer must remain in his *ir miklat*. The reason for this is that the *ir miklat*, by definition, is a place of exile for the inadvertent killer.⁷

Indeed, according to the Mishna and the Talmud, the killer does not "flee" to the *ir miklat* (as the Torah formulates his movement); rather, he is **exiled there**. In the second chapter of *Makkot* ("Elu Hen Ha-Golin"), which deals with the laws of the inadvertent killer and his living in an *ir miklat*, the verb *goleh* appears thirty times. This semantic change is rooted, in our opinion, in the plain sense of the term *miklat*, which is the guide word in our passage.⁸

The term *ir miklat* also expresses the **unique nature of the exile** imposed upon the inadvertent killer. It is not just that he is obligated to leave his place and move to some other place. The *ir miklat* serves the exile as a miniaturized alternative to the wide-open world in which he lived until now. The *ir miklat* is for him a separate world – a miniature version of the outside world.

We will deal with the halakhic implications of this idea in the last section of our study.

IV. The two roles of a city of refuge

A question may be raised regarding the interpretation that we proposed in the previous section for the word *miklat* as a constricted or a

constricting place. How are we to understand the verses in which the word *miklat* appears in the context of rescue from the avenger of blood – "And the cities shall be to you for a *miklat* from the avenger" (v. 12); "shall these six cities be for *miklat*, that every one that kills any person through error may flee there" (v. 15)? Indeed, it was these verses that gave rise to the interpretation (appearing already in Targum Onkelos) based on the context – that *miklat* denotes refuge and protection.

We will answer this question after a brief clarification.

We saw in the previous section that the inadvertent killer's residing in an *ir miklat* has two different and contrary roles. On the one hand, his living there is an **obligation**, as it serves as a place of exile that severely restricts the area in which he may live – sort of a prison. On the other hand, his living there serves as protection from the blood avenger, and in this sense it is a **privilege** for the inadvertent killer.

Is there a connection between these two roles of an *ir miklat*? The answer to this question seems to be in the affirmative. These two roles impact upon each other and create a critical balance between them.

Let us first examine this connection from the perspective of protecting the killer from the blood avenger. This protection is not provided by way of walls and armed guards who prevent the blood avenger from entering the city, but by way of law. The Torah defines the legitimate area of the inadvertent killer as exclusively in the city of his exile – his refuge. In this territory, the free action of the blood avenger is banned. If he kills the inadvertent killer within this boundary, he will be executed as a murderer, and the "heat of his heart" will not exempt him from punishment. It turns out that the *ir miklat*, in its role as a closed and miniaturized world for the inadvertent killer

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and precisely because of it, creates a safe place for him to live, a place where the blood avenger has no license to kill him.

Now let us examine the inadvertent killer's residence in the *ir miklat* from the perspective of the punishment of exile that this entails. What assures that the inadvertent killer will remain in his place of exile? Once again, the city is not surrounded by fences and guards who prevent the killer from leaving. What prevents him from leaving is the threat he will be killed outside the *ir miklat* by the blood avenger, who is permitted to kill him there. (In fact, even other people are not punished for killing him there, in accordance with the position of R. Akiva in *Makkot* 2:7.)

Thus, the two roles of the *ir miklat* create a mutual contribution. The license granted to the blood avenger to kill the inadvertent killer outside the *ir miklat* forces the killer not to leave it, and thus to comply with the duty of exile imposed upon him; at the same time, the absolute prohibition cast upon the blood avenger to kill the inadvertent killer within the confines of the *ir miklat* assures the killer of protection as long as he remains in exile there.

According to what we have said here, we understand the connection expressed in the verses cited above between the city being for *miklat* – for exile in a constricted place – and the city being a place of rescue for the inadvertent killer from the hands of the blood avenger. It is a *miklat* for the killer – restricting his life exclusively to its borders, and at the same restricting its area from the activity of the blood avenger.

V. The halakhic implications of the idea of the restriction of life in an *ir miklat*

The significance of residing in an *ir miklat* as a restriction of the inadvertent killer's life-space to the borders of that city was well expressed by R. Isser Yehuda Unterman z"l, Chief Rabbi of Israel,

⁷ This idea, which is the essence of the halakhic understanding of the laws in our *parasha*, stems not only from the interpretation that we are offering to the term *ir miklat*, but also from the plain sense of two laws appearing in the section dealing with the cities of refuge:

a. V. 25: "... and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge... and he shall dwell therein until the death of the High Priest who was anointed with the holy oil" (and again in v. 28). The assignment of this time is certainly not connected to saving the inadvertent killer from the danger posed by the blood avenger (even though after the death of the High Priest, the blood avenger is certainly forbidden to kill the inadvertent killer). Rather, it stems from the idea that an inadvertent killer requires atonement; this atonement is completed with the death of the High Priest, but it continues as long as he remains in the city of refuge. This implies that the killer is **obligated** to reside in the *ir miklat* until the death of the High Priest, regardless of the danger posed by the blood avenger.

b. V. 32: "And you shall take no ransom for one who has fled to his city of refuge, that he should come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest." This law is a continuation of the similar law that precedes it in v. 31: "Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer, who is guilty of death; but he shall surely be put to death." A comparison of these two laws teaches that the inadvertent killer's residing in his *ir miklat* is regarded as his punishment, which is similar to the death penalty imposed on the deliberate killer (but, of course, a lighter punishment). The Torah forbids the substitution of a monetary ransom for either of these punishments. If the purpose of dwelling in the city of refuge was just the protection of the killer from the blood avenger, there would be no place for these laws.

⁸ What we have stated here, as well as what was stated in the previous note, counters the explanation offered by Nechama Leibowitz for the difference between the language of the Torah and that of the Mishna (*Studies in Devarim, Parashat Shofetim*, pp. 192-193):

How far the Torah in this way achieved its aim, to attain by restriction of the power of the blood-avenger the eventual eradication of that institution, may be seen from the difference between the language of the Torah and that of the Talmudic sages... The Mishna does not mention the flight at all but speaks merely of exile... implying that the cities of refuge were no longer needed as a protection against the angry pursuer, since the blood-avenger no longer pursued his victim. This instinct of personal vendetta had been blunted. No longer was it so deeply felt that the son who did not avenge his father's death was shirking his duty. The city of refuge remained not as an asylum but as a punishment, as exile that atoned for the iniquity.

Regarding Nechama Leibowitz's argument, the following should be noted: 1) In the time of *Chazal*, there were no cities of refuge at all, neither as havens from the blood avenger nor as exile to atone for sin. 2) The attitude toward blood-avenging is discussed by the Sages in the Mishna (*Makkot* 2:7); according to R. Yose the Galilean, it is a *mitzva* for the blood avenger to kill the inadvertent killer who left his city of refuge, and according to R. Akiva, it is permitted. 3) The killer's fleeing to the city of refuge is described in *Makkot* 2:5: "Two Torah scholars were delegated to escort the manslayer in case anyone attempted to slay him on the way, and that they might speak to him." Thus, it is clear that in the consciousness of *Chazal*, this "instinct of personal vendetta" had not been blunted and it was necessary to deal with it by way of officers of the court. 4) *Chazal's* understanding of an *ir miklat* as a place of punishment and exile for the inadvertent killer is well anchored in our *parasha*, both in the laws cited in the previous note and in the very term *ir miklat* as we have interpreted it. But because this conception is not sufficiently prominent in the Torah, *Chazal* emphasized it through the linguistic use that they made of the term "exile" in reference to the cities of refuge. 5) The concept of "blood vengeance" in the Torah and in the words of *Chazal* is not one of "personal vendetta" or an "instinct" that must be blunted. This is not the forum in which to expand upon this matter.

in his book, *Shevet Mi-Yehuda*, although he does not connect this to the word *miklat*.⁹ We will preface his words with several points.

The *mishna* in *Makkot* 2:7 states:

He [the inadvertent killer] may not go out [from his *ir miklat*] to bear witness in respect of some religious observance; nor as witness in a monetary suit; nor as witness in a capital case; nor even should [all] Israel have need of him, not even if he be captain of the host like Yoav the son of Tzeruya. He may never go out, as it is stated: "He fled there," [to indicate that] "there" must be his abode, "there" his death, "there" his burial.¹⁰

This matter aroused great difficulty among the later commentaries. Is it possible that one who can save the lives of many people, and even the lives of all of Israel, is prohibited to leave his *ir miklat* for that purpose?¹¹

R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk in his book *Or Same'ach* on the Rambam (*Hilkhot Rotze'ach* 20:8) brings proof from this *mishna* (and from the Rambam's formulation of the *halakha* that emerges from it) that:

Since the blood avenger is permitted to kill him [the inadvertent killer, if he leaves his *ir miklat*], he must not put himself in possible danger in order to rescue his fellow from certain danger.

It should be added that according to the *Or Sameach*, a person must not put his life in potential danger not only to save the life of an individual, but even to save all of Israel.

R. Unterman raises strong objections against the words of the *Or Same'ach*:

First of all, if all of Israel need him, surely he can be assigned guards who can protect him from the blood avenger, so that he will not kill him.¹² Second, it is remarkable that when one must go out to war, when there are always great dangers... one is not exempt because of these dangers, but rather obligated to fight against the enemies. But if there is added the danger of some blood avenger, he is exempt from going out to war! Can this be?

Apart from this, from the wording of the *mishna* itself we see that this is not the reason that he does not go out to save lives, for were this the case, the *mishna* would have stated: "He may never go out from there... as it is stated: 'But if the manslayer shall at any time go beyond the border... and the avenger of blood slay the manslayer; there shall be no blood-guiltiness for him' (vv. 26-27)." For it is from here that we know that the avenger of blood may kill him. The *mishna*, however, cites a different verse, because it is stated "there" three times (so it stated explicitly in the *Sifrei* and the *Tosefta*). Therefore, we say: "There" must be his abode, "there" must be his death, "there" must be his burial. But no mention at all is made of the fact that his blood is permitted [to the avenger]!¹³

After rejecting the *Or Same'ach's* explanation of our *mishna*, R. Unterman proposes a different explanation:

The law of exile is like the death penalty for murder... for with it he is entirely cut off and separated from the external world, and he has no connection to those outside of it. For with respect to the world at large, it is as if he does not exist – until the death of the High Priest. We learn this from the fact that the Torah uses the word "there" three times with respect to the exile, telling us: "There" must be his abode, "there" must be his death, "there" must be his burial. From this we see that Scripture decrees that **the exile's life and existence must be restricted exclusively to that place**; with respect to the world outside its boundaries, he is like a dead man, who is exempt from the commandments¹⁴... He has no obligation to any *mitzva* that has a connection to the outside world: He does not bring the Pesach offering or any other sacrifice, and he does not go out to bear witness, not even to save a life and even regarding all of Israel, as it is stated: "there."

It is clear to me that we do not come to this because of the prohibition to leave the city of refuge, for about this various authors have raised objections... that saving lives sets aside all

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[prohibitions]... But the answer is... that we are not dealing here with a prohibition. Rather, it is because the connection between him and the external world has been altogether severed and he is not bound by any *mitzva* relating to the world at large, because he lives only "there." Inside the city, he is certainly obligated in all of the commandments, but not at all with regard to that which is outside its boundaries.

We suggest that this definition of the punishment of exile in a city of refuge derives from the very fact that it is a *miklat* in the sense explained above: a city that restricts the life of an inadvertent killer to its borders.

The constriction of the inadvertent killer's life to the boundaries of the *ir miklat*, while constituting a punishment of being cut off from the world outside, also has a positive meaning (beyond the fact that his life is protected from the blood avenger). The life that the inadvertent killer is supposed to live within his *ir miklat* is a full life. Not only is he obligated to fulfill there all of the *mitzvot* that he can possibly fulfill, but the nature of his life there must be similar to what it had been outside. From here we come to the law taught in a *baraita* in *Makkot* 10a:

A *Tanna* taught: A disciple who goes into exile is joined in exile by his master, as it is stated: "[and that fleeing to one of these cities] he might live" (*Devarim* 4:42).

The *gemara* explains: Provide him with whatever he needs to live.¹⁵

(Translated by David Strauss)

⁹ I first became acquainted with his novel insight on this matter in a *shiur* that I heard from him when I was a young yeshiva student and he was already at the end of his term as Chief Rabbi. I later found his words in his book *Shevet Mi-Yehuda* (Mossad Ha-Rav Kook: Jerusalem, 5744), pp. 19-21.

¹⁰ The derivation seems to be based on the multiple instances of the term *shama* ("there") regarding the *ir miklat* (vv. 11, 15, 25, 26). Thus: "there" shall be his abode; "there" shall be his death; "there" shall be his burial. This is also the way the matter is expounded in the *Sifrei*.

¹¹ R. Yisrael Lifshitz raised a similar objection in his commentary to the Mishna, *Tiferet Yisrael*:

Surely even the desecration of Shabbat is permitted in order to save a life... and anyone who saves one life in Israel is regarded as if he saved the entire world (*Sanhedrin* 37a). How, then, is it not permitted for this man to transgress a positive precept in order to save all of Israel, if he is like Yoav the son of Tzeruya or the like? He goes on there at length with additional arguments.

R. Shlomo Ha-Kohen of Vilna, in his *Cheshek Shelomo* to *Makkot* 11b (printed in the Vilna Shas), reiterates the questions raised by the *Tiferet Yisrael* and concludes:

Were I not afraid, I would say that [the *mishna*] does not mean to say that he is forbidden to leave... but rather it means that even though he is obligated to go out, nevertheless this does not exempt him from exile. Rather, immediately upon completing the *mitzva*, he must return to his exile in the city of refuge.

This, however, is not the plain sense of the *mishna*. Moreover, why would we have thought that because he went out for the sake of a *mitzva*, he is now exempt from exile, to the point that the *mishna* must point out this thinking is incorrect?

The author of the *Arukh Ha-Shulchan* (*Choshen Mishpat* 428:57) explains that when our *mishna* states that he "does not go out," it means that we do not compel him to go out. This too does not appear to be the plain meaning of the *mishna*.

¹² The author of the *Tiferet Yisrael* raised a similar objection to a position similar to that of the *Or Same'ach*: "Is another Jew forbidden to lock the blood avenger in a room until the other [the inadvertent killer] rescues all of Israel?"

¹³ The *Tiferet Yisrael* also raised this question in brief.

¹⁴ Viewing the inadvertent killer's exile in the *ir miklat*, which restricts his life to the confines of that city, as partial death – or perhaps we should say as relative death (in relation to the world outside the *ir miklat*) – rises from the comparison that the Torah draws between the prohibition of taking a ransom "for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death" and the prohibition of taking a ransom "for one who has fled to his city of refuge." Similarly, the law of the *mishna*, "There shall be his abode, there shall be his death, there shall be his burial," alludes to this. But in a dialectical manner, this symbolic death protects the life of the inadvertent killer from real death at the hands of the blood avenger.

¹⁵ a. The law taught in the *baraita* is followed in the *gemara* by the statement of R. Yochanan: "A master who goes into exile is joined in exile by his academy."

b. When the Rambam brings these laws at the beginning of the seventh chapter of *Hilkhot Rotze'ach*, he explains the reason offered in the *gemara* as follows: "For the life of one who possesses knowledge without Torah study is considered to be death."

c. An idea similar to what we have proposed in the last section of our study is found in the commentary of R. S.R. Hirsch to v. 11.



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1 - Topic - Thoughts on the times that we are in

As we prepare for Shabbos Parshas Matos Massei. Really for a thinking person it's a very unusual, meaningful, and reflective Shabbos. This Shabbos we will say Chazak Chazak V'nischazeik on Sefer Bamidbar. You'll remember that when we finished Sefer Vayikra, when we came to the end of Sefer Vayikra and it was time to say Chazak Chazak V'nischazeik, we were in a very different situation, a very different Matzav. And we wonder looking forward when we'll come to the end of Devarim and it will be time for Simchas Torah, where will we be? What will our conditions be? Only the Ribbono Shel Olam knows. It's a time to reflect on what has taken place to us, what has happened to us, how much we may or may not have changed. We say every day (אָרשטיק לי לעולם). When we put on our Tefillin we mention the Pasuk that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is married to us forever. And there is a Kasha that Darshonim ask. Eirusin is not a full marriage. In the times of Chazal they did Kiddushin, which is Eirusin, and they got married a few months later, within twelve months they got married. Eirusin is a temporary state, Eirusin is sort of like being engaged. What is (אָרשטיק לי לעולם)? You'll be engaged to me forever, you have to get married sometime? In Pshat it needs a Hesber.

The Gemara says in Kesubos Daf 71b (bottom of the Amud), in a Nevuah of Hosheia, for the days of Moshiach it says in Hoshea 2:18 (וְהָיָה בְיָמֵינוּ הַהוּא נָאֵם-)

(וְיָרֵךְ, תִּקְרָא אִשִּׁי; וְלֹא-תִקְרָא לִי עוֹד, בְּעָלִי כְלָה) (כלה). That when Moshiach comes we'll refer to Kavayochel G-d as Ishi, my husband. The Gemara explains (כלה). The Gemara says that Kavayochel the Ribono Shel Olam is married to Klal Yisroel when they have a home together, a Beis Hamikdash together. However during the time of the Galus, it's like a Kallah who is still in her own father's house, she hasn't moved in yet with her husband, they are still distant from each other.

That's Eirusin, (אָרשטיק לי לעולם). Hakadosh Baruch Hu guarantees that Eirusin is forever. Nesuin, the intimate relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, that is when the Beis Hamikdash is standing, the house, the Cheder Hamitos, the Pasuk calls it. The place where Klal Yisroel has an intimate connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

But there's another difference between being engaged and being married, between Eirusin and Nesuin. It's true the intimate and close relationship is only after a full marriage, but the Eirusin requires that there be a certain longing, a certain desire, a certain feeling for what's coming. There is a certain excitement when a person is holding by Eirusin, there's a longing for the time that the couple will get married. That is the job of Klal Yisroel here in our Galus and at the time that we are K'allah B'veis Avi'ha. (אָרשטיק לי לעולם). We put on the Tefillin like we're putting on an engagement ring on our fingers. Looking forward to the time that Kavayochel the Ribbono Shel Olam and us will be together.

Klal Yisrael does that. We long for when Moshiach will come. When you hear someone speak at a Sheva Berachos or at a Bar Mitzvah, at most occasions, typically the Drasha ends with the words Bim'haira B'yameinu Amen. Talking about soon. The longing for when Moshiach will come. That longing took on a different meaning this year. Our Shuls are a Mikdash M'at. Our small Batei Mikdashim. In Galus we always have our Shuls. But we didn't have it. That M'at, longing for the Bais Hamikdash should exist and did exist in our longing for our Shuls.

Someone cried to me today, at his Mincha Minyan people are back to picking up their phones, are back to texting back to other people, reading their texts in Shul. The whole Cheishek, the whole desire is dissipating. It is going away. We need to be Mechazeik. Chazak Chazak. We need to be Mechazeik in the meaning of being back in Shul. In the appreciation of being back in Shul. The longing for being back in the Bais Hak'neses.

For many youngsters who have been out of Shul for months, not only is it not a longing but the routine of being in Shul is disrupted, terribly disrupted. Boys who are the ages of 11 - 15 in the years where they develop, have to grow up in the understanding that the morning comes, you go to Shul, you put on Tefillin and you Daven. That has been disrupted. It is very painful to see. Very difficult to see. It is going to be a challenge in all of the Yeshivos. We need to have that longing for the Davening, to the Shul. We need to give it over to our children, to our families. How we appreciate being able to go back to Shul.

When it is a rainy Friday night, instead of making a Minyan in a house in the neighborhood, or on a porch, we should send a message that we long to be in Shul and we should do it. Wake up Klal Yisrael.

It is reminiscent of Yirmiyah. We read Yirmiyah. Yirmiyah says Klal Yisrael wake up. How could Klal Yisrael not wake up with a Churban coming? We here in America, are we not afraid of a Churban coming? Why are we not waking up to an appreciation of being in Shul? Just to do things right, nothing new. Just to do things correctly. Not to be distracted by outside things that don't belong in the Bais Hamedrash. Chazak Chazak V'nischazeik. Let us reflect.

Let us reflect on what? On what has transpired and the fear of what will happen. All in the same time as great social upheaval in this country. It is our job. Our job is not to fix things. What will be? I don't know what will be. My conscience is clear if I do what I have to do. To do what I have to do? Is to appreciate the return to Batei K'neisios and Batei Midrashos. The return to Minyanim. The return to a Yehai Sh'mai Rabba that we missed for so long. Let's do it. Chazak Chazak V'nischazeik. Klal Yisrael, be Mechazeik

yourself. We still Daven that IY"H that when it will come to Simchas Torah we will all be together and that we will be able to dance B'simcha Rabbah.

2 - Topic - A thought on the Parsha

31:7 (כְּאֶשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ, עַל-מִדְיָן) Klal Yisrael went to do battle with Midyan (כְּאֶשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ, אֶת-מֹשֶׁה) as HKB"H commanded Moshe Rabbeinu. What do you mean that they went to do battle as HKB"H commanded Moshe?

The Sifri says that this comes to tell us a Halacha that HKB"H told Moshe to tell Klal Yisrael that when you go to do battle there is a certain formation that needs to be done. That is Ten Lahem Ruach Reviis She'im Livroach Yich'lu. When you surround a city and you conquer it, let there be an escape route. Let there be a way for them to get out. If there is a route by which they can get out then you are doing the Milchama (אֶת-מִלְחָמָה). Then you are doing it the right way. The way that you are supposed to do it.

The Ramban in Sefer Hamitzvos (Mitzvas Asei Hei) adds a number of Mitzvos that he feels were missed by the Rambam. One of those Mitzvos is a Mitzvas Asei to leave the fourth side open. The Ramban counts it as a Mitzvah. The Rambam does not count it as a Mitzvah. If it were up to me I would say that it is not a Kasha. The Rambam writes in Sh'roshim, in his rules, that Mitzvos which are not clearly spelled out in Pesukim don't go into the counting of Taryag Mitzvos. There are more Mitzvos than Taryag. The ones that are only Merumaz, that are hinted at in Pesukim. That is how I would understand the Rambam.

The Meshech Chochma in this week's Parsha gives us a deeper and more valuable insight. This is because there is a second Machlokes. The Machlokes is whether this applies only to Milchemes HaReshus which the Ramban says this applies only to a Milchemes HaReshus and the Rambam says that this applies to all Milchamos including a Milchemes Mitzvah as well. The Meshech Chochma gives us an understanding of the Machlokes between the Rambam and Ramban.

The Ramban held that it is a Mitzvah to leave the 4th side open, to leave an escape route for the people who are going. Explains the Meshech Chochma, just like it is a Mitzvah to offer Shalom, to offer peace at the time of a Milchama, so too it is a Mitzvah to have Rachmanus and try to avoid bloodshed and leave an escape route for the people that are being conquered. So according to the Ramban it is a Torah mandated obligation to try to have less bloodshed and let people escape.

The Rambam disagrees in the explanation of this command. He says no, it is not a Mitzvas Asei. It is part of the strategy of war. It is a fact that when a person is cornered and he has no choice and he is stuck, he will fight with much more dedication. He will have superhuman strength in his fight, in his battle. Don't corner the enemy. If you corner him, he will fight in a much stronger way. Leave him an escape route so that when things seem hopeless to him, he will run away rather than redouble his energy. So according to the Rambam it is not a Mitzva, it is part of the strategy of war.

Mimeila says the Meshech Chochma, according to the Rambam there is no difference whether it is a Milchemes Mitzvah or Milchemes Reshus. It doesn't matter what type of battle. In any war, you fight the war with a strategy that is given over to us, that we understand and we were taught. The Ramban holds that it is a Mitzvas Asei, he can make a difference between one and the other. This is the Meshech Chochma's understanding.

We turn now to the Sifrei Mussar all who tell us that everything to do with (כִּי-תֵצֵא לִמְלָחָה) going out to battle in this world is a Remez, is a hint at how to do battle with the Yeitzer Hora. How to do battle with the desire to be lazy and not to do Mitzvos.

We learn here from the Rambam a psychological truth. That when a person feels he has no choice, it is something he must do, he gets more energy. The adrenaline flows. He is able to do things he wasn't able to do otherwise. He is able to conquer and defeat those who could otherwise not conquer and defeat.

It is a lesson. When we go to do battle with the Yeitzer Hora, we have to feel there is no choice, there is no possibility of doing differently. It has got to be this way. Maybe I went to sleep at 3 last night and I just can't get up for my Daf Yomi or for my Minyan. When a person sees that he is living in a unique

time. He is living in a time where going to the Shul in the morning, or going to the learning in the morning, and getting back with your Chaburah of friends is something that HKB"H is asking, is it something you appreciate, is it something you deserve? When a person feels that the Yeitzer Hora has him cornered, he finds greater strength, more energy, more ability to do the things that he has to do. Tach'sisai Hamilchama. The way to do battle.

Please, as we say Chazak Chazak V'nischazeik, say it to yourselves and let us all say it each to ourselves. Say it in a way that has meaning and that it gives us Chizuk for the coming week as we go through the three weeks, and we mourn the Churban Bais Hamikdash, we should include with that a mourning for the Batei K'neisios, the empty Shuls in all parts of the world by Klal Yisrael. Could it be that the Sefer Torah wasn't open for a whole Sefer (i.e. Vayikra)? Could it be? Hard to understand. Hard to think back and believe that it could be so.

Chazak Chazak V'nischazeik! Klal Yisrael, join me in trying to make it happen. Have a better appreciation and a more meaningful appreciation of the Batei K'neisios and Batei Midrashos of Klal Yisrael. Wishing one and all an absolutely wonderful Shabbos Kodesh.

from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU

INSPIRATION

Stand Up and Speak Out

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

July 16, 2020

On April 11, 1944, a young Anne Frank wrote in her diary:

Who has made us Jews different from all other people? Who has allowed us to suffer so terribly until now? It is God Who has made us as we are, but it will be God, too, who will raise us up again. Who knows – it might even be our religion from which the world and all peoples learn good, and for that reason and that reason alone do we now suffer. We can never become just Netherlands, or just English, or representatives of any other country for that matter. We will always remain Jews.

Anne Frank was on to something. The Talmud asks, from where did Har Sinai derive its name? After offering a few alternatives, the Talmud suggests that Har Sinai comes from Hebrew word "sinah" which means hatred, because the non-Jews' hatred of the Jews descended upon that mountain when the Jewish people received the Torah there. Torah demands a moral and ethical lifestyle, an attitude of giving rather than taking, a life of service rather than of privilege, that has revolutionized the world.

The Jewish people have been charged to be the moral conscience of the world, a mission they have not always succeeded at, but that nevertheless drew the ire, anger and hatred of so many. For two thousand years the Jews were bullied and persecuted simply because of their Jewishness and all that stands for. After the Holocaust, the world gave the Jews a reprieve from their hatred, becoming instead beneficiaries of their pity. But looking at events around the world, it is rapidly becoming clear that the last 75 years was an aberration. We have witnessed the rise of anti-Semitism around the world as the world reverts back to its ageless pattern and habit.

The Midrash (Eichah Rabbah 1) teaches that three prophets used the term "eichah" – o how! In Devarim, Moshe asks: "Eichah, how can I alone bear your troubles, your burden and your strife?" (Deut. 1:12) In the Haftorah for Shabbos Chazon, the Prophet Yeshayahu asks: "Eichah, how has the faithful city become like a prostitute?" Lastly, Yirmiyahu begins the Book of Eichah: "Eichah, how is it that Jerusalem is sitting in solitude! The city that was filled with people has become like a widow..." Eichah – How? How is it that anti-Semitism persists? Why must they rise up against us in every generation?

On Tisha B'Av we will sit on the floor and wonder aloud, eicha? How could it be Jews have to fear for their lives yet again? Eichah – how could it be that

today, with all the progress humanity has made, more than a quarter of the world is still holding anti-Semitic views?

Rabbi Soloveitchik tells us that though the Midrash identifies three times the word eicha is used, in truth there is a fourth. When Adam and Chava fail to take responsibility, God calls out to them and says ayeka, where are you? Ayeka is spelled with the same letters as eicha, leading Rabbi Soloveitchik to say that when we don't answer the call of ayeka, when we don't take personal responsibility for our problems and blame others, we will ultimately find ourselves asking eicha, how could it be?

We can ask eicha, how could all of these terrible things be, but we may never have a definitive answer. Our job is to make sure we can answer the call of ayeka, where are you? Are you taking responsibility? We may not be able to fully understand why anti-Semitism exists, but we can and must remain vigilant in calling it out, confronting it and fighting it. We must remain strong in standing up for Jews everywhere. We must confront evil and do all we can to defeat it.

And, we must do all that we can to take personal responsibility to fulfill the Jewish mission to bring Godliness into the world. If individual Jews were hated for being the conscious of the others, all the more so does a Jewish country generate hate for being the moral conscious of the whole world, held to higher moral standards than any other country or state.

Our job is not to be discouraged by asking eicha, but to ensure that we can answer the call of ayeka. Anti-Semitism will not come to an end by assimilating and retreating. It will come to an end when we can positively answer the question that the Talmud tells us each one of us will be asked when we meet our Maker: did you long for the redemption and did you personally take responsibility to do all that you can to bring the redemption? Did you truly feel the pain of exile and feel the anguish of the Jewish condition in the world? Do you truly and sincerely care? Did you anxiously await every day for Moshiach to herald in an era of peace and harmony, an end to anti-Semitism and suffering?

It is not enough to long for Moshiach, we must bring him. It is not enough to hope for redemption, we must be the catalyst for it. It is not enough to be tired of eicha, we must answer ayeka. If we want to get up off the floor and end the mourning, if we want to finally end anti-Semitism, it is up to us to do what is necessary to heal our people, to repair the world, to love one another, and to earn the redemption from the Almighty.

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The words of this author reflect his/her own opinions and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Orthodox Union.

from: Rabbi Sacks <info@rabbisacks.org>

date: Jul 15, 2020, 3:17 PM

subject: My Teacher: In Memoriam (Matot - Masei 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There are moments when Divine Providence touches you on the shoulder and makes you see a certain truth with blazing clarity. Let me share with you such a moment that happened to me this morning.

For technical reasons, I have to write my essays for the Covenant & Conversation series many weeks in advance. I had come to Matot-Masei, and had decided to write about the cities of refuge, but I wasn't sure which aspect to focus on. Suddenly, overwhelmingly, I felt an instinct to write about one very unusual law.

The cities were set aside for the protection of those found guilty of manslaughter, that is, of killing someone accidentally without malice aforethought. Because of the then universal practice of blood vengeance, that protection was necessary.

The purpose of the cities was to make sure that someone judged innocent of murder was safe from being killed. As Shoftim puts it: "And he shall flee to one of these cities and live" (Deut. 19:5). This apparently simple concept was given a remarkable interpretation by the Talmud:

The Sages taught: If a student was exiled, his teacher was exiled with him, as it is said: "(And he shall flee to one of these cities) and live," meaning do the things for him that will enable him to live.[1]

As Rambam explains: "Life without study is like death for scholars who seek wisdom." [2] In Judaism, study is life itself, and study without a teacher is impossible. Teachers give us more than knowledge; they give us life. Note that this is not an aggadic passage, a moralising text not meant to be taken literally. It is a halachic ruling, codified as such. Teachers are like parents only more so. Parents give us physical life; teachers give us spiritual life.[3] Physical life is mortal, transient. Spiritual life is eternal. Therefore, we owe our teacher our life in its deepest sense.

I had just written the text above when the phone went. It was my brother in Jerusalem to tell me that my teacher, Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch, zecher tzaddik livracha, had just died. Only rarely in this "world of concealment" [4] do we feel the touch of Providence, but this was unmistakable. For me, and I suspect everyone who had the privilege of studying with him, he was the greatest teacher of our generation.

He was a master posek, as those who have read his Responsa will know. He knew the entire rabbinic literature, Bavli, Yerushalmi, Midrash Halachah and Aggadah, biblical commentaries, philosophy, codes and responsa. His creativity, halachic and aggadic, knew no bounds. He was a master of almost every secular discipline, especially the sciences. He had been a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Toronto and had written a book about probability and statistical inference. His supreme passion was the Rambam in all his guises, particularly the Mishneh Torah, to which he devoted some fifty years of his life to writing the multi-volume commentary Yad Peshutah. By the time I came to study with the Rav, I had already studied at Cambridge and Oxford with some of the greatest intellects of the time, among them Sir Roger Scruton and Sir Bernard Williams. Rabbi Rabinovitch was more demanding than either of them. Only when I became his student did I learn the true meaning of intellectual rigour, shetihyu amelim ba-Torah, "labouring" in the Torah. To survive his scrutiny, you had to do three things: first to read everything ever written on the subject; second to analyse it with complete lucidity, searching for omek ha-peshat, the deep plain sense; and third, to think independently and critically. I remember writing an essay for him in which I quoted one of the most famous of nineteenth century Talmudic scholars. He read what I had written, then turned to me and said, "But you didn't criticise what he wrote!" He thought that in this case the scholar had not given the correct interpretation, and I should have seen and said this. For him, intellectual honesty and independence of mind were inseparable from the quest for truth which is what Talmud Torah must always be.

Some of the most important lessons I learned from him were almost accidental. I remember on one occasion his car was being serviced, so I had the privilege of driving him home. It was a hot day, and at a busy junction in Hampstead, my car broke down and would not start up again. Unfazed, Rabbi Rabinovitch said to me, "Let's use the time to learn Torah." He then proceeded to give me a shiur on Rambam's Hilchot Shemittah ve-Yovel. Around us, cars were hooting their horns. We were holding up traffic and a considerable queue had developed. The Rav remained completely calm, came to the end of his exposition, turned to me and said, "Now turn the key." I turned the key, the car started, and we went on our way.

On another occasion, I told him about my problem getting to sleep. I had become an insomniac. He said to me, enthusiastically, "Could you teach me how to do that?" He quoted the Rambam who ruled that one acquires most of one's wisdom at night, based on the Talmudic statement that the night was created for study.[5]

He and the late Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l were the Gedolei ha-Dor, the leaders and role models of their generation. They were very different, one scientific, the other artistic, one direct, the other oblique, one bold, the other cautious, but they were giants, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Happy the generation that is blessed by people like these.

It is hard to convey what having a teacher like Rabbi Rabinovitch meant. He knew, for example, that I had to learn fast because I was coming to the rabbinate late, after a career in academic philosophy. What he did was very bold. He explained to me that the fastest and best way of learning anything is to teach it. So the day I entered Jews' College as a student, I also entered it as a lecturer. How many people would have had that idea and taken that risk? He also understood how lonely it could be if you lived by the principles of intellectual integrity and independence. Early on, he said to me, "Don't be surprised if only six people in the world understand what you are trying to do." When I asked him whether I should accept the position of Chief Rabbi, he said, in his laconic way: "Why not? After all, maybe you can teach some Torah."

He himself, in his early thirties, had been offered the job of Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg, but turned it down on the grounds that he refused to live in an apartheid state. He told me how he was visited in Toronto by Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz who had held the Johannesburg position until then. Looking at the Rav's modest home and thinking of his more palatial accommodation in South Africa, he said, "You turned down that for this?" But the Rav would never compromise his integrity and never cared for material things. In the end, he found great happiness in the 37 years he served as head of Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Maale Adumim. The yeshiva had been founded six years earlier by Rabbi Haim Sabato and Yitzhak Sheilat. It is said that when Rabbi Sabato heard the Rav give a shiur, he immediately asked him to become the Rosh Yeshiva. It is hard to describe the pride with which he spoke to me about his students, all of whom served in the Israel Defence Force. Likewise it is hard to describe the awe in which his students held him. Not everyone in the Jewish world knew his greatness, but everyone who studied with him did.

I believe that Judaism made an extraordinarily wise decision when it made teachers its heroes and lifelong education its passion. We don't worship power or wealth. These things have their place, but not at the top of the hierarchy of values. Power forces us. Wealth induces us. But teachers develop us. They open us to the wisdom of the ages, helping us to see the world more clearly, think more deeply, argue more cogently and decide more wisely.

"Let the reverence for your teacher be like the reverence for Heaven," said the Sages.[6] In other words: if you want to come close to Heaven, don't search for kings, priests, saints or even prophets. They may be great, but a fine teacher helps you to become great, and that is a different thing altogether. I was blessed by having one of the greatest teachers of our generation. The best advice I can give anyone is: find a teacher, then make yourself a disciple.

Shabbat Shalom

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Weekly Parsha MATOT – MAASEI

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

This week's Torah reading begins with our teacher Moshe calling together the heads of the tribes of Israel, and relating to them the laws of the Torah regarding vows, promises, commitments and verbal speech. On the surface, there seems to be no reason why these laws should especially be given through the offices and conduct of the heads of the tribes of Israel. These laws apply to all Jews, and are eternally relevant to all human situations. It is interesting to note that we do not find other occasions that the leaders of the tribes of Israel were specially chosen to be the conduits of the message that the Torah and Moshe wanted to communicate to all of Israel.

According to the tradition of the Talmud, as expanded upon by Rambam and other scholars, the elders of Israel, the leaders of the tribes were taught directly by Moshe the entire Oral Law as received by him at Mount Sinai.

The fact that this portion of the law was taught to the elders of the tribes contains a particularly significant message that is truly relevant to our time in society.

Everyone must keep their word. There are no two different standards of observance for the leaders of the tribes and for the ordinary members of the tribe itself. Yet, we realize that the leaders of the tribes are particularly prone to violate this injunction, that demands full commitment and compliance with one's words and promises.

We are all aware of political leaders who when campaigning for office make grandiose promises and undertake to further proposed policies and agendas. And we are just as aware that when these very same people achieve office and power, they oftentimes renege and reverse the very ideas and proposals that they used to gain that power and position. The excuse that is always given is that one sees from here -- in a position of power -- what one did not see from there, when one was not in such a position or office of power. However, that is usually a lame excuse.

The words and promises of leaders and politicians in our time do not carry very much weight with the population that they are meant to represent. It is because of this tendency by leaders to say one thing and then do another that the Torah emphasizes that these laws of commitment, regarding the spoken word, that one is bound to fulfill whatever one says, is especially important to emphasize to the leaders of the tribes. Too often they have made commitments and statements before, that now, when they have achieved a leadership role, they are no longer willing to fulfill or honor. This is an important lesson for all times, but especially ours.

Shabbat Shalom
 Rabbi Berel Wein

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Three Weeks: Teachers Armed with Spiritual Might Rav Kook Torah

The three weeks between the fasts of the 17th of Tammuz and the 9th of Av is a time of mourning, commemorating the calamities that befell the Jewish people during this time: exile from the Land of Israel, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This time is called Bein Ha-Metzarim, a time when the Jewish people are "Between the Straits."

The Shulchan Aruch mentions a curious custom: teachers should not strike their students during the Three Weeks. Not that teachers are encouraged to hit students during the rest of the year; but during this period of mourning, they should be especially careful to avoid punishing students. This custom is the source for Rav Kook's dictum for the month of Tammuz:

מבין המצרים נגאל עם, על ידי מורים חמושים בגבורה רוחנית, שאינם צריכים למקל "חובלים."

"The nation is redeemed from 'Between the Straits' by teachers who are armed with spiritual might, teachers who do not need a beating rod." Rav Kook took this custom and transformed it into something much greater: a philosophy of education in the modern era. Our youth cannot be subdued with rods; they cannot be coerced with threats of punishment in this world or the next. We can only reach them, Rav Kook taught, with love and spiritual greatness. A generation in spiritual distress - "between the straits" - must be inspired by teachers equipped with a broad vision and lofty spirits.

A Generation that Seeks High Ideals

Rav Kook thought deeply about the rampant rejection of traditional Jewish observance that he witnessed. Unlike the prevalent opinion of other rabbinical leaders, who attributed the flood of secularization to widespread hedonism and a lack of integrity, Rav Kook interpreted the phenomenon in a radically different way. He presented his analysis in a highly significant essay entitled Ma'amar HaDor ("The Generation"). There he wrote:

“Our generation is an amazing, wondrous phenomenon. It is difficult to find a similar case in all of our history, a generation composed of contradictions, a mixture of light and darkness.

It is precisely the nation’s greatness that has brought about its spiritual decline. This generation finds that all it hears and sees from its parents and teachers is beneath it. The morals [of the previous generation] fail to capture its hearts and quench its thirst, they fail to instill fear and trepidation. This generation has already risen beyond the stage when one runs away due to fear, real or imagined, physical or spiritual.

Great persecutions and upheavals have made them tough and intrepid. Fear and threats cannot move them. They will only rise and follow a path of life that is lofty and enlightened. Even if they wanted to, they cannot be bowed and bent, saddled with burdens and yokes... They cannot be motivated to return [to traditional Judaism] through fear.

But they are very much capable of returning to Judaism through love.... A great-spirited generation seeks, and must seek, in every direction that it turns, great ideals.

This is not a generation of pettiness, but one of greatness and high ideals.

The only way to reach out to such a generation is through spiritual greatness.”

Path of Pleasantness

A careful analysis of the wording in Rav Kook’s adage reveals an additional insight. The phrase “beating rod” does not appear in the Shulchan Aruch.

This phrase comes from Sanhedrin 24a, where the Sages contrasted the Torah scholars of the Land of Israel with those living in Babylonia.

The Babylonian scholars were sharp and caustic in their legal debates. Their method of Torah study was often like a “beating rod,” sharp and unpleasant. The scholars of Eretz Yisrael, on the other hand, would gently correct one another. Their gracious method of study was characterized as noam, one of pleasantness and mutual respect.

In short, a successful educational approach for our time must embrace two qualities:

- It must incorporate a spiritual greatness that will inspire an idealistic generation.
- It must adopt the pleasant path of the gentle scholars of Eretz Yisrael, who did not resort to the harsh methods of their colleagues in the Exile.

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 18 July 2020 / 26 Tammuz 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Matot - Masei

Device Maintenance

“Moshe wrote their goings forth, according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.” (33:2)

The screen flashed: “Device maintenance! Tap below to optimize your machine!” I tapped. “Wow! You’ve got 5 memory-hungry programs hogging up your memory! Let’s see what we can do about this! Tap below to improve it! This won’t affect your personal data.”

I tap the button. Immediately, circles spin on my screen, and little flashes, like so many drops of sweat, seem to spin off the circles as we valiantly do battle with those memory-hugging hogs. And then, in quick succession, “10 background apps closed.” “100 MB of storage space freed up.” “No abnormal battery use detected.” “No app crashes detected.” “No malware apps detected.” “Virus scanning turned on.” “Total freed up – 2.5 GB since you started using Device Maintenance!” And at the top the screen, inside a large circle throb the words: “100 – Excellent! Your device had been optimized.” I felt good about that.

It’s amazing how far a little encouragement goes – even from an inanimate machine.

“Moshe wrote their goings forth, according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.”

In the first half of this verse, Hashem tells Moshe to encourage the people and write that all their “goings

forth” were only for the goal of reaching Eretz Yisrael — the destination of all their “journeyings.” That is why in the first half of the sentence, “goings forth” precedes the word “journeys.” Without that encouragement to the Jewish People in the desert, their journeyings seemed like nothing more than an incessant road-trip. In the second half of the verse, the word “journey” precedes “going forth.” Now, another place. Now, another place. Like a seemingly endless succession of “goings forth.” They didn’t focus on where the journey was taking them. A little encouragement goes a long way.

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subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

“Setting Our Priorities Straight”

(updated and revised from Parashiot Matot-Masei 5761-2001)

This coming Shabbat, the double parashiot, Matot and Masei, will be read in synagogues throughout the world.

In parashat Matot, we are told that the tribes of Reuben and Gad, were successful herdsmen with large numbers of sheep and cattle. The Torah reports that the tribal leaders of Reuben and Gad saw the luscious lands of Yaazer and Gilead, located on the Eastern side of the Jordan, and determined that these lands would serve as ideal pasture and grazing locations for their cattle. The leaders of Gad and Reuben, (later joined by half of Menashe), approached Moses and Elazar, the high priest, and the princes of the 12 tribes, and asked for permission to settle in that portion of the land. Moses was distressed by the request, thinking that Reuben and Gad were trying to shirk their obligations to help in the battles to capture the land of Canaan. In Numbers 32:6, Moses excoriates the tribes of Reuben and Gad saying: ? האנשים יצאו למלחמה, ואתם תשובו פה “Shall your brothers go out to battle while you remain here?” Moses further accuses the tribes of Reuben and Gad of trying to cause the other tribes to lose faith in the land of Israel, comparing them to the scouts, who in the previous generation had caused the People of Israel to lose the right to enter the land of Israel.

In response, the leaders of Reuben and Gad say, Numbers 32:16: נָדַרְתָּ צֶאֱן לָנוּ וְעָרִים לְטָפְנוּ, “We will build pens for our livestock and cities for our small children. Furthermore, they promise to send troops to join the other tribes of Israel, until the battle for the land is complete. They vow not to return to their homes until all the people of Israel are settled on their patrimony.

Moses is delighted by their forthcomingness, and invites Reuben and Gad to serve in the vanguard of the Israeli army that will drive the Canaanite inhabitants out of the land.

Moses however, makes a subtle correction to their original response. In Numbers 32:24, Moses says to the tribes of Reuben and Gad: כְּנוּ לָכֶם עָרִים בְּנוּ לָכֶם עָרִים, “Yes, do whatever you must, but first build cities for yourselves and for your small children, and then erect pens for your flocks. Rashi on Numbers 32:16, citing the Midrash Tanchuma, says that Moses firmly corrected the two tribes for saying that they would first build pens for their cattle, and only then erect cities for their children, implying that they were more concerned with their property (their sheep) than they were for their children. Moses strongly asserts that care for the children must be their first concern and priority.

In the ritual of the Pidyon Haben, the Redemption of the First-born son, the Cohen asks the child's father, "Do you prefer to give me your first born, the first born of his mother, or would you rather redeem him for the five shekels required by the Torah?" In effect, the Cohen asks the parent, do you want your child or your money? Do you intend to put career ahead of family, or will you set your life's primary focus to be your children and your family?

In our era of overwhelming materialism, most people already define themselves by their careers—I'm a lawyer, a doctor, a baker, a candlestick maker. Judaism, to the contrary, sees career not as an end, but as a means of putting bread on the table, enabling parents to properly care for their families. The Torah encourages Jews to define themselves as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. Careers, while important, must remain secondary.

Dennis Prager, the well-known Los Angeles radio personality, has said that he's never heard of a person lying on his death bed, say to his rabbi, "What a mistake I made with my life. Why didn't I spend more time at the office?"

In a very stirring Holocaust survivor's poem, entitled Star Eternal written by the poet Ka-tzetnik 135633, the author deals with the question of "Wiedergutmachung"—accepting reparations from the Germans to compensate for the losses. The child in the poem says:

"Mother, now they want to give me money to make up for you.

I still can't figure out how many German marks a burnt mother comes to."

The value of life is infinite, whether a mother's life, a father's life, a son's

life or a daughter's life. Moses was correct in setting the priorities of the

tribes of Reuben and Gad straight. As he says in Numbers 32:24: כְּנֹעַם לְבָנֵיכֶם

לְבָנֵיכֶם וְגִדְרָהּ לְבָנֵיכֶם, "First build for yourselves cities for your children, and only then build the pens for your flocks."

May you be blessed.

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subject: Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion

Shabbat Shalom: Pinchas (Numbers 25:10-30:1)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Matot – Masei : Numbers 30:2–36:13

Efrat, Israel – What unites Jews throughout the world as one nation and one people? What is the most critical factor responsible for our amazing persistence as a unique historical entity, despite our having been scattered throughout the globe and subject to persecution and pogrom, despite our having been chased from pillar to post? What idea and ideal have prevented us from falling prey to assimilation, from disappearing into the sands of time as just another grain of sand, indistinguishable from the other grains, simply being "a part of" rather being "set apart from"? Why have we insisted upon Jewish exclusivity, Jewish separatism, Jewish apartness?

Our biblical portion of Matot makes a distinction between two technical terms which it doesn't quite define: "If a man makes a vow [neder] to dedicate an object to the Lord, or takes an oath [shevua] to prohibit himself from partaking of a certain food or from participating in a certain activity, he must not desecrate his word" (Numbers 30:3). My revered teacher and mentor Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik defines a vow as pertaining to an object (a person is on a diet, and he vows that henceforth bread will become for him as prohibited as bacon), and an oath as pertaining to a subject (the person himself will no longer eat bread).

In the first instance of a vow, the emphasis is on the object, the bread, the "heftza" in the second instance of oath, the emphasis is on the subject, the person, the "gavra".

In the Talmudic school of Brisker methodology, much of the world may be divided between gavra and heftza, subject and object; indeed, in most instances a human being, especially if he is born to be free ought be seen as a

"subject." However, if a person is enslaved, he ipso facto has been turned into an "object," having been denied his fundamental freedom of choice.

This distinction can serve us well in attempting to answer our opening philosophical query about what sets Jews apart and makes us unique. But, first, a personal experience of significance: At the end of the Yom Kippur War, while on an El Al airplane on the way to Israel, I was shocked to discover news about an acquaintance of mine, who had lost his first family in Auschwitz, remarried and had two sons on the West Side of Manhattan, had moved to Israel and lost his eldest boy in the Six Day War—I discovered that he had now lost his only remaining son in the Yom Kippur War.

I made a condolence call as soon as I got off the plane.

My disconsolate friend was sitting on the floor with his wife, surrounded by would-be comforters; no one, however, said a word, so that the atmosphere was tense with a heavy silence which shouted upwards to heaven in tear-filled protest. As I quietly intoned the condolence formula: "May the Place [Makom, a synonym for God] comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem", my friend looked up. "Why does the blessing use the word Makom and not Elokim or Hashem?" He didn't wait for a reply, but himself offered the answer. "When I lost my first family in the Holocaust, an atrocity which I suffered as a passive victim of monstrous Nazi fascist-racists, I could not even mourn properly and I could not be comforted; it all seemed so absurd and meaningless.

"Now, however, although I am devastated and unable to speak to my comforters, I nevertheless do feel comforted.

"The place comforts me; the fact that my second set of children were killed because they chose to live in Israel which, is indeed a dangerous war zone, because they chose to realize our destiny which is Jerusalem, because they chose to guarantee Jewish future by risking their own present lives. Both sets of children were sacred sacrifices, but the first set were passive objects whereas the second were dynamic subjects who actively fought for our Jewish future!

Yes, the place comforts me..."

Allow me to interpret this distraught but wise father's words on the basis of yet another insight from Rav Soloveitchik. In Kol Dodi Dofek, my rebbe distinguishes between the Holocaust experience in which the Jews were united by a common fate (goral) foisted upon them from without, from a largely sinister gentile world cooperating enthusiastically with the "final solution" of Nazi Germany—and the Sinai experience, in which the Jews were united by a common destiny (yi'ud) which they accepted upon themselves, pledging to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers to convey God's message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice to the world. It is this sense of destiny which brought us to Israel and compels us to fight against tyranny and terrorism.

At this time, we remember the three pure and holy sacrificial Jewish victims of six years ago—Gil-Ad Shaer, Eyal Yifrah and Naftali Fraenkel who were captured and mercilessly murdered outside Alon Shvut in Gush Etzion.

Tragically an innocent Palestinian boy, Muhammad Abu Khdeir, was cruelly murdered at the hands of misguided and evil Jewish teenagers. The Gush lies geographically between Hebron—where God initially chose Abraham and made him the father of a multitude of nations including Ishmael because he was teaching his descendants God's path of compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Gen. 18:18-19)—and Jerusalem, where Jewish and world history will culminate in the rebuilding of a Holy Temple from whence Zion's message of a Torah of peace and redemption will be accepted by all the nations of the globe. Now too, the "place" (makom) comforts us in our period of national rebirth—among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. Shabbat Shalom!

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha - Parshas Matos

Tricks of the Trade -- Trade of the Tricks

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

“Those who live by the sword,” the clichéd expression goes, “die by it as well.”

What about those who live by other means of evil? What happens to those who live by the curse, do they die by the curse? Or do they die by the sword as well?

Parshas Matos tells us of the fate of Bilaam ben Be’or, the world’s most trusted and experienced sorcerer, whose curses never failed to hit their mark. Bilaam was hired by the king of Moav to curse the Jews and only through the merciful intervention of the Almighty’s Divine Hand were his efforts thwarted.

After his original scheme had failed, Bilaam devised a plot that found the chink in our spiritual armor. He advised Balak to seduce Klal Yisrael to sin with Midianite women.

The Jews unfortunately fell prey to his plot and the wrath of Hashem was unleashed against His people. Thousands of Jews were killed in a plague and if not for the brave intervention of Pinchos, the grandson of Ahron, the toll would have been higher.

But now it was time for payback. Moshe amassed an army led by Pinchos, which struck Midian hard. The Torah tells us: “They massed against Midian, as Hashem had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian along with their slain ones – Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian; and Balaam son of Beor they slew with the sword.” (Numbers 31:7-8).

The final few words of the posuk raise a question: Does it really make a difference how they killed Bilaam? They killed him. Does it make a difference if they killed him by drowning or they killed him by arrows. Perhaps the Jewish nation gave him a taste of his own medicine and cast a spell upon him like he attempted to do to Klal Yisrael? Is it really significant to tell how the Jews killed Bilaam? Why does the Torah tell us how he died? The commentaries contrast the normal method in which Jews did battle — their mouths, with the way our Biblical nemesis Esav did battle — his sword. In this case, the roles seem reversed. Bilaam used his mouth, we used the sword. Is there a lesson in that as well?

World champion heavyweight boxer Joe Lewis reigned for over a decade from the late 1930s to his retirement in 1949. As a black man, he endured racist abuse despite his status as a major sports hero.

During his period of army service, he was driving with a fellow GI when he was involved in a minor collision with a large truck. The truck driver got out, yelling and swearing racial epithets at Louis, who just sat in the driver’s seat smiling.

“Hey you’re Joe Lewis! You’re not gonna let him get away with that! Why didn’t you get out and knock him flat?” asked his buddy after the truck driver had moved on.

“Why should I?” replied Joe. “When somebody insulted Caruso, did he respond by singing an aria?”

Rashi explains the Torah’s underlying aim in telling us how Bilaam was killed. Bilaam was a descendant of Esav, whose existence and métier was decreed centuries before by his father Yitzchak, “”And by your sword you shall live” (Genesis 27:40). Yaakov’s weapon of choice throughout history came from Yitzchak’s words, “the voice is the voice of Yaakov,” it is through Yaakov’s mouth — through prayer and petition, persuading and cajoling that he was most successful. Bilaam did not use his trademark weapon — the sword — against Israel. Instead he attempted to cast a spell upon the Israelites, Bilaam switched venues and used the mouth — the instrument of brother Yaakov.

And so, explains Rashi as Bilaam exchanged his métier for the métier of Israel, Hashem showed the world that we do not have to rely solely upon our weapons of choice. As Bilaam exchanged his weapon, we, too, exchanged ours.

When it comes to dealing with our enemies, we have to use every appropriate means that fits the needs of the hour. Despite the fact that we are the people of words, we must know when to put our forte aside and use a different tool. Because in order to survive, we need not only know the tricks of the trade, but also how to trade our tricks!

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Matot-Masai: Wasted Influence

Ben-Tzion Spitz

The minute a person whose word means a great deal to others dare to take the open-hearted and courageous way, many others follow. - Marian Anderson

Historically, it was extremely common for armies and soldiers to ravage and pillage their enemies. It was seen as their right to claim the spoils of war, whether human, animal, or inanimate valuables.

God, at the end of the Book of Numbers, commands Israel to battle the Midianite army. The Midianites had allied with the Moabites when they tried to curse the nation of Israel through the sorcerer Bilaam. When the cursing scheme proved unsuccessful, the Midianite and Moabite women conspired to seduce the men of Israel into illegal romantic activity, and succeeded. This was followed by heinous idol worship, which raised God’s ire and led to a sudden plague and the death of 24,000 men of Israel.

God commands the army of Israel to avenge the Midianite involvement and to take the fight to them.

The army of Israel is victorious and completely vanquishes the Midianite army. As a bonus, the Torah reports that the Israelites didn’t have even one casualty from their battle. On their return from battle, the army commanders offer sacrifices to God and donate from the gold and jewelry they captured in battle.

The Meshech Chochma on Numbers 31:49 deciphers the language the army commanders use before they offered their sacrifices. The army commanders were given charge of their soldiers. They reported that they didn’t lose one soldier. The deeper significance that the Meshech Chochma uncovers is that no soldier even touched an enemy woman, though it might have been quite natural in those days for them to do so in the heat of battle and victory.

Upon witnessing the upstanding behavior of their charges, the army commanders realized a previous mistake they had made. Seeing how the soldiers followed their commanders’ orders not to touch any of the enemy women, the commanders belatedly understood that they could have, likewise, influenced the men who had previously given in to the temptations of the Midianite and Moabite women. Had the commanders made clear their expectations of the behavior of an Israelite man, they surmised that the illegal romantic dalliances may have been averted. The commanders were guilty of not using their influence where and when it was required in that case, and as such, they felt it necessary to bring a sacrifice to atone for their lack of judgment and involvement.

May we realize the influence we have on those around us and always use it positively.

Dedication - To the memory of our Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yehuda Amital z”tl, on his tenth yahrtzeit. His influence was significant and undeniable.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz (rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites)

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

What Anger Does to Us

Matot – Masei

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, Rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites

Toward the end of the book of Numbers, we read about the Israelites making their way to the Promised Land, the land of Canaan – the Land of Israel.

Forty years of wandering are about to end. We would be happy to read about a festive entrance into the land, but history did not abide by our expectations.

The entrance to the Land of Israel was replete with wars, and this week we read about the war fought against the five kings of Midian.

We also learn some laws pertaining to purity and utensils: how one can purify a utensil that became impure, etc. These laws are practical today as well when there might be a need to kasher a utensil that was used for cooking a food forbidden according to the laws of kashrut.

And here's an interesting detail: As opposed to the rest of the Torah laws that were told by Moses, these were not told by him. Moses was commanded these laws, but the person who instructed the nation about them was Elazar the kohen, the son of Aaron:

Elazar the kohen said to the soldiers returning from battle, "This is the statute that the Lord commanded Moses..." (Numbers 31, 21)

Why was Moses silent and why did he let Elazar take his place? Chazal, in midrash, offer an answer we would never have dared to give. Let us quote them:

"Moses, our teacher, because he succumbed to anger, he succumbed to error." (Sifre on Numbers, Matot, 157)

A few verses before the instruction given by Elazar the kohen, we read: "Moses became angry with the officers of the army...who had returned from the campaign of war" (Numbers, 31, 14). The result, according to the midrash, was immediate: Moses forgot the halachic (Jewish law) instruction relevant to the situation and Elazar had to take his place. Later, the sages of the midrash list other times when Moses got angry and as a result made a mistake in halacha or action.

One of the early Jewish biblical commentators, Rabbi Judah ibn Balaam (Spain, 1000-1070), made a connection between this story and one about the prophet Elisha told in Kings II. The story there is about a regional war led by King Yehoram of Israel, King Yehoshafat of Judea, and with them the king of Edom, against King Meisha of Moab. At a certain point, when the armies of Israel and Judea were in trouble, the kings turned to Elisha the prophet who was accompanying the army. Elisha initially responded in anger, "What do I have [to do] with you? Go to your father's prophets and to your mother's prophets!", hinting at the idol worship prevalent in those days in the kingdom of Israel. Later, Elisha agreed to the kings' request and instructed, "And now fetch me a musician." And immediately, "the musician played, the hand of the Lord came upon him."

Why did Elisha need a musician to play for him? Rashi answers this in only a few words, "Because of his anger, the Divine Presence left him" (Rashi on Kings II 3, 15). Again, we encounter a tremendously spiritual person getting angry, even legitimately and justifiably angry, but as a result of this anger, he is unable to return to his spiritual level. The Ralbag (Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, commentator and astronomer, Provence, 14th century) wrote the following about the story of Elisha:

"To tell us that one should avoid anger, because anger extinguishes the light of the intellect."

We are being called upon to learn from our nation's greatest leaders, from their successes but also from their failures. We have to admit that we don't have to go all the way back to Moses in the 14th century BCE or back to the prophet Elisha in the 9th century BCE. We know full well how anger can be detrimental and we are fully aware of the damage and harm that come from rage. How many relationships have been harmed by an uncontrolled moment of anger? How many disputes could have been resolved had people exercised restraint and not allowed anger to gain control over them?

Yes, we can. We can overcome anger, control it and manage it.

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Matos-Masei

פרשת מטות-מסעי חש"פ

Matos

נקום ונקמת בני ישראל מאת המדינים אחר תאסף אל עמיך

Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midyanim; afterward you will be gathered unto your people. (31: 2)

Hashem informed Moshe *Rabbeinu* that he would leave this world once *Klal Yisrael* destroyed Midyan. Then *Klal Yisrael* would be avenged. Once *Klal Yisrael* exacted vengeance, Moshe's "work" (so to speak) would be complete. Although Moshe was acutely aware that once he completed this *mitzvah* he would die, he executed the vengeance with amazing alacrity. A *mitzvah* is a *mitzvah*, even if it meant that it would hasten his own demise.

The Torah writes that the Jewish People waged war with Midyan, and they succeeded in killing all males. Among them was Bilaam ben Be'or, the pagan prophet who was hired by Balak, king of Moav, to curse the Jews. Since vengeance against Midyan was the criterion for Moshe's passing from this world, and Bilaam was part of that vengeance, it makes sense that Moshe's death was dependent upon Bilaam's death. It was almost as if Moshe could not die as long as Bilaam remained alive. Why is this?

Horav Yaakov Yitzchak HaLevi Ruderman, zl, explains this based on *Chazal's* commentary to the *pasuk* in *Devarim* 34:10, *V'lo kam Navi od b'Yisrael k'Moshe*; "Never again has there arisen in *Yisrael* a prophet like Moshe." *Chazal (Sifri)* note the Torah's emphasis on *Yisrael*, which they say implies that another prophet would never arise in *Yisrael* that would achieve Moshe's stature. In the gentile nations, however, such a prophet could possibly exist (albeit, on a contrasting, spiritual level of defilement). This was Bilaam who, after strenuous preparation under certain circumstances and criteria, could communicate with G-d. In other words, on some plane, Bilaam was the pagan analogue to Moshe. Taking this further, the *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes *Kohes* 7:14, *Gam es zeh l'umas zeh asah Elokim*; "G-d has made the one as well as the other." *Chazal (Chagigah* 15a) say, "Everything that Hashem created, He created a counterpart (*l'umas zeh*). He created the righteous; He created the wicked; He created *Gan Eden*; He created *Gehinnom*." We infer from *Chazal* that the world has to function in a balanced way: for every good creation, a like creation must exist in opposition. Thus, the *Rosh Yeshivah* explains, the relationship between Moshe and Bilaam was *zeh l'umas zeh*. Bilaam was Moshe's counterpart, the balance of evil to good. What Moshe achieved in purity and sanctity, Bilaam counter-achieved in spiritual defilement and impurity.

As such, we understand why it was necessary for Moshe's life to end once Bilaam was no longer alive to balance his *kedushah*. As long as Bilaam lived, Moshe lived. Once Bilaam died, Moshe could return to his Source. With this in mind, we might understand why Moshe rushed to execute the *mitzvah* of vengeance. He understood that as long as Bilaam lived, a high level of defilement would pervade the world. He was willing to give up his life in order to rid this world of Bilaam's spiritual contaminant.

ויאמר בני גד ובני ראובן אל משה... עבדיך יעשו כאשר אדני מצוה ... עבדיך יעברו כל חלוץ צבא לפני ד' למלחמה כאשר אדני דבר

Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven said to Moshe... Your servants shall do as my lord commands... And your servants shall cross over, every armed person of the legion, before Hashem, to do battle, as my lord speaks. (32:25,27)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* exhorted *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* to assume their share of the battle of conquering *Eretz Yisrael*, concluding, "*V'nichb'shah ha'aretz lifnei Hashem, v'achar tashuvu*," "And the Land; shall be conquered before Hashem, and then you shall return" (ibid 32:22). *Chazal (Midrash)*

comment that Moshe's statement, *V'achar tashuvu*, "And then you shall return," was fulfilled *b'm'lo muvan ha'milah*, to the word. Every member of *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* returned home from the war and apportioning of the Land, a total of fourteen years. Not a single one died, not even of natural causes! *Tzaddik gozeir v'Hakadosh Boruch Hu mekayeim*; the *tzaddik*, righteous person, issues a decree, and Hashem fulfills his request.

The *Maharil Diskin*, *zl*, explains that this is why the Torah first quotes *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* as saying, "Your servants shall do as my lord commands..." The *anshei tzavah*, men of the legion, the soldiers who fought the war, were between the ages of twenty and sixty years old. The second group, the *chalutzei tzavah*, armed men of the legion, was comprised of those who were past the age of the draft, sixty years old, who really did not have to go, but went anyway, due to a sense of *achrayus*, responsibility, for *Klal Yisrael*; they responded, *kaasher adoni doveir*, "As my lord speaks." Hashem had issued no command for them to go. When they heard, however, Moshe's assurance that all would return, granting them fourteen years of life, they were going. Moshe's word meant something to them.

The word/promise/assurance of a *tzaddik* is like money in the bank. A young man was studying diligently in *yeshivah* and had reached marriageable age. He had decided that the time was ripe to look for his life's companion. He met a young woman who hailed from a fine family. She was replete with *middos tovos*, refined character traits, G-d-fearing and kind-hearted. Two weeks following their engagement, the *kallah* began to have headaches-accompanied by body tremors. The *chassan's* mother began to worry. Two weeks later, the *kallah* told her *chassan* the bleak news: she had developed a grave illness that would require treatment. With the help of the Almighty, she was hopeful for a recovery. She told him that she understood that he may want to break the *shidduch*, engagement, and move on with his life. He looked at her incredulously, "What are you saying? Absolutely not. We are in this together!" The young woman was a bit more perspicacious. She said, "Let us wait and see how your parents feel. Talk it over with them, and then you can make your decision."

The young *chassan* came home and spoke with his parents. They sympathized with the young woman and her family, but they "agreed" that the *shidduch* should be severed. When the *chassan* argued, his mother countered, "Do you not think it strange that she became sick right after the engagement?" She was intimating that the illness had not just appeared now, that the girl had not been well prior to their engagement. The *chassan* was not budging. He would not forsake his *kallah* at such a difficult time. The parents felt that, after a few days, he would come to his senses.

The *chassan* returned to his *yeshivah* and studied diligently. A week passed, and he called his *kallah* to inquire about her health. Her mother answered with a question, "Why are you calling? The *shadchan*, matchmaker, has informed us that the *shidduch* is off." The young man was floored, "No one can break this *shidduch* except me, and I will marry your daughter!" The young man went home and asked his parents to allow him to make his own decisions. They countered, "Let us ask *daas Torah*. We want to ask *Chacham Ovadyah Yosef*, *zl*, and we will abide by his word." Their son agreed, on the condition that they acknowledge up front that he was going only because one does not reject a *gadol*, Torah giant, of *Chacham Ovadyah's* stature. As far as he personally was concerned, his mind was made up: he was marrying his present *kallah*.

The meeting with *Chacham Ovadyah* took place the next day. The *Chacham* first inquired about the young man's learning, his diligence and erudition. He remarked that his father was a distinguished Torah scholar. The *Chacham* then asked the young man if he agreed with his parents, who contended that the girl had been aware of this grave illness prior to the engagement, which would invalidate the engagement. The *chassan* replied that while he could not prove it, in his heart he felt that this was not a ruse. The young lady was a wonderful, sweet, kind, righteous, G-d-fearing woman, everything that he sought in a wife: "I feel that He Who sits upon High is testing my resolve and commitment. This is the young woman with whom I want to spend the rest of my life!" The young man broke down in bitter weeping. The

Chacham embraced him and, himself weeping, declared, "You will marry her. Hashem will bless her with a complete recovery, and the two of you will establish a beautiful *bayis*, home, for generations to come! As you are stalwartly committed to her, so shall she be to you throughout your life."

The *chassan* walked out of the room and signaled his parents to enter. The *Chacham* said, "At first, I portrayed myself as being antagonistic to the marriage. I wanted to see if he was truly committed. He is – and he will be blessed." When a *gadol* utters his blessing, it is an appeal to Hashem from an individual whose relationship with the Almighty is an inextricable bond. *Chacham Ovadyah Yosef* was a *gadol* whose life was Torah, the lifeblood of our people.

The wedding took place as soon as the *kallah's* treatments had successfully been completed. The *Chacham's* blessings were realized: a healthy mother and father raised eight healthy children. After studying for a number of years in *kollel*, the father became a *rosh yeshivah*, reaching out to hundreds of students. Most of their children were married off, and the next generation was already a part of their lives. Everything seemed perfect until the faithful *chassan* became ill with a dread disease that causes the death of the neurons controlling muscles. It began as weakness and progressed to complete paralysis of everything but his fingers and head. Thirteen years have passed, and his wife has never left his side. Her devotion is beyond belief and indescribable with mere words. *Chacham Ovadyah* came to every milestone and, amid tears, rendered his blessing to the wife to have the strength and courage to continue her extraordinary work. As her *chassan* stood by her years earlier, she continues to stand by him. *Chacham Yosef's* blessing continues to realize fruit.

Masei

אלה מסעי בני ישראל ... ויכתב משה את מוצאיהם למסעיהם על פי ד'

These are the journeys of *Bnei Yisrael*... Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem. (33:1,2)

The journeys of *Klal Yisrael* from the time they left Egypt until their arrival in the Holy Land are significant, since the Torah underscores them. The Torah only contains events that have importance for posterity. Moshe recorded these journeys by the word of Hashem, because (according to *Rambam*), in this way, the nation would remember the miraculous events which occurred in the wilderness for all time. Veritably, some of these miracles were clearly evident, such as the Clouds of Glory and the *manna*. As we all know only too well, however, memory fades, and doubters and skeptics are likely to arise and claim that: A. It never happened; B. Even if it did occur, we traveled near inhabited areas where there was water; *manna* was a natural phenomenon. To remove such ideas, Hashem set the record straight by detailing the entire itinerary of barren and desolate plains, so that the nation will know that they survived by miracle. Furthermore, the *Rambam* adds that the nation was to be aware and acknowledge that every step of the journey was guided by the will of Hashem. Nothing was random; nothing was by chance. Everything happened by Heavenly design.

I think that we can further encapsulate the lessons expressed by this detailed itinerary. "Life is a trip" is a popular cliché: The Torah here defines *Klal Yisrael's* sojourn through the wilderness as a journey. Is there a difference? I recently came across an article that distinguishes between "trip" and "journey," suggesting the two words are more than mere synonyms. While both describe traveling from one place to another, "trips" are much shorter in duration. As Jews, we must remember that life from cradle to grave is one long journey. To reduce life's occurrence to a series of trips is exactly what the Torah here is telling us not to do.

While it is true that life has its "moments" – periods of stress, challenge, confrontation, anxiety, intervals of joy, *nachas*, success, celebrations – but these are not isolated "stops" which break our long journey into trips. Each and every one of these "trips" is connected to its predecessor and leads up to what follows. Hashem has a plan for us and, at the end of the journey, if we would be able to look back and connect all of the trips, we would see clearly how they are all part of one long journey.

Perhaps the most critical life lesson that we should derive from here is that everything that has taken place during our journey is *al pi Hashem*, by the instruction, will and guidance of Hashem. *Hameichin mitzadei gaver*; “He guides the footsteps of man” is a verity every Jew should acknowledge every step of the way, even when it seems nonsensical and irrational. Hashem has a reason, a Heavenly reason, known only to Him.

Mutty made the trip every day: once in the morning; and the return trip in the evening. Brooklyn to Manhattan was accessible through a few routes: The Brooklyn Bridge was his choice. Tonight, it happened to be pouring. He was extra careful. The last thing he wanted was to have a mishap on the bridge with thousands of cars moving back and forth, each occupant having one concern on his/her mind: reaching his/her destination as soon as safely possible. Tonight had been a rough trip. The traffic was moving very slowly due to the inclement weather. It had been a long, hard day at the office. Mutty was tired, hungry and on edge. Bad weather had that effect on him. Suddenly, he saw the slowed traffic becoming slower as each car began to move from the left lane to the right. As slow as it had been before, it very quickly came to a standstill. Finally, he was able to see the reason for the delay. A car was stuck in the left lane; the driver was standing outside of his car, probably waiting for help from the police, a tow truck, or a kind driver that could help him get his car started.

In New York, rush hour on a bridge was a bad place to be stuck before the cell phone era. When one was stuck, he prayed. He was now the driver of the car that was stuck. This had never happened to him before. Actually, it was not even his car. He owned a large construction firm, and, since his luxury sedan was being serviced, he took one of the cars in the pool without bothering to check if it were up to par. Apparently, it was not. What surprised him was the multitude of drivers who passed him, refusing to even look his way, almost as if they blamed him for causing them to be delayed. Finally, after thirty minutes of waiting not so patiently, a kind fellow, from the looks of him an Orthodox Jew, stopped and pulled behind his car and asked, “What seems to be the problem?”

It was Mutty, who could not fathom why not one of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, before him did not stop to offer assistance to a fellow driver. Mutty offered to help, did some checking and discovered that the problem was elementary: the car had run out of gas. Henry had taken a company car without checking to see if it had been filled with gas. A resourceful person, Mutty syphoned some gas from his tank and poured it into Henry’s car, and all was well. Henry could not stop expressing his gratitude. He asked Mutty what he did for a living. Mutty told him that he sold commercial carpets to businesses. Henry gave Mutty his card and asked him to call him the next day.

The next day came and went. Mutty was busy at home and at his business. He was doing his best to build up his business. A week passed before Mutty called Henry’s office. The secretary answered in the usual “friendly” monotone she reserved for callers she did not know. Obviously, Henry’s business did not rely on a cheerful secretary. When Mutty gave his name and said that he was following Henry’s request, her attitude immediately shifted gears and went into, “Yes, yes, Henry said to put your call through immediately.” After some talk and effusive gratitude on Henry’s part, Henry came to the point, “Mutty, I cannot thank you enough. It is not how much you did, but the care and sensitivity you exhibited by stopping. You mentioned that you sell commercial carpeting. I am in construction here in Manhattan. My company is presently completing a forty-five story office building. I instructed my manager to use your company to carpet all the offices in the building. Thank you very much!”

Mutty had been upset about the delay on the Brooklyn bridge. Hashem was rearranging his “trip,” on which he appeared to be encountering turbulence at first, but which ended up quite rewarding. It is all a part of the journey.

Rav Azaryah was the son of Holocaust survivors. He lived in *Eretz Yisrael* where he had a small *yeshivah* for students who required a little extra help, love, care and understanding. He was quite good at what he did. When he began having pains in his back his doctors discovered that he had an illness

for which the only cure was surgery. The surgeon who had perfected the method was the most proficient at performing the procedure. He lived and worked in Berlin, Germany. The last place to which Rav Azaryah wanted to travel was Germany. The horror stories that his parents had shared with him had taken care of that. Nonetheless, after consulting with a number of *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, he accepted their advice and blessings for a *refuah sheleimah*, speedy recovery, and he purchased tickets to Berlin. He did, however, make one critical decision: When he traveled throughout the diaspora, he made a point of not calling attention to his Orthodox Jewish religious observance. (A beard does not call attention anymore.) On this trip, particularly because it was to Germany, he would proudly display his *tzitzis*, his *payos* would be evident down the sides of his face, and he would wear his *Shabbos* frock and hat.

One day, as he stood in the supermarket selecting fruits and vegetables, a distinguished looking gentleman, who was obviously a priest (he was dressed in the entire garb), approached and asked him, “Are you a Rabbi?” “Yes, I am. How can I help you?” Rav Azaryah replied. “As you can tell, I am a priest. I am in charge of the morgue. According to the city rules, if a body has not been claimed within 72 hours, the corpse is to be cremated. We have a Jewish man whom I was about to have cremated, since we are not aware of any next of kin. When I saw you, however, I felt that you were Heaven-sent to ensure that this man receive a proper Jewish burial,” the priest explained.

Rav Azaryah was confused. On the one hand, he was in a strange country where he didn’t even know the language (as it was, he was conversing in pseudo English/*Yiddish*), let alone the culture and the community. On the other hand, how could he ignore the *mitzvah* of bringing a Jew to *kever Yisrael*, Jewish burial? This was a *meis mitzvah*, a Jewish corpse who had no one to attend to his burial. First, he had to confirm that the deceased had, indeed, been Jewish. Merely having had a *bris* was not necessarily sufficient proof. He phoned the nursing home where the deceased had resided and asked to speak to the social worker who was in charge of the man’s case. During the course of the conversation, the woman who was (supposed to be) devoted to the patient, intimated disparagingly that the deceased had been a Jew. When Rav Azaryah asked her how she knew this, the woman said that he had one of those Jewish boxes on his doorpost (*mezuzah*). This was all Rav Azaryah required to ascertain the man’s Jewish genealogy. He now knew why he had been destined to have his surgery in Germany. In this way, he was able to bring a fellow Jew to *kever Yisrael*.

Va’ani Tefillah

ועל נסך שבכל יום עמנו ועל נפלאותיך שבכל יום – *V’al nisecha she’b’chol yom imanu v’al niflosecha she’b’chol eis*. For Your miracles that are with us every day, and for Your wonders and favors in every season.

Miracles are those remarkable events which are clearly Heavenly-fabricated. Wonders are those events which are regarded as natural, such as breathing, rain, vegetation growth and life all around which, until it is suddenly halted, we take for granted. These are natural phenomena, because we call consideration to them. Nothing is natural about breathing. *Al kol neshimah u’neshimah tehallel Kah*, “For each and every breath that we take, we should praise Hashem.” Breathing is a gift, a miraculous gift, which we all too often take for granted. We thank Hashem for both the miracles and the wonders, but we know and acknowledge that they are both one and the same. They are just relative terms used to distinguish between two forms of supernatural events: the ones which we acknowledge as miracles; and the ones which we unfortunately take for granted as being “natural.” We, nonetheless, concede that they are no less miraculous.

*In loving memory of our parents and brother
Cy and Natalie Handler - 3 Av 5772 - 24 Teves 5771
Jeremy Handler - 19 Tammuz 5766
by the Handler Family
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Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya
Vacation Situations

Question: Is it appropriate to remove one's tallis katan while playing sports or engaging in strenuous activities that make one hot and sweaty?

Discussion: Some poskim write that it is not appropriate to do so.[1] While it is true that neither Biblical nor Rabbinic law obligates one to wear a tallis katan at all times[2], it has become the accepted custom that every male wears a tallis katan all day long. [3] Rav M. Feinstein rules that since it has become customary to wear a tallis katan all day long, one may no longer deviate from this practice, and one who does so transgresses the dictum of al titosh Toras imecha[4].

What are the origins of this custom? Why did men choose to be meticulous about donning a tallis katan even when they were not required to do so? The poskim mention two basic reasons: 1) Wearing tzitzis gives us the opportunity to be constantly reminded of our obligations as a Jew, as it is written in Bamidbar (15:39), "That you may see it and remember all the commandments of Hashem and perform them." [5] 2) The Talmud[6] tells us that wearing a tallis katan serves as protection from "Hashem's wrath"; when He observes His children performing mitzvos — such as tzitzis — that they are not even obligated to perform, His anger is contained and He views us more favorably. [7]

It follows, therefore, that no matter the heat or discomfort, one should still be particular not to remove his tallis katan: One constantly needs a reminder of his status as a servant of Hashem, and one should always take advantage of the protection that the tallis katan offers to those who wear it[8].

There are, however, contemporary poskim who question this ruling. They argue that the mitzvah of tzitzis is only properly fulfilled when one is wearing a garment which benefits him in some way, e.g., it protects or warms him[9]. If, however, the garment does not benefit its wearer in any way, and on the contrary — it makes him uncomfortable or bothers him, then it is possible that the tallis katan no longer falls under the category of a "beged" (a useful garment), and one who wears a useless beged does not fulfill the mitzvah of tzitzis by wearing it[10].

Question: Are pets muktzeh on Shabbos and Yom Tov?

Discussion: The Talmud[11] states that it is forbidden to move animals on Shabbos. In halachic terms, animals are considered like sticks and stones which have no permissible Shabbos use and are muktzeh machmas gufo, severe muktzeh, which may not be moved for any reason. This ruling is quoted by Shulchan Aruch[12] and most of the later poskim, and no distinction is drawn between farm animals and households pets; all are considered severe muktzeh. Some poskim expressly include "playful animals" in this prohibition[13].

There are, however, other poskim who do distinguish between farm animals and household pets. In their opinion, a pet is considered like a household item, similar to a toy or a picture, and is not classified as muktzeh at all[14]. While it is advisable to follow the majority opinion and not carry or move pets on Shabbos[15], those who are lenient have a halachic authority upon whom to rely[16]. Certainly, if the pet is in distress, one may be lenient and move it or carry it[17].

All opinions agree that it is permitted to touch (without moving) or feed one's pets on Shabbos. It is also permitted to hold onto a leash and walk a dog in an area which is enclosed by an eiruv[18]. It is permitted to place a leash on a dog on Shabbos[19].

Question: How mandatory is Chazal's advisory that a guest should not change his customary lodging place?

Discussion: Rashi[20] explains that there are two reasons behind this advisory:

Switching lodgings discredits the guest, since he will be considered hard to please or disreputable in some way.

Switching lodgings harms the host's reputation, since it gives the impression that his lodgings were unsatisfactory[21].

If a guest has a bona fide reason to change his lodging place, however, the halachah will not restrict him from doing so. For example, if a guest customarily lodged at a certain home, but came to town for a simchah and wants to stay at the home of the ba'al simchah, that would be permitted. If a guest customarily lodged at a certain home, but upon his return visit the original host was out of town or indisposed, or no longer had the space for guests, the halachic advisory would not apply and the guest could stay elsewhere[22].

Question: On Shabbos or Yom Tov, is it permitted to use suntan lotion in order to prevent sunburn?

Discussion: Suntan lotion which is in cream, ointment or thick, slow-pouring oil form, is forbidden to be used on Shabbos, as it may be a violation of the Shabbos Labor of Smoothing[23]. It is permitted, however, to use suntan protection which is in a liquid spray form, since Smoothing does not apply to runny, non-viscous liquids such as liquid spray.

Although there is a Rabbinic injunction against taking medicine on Shabbos, suntan protection is not considered medication, since its purpose is not to heal but to protect. It is similar to using insect repellent on Shabbos, which is permitted since its function is also not to heal but to protect[24].

Taking medication for ordinary sunburn, however, even if it is in spray or liquid form, could be a violation of the Rabbinic injunction against taking medicine on Shabbos. In the atypical case where the sunburn is so severe that one feels "weak all over" or bad enough to require bed rest because of it, liquid or spray medication is permitted[25]. If there is a chance that infection will set in, all medications and ointments are permitted to be used[26].

Note: Our discussion regarding suntan protection pertains to those who might get sunburned while fulfilling a Shabbos mitzvah, e.g., those who need to walk a long distance to shul on Shabbos. But to deliberately sit in the sun in order to get a suntan is not in keeping with the spirit of Shabbos, and indeed, is forbidden on halachic grounds by some contemporary poskim[27].

1. Mahri Elgazi, quoted in Tzitz Eliezer 14:49-2; Rav B. Zilber, Yagel Yaakov, pg. 165.

2. The Torah requirement is to place tzitzis on a four-cornered garment when one is wearing such a garment. The Torah, however, does not require that one specifically put on a four-cornered garment so as to be obligated to wear tzitzis; O.C. 24:1.

3. Aruch ha-Shulchan 8:2; Tzitz Eliezer 8:4; Yechaveh Da'as 4:2.

4. Igros Moshe O.C. 4:4; O.C. 5:20-25.

5. O.C. 24:1. See Rambam, Hilchos Tzitzis 3:11.

6. Menachos 41a.

7. See Tosafos, Pesachim 113b, s.v. v'ein, and Gilyon ha-Shas; Rokeiach 331: Kesef Mishneh, Hilchos Tzitzis 3:11.

8. See Halichos Shelomo 1:3, Devar Halachah 25; Tzitz Eliezer 14:49-2.

9. See Koveitz Shiurim, vol. 2, 23:8.

10. Rav Y.S. Elyashiv and Rav C. Kanievsky, quoted in Rivevos Efrayim 7:265 and Yagel Yaakov, pg. 166. See also Ashrei ha-Ish, Tzitzis 2:23, Nezer ha-Chayim, pg. 164, and Doleh U'mashkeh, pg. 27.

11. See Shabbos 128b.

12. O.C. 308:39

13. See Tosafos, Shabbos 45b, s.v. hacha; Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 308:78; Da'as Torah, O.C. 308:39; Kaf ha-Chayim 308:235.

14. Minchas Shabbos 88:10, quoting Nezer Yisrael and Halachos Ketanos; Az Nidberu 8:36.

15. Minchas Shabbos, 88:10; Yabia Omer 5:26.

16. Rav S.Z. Auerbach; see Shulchan Shelomo, O.C. 308:74-4; B'tzeil ha-Chochmah 5:33-34. There are conflicting sources concerning Rav M. Feinstein's opinion on this subject; see Sefer Tiltulei Shabbos, pg. 119, and Igros Moshe, O.C. 5:22-21.

17. See Mishnah Berurah 305:70 and Chazon Ish, O.C. 52:16.

18. Under certain, very specific conditions, it is even permitted to walk a dog with a leash in a public domain; see O.C. 305:16 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 5.

19. O.C. 305:1, 8, 10.

20. Arachin 16b.

21. Accordingly, one should not change even from one Jewish-owned hotel to another — unless he has a bona fide reason for doing so — as it discredits the hotel where he stayed.

22. See Piskei Teshuvos 170:6, quoting Ohalecha b'Amisecha.

23. Based on Da'as Torah, O.C. 328:26; Chazon Ish, O.C. 52:16 and Tzitz Eliezer 7:30-2. 24. Based on O.C. 328:23. See also Mishnah Berurah 301:108.

25. See The Monthly Halachah Discussion, pgs. 90-91.

26. See The Monthly Halachah Discussion, pgs. 101-102, for more details.

27. See Chelkas Yaakov 4:17; Minchas Yitzchak 5:32; Az Nidberu 2:30; Machazeh Eliyahu 65:24.

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PARASHAT MATOT: SECRET STRUGGLE

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

SETTING THE SCENE:

In the end of our parasha, two shevatim (tribes) approach the leaders of the nation with a request. The tribes: Re'uvein and Gad. The leaders: Moshe, Elazar, and the Nesi'ei Eda (leaders of the congregation).

Thinking back just a bit, we recall a similar scene of people with a request approaching almost the same group of leaders: the daughters of Tzelafhad approach Moshe, Elazar, the Nesi'im, and the entire congregation with their request. Since only males can inherit a portion of land in Eretz Yisrael, will they be excluded simply because their father fathered no sons?

Just as the Torah's account of Benot Tzelafhad's request first introduces the group voicing the request, telling us all of their names and also obliquely introducing their request (earlier, during the census, by telling us that Tzelafhad has only daughters) — here also, in our parasha, the Torah introduces the group and, obliquely, its problem: these are the people of Re'uvein and Gad, and they have "lots of cattle." But unlike the daughters of Tzelafhad, this group is not protesting an injustice, they are seeking an economic advantage.

ANTICIPATING RESISTANCE:

The fact that the request is calculated to their economic advantage is something Gad and Re'uvein implicitly acknowledge in the way they make their request. Instead of saying baldly, "Instead of continuing on with the rest of the nation to Eretz Yisrael, the land promised to the Avot, we would rather settle right here in 'hutz la-Aretz,' in order to raise enormous flocks on the fertile grazing land here," they simply put two facts before Moshe: "Well, uh, this here land is cattle land, and we, uh, we've got lots of cattle." They leave Moshe to draw the inevitable conclusion.

They also refer to themselves as "avadekha," "your [Moshe's] servants," behaving obsequiously to mitigate the explosive reaction they expect from Moshe. Recall that others in the Torah have made the same move, referring to themselves as "your servant" in anticipation of a hostile response:

1) On his return from his many years at Lavan's house, Ya'akov refers to himself as "your servant" several times in his communications with his brother Eisav. Since Ya'akov expects Eisav to confront him with still-murderous rage over his theft of Eisav's berakhot (the deathbed blessings Yitzhak intended for Eisav), he hopes to calm Eisav with gifts and a show of fealty to him as family leader.

2) Ya'akov's sons refer to themselves as "your servants" when they stand before the "disguised" Yosef, accused of espionage. They deny Yosef's accusation, but do so humbly, using the term "avadekha" many times.

3) The representatives of Bnei Yisrael refer to themselves this way when trying to deal with Paro, who has just made the conditions of their servitude more harsh than before.

In sum, we often find this term used when the person using it thinks the other person is going to be angry. The same is true here — the obsequious self-reference shows that Gad and Re'uvein know that their request will likely alarm or anger Moshe.

NEGOTIATING POSTURE:

The use of "avadekha" is also reminiscent of the negotiations over the cave and field of Mahpela which Avraham purchases from Efron as a gravesite for Sara (Parashat Hayyei Sara). Each party to the negotiations attempts to outmaneuver the other by being super-courteous, giving the appearance of generosity while truly struggling for a more powerful position. Avraham casts himself as the pitiful stranger and wanderer, his wife's corpse lying before him awaiting burial. He tries to force his opponent(s) to yield the cave he wants by making it seem like refusing would be an act of great callousness to a poor stranger. The Bnei Het, Avraham's interlocutors, know exactly what Avraham is up to, and try to take the wind out of his sails by denying that he is a pitiful wanderer, insisting that he is not a "ger ve-toshav," but instead a "nesi Elokim," a prince of God, a powerful noble. On the surface, they pay tribute to Avraham, but in truth, they are trying to weaken his bargaining position by according him great status.

"THE LAND HASHEM HAS CONQUERED":

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein describe the land they desire as "eret mikneh," a land of cattle, or well suited for cattle. This is no surprise. But they also refer to the land as "the land Hashem has conquered before the congregation of Israel." Why do they have to remind Moshe who conquered the land for them? Do they imagine that Moshe thinks he should get the credit, or that the people should?

Recall how in Sefer Bereshit the servant of Avraham (Eliezer, according to the midrash), trying to find a wife for Yitzhak, devises a test by which (he hopes) Hashem will show him the right woman. When Rivka passes the test, the servant 'knows' she's the one. But he still must convince her family that the match is a good one; after all, Rivka's family has never even met Yitzhak, and he is asking them to send off their daughter to a new life with a man sight unseen. So the servant tells her family the story of the test he devised and how Rivka passed it with flying colors. Of course, he changes a few details to make it seem a bit more impressive, and he succeeds: by the time he is finished, the family can respond only, "Me-Hashem yatza ha-davar" — "This matter has gone forth from Hashem": it seems to be Hashem's will, so we must agree to it.

Abravanel suggests that perhaps something similar occurs here (although he does not cite the parallel with Avraham's servant): Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein want Moshe to accept their proposal, so they make it seem if it is really Hashem's plan. "Look: We have lots of cattle, and Hashem has conquered this **cattle-land** before the nation . . . obviously, He means for some part of the nation to have it, otherwise why did He 'conquer it before the congregation of Bnei Yisrael'? And obviously, *we* are the people who are meant to settle there, because this land is such great cattle land, and we have loads of cattle!" Moshe is supposed to respond the same way Rivka's family did: "Me-Hashem yatza ha-davar."

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein may also anticipate that Moshe will reject their plan because it is unfair: since the entire nation participated in the conquest of the land that Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein now desire, it would be unfair to allow them to settle without helping the other shevatim conquer the land which will become theirs. In order to deflect this argument, they characterize the conquest of this land as something done completely by Hashem, with the people merely following in His victorious wake. "You can't tell us that everyone helped win this land for us, and that we have to help them conquer their land — Hashem did it all! And just as He did it on this side of the Jordan for us, He'll do it on the other side for the rest of the shevatim. It really had nothing to do with actual soldiers who risked their lives — it was all Hashem!"

MOSHE RESPONDS (NOT):

But Moshe doesn't play ball. He responds to the request of Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein by remaining silent. He doesn't say a word. Many times in our study of the parasha, we have noted that when someone ("A") says something to someone else ("B"), and then "A" says something *else* in a new statement (preceded by a new "va-yomer"), it's because "B" has not responded!

Why doesn't Moshe respond?

A few weeks ago, we talked about Bil'am and how Hashem asks him questions. First, when Balak's men arrive to summon Bil'am to curse Bnei Yisrael, Hashem asks him, "Who are these men with you?" Now, Hashem knows the answer to the question, and Bil'am knows He knows. But instead of acknowledging that Hashem is telling him that he is on the wrong track, Bil'am simply answers the question: "Oh, these fellows are Balak's men." Hashem's unnecessary question hints to him that he should really just forget about cursing Bnei Yisrael and ask Balak's men to go home, but, blinded by Balak's shimmering promises of gold, he refuses to see. (Similar scenes occur when Hashem asks Adam, who has just eaten from the tree of knowledge, "Where are you?", or when Hashem asks Kayyin, who has just killed Hevel, "Where is your brother?", see the shiur on Parashat Balak for more details.) Hashem even speaks to Bil'am through his donkey, asking him three further unnecessary questions, but it is no use: Bil'am simply answers the questions instead of going home as he is supposed to. Bil'am doesn't truly "see" until after Hashem has blessed Bnei Yisrael twice through his own mouth; then, finally, he "sees" that Hashem desires to bless Bnei Yisrael, and he adds his own blessing.

Moshe plays the opposite game with Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein — instead of using speech to hint something, he uses silence. Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein voice their request in a subtle way because they knew Moshe won't like it; they are hoping they won't have to spell it out completely. But Moshe pretends not to understand, making it seem as if he is waiting for them to make their request, as if they have delivered only the introduction and not the request itself. Just as Bil'am is not supposed to answer the questions, and instead take them as a hint that Hashem doesn't want him to get involved in cursing His nation, Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein are not supposed to actually make their request explicit — they are supposed to withdraw it and drop the matter. But just as Bil'am ignores the hints and simply answers Hashem's questions, Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein ignore Moshe's hint and make their request explicit.

MOSHE RESPONDS (REALLY):

Moshe, of course, responds explosively when they finally state what they want. What is it that bothers Moshe so much? Possibilities:

- 1) It's not fair that these people should fight one battle and be able to settle in their portion, while everyone else must continue to fight.
- 2) Their desire to settle here and not cross the Jordan will be interpreted by the rest of the people as a sign of fear: they will believe that Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein don't want to go on because they don't trust Hashem's promises to give them the Land and help them conquer it. Like the meraglim (spies) of forty years ago, they will cause the people to reject Hashem's promises.

Notice, by the way, the word plays Moshe uses in his speech:

1) “Mil’u aharei Hashem” — this phrase figuratively means to be faithful to Hashem, but here Moshe uses it in a more literal sense: to follow Hashem into the Land, versus “ki teshuvun me-aharav,” not to follow Him into the Land. Yehoshua and Calev are “mil’u aharei Hashem” not simply because they follow His instructions and remain faithful to Him, but because they are ready to go literally “aharav” — to follow Him into the Land. On the other hand, those who reject the Land are “shav me-aharav,” meaning not only figuratively that they do not “follow Him,” but literally that they do not follow Him — into the Land.

2) “Teni’un / va-yeniem” — Moshe accuses Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein of breaking the resolve of the other shevatim and weakening their courage: “teni’un,” “preventing” or “weakening.” Hashem’s reaction to the last time this happened was a very similar word: “va-yeniem,” He tossed the people into the desert for 40 years. Moshe is basically telling the Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein that their action of “meni’a” (with an alef) is tantamount to an action of “meni’a” (with an ayin) — that by breaking the people’s courage, they are directly responsible for what will surely be Hashem’s terrible reaction.

LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE SECRET:

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein’s next move is to come close (“va-yigshu”) to Moshe. What is this all about? Is Moshe suddenly hard of hearing, or are they suddenly hoarse? Are they trying to threaten Moshe by coming closer?

Most likely, they are embarrassed. They have been exposed: they first made their proposal obliquely, not even spelling out what they wanted, but Moshe didn’t bite. Then they made their request explicit, and Moshe exploded. Not only did he rebuff their request, he accused them publicly — in front of “Elazar and the leaders of the congregation” — of selfishness and of having repeated the crime of the meraglim. They are trying to save face and contain the situation, so they come closer to Moshe, as if to say, “Hey, can we just talk about this quietly? Let’s not make a big deal out of this.” Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein are basically ready to just melt into the ground out of mortification, so they try to defuse the situation by first making this a private conversation and then sweetening their offer.

THE NEW DEAL:

What are the elements of the Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein’s new offer?

- 1) They will build structures for their animals and families.
- 2) They will lead the military charge into Eretz Yisrael, forming the avant garde, first to face the enemy’s slings and arrows.
- 3) They will return to their cities only once all of Bnei Yisrael have received their own portions in Eretz Canaan.

Moshe seems happy with the new offer: “If you will do as you have said, then all will be well.” And then he warns them to take this commitment very seriously. But why does the Torah bother telling us *all* of what Moshe says when he repeats all the details of the deal? We already know what the deal is — we’ve just heard it from Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein! Why do we need to hear Moshe say it back to them?

SUB-SURFACE STRUGGLE:

On the surface, it seems that everyone agrees — Moshe begins his response, “If you will do this thing that you have said . . .” and finishes off, “and what has come out of your mouth, you should do!”, but the truth is that the deal Moshe describes is radically different from the deal Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein have just offered. It is not at all “what has come out of your mouth”!

This is classic in biblical scenes of negotiation: on the surface there is agreement, but the subtle ripples on the surface reveal that below, a real struggle is taking place. An earlier example of this is Avraham’s negotiation with Bnei Het and Efron the Hittite for the field and cave of Mahpela, as mentioned above. (Parashat Hayyei Sara, available in the archive.)

Let us note the differences between Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein’s version of the agreement, and Moshe’s version:

- 1) **FIRST TASK:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein state that their first task will be to build protective structures things for their precious possessions (cattle and children); according to Moshe, their first task will be to lead the charge into Eretz Yisrael.
- 2) **CITIES OR CORRALS:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein state that their first task in building structures to hold their possessions will be to build corrals for their beloved cattle; only afterward do they mention building cities for their children. According to Moshe, their first task is to build cities for their children, and only then to build corrals.
- 3) **BEFORE WHOM?:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein offer to lead the charge “Lifnei Bnei Yisrael” (“before Bnei Yisrael”); Moshe

describes their task as to lead the charge “Lifnei Hashem” (“before Hashem”).

4) WHOSE VICTORY: Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein describe the eventual triumph over the Canaanites as something *they* will accomplish — *they* will accompany the other tribes “until **WE** have brought them to their place” — while Moshe describes the conquest as something for which Hashem is truly responsible — “The Land will be conquered before **Hashem,**” “Until **He** drives out His enemies from before Him.”

5) WHEN TO RETURN: Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein state that they will not return to their own land until all of Bnei Yisrael have received their piece of the Land — “Until Bnei Yisrael inherit (“hit-nahel”), each man his inheritance” — while Moshe says they should return as soon as the Land is captured, and not wait until it is distributed to each person as his inheritance (nahala).

6) NAHALA OR AHUZA: Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein refer to the land they desire as a “nahala” — an inheritance (“For our inheritance has come to us on the other side of the Jordan, to the West”) — while Moshe refers to it as an “ahuza,” a “holding,” not an inheritance.

What do all of these differences add up to? What is the real debate between Moshe and Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein?

TRIPLE PLAY:

Moshe’s “corrections” to the proposal of Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein carry three separate messages. Conveniently enough, Message A leads to differences 1 and 2 above, Message B leads to differences 3 and 4, and Message C leads to differences 5 and 6.

MESSAGE A: FAILURE IN BEIN ADAM LA-HAVERO (interpersonal responsibilities):

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein clearly have their priorities completely confused. While it is true that chronologically, they must build cities for their children and corrals for their animals before they depart to form the battle vanguard, Moshe must remind them that this is not supposed to be their primary orientation at this point. It should not be the first thought in their heads and the first thing out of their mouths. Yes, chronologically, but no, as a mentality. These people have just taken care of themselves, assuring their receipt of the land of their choice; their primary focus at this point ought to be fulfilling their responsibilities toward others, entailed by what they have just received. They should be most conscious of their responsibility to aid the other shevatim in battle, not thinking first about the tasks they will undertake to assure the safety of what is theirs. “You have just taken care of yourselves,” Moshe says to them; “it is time to turn your attention to taking care of the others, who have provided you with this land. Taking care of your own things should be a footnote to your serving as the vanguard — not the other way around!”

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein also fail at bein adam le-havero in putting their cattle before their families: in thinking aloud about what they must do next, they first mention building corrals for their sheep, and only then remember that they must also build cities for their wives and children! Moshe must reverse the order, implicitly scolding them for reversing their priorities by putting money ahead of family.

MESSAGE B: FAILURE IN BEIN ADAM LA-MAKOM (relationship with Hashem):

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein do indeed describe the land they desire as a land “conquered by Hashem,” giving credit to Him for the victory. But this attribution is merely strategic, a way of making their request appear part of Hashem’s plan and therefore unrefusable. When they volunteer to lead the charge into Eretz Canaan, they promise to remain with the other shevatim “until **WE** have brought them to their place,” i.e., until WE have conquered everything and provided each person with his portion in the Land. And, significantly, their promise is to venture forth “before Bnei Yisrael.” Moshe powerfully reminds them that the victories to come, those in Eretz Yisrael, may be attributed to no one but Hashem: they are to venture forth “before Hashem” — this phrase appears *seven* times in total in our section — not “before Bnei Yisrael”; the Land will be conquered not by the brave vanguard, but “will be conquered before Hashem.” The conquest takes place almost passively, so to speak; the Land simply “is conquered,” without a human actor. The vanguard is needed not to wield its swords with might and valor, but only to demonstrate its faith in Hashem’s promise to help the people inherit the Land. “Lo be-hayil, ve-lo be-kho’ah, ki im be-ruhi.”

MESSAGE C: FAILURE IN RELATIONSHIP TO ERETZ YISRAEL:

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein make strenuous efforts to equate the land they want, which is not part of Eretz Yisrael, with Eretz Yisrael proper. They want to both “downgrade” the break they are making with the rest of the nation and “upgrade” the status of the land they have chosen, so they attempt to draw parallels between these two pieces of real estate. First, they refer to their chosen land as a “nahala,” an inheritance, exactly the term which is used to refer to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe corrects them: perhaps they have acquired an “ahuza,” a permanent possession, but they have certainly not “inherited” (“nahala”) a thing. The land they inhabit is not part of the Land, not part of the Jewish “heritage” promised to the Avot. It is, at best, an annex, an “ahuza.”

Second, they insist on remaining with the rest of the shevatim not just through the end of the conquest, but until all of the people have

actually received their pieces of the Land. Once this “inheritance” (“yit-nahel,” “nahalato”) process is completed, they will return to their own land. Since they want to claim that what they have received is a “nahala” as well, it is only fair that they remain with the others until they, too, have received their nahala. They are willing to make this sacrifice for the sake of upgrading the status of their holding (“ahuza”). Moshe knows what they are up to, and knocks them down a few pegs: they need not be so generous, he tells them; it will be enough for them to stick around just until the conquest is over. Moshe is telling them that no “nahala” has taken place here, and therefore they have no obligation to stay around until each person receives his own nahala within Eretz Yizrael proper.

Other indications also bespeak the attempt to equate the land under discussion with the Land to be entered: twice, Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein refer to the land they want as “the other side of the Jordan” — first, “Grant us this land . . . do not take us over the Jordan,” and later, “For our inheritance has come to us across the Jordan, to the West.” From their perspective, the difference between the land and the Land is really nothing; they are both simply opposite sides of the Jordan River. Our inheritance is on this side, yours is on that side. We'd rather stay here, on this side of the river. The river, for them, is not so much a border as it is a landmark.

But Moshe refuses to accept this sneaky equation of the “two sides of the Jordan”: twice during his response to Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein, he refers to the Land as “the Land that Hashem has given to them.” It is not just “land,” on this side of the river or that side, it is The Land Hashem Promised To Our Forefathers, The Land In Which They Lived, The Land He Offers To Us. Do not deny what you are rejecting, Moshe says.

Perhaps some of us are clever enough to always formulate what we say in a way which is both advantageous to us and also does not expose our hidden aims. But when most of us speak, anyone with a sharp ear can tell a lot about what we are really thinking and feeling, the same way we have studied the conversation of Moshe and Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein.

May what our tongues reveal about us reflect well-ordered priorities about our responsibilities to other people, to Hashem, and to the values of the Torah.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshios Matos & Masei: (Siyyum on Sefer Bamidbar)

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

I. TRIBAL INTEGRITY AND FAMILY INTEGRITY

The very last presentation in Sefer Bamidbar is a dialogue between Mosheh and the chieftains of Menasheh regarding the land which will soon be inherited by the five daughters of Tz'lofchad, a (dead) member of the tribe.

If we look back to chapter 27, we find that the daughters of Tz'lofchad approached Mosheh with a concern regarding the maintenance of their father's memory in Eretz Yisra'el:

"Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against Hashem in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." (Bamidbar 27:3-4)

Following the assumption that, as daughters, they would not inherit their father's lot in the Land, his name would be lost among the tribe of Menasheh.

Indeed, God affirms the implication of their approach to Mosheh and responds:

"The daughters of Tz'lofchad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them." (ibid. v. 7)

Now, some time later (after the presentation of the war with Midian, the negotiations with the Reubenites and Gadites along with many Halakhot), the chieftains of Menasheh register a concern with Mosheh in response to the Divine solution on behalf of Tz'lofchad's family:

"...and my lord was commanded by Hashem to give the inheritance of our brother Tz'lofchad to his daughters. But if they are married into another tribe of the B'nei Yisra'el, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken away from the allotted portion of our inheritance. And when the Yovel of the B'nei Yisra'el comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they have married; and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestral tribe." (Bamidbar 36:2-4)

To this challenge, Mosheh responds immediately (without consulting with God - unlike his response to the daughters of Tz'lofchad):

Then Mosheh commanded the B'nei Yisra'el according to the word of Hashem, saying, "The descendants of the tribe of Joseph are right in what they are saying. This is what Hashem commands concerning the daughters of Tz'lofchad, 'Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married'..."

From a straight reading of these verses, it is clear that Mosheh had already been commanded regarding the matrimonial limitation to be imposed on the daughters of Tz'lofchad (and he did not turn to God for more instruction at this point) - but he delayed presenting them until the chieftains approached him. (Alternatively, we could posit that the entire Halakhic schema was presented as one to Mosheh and, from him, to the tribe - but that it was, for some reason, related in the Torah's narrative as separate - and separated - incidents. In any case, the question is the same, to wit:)

Why are these two presentations isolated from each other?

II. B'NEI GAD AND B'NEI RE'UVEN

Another question of "placement" may be asked regarding the other significant "land-allotment challenge" at the end of Bamidbar. Chapter 32 is devoted to the "doubled condition" made with the members of the tribes of Gad and Re'uvan (and, later on, a few Menashe-ite families. Two interesting side points, beyond the scope of this shiur, relate to the role of this tribe to the end of Bamidbar. First of all, why did they jump on the Gad-Re'uvan "bandwagon" in the middle of the negotiations with Mosheh? Second, note that they are the tribe of Tz'lofchad; thus, they are involved in all of the "land-allotment" issues at the end of Bamidbar...something worth investigating).

B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvan had a lot of cattle and found the East Bank of the Jordan to be plentiful for their needs - and they approached Mosheh, asking him to be allowed to remain there, without crossing over the Jordan river. Mosheh ultimately "struck a bargain" with them: If they would agree to be at the vanguard of the fighting force in Eretz Yisra'el, leaving their families and cattle behind while they fought, they would be allowed to inherit on the East Bank. Besides the fascinating Halakhic discussions revolving around the "doubled condition" (see Mishnah Kiddushin 3:4, the discussion in the Bavli ad loc. and in Rambam, Ishut Ch. 6), there is simply a question about chronology/sequence here. The land which these two (plus) tribes chose to inherit was the land formerly occupied by Sichon and Og. We read about the successful wars against these two mighty kings at the end of Parashat Hukat - back in Chapter 22. Why didn't B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvan approach Mosheh then? Or, alternatively, why is their approach and subsequent negotiations recorded here?

We will try to answer each of these "placement" questions with a common approach - one which will also serve as a (hopefully) fitting Siyyum to our study of Sefer Bamidbar. First - a much more basic question about the Sefer.

III. LEKHEIKH AHARAI BAMIDBAR - ?

Throughout Sefer Bamidbar, we are given one basic picture of the B'nei Yisra'el (both the generation of the Exodus and their children, the generation of the conquest). It is not a pretty picture, as we read of one sin after the other, one complaint after the other. There is very little - it seems - to recommend this nation, based on the narratives in Bamidbar. The only positive remarks about them come - perhaps surprisingly, perhaps not - from the arch enemy, the prophet Bil'am.

Several of the events about which we read - notably the incident with the scouts ("spies") the Korach rebellion and the incident at Shittim

(Ba'al P'or) - lead to explicit Divine threats to destroy the people (or so it seems to Mosheh - see Bamidbar 16:21-22 and Rabbenu Hannanel ad loc.). Even though each of these threats was averted, the "mega-question" must be asked:

How did the B'nei Yisra'el survive the desert? How were we not consumed by our own sins?

In order to address this question, we must first review the basic events of Sefer Bamidbar and note the division of the Sefer:

A: Chapters 1-10:

Establishment of the Relationship between the tribes and the Mishkan and readiness to march into Eretz Yisra'el.

1-4: Census
1-2: General Census
3-4: Levite Census
5-6: Assorted Laws relating to Sanctity of the Camp
7: Dedication of the Mishkan
8-10: Preparation for leaving Sinai
8: Sanctification of the Levi'im
9 (1-14): Celebration of Pesach, Institution of Pesach Sheni
9 (15-23): Description of the 'Anan
10 (1-10): The Trumpets of Assembly
10 (11-28): Beginnings of Travel
10 (29-34): Invitation to Hovav
10 (35-36): Misplaced Parashah (see Rav Soloveitchik's shiur)
B. Chapters 11-25: "The Troubles"
11-12: Challenges of Leadership
11:1-3: Mit'onenim ("complainers")
11:4-35: Mit'avim ("lusters")
12: Mosheh, Miriam and Aharon (Lashon haRa')
13-14: Scouts ("Spies")
13 - 14:39: M'raglim (Scouts)
14:40 - 45: Ma'pilim (those who tried to enter the Land prematurely)
[15: Various Laws]
16-17: Korach
[18: Laws of Gifts given to Levi'im and Kohanim]
[19: Laws of The Red Heifer]
20 - 21:10: Dissolution of Leadership
20:1: Death of Miriam
20:2-13: "Mei M'rivah" - the decree against Mosheh and Aharon
[20:14-21: Edom]
20:22-29: Death of Aharon
[21:1-3: K'na'ani War]
21:4-10: Complaints, the Snakes and the Copper Serpent
[21:11 - 22:1: War with Sichon and Og]
[22:2-24:25: Bil'am]
25: Ba'al P'or
25:1-6: The Sin and the Plague
25:7-15: Pinchas
25:16-18: God's command to avenge the seduction

[As can be seen, this section is overwhelmingly represented by stories of challenge, rebellion and sin. Those sections which do not fit this category have been bracketed; the reasons for their inclusion in this part of Bamidbar are generally local and deserve a separate treatment.]

C: Chapters 26-36:

Establishment of the Relationship between the tribes and their places in Eretz Yisra'el.

(Note the similarities between this section and section A. The interested reader is directed to Aviah Hakohen's shiur on this topic, which can be found in Megadim 9:27-40)

26: Census
27:1-11: Daughters of Tz'lofchad and Laws of Inheritance
27:12-23: Appointment of Yehoshua' as Mosheh's successor
[28-30: Various Laws]
28-29: "T'midin uMusafin" (regular and holiday offerings)
30: "N'darim" (vows)
31: War with Midian
32: Negotiations with B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven
33:1-49: Travelogue
33:50-35:34: Laws relating to Conquest
33:50-56: Destruction of Pagan Worship-sites
34:1-15: Borders of the Land
34:16-29: Naming of Tribal Representatives for Division of Land
35:1-8: Levite Cities
35:9-34: Cities of Refuge
36: Interaction with Chieftains of Menasheh

Now that we have seen the basic division of the Sefer - we may also find some information which will help us answer our "larger" question.

IV. METHODOLOGY NOTE: CHIASMUS AND BOOKENDS

As we discussed at length in an earlier shiur, it is possible to discern a chiastic literary structure ("ABCBA") in many sections of Tanakh. Without going into the many details of how this may be found in Bamidbar (the reader is again referred to the article by Hakohen, cited above), there is one piece of the chiasmus which will help us understand an underlying theme in Sefer Bamidbar.

If we accept the notion that the first and third sections ("Before" and "After" the Troubles) are chiastically related, it follows that the events at the end of the first section should be mirrored at the beginning of the third section.

One more bit of methodology before proceeding:

One of the basic assumptions of this shiur is that the Torah utilizes linguistic associations, made by either repeating a phrase several times in one narrative or by using a relatively rare word or phrase in two places, serving as a link. The Torah informs us much more about the relationship between the two linguistically-related narratives (or legal sections) than just the words - each can inform about the other, and the comparison can lead to significant contrasts.

One clear example of this was dealt with in this year's shiur on Parashat Balak. The Torah clearly creates an association between the Bil'am/donkey trip and the Avraham/donkey trip ("The Akedah"). By setting up this comparison, the Torah is able to subtly demonstrate the wide gulf that separates Avraham from Bil'am (see Avot 5:19).

This type of association has a source in the world of Halakhic exegesis: "Gezerah Shavah". When two areas of law employ a common phrase which is either (seemingly) superfluous or is a relatively rare use of those words, associations may be made which allow us to apply the known legal parameters, obligations and restrictions of one area to the other. For instance, the Torah uses the verb *L*K*cH* (lit. "take") when describing betrothal: "If a man shall Yikach (take) a woman..." (Devarim 24:1). The Torah uses a similar verb in describing Avraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah (B'resheet 23:13). The Rabbis were able to use this association to infer that money is a valid form of Kiddushin (betrothal). In other words, what we know about one instance (Avraham) of *Lekichah* (money), we can apply to the second (marriage) ambiguously presented source.

In much the same way, if we can identify two narratives which employ rare phrases or words (for example), this may indicate that the two are meant to be linked and viewed as a unit - or each against the backdrop of the other.

V. REVERSING THE DIRECTION OF LEGAL TRANSMISSION

We are accustomed to a "top-down" (or "Top-down") form of legal transmission - God speaks to Mosheh, instructing him to transmit the information to the B'nei Yisra'el.

There are two instances where this direction is reversed - and they are both found in Sefer Bamidbar.

In Chapter 9 (near the end of the first section):

Now there were certain people who were unclean through touching a corpse, so that they could not keep the Pesach on that day. They came before Mosheh and Aharon on that day, and said to him, "Although we are unclean through touching a corpse, Lamah Nigara' (why must we be kept) from presenting Hashem's offering at its appointed time among the B'nei Yisra'el?" Mosheh spoke to them, "Wait, so that I may hear what Hashem will command concerning you." (Bamidbar 9:6-8)

In this case, Mosheh had reminded the people that they should bring the Pesach offering (it was one year since the Exodus). Several people approached him with their problem - on the one hand, they were impure and unable to participate in the offering; yet, they did not want to be left out of the national celebration. Instead of God initiating the instruction, the initiative came from these people who despaired of being left out of the congregation.

God's response affirmed their position, and the laws of the "Second Pesach" (Pesach Sheni) were given.

Near the beginning of the third section of Bamidbar, we find a curiously similar interaction. Mosheh is about to distribute the Land, via the lottery, to the tribes.

Enter the daughters of Tz'lofchad:

"Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against Hashem in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away (Lamah yigara') from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." (Bamidbar 27:3-4)

Again, the initiative came from individuals who were concerned that as a result of the normative legislation, some level of inclusion will be threatened (in the first case, their inclusion among the people; in this one, the integrity of their father's house within the tribe).

Again, God's response affirms their basic position - daughters inherit their father's estate if there are no sons.

Note also the use of the rare root *G*R*A'* in both of these stories. It means "to be left out" and underscores the concerns of both groups. Note that the only other contexts where it appears in legalistic literature (besides Bamidbar 36 - see below) is in a husband's obligations to his wife (Sh'mot 21:10) and in the prohibitions against diminishing any of the Mitzvot (D'varim 4:2, 13:1). The integrity of the family, as well as God's word, must be maintained and not diminished.

These "bookends" may help us understand the nature of Sefer Bamidbar and answer our earlier question - since they frame the middle section of the Sefer. First - one introductory note.

VI. REDEMPTION DEMANDS UNITY

When Mosheh was a young man in Egypt, he went out to see how his brothers were faring. When he saw the harsh treatment one was receiving at the hand of an Egyptian taskmaster, Mosheh slew the Egyptian. The next day, Mosheh went out and found two of his brothers fighting. He was discouraged and tried to keep them from hurting (or even threatening) each other. The Midrash is sensitive to Mosheh's concerns and casts them in a prescient light:

"Mosheh was afraid and said: 'How did this matter become known?'" He said to them: "You are guilty of Lashon haRa' (gossip - for how did these two Hebrews find out that he had saved the life of another Hebrew by killing the Egyptian?) - how will you be redeemed?" (Midrash Tanhuma Sh'mot #10).

Mosheh was distressed because at the beginning of his mission to lead the B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt, he noted their fractiousness - fighting and gossiping. This concerned him because he felt that such a people would never be successfully redeemed. In other words, regardless of whatever other merit is necessary to earn God's salvation, if the people do not get along with each other, there is no hope.

On the other hand, the Midrash tells us, no matter how low the B'nei Yisra'el sink in their ritual behavior, as long as they stand united, nothing can defeat them:

Rebbi says: Great is peace, such that even if Yisra'el are worshipping foreign gods but they are at peace with each other, God declares (as if to say) "I cannot defeat them", as it says: Ephraim is joined to idols - let him alone. (Hoshea 4:17). However, if their hearts are divided [against each other], what does the verse say? Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. (Hoshea 10:2). (Midrash B'resheet 38:6).

Note also the famous statement in the Yerushalmi:

R. Aba bar Kahana said: The generation of David were all righteous, but, since they were guilty of infighting, they would go out to war and be defeated...however, the generation of Ah'av were idolaters, but, since were not guilty of infighting, they would go out to war and prevail. (JT Peah 1:1)

VII. THE "SINS OF THE DESERT"

Guided by the great desire of inclusion in national and tribal celebrations and holdings, as expressed by the impure men and by the daughters of Tz'lofchad, we can now re-examine the many sins that make up the bulk of the middle of Bamidbar and understand the success of B'nei Yisra'el to "come out of it alive".

As terrible as some of these sins were, culminating in the vile idolatry of P'or, we never find the B'nei Yisra'el turning against each other. Indeed, the reaction to the "bad news" of the scouts was "let us appoint a captain and return to Egypt". As awful and self-defeating as that plan was, it reflected an awareness of common destiny - instead of scattering or settling in, the people's desire to remain together (which could have been accomplished, according to this hysterical outburst, even in Egypt) was manifest and constant.

We even look at the most direct attack to Mosheh's leadership - the Korach rebellion. What was his rallying cry? Kol ha'Edah kulam K'doshim - ("The whole congregation is holy" - see our shiur on this topic) - a misguided and misleading populism, no doubt, but one which served to unite the people, rather than turn them against each other.

We can now respond to the "large" question. B'nei Yisra'el were successful in surviving a sinful period in the desert because their sins did not turn them against each other and they seemingly avoided Sin'at Hin'am (groundless hatred) and the like.

We can now turn to our more detailed questions, focused on the end of the Sefer.

VIII. THE REQUEST OF B'NEI GAD AND B'NEI RE'UVEN

We can now understand the terrible threat posed by [Mosheh's initial understanding of] the request made by B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvén. Since the saving grace of the people throughout the desert was their unity and sense of common destiny and mutual responsibility, the "abandonment" of the B'nei Yisra'el by these two tribes was a dire threat indeed. (See Yehoshua Ch. 22 for the denouement of the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvén agreement; note how seriously the leaders of the B'nei Yisra'el respond to their separation.)

On this level, the most reasonable place for their request would have been at the end of Parashat Hukat, immediately after the defeat of Sichon and Og. It would have been appropriately placed there if these two tribes had not demonstrated their willingness and desire to maintain a common destiny with the rest of the B'nei Yisra'el by forming the vanguard of the conquest. It would have belonged to the "Troubles" section of Bamidbar.

That is not how events unfolded. Just like the impure men and the daughters of Tz'lofchad, the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvén initiated a request for inclusion (note that they presented the "compromise" plan to Mosheh, not the reverse. This is similar to the inverted order of legal instruction as seen in the two "bookend" cases).

As such, this Parashah belongs "away from the troubles" - in the third section of Bamidbar. Instead of viewing their request as another "sin of the desert", we understand it as an opportunity to demonstrate even greater inclusion and national responsibility.

[There is another reason why the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvén delayed their request until now - it was only after the success against Midian that they felt that the beginning of the conquest was underway - note the common Halutz in both the Midian war and the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uvén compromise].

[One interesting note about the negotiations between Mosheh and the two tribes. As S'forno points out at Bamidbar 32:28 and 33, Mosheh wanted the two tribes to delay their "conquest" of the East Bank until after the conquest in the promised Land. They insisted on taking the Land now, and Mosheh conceded this point, in order to avoid further dispute with them.

What was the reason for this dispute? We could answer based on the notion of Kibbush Yachid. As the Rambam (MT T'rumat 1:3) points

out, any land outside of the "commanded borders" which is conquered, even if done by the King and with the support of the people and the Sanhedrin, is considered Kibbush Yachid (individual conquest) if it was done before the complete conquest of the Land within the commanded borders. Land which is the result of Kibbush Yachid is only quasi-sanctified with the sanctity of Eretz Yisra'el.

Therefore, if the two tribes took the Land now, it would forever remain Hutz la'Aretz - outside of the borders of Eretz Yisra'el. On the other hand, if they waited to "take" it until after the complete conquest, it would be an expansion of Eretz Yisra'el and would have the full holiness of the Land.

Mosheh had every reason to want these two tribes to wait for their conquest; Mosheh knew he was to be buried in this area (see Bamidbar 27:12-13). If their conquest waited, he would end up buried in Eretz Yisra'el - but only if they waited. Nevertheless, in order to avoid further dispute, Mosheh ceded on this point and allowed them to take the Land in advance of their conquest of the West Bank. A tremendous bit of "Mussar" about how far we should be willing to go to avoid "Mah'loket"!]]

IX. MENASHEH'S CHIEFTAINS REVISITED

We can now answer our first question with ease: Why did Mosheh wait to transmit the final bit of information regarding the daughters of Tz'lofchad and their matrimonial limitations?

This Parashah is, indeed, a perfect conclusion to the book of Bamidbar. Although Mosheh had already been given the instructions regarding these details, it took the approach of the chieftains with their concern for tribal integrity (note, again, the use of the rare root G*R*A' - see above) to merit the transmission of this law. There were conflicting concerns here: The integrity of the family within the tribe (the claim of the daughters) as against the integrity of the tribe within the nation (the claim of the chieftains). The response could only come when, just like the impure men, the daughters of Tz'lofchad and the B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven before them, the chieftains of Menasheh were willing to approach Mosheh to demonstrate their concern for the integrity of the group.

X. POSTSCRIPT

This sense of common destiny - what Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l refers to as B'rit Yi'ud, is the secret to Jewish survival - and what allowed us to successfully enter and conquer Eretz Yisra'el. As we enter the nine days of mourning for our Beit haMikdash, let us remember that, in the words of Rav Kook zt"l: Just as the Temple was destroyed due to Sin'at Hinam (groundless hatred), it will only be rebuilt through Ahavat Hinam (groundless love).

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PARSHAT MAS'EI
The Borders of the Land of Israel
I

What are the precise borders of the Land of Israel?
From the story of Bnei Gad & Reuven in Parshat Matot (chapter 32), it seems as though the borders of Israel are rather 'expandable', while in Parshat Mas'ei (chapter 33) they appear to be quite fixed. In the following shiur, we examine the biblical roots of this complicated topic.

INTRODUCTION

Two clichés, both based on psukim in Tanach, are commonly used to describe the expanse of the borders of the Land of Israel:

- (A) 'from the Nile to the Euphrate'
- (B) 'from Dan to Beer Sheva'

The discrepancy between these two borders is immense! According to (A), Eretz Yisrael encompasses almost the entire Middle East, while according to (B), Israel is a tiny country not much bigger than the state of Rhode Island.

So which cliché is more 'correct'?

THE BORDERS IN PARSHAT MAS'EI

We begin our study with chapter 34 in Parshat Mas'ei, for it contains what appears to be a very precise description of the borders of the Land of Israel:

"And God spoke to Moshe saying: Command Bnei Yisrael and tell them, when you enter Eretz Canaan, this is the land which shall become your inheritance - **Eretz Canaan according to its borders**. Your southern border, from Midbar Tzin..." (see 34:1-13).

Over the centuries, many attempts have been made to identify each location mentioned in this chapter. In regard to the eastern and western borders, i.e. the Mediterranean Sea (34:6) and the Jordan River (34:11-12), there really isn't much to argue about. In regard to the southern border, most commentators agree that it follows a line from the southern tip of the Dead Sea until El-Arish, i.e. slight south of the Beer Sheva-Gaza line in the northern part of the Negev.

However, in regard to the northern border, we find a variety of opinions:

The 'minimalist' opinions identify the northern border in the area of today's Southern Lebanon, i.e. along the Litani River - until it meets the Metulla area (what used to be called the 'good fence'). On the other hand, the 'maximalist' opinions identify the northern border somewhere up in Turkey and Northern Syria.

THE EASTERN FRONTIER

To complicate matters, the 'eastern border' of the Land of Israel presents us with another problem. Even though Parshat Mas'ei states explicitly that the Jordan river forms the eastern border of Eretz Canaan, the 'deal' that Moshe Rabbeinu makes with 'bnei Gad u-bnei Reuven' (see 31:1-54) clearly indicates that that it is possible to **expand** this eastern border to include what is known today as Transjordan.

As you review that story, note how Moshe Rabbeinu grants the area of Transjordan to the tribes of Gad, Reuven, and Menashe as their official inheritance - even though it's only on the condition that they fulfill their vow to help everyone else conquer the western bank! [The fact that this area indeed becomes their 'official inheritance' can also be proven from Yehoshua chapters 13->14, and 22.]

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So why are the borders of Eretz Yisrael so ambiguous? Are

they vast or small? Are they fixed or expandable? Are certain parts of the 'Holy Land' holier than others?

To answer this question, and to understand why this topic is so complicated, we must return to Sefer Breishit and carefully examine the psukim that describe the land that God promised to the Avot.

THE LAND PROMISED TO AVRAHAM AVINU

Recall from Parshat Lech Lecha, that when God first chose Avraham Avinu to become His special nation, at that same time He also promised him a special land. [See Breishit 12:1-7. See also Breishit 13:14-17, 15:18, 17:7-8.]

[If you'd like to see additional sources regarding the promise of the Land to our forefathers, see Breishit 22:17-18, 26:2-5, 28:3-4, 28:13-14, 35:11-12, 46:1-4, 48:4 & 21.]

In God's first three promises to Avraham, note how He describes the land in very general terms, without any precise borders. For example:

- 1) In **Ur Kasdim**:
"Go forth from your native land & from your father's house to the **land which I will show you**" (see 12:1).
- 2) At **Shchem**:
"I will assign **this land** to your offspring" (see 12:7).
- 3) At **Bet-El**:
"Raise your eyes and look out from where you are... for I give all the **land which you see**" (see 13:15).

However, later on in Parshat Lech Lecha, when Avraham Avinu enters into two covenants ['britot'] with God concerning the future homeland of his progeny, we finally find a more detailed definition of the land. However, as we will now show, each covenant appears to describe a different set of borders!

1) At BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM: / 'HA-ARETZ'

Let's begin by quoting the pasuk in 'brit bein ha-btarim' where God promised the Land to Avraham, noting how it details the borders:

"On that day God made a covenant with Avraham, saying: to your offspring I assign **this land**, from the **river of Egypt** [the Nile] to the **river**, the river **Euphrates**, the Kenites, Knizites ...(the ten nations)" (Breishit 15:18-20).

The land defined by these borders is immense! It extends in the northeast from the Euphrates River that flows from northern Syria to the Persian Gulf, and in the southwest from the sources of the Nile River in Ethiopia down to the port city of Alexandria! [Undoubtedly, this covenant is the source for the popular phrase 'from the Nile to the Euphrates'.]

2) At BRIT MILA: / 'ERETZ CANAAN'

Two chapters later in Sefer Breishit, we find how God enters yet another covenant with Avraham, and once again He mentions the land as part of that covenant, yet its description is quite different:

"And I shall establish My covenant between Me and you, and your descendants... and I assign the land in which you sojourn to you and your offspring to come, all the **land of Canaan**,..., and I shall be for you a God" (see 17:7-8).

Note how according to this covenant, the 'promised land' is much smaller. Although this is the first time in Chumash where we find the expression **Eretz Canaan**, the borders of Canaan, son of Cham, have already been described in Parshat Noach:

"And the border of the Canaani was from Sidon (the Litani valley in Lebanon) down the coastal plain to Grar and Gaza, [and likewise from Sidon (down the Syrian African Rift)] to Sdom, Amora... [area of the Dead Sea]" (see Breishit 10:19).

[Note that this is the only border which is detailed in

the genealogies of Breishit chapter 10, most probably because it is needed as background information to later understand Parshat Lech Lecha!]

This biblical definition of Eretz Canaan correlates (more or less) with the general locale in which the forefathers sojourned - 'eretz megurecha' (see 17:8). In the various stories in Sefer Breishit, we find how the Avot lived [and traveled] in the area bounded by Beer Sheva and Gerar to the south (see 21:22-33, 28:10, 46:1), and the area of Shchem and Dotan (37:12-17) to the north. Further north, recall as well how Avraham chased his enemy as far north as **Dan**, in his battle against the Four Kings (see Breishit 14:14)!

[Undoubtedly, this border reflects the popular phrase: 'from Dan to Beer Sheva'. This phrase is used several times later in Tanach to define the people living in the Land of Israel. For example: "And all of Israel, from Dan to Beer Sheva, knew that Shmuel was a trustworthy..." (See Shmuel Aleph 3:20, see also Shoftim 20:1 and Melachim Aleph 5:4-5).

TWO BORDERS / TWO TYPES OF KEDUSHA

In summary, the source for the conflicting borders of Eretz Yisrael appears to lie in these two different definitions of the Land, one in **brit bein ha-btarim** and the other in **brit mila**. Therefore, we assume that these different borders reflect the different purpose of each covenant.

To appreciate their difference, we must return to our study of Sefer Breishit, and the purpose of those two covenants.

In our study of Sefer Breishit, we discussed its theme of 'bechira' - i.e. how God entered a relationship with Avraham Avinu in order that his offspring would become a 'model nation' in a special land, whose purpose would be to bring the 'Name of God' to all mankind. Towards that goal, God fortified that special relationship with two covenants - 'brit bein ha-btarim' and 'brit mila', each one reflecting a different aspect of the future relationship between God and His nation.

The very first time that God spoke to Avraham, He had already 'promised' the concept of a nation and a land (see 12:1-8, 13:14-17). However, the details of **how** that nation would form and ultimately inherit the land only unfold several chapters later.

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM

After Avraham's military defeat of the Four Kings (and hence his first **conquest** of the Land / see chapter 14), chapter 15 describes how God initiates a 'covenant' - better known as brit bein ha-btarim - that reinforces His original promise from chapter 12. However, even though that covenant reassures Avraham that his offspring will indeed **conquer** ('yerusha') the Land one day; God also informs Avraham at that time that it won't happen immediately! Instead, some four hundred years will pass, during which his offspring must endure slavery in a foreign land; and only afterward will they gain their independence and conquer the 'promised land'. [See Breishit 15:1-19, especially 13-18.]

As you review the psukim that describe brit bein ha-btarim, note how the land is consistently referred to as 'ha-**aretz**' (and not Eretz Canaan!), and its borders will extend from the 'Nile to the Euphrates' - the land of [then occupied by] the ten nations (see 15:18-20).

Hence we conclude that this covenant reflects the **historical / national** aspect of Am Yisrael's relationship with God, for it emphasizes that Avraham's children will become a sovereign nation at the conclusion of a long historical process (better known as Yetziat Mitzrayim).

Finally, note as well that throughout this covenant, the word **yerusha** is consistently used to describe the future **conquest** of the land, and Hashem's Name is 'shem Havaya'.

BRIT MILA (Breishit chapter 17)

Several years later, immediately prior to the birth of his only son from Sarah, God enters yet another covenant with Avraham - better known as brit mila. In preparation for this covenant, God

first changes Avram's name to Avraham and then promises that He will enjoy a special relationship with his offspring - 'lihyot lachem le-Elokim' - to be 'a close God for them'. [See Breishit 17:3-9.]

This covenant seems to reflect a more 'personal' relationship between God and His people, not only at the national level, but more so at the personal - family level; a special intimacy with the Divine. In this covenant, note how the Promised Land is referred to as **Eretz Canaan**", and the future inheritance of the land is referred to as 'achuza' (in contrast to the use of the word 'yerusha' in brit bein ha-btarim).

Hence, we can conclude that there are two aspects in regard to the 'kedusha' (sanctity) of Eretz Yisrael:

(A) The NATIONAL aspect

The 'kedushat ha-**aretz**' of brit bein ha-btarim relates to the **conquest** of the land (yerushat ha-aretz) and the establishment of a national entity - a sovereign state. This kedusha is only realized once Bnei Yisrael attain sovereignty, as was the case in the time of Yehoshua. For example, the obligation to give tithe from the land (i.e. 'trumot u-ma'asrot') only begins once the land is conquered.

[See Rambam, Hilchot Trumot, first chapter!]

(B) The PERSONAL aspect -

The kedushat Eretz Canaan of brit mila already existed in the time of the Avot and remains eternal. This kedusha reflects God's special Providence over this land (see Vayikra chapter 18), no matter who is living in the land. This intrinsic kedusha is forever present no matter who is sovereign over the Land, be it Persians, Romans, Crusaders, Turks, British etc. [Let's hope that there will not be a need to add any others to this list in our own generation.]

The following table summarizes our analysis thus far:

	THE VAST BORDERS	THE LIMITED BORDERS
	=====	=====
PHRASE:	Nile to the Euphrates	from Dan to Beer Sheva
COVENANT:	Brit bein Ha-btarim	Brit mila
NAME:	ha-aretz	Eretz Canaan
ASPECT:	National	Personal
ACQUIRED BY:	yerusha=sovereignty	achuza

YERUSHA & ACHUZA

To clarify this distinction, let's take a closer look at two key words that describe our acquisition of Eretz Yisrael in each covenant:

- (A) In brit bein ha-btarim - yerusha (Br.15:3,4,7,8);
- (B) In brit mila - achuza (Br.17:8).

In Chumash, the word 'ye-**ru-sha**' implies conquest, which leads to sovereignty, i.e. military control over an area of land. [Not to be confused with its popular usage, 'ye-**ru**-sheh', usually referring to an inheritance that one receives from a parent.]

This sovereign power can then apportion that land, or sell it, to its inhabitants. Once acquired in this manner, the purchaser of this land can then sell or give his portion to anyone he may choose. Usually, if the owner dies, the land is automatically inherited by his next of kin. In Chumash, this type of ownership is known as achuza (and/or nachala).

For example, when Sarah dies Avraham must acquire an 'achuzat kever' - a family burial plot (see Breishit 23:4). He must first **purchase** the plot from the Hittites, for at that time they are the sovereign power. Accordingly:

- (A) Brit bein ha-btarim, the national aspect, uses the word yerusha for it foresees Am Yisrael's **conquest** of the Land.
- (B) Brit mila uses the word achuza for it emphasizes one's **personal connection** to the land.

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Based on our understanding of these two covenants, their conflicting borders can be reconciled.

Avraham Avinu was chosen to be a nation that would become a blessing for **all** nations (see Br. 12:3). In that promise, the special land set aside for that nation is called ha-aretz. In brit bein ha-btarim, ha-aretz is defined as the land between the Nile and Euphrates. These two rivers don't necessarily need to be understood as borders; rather as 'limits' of expansion! Let's explain why.

Never in the history of mankind have these rivers marked the border between two countries. Instead, these rivers were the underlying cause for the formation of those two **centers** of ancient civilization - i.e. Mesopotamia ('nehar Prat') and Egypt ('nehar Mitzrayim'). [See 15:18-21.]

Therefore, as brit bein ha-btarim reflects the **national** aspect of our relationship with God, its borders - or the 'limits of its expansion' - reflect our nation's destiny to become a blessing to **all** mankind. We are to become a nation 'declaring God's Name' at the crossroads of the two great centers of civilization. The location of this land between these two rivers enables that goal, and hence reflects this aspect of our nation purpose.

THE 'KERNEL'

The more precise geographic borders of this special land are defined in brit mila as Eretz Canaan - 'the land in which our forefathers sojournd'. Because this land is destined to become the homeland for God's special nation, it possesses intrinsic kedusha. It is this sanctity which makes the land sensitive to the moral behavior of any of its inhabitants (see Vayikra 18:1-2,24-28).

Hence, the most basic borders of Eretz Yisrael are those of 'Eretz Canaan', i.e. 'from Dan to Beer Sheva', as promised in brit mila. These borders constitute a natural geographic area; Eretz Canaan is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea on the West, the Negev desert on the South, the Syrio-African Rift (Jordan River) to the East, and the Lebanon Mountain Range to the North [the Litani River valley].

Once this 'kernel' area is conquered, in potential its borders can be (but do not have to be) extended. The limits of this expansion - from nehar Mitzrayim to nehar Prat (as set in brit bein ha-btarim) could be understood as '**limits**' rather than 'borders'; as each river represents a center of ancient civilization.

After conquering Eretz Canaan, Am Yisrael can, if necessary, expand its borders by continuous settlement outward, up until (but not including) the two ancient centers of civilization, Egypt and Mesopotamia.

EXPANDING KEDUSHA

This interpretation explains why Transjordan does not acquire kedushat ha-aretz until Eretz Canaan is conquered. Bnei Gad & Reuven must first help conquer the 'kernel' area of Eretz Canaan. Afterwards, this kedusha can be 'extended' to Transjordan. [Note the use of the phrase 'lifnei Hashem' in Bamidbar chapter 32, especially in 32:29-30.]

When Bnei Gad & Reuven follow the terms of their agreement with Moshe, not only do they help Bnei Yisrael conquer Eretz Canaan, they also facilitate Transjordan becoming an integral part of Eretz Yisrael ('ha-aretz').

THE RAMBAM'S DEFINITION OF ERETZ YISRAEL

In his Yad HaChazaka, the Rambam must provide a 'halachic' definition of Eretz Yisrael, for many mitzvot apply only in that Land. He does so in the first chapter of Hilchot Trumot & Ma'asrot [in Sefer Zraim]

As trumot & ma'asrot are laws that apply only in Eretz Yisrael, the Rambam must provide a precise definition of its borders. Although one would expect a geographical definition, to our surprise we find instead a 'political' one!

"Eretz Yisrael - which is mentioned anywhere (in Yad Hachazaka) - includes those lands that are **conquered** by a King of Israel or by a 'navi' with the backing of the majority of Am Yisrael ..." (see 1:1-2).

Note how Rambam defines the borders of Eretz Yisrael as the area under Israeli 'conquest' [= yerusha]. Whatever area within the Land is under Am Yisrael's sovereignty is considered 'halachically' as Eretz Yisrael.

Based on the above shiur, we can understand the reason for this strange definition.

Certainly, Jewish sovereignty doesn't make any geographic area 'holy'. As Rambam himself explains in the third halacha, it is only if this conquest takes place within an area of 'the land that was promised to Avraham Avinu - i.e. the borders of Eretz Canaan as promised to Avraham at brit mila, and defined in Parshat Mas'ei. However, this area reaches its fullest level of kedusha only once Am Yisrael conquers it.

Then, once this 'kernel' area is conquered, Am Yisrael can expand its borders up until Bavel [= nehar Prat] and Mitzrayim [= nehar Mitzrayim]. However, as Rambam explains in the third halacha, this expansion can take place only after the 'kernel' area of Eretz Canaan is first conquered.

Finally, in the fifth halacha, Rambam uses this to explain why the kedusha of the Land [= 'kibbush rishon'] was annulled when the first bet ha-mikdash was destroyed. Because the kedusha of the land (in relation to trumot u-ma'asrot) is a function of its conquest (yerusha or 'mi-shum kibbush'), therefore as soon as Bnei Yisrael lost their sovereignty, the kedusha of the land was lost as well ['batla kedushatah']. Similarly, during the second Temple period, because the land was not conquered, rather it remained under the sovereignty of other nations (e.g. Persia, Greece and Rome), the kedusha never returned. Instead, Ezra instituted a rabbinic kedusha to obligate the produce of the land with trumot u-ma'asrot, because the original kedusha did not return.

I recommend that you review this Rambam inside (see also the final halacha of perek aleph), and note how these laws relate directly to the primary points of our shiur.

'LAND FOR PROGRESS'

We have shown that our relationship to the Land of Israel, just as our relationship with God, exists at both the national and individual level. God chose this special land **in order** that we fulfill our destiny.

While kedushat Eretz Yisrael at the individual level may be considered a Divine **gift**, its kedusha at the national level is most definitely a Divine **challenge**. To achieve its fullest borders and to be worthy of them, we must rise to that challenge.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. MITZVAT KIBBUSH ERETZ CANAAN

Our interpretation enhances our understanding of the Torah's presentation of the mitzva to conquer Eretz Yisrael in Parshat Mas'ei (Bamidbar 33:50-56). First, Bnei Yisrael are commanded to **conquer** the land = yerusha:

(A) "**ve-horashtem** et kol yoshvei ha-aretz mipneichem...

ve-horashtem et ha-aretz vi-yshavtem bah, ki lachem natati et ha-aretz lareshet otah."

Only once the land is conquered, can it then be apportioned to each family, according to the tribal households:

(B) "**ve-hitnachaltam** et ha-aretz be-goral le-mishpechoteichem... le-matot avoteichem **titnachalu**..."

The conquest is referred to as 'ye-ru-sha', while the distribution of the land afterward is referred to as 'nachala':

Yerusha is achieved by the joint effort of military effort by all twelve tribes [Yehoshua chapters 1-12]. Afterwards, nachala is achieved when each tribe settles and establishes communities in its portion [Yehoshua chapters 13-19].

Note that the word nachala could be considered synonymous with achuza; achuza is usually used when purchasing a piece of land, as when Avraham buys a burial plot and field from Efron

(see Br. 23:9,16-20), while nachala is usually used in reference to a family inheritance.]

PARSHAT MATOT [Parshanut]

The opening pasuk of Parshat Matot is simply a 'gold mine' for those who enjoy the study of "parshanut" [the Hebrew word for biblical commentary].

In this week's shiur, we discuss how the classical commentators grappled with the difficulties that arise when studying Bamidbar 30:2.

INTRODUCTION

There are two classic approaches to the study of "parshanim". The simplest is simply to read the pasuk, and then immediately afterward, to read the commentary; thus enhancing one's understanding and appreciation of what the Torah is telling us.

Another approach is to read each pasuk carefully while considering its context, but before reading any commentary - to attempt on your own to consider any problems that arise, and then to contemplate possible answers. Then, after you have thought through all the various possibilities, to read the various commentaries, noting if they raised the same (or similar) questions and/or answers.

Even though the latter approach is quite tedious, it usually leads to a much better appreciation and understanding of the various commentaries.

In the following shiur, we will employ this method, as we study the opening pasuk of Parshat Matot.

LOTS OF QUESTIONS

Let's begin by taking a look at the first pasuk, and then making a list of questions that arise:

"And MOSHE spoke to the Heads of the Tribes of Bnei Yisrael saying: THIS is the 'DAVAR' [translation unclear] that God has commanded: If a man makes a vow or takes an obligation...." (see 32:2-3)

The first obvious question that catches almost everyone's attention relates to the fact that these laws about "nedarim" [vows] are directed specifically to the "rashei ha'matot" [tribal leaders]. In contrast to most all other laws in the Bible, that are directed to the entire nation - for some reason, these laws are different.

Before we attempt to answer this question, let's note some other related questions that come to our attention:

- When did God inform Moshe about these laws? Were they only given now in the fortieth year, or had God told them to Moshe at an earlier time?
[Note that this set of laws doesn't begin with the classic 'opening pasuk' of "va'yadaber Hashem el Moshe lay'mor... daber el Bnei Yisrael..." - And God spoke to Moshe saying...]
- Were these laws supposed to be kept 'secret' from the rest of the nation, i.e. were they intended **only** for the 'leaders'; or was everyone supposed to know them?
- Even if these laws were given to Moshe at an earlier time, why are they recorded specifically at this point in Sefer Bamidbar?
- Why does Moshe introduce these laws with the introductory phrase "ZEH HA'DAVAR"? (see 30:2)

With these additional questions in mind, let's return to our opening question.

EXCLUSIVITY

Let's begin by discussing why Moshe presents these laws directly to the tribal leaders, and not to the entire nation.

In Sefer Vayikra, we find several instances where a set of laws are given to a 'select' group. For example, note how the laws of how to offer a sacrifice in Parshat Tzav are given directly to the "kohanim" (see Vayikra 6:1-2). However, there the reason is obvious, for only the kohanim need to know those laws.

How about these laws concerning "nedarim" in Parshat Matot?

There are two possible directions to we can entertain. Either:

1. They are indeed intended to be heard **ONLY** by the tribal leaders - if so, we must attempt to understand why the laws of "nedarim" are special in this regard.
2. The entire nation is supposed to hear these laws - if so, we must explain why the tribal leaders receive them first.

Let's see how we find these two approaches in the classic commentators. Let's begin with Rashi's commentary on 30:2: "He [Moshe] gave honor to the princes to teach them first, then afterward he taught [these laws] to Bnei Yisrael..."

Note how Rashi, in his opening line, assumes that the reader was already bothered by this question; and he immediately provides an answer. He follows the second approach, i.e. the entire nation heard these laws as well - but explains that the princes were taught first, as an honor to the tribal leaders.

This explanation immediately raises another question: How about when all of the other mitzvot were taught - were they also first taught to the "rashei ha'matot", and to the people later on?

Rashi claims that this was indeed the common practice - and proves his claim from a pasuk in Sefer Shmot, that describes what transpired when Moshe came down from Har Sinai with the second Luchot:

"...And how do we know that all of the other mitzvot were taught in this manner? As the pasuk states [when Moshe descended from Har Sinai with the second luchot]: Then Aharon and all of the PRINCES of the congregation approached him [i.e. Moshe], and Moshe spoke to them [re: the laws]. Then AFTERWARD, ALL of BNEI YISRAEL came forward and Moshe COMMANDED them concerning ALL of the laws that God had instructed him on Har Sinai (see Shmot 34:29-32)."

[Note that we've included the entire quote of 34:32 (even though Rashi only quoted half of it). That's because Rashi takes for granted that you know the continuation (which is key to understand his "pirush"). As a rule of thumb - whenever Rashi (or any commentator) quotes another pasuk - look up that pasuk in its entirety and pay careful attention to its context.]

Even though Rashi has established that ALL of the mitzvot were given in this manner (first to the princes and then to the people), our opening question still remains, but now in a different form. If indeed this was that manner that all the laws were transmitted - why does the Torah emphasize this point specifically in regard to the laws of "nedarim"?

Rashi deals with this question as well, explaining that the Torah does this intentionally in order that we infer a specific halacha:

"...And why is this mentioned here? To TEACH us that a vow can be annulled by a SINGLE judge - if he is an EXPERT, otherwise a group of three "hedyotot" [non-experts] is required to annul a vow."

In other words, by informing us that Moshe first gave these laws to the "rashei ha'matot", we can infer that there is something special about their status in regard to these laws of "nedarim" that follow. This allowed Chazal [the Sages] to conclude the special law that an expert judge ["yachid mumche"] can annul such vow on his own.

To strengthen his interpretation, Rashi then raises the possibility of the first approach (i.e. that these laws were given exclusively to the tribal leaders) - in order to refute it:

"... OR - [possibly] Moshe made have told these laws **ONLY** to the tribal leaders [and hence not to all of Bnei Yisrael] - -- it states here ZEH HA'DAVAR (32:2) and it states in regard to SHCHUTEI CHUTZ [offering a sacrifice outside the Mishkan] the phrase ZEH HA'DAVAR (see Vayikra 17:2) - just like those laws were directed not only to the priests, but **ALSO** to the entire nation [as it states "speak to Aharon, his sons, and ALL BNEI YISRAEL" (17:2); so too these laws [of NEDARIM were given not only to the princes but also to ALL of Bnei Yisrael.]"

Rashi completes his commentary by adding two additional points concerning why the Torah records how Moshe introduced

these laws with the phrase "zeh ha'dvar..."

"We learn from here that Moshe was prophet of a higher level than other prophets could say only: "KOH amar Hashem" - [thus God said] - but only Moshe could state precisely "ZEH HA'DAVAR..." - THIS was the word of God..."

Finally, Rashi concludes this commentary with another "halacha" that Chazal infer from this pasuk concerning HOW (i.e. in what manner) the judge must pronounce the annulment of a vow.

PSHAT vs. DRASH

As usual, Rashi's commentary anchors itself on several MIDRASHIM (see Sifri 153, and Nedarim 88a). In other words, he explains the pasuk based on statements made by earlier commentators, as recorded in the Midrash.

In contrast, other commentators such as Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Ramban will usually anchor their interpretation in what they feel is the simple understanding ["pshat"] of the pasuk - even if that understanding may contradict a Midrash. Nonetheless, they will usually consider the opinion raised by the Midrash with the utmost respect - but they do not automatically accept it.

Let's see how this will help us understand the interpretations advanced by Rashbam and Ramban, as they relate to the topics discussed by Rashi. Afterward, we will discuss Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and Seforno.

RASHBAM

Rashbam, clearly bothered by all of the questions that we raised above, approaches all of them from a very different angle. His first consideration is the juxtaposition of these laws to the laws of Tmidim u'Musafim that were found at the end of Parshat Pinchas.

In essence, Rashbam considers this section of laws concerning "nedarim" as a direct continuation of the laws that concluded Parshat Pinchas; and hence, we no longer have a strangely worded introductory pasuk, since it isn't introductory! Carefully follow how he presents his key points:

"I was asked a question in the city of Loshdon, Aniyob (somewhere in France): 'According to pshat - where else do find such a parshiya that begins in this manner, [where Moshe commands mitzvot] but does not begin with VA'YDABER HASHEM EL MOSHE... [informing us first that God told these laws to Moshe]?' -

and this was my [Rashbam's] answer:

Above [at the end of Parshat Pinchas/ 29:39] it states:

"These [korbanot] you shall bring on your holidays in ADDITION to your VOWS [nedarim & nedavot...]"

[This paus teaches us that] you must offer all of your voluntary korbanot [that you had taken upon yourself by a **vow**] during one of the three pilgrimage holidays - in order that you do not transgress the commandment of 'keeping a promise on time [ba'al t'acher"/ see Mesechet Rosh Ha'shana 4a.]

Therefore, Rashbam maintains that God told Moshe these laws of "nedarim" at the same time that he told him the laws of the korbanot of the holidays in Bamidbar chapters 28->29. Since those laws began with "va'yadaber Hashem...", there is no need to repeat that phrase once again. Instead, the Torah tells us that after Moshe told the people the laws of the korbanot (see 30:1):

"he [Moshe] went to the tribal leaders - WHO are their JUDGES - to tell them to teach these laws concerning NEDARIM to ALL of Bnei Yisrael. When he did this, Moshe told them: God has just commanded me to tell you that everyone must offer the NEDARIM and NEDAVOT during the holidays (see 29:39), therefore should anyone make a vow [neder]... they should not BE LATE in fulfilling it..."

First of all, note how beautifully Rashbam explains the phrase "LO YACHEL DEVARO". Usually, "yachel" is translated - he should not PROFANE (or break his pledge/ JPS). Based on his interpretation, Rashbam translates "yachel" as DELAY, and brings excellent examples from Breishit 8:10 and Shoftim 3:25.

[Note also how he boldly states that according to pshat, any other translation of "yachel" here is a MISTAKE!]

In summary, Rashbam claims that chapter 30 is simply direct continuation of chapter 29, for one is obligated to fulfill his vows (chapter 30) on the holidays (chapter 29). By recognizing this point, note how Rashbam manages to answer ALL of the questions raised in our introduction, and adds a brilliant translation for the word "yachel" within this context.

If you don't read him carefully (while paying attention to the opening questions), you won't appreciate how clever his pirush is!

[Note as well how the division of chapters makes a 'futile' attempt to solve Rashbam's opening question, by starting chapter 30 with the last pasuk in Parshat Pinchas. [Did you notice this?]] Note how CHAZAL's division according to parshiyot must be correct, i.e. beginning the new topic in 30:2 - BECAUSE 30:1 forms the completion of 28:1-2, and hence SHOULD be the LAST pasuk in chapter 29 instead of the first pasuk in chapter 30.]

RAMBAN

Ramban begins his commentary dealing with the same question that bothered Rashbam, but offers a very different answer! [Note also how Ramban also takes for granted that the reader has already been bothered by these questions.]

"The pasuk does not tell us first that God told these laws to Moshe... like it says by SHCHUTEI CHUTZ and most all other parshiyot, INSTEAD we are told this at the END of this parshiya! [There we find a summary:] "These are the laws that GOD COMMANDED MOSHE... (see 30:17)"

Note how clever this Ramban is! He answers the question by paying careful attention to the **conclusion** of this unit. [Again, this is a classic example of the comprehensive nature of Ramban's approach.]

Ramban brings a parallel example from SHCHUTEI CHUTZ (see Vayikra 17:1-2), clearly in reaction to Rashi's pirush (which he will soon argue with), even though he doesn't quote Rashi directly! [Ramban expects that the reader of his commentary is already familiar with Rashi, as he himself was!]

But even without this concluding pasuk (i.e. 30:17) Ramban proves that we need not be bothered by the fact that Moshe's instruction to the "rashei ha'matot" is not prefaced by "va'yadaber Hashem el Moshe...". Ramban brings two other examples where commandments by Moshe that begin with ZEH HA'DAVAR are not prefaced with a "va'yadaber Hashem el Moshe...":

[Furthermore], in Parshat Shmini it states ZEH HA'DAVAR (see Vayikra 9:6 and its context) without a preface that God had commanded this, and in relation to keeping the manna [next to the aron] it states ZEH HA'DAVAR... (see Shmot 16:32)"

Once again, we see the comprehensive nature of Ramban's methodology, always considering parallel occurrences of similar phrases or patterns.

After explaining WHO these tribal leaders are (possibly those leaders mentioned later in Bamidbar 34:17-29), Ramban offers an interpretation which is exactly the opposite of Rashi's, claiming that indeed these laws were given intentionally ONLY to the tribal leaders:

"And the reason for Moshe saying these laws to the "rashei ha'matot" - BECAUSE there is no need to teach all of Bnei Yisrael that a father (or husband) can annul the vow of his daughter (or wife). Maybe these laws need to kept 'hidden' so that people will not take their words lightly (should they know that their promises can be annulled). However, the judges and leaders of Israel MUST know these laws..."

Note how Ramban prefers the 'simple pshat' of the pasuk over Chazal's interpretation (i.e. the Sifri quoted by Rashi) - and provides a very good reason that supports his preference.

On the other hand, Ramban does accept the halacha that Chazal infer from these psukim, relating this to the special style that the Torah uses to record this commandment:

"And this does HINT to the MIDRASH CHAZAL that tribal leaders have special privileges in relation to nedarim that a "yachid mumche" (expert) can annul a vow on his own..."

Ramban concludes his commentary by noting, as Rashbam did, the thematic connection to the laws of Tmidim u'Musafim (based on 29:39), nevertheless reaching a different conclusion.

IBN EZRA

Ibn Ezra also deals with the thematic connection between these laws of "nedarim" and the 'neighboring' topics in Sefer Bamidbar. However, instead of looking 'backward' to the halachik sections of Parshat Pinchas, he looks forward to what transpires in the stories that are recorded in Parshat Matot, i.e. the war against Midyan and the story of Bnei Gad and Reuven (chapters 31 & 32).

"In my opinion, this parshiya was given AFTER the war against MIDYAN (chapter 31), and that is why THAT story is recorded immediately afterward! [Ibn Ezra then brings an example of this style from Bamidbar chapter 12.]

This interpretation is also very creative, for it claims that these laws were actually given in reaction to an event that took place at that time! As you study this Ibn Ezra, note how he also deals with most all of the above questions, yet offers very different answers. Let's take a look:

"Then, (after that battle) the pasuk tells us that Bnei Gad and Reuven came to Moshe and Elazar and the PRINCES and requested [to keep Transjordan / see 32:1-5]. At the conclusion of their discussion, [when the deal is finalized] it states:

"Then Moshe gave instructions [concerning Bnei Gad] to Elazar and Yehoshua and the RASHEI AVOT HA'MATOT L'BNEI YISRAEL" (see 32:28),

after Moshe had just forewarned Bnei Gad u'Reuven that '**whatever you PROMISE - you must keep**' " (see 32:24)..."

Ibn Ezra prefers both this thematic (making and keeping promises) and textual ("rashei ha'matot") parallel to chapter 30, in order to explain the location of this parshiya at this point in Sefer Bamidbar; over Rashbam's and Ramban's parallel to Parshat Pinchas.

Note also how Ibn Ezra agrees with Rashi that the "rashei ha'matot" were supposed to relay these laws to Bnei Yisrael; however he provides a different proof, based on the LAMED in L'BNEI YISRAEL in 30:2!

CHIZKUNI

Chizkuni opens with yet another creative answer to our original question. He states:

"k'dei l'hachirach et ha'am" - in order to enforce this upon the people"

Like Rashi, he agrees that these laws were indeed intended to be taught to EVERYONE (arguing with Ramban). However, Chizkuni provides a different reason for why the "rashei ha'matot" are singled out. Unlike Rashi who claims that it is an issue of 'honor', he claims that they are taught first, for it is their responsibility to enforce these laws. Chizkuni understands that the Torah wants the leaders to make sure that unnecessary vows are annulled (by those who can), OR that the leaders should make sure that the people keep their promises.

Afterward, Chizkuni continues by quoting from both Ibn Ezra and Rashi.

SEFORNO

Finally, Seforno adds a very creative explanation for the phrase ZEH HA'DAVAR. He claims as follows:

In the original commandment at Har Sinai - "Do not to make an oath in God's Name (and not fulfill it) lest God's Name be desecrated" (see Vayikra 19:12) - one may conclude that this would refer to anyone making a vow.

Here in Parshat Matot, claims Seforno, the Torah makes an exception. That law applies only to males - for they are 'their own bosses' ["b'rshut atzmo"]. However, a wife or a daughter, because

she is under the jurisdiction of her father (or husband), should she not fulfill a vow, it would not be such a terrible desecration of God's Name, for the person hearing this vow being made immediately realizes that she may not be able to fulfill it. As the potential "chillul Hashem" is less, the Torah provides a special avenue through which she can annul her vow.

This original interpretation (even though it may sound a bit chauvinist) takes into consideration the details of these laws in relation to a similar law recorded earlier, and explains both the phrase ZEH HA'DAVAR as well as the nature of the specific details of these laws.

NEXT TIME

Hopefully, our shiur has highlighted how "parshanut" can be better understood by spending a little time first considering possibilities, instead of just reading right away what each one has to say. In other words, if you study Chumash the same way the commentators themselves did (thinking first), you'll have a better chance of appreciating the treasure that they have left us.

shabbat shalom,
menachem



SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOT MASEI • 26 TAMMUZ 5780 JULY 18, 2020 • VOL. 27 NO. 32

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Device Maintenance

“Moshe wrote their goings forth, according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.” (33:2)

The screen flashed: “Device maintenance! Tap below to optimize your machine!” I tapped. “Wow! You’ve got 5 memory-hungry programs hogging up your memory! Let’s see what we can you about this! Tap below to improve it! This won’t affect your personal data.”

I tap the button. Immediately, circles spin on my screen, and little flashes, like so many drops of sweat, seem to spin off the circles as we valiantly do battle with those memory-hugging hogs. And then, in quick succession, “10 background apps closed.” “100 MB of storage space freed up.” “No abnormal battery use detected.” “No app crashes detected.” “No malware apps detected.” “Virus scanning turned on.” “Total freed up – 2.5 GB since you started using Device Maintenance!” And at the top the screen, inside a large circle throb the words: “100 – Excellent! Your device had been optimized.” I felt good about that.

It’s amazing how far a little encouragement goes – even from an inanimate machine.

“Moshe wrote their goings forth, according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem, and these were their journeys according to their goings forth.”

In the first half of this verse, Hashem tells Moshe to encourage the people and write that all their “goings forth” were only for the goal of reaching Eretz Yisrael – the destination of all their “journeyings.” That is why in the first half of the sentence, “goings forth” precedes the word “journeys.” Without that encouragement to the Jewish People in the desert, their journeyings seemed like nothing more than an incessant road-trip. In the second half of the verse, the word “journey” precedes “going forth.” Now, another place. Now, another place. Like a seemingly endless succession of “goings forth.” They didn’t focus on where the journey was taking them. A little encouragement goes a long way.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 128-134

From Head To Toe

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav, "A person should always sell the roof beams of his house and buy shoes for himself."

People say that the clothes make the man. I would argue that the man makes the clothes – well, someone has to make them! We find earlier in our *masechta* that Rabbi Yochanan said, "My clothes honor me." (Shabbat 113a) Rashi explains that clothes honor the person who wears them. Rabbi Yochanan wore "rabbinical garb" that was suitable for him and therefore honored him. And when a person dresses up for Shabbat, his clothing helps him express his great honor for Shabbat.

While the importance of dressing properly – especially on Shabbat – is beyond dispute, our *gemara* seems to teach the unique significance of wearing shoes. We are taught that one must even sell (at least part of) his home, if needed, to acquire appropriate footwear. The significance of shoes seems to be beyond that of ordinary clothing. Rashi in our *sugya* explains that there is no greater disgrace than walking barefoot in public. Shoes contribute to our basic sense of human dignity. We are taught that Rabbi Akiva instructed his son Rabbi Yehoshua to never go barefoot.

It is said that when the Kotzker Rebbe would discard his worn-out shoes, he would first cover them up before disposal. He said, "How can I throw away shoes that have served me so well for so long in a disrespectful manner?" Shoes are virtually a necessity to assist us in making our path through life with the goal of fulfilling our purpose in this world. There is even a *beracha* that was enacted to be said when putting on one's shoes in the morning: "Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has provided me my every need." (The widespread custom nowadays is to say this *beracha* together with the other *Birkot Hashachar* – the Morning Blessings – in shul before Shacharit.)

Kabbalistic teachings apply the shoe-concept to the relationship between a person's body and soul. The shoe symbolizes the physical body. And just as the shoe encases the lowest part of the physical body and allows it to ambulate in the world, so too does the body encase the lowest level of the soul and allows it to ambulate and relate to the physical world.

- *Shabbat 129a*

Once in Joy, Always in Joy

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, "Every mitzvah which the Jewish People accepted in joy, such as milah, is still celebrated to this day with joy (with a festive meal - Rashi)."

Where do we find the source for this idea? David Hamelech said, "I rejoice in Your command, like one who finds great treasure." (*Tehillim* 119:162) Rashi, in his commentary to Sefer Tehillim, quotes *Chazal's* teaching that this verse refers to the constant *simcha* that accompanies the mitzvah of *milah*. When David Hamelech was in the bathhouse and saw himself without *tzitzit*, *tefillin* and Torah (due to its being a place where people are not clothed), he was distraught. He said, "Oy vey, I am 'naked' of all commandments!" Immediately, however, when he thought of the mitzvah of *milah* that he was constantly fulfilling, he rejoiced. When he exited the bathhouse he said, "I rejoice in Your command."

Rashi, in our *gemara*, explains that since the word for command is singular and not plural (*'imratecha'* instead of *'imrotecha'*) it refers to the singular mitzvah of *milah*, which preceded the other mitzvahs when it was commanded to Avraham Avinu. David Hamelech rejoicing in the mitzvah of *milah* – a mitzvah that once it is performed provides constant fulfillment without effort – indicates that *milah* is a mitzvah that was accepted by the Jewish People with joy and is therefore a mitzvah that will always be celebrated with joy.

- *Shabbat 130a*

Matot

Questions

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machane" (camp). Which *machane*?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 and 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machane Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikve*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

Masei

Questions

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

Answers

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

When Suddenly...

The way the Torah looks at it, there are three types of murderers: One who kills by mistake (*shogeg*), one who kills by complete accident (*oness*), and one who kills on purpose (*meizid*). The Torah mandates that one who murders another by mistake must flee to a City of Refuge. In describing how one might inadvertently kill somebody, the Torah says: “And if, with suddenness (*peta*), without enmity, did he (the murderer) push him (his victim), or he threw an instrument upon him...” (Num. 35:22). In this passage, the word *peta* (technically, *feta*) appears in the sense of something that happened “suddenly.” This rare word appears only seven times in the entire Bible, often accompanied by its apparent synonym *pitom* (“suddenly”). In this essay we will consider what – if anything – is the difference between the words *peta* and *pitom*.

The Torah teaches that if a Nazirite becomes ritually impure, he must shave his hair, bring certain sacrifices, and restart his term as a Nazirite. In introducing this law, the Torah writes: “And if a person should die upon him (the Nazirite) with sudden (*peta*) suddenness (*pitom*), and he became impure...” (Num. 6:9). In this passage, *peta* and *pitom* appear in tandem, to stress that the Nazirite must restart even if he became ritually impure unintentionally – meaning, even if it happened “all of a sudden.” [The Bible also uses *peta* and *pitom* as a couplet in Isa. 29:5, Isa. 30:13 and Prov. 6:15. In the other two Biblical passages where *peta* appears (Chavakuk 2:7, Prov. 29:1), *pitom* does not appear alongside it; *pitom* appears a total of twenty-five times in the Bible.]

The Mishna (*Kritut* 2:2) rules that although one generally brings a sin-offering or guilt-offering for a sin committed by mistake, when it comes to the Nazirite who became ritually impure, he must bring a guilt-offering, whether he violates the terms of his Nazirite vow by mistake (*shogeg*), by accident (*oness*), or on purpose (*meizid*). The Talmud (*Kritut* 9a) justifies this ruling by explaining that regarding the Nazirite becoming impure, the Torah uses the words *peta* and *pitom*. Now, the Talmud maintains that *pitom* is the more ambiguous of these two terms, as it could refer

to *shogeg*, *oness*, and even *meizid* (see below). Because of this, one might have thought that just as, in general, a guilt-offering is brought only when one’s sin is *shogeg*, but not if it was *oness* or *meizid*, so too does the term *pitom* when discussing the Nazirite refer only to *shogeg*. This supposition would exempt the Nazirite from bringing sacrifices if he became ritually impure by accident or on purpose. In order to obviate this supposition, the Torah wrote *peta* alongside *pitom*. Since *peta* only means *shogeg* (see below), then *pitom* must mean something other than *shogeg*, thus providing the basis for the Mishna’s ruling that the Nazirite must offer a guilt-offering even if he *purposely* (*meizid*) becomes ritually impure.

How does the Talmud know that *pitom* can refer to *shogeg*, *oness*, and *meizid*? The Talmud cites three proof-texts in which *pitom* or words similar to it appear in situations of *shogeg*, *oness*, and *meizid*. The first passage reads, “The clever one sees evil and hides, while the fools (*petaiim*) violate and are punished” (Prov. 22:3). This verse alludes to deliberate sinning (*meizid*), and refers to such foolish sinners with a word that resembles *pitom*, thus teaching that *pitom* can mean *meizid*. Then the Talmud cites another passage: “The fool (*peti*) believes everything” (Prov. 14:15). This verse criticizes the fool’s naivety that can lead to mistaken (*shogeg*) sin. Since the word for “fools” (*peti*) is similar to *pitom*, this shows that *pitom* can also refer to *shogeg*. [Bartenuro (cited below) cites Ezek. 45:20 to illustrate the *pitom-peti* connection.] Finally, when it comes to *pitom* meaning *oness*, the Talmud cites the verse, “And G-d spoke suddenly (*pitom*) to Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam...” (Num. 12:4). This means that He suddenly foisted a prophecy unto the trio in a way that was totally beyond their control. This is akin to an *oness*, which is something that happens by complete accident and is totally beyond a person’s control. Because *pitom* appears in that passage, the Talmud understands that *pitom* can refer to *oness*.

How do we know that *peta* means *shogeg*? The Talmud explains that *peta* refers to *shogeg* because the

unintentional murderer is only obligated to flee to a City of Refuge if he killed somebody by mistake (*shogeg*), but if he innocently killed somebody in a freak accident (*oness*), then he is exempt from fleeing to a City of Refuge. Since in that context the Torah uses *peta* to describe the inadvertent killer's "sudden" action that led to his victim's death, this indicates that *peta* refers to *shogeg*.

If truth be told, not all of the Sages agree to the Talmud's assumption that *peta* refers to *shogeg* and *pitom* refers to all three frames of mind. The Midrash (*Sifrei* to Num. 6:9) admits that *peta* and *pitom* refer to two different degrees of unintended actions, but registers a dispute over how exactly this works out: According to Rabbi Yoshiya, *peta* refers to *shogeg* (like the Talmud assumes) and *pitom* refers to *oness*, while Rabbi Yonatan maintains that *peta* refers to *oness* and *pitom* refers to *shogeg*. Rashi (to Num. 6:9) seems to follow Rabbi Yonatan in explaining that *peta* means *oness* and *pitom* means *shogeg*. However, Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667), author of *Turei Zahav* (*TaZ*), explains in *Divrei David* (there) how Rashi actually follows the Talmud in adopting Rabbi Yoshiya's opinion (see also *Biur HaGra* to Prov. 6:15).

To summarize our findings so far, *peta* and *pitom* both refer to something that happened "suddenly," but seem to refer to different degrees of intentionality in the one who executed/experienced that sudden event.

Interestingly, Rashi (to Num. 35:22, Prov. 6:15, and *Makkos* 7b) explains *peta* as an expression of "closeness" and "immediacy." In this sense, it denotes something "sudden" as happening in such quick succession that one could not have possibly been careful about preventing it. In fact, the word *haftaah* ("surprise") in Modern Hebrew is derived from *peta*. All this seems to fit with Rashi's ostensible opinion that *peta* refers to *oness*.

Rabbi Ovadiah of Bartenuro (*Amar Nakeh* to Num. 6:9) offers a slightly different take on why *peta* should refer to *oness*. The trilateral root of *peta* is PEH-TAV-AYIN, but Bartenuro explains that since the letter PEH is often interchangeable with the phonetically-similar letter BET, we can view the root of *peta* as BET-TAV-AYIN. Bartenuro explains that BET-TAV-AYIN is, in turn, a permutation of BET-AYIN-TAV, which means "startled" or "frightened" in Biblical Hebrew (for examples, see Esther 7:6 and Jer. 8:15). The Arabic word *baghta* is a cognate of this root and means "unexpected event." Bartenuro explains that *peta* refers to something that happened in a surprising way that caught somebody totally off-guard. This means that *peta* must refer to *oness*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) explains that BET-AYIN-TAV is actually derived from the two-letter root BET-AYIN, which refers to something that "reveals itself from beneath the surface." Thus, he explains that a *bua/avabua* (Ex. 9:9-10, Isa. 64:1) refers to "boils," which bubble up on the surface of one's skin. As a corollary of that usage, this root came to mean "fear," which is often accompanied by goose-bumps on the surface of one's skin.

Rabbeinu Efrayim ben Shimshon of Regensburg (to Num. 12:4) parses the word *pitom* as a portmanteau comprised of the words *peh* ("mouth") and *toem* ("fits" or "matches"). He ostensibly explains that something which happens *pitom* happens so quickly and suddenly that it resembles the speed at which words exit one's mouth. Rabbi David Golomb (1861-1935) similarly writes that the TAV-ALEPH-MEM element in the word *pitom* denotes "fitting" or "matching," as if to say that when something happens suddenly, a person may have been in the midst of experiencing a calm serene moment (where everything is "in sync" and "fits together") — *when suddenly* something happens to disrupt the idyllic situation.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 9:27, Num. 6:9) offers a discussion on the concept of *pitui* ("convincing" or "seducing") which is relevant to our study. He explains that *pitui* essentially recalls a state wherein a person is easily swayed by external impressions and influences. Rabbi Hirsch relates *pitui* to *petach/patuach* ("open"), because for one to be convinced by another, one must be "open" — and thus susceptible — to the influence of such external stimuli. This also relates to the simple-minded fool (*peti*), who can be easily deceived or talked into doing things.

In this spirit, Rabbi Hirsch explains that *peta* refers to a "surprise" that a person could have foreseen if he had simply thought about the likely outcomes of a given situation or course of action. This is comparable to the halachic level of *shogeg*, where one's inadvertency derives from a mistake. If the inadvertent sinner had been a bit more mindful, then he could have avoided sinning. In a similar way, the "surprise element" of a *peta* could have been neutralized if only one would have put more thought into the matter.

On the other hand, the term *pitom* denotes a surprise occurrence that no amount of analytics or forecasting could predict. When it comes to such an event, the "surprise element" and lack of foreknowledge renders one akin to a *peti*, who could not have anticipated or prepared for this sudden event. In further clarifying the difference between *peta* and *pitom*, Rabbi Hirsch summarizes that

peta denotes a subjective surprise, while *pitom* denotes an objective surprise.

Rabbi Pappenheim actually writes the exact opposite. He maintains that *peta* refers to a surprise occurrence, whose catalyst or direct cause is not readily visible in an objective way, while *pitom* refers to a surprise occurrence that those affected by the sudden surprise were subjectively unable to prepare for, even though the signs of its impending arrival were demonstrably clear. Either way, most sources point to a marked difference between the words *peta* and *pitom*.

– whatever the exact difference between those two words may be.

In contrast to all this, Ibn Ezra (to Num. 35:22) seems to say that *peta* and *pitom* are one and the same. Rabbi Avraham Menachem Rappaport (*Minchah Belulah* to Num. 12:4) seemingly follows this idea when he suggests that *peta* and *pitom* are etymologically-related because the letters AYIN and ALEPH can be interchangeable, such that PEH-TAV-AYIN equals PEH-TAV-ALPEH-(MEM). According to this approach, *peta* and *pitom* may actually mean the exact same thing; they are not synonyms but rather are different forms of the same word!

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows, especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not even one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting).

The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan River and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer the Land of Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to completely rid the Land of the Canaanites, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the Levites, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established so that someone who unintentionally kills another person may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their own tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar*/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING EIGHT : STANDING TALL

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who straightens the bent.”

The previous blessing acknowledges our ability to break free from the restraints of the physical world so that we can focus on our spiritual selves. Which leads us directly to the eighth blessing: “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who straightens the bent.” Who is bent over? Someone who is overburdened by the weight of the world’s problems. Someone who unceasingly feels the heaviness of that responsibility.

But Judaism teaches that the existence of the world is not the responsibility of any one particular individual. The world belongs to G-d. Therefore, a person who knows with certainty that they do not have the undivided responsibility of the world’s wellbeing on their shoulders is not bent down with the weight of that responsibility. In effect, they are able to stand up straight because they do not have to carry a burden that is not theirs. Rather, they will be able to focus on their own personal responsibilities instead.

Of course, this is not to suggest that a person’s individual duties are not numerous and all-encompassing. They are. We are obligated to live our lives in such a way that reflects the Divine that resides within us. That is a solemn responsibility that requires much inner strength and determination. But, what we are not obliged to do is to take sole responsibility for the world. More than that, by accepting that it is G-d Who directs and oversees the running of the world, we open ourselves up to the capability of contemplating our own individual obligations. To focus on the reality that G-d has tasked each of us with a particular purpose, and, most importantly, with the wherewithal to fulfill our purpose. It is an obligation that we should all

embrace enthusiastically because it confers personal meaning to each and every person’s existence.

Yes, it may be a weighty responsibility, but it is the most exhilarating concept as well.

On June the 2nd in 1952, Princess Elizabeth was crowned as queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. The investiture ceremony is very long, full of British pomp and pageantry. The coronation clothing is heavy. Very heavy. Just like the crown itself, which is worn only once in the lifetime of a monarch, and weighs in at just under five pounds. Due to its excessive weight, wearing it for an extended period of time is extremely uncomfortable, perhaps even oppressively so. When Rabbi Shimon Schwab was asked by one of his children how the newly crowned queen could possibly sit there for so long while wearing such a load on her head, he answered, “You are right. It is frightfully heavy, and, I am sure, it is very, very uncomfortable. But I guarantee you that at *that moment* she wouldn’t change places with anyone in the world!” The reason is obvious. All of that “extra” weight is not really extra at all. The glorious magnificence that are the crown jewels define the wearer as the Queen of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth. And it is worth every moment of discomfort to wear them!

When we recite the blessing, “Who straightens the bent,” we are accepting upon ourselves the leadership of G-d. And, together with His Torah, we now have the wherewithal to be guided in the correct direction so that we can fulfill our task in this world. We stand up straight, like soldiers on parade, secure in the knowledge that it is the ultimate Monarch Who is ruling over us.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Value of a Vow

A vow has the power to create new obligations and prohibitions. For example, a vow designating an animal for a holy purpose creates a prohibition against using it for the mundane. In the case of a personal vow, a new obligation - a personal mitzvah - is created with binding force. Consequently, there are many laws regarding validity, fulfillment and annulment of vows. But one may wonder: Why the vow? Would it not be simpler to merely bring the animal as a sacrifice without the vow, or perform or refrain from the designated act without the commitment?

Our Sages disagree as to whether it is preferable to vow to bring an offering before bringing it, or to bring the offering without the preceding vow. However, the root of the disagreement is not about whether there is value to the vow per se. The only factor that makes a vow suspect is that something may get in the way of its fulfillment. If one could be sure of its execution, then all would agree that a vow is preferable.

Why is this so?

Rav Hirsch points out that, unlike any other mitzvah, the laws regarding vows take effect even before the age of maturity - one year before a boy turns thirteen and one year before a girl turns twelve - provided that they understand that they have made this vow to Hashem. There is a deep psychological basis for this law. In the case of other mitzvahs, the obligation comes only at the age of maturity, when the child's intelligence is sufficient to

warrant the imposition of responsibility. However, there is great significance to the resolutions a youth makes approaching the age of maturity. These are resolutions, uttered secretly, known only to G-d, but they are often decisive for a lifetime. Such vows are statements of purpose and of goals, the ripening of which will happen with maturity. The verbal commitment of a youth is received with loving seriousness, as long as the youth knows it is to G-d that he vows, because it is a commitment that is to ripen into a relationship that will then yield more fruit.

Commitment, then, has spiritual value independent of fulfillment. We need look no further than the Israel's acceptance of Torah at Mount Sinai to see this truth: G-d presented us with the opportunity to first *commit* - "We will do, and we will hear" - and only then, to put into practice. Both stages have relationship value. This is also why when someone intends to do a mitzvah, but is prevented from doing so, he is still rewarded. The "reward" - the increased relationship with Hashem - has already taken root.

Our human interactions are no different. When actions are preceded by thought, planning and verbal commitment, they are laden with deeper relationship meaning. There is much value to a vow.

- *Source: Based on the Hirsch Commentary, Bamidbar 30:4*

SEASONS - THEN AND NOW

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

Harmony of a Nation - Overcoming Baseless Hatred (Part 3)

Ways to Overcome Baseless Hatred

People often think that it is impossible to change the way one feels about someone else. After all, how can a person be expected to control his/her instinctive, emotional feelings about others? This is especially true if, as a result of past interactions, there is built-up hatred or animosity between the two. In such cases, people regularly think that there is no way to stop hating someone after the things that went on between them. This is, however, simply not true.

We mentioned previously that every type of hatred, other than that which is halachically permitted (refer to the previous article about the details of when it is permitted), is considered baseless hatred – because no reason is good enough to hate someone. We also mentioned that one can be guilty of baseless hatred by merely hating someone in one's heart without doing any action against one's fellow at all. For example, just taking pleasure in the downfall of one's fellow, even without taking part in causing it, is considered baseless hatred. Now, it is obvious that Hashem wouldn't demand something from us if it was not within our ability to do it. Therefore, from the very fact that Hashem commanded us not to hate anyone (outside of where halacha allows it), it means that it is within the ability of each and every one of us to control our emotions and remove the hatred from within us. This being the case, let's analyze different things one can do to remove inner hatred.

Overcoming Jealousy

The commentaries explain that often the root of baseless hatred is jealousy. It is jealousy that causes one to find faults in the other person's actions, in order to justify his personally triggered hatred (see the Chafetz Chaim's *Ahavat Yisrael*, Perek 4). So, the question becomes: How can one fight jealousy, especially when one considers the fact that there are opinions that hold that one transgresses the prohibition of jealousy by merely wanting something his friend has – even in his heart? (See Ibn Ezra on Shemot 20:14, Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzvot*, *lo taaseh* 266.)

The Chafetz Chaim explains that a person who is a carpenter is not jealous of a diamond maker's tools. Even

though the diamond maker's tools are much more expensive than the carpenter's, he does not desire them since he has no use for them. So too, every person should realize that Hashem has put him in this world to accomplish certain tasks that are specifically meant for *him*. Hashem, with His all-encompassing knowledge, also gave him all the tools he needs to accomplish his goals. These tools include his mental abilities, skills, financial means, familial upbringing, and more. If there is anything that was not included in this "package" from Hashem, then it is a sure sign that that tool is simply unnecessary for his purpose in this world! While overcoming jealousy is no simple task, contemplating this idea can be very beneficial in removing jealousy (*Machaneh Yisrael* vol. 2 *perek* 1. See also Ibn Ezra on Shemot 20:14). (Notwithstanding the above, it must be noted that sometimes the reason one is not given something from Hashem is because of his transgressions or because he didn't pray for them.)

Overcoming the Desire for Taking Revenge

Often, hatred is a form of passive revenge for a seeming offense that was done to him. This means that even though one wouldn't actively try to hurt his fellow, nevertheless, he would take pleasure in bad things that might happen to him. The *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that one reason behind the prohibition of taking revenge is to instill in us the realization that everything is essentially from Hashem (*Sefer Hachinuch*, 241). Even if the other person did do something wrong by performing the misdeed, from the fact that Hashem did not stop him from doing it we see that Hashem wanted it to happen! As it says in the Gemara: No one can lift even a finger without Hashem allowing him to do so (*Chullin* 7b), and elsewhere it says: Nobody has the ability to touch something that is meant for another person (*Yoma* 38b). Therefore, if someone did "touch" something that belonged to us, we must realize that it was not really meant for us at all. By remembering this, we are able to avoid taking the action personally, and minimize – if not eradicate – the hatred we feel.

Another way to fight the desire for revenge, and thereby remove the hatred one feels, is by remembering the words of the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Yerushalmi explains that someone who takes revenge is like a right hand, which, upon being cut by the left hand, goes and cuts the left hand in return (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4). Commenting on this Yerushalmi, the Korban HaEida explains that we are all different parts of one whole – so just because one was hurt by another, hurting him in return would be just as absurd as the right hand cutting the left in return for its carelessness. One can get to this level by working on the mitzvah of *loving one's fellow as oneself*, until one can reach a degree of love where one feels like he is “one” with his fellow. But, how can one build love towards someone he hates? *Chazal* tell us that one way to build love and unity with one's fellow is through giving and doing acts of kindness, which is the topic of the following section.

Generating Love through Giving

Chazal tell us that if one wants to love his friend, he should perform acts that will benefit his friend (Derech Eretz Zuta, perek 2; see also Bava Metzia 32b and Tosefot “lakof yitzro” there). To explain these words of *Chazal*, Rav Dessler writes that people generally think that it is because they love someone that they perform positive acts for them. And the more that someone loves another, the more he gives to him. People generally are under the notion that it is their love for another that generates their giving to them. However, when investigating further, we find that, in fact, the opposite is even truer. Rav Dessler explains that every person essentially loves himself, and

when he gives and helps others he extends of himself to that person, and it is that extension of himself *that he sees in the other* that generates love towards him. Based on this, we can say that it is the giving that leads to the love.

So, the more one gives, the more love is created. Rav Dessler explains that this is why people love their children, their pets, their plants, their creations. In all these cases it is the giving that is creating the love! This also explains why parents usually love their children more than the children love their parents. Since the giving is often from the parents to the children, the parents feel more love towards the children. All of this wisdom is contained beautifully and succinctly in the words of *Chazal*, who say that when one wants to love another, he should give to him (see Michtav M'Eliyahu, vol. 1 p. 31-39).

Based on the above, one should try to give to, or do acts of kindness for, someone whom he doesn't like, in order to generate love for him. One can even do this through praying for him. This, too, is an act of giving that can create love (see Igrot, Chazon Ish 1:123).

Next week we will, *iy"H*, continue with more ways of overcoming baseless hatred.

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 Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt"l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE
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