

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 8 #38, July 9, 2021; Matot Masei 5781; 29 Tammuz 5781 (Rosh Hosesh Av on Shabbat)

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 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his 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. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!

Amid rising US anti-Semitism, a large coalition of Jewish groups is preparing for a solidarity rally in the District on Sunday. (The headline from the Times of Israel used almost these exact words in its Internet headline.) Given my alarm at the brutal anti-Semitic attacks in the neighborhoods where I grew up in Los Angeles (even more heavily Jewish now than when I was young), and vandalism at one of our local shuls, action to address the situation is both personal and very important.

Many of the Devrei Torah in my compilation (below) warn that we must internalize lessons from our past (and the past of our people) to guide us in the future. As Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer and Rabbi Marc Angel both put it, hardships of the past, many involving anti-Semitism, become lessons to enable us to grow and cope in the future.

Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, brings the lesson back to Israel by reminding us of the importance of having one place, in a vulnerable land that God protects, where Jews can be a majority of the population and build a society based on Jewish law. A group of 150 Jews from Warsaw came to Rav Kook in 1920 for a ruling whether any individuals could prevent the leader of the group from taking a mortgage for more than 8000 British pounds (a huge amount in those days) to establish an agricultural community in Israel. Rav Kook ruled that preventing the group of Jews from acquiring the land would be repeating the sin of the Meraglim and that therefore the group had to proceed. This purchase of land from Arabs became Bnai Brak. In a world where anti-Semitism will always exist, Israel must always be a holy priority for Jews everywhere.

In Matot, the children of Reuven and Gad come to Moshe and request that their inheritance be on the east side of the Jordan River, in the land of Jazer and Gilead (formerly Moab), because they have much livestock, and that land is terrific for grazing (ch. 32). Many commentators have analyzed Moshe's negotiation with the tribes of Reuven and Gad. The most informative is probably by Rabbi Eitan Mayer (attached by E-mail and also available in the archives at PotomacTorah.org). Rabbi Mayer observes that Moshe would not let B'Nai Reuven and Gad wait for the division of the land to take over the land east of the Jordan. Moshe was very clear that this land was not part of Israel, not part of the land that God had promised to B'Nai Yisrael, and that in taking this land, they were giving up the inheritance that God had promised to the Avot.

Rabbi Fohrman's chevra observes that Reuven, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh end up with what one might call "Israel Heights," a border area connected with Israel. This land includes what had formerly been Moab, and it contains Har Nevo, where Moshe looks over the border to see Israel, where Moshe dies and is buried. By obtaining Israel Heights, Reuven and Gad end up owning Moshe's burial place (exact location unknown).

Moshe's contract with Reuven and Gad requires that these tribes go on the front lines to help conquer the land of Israel. Their actions are the first example of a continuing connection among Jews inside and outside Israel. Jews living outside Israel always have a close connection with Israel and volunteer immediately to support Israel, both with their direct actions and indirectly through donations.

Rabbi Rhine adds another connection. During the wars to conquer Israel, a third of the volunteers from the various tribes do their service as prayer groups while a third do the actual fighting and another third protect the Israeli camp. We Jews living outside Israel continue this tradition of praying daily for Israel.

We can extend this analysis. Reuven and Gad acquire what used to be Moab, the home of Ruth's ancestors. Moab is also half of the ancestry of King David and of all future kings of Israel. Ruth is what we now call a Jew by Choice. Thus Jews by Choice and descendants of King David also share a heritage to lands outside Israel as well as to the land that God promised to our Avot.

Moshe adds half the tribe of Manasseh to Reuven and Gad. Manasseh serves as the glue to connect Jews on both sides of the Jordan River. By placing Manasseh (from the Rachel side of the Jews) to Reuven and Gad (from the Leah side), Moshe brings together the two branches of Yaakov's family. Israel Heights therefore also represents Jews living together as brothers, working for Jews everywhere. This reconciliation is a beautiful way to bring Sefer Bemidbar to a close. The connection of all Jews, from whatever background, working together for Israel and for our fellow Jews, also inspires us as we start the Nine Days with a rally in support of Israel.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was a master at bringing together insights from numerous seemingly unrelated sources to make a coherent and compelling point. Hopefully I have done a bit of the same with my message this week. If he were alive and well, Rabbi Cahan would have been an important part of the rally for Israel. Rabbi Adam Raskin, current Rabbi of Har Shalom, will have a bus load of congregants at the rally on Sunday – as will leaders of shuls and other organizations all over the country. May the experience of Jews working together, a lesson from Moshe's negotiation with Reuven and Gad, inspire current Jews to work for common goals in our time.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Allegra, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Matos Masei: Dead First
By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky) for a Mishebarach!]

Parshas Masei discusses the sojourns of Klal Yisrael through the desert. It focuses on the many stops that the Jewish nation made, hinting at the ensuing incidents that occurred with each stop.

But one verse seems to divert attention from the Jews' travels and chooses to focus on a scene occurring miles away. The Torah tells us that "the Jews journeyed from Ramses on the fifteenth day of the first month and went forth with a Yad Ramah to the eyes of all Egyptians" (Numbers 33:3). The Torah then inserts a seemingly irrelevant detail, one that seems to be insignificant if not anticlimactic in proportion to the great tragedy that befell the Egyptians and the miraculous Exodus of the Jews. It reverts to a scene that takes place back in Mitzrayim as the Jews were a few days into their escape from Egypt. "The Egyptians were burying their dead and in their gods Hashem meted justice" (ibid.v.4).

Isn't that a mere detail in history? Why even mention it? In fact if we were to mention anything, the Torah should write "and the Egyptians were mourning their first born-dead whom Hashem miraculously smote on the prior night."

It seems that the Torah placed this posuk in this place as a significant lesson a part of the lessons of the Exodus.

In the famous work, A Tzaddik in our Times, Simcha Raz relates an amazing story about Rabbi Aryeh Levin, the tzadik of Jerusalem: It was mid-May 1948, bombs were raining on central Jerusalem, no street was safe and no home a haven. Yet it was during a bomb attack that Samuel Weingarten, a bank cashier who volunteered for civil defense, spotted the holy sage Rabbi Aryeh Levin, maneuvering his way, dodging craters below and bombs from above, in a desperate effort to get somewhere. His steps were careful and calculated and he strode with confidence with a clear destination in mind.

"Rabbi!" he shouted above the din. "Where are you going? A Jew must guard his soul! They are shooting at us! Get inside a shelter!"

Rabbi Levin was not fazed. "I am on my way to do the greatest mitzvah. There are forty deceased souls in the Bikur Cholim Hospital, with no one to guard them. The only watchmen are the human jackals who cut their finger to remove their jewelry. I am rounding up volunteers to guard them. The bombs will have to find different addresses."

In addition to exacting every detail of how a Jew should live their life, the Torah is also a guidebook to an entire world on what is ethically correct. The foundations set in the Torah of myriad principles found the core of ethical behavior even to the basest of people.

Murder, incest, and other abominable acts are deplored in the Torah. Some are denoted with the words toaivah, abominable, others with depictions of Heavenly retribution, whether it be the Flood or the destruction of S'dom. Those stories are lessons for civilization. They are standards required for every inhabitant of planet Earth. Those aspects of the Torah serve as a moral compass. They come together with the ethos of kindness and compassion that can be surely garnered by those who are students of the Torah.

So if we take a step back in time and understand what was going on in the minds of the Egyptians, and what the Torah deems important to mention, perhaps we can garner another moral lesson that may better inspire our generation of proper values.

Imagine! For 210 years the Jews were captive in Egypt. Despite miraculous plagues, never heard of or seen before in the history of civilization, the Egyptians held on. They were not letting go!! Not a threat of disaster, nor its execution cracked their resolve nor diminished the Egyptians' desire to maintain their hold on the Jews. Not blood, boils, locust or any other plague, shook their resolve. Even when the Jews finally left, the Egyptians chased after them. But not immediately. The Torah tells us that something else was more important. Something was worth giving the Jews an enormous head-start. Something was worth losing the very nation that their first-born gave their lives to keep all for one staid principle. The honor and burial of the dead.

Perhaps the Torah talks to civilization. It tells the world what was important, even to a nation that had no qualms about the indenture of another people. No matter how long it took., no matter the financial ramifications, no matter the loss of power and prestige in giving the Jews a long head-start. It did not matter. Honor the smitten. Bury the dead.

And so the Torah tells us that despite the political ramifications that occurred with the Exodus, something else was on Egypt's mind. Maybe the actions of that primitive nation should give the world a perspective about what really matters. If an ancient nation was willing to give up its century-old national pride, the loss of the largest single work-force in history for the honor of the dead, shouldn't every nation give thought about their priorities as well? Shouldn't they keep the honor of

those buried instead of a shopping mall, a new roadway, or even the prestigious honor that a place in a museum bestows? We may not learn many great moral lessons from the Egyptians, but this one we all can.

Even if in the war of wits you come in dead last, in the war of morality make sure it's dead first.

Good Shabbos!

Looking Back to Move Forward

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

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 spiritually, 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.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2015/07/looking-back-to-move-forward/>

Parshas Matos -- The Jewish Army by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2014 Teach 613

The Jewish army was mobilized. Moshe gave the directive and the Jews prepared to wage war against Midian. “For they have harassed you with conspiracy...” It was a time for action.

The strategy was simple. Each tribe would contribute three thousand soldiers. The medrash explains: One thousand would wage war, one thousand would guard the army camp, and one thousand would remain in the Jewish encampment to pray for their brothers in battle.

I believe that this third group, the prayer group, can be a source of great inspiration to us.

Let us question the function of this third group. Certainly all the Jews were involved in prayer. “There are no atheists in a foxhole.” How much more so among this righteous generation who had the Sanctuary and witnessed miracles on a daily basis. Certainly the Jews who went into battle recited prayer. Certainly the Jews guarding the army camp devoted themselves to prayer. Why was it necessary to appoint a special prayer division of a thousand people to remain in the Jewish encampment and pray for their brothers in battle?

It seems to me that there are different types of prayer. Each one makes a different type of impact. The prayer of the person who physically enters the battle is short and to the point, as he receives his orders and moves into position. The prayer of the Jews in the army camp is also somewhat abbreviated. They are close enough to hear the cries of battle and they may have to shield themselves from projectiles of the enemy.

The prayers of the Jews in the Jewish encampment, however, are truly unique. Far enough from the battle that they don't feel the need for shortened prayer, yet close enough to appreciate the seriousness of the situation, these Jews can concentrate on prayer without any distractions.

In our time as well, the Jewish people divides responsibility in times of crisis. Easily recognizable is the battle division, the group of Jews who go into battle and experience confrontation. We can also identify the division that guards the camp. These are the people near the place of confrontation. They sense the threat, but not in the sense of those in active battle.

But there is a third group: The Prayer Division of the Jewish Army. Although all Jews are undoubtedly involved in prayer, G-d in His kindness provided a group which can be totally steeped in prayer without distraction. The Jews of the Diaspora have this responsibility. Far enough away from the danger that there are no distractions, yet close enough to take the crisis seriously, we are at liberty to devote ourselves to lengthy and concentrated prayer.

Recently, we have watched closely the developments in the Land of Israel, and we have mobilized our divisions. Each division knows its role and will perform valiantly and in sync with the other divisions.

One of the misconceptions about prayer is that people think either a prayer is effective or it isn't. Actually when we pray in a unified way, day after day, our prayers have a cumulative effect. Each prayer is treasured by G-d.

He will ask, "What are the voices that I hear?"

We will answer, "They are the voices of Your children pleading with You in their time of need."

Who are we to anticipate G-d's response? Yet, the prophet Yirmiya, in the reading of Haftorah, has already articulated the response for which we yearn.

"And the Word of G-d was upon me saying. Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem saying: I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of marriage that was between us... They shall wage war against you, but they will not prevail over you, because I am with you to rescue you in your time of need." Amen.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.
RMRhine@Teach613.org. Teach613, 10604 Woodsdale Dr., Silver Spring, MD 20901. 908-770-9072. **Donations welcome to help with Torah outreach.** www.teach613.org. Note: Rabbi Rhine is on summer vacation and has authorized his followers to use an archived Dvar Torah until he returns.

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-matos-the-jewish-army/>

The Past as Prelude: 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.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/past-preludethoughts-matot-masei> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Who is a Racist/Anti-Semite?

Blog by Rabbi Amrc D. Angel *

It has become all too common for people to brand their opponents as racists or as anti-Semites. Instead of allowing for reasonable discussion among those with different viewpoints, name-calling is an attempt to stigmatize and delegitimize the other.

Certainly, there really are people who are racists and anti-Semites. They hate with a visceral hatred, without even knowing (or caring to know) about the victims of their hatred. Their venom is not aimed at an individual based on a particular grievance. Rather, it is a blanket animus against anyone who is associated with the despised group.

Genuine racists and anti-Semites are dangerous because their hatred has no limits. They are mired in hatred. They may reach the point of taking action—including violent action—against those they hate.

The late psychiatrist and philosopher, Dr. Silvano Arieti, pointed out that the root of hatred is fear. Haters are basically afraid of those they hate. They ascribe evil powers and intentions to them. In this sense, hatred is a form of mental illness...an irrational fear-based fantasy that engulfs one's life.

Many years ago, I officiated at the conversion to Judaism of a woman who had been raised in Saudi Arabia, a daughter of American parents stationed in that country. She had grown up with vile anti-Jewish stereotypes, even though she had never met a Jew. When she traveled to the United States for college, she came into contact with Jewish students. For the first time in her life, she had to deal with her innate hatred of Jews...and her very likeable and decent Jewish contemporaries. She realized that the anti-Jewish venom that poisoned her upbringing had not only been unfair to Jews...but had been unfair to her own humanity. She began to study Judaism as a way of overcoming her prejudices; and she ultimately chose to become Jewish and to marry a Jewish man. She told me: "If only everyone could live for one month in the skin of those they were raised to hate...then they would develop understanding. They would recognize how destructive hatred is to their own lives, let alone to the lives of the victims of hatred."

There are, unfortunately, people of various religions and races who are indeed racists and/or anti-Semites. They are a threat to society, and a threat to themselves.

However, there are people who are branded as racists or anti-Semites, but who are incorrectly stigmatized with these terms. If someone criticizes the views of a Jew, this doesn't make him/her an anti-Semite. If someone points out negative ideas or actions of a black or a white person, this doesn't make him/her a racist. To accuse someone of being a hater is to engage in a serious charge. One must think very carefully before labeling someone as a racist/anti-Semite.

It is increasingly common for people to brand as racists/anti-Semites anyone who calls their opinions or actions into question. Name-calling does not solve problems or disagreements.

It is problematic when individuals receive criticism but then blame the critic and call him/her a racist or anti-Semite. Instead of addressing issues, conflicts then become name-calling events in which both sides engage in ad hominem attacks. The fires of hatred intensify, and no one really wins. Society as a whole loses when public discourse is reduced to name-calling.

There are real racists and anti-Semites, and these surely must be confronted for what they are.

But there are also those who are branded as racists/anti-Semites as a way of dismissing their arguments and maligning their character.

It would be a giant step forward for society if the terms "racist" and "anti-Semite" were used only when entirely accurate, and not as a ploy for discrediting opponents.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals..

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/who-racistanti-semite-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel>

Parshas Matos-Masei @ 2020
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.

[Rabbi Singer is on vacation. He permitted me to reprint his Dvar Torah from last year.]

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Emerging Through Life's Fragility

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Life is fragile. We experienced that fragility first hand when we heard this week of the sudden loss of Gary Cohen, dear friend, upstanding community member, and husband and father.

No one realized life's fragility more than King Solomon, who stated right at the beginning of Kohelet (I'll paraphrase). All of life goes away. Everything just rises and falls and goes back to its source. Nothing endures. Through 12 chapters, Kohelet restates this theme.

But humans are not fragile. We have the ability to emerge from our most painful experiences. Kohelet ends with extolling man as someone who can keep God's commands and do good in the world. No matter how fragile life can be, humans can reemerge stronger than ever. As Viktor Frankl points out in Man's Search for Meaning, the one thing given to us that we have control over is our reaction to the situation. Fragility can surround us, but man can be anti-fragile.

But let us all remember what we said last week. It is only through fully experiencing the brokenness and sadness of the situation that we can emerge through it. It took Kohelet 12 chapters of meditating on fragility and Viktor Frankl going through the worst experiences to arrive on the other side.

"There's a time and a place for everything" says Kohelet, and now is the time to grieve. Now is the time to experience the searing pain that comes when we lose someone we love in such a sudden way. Now is the time to remember Gary, his life, and what he stood for. I and many who knew Gary remember his strength. He was someone who always had the courage to do the right thing and someone who constantly challenged himself to learn and grow more.

But most of all, now is the time to care for each other and all the mourners as we go through this difficult time.

May Gary's soul have an aliyah in heaven. May his family that he loved so much be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Israel.

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Moshe Rube

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. Those not connected with the Birmingham community may not realize that Gary Cohen was one of many of our people lost in the tragic building collapse in Florida.

Rav Kook Torah

Mattot: No Excuses for Remaining Outside the Land!

When the tribes of Gad and Reuben petitioned not to cross the Jordan River and enter Israel proper, Moses denounced the proposition and lashed out at them. "Why are you trying to discourage the Israelites from crossing over to the Land that God has given them?"

We can certainly understand Moses' anger and frustration. But this incident took place not long after he was punished for berating the people at Mei Merivah. When he snapped at the people, "Listen now, you rebels!" (Num. 19:10), God informed Moses that he would not be leading the Jewish people into the Land of Israel.

We similarly find that the prophet Isaiah was punished for his harsh criticism when he lamented, "I live among a people of unclean lips" (6:5).

Yet there is no indication that Moses was wrong in his scathing response to the tribes of Gad and Reuben. What was different?

Imitating the Mistake of the Spies

Rav Kook explained that, in this situation, Moses was justified in his outrage. Moses realized that their request could discourage the entire people from entering the Land, like the debacle of the Spies. His response needed to be stern.

We learn from here that anyone discouraging the Jewish people from ascending to the Land is following in the footsteps of the infamous Spies and repeating their disastrous folly.

The tribes of Gad and Reuben presented reasonable arguments — "we have much livestock." But their request could erode the people's commitment to settle the Land. There was no place for polite discussion; Moses needed to be forceful and resolute. And if that was true for the righteous tribes in the time of Moses, what can we say in our generation, even when people offer what appear to be reasonable objections to making Aliyah?

Rav Kook concluded: we are unable to fathom God's ways, but nothing exempts one from Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. We must bolster our faith that, by ascending to the Land and settling it, we are fulfilling the Torah's goals.¹

Rav Kook's forceful words found a practical application in an unusual court case that he adjudicated in 5682 (1922).

Warsaw, 1920

Yitzchak Gershtenkorn had a plan. A brilliant, magnificent plan. The 29-year-old Hassidic Jew from Warsaw approached two friends with his proposal: every week, they would deposit money into a joint bank account. The funds would be dedicated to a single goal — to purchase land to settle in Eretz Yisrael.

His friends enthusiastically agreed. Over the coming months, they deposited money each week, excited in the knowledge that each payment brought them a little closer to their goal.

R. Yitzchak noted that his endeavor was already a remarkable success. His two friends, who had never dreamed of settling the Land, had changed. They acquired new aspirations; their views on Galut (exile) and the Land of Israel had shifted. They had become “Jews of Eretz Yisrael”!

He decided the time was right to take the next step. He began recruiting other religious Jews in Warsaw. Gershtenkorn spoke in synagogues about settling and working the Land, raising great interest. Within a short time, the group numbered 150 members. They formed a society called Bayit VeNachalah (“Home and Heritage”), dedicated to establishing an agricultural community for religious settlers in the Holy Land.

After the initial enthusiasm, however, the project began to waver. Some members were nervous because Polish law prohibited taking money out of the country. Others worried that the funds raised were so meager that, even after years of saving, they would not suffice to purchase suitable land in Eretz Yisrael. Several members threatened to resign.

That winter, the Gerrer Rebbe returned from a visit to Eretz Yisrael.² The Rebbe granted an audience to R. Yitzchak and told him,

“I will recommend anyone who asks me that they should join your group. I cannot provide you with any financial help because I am already committed to a similar undertaking in the Jaffa area. But never get discouraged! God will crown your venture with success.”

Encouraged, R. Yitzchak called a general meeting of Bayit VeNachalah. When the members heard the Gerrer Rebbe’s words and blessing, their doubts and hesitations were dispelled.

Purchasing Bnei Brak

Two years later, R. Yitzchak and two other delegates traveled to Eretz Yisrael to locate a suitable plot of land for their envisioned community. In his memoirs, R. Yitzchak described his high emotions during the long train ride from Egypt to the Holy Land:

“On that night, as we traveled from Alexandria to Tel Aviv, I could not sleep. We passed through the desert, and the sand penetrated our railway carriage through the closed blinds. To me it was symbolic: a person does not enter the Land of Israel unless he is first covered in desert sand, like our ancestors long ago who sojourned through the Sinai desert.

Absorbed in my thoughts, the sights and visions of Biblical times passed before my eyes. In my mind, I saw the journeys of the ancient Israelites, traveling with their flags and tribal camps. I, too, was not traveling alone, but stood at the head of an entire camp of Warsaw Jews, who were waiting to hear the results of our expedition.

My heart began to beat fast. We are crossing the border! We are already traveling in our Land. I opened the window wide and breathed in the soul-reviving air of Eretz Yisrael.”

While the purpose of the journey was to locate a suitable plot of land, R. Yitzchak took advantage of times between trips to meet the prominent scholars and rabbis of the holy city of Jerusalem. On the Shabbat before Passover, he visited Rav Kook in his home, where he was greeted with great warmth.³

For three weeks, the delegates searched for suitable land, examining plots near Rehovot and Rishon LeTzion. But Gershtenkorn was most drawn to a hilly stretch of ground along the road from Tel Aviv to Petach Tikva. The land belonged to a few Arab families who lived in a nearby village.

The residents of the nearby settlements urged them to buy this particular piece of land so that all Arab holdings from northern Tel Aviv to Petach Tikva would be under Jewish ownership. It was a matter of security; the hills of Bnei Brak were used by Arabs to ambush Jewish travelers. A new Jewish settlement would dislodge the Arab raiders and secure the road from Tel Aviv to the Sharon region.

Rav Kook's Ruling

There was, however, a serious issue which led to a vehement dispute among the delegates. Geulah, the organization responsible for redeeming land from Arab hands, requested 10,000 pounds sterling for the property they sought. But their society had only collected 900 pounds.

The other delegates were wary. How could they obligate themselves to an additional sum of 9,000 pounds — ten times more than they had succeeded in saving at that point! — without prior consensus of the entire group?

Gershtenkorn was confident that the money could be raised. After many arguments, the delegates agreed to bring the matter as a Din Torah for the Chief Rabbi, Rav Kook. According to his decision, they would proceed.

The evening after Passover, the delegates presented their dispute to Rav Kook. The society's treasurer argued that he saw no basis at the current time for a reasonable livelihood for the members, who are not wealthy; it is the delegates' obligation to be faithful agents and not conclude any transaction until returning to Warsaw and giving an accurate report to the society.

Yitzchak Gershtenkorn argued that he was the sole official representative; the other delegates had no right to obstruct the purchase.

After much deliberation, Rav Kook ruled in favor of Gershtenkorn. He noted three points:

1. We must distinguish between an individual and a community. If an individual asks whether he should make Aliyah or not, one is permitted to give advice for a specific case. But a community is a different story. One who influences the views of an entire community and deters them from moving to the Land — he is "giving an evil report of the Land" and repeating the villainous act of the Spies.
2. Regarding the concerns that the group will be unable to complete the purchase of the land, we have a rule in Halachah that "The community is not poor." Who said that only the current members will foot the bill? If they are unable to pay, other Jews of means will come and purchase a share, thus enabling the society to conclude the land acquisition.
3. Yitzchak Gershtenkorn was appointed as the sole representative with powers to purchase. The other delegates did not have the right to prevent him from executing the transaction.

Two weeks later, R. Yitzchak handed over the society's money as down-payment for the land. Thus the agricultural settlement of Bnei Brak was founded — on the 5th of Iyyar.⁴

(Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 405-407. Chaluztim LeTzion: the Founding of Bnei Brak with Rav Kook's Support, by Moshe Nachman, pp. 32-33. Background details from The Jewish Observer, Sept. 1974.)

FOOTNOTES:

1 According to Shivchei HaRe'iyah, p. 268, Rav Kook related this idea to Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), the sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch, when the Rebbe visited Rav Kook in 1929. The Rebbe is reported to have responded, "These are holy words from a holy mouth."

2 Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter (1866-1948), known as the Imrei Emet of Gur, had a special love for Eretz Yisrael. He visited four times, purchased parcels of land, and urged his chassidim to do likewise. The fifth time he came to Israel, it wasn't as a visitor. He was fleeing from occupied Poland and the Nazis, who placed the "Wunder Rebbe Alter" at the top of their most-wanted list. Elderly and in ill health, the Rebbe escaped from Poland in 1940 to the house that awaited him in Jerusalem. (Mishpacha Magazine, Sep. 2018)

3 In his memoirs, Yitzchak Gershtenkorn described his surprise upon meeting Rav Kook:

"In Poland at that time, one had the impression that there were two chief rabbis in Jerusalem. The first was Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, appointed by the Haredi community; and the second was the leader of the enlightened community — Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook. I pictured Rav Kook as a modern rabbi. A year before my visit, I had become friendly with his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook [who visited Warsaw to promote his father's movement, Degel Yerushalayim]. Already in Warsaw, R. Tzvi Yehuda made a deep impression on me as a serious Torah scholar, distinguished in Torah and piety. But the Haredi newspapers in Poland would always stress the prominence and authority of those who opposed Rav Kook.

How great was my astonishment during my first visit to Rav Kook's house. I saw before me a holy tzaddik, one of the select few of the generation. How saintly and noble was his holy visage! ... His words of Torah and piety flowed like a spring, brimming with love for the Land of Israel and the Jewish people... After that visit, I became attached to Rav Kook in heart and soul."

4 The following week, Gershtenkorn met with Rav Kook before returning to Poland. Rav Kook provided him with a public letter of recommendation to help enlist more members and financial support. R. Yitzchak wrote in his memoirs:

"At all times, the Gaon [Rav Kook] was my faithful light and guide in our dealings regarding Bnei Brak. During the most trying and difficult days, when I would travel to Jerusalem to pour out my heart and soul before the Kotel, I never missed the opportunity to visit his holy abode. The encouragement and strength that I received from him were a balm for my soul."

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/MATOT-79.htm>

Matot-Massei (5769) – The Religious Significance of Israel

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

The long journey is nearing its close. The Jordan is almost within sight. The Torah (Num. 33: 1-49) sets out an extended list of the stages of the Israelites' route. It sounds prosaic: "They journeyed from X and camped at Y", over and over again. But the effect is to heighten tension and increase anticipation. Finally the list draws to a close, and G-d tells Moses: "Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess" (33: 53). This, according to Nachmanides, is the source of the command to dwell in the land of Israel and inherit it.

With this we come to one of the central tensions in Judaism and Jewish history: the religious significance of the land of Israel. Its centrality cannot be doubted. Whatever the subplots and subsidiary themes of Tanakh, its overarching narrative is the promise of and journey to the land. Jewish history begins with Abraham and Sarah's journey to it. Exodus to Deuteronomy are taken up with the second journey in the days of Moses. Tanakh as a whole ends with Cyrus king of Persia granting permission to Jews, exiled in Babylon, to return to their land: the third great journey.

The paradox of Jewish history is that though a specific territory, the holy land, is at its heart, Jews have spent more time in exile than in Israel; more time longing for it than dwelling in it; more time travelling than arriving. Much of the Jewish story could be written in the language of today's sedra: "They journeyed from X and camped at Y".

Hence the tension. On the one hand, monotheism must understand G-d as non-territorial. The G-d of everywhere can be found anywhere. He is not confined to this people, that place – as pagans believed. He exercises His power even in Egypt. He sends a prophet, Jonah, to Nineveh in Assyria. He is with another prophet, Ezekiel, in Babylon. There is no place in the universe where He is not. On the other hand, it must be impossible to live fully as a Jew outside Israel, for if

not, Jews would not have been commanded to go there initially, or to return subsequently. Why is the G-d beyond place to be found specifically in this place?

The sages formulated the tension in two striking propositions. On the one hand, "Wherever the Israelites went into exile, the Divine presence was exiled with them" (Mekhilta, Bo, 14). On the other, "One who leaves Israel to live elsewhere is as if he had no G-d." (Ketubot 110b). Can one find G-d, serve G-d, experience G-d, outside the holy land? Yes and No. If the answer was only Yes, there would be no incentive to return. If the answer were only No, there would be no reason to stay Jewish in exile. On this tension, the Jewish existence is built.

What then is special about Israel? In The Kuzari, Judah Halevi says that different environments have different ecologies. Just as there are some countries, climates and soils particularly suited to growing vines, so there is a country, Israel, particularly suited to growing prophets – indeed a whole Divinely-inspired people. "No other place shares the distinction of the Divine influence, just as no other mountain produces such good wine" (Kuzari, II: 9-12).

Nachmanides gives a different explanation. G-d, he says, "created everything and placed the power of the lower creatures in the higher beings, giving over each and every nation 'in their lands after their nations' some known star or constellation . . . But the land of Israel, in the middle of the inhabited earth, is the inheritance of G-d . . . He has set us apart from all the nations over whom He has appointed princes and other celestial powers, by giving us the land [of Israel] so that He, blessed be He, will be our G-d and we will be dedicated to His name." (Commentary to Lev. 18: 25). Though every land and nation is under the overarching sovereignty of G-d, only Israel is directly so. Others are ruled by intermediaries, earthly and heavenly. Their fate is governed by other factors. Only in the land and people of Israel do we find a nation's fortunes and misfortunes directly attributable to their relationship with G-d.

Judah Halevi and Nachmanides both expound what we might call mystical geography. The difference between them is that Judah Halevi looks to earth, Nachmanides to heaven. For Judah Halevi what is special about the land of Israel is its soil, landscape and climate. For Nachmanides, it is its direct governance by G-d. For both of them, religious experience is possible outside Israel, but it is a pale shadow of what it is in the land. Is there a way of stating this non-mystically, in concepts and categories closer to ordinary experience? Here is one way of doing so.

The Torah is not merely a code of personal perfection. It is the framework for the construction of a society, a nation, a culture. It is about what R. Aharon Lichtenstein called, in a memorable phrase, 'societal beatitude.' It contains welfare legislation, civil law, rules governing employer-employee relationships, environmental provisions, rules of animal welfare, public health, governmental and judicial systems.

The Torah stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from Gnosticism and other world-denying philosophies that see religion as an ascent of the soul to ethereal realms of the spirit. G-d lives here, on earth, in human lives, interactions and associations. The Torah is terrestrial because God seeks to dwell on earth. Thus the Jewish task is to create a society with the Divine presence in its midst. Had Judaism been confined to matters of the spirit, it would have left vast areas of human concern – the entire realms of politics, economics and sociology – outside the religious sphere.

What was and is unique about Israel is that it is the sole place on earth (barring shortlived exceptions like the Himyarites in the 6th century and Khazars in the 8th, whose kings converted to Judaism) where Jews have had the chance to create an entire society on Jewish lines. It is possible to live a Jewish life in Manchester, Monsey, Madrid or Minsk. But it is always a truncated experience. Only in Israel do Jews conduct their lives in the language of the Bible, within time defined by the Jewish calendar and space saturated in Jewish history. Only there do they form a majority. Only there are they able to construct a political system, an economy and an environment on the template of Jewish values. There alone can Judaism be what it is meant to be: not just a code of conduct for individuals, but also and essentially the architectonics of a society.

Hence there must be some space on earth where Jews practice self-government under Divine sovereignty. But why Israel, specifically? Because it was and is a key strategic location where three continents, Europe, Africa and Asia, meet. Lacking the extended flat and fertile space of the Nile delta or the Tigris-Euphrates valley (or today, the oil-fields of Arabia), it could never be the base of an empire, but because of its location it was always sought after by empires. So it was politically vulnerable.

It was and is ecologically vulnerable, because its water-resources are dependent on rain, which in that part of the world is never predictable (hence the frequent 'famines' mentioned in Genesis). Its existence could never, therefore, be taken for

granted. Time and again its people, surviving challenge, would experience this as a miracle. Small geographically and demographically, it would depend on outstanding achievement (political, military and economic) on the part of its people. This would depend, in turn, on their morale and sense of mission. Thus the prophets knew, naturally as well as supernaturally, that without social justice and a sense of divine vocation, the nation would eventually fall and suffer exile again.

These are, as it were, the empirical foundations of the mysticism of Halevi and Nachmanides. They are as true today as they were in ancient times. There is a directness, a naturalness, of Jewish experience in Israel that can be found nowhere else. History tells us that the project of constructing a society under Divine sovereignty in a vulnerable land is the highest of high-risk strategies. Yet, across forty centuries, Jews knew that the risk was worth taking. For only in Israel is G-d so close that you can feel Him in the sun and wind, sense Him just beyond the hills, hear Him in the inflections of everyday speech, breathe His presence in the early morning air and live, dangerously but confidently, under the shadow of His wings. to Num. 13:2.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5769-matot-massei-the-religious-significance-of-israel/>

The Three Weeks

by Chaya Mushka & Nechama Krimmer *

We are now in the middle of "the Three Weeks," a period of mourning over the destruction of both the First and Second Holy Temples. It's a difficult subject to tackle as the loss is overwhelming. Where do we start? The horrific loss of human life? The subsequent trials of a long, cruel exile? The termination of our connection to G dliness that came through the Temple services? Can we even conceptualize the G dliness that was revealed inside the Temple enough for us to properly mourn for it today?

The destruction of the Beis HaMikdash was not just a Jewish tragedy. Gentiles also prayed, offered sacrifices, and received blessings in the Temple. As the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed, "I will bring them to My holy mount, and I will cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer, their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for ALL peoples" (56:7).

The windows of Hashem's House had an unusual quality. Generally, windows are constructed to bring in as much natural light as possible. The windows of the Beis HaMikdash, however, were constructed in the opposite direction. They were designed in order that the G dly light from inside the Beis HaMikdash could shine to the outside world.

Through the recent events of this year we have received a perhaps unwanted glimpse into the window of the destruction of the two Holy Temples.

On Lag B'Omer, we watched in horror as news flooded in of the martyrs who perished in Meron at the grave of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai in the midst of such a joyous celebration. 45 dead, 150+ injured.

Then just a few weeks later, on the holiday of Shavuot, bleachers collapsed in a synagogue near Jerusalem. 2 dead, 160+ injured.

And last week, we watched the collapse of the Surfside Champlain Towers South in Miami and the rubble that was left behind. 54+ dead, 80+ missing and presumed dead.

These events, which unfolded in front of our eyes, each involve three things: a joyous occasion turned tragedy, a collapsing structure, and the unity that comes from shared grief.

Since everything that we see and hear is through Divine Providence, we can utilize these experiences to further understand what we are mourning for.

Or conversely, what we are collectively yearning for: the building of the Third Beis HaMikdash, which will never be destroyed.

* In Memory of Rabbi Chaim Dovid Nota Wichnin, z"l.

https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/5183234/jewish/Three-Weeks.htm

Being Honest Should be Completely Obvious

By Yossi Ives *

The section of the Torah (Numbers 30:2-17) that speaks about the laws of vows has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning appears to be a general introduction about the obligation to keep one's word:

If a man makes a vow to the Lord or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not violate his word; according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do.

The middle section includes a set of rules about the right of a husband or a father to object — under particular circumstances — to vows made by his wife or daughter. A couple of examples: the father can only nullify his daughter's vow on the day he hears of it, and he can only object to his wife's vow if it affects him.

The section concludes with a summary:

These are the statutes which the Lord commanded Moses concerning a man and his wife, a father and his daughter, in her youth, while in her father's house.

Given that the purpose of this final verse is to serve as a summary of what came before, why is it focused exclusively on the middle part while ignoring the beginning?

Surely the obligation to fulfill one's vows is more important than the ability to abolish them. And as such, the summary verse appears to omit the most salient point!

In characteristic fashion, the Rebbe shows us that we need to shift our perspective.

We assume that the opening verse — "he shall not violate his word" — is a commandment to honor our word, and thus we wonder how this important law is left out of the summary. But what if the opening verse is not a command at all?

This is indeed the case, the Rebbe explains. This section of the Torah is entirely about nullifying vows — which explains why the summary is exclusively focused on this aspect. As for the first verse? That is merely an introduction that is stating the obvious. In other words: "As we all know, a person's word should be their bond, which normally means a sacred commitment to fulfilling one's vows. However, there are specific occasions when vows may be cancelled..."

Our Torah portion is not introducing the obligation to do as one promised, as this is already well established. Rather, it is focused on the more surprising fact that it is possible to annul the vow.

By now we have gone through almost four-fifths of the Five Books of Moses, in which the assumption has been that a person must act with integrity. The making and keeping of promises are a theme running through so many of the Biblical stories. When Jacob is cheated by his father-in-law, Laban, he scolds him, "And why did you cheat me?"¹ Sticking with Jacob, we read how he made and kept a vow to be faithful to G d.²

Many of the previous sections of the Torah contain laws that are based on the core value of honoring one's word — from promises to donate the value of a person or animal for sacred purposes³ to the laws pertaining to a Nazarite vow.⁴

Moreover, the Ten Commandments declare "You shall not issue false testimony,"⁵ and we are urged to "distance yourself from anything false."⁶

By the time we arrive at the end of the book of Numbers, we have been reminded countless times about the need to keep our word.

Thus, the opening verse here does not introduce a new obligation, it introduces the laws of annulling vows. The summary at the end therefore focuses on the ways in which a vow may be overturned.

With this in mind, another difficulty is cleared up. At the very beginning, we are told that these laws were delivered to “the heads of the tribes.” Rashi explains that this is mentioned to tell us that just as a father can annul a vow, so may a leading expert disqualify a vow.

Since the Torah specifies that this section was presented to the leaders, it is reasonable to assume that the leaders have some sort of unique relationship with the issue. But why would Rashi think that this relates to the leaders’ role in undermining the vow, rather than the more obvious idea that they have a special role in ensuring people adhere to their vows?

But knowing that this section is entirely about annulling vows, it is easy to understand that the mention of the leaders as the recipients of the laws will also relate to their role in getting rid of vows.

There is a powerful lesson in all of this. In the eyes of the Torah, integrity and honesty are not commands; rather, they should be seen as a way of life. The sacredness of one’s word should be woven into the fabric of one’s being, just as it is woven into so many of the stories and the laws of the Torah. It is so patent, it need not even be said. After all, what kind of world would we live in if we could give no credence to the value of a person’s promise?

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 13, Parshat Matot I.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 29:25.
2. Genesis 28:20-22, 31:13.
3. Leviticus 27.
4. Numbers 6.
5. Exodus 20:13.
- 6 Exodus 23:7.

* Rabbi of Cong. Ahavas Yisrael of Pomona, N.Y. and founder and Chief Executive of Tag International Development, a charitable organization that focuses on sharing Israeli expertise with developing countries.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5175325/jewish/Being-Honest-Should-be-Completely-Obvious.htm

Matot-Mas’ei: Every Regression a Progression

An Insight by the Rebbe *

"These are the journeys of the Israelites who left the Land of Egypt." Mas'ei 33:1

The archetype of constricted consciousness is the Land of Egypt. The Hebrew name for Egypt (Mitzraim) means “limits” and “boundaries” (meitzarim). The Exodus from Egypt is thus the archetype for transcending limits in the spiritual life. But here we find an instructive nuance in the way the Israelites’ itinerary is introduced: “These are the journeys of the Israelites who left the Land of Egypt.” This phrase seems to imply that all the journeys were from the Land of Egypt, while technically only the first journey was from Egypt.

By introducing the entire itinerary this way, the Torah teaches us that whenever we go out of Egypt, whenever we transcend one level of life, we should consider our new, expanded level of consciousness a new “Egypt,” a level of constricted awareness relative to where we want to go next. In this way, we are constantly going out of Egypt.

Furthermore, it is not enough to just enhance or ascend at our present level; each leg of the journey should be a complete departure from the previous way we conceived of G-d, of life, and of ourselves.

In this context, it is particularly instructive to realize that not everything that happened along this journey from Egypt to the threshold of the Promised Land was altogether positive. At quite a few stops, the Israelites fell backwards, even retreated, and learned the lessons of Divine living the hard way. Nonetheless, they are all called “journeys”; in the long run they all contributed to the final arrival. This teaches us that in order to progress in life, we must learn how to see every regression as a lesson in how to progress further, and thereby turn every failure into a success.

* From the *Kehot Chumash*

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

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Salomon Nadel, a"h,
(Shlomo Zalman ben Pinchas HaKohen)

Volume 26, Issue 38

Shabbat Parashat Matot-Masei

5781 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

My Teacher: In Memoriam

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 last year.

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

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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.

[1] Makkot 10a.

[2] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Rotze'ach, 7:1.

[3] Mishneh Torah, Talmud Torah 5:1.

[4] The phrase comes from the Zohar.

[5] Rambam, Hilchot Talmud Torah 3:13; based on (a slightly different text of) Eruvin 65a.

[6] Avot 4:12.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Moses recorded the places of origin toward the places of destination... and these are the places of destination toward the places of origin" [Numbers 33:2].

Undoubtedly, the Exodus stands as the central event of our nation's collective consciousness, an event that we invoke daily in the Shema, on the Sabbath, on festivals, and after every meal. Still, when we consider the detail that our portion of Masei devotes to recording all 42 stops of the 40 year desert sojourn, we're a little taken aback. One chapter devotes 45 verses to listing all 42 locations, and since each location was not only a place where the Israelites camped, but also a place from which they journeyed, each place name is mentioned twice. Why such detail? Different commentators take different approaches.

The Sforno maintains that the plethora of locations is a way of highlighting the merit of the Jewish people, who, "in the loving kindness of their youth, followed God into the desert, a land not sown" (Jeremiah 2:2). And the Sefat Emet suggests that the names of the encampments are included to demonstrate that wherever the Jewish people travelled through

our long history, we have been able to create Tikkun Olam – making a profound impact on our environment.

This week, I would like to concentrate on the commentary of Nahmanides. Apparently, he is troubled not only by the delineation of each stage of the journey, but also by the additional declaration that "...Moses wrote their goings forth, according to their stations, by the commandment of God..." (Numbers 33:1-2). These words suggest that the actual recording of these journeys has importance. In approaching the issue, Nahmanides first quotes Rashi who says that Moses "set his mind to write down the travels. By doing this, he intended to inform future generations of the loving kindness of God...who protected His nation despite their manifold travels". Nahmanides, then quotes Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed, 3: 50) who understands the detail as a means of corroborating the historical truth of the narrative. He adds that later generations might think they sojourned in a "desert that was near cultivated land, oases which were comfortable for human habitation, places in which it was possible to till and reap or to feed on plants, areas with many wells...", hence the enumeration of all these way-stations is to emphasize the extent of the miracle of Israelite subsistence. After quoting these views, Nahmanides concludes with his own most intriguing comment: "The recording of the journeys was a Divine commandment, either for reasons mentioned above, or for a purpose the secret of which has not been revealed to us...". Nahmanides seems to be prompting us to probe further.

I would submit that the secret he refers to may indeed be the secret of Jewish survival. After all, the concept of "ma'aseh avot siman l'banim" – that the actions of the fathers are a sign of what will happen to the children – was well known to the sages, and one of the guiding principles of Nahmanides's Biblical commentary. Perhaps, the hidden message of this text is an outline of the future course of Jewish history. From the time of the destruction of the Temple, until our present return to the Land of Israel – the "goings forth" of the Jewish people certainly comprise at least 42 stages: Judea, Babylon, Persia, Rome, Europe, North Africa and the New World. As Tevye the Milkman explains in Fiddler on the Roof when he is banished from Anatevka, "Now you know why Jewish adults wear hats; we must always be ready to set out on a journey!" Moreover, each Diaspora was important in its own right, and made its own unique contribution to the text (Oral Law) and texture (customs) of the sacred kaleidoscope which is the Jewish historical experience. Are not the Holocaust memorial books, where survivors try to preserve what little can be kept of lost worlds, examples of our sense that God commanded us to write things down – to remember? Perhaps the Jews didn't invent history, but they understood that the places of Jewish wanderings, the content of the Jewish

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lifestyle, and the miracle of Jewish survival are more important than those hieroglyphics which exalt and praise rulers and their battles. The "secret" Nahmanides refers to may not only be a prophetic vision of our history, but a crucial lesson as to what gave us the strength, the courage and the faith to keep on going, to keep on moving, to withstand the long haul of exile.

If we look at the verse where Moses writes down the journey according to the command of God, we read that Moses recorded "their starting points toward their destinations at God's command and those were their destinations toward their starting points". What does this mean? Why does the same verse conclude "destinations toward starting points"? Fundamental to our history as a nation is that we are constantly traveling – on the road to the Promised Land, on the journey towards redemption. That direction was given to us at the dawn of our history: in Hebron, with the Cave of the Couples, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, and their gracious hospitality to everyone, their righteous compassion and just morality; and in Jerusalem, the city of peace. Even as we move down the road of time, we must always recall the place of our origin.

When S.Y. Agnon received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he was asked about his birthplace. To the interviewer's surprise, he answered that he was born in Jerusalem. The interviewer pointed out that everyone knew he had been born in Buczacz, a town in Galicia. Agnon corrected him: "I was born in Jerusalem more than 3,000 years ago. That was my beginning, my origin. Buczacz in Galicia is only one of the stopping-off points".

Only two princes of tribes who served as scouts reached the Promised Land: Caleb and Joshua; Caleb because he visited the graves of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron, and Joshua because the name of God, the author of the revelation was added to his name. Only these two set out for the Promised Land with their place of origin at the forefront of their consciousness. Only those with a proud past can look forward to a glorious future.

As long as we wander with our place of origin firmly in mind, we will assuredly reach our goal. We may leave our place of origin for our destination, but our places of origin in Israel will remain our ultimate destiny.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Which legendary person's Yartzeit will be commemorated on Wednesday next week? In Parshat Chukat, details are provided of the sad passing of Aharon HaCohen – Aharon the High Priest. But unusually, there is no date given for his death. In the second of this week's parshiot -Ma'asei – reference is again made to his passing and this time we are told that Aharon died "בחדש החמישי באחד לחודש" – on the first day of the fifth month". Now,

since Nissan is the first month of the year, the first day of the fifth month, is Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av, which will be next week Shabbat.

We know from here therefore, that every year we read about the Yartzeit of Aharon on the Shabbat which is closest to that date – and I cannot think of a better time in the year to contemplate on the life of Aharon and his teachings. He died on Rosh Chodesh Av, the commencement of the saddest month of the year. As Chazal teach us in Mesechet Ta'anit “שמשינו אב ממעטין בשמחה” – with the commencement of the month of Av, our joy decreases”. This is on account of the fact that so many tragedies befell our people at the time including the destruction of both of our temples.

Our second temple fell in the year 70 because of the sin of Sinat Chinam- causeless hatred. And when you think about it, the example that Aharon set provided the antidote to Sinat Chinam. Hillel, in Pirkei Avot, teaches us הָיִי כְּתַלְמִידוֹ שֶׁל אֶהְרֶן – we should strive to be like the disciples of Aharon, אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם – like him we should ‘love peace and pursue it’, אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וְהַבְּרִיּוֹת אוֹהֵב – and like him, we should ‘love all other people and bring them close to Torah’

Aharon taught through his personal example that we should love peace but that actually is not good enough. We need to ensure that there will be a peaceful environment wherever we are. We should love all other people and through our love for them, share with them the beauty of a life of Torah.

One thousand nine hundred and fifty years after the destruction of our temple, tragically, but causeless hatred is still very much in our midst. As we commemorate the Yartzeit of Aharon we must transform שְׂנֵאת חֵם into אֹהֶב חֵם – causeless love.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Moshe the Bridge Builder

Rabbi Dov Kaplan

Thank God Moshe our leader was in excellent health in his advanced age. The parsha tells us that two tribes of Israel, Reuven and Gad, approached Moshe with a request to remain on the other side of the Jordan River.

Incredulously, after 40 years in the wilderness and now on the cusp of entering the Promised Land, they declare that they have no wish to cross over. The shock upon hearing such a seditious request would have been potentially harmful to even a much younger man.

In response, Moshe rebukes them for separating themselves from their brethren in the coming campaign for conquest of Canaan. He accuses them of nurturing a rebellion like the spies 38 years earlier. After making their biased report, the People panicked and were

subsequently punished to wait until the entire generation died out.

On a personal level, Moshe had only recently learned that, tragically, he himself would not be allowed to lead the People into the Land. How Reuven and Gad's disregard of the Land must have rankled him.

Although it is obvious that Moshe considers their plan a terrible one, he negotiates with them. Finally, once the two tribes have accepted his conditions, Moshe accedes to their request. It is agreed that if they join the rest of the tribes until after the conquest of Canaan is complete, then and only then will they be awarded the territories east of the Jordan. As the verse states:

Moses gave them, the descendants of Gad and the descendants of Reuben and half the tribe of Menashe the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan the land together with its cities within borders, the cities of the surrounding territory. (Bamidbar 32:33)

Anyone following the story will undoubtedly notice the surprisingly inclusion of “half the tribe of Menashe”. From where did they suddenly appear?

From the initial request and throughout the negotiations there was no mention of Menashe.

There are various proposed answers, but the most surprising approach suggests that Moshe “volunteered” families from Menashe to join the other 2 tribes. He instructed them to make their homes on the other side of the Jordan.

This explanation indeed solves one problem, but raises an even greater question. How is it that Moshe, who found the request by Gad and Reuven so repulsive, would then ask half the tribe of Menashe to join the others beyond the Jordan? Had Moshe changed his mind?

In order to answer this new problem, we need to fully consider the reasons for Moshe's resistance to their request.

On the matter of weakening the resolve of the other tribes Moshe has addressed the issue by demanding that Reuven and Gad join the troops in the upcoming battles with the Canaanite nations.

Yet he was still concerned regarding the long-term risks of them settling on the east bank. By allowing them to establish their homes far from the other tribes, the danger of them growing apart from the rest of the nation became a serious concern. He foresaw that the physical distance could foster an emotional and spiritual estrangement within the family of Israel.

In the Book of Yehoshua we read that both the western and the eastern tribes were concerned

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with this problem. When they threaten to attack the two and a half tribes who had built a (forbidden) altar in their territory, Reuven, Gad and Menashe explain why:

“that your children should not say to our children in the future: “You have no share in Hashem.” (22:27)

Moshe, in his wisdom, realized that he must create a bond or a bridge to join together the tribes on both sides of the Jordan. But who to send? It was imperative to find the right candidate for the job.

One tribe stood out: Menashe. Their love for the Land is demonstrated in Parshat Pinchas through the supplication of the righteous Daughters of Tzlophchad of Menashe who wished to inherit the portion of their deceased father in the Holy Land. (Chapter 27).

In Parshat Masei (Chapter 36), our 2nd parsha in this week's double-header, the elders of Menashe remonstrate with Moshe that their portion of the Land will be diminished if the Daughters of Tzlophchad marry outside the tribe. Our sages understood that they, too, were motivated by their love of the Land.

Besides being lovers of Eretz Yisrael we can learn from the end of Parshat Matot that the tribal members of Menashe were also courageous and mighty warriors. After settling matters with Moshe, the Torah writes that Reuven and Gad built cities for their families, while the Menasheites did battle and conquered (32;34-31).

Additionally, we are told in the Book of Shoftim (Chapters 11-12) that Menashe joined Yiftach in his war with the Ammonites contrary to others who did not.

Rabbi Naftali Z. Y. Berlin (d. 1893) proffered another suggestion for Moshe's choice. He wrote that Menashe was chosen because they were great Torah scholars. (Ha'amek Davar to Devarim 3:16)

From all the above, we can appreciate why Moshe chose to include half of the tribe of Menashe east of the Jordan. They were men of courage, lovers of the Land of Israel and of the Torah.

There is one more essential tribal characteristic that I learned about from my great mentor, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, years ago in a shiur delivered in our rabbinic training program in Yerushalayim.

He pointed out to us that the ‘original’ Menashe, the son of Yosef, is the first brother in the Torah who, for the sake of shalom bayit (peace at home), ignores his pride and jealousy.

In the final parsha of Breishit, the Torah tells us of the blessings Yaakov bestowed upon his

two grandsons, Efraim and Menashe. Yosef, their father, positioned them according to birth. Menashe, the eldest stands to the right of Yaakov and Efraim, the junior, to the left.

Curiously, before reciting the blessings, their grandfather crosses his hands over, placing his right hand on the younger boy and his left on the older one. The significance of this is not lost on Yosef who attempts to correct his elderly father. But Yaakov responds:

"I know, my son, I know; he too will become a nation, and he too will be great. But his younger brother will be greater than him..." (48:19)

Menashe, being the eldest, had every right to feel rancour upon hearing this. Yet he holds his tongue, accepts the order as described and seems to hold no ill feeling toward his younger brother. (Moshe could especially appreciate this vis-a-vis his older brother, Aharon.)

Menashe understood, Rabbi Riskin taught us, the principle of 'gadol hashalom', "peace is great".

In an attempt to connect the tribes east of the river with the rest of the nation on the west, Moshe chose the tribe of Menashe, to bridge the gap between the two parts of the House of Israel.

Their tribal traits made them his obvious choice, for a person who wishes to be such a connector needs not only to love the Land of Israel and the Torah, but must essentially love the People of Israel.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger Messaging Priorities

Where was Moshe Rabbeinu buried? Har Navo? That is how it is recorded at the end of Devarim (34:1). However in this week's parsha, Rashi explains to us that Navo was named in honor of a pagan deity, and that name just had to go. That is how Chazal explain, (32:37-39) "And the [tribe] of Reuven built Cheshbon, and Elaleh and Kiriathaim, and Nevo and Baal Meon - their names being changed and Sibmah and they gave their names to the cities that they built". Yet it would seem that we could not rebrand Nevo, that the new name simply did not take, and even the Almighty conceded to leave the pagan name in place and forever associated with none less than the greatest of all nevi'im.

Why does the Torah record what seems to be a fruitless and failed attempt at communal change? When viewed in context of the entire parsha, we may begin to appreciate that perhaps this was part of a larger lesson that Moshe was imparting to his generation. If correct, then the teaching begins with Moshe's negotiations with the tribes of Reuven and Gad, as they request to leave their families and flocks on the eastern side of the Yarden.

Moshe Rabbeinu reviews and confirms the obligations of the two tribes. Their commitment to fight alongside their brethren to capture the mainland would retroactively earn them the right to settle their families and flocks earlier than anyone else. Moshe (32:24) records this benefit, "Build your cities for your children and spaces for your flocks, and [keep your promises]" However Rashi points out that Moshe was delivering a "shtoch" as he was firming up the deal. He was, in a not-so-veiled critique, correcting their prior presentation, (32:16) "And they approached [Moshe] and they said, "We will build spaces for our sheep and cities for our children". Moshe let them know that he was profoundly disappointed with their priorities. Whereas my untrained ear would never pick this up, Moshe understood that they had planned to build the spaces for the sheep first. This concerned Moshe enough to deliver a stinging rebuke, one that will be heard by all Jews at all times.

In years gone by I had felt that the criticism was unduly harsh and undeserved. Did Moshe really believe that these Jews would protect their sheep before making their children safe? Are we to believe that this was a Freudian slip, that it truly represented their priorities, and that they cared for the sheep more than their children. Did they deserve to be forever censured? Yet this year my mind for some reason took me to a different place and I came to an appreciation of Chazal's insight. I have no doubt these tribes treasured every accomplishment and milestone of their children far more than the fleece and meat of their sheep with all the wealth that it brought. But consider this: every yom tov when they would travel to Yerushalayim and the children would ask for hours, "Are we there yet? Why do we live so far from Yerushalayim?" and undoubtedly we would hear on the very same trip, "why can't we stay home this time?", "why can't we visit Yerushalayim more often and stay longer?"

Whereas their response to Moshe may have been some unthinking and unfortunate gaffe, the honest and perhaps frequent parental answer would be quite different. Every aliya laregel would indeed communicate that our wealth, our family business, our financial security, and our large premises all keep us far from Yerushalayim and make our trips there difficult and less frequent. Truth be told, over the course of the fourteen years the fathers were absent even if only for periods at a time. Undoubtedly their children would need "help learning a daf" or had to "sit alone in shul" or wonder before retiring "where did abba call from?", and they would find out that it is all because of the sheep.

That is the meaning of the "shtoch", of the censure. It was a message that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to bring home to his children before they signed the dotted line.

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So what happened with Har Nevo? That completes this teaching for all times. Sometimes names, and certainly ideas, are so well embedded that even the attempt of the conquering tribes could not change them. That is what Moshe Rabbeinu was attempting to teach us in so many ways.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

"You're Doing the Right T(h)ing!"

If a man makes a vow to HASHEM or makes an oath to prohibit himself, he shall not profane his word; according to whatever came out of his mouth, he shall do. (Bamidbar 30:3)

Moshe wrote their goings forth to their journeys at the bidding of HASHEM, and these were their journeys to their goings forth. (Bamidbar 33:2)

In honor of both Parshas Matos which focuses on the power of the spoken word and in the spirit of Parshas Masei which accounts for the travels of the Jewish People in the desert over the course of 40 years, I would like to share a personal account of a brief but powerful verbal exchange that took place not quite 40 years ago.

It was probably my first public appearance at a larger family event since I had started to learn in Yeshiva. I remember it was July 4th and it was very hot. People were arriving for the cocktail hour before the wedding and there was the typical mingling and bubbly conversations going on in every corner. Many guests and family members had not seen each other since the last wedding or funeral and in different pockets in a variety of rooms there was a friendly social buzz.

I can never forget the reception I received. It was consistent and overt. There was no attempt at subtlety. There I was with a black Yarmulka planted firmly on my head. I had a short black beard, and Tzitzis were peeking out from underneath my suit jacket. Whichever small group I approached, the people standing there, all of whom I have known my entire life, spontaneously, halted their conversation, looked at each other with a wide eye glance, and then while casting a brief glance in my direction, seemingly on cue, dispersed leaving me standing there by my lonesome, as if I had some obvious and serious communicable disease.

It didn't happen once or twice. It happened everywhere, and predictably so. I had said nothing to no one. Not even "hello". I decided that it was ok with me. In business and psychology you've got to know who owns the problem. If they were offended by my appearance, it was not my problem.

Then my elderly Aunt Fanny surprisingly beckoned for me to come to her. She must have been in her mid- 80's. Aunt Fanny was not taller than a breakfast room table, and with

her beehive hairdo, with a tall box of Cheerios on top. She was wearing a fur coat I remember although it was 90 degrees in the room. I happily came right over to her. Somebody actually wants to talk to me.

Aunt Fanny was my grandfather's sister. She was from the older group of 10 children that were born in Europe and was raised in America. She had credible memories of the "old world" that she was known to share.

I remember bending way over to hear what she had to say. Her voice was weak and raspy and there was a hint of a European accent yet. When I was close enough she told me, "Everybody thinks you're crazy!" I remember thinking, "Thanks for sharing. Sharing is caring!" Then she called me to come closer again and I made the mistake of bending down even closer. This time she belted out with a ferocity I shall never forget, "BUT YOU'RE DOING THE RIGHT T(H)ING!" My ears were ringing!

I heard in those words a ringing endorsement. Who's going to bury this one correctly! Who's going to give names for those who are no more?! Who's going to carry on?! Tragically from those ten children, born to my Zeidy who was a Shomer Shabbos his entire life, davening three times a day, it's hard to find a Jew. Later my Aunt Rhoda, Aunt Fanny's daughter, told my mother OBM, that Label's family is just like Zeidy's; five boys and five girls, bli ayin hora. It's no doubt partially due Aunt Fanny's honest and encouraging words.

Whenever I have an opportunity to tell my personal story I always include this little vignette of Aunt Fanny. I met a young Rabbi on a plane, years back, coming back from Israel. He would bring students from his campus to Ohr Somayach in Monsey where I would tell my story. He told me you don't know how many students are walking around campus and saying to each other constantly, "You're doing the right t(h)ing!"

OU Dvar Torah

The Real Me Rabbi Bernie Fox

The members of Reuven and Gad had an abundance of livestock very numerous and they saw the land of Yazer and the land of Gilad, and behold, the place was a place for livestock. (Sefer Bamidbar 32:1)

I. Reuven and Gad's dialogue with Moshe
The closing portion of Parshat Matot describes the circumstances leading to two and a half shevatim – tribes – settling on the eastern side of the Jordan. Bnai Yisrael captured these territories in battles that they did not seek or initiate. They had asked Sichon, one of the territories' rulers, to allow them passage through his kingdom on their march to the Land of Canaan. Rather than acquiescing, Sichon attacked Bnai Yisrael. He was defeated and his lands captured. This defeat did not

deter the other local ruler – Og – from attacking. He too was defeated and his lands were taken. The capture of these territories did not immediately alter the nation's plan to continue to the Land of Canaan, capture it, and for all the tribes to settle in it.

This plan was challenged by the shevatim of Reuven and Gad. These tribes possessed huge flocks. The lands of Sichon and Og were ideal for grazing. Reuven and Gad suggested to Moshe that they take possession of these lands in place of their portions in the Land of Canaan on the western side of the Jordan.

Moshe reacted negatively. He offered a number of objections. Among these was concern that the behavior of these shevatim would undermine the other tribes' determination to capture the Land of Canaan. They would interpret the behaviors of Reuven and Gad as motivated by fear. This perceived fear would provoke widespread insecurity and the nation would refuse to engage in the conquest of the Land of Canaan. Once again, the nation would be punished by Hashem for its lack of faith in His providence.

The shevatim of Gad and Reuven then reached an agreement with Moshe. They will settle their families in the territories east of the Jordan. Then, they will lead the nation in the conquest of the Land of Canaan. Only after all the tribes have settled in their respective lands, will they return to their own lands and families east of the Jordan.

Moshe formalizes this proposal. If the tribes of Reuven and Gad fulfill their commitment to the other tribes, then they will receive their portions in the territories east of the Jordan. However, if they do not follow-through on their commitment, then they will not receive their portions east of the Jordan but will settle with their brethren west of the Jordan. Reuven and Gad accepted this agreement.

And Moshe said to the members of Gad and the members of Reuven: Will your brothers engage in war and you will dwell here? (Sefer Bamidbar 32:6)

III. Moshe Questions the Ethics of Reuven and Gad

This is an outline of the incident. However, closer scrutiny of the passages reveals a number of crucial ambiguities in the narrative. The first is expressed in the above passage. The passage describes the first of Moshe's objections to Reuven and Gad's proposal. What is his objection? According to Don Isaac Abravanel, Moshe was objecting that their proposal was unjust. They were asking to settle in lands captured through battles waged by all the tribes. Yet, they were suggesting that they should not be required to reciprocate and join with the nation in the conquest of the territories that would be the apportioned to the other shevatim.[1]

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Rabbeinu Ovadia Sforno disagrees. He understands Moshe's words as rhetorical. He was saying, "How is it possible that you think that your brothers will agree to this ridiculous suggestion!"

The difference between these two interpretations is substantial. If Moshe was voicing an objection – as suggested by Abravanel, then Moshe understood that Reuven and Gad were indeed suggesting that they remain in the territories they would possess east of the Jordan and not join with Bnai Yisrael in the capture of the Land of Canaan.

Sforno's interpretation of Moshe words as rhetorical suggests that Moshe did not believe that Reuven and Gad intended for their absurd request to be taken seriously. Then, why did they make the request? Moshe accused them of sinister motivations. They know their request will be rejected. They are making it in order to subtly communicate their fear of the nations of the Land and Canaan. They are not seeking the territories east of the Jordan. They are trying to discourage confronting the mighty nations west of the Jordan.[2]

How are we to understand the behavior of Reuven and Gad according to Sforno? Is he suggesting that these shevatim plotted to undermine the conquest of the Land of Canaan?

And they approached him and they said: We will build here corrals for our flocks and cities for our children. And we will arm ourselves quickly before the Children of Israel until we have brought them to their place. And our children will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. (Sefer Bamidbar 32:16-17)

III. The Tribes Respond to Moshe's Objections

Let's put aside this question and consider another important ambiguity that is contained in the above passages. The tribes of Reuven and Gad explain that they will settle their families in the territories east of the Jordan and then lead the nation in the capture of the Land of Canaan. They will not return to their lands and families until the conquest and apportioning of the land is completed.

Are the tribes clarifying their request of revising it? The passages are ambiguous and the commentators differ on the issue. According to Abravanel, the tribes clarified their request. They were not seeking to opt-out of the conquest of the Land of Canaan. In fact, they would lead the nation in its conquest.[3] Others disagree and see in their response a revision of the shevatim's position. Ralbag – Gersonides – very explicitly adopts this interpretation.[4]

IV. Moshe's insists upon a formal agreement Which of these two interpretations fits best into the narrative? If the tribes were revising their position, then Moshe's insistence upon a formal agreement makes sense. Their original proposal was to abandon their brethren and not participate in the conquest of the Land of Israel. Moshe suspected that they were either fearful or that they did not fully appreciate the land Hashem had promised the Patriarchs.[5] A formal agreement was necessary. Perhaps, fear and doubt about the land will reassert themselves and, at some future moment, they will be tempted to abandon their brothers.

Moshe's insistence upon a formal agreement is much more difficult to explain if the tribes were not revising but were clarifying their position. They had never contemplated abandoning their brethren and not participating in the conquest! Why did Moshe insist upon a formal agreement?

V. Moshe's Understanding of the Position of Reuven and Gad

One possibility is that although the shevatim were clarifying their request, Moshe could not know this with certainty. He had to consider the possibility that, embarrassed by Moshe's criticisms, they presented their revision as clarification of their original position.

The difficulty with this answer is that it assumes that Moshe repeatedly misunderstood or was uncertain of the intentions of Reuven and Gad. First, he assumed that they intended to exclude themselves from the capture of the Land of Canaan. Even when they explained to Moshe that this was not their intent, he continued to suspect them. Is it possible to explain Moshe's behavior without assuming that he continually misinterpreted or was uncertain of Reuven and Gad's position?

VI. Self-Knowledge and its Limitations

The answer lies in considering a fundamental issue. How well do we understand our own motivations? Can we be sure that our actions are performed for the reason that we believe motivates us? Is it possible that sometimes we are motivated not by the factors of which we are aware but by much deeper considerations of which we are not completely aware?

Moshe required that Reuven and Gad formalize their commitment. This was not because he suspected that their leaders were disingenuous and were presenting a revision as a clarification. He accepted their sincerity. They were seeking grazing lands for their flocks and they never intended to excuse themselves from participating in the conquest of the Land of Canaan. However, he also recognized that it is difficult for us to be fully aware of our motivations.

Reuven and Gad explained that they wished to settle east of the Jordan because the land was perfect for grazing their flocks. But Moshe understood that we are not always fully aware

of our true motives. If deep within the recesses of their unconscious they questioned whether the land could be conquered, this doubt might be the true motivation for their request. In other words, Moshe feared that they asked to settle in the lands east of the Jordan because, unconsciously, they harbored doubts about the conquest of the Land of Canaan. At some point, in the future, these doubts may reassert themselves. Will Reuven and Gad remain committed to participating in the conquest of the land even if they encounter discouraging set-backs? Moshe concluded that a formal agreement was the best assurance that Reuven and Gad would remain steadfast.

Let us return to Sforno's comments. Sforno is not necessarily suggesting that Reuven and Gad plotted to undermine the conquest of the Land of Canaan. He is not denying the sincerity of their request. They asked to settle in east of the Jordan because they believed these lands were best suited for their flocks. But Moshe immediately recognized a deeper unconscious motive. They feared that the Land of Canaan could not be conquered. How did Moshe identify this unconscious motive? He presented to Reuven and Gad his evidence. Their request was nonsensical. Did they really expect the other shevatim to accept this deal? Moshe said to them, "You are speaking nonsense! But there is a context in which your request does make sense. You are unconsciously afraid the nations of Canaan cannot be subdued and you are trying to forestall the entire initiative!"

VII. Judging Other's Motives

Moshe teaches us two important lessons. First, we should not be certain that we fully understand our motives. Instead, we must act properly but humbly. We believe that our acts of righteousness and kindness are motivated by authentic virtue but we must be humble and recognize that we cannot be certain of our true motivation.

Second, when we recognize the innate uncertainty of our motivations, we can give credit to others for their acts of righteousness and kindness despite suspicions regarding their motives. We should applaud those who act properly and not be overly concerned with their motivation. We can rarely be certain that our own motives are pure. Yet, we try to act properly. We should appreciate others who act properly despite our skepticism of their motives.

[1] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer BaMidbar (Chorev Publishing House, Jerusalem 5768), p 266.

[2] Rabbeinu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Bamidbar, 32:6-7. See notes of Rav Yehuda Cooperman.

[3] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer BaMidbar (Chorev Publishing House, Jerusalem 5768), p 267. Abravanel's position is not completely clear. It is possible that he means that they presented a new position as if they were only clarifying their original position. In fact, they were revising their position in response to Moshe's objections. See

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comments of Rabbeinu Yosef Bechor Shor who seems to interpret the shevatim's response as a clarification of their original request.

[4] Rabbeinu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gersonides), Commentary on Sefer BaMidbar, (Ma'alot Publishing, Ma'ale Adumim, 5769), p 417.

[5] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer BaMidbar (Chorev Publishing House, Jerusalem 5768), p 266.

Weekly Parsha MATOT-MAASEI 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The combination of these two sections of the Torah constitutes the question, raised by all commentators over the ages, as to whether there is a connection between these two Parshiot, or is it just a matter of calendar convenience that unites them is one Torah reading on this coming Sabbath.

I have always believed that there are no random occurrences or events as they appear in the text in the Torah and in other holy writings. The Torah is not a random work, and these sections of the book are also not randomly put together. There must be a connecting bond, a common denominator that unites these two apparently disparate and different sections of the Torah.

I feel that it is in the relationship between the Jewish people and the land of Israel that is the connection that links Matot and Maasei. In this reading of Matot, we are told of the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to settle themselves and their families, their flocks, their wealth, and talents outside the strict borders of the land of Israel. They point out to Moshe all the advantages that they would enjoy if he allowed them to take their share in the land of Israel east of the Jordan River.

Moshe resists their plan, and sharply criticizes them for advancing it publicly. However, he is powerless to change their minds and alter their demands. He reaches an accommodation with them, i.e. that they will participate in the conquest of the land of Israel itself and not forsake their brothers in the struggle to obtain the land of Israel for the tribes of Israel. However, it is obvious that even this result, to settle east of the Jordan River, is a disappointment.

Advancing in history, we see that centuries later the tribes of Reuven and Gad were the earliest ones who were forced into exile, losing their land and independence.

In the second section of this week's Torah reading, we have the entire list of all the way stations that the Jewish people experienced during their sojourn in the desert of Sinai. Rashi is quick to point out that every one of these places had memories for the Jewish people, and were not just simply names of places, but, rather, descriptions of past events. Each place was a challenge and a test. We find in Judaism and Jewish thought that maintaining Jewish values is not always convenient. It demands sacrifice and memory of historical importance. In our time, many Jews, if not most of them, have again chosen to live outside the confines of the land of Israel. I do not mean to criticize any of them for this choice, but I merely make the observation that for almost all these Jews, it is a matter of convenience. It is the same type of convenience that led the tribes of Reuven and Gad to prefer the pasture lands of Transjordan over the land of Israel itself. It certainly was more convenient for them to do so, but the hard truth about Judaism is that it is never convenient – it is demanding, insistent and unwavering.

Remembering fondly all the way stations that we have experienced over our long exile in this world may create within us a feeling of nostalgia, but that is only because we do not directly face the lessons of exile, and what was endured throughout the centuries. It is certainly not for me to criticize Jews who choose to live outside of the land of Israel. It is their choice, and many, if not most, have good reasons to do so. But none of this changes the historical fact that only in the land of Israel do the Jewish people have a future, and only there will they be able to truly fulfill the mission set forth for them at Mount Sinai.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

ON BECOMING A PROPHET

Lately, I realize that I am reaching a new status and level in life. I receive calls and requests daily from people whom I do not know, who apparently have no relationship to me, and who wish to hold conversations with me and seek my advice. Naturally, I am very flattered that somehow people both here in Israel, and in the English-speaking diaspora feel that I could be of help to them. The truth is that in both situations, the only hope that I can offer is that of a listening ear and a sympathetic heart.

For whatever reason, I am currently receiving more requests from people who simply want to talk to me about issues and challenges that they face in their own personal and family lives, more than I received when I was officially occupied full-time in the American rabbinate. I attribute this increase in the volume of petitioners to the fact that people realize that I am an old person, and that elderly people have the time and disposition to share conversations and thoughts with others. After all, people reason, what else does he have to do with himself all day long. I am willing to admit that there is a modicum of truth in that statement. There are certain days when time drags on, and not much is accomplished. However, Thank God, that is still not the norm for most of the days of my life on this planet.

We certainly live in dangerous and uncertain times. There is no question that previous certainties in life and society, that we once took for granted and assumed would always be part of our daily existence, have now been called into great question and clouded with doubt. This is especially true regarding the political, economic, and demographic changes that have overtaken Jewish society and general society in the English-speaking world.

In the 1980s, in the United States, I felt, as most American Jews did, that public, vicious, and violent anti-Semitism was a thing of the past, and would no longer exist within American society. It is now quite evident that this notion was a mistake in judgment on my part. Members of Congress and other elected public officials openly express their hatred of Jews, and especially hatred of the state of Israel, and do so without real reprimand or harmful consequences to themselves or their causes.

This is a very worrisome event, for in the past, anti-Semitic speech sooner or later morphed into violent and physical anti-Jewish behavior and policies. Because of this unforeseen and, in many respects, amazing turnaround in the attitudes towards Jews in the free and democratic societies of the world, Jews, both individually and collectively, have become concerned and nervous about the future role and place in the general society in which they are living. There are those who see, on a personal level, that emigration to the land of Israel is a solution, regarding the issues that face them and their families. But that is a big step especially for American Jews to take, and moving to Israel is, therefore, viewed with trepidation, and grave doubts.

What people want, in effect, is a prophet to tell them what to do, when to do it. And a guarantee of success in whatever choice they may have made. This is a natural human reaction – the transference of having to make every consequential decision, from ourselves onto the shoulders of others. And if we invest those others with a certain degree of respect for their accumulated wisdom over the years, it is not difficult to realize that we are creating prophets to help instruct us as to what our future behavior and decisions should be.

But I am convinced that it is exceedingly difficult to give good advice to someone you do not know and have never met. You are asked to be blessed with the spirit of prophecy, to be able to advise others in a meaningful fashion. I am certainly willing to listen to others and to empathize with them over their difficulties, but empathizing with others is a far cry from predicting the future for an individual or a family. History can help us discern general patterns, but it cannot be relied upon for specific ideas and actions to guide us in our behavior in the present and the future. Being a false prophet is worse than being no prophet at all.

Shabbat shalom

Berel Wein

Conflict Resolution (Matot-Masei 5781)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZL

One of the hardest tasks of any leader – from Prime Ministers to parents – is conflict resolution. Yet it is also the most vital. Where there is leadership, there is long-term cohesiveness within the group, whatever the short-term problems. Where there is a lack of leadership – where leaders lack authority, grace, generosity of spirit and the ability to respect positions other than their own – then there is divisiveness, rancour, back-biting, resentment, internal politics and a lack of trust. True leaders are the people who put the interests of the group above those of any subsection of the group. They care for, and inspire others to care for, the common good.

That is why an episode in parshat Matot is of the highest consequence. It arose like this: The Israelites were on the last stage of their journey to the Promised Land. They were now situated on the east bank of the Jordan, within sight of their destination. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, who had large herds and flocks of cattle, felt that the land upon which they were now encamped was ideal for their purposes. It was good grazing country. So they approached Moses and asked for

permission to stay there rather than take up their share in the land of Israel. They said: "If we have found favour in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan." (Num. 32:5)

Moses was instantly alert to the risks. These two tribes were putting their own interests above those of the nation as a whole. They would be seen as abandoning their people at the very time they were needed most. There was a war – in fact a series of wars – to be fought if the Israelites were to inherit the Promised Land. As Moses put it to the tribes: "Should your fellow Israelites go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from crossing over into the land the Lord has given them?" (32:6-7). The proposal was potentially disastrous.

Moses reminded the men of Reuben and Gad what had happened in the incident of the spies. The spies demoralised the people, ten of them saying that they could not conquer the land. The inhabitants were too strong. The cities were impregnable. The result of that one moment was to condemn an entire generation to die in the wilderness and to delay the eventual conquest by forty years. "And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the Lord even more angry with Israel. If you turn away from following Him, He will again leave all this people in the wilderness, and you will be the cause of their destruction." (Num. 32:14-15) Moses was blunt, honest and confrontational.

What then follows is a model illustration of positive negotiation and conflict resolution. The Reubenites and Gadites recognise the claims of the people as a whole and the justice of Moses' concerns. They propose a compromise: Let us make provisions for our cattle and our families, they say, and the men will then accompany the other tribes across the Jordan. They will fight alongside them. They will even go ahead of them. They will not return to their cattle and families until all the battles have been fought, the land has been conquered, and the other tribes have received their inheritance. Essentially they invoke what would later become a principle of Jewish law: *zeh neheneh vezeh lo chaser*, meaning, an act is permissible if "one side gains and the other side does not lose." [1] We will gain, say the two tribes, by having land which is good for our cattle, but the nation as a whole will not lose because we will still be a part of the people, a presence in the army, we will even be on the front line, and we will stay there until the war has been won.

Moses recognises the fact that they have met his objections. He restates their position to make sure he and they have understood the proposal and they are ready to stand by it. He extracts from them agreement to a *tenai kaful*, a double condition, both positive and negative: If we do this, these will be the consequences, but if we fail to do this, those will be the consequences. He asks that they affirm their commitment. The two tribes agree. Conflict has been averted. The Reubenites and Gadites achieve what they want but the interests of the other tribes and of the nation as a whole have been secured. It is a masterclass in negotiation.

The extent to which Moses' concerns were justified became apparent many years later. The Reubenites and Gadites did indeed fulfil their promise in the days of Joshua. The rest of the tribes conquered and settled Israel while they (together with half the tribe of Manasse) established their presence in Transjordan. Despite this, within a brief space of time there was almost civil war.

Chapter 22 of the Book of Joshua describes how, after returning to their families and settling their land, the Reubenites and Gadites built "an altar to the Lord" on the east side of the Jordan. Seeing this as an act of secession, the rest of the Israelites prepared to do battle against them. Joshua, in a striking act of diplomacy, sent Pinchas, the former zealot, now man of peace, to negotiate. He warned them of the terrible consequences of what they had done by, in effect, creating a religious centre outside the land of Israel. It would split the nation in two.

The Reubenites and Gadites made it clear that this was not their intention at all. To the contrary, they themselves were worried that in the future, the rest of the Israelites would see them living across the Jordan and conclude that they no longer wanted to be part of the nation. That is why they had built the altar, not to offer sacrifices, not as a rival to the nation's Sanctuary, but merely as a symbol and a sign to future

generations that they too were Israelites. Pinchas and the rest of the delegation were satisfied with this answer, and once again civil war was averted.

The negotiation between Moses and the two tribes in our parsha follows closely the principles arrived at by the Harvard Negotiation Project, set out by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their classic text, *Getting to Yes*. [2] Essentially, they came to the conclusion that a successful negotiation must involve four processes:

Separate the people from the problem. There are all sorts of personal tensions in any negotiation. It is essential that these be cleared away first so that the problem can be addressed objectively.

Focus on interests, not positions. It is easy for any conflict to turn into a zero-sum game: if I win, you lose. If you win, I lose. That is what happens when you focus on positions and the question becomes, "Who wins?" By focusing not on positions but on interests, the question becomes, "Is there a way of achieving what each of us wants?"

Invent options for mutual gain. This is the idea expressed halachically as *zeh neheneh vezeh neheneh*, "Both sides benefit." This comes about because the two sides usually have different objectives, neither of which excludes the other.

Insist on objective criteria. Make sure that both sides agree in advance to the use of objective, impartial criteria to judge whether what has been agreed has been achieved. Otherwise, despite all apparent agreement, the dispute will continue, both sides insisting that the other has not done what was promised.

Moses does all four. First he separates the people from the problem by making it clear to the Reubenites and Gadites that the issue has nothing to do with who they are, and everything to do with the Israelites' experience in the past, specifically the episode of the spies. Regardless of who the ten negative spies were and which tribes they came from, everyone suffered. No one gained. The problem is not about this tribe or that but about the nation as a whole.

Second, he focused on interests, not positions. The two tribes have an interest in the fate of the nation as a whole. If they put their personal interests first, God will become angry and the entire people will be punished, the Reubenites and Gadites among them. It is striking how this negotiation contrasts so strongly to the dispute with Korach and his followers. There, the whole argument was about positions, not interests – about who was entitled to be a leader. The result was collective tragedy.

Third, the Reubenites and Gadites then invent an option for mutual gain. If you allow us to make temporary provisions for our cattle and children, they say, we will not only fight in the army. We will be its advance guard. We will benefit, knowing that our request has been granted. The nation will benefit by our willingness to take on the most demanding military task.

Fourth, there was an agreement on objective criteria. The Reubenites and Gadites would not return to the east bank of the Jordan until all the other tribes were safely settled in their territories. And so it happened, as narrated in the book of Joshua:

Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasse and said to them, "You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. For a long time now—to this very day—you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. Now that the Lord your God has given them rest as He promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan. (Joshua 22:1-4)

This was, in short, a model negotiation, a sign of hope after the many destructive conflicts in the book of Bamidbar, as well as a standing alternative to the many later conflicts in Jewish history that had such appalling outcomes.

Note that Moses succeeds not because he is weak, not because he is willing to compromise on the integrity of the nation as a whole, not because he uses honeyed words and diplomatic evasions, but because he is honest, principled, and focused on the common good. We all face conflicts in our lives. This is how to resolve them.

Parshat Matot-Masei (Numbers 30:2 – 36:13)**Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

Efrat, Israel – “And Moses recorded the places of origin toward the places of destination... and these are the places of destination toward the places of origin” [Numbers 33:2].

Undoubtedly, the Exodus stands as the central event of our nation’s collective consciousness, an event that we invoke daily in the Shema, on the Sabbath, on festivals, and after every meal. Still, when we consider the detail that our portion of Masei devotes to recording all 42 stops of the 40 year desert sojourn, we’re a little taken aback. One chapter devotes 45 verses to listing all 42 locations, and since each location was not only a place where the Israelites camped, but also a place from which they journeyed, each place name is mentioned twice. Why such detail? Different commentators take different approaches.

The Sforno maintains that the plethora of locations is a way of highlighting the merit of the Jewish people, who, “in the loving kindness of their youth, followed God into the desert, a land not sown” (Jeremiah 2:2). And the Sefat Emet suggests that the names of the encampments are included to demonstrate that wherever the Jewish people travelled through our long history, we have been able to create Tikkun Olam – making a profound impact on our environment.

This week, I would like to concentrate on the commentary of Nahmanides. Apparently, he is troubled not only by the delineation of each stage of the journey, but also by the additional declaration that “...Moses wrote their goings forth, according to their stations, by the commandment of God...” (Numbers 33:1-2). These words suggest that the actual recording of these journeys has importance. In approaching the issue, Nahmanides first quotes Rashi who says that Moses “set his mind to write down the travels. By doing this, he intended to inform future generations of the loving kindness of God...who protected His nation despite their manifold travels”. Nachmanides, then quotes Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed, 3: 50) who understands the detail as a means of corroborating the historical truth of the narrative. He adds that later generations might think they sojourned in a “desert that was near cultivated land, oases which were comfortable for human habitation, places in which it was possible to till and reap or to feed on plants, areas with many wells...”, hence the enumeration of all these way-stations is to emphasize the extent of the miracle of Israelite subsistence. After quoting these views, Nahmanides concludes with his own most intriguing comment: “The recording of the journeys was a Divine commandment, either for reasons mentioned above, or for a purpose the secret of which has not been revealed to us...”. Nahmanides seems to be prompting us to probe further.

I would submit that the secret he refers to may indeed be the secret of Jewish survival. After all, the concept of “ma’aseh avot siman l’banim” – that the actions of the fathers are a sign of what will happen to the children – was well known to the sages, and one of the guiding principles of Nahmanides’s Biblical commentary. Perhaps, the hidden message of this text is an outline of the future course of Jewish history. From the time of the destruction of the Temple, until our present return to the Land of Israel – the “goings forth” of the Jewish people certainly comprise at least 42 stages: Judea, Babylon, Persia, Rome, Europe, North Africa and the New World. As Tevye the Milkman explains in Fiddler on the Roof when he is banished from Anatevka, “Now you know why Jewish adults wear hats; we must always be ready to set out on a journey!” Moreover, each Diaspora was important in its own right, and made its own unique contribution to the text (Oral Law) and texture (customs) of the sacred kaleidoscope which is the Jewish historical experience. Are not the Holocaust memorial books, where survivors try to preserve what little can be kept of lost worlds, examples of our sense that God commanded us to write things down – to remember? Perhaps the Jews didn’t invent history, but they understood that the places of Jewish wanderings, the content of the Jewish lifestyle, and the miracle of Jewish survival are more important than those hieroglyphics which exalt and praise rulers and their battles. The “secret” Nahmanides refers to may not only be a prophetic vision of our history, but a crucial lesson

as to what gave us the strength, the courage and the faith to keep on going, to keep on moving, to withstand the long haul of exile.

If we look at the verse where Moses writes down the journey according to the command of God, we read that Moses recorded “their starting points toward their destinations at God’s command and those were their destinations toward their starting points”. What does this mean? Why does the same verse conclude “destinations toward starting points”? Fundamental to our history as a nation is that we are constantly traveling – on the road to the Promised Land, on the journey towards redemption. That direction was given to us at the dawn of our history: in Hebron, with the Cave of the Couples, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, and their gracious hospitality to everyone, their righteous compassion and just morality; and in Jerusalem, the city of peace. Even as we move down the road of time, we must always recall the place of our origin.

When S.Y. Agnon received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he was asked about his birthplace. To the interviewer’s surprise, he answered that he was born in Jerusalem. The interviewer pointed out that everyone knew he had been born in Buczacz, a town in Galicia. Agnon corrected him: “I was born in Jerusalem more than 3,000 years ago. That was my beginning, my origin. Buczacz in Galicia is only one of the stopping-off points”.

Only two princes of tribes who served as scouts reached the Promised Land: Caleb and Joshua; Caleb because he visited the graves of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron, and Joshua because the name of God, the author of the revelation was added to his name. Only these two set out for the Promised Land with their place of origin at the forefront of their consciousness. Only those with a proud past can look forward to a glorious future.

As long as we wander with our place of origin firmly in mind, we will assuredly reach our goal. We may leave our place of origin for our destination, but our places of origin in Israel will remain our ultimate destiny.

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Mattos-Masei Av 5781**Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University****Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig**

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe ben Yitzchak. “May his Neshama have an Aliya!”

A Man of Your Word

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisroel saying, “This is the matter that Hashem commanded: If a man takes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath...” (30:2-3)

Parshas Mattos begins with Moshe introducing the laws of vows to the heads of the tribes. Rashi (ad loc) points out that this was a remarkable departure from Moshe’s usual method of teaching of the laws of the Torah to Bnei Yisroel and that Moshe taught the heads of the tribes first as a way of according them honor. Rashi also notes that a tribunal of three common people can nullify a vow if no expert in vows is available. The holy day of Yom Kippur begins with this concept of vows – Kol Nidrei. What is so essential about the laws of vows that it opens the service on what is arguably the most intense day on the Jewish calendar? The Talmud (Bava Basra 88a) comments on the verse “speaks truth in his heart” (Psalms 15) as referring to someone who truly fears Hashem. Curiously, the Gemara found it necessary to give an example of such a person: Rav Safra. Rashi (ad loc) goes on to explain how Rav Safra came to be the paragon of this virtue:

Rav Safra was in the middle of saying Krias Shema when someone approached him to buy something that Rav Safra was selling. The buyer proceeded to offer a sum of money for the item he wished to buy. Rav Safra, who was still davening, was silent. The buyer understood Rav Safra’s silence as a reluctance to sell because the sum wasn’t high enough, so he kept raising his offer until it was a very large sum of money. Once Rav Safra finished his prayers he turned to the buyer and sold it to him for the original price offered. Rav Safra explained, “I had already decided after hearing your first offer to accept the original amount offered.”

Most people grow up valuing the concept of “keeping your word.” Unfortunately, modern society has all but abandoned this ideal, in fact in some cultures a signed contract is only a basis for further negotiation. In general, this notion of being “a man (or woman) of your word” is seen as being morally binding because once you give your word someone else has ownership over your expected performance, which in turn causes them to make decisions and commitments of their own based on your word.

However, we see from the Gemara that there is really a much more profound reason for keeping your word. The story that Rashi cites has nothing to do with keeping your word; Rav Safra was silent the entire time, he never committed to a price. Why was Rav Safra bound to fulfill the price that he had only agreed to in his mind?

The answer is because there is a much higher truth that we are ALL bound to: we are obligated to be truthful to ourselves. We don’t have to live up to our word because someone else has relied on it and made decisions based upon it; We have to fulfill our promises because we said it and we have an obligation to ourselves to make it a reality. This is why the verse says, “speaks truth in his heart” (Psalms 15): It has nothing to do with our commitments to other people – the basis for keeping our word is because we owe it to ourselves. That is what the whole discussion in this week’s parsha regarding vows is all about: when a person takes something that is permitted and forbids it from himself.

We often feel like we own the rights to ourselves. Therefore, even if we make commitments to ourselves (I will stop smoking, I will lose weight, etc.) we often have no compunction at all, or perhaps only a fleeting sense of guilt, about breaking those promises to ourselves. This is wrong. We don’t own ourselves, we are here as a gift of the Almighty. Our responsibility to ourselves lies in the obligation to Hashem; that’s why the Gemara calls those like Rav Safra “those that truly fear Hashem.”

This is why the subject of vows is so central to the Yom Kippur service. We acknowledge that we understand that even within commitments to ourselves we have an obligation to Hashem. Only when we articulate the severity of the obligation that comes with giving our word can we commit to fulfilling our word and changing our ways through teshuvah. This is the very essence of Yom Kippur, and thus why we begin with Kol Nidrei.

Violations & Obligations

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, “Take vengeance for Bnei Yisroel from the Midianites...” (31:1-2)

Hashem asks Moshe to go to war with Midian and take revenge for what they did to the Jewish people. Interestingly enough, Moshe chooses not to go himself, but rather sends Pinchas to lead Bnei Yisroel into battle. This seems somewhat odd as Hashem told Moshe to take vengeance on the Midianites. Why didn’t he go himself? Is it possible that it was because he was getting up there in years? However, just shortly prior, Moshe himself defeated the two greatest world powers: Sichon and Og. So why didn’t Moshe go to fight the Midianites as Hashem had commanded?

There is a concept known as hakoras hatov – recognizing the good that someone has done for us. We see this in Egypt when it came to striking the water to create the plagues of blood and frogs. Aharon was asked to perform these plagues instead of Moshe because both these plagues entailed afflicting the Nile, so to speak, and the Nile had served to protect him when he was a baby (see Rashi Shemos 7:19). Similarly, Moshe was not permitted to strike the ground for the third plague (lice) because the earth had helped him by hiding the corpse of the Egyptian that he struck down (see Rashi Shemos 8:12).

So too, Moshe could not possibly attack the Midianites as he owed them a debt of gratitude from when he was a fugitive from Egyptian justice. Eventually, he also married the daughter of Yisro, a high priest in Midian, and had children there.

We see something quite fascinating here; even though Hashem clearly told Moshe to go and take vengeance from the Midianites, Moshe understood that he himself could not go because that would display a

deep sense of personal disloyalty. The Torah is teaching us an incredible lesson: Hashem doesn’t just issue a command and in doing so, abrogate a core principle and tenet of Jewish philosophy. Moshe understood that even though Hashem wanted the Midianites to pay for what they had done, it was inappropriate for him to lead an attack.

This message is often lost on those who blindly follow what they believe to be the right course of religious action, believing they are doing it for the sake of Hashem. In fact, the Torah gives us an example of a person who had every intention of acting for the sake of heaven, but the Torah castigates her for what she wanted to do. The wife of Potiphar tried to seduce Yosef in order to have children with him – believing that she saw in her astrological signs that some of the Jewish tribes would descend from her. The Torah considers her act so repulsive that she is called a “wild animal” for what she wanted to do; even though she thought she was doing it for the sake of Hashem.

Having the right intention isn’t enough. We cannot abrogate Hashem’s other commandments to fulfill those that we would like to do, or to make social commentary (e.g. throwing rocks on Shabbos at cars traveling through a religious neighborhood). We must remember that Hashem places the highest importance on the value of shalom, even allowing His name to be erased for the possibility of shalom. Finally, it is important to remember that Hashem destroyed the generation of the flood because they were fighting with each other, while he kept the generation of the disbursement alive because they got along (even though their unity was really only grounded in fighting a war against Hashem).

Did You Know...

Right before the Jewish people went into Eretz Yisrael, Hashem commands them to drive out the previous inhabitants, to destroy their idols, and to destroy their places of worship.

Interestingly, what the Arabs call their temple (Mosque) comes from the word the Torah uses here to say place of worship (maskiyosem). Similarly, Christians refer to their church as a house of worship.

This is telling because it shows us how the non-Jews view their temples, as a place to worship their god. This is in stark contrast to how Jews view it, as a Beis Haknesses. The literal translation simply means “a house of gathering,” a place where we can come together and pray. Although the difference seems subtle, it is profoundly different.

Essentially, non-Jews view worshiping god as something that is reserved to their individual temples, and no more. In contrast, Jews view Avodas Hashem as something that we do every second of every day. We ought to do it in shul, but if for whatever reason that isn’t feasible, we daven at home or while traveling. The only difference between everyday worship and worshipping in a Beis Haknesses (or a shul) is the importance of a gathering, mainly that Hashem’s presence rests on a group (of ten or more men), and as Maimonides tells us that the prayers of a congregation never go unanswered. Summarily, non-Jews view worship as an act of going somewhere and completing something, while Jews understand that Avodas Hashem has to be a complete lifestyle and an integral part of everything that we do.

Talmudic College of Florida

Rohr Talmudic University Campus

4000 Alton Road, Miami Beach, FL 33140

Café con Fe

Rabino Pynchas Brener

Conectándote al Judaísmo

Matot Numbers XXX,2 – XXXII

Promise, Guilt, And Acquittal

Studying our religious sources confronts us with an additional requirement: understanding the social and political realities of the historical moment that interests us. For example, an appreciation of our modern environment, which is essentially materialistic, implies an obsessive preoccupation with the constant acquisition of objects and goods. This insatiable hunger for the material is the attitude that prevails today in our Western culture. In other cultural systems, the order of values is often different. Therefore, evaluating other cultures according to our hierarchical pattern of values often leads us to misinterpret the causes and meaning of events.

Many argue that not enough importance is given to the word in our cultural environment to a promise. Our pronouncements and verbal commitments are treated lightly. On the other hand, in the biblical world, a vow, a promise, an oath are considered key and binding. "Motsa sefatecha tishmor veasita," "what emanates from your lips you will care and fulfill," is a fundamental principle of the Torah. (In particular, in the Latin American world, we find a lack of emphasis on fulfilling verbal commitments).

Our text begins with an analysis of promises, the obligation to keep them, and the conditions under which they can be modified, qualified, or annulled. It is probably based on the premise that a human being, a thinking entity, must reflect before making a pronouncement. The human ability to conceive the universe through intellectual models, which is related to its linguistic competence (aptitude that separates the human being from any other creation) supposes to guard and jealously care for this faculty.

There are certain promises, Neder in Hebrew, which from the outset are invalid. For example, the Neder havai is a promise based on an impossible fact, such as promising a flying camel. When one unwittingly makes a promise, it is called Neder shegaga, and it is also worthless. Neder onsim refers to a promise that cannot be fulfilled because something unexpected happens, for example, a sudden ailment that prevents the performance of a certain action at a given time.

Our Chachamim differentiate between Neder and, Shevuah which is an oath. The subject of the Neder is an object or a circumstance (except the Neder of donating a sum for charity or for the Beit HaMikdash, in which case the person himself is compromised). In contrast, the subject of the Shevuah is the human being himself. The Neder, which makes an equivalence between what is permitted and forbidden according to the Torah, is invalid. For example, it is not valid to claim that an apple will be banned from me as if it were pork. (Unless the ban had been given by another verbal pronouncement, such as the promise to offer a certain animal for slaughter).

From that moment on, the result is that you cannot ingest the meat of that animal because it immediately belongs to the Beit HaMikdash). At the same time, you cannot swear about something that contradicts our precepts. There is no point in a Shevuah in which one claims that he will ingest pork, just as a Shevuah in which one promises not to put on the Tefilin for the morning prayer Shacharit is invalid. Our tradition is not sympathetic to promises and oaths. In the opinion of our Chachamim human beings must act correctly without the extreme recourse of a Neder or a Shevuah. If a person repents immediately after making a promise, it is possible to cancel it retroactively. The process of Hatarat nedarim, which is a kind of absolution, allows a scholar or a group of three people to exempt one from a promise, asking him first, in case he had made the promise without knowledge of the consequences of it. According to our chapters, a husband can relieve his wife of a promise, and a father can do the same with his minor daughter.

Although the Chachamim opine Tov shelo tidor, namely that it is preferable not to promise, while certain exceptions are considered. For example, making a Neder abstain from alcoholic beverages, is profitable according to Rambam and Ramban. Some authors of the Talmud think that some promises demonstrate arrogance. The Neder of refraining from eating meat, for example, (when a certain period is not specified, the promise is considered to last thirty days) is a kind of demonstration of feeling superior because the person points out that he can live while abstaining from certain pleasures, while others cannot.

Our chapters also deal with the person who kills another person without intending to do so. (This person is called Shogeg, which alludes to the absence of intent to kill, but does not imply total innocence. It is estimated that there was carelessness or lack of foresight, which resulted in the death of a human being). The Torah orders the construction of six cities in Hebrew Arei Miklat, which serve as a refuge for these people. In addition, the forty-two cities of the tribe of Levi were also considered "cities of refuge."

According to the biblical text, the Goel Hadam, meaning the redeemer of the spilled blood (probably a close relative of the dead, or perhaps it is someone specifically designated to avenge that death) could kill the person who had committed the crime, even though there was no intention to kill. The Ir Miklat offered protection against the Goel Hadam. According to the Chachamim, if the Goel Hadam violated the protection of these places, he would be sentenced in turn for having committed a deadly crime.

The person in question was to remain in the Ir Miklat until the time of the death of the Kohen Gadol, who was the chief of the Kohanim in office when the crime was committed. From that moment on, the one who had involuntarily committed the crime could return to his place of residence without fearing revenge for the Goel Hadam. What is the relationship between the Kohen Gadol and the crime committed? From a certain perspective, the community leader is equally responsible for everything that happens, including the crimes that have been committed.

The argument is based on the fact that the murder testifies that the mentor's affection was not adequate; had it been effective, he would have inspired and motivated them to refrain from committing a crime. In the Jewish tradition, Mita

mechaperet, death is the great atonement for sins, and therefore the death of Kohen Gadol frees those involved from guilt. According to Abarbanel, the death of Kohen Gadol is a cause for national mourning and sadness, and the magnitude of this collective pain serves to dampen the wrath of the Goel Hadam for him to desist from his purpose of revenge.

According to the commentator Sforno, God knows the degree of guilt of the person who perpetrated the crime and can determine with certainty whether or not there was the intention to murder another person. Therefore, the longevity of the Kohen Gadol is somehow related to the relative innocence of the person who committed the crime. Some remain in an Ir Miklat for the rest of their lives due to the long life of the Kohen Gadol. This explanation presents the difficulty that the years of the life of the Kohen Gadol are a function of the degree of guilt of another person. We could get out of our predicament, considering, as we mentioned, that the Kohen Gadol is indirectly involved in what happens in society and is, therefore, also responsible for the individual behavior of the members of the community.

Mitsvah: Ordinance Of The Torah In This Parashah

Contains 1 Positive Mitsvah And 1 Prohibition

Numbers 30:3 Law on Voiding Promises

Numbers 30:3 Not to break a promise

Mas'ei - Numbers XXXIII – XXXVI

The Role Of The Wise

Our chapters describe in detail the journeys of the Hebrews through the desert, noting the locations they touched on their journey to the Promised Land. In the place called Hor Hahar, near the land of Edom, Aharon, the chief of the Kohanim, dies. Aharon died at the age of one hundred and twenty-three, a few months after the beginning of the conquest of Israel. Moshe also dies in the desert, and a new leadership headed by Yehoshua emerges who will be the driver in transforming the people into a nation in the land of Canaan.

The Jewish people are prepared for this task by the centuries of slavery in Egypt, which gives freedom its real value. It was also communicated to them on Mount Sinai, where they received a complex and complete system of laws to develop in an orderly manner in an independent environment. Of course, conquering Canaan is long and tedious, but even more difficult is the transformation of the family descended from Yaacov from a people into a nation.

The two great leaders, Aharon and Moshe, die, and a new generation takes the reins of command and guardianship of the people. The dominant figure among the brothers had been, indisputably, that of Moshe. "MiMoshe ad Moshe lo kam keMoshe," it was often said that from the time of the biblical Moshe until the days of Maimonides, no comparable personality had emerged. The descendants of Moshe do not inherit his leadership, and his children disappear from the pages of history.

Aharon, who plays a secondary role to that of his brother, is different because his children are his royal and spiritual heirs. The Beit HaMikdash, as the main spiritual nucleus for the Jewish people, depended for its functioning on the Kohanim, the descendants of Aharon.

Moshe grows up in the palace of Paro, the Pharaoh. Moshe knows and grows up in the royal court and is unaware of the street and slavery. Moshe has been conditioned, since childhood, for leadership and nobility. As an adult, he stumbles upon the reality of the fate of his people, which is servitude. Moshe can lead and instruct, lead and inspire, but he does not belong to the Amecha, the Hebrew people. Moshe belongs to the select, to royalty. It is probably difficult for him to identify with the downtrodden.

His father-in-law, Yitro, claims on one occasion that the people have to stand all day to have access to his trial while he, Moshe, remains seated. (Keeping the distance of the case, it is interesting to note that Theodore Herzl, the great leader of political Zionism, is also unaware of pogroms and persecutions. Herzl suffers a cultural shock over the case of Captain Dreyfus upon discovering that anti-Semitism existed in the midst of civilized Europe).

On the other hand, Aharon is born, grows, and develops within the people until he reaches the position of leader. But his roots, like that of the rest of his co-religionists, are in the bitterness of slavery. In the episode of the Egel Hazahav, Aharon identifies with his people, feels their bewilderment at Moshe's tardiness, and understands their fear, bewilderment, and uncertainty, and considers themselves lost, abandoned, in a hostile desert. The insecurity fostered by decades of slavery is still being felt. Only a new generation that did not experience the Egyptian yoke will build a society that contemplates choice and freedom.

The contrast between the personalities of Moshe and Aharon can perhaps be seen from the following perspective. Moshe is the transmitter of the Divine Will to the people. Moshe is the spokesman of the Law, of the imperative that is demanded of society for its elevation and fulfillment. On the other hand, Aharon is the defender and lawyer, the mediator and interlocutor who manifests the needs of the people before the Divine throne. Aharon is the one who strives to create bridges and bring the community closer to the Creator.

Moshe's role is to bring God's message to earth. Aharon's role is to elevate the mundane to the heavenly. Moshe's starting point is the Eternal. For Aharon, the center of his concern is Am Israel, the Jewish People. While Moshe is the messenger of God, Aharon is the defender of the interests of the people. We have listed some differences that are not absolute because our purpose is didactic. On numerous occasions, Moshe intercedes for the needs of the people, while Aharon and his descendants engage in religious worship and service of God.

For the sages of the Talmud, the essential characteristic of Aharon is his commitment to Shalom, peace. We must all learn from the example of Aharon, according to our Chachamim. We must individually be Ohev Shalom and Rodef Shalom, lovers of peace and have peace as a purpose. This concept of Shalom has been used in the culmination of the blessing that the Kohanim impart to the people by Divine order. The central prayer of every religious service, the Amidah, concludes with a blessing that qualifies God as the one who blesses His people Israel with Shalom.

According to the Talmud, scholars propagate peace worldwide by proclaiming: "Talmidei Chachamim marbim shalom baolam," "Scholars increase peace in the world." In ancient times the Pax Romana had become the fundamental axis of Rome's politics. But this was a peace obtained thanks to the surefooted march of its legions. It was a peace that concealed ideological conflicts and did not allow the expression of any conflictive or different thought from that of the Patricians or those of the Senate of Rome. On the other hand, in the Jewish tradition, Shalom is the harmony that arises from the serious analysis of the different alternatives that the intellect conceives. Shalom is the concordance and coincidence of the conclusions after an exhaustive study of the various possible paths.

Being a Rodef shalom refers to a state of mind. It is a distant and, perhaps, unattainable goal, but we approach true Shalom as we head down this path. By reducing the distance between different opinions, a greater rapprochement and understanding between human beings and greater tolerance are obtained.

Moshe and Aharon represent a certain separation of powers. Moshe most closely resembles the political leader, while Aharon is the one who leads the ritual (especially the order of sacrifices) and is the instructor of the masses. Naturally, this differentiation is not an exact one because Moshe is traditionally regarded as the master par excellence known as Moshe Rabbenu, "Our Master Moshe." Over time, the descendants of Aharon were the first popular teachers and those who intervened and adjudicated in the cases of Tsara'at, which is a condition similar to leprosy, and those of Tum'a, which is ritual impurity, in general.

During the last stage of the second Beit HaMikdash, the Kohanim were also the kings in the time of the Chashmonaim. Some argue that this was the moment of the greatest glory of the Jewish people in ancient times. For others, the coincidence of the priesthood with a civil authority constituted a conflict of interest with negative consequences for society. The destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash relieved the Kohanim of their importance (due to the impossibility of continuing the sacrifices). The Chachamim, who are the scholars, assumed, from then on, the spiritual leader of the Jewish people.

Mitsvah: Ordinance Of The Torah In This Parashah

It Contains 2 Positive Mitzvot And 4 Prohibitions

Numbers 35:2 Providing cities for the Levites who also served as Cities of Refuge

Numbers 35:12 Do not execute a person found guilty before trial

Numbers 35:25 Forcing the person who unintentionally killed to go to a City of Refuge

Numbers 35:30 The witness in a capital case cannot judge the event

Numbers 35:31 Not accepting a redemption payment to save a murderer from the death penalty

Numbers 35:32 Not accepting a redemption payment to free a person from having to go to a City of Refuge

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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

Parshat Matot - Masei

For the week ending 10 July 2021 / 1 Av 5781

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com

Sticks and Stones

"...an utterance of her lips..." (30:07)

We are all so delicate. Our egos are so fragile. Our Sages tell us to run away from honor, but we all need self-worth. One of the names for the soul is kavod — honor. As we say each day in our prayers, "So that my soul (kavod) might sing to you and not be silenced..." (Mizmor Shir Chanukat HaBayit). If you take all honor away from someone, they either die or go crazy. This was exactly what those Nazi monsters tried, and in some cases succeeded, to do to our brothers and sisters in the Second World War era. And when someone goes crazy and imagines

himself to be someone else, he doesn't just think that he is the local bank manager. Rather, he imagines himself to be the most illustrious person he can think of, someone with the greatest honor. He imagines himself to be Napoleon, or herself to be the Queen of England.

One of the reasons why the Second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed was the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza: A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, "Go and bring Kamtza." The man went and brought Bar Kamtza by mistake. When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there, he said, "What are you doing here? Get out!" Said the other, "Since I am already here, let me stay and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink." Said the host, "Absolutely not." "Then let me give you half the cost of the party." The host refused. "Then let me pay for the whole party." Still the host refused, and took him by the hand and threw him out.

Bar Kamtza was prepared to pay an enormous sum to save himself from humiliation. And if Bar Kamtza came to the party, it meant that he assumed that the host wanted to be his friend now — which could only have crushed him further.

No one can second-guess the Master of the World. No one can say this happened because of that. But when tragedies happen — and especially when they are close to home — each one of us must do more than a little soul searching.

This year, 45 holy Jews were crushed to death in Meron on Lag B'Omer. On Erev Shavuot, two more of our holy brethren were crushed to death and over 180 injured in Jerusalem.

As I write this, five people have died and 156 remain missing as a result of the collapse of an apartment building in Miami, Florida. The area is more than a third Jewish, with a large Orthodox population.

Stones can crush, and bodies can crush — but words can crush just as effectively.

It's not just sticks and stones that break bones.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message Matot-Masei 5781-2021

"Does the Torah Allow Its Citizens to Take the Law Into Their Own Hands?" (updated and revised from Matot-Masei 5762-2002)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In parashat Masei, the second of this week's double parashiot, Matot-Masei, we encounter a fascinating and perplexing law known as עיר מקלט –Eir Miklat, the city of refuge.

In Numbers 35, we read that G-d speaks to Moshe and directs him to tell the people of Israel, that when they cross the Jordan and enter into the land of Canaan, they are to establish six cities of refuge where a person who "accidentally" kills another person must run. Three cities of refuge are to be located on the east side of the Jordan, and three on the west side of the Jordan.

The Torah further explains that an accidental killer must run to a city of refuge in order to escape the vengeance of the next of kin who has the right to kill the perpetrator if he catches him before he enters, or is outside, the city. In Numbers 35:25 we learn that the accidental killer who succeeds in reaching the city, must remain in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. Upon the death of the High Priest, he may exit the city and return to his home to resume a normal life.

This particular portion raises many weighty questions. Does the Torah permit a person to take the law into his own hands, allowing the next of kin to pursue, and perhaps, even kill, the accidental murderer? Furthermore, why does the accidental murderer stay in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest? What does the High Priest have to do with all this? And finally, isn't this entire issue out of character for the Torah, which, in general, is so compassionate toward, and protective of, human life?

In order to understand the nature of the law of the Eir Miklat, the city of refuge, we need to look into the insights and explanations of the Oral Law, which are found in the Talmudic tractate Makot, and review as

well Maimonides' Laws of Ro'tzay'ach u'shmee'rat ha'nefesh, the Laws of Murderers and Protecting Life.

While the written Torah states that there were to be six official cities of refuge, the Oral Code indicates that an additional 42 Levite cities also served as locations of refuge. Both, the Talmud and Maimonides explain that there were really three categories of accidental deaths. In the first, שוגג קרוב לאונס, the accidental death occurred without any negligence on the part of the perpetrator. Such would be the case where an unstable person climbs over the fence of a firing range, runs in front of the target and is killed.

The second category of accidental homicide is known as שוגג. In this case the accidental death occurs due to petty negligence. Perhaps the rifleman forgot to close the door to the firing range, or the fence had a break in it and a child wandered in and was killed.

The third scenario, שוגג קרוב למזיד, is a case where there was gross negligence on the part of the perpetrator, e.g., a person shoots wildly in a public area. Even though the shooter did not intend to kill one particular person, the killing is virtually premeditated.

In all three cases, the killers run to the city of refuge. Now the key to understanding this portion is the verse in Numbers 35:12 which reads: וְהָיוּ לָכֶם הָעָרִים לְמִקְלָט מִגָּאֹל, and these cities shall be as refuge from the redeemer, וְלֹא יָמוּת הָרָצָח עַד עָמְדוֹ לִפְנֵי הָעֵדָה לְמִשְׁפָּט, and the killer shall not be put to death until he stands before the congregation for judgment.

All three killers run to the city of refuge, and presumably, arrive safely. Their arrival is virtually assured since the distances to the cities of refuge were never great, and these particular roads were always kept in excellent repair. In addition, the avenger of blood, the next of kin, cannot really exact vengeance and kill the perpetrator, because he is never certain into which particular "accidental" category the perpetrator falls. If the death was truly accidental and there was no negligence, the killer is not at all at fault, and is entitled to go free! In the instance of gross negligence, according to some rabbinic opinions, the killer must stand trial for murder and face the consequences. Only in the case of שוגג, where the death was due to petty negligence, can the killer be put to death by the next of kin. However, as you will see, this was also virtually impossible.

All three of the perpetrators are put on trial. In the instance of no negligence, the killer is released. If the court determined that there was gross negligence, the killer is punished. If the death was truly accidental, the killer is accompanied back to the city of refuge by religious guards, who provide protection, and the perpetrator remains in the city until the death of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest.

Why the High Priest? Because, in addition to his clerical duties in the Temple, the High Priest serves as the chief educational officer of Israel. In effect, the High Priest is in charge of teaching and training the nation, and effectively conveying the uncompromised primacy of the sanctity of human life. In a revolutionary advancement in human ethics, Jewish law proclaims that the occurrence of an accidental death implies that the educational system, for which the Kohen Gadol is responsible, was inadequate. The implications of this revolutionary idea are vast.

Almost parenthetically, the Talmud reports that in order to hasten the release of the "prisoners" in the Cities of Refuge, their families often prayed for the death of the High Priest. In response, the High Priest's mother would travel from city to city to try to "bribe" the killers with sweets and food, to convince them not to pray for her son's harm.

In a fascinating nuance to these laws, the Oral Code states that the teachers or the rabbis of accidental killers were exiled to the city of refuge together with their student. Furthermore, students, as well, are exiled to the city of refuge if their teacher were involved in an accidental death. This principle is deduced from the fact that the verse in Deuteronomy 4:42 states: וְהָיָה, and he shall run to one of those cities and live, implying that a teacher cannot live without his/her students, and students cannot live without their teacher. A possible further implication is that accidental killers are in desperate need of re-education, consequently, their teachers need to be at their side.

Once again, we learn that the bottom line of all the Torah is the principle of the sanctity of human life. Too often, in our society is this value

belittled and dismissed, particularly since so many citizens are presumably covered by liability or accident insurance. The Torah, on the other hand, declares that even petty negligence may not be excused, that the accidental killer must be held accountable for his error and undergo rehabilitation. This is accomplished by bringing all the accidental killers together to a city of refuge for the equivalent of "group therapy," and reeducating them regarding the ultimate value of the sanctity of life.

We see that what seemed to be a primitive law of the Torah, is actually light-years ahead of contemporary legal practices and modern social philosophy.

May you be blessed.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah Matot-Massei

Pack this in your bags - it doesn't weigh anything

When travelling, the most important thing to take with us doesn't weight anything at all.

Now that at long last many of us can think about travelling once again, we can derive a lot of inspiration from Parshat Massei. There the Torah tells us about the journeys of the Israelites in the wilderness (Bamidbar 33:2):

"Lemaseihem al pi Hashem," – "They journeyed according to the word of Hashem."

In Parshat Beha'alotecha (Bamidbar 9:23), added details are given:

"Al pi Hashem yachanu, v'al pi Hashem yisa'u," – "According to the word of Hashem they camped and according to the word of Hashem, they travelled."

The Chassidik master Rav Usher of Riminov commented that we can learn from here how important it is, regardless of whether we are at home or on our way, to take Hashem with us always. He writes that it is usually far easier to be committed to a life of kedusha and tahara, holiness and purity, when we are at home.

The Torah in Parshat Tzav (Vayikra 6:5) tells us about the perpetual fire on the altar. The Torah there says,

"V'ha'ish al hamizbeiach tukad bo; lo tichbeh." – "The fire upon the altar shall be established upon it. It shall never be extinguished."

In the very next verse, again the Torah says, "lo tichbeh" – "it shall never be extinguished." The Gemara in the Yerushalmi, Masechet Yuma, tells us that we are told twice to extinguish the fire because this is an allusion to the fire of our Judaism within us. We should not extinguish it when we are at home and it shall not be extinguished when we are away from home. And the Torah says "tukad bo" – "it shall be upon it" which can also be understood as, "it shall be always within us ourselves."

I'm always inspired by so many people who make a point while away from home of going to the 'nth degree' in order to guarantee that they can keep kosher properly, that they can learn, that they can be involved in Jewish community life. It's so wonderful when people, wherever they are in the world, will always pop into the local community; look into its history; take an interest in what is going on there; learn from what the opportunities are and how their lives can be Jewishly enriched as a result of the vacation that they are enjoying.

In this way we can fulfil the words of the Torah that we all know by heart from the shema: "Veshinantam levanecha vedibarta bam." We should teach our families to grow up in a Jewish, way we should speak words of Torah and practise the mitzvot, and where? "Beshivtecha b'veitecha uvelechtecha vaderech," – equally when we are at home and when we are on the way.

Shabbat shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Matos - Oath of Office

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

The portion of Matos begins with the laws governing commitments and pledges. In Torah law, words are not taken lightly and when one makes an oath, the implications are exacting. The portion begins, “Moshe spoke to the Roshei HaMatos, the heads of the tribes, saying: This is the thing that Hashem commanded. If a man takes a vow to Hashem or swears to enact a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; whatever he said he shall do” (Numbers 30:2-3). The portion continues to discuss vows that one places upon himself, as well as vows that are between husbands and wives and fathers and daughters. The Torah continues to detail the complex laws of both the obligation and revocation of vows.

What is strikingly different in this portion is the way it was transmitted. Normally the Torah does not talk about the teaching of the law to the heads of the tribes. Back in Parshas Ki Sisa, the Torah tells us that Moshe would first teach Ahron, then Ahron’s children, then the elders, and only then all of Israel (Exodus 34:31-32).

But the Torah hardly ever reiterates that point. Here, in Matos, Moshe emphasizes his directive to the heads of the tribes. Why? Wasn’t the whole Torah given to them first? Why repeat that fact here? Rashi explains that Moshe meted honor to the elders and leaders because they play a vital role in the laws of vows. Unlike other judicial actions, the power of annulment of vows is done by individuals who are experts.

An expert can rule on vows and has the ability to decide which ones are valid, and which ones are senseless and inconsequential. He can evaluate vows that were made under duress and those invoked out of fear. He has the power to render them void. Therefore, unlike other commandments, Moshe specified the role of the leaders in reference to vows.

But perhaps there is another important significance to specifying the role of elders when talking about vows.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was a world renowned Talmudic sage who wrote on almost every aspect of the Torah. However as the Rabbi of Pozen, which was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, his custom was to defer responding to questions that were sent from outside his country. After all, he felt that the stature of other rabbis would be diminished had all their congregants sent their questions to an out-of-town rabbi.

However, he once received a letter from Bialostock, Poland to which he did respond.

He began his response: “Although I am unworthy of answering questions from distant lands that are filled with great rabbis and Halachic scholars, and surely Poland is not lacking in either, his time I will answer.” Then Rabbi Akiva Eiger added his reason.

“A few months back I was at a simcha (joyous occasion) at which someone from your town said that he would write me concerning a difficult matter. Though I did not encourage him to do so, I also did not discourage him. In fact, I may have even nodded my head slightly. That may have been taken as a commitment to answer the question. And if I even appeared to have consented, I surely do not want to appear as if I have reneged on a commitment.”

The Torah transmits the laws of oaths through the heads of each tribe because it wants to reiterate to them the importance of a leader’s adherence to commitment. The eyes of a nation are focused on their words, their promises, and their commitments. It is only fitting that those who bear the tremendous responsibility of assuring their tribes of their needs and requests, should be the very ones that transmit those laws.

Unfortunately, the words of contemporary leaders and elected officials don’t mean much. Abba Eban once said, “It is our experience that political leaders do not always mean the opposite of what they say.”

The Torah hands the responsibility of the burden of words upon those who are faced with the greatest challenge to meet their commitments. Torah leaders shall personify the commitment to, “all that will come out of his mouth he shall keep.” It is no wonder that the Torah specifies the role of the tribal leaders when discussing the importance of commitment. For when the leaders keep their word, the nation follows in step.

Good Shabbos

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Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Two-time sorcerous loser (Matot-Masai)

Ben-Tzion Spitz

An error is the more dangerous in proportion to the degree of truth which it contains. - Henri Frederic Amiel

A couple of weeks ago, we read in the Torah how the sorcerer Bilaam was hired by the king of Moab to curse the nation of Israel. The Moabites allied themselves with the Midianites to fight Israel. Their hope and expectation were that the curse of the powerful sorcerer Bilaam would allow them to rout the Israelites who were getting uncomfortably close to their borders on their desert journey to the land of Canaan. Though Israel had no intention of bothering either of those nations and had explicit instructions from God not to harm the Moabites, these allies either weren’t aware or didn’t believe in the peaceful intentions of the nomadic tribes of Israel who had spent almost forty years in the desert and had recently started making their way towards Canaan.

As we read then, the efforts of Bilaam were a massive failure. Despite his eagerness and enthusiasm to curse Israel, God forces Bilaam to utter beautiful poetic blessings to Israel in front of the Moabite and Midianite leadership. After three botched efforts, Balak, King of Moab, sends the failed sorcerer home. The question arises as to why we see Bilaam unexpectedly mentioned in this week’s reading, seven chapters after Balak sent Bilaam home in ignominy? In this week’s reading, the Israelite army does ultimately attack the Midianites in retaliation for the mass-seduction of Israelite men by the Moabite and Midianite daughters, which followed the episode with Bilaam. The public licentiousness and accompanying idolatry lead to God’s fury and punishment of Israel by plague. What is Bilaam doing in the middle of this later battle with Midian?

The Bechor Shor on Numbers 31:8 explains that Bilaam had indeed failed in his bid to curse Israel and was sent home in shame. However, the Midianites had understood from Bilaam that the way to harm Israel is to get them to sin and that God is particularly hateful of sexual licentiousness. The Moabites and Midianites follow Bilaam’s hint, sending their daughters to seduce the Israelite men, which leads directly to God killing 24,000 Israelite men by a sudden plague. Finally, seeing the vulnerability of Israel due to their fresh and flagrant sin, the Midianites call Bilaam back to finish the job and curse Israel.

Bilaam does indeed return to try to curse Israel again, which explains his unexpected presence at this later place and time. However, this apparently powerful sorcerer didn’t learn from his first failure against Israel and he succumbs to an ignoble fate, to be caught and killed during Israel’s retaliation against Midian.

May God always protect us from our enemies, on all fronts.

Dedication - To the memory of Joseph Wiesel z”l. May his family be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

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.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Matot-Masei: Nurturing those who service God

The Jerusalem Post

This week, we read two connected parashot – Matot and Masei, in which we learn about the way that the kohanim and Levites should live.

This week, we read two connected parashot – Matot and Masei. These parashot complete the book of Numbers, the fourth of the five books of the Torah that describes the journeys and events that the children of Israel experienced during their forty years in the desert. Toward the end of the book of Numbers, we read a commandment about the manner in which the Jewish nation should settle the Land of Israel after they enter and conquer it. It would be expected that the Land of Israel would be divided among all the tribes, based on the principle, “To the large [tribe] you shall give a larger inheritance and to a smaller tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance” (Numbers 26:54). But that was not what was done!

In actuality, an entire tribe – the tribe of Levi – was not slated to receive a designated piece of land in the Land of Israel. Instead, the rest of the tribes were commanded to set aside 48 cities from their inheritance for the tribe of Levi:

All the cities you shall give to the Levites shall number 48 cities, them with their open spaces. And as for the cities that you shall give from the possession of the Children of Israel, you shall take more from a larger [holding] and you shall take less from a smaller one. Each one, according to the inheritance allotted to him, shall give of his cities to the Levites. (Numbers 35:7,8)

In addition to the cities that the Levites got from the children of Israel, they also got ma'asrot: tithes, a tenth of the annual harvest was given to the Levites as compensation for their work in the Temple. The kohanim from among the Levites received additional gifts from the nation – a total of twenty-four gifts – for example, teruma from the harvest, the firstborn of cattle, hafrashat challah, setting aside dough, as well as part of the sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle and the Temple.

With these commandments, the Torah describes the way the kohanim and Levites should live. They do not receive a designated plot of land or a specific place to live, as the tribes got. Instead, the Levites and kohanim got tithes and various other gifts from the nation for their livelihood.

We find the following in Sefer HaChinuch (13th century, anonymous author), a book that describes each of the Torah's 613 commandments and gives detailed explanations for each:

It is from the roots of the commandment [that it is] so that all of the involvement of this tribe be in the service of God, blessed be He, and that they need not work the land. And the rest of the tribes give them a portion from all that they have without [the Levites] toiling for it at all. (Sefer HaChinuch commandment 604)

God wanted there to be one sector in the nation dedicated not only to servicing the Lord in the Temple, but also to spirituality, intellectualism, and the study of laws of the Torah and justice. To this end, these people had to minimize their time spent working the land and dealing with material matters leaving them time to delve into spirituality.

However, if the tribe of Levi would only deal with godly matters among themselves, they would miss the point of influencing the entire nation. For this reason, the Torah commands that each tribe set aside cities for the kohanim and the Levites. By being integrated within the tribes, they would be able to teach the proper way to live and would have a spiritual impact on everyone, near and far.

This need to have a segment of the nation dedicated to serving God is relevant nowadays as well. We can learn from the model the Torah proposes that there is a need even today to nurture people who dedicate their lives to God and to spirituality, and that we should support them in this path in the hopes that people like the ideal kohen described by the prophet Malachi rise from among us:

For a priest's lips shall guard knowledge, and teaching should be sought from his mouth, for he is a messenger of the Lord of Hosts. (Malachi 2:7)

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Matot: Kashering the Spoils of Midian

Chanan Morrison

Elazar Instructs the Soldiers

Following the punitive war against Midian, Elazar the High Priest taught the soldiers how to kasher the utensils they had captured during the campaign.

"This is the Torah law that God commanded Moses: ... Any article that was used over fire, must be passed over fire and it will be pure; but it must be purified with the sprinkling water. However, that which was not used over fire, you must pass through water." (Num. 31:21-23)

Why was it Elazar who instructed the soldiers, and not Moses?

The Sages explained that Moses, in his anger at the soldiers for not conducting the war properly, forgot to instruct them about kashering the Midianite utensils. "Because Moses became angry, he came to err, and

the laws of purifying gentile vessels escaped him" (Rashi 31:21, from the Sifrei).

Is there a connection between the cause for Moses' anger and the particular laws that he forgot?

Also, this was not the first battle of these soldiers. Why didn't they already learn the rules of kashering vessels after defeating the Amorite kings Sichon and Og?

Two Steps of Purification

We see that there are two steps to purifying used utensils obtained from non-Jews. First, we must purge any forbidden substances absorbed in the utensil. "Any article that was used over fire, must be passed over fire and it will be pure." The second step is immersing the utensil in a mikveh. The waters of the ritual bath purify the vessel, preparing it to enter the domain of Israel. This second step is similar to the ritual immersion of converts, as they leave the non-Jewish world and join the Jewish people.

These two steps of kashering parallel the two stages by which the Land of Israel was acquired by the Jewish people.

The first stage took place during the era of the Avot. "Rise, walk the Land, through its length and breadth, for I will give it to you" (Gen. 13:17). Why did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob need to walk throughout the Land of Israel? Their journeys - building altars, digging wells, raising crops — were analogous to the first step in purging a utensil, as we remove the prohibited substances absorbed in it.

The second stage was the actual conquest in the time of Joshua. The final conquest of the Land parallels the complete immersion of a utensil in a ritual bath. This act completed the transfer of the Land to the Jewish people.

The initial purification process of the Avot allows us to understand an astonishing Talmudic statement. The Sages wrote that during the seven years of conquering the Land, the Jewish people were permitted to eat pork (Chulin 17a). They were allowed to enjoy all of the spoils from the Canaanite nations — even pig meat! This was in accordance with God's promise that "You will have houses filled with all good things that you did not put there" (Deut. 6:11).

Why did God permit the Israelites to eat blatantly non-kosher foods? This was only possible because the preparatory actions of the Avot had already cleansed the land of its impurities.

For this reason, there was no need to purify the utensils acquired in the battles with Sichon and Og. The lands of the Amorites took on the holiness of the Land of Israel (see Nachmanides on Num. 31:23).

Moses' Mistake

Why then was it necessary to purify the spoils from the war in Midian? Moses in fact thought that it was not necessary. He saw this war as a conquest, and he thought the land of Midian would also acquire the holiness of the Land of Israel.

God, however, knew that the war would not be waged with pure motives. In the end, the land of Midian would not become part of the Land of Israel. Therefore, God commanded the soldiers to "take revenge for the Israelites" (Num. 31:2). This would not be a war of reprisal for God, but for the Jewish people.

Now we may understand the connection between Moses' anger and his mistake. He railed against the generals for not exacting vengeance against the Midianite women, who had enticed the Israelites to rebellion and idolatry. This error meant that the war could no longer be considered a war for the sake of Heaven.

Moses' anger led to his mistake. He failed to recognize that, in the new circumstances, this battle no longer belonged to the conquest of the Land of Israel. So it fell to Elazar to instruct the soldiers how to kasher the spoils from Midian.

(Shemuot HaRe'iyah, Matot-Masei 5690/1930)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Matos-Masei

פרשת מטות-מסעי תשפ"א

Matos

וידבר משה אל ראשי המטות

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes. (30:2)

It is good to digress once in a while to gain insight into the eminence of those individuals who have ascended the ladders of Torah erudition sufficiently to be called *Roshei ha'mattos*, heads of the tribes. Someone asked *Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*, how many times the word "Moshe" is mentioned in the Torah. He replied, "614 times." The questioner countered that he had checked with a computer, and the total was 616. *Rav Chaim* disputed this, claiming that the computer had erred. "Moshe" appears in the Torah exactly 614 times. The man was shocked. How could the computer be wrong? *Rav Chaim* explained that while the name Moshe is written 614 times, the spelling – *mem, shin, hay* – comes up two times, *V'im yimaat ha'bayis miheyos misheh* (spelled *mem, shin hay*). (*Shemos* 12:4) and *Shamot kol masheh yado* (spelled *mem, shin, hay*) (*Devarim* 15:2). *Horav Shlomo Levinstein, Shlita*, quotes *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Beshalach* 16) that *talmidei chachamim*, Torah scholars, are called *sofrim*, since they are *sofer*, count, every word in the Torah (because it is so precious to them).

The *Rosh Yeshivah* of Mir, *Horav Nochum Partzovitz*, walked into the *bais hamedrash* and noticed two *bachurim* talking in anything but learning. When they saw him approaching, they suddenly changed their discourse and quickly transitioned to a debate concerning a passage in the *Talmud* (*Nedarim*). One of them pretended to be reading: "*Tanu Rabbanan*"; "The Rabbi taught." *Rav Nachum* walked by and, in his inimitable muted tone, said, "The phrase *Tanu Rabbanan* is not found anywhere in *Meseches Nedarim*."

When this vignette was related to *Rav Chaim Kanievsky*, he closed his eyes momentarily (as if he were quickly reviewing the entire folio of *Talmud*), and then he remarked, "It is true that *Tanu Rabbanan* is not to be found, but *d'tanu Rabbanan* is found" (27a).

This incident was shared with *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, zl*. He commented, "Why are you so impressed? This is his *makolet*, grocery store. Every grocer knows exactly where every item in his store is situated, its price and how many of each item is available. He lives his *makolet*. It is his very life. To *Rav Chaim*, the *Gemorah* and its commentators are his very life. They are his *makolet*."

ידבר משה אל ראשי המטות... לא יחל דברו בכל היוצא מפיו יעשה

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes... He shall not desecrate his words; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (30:2,3)

The *Tiferes Shlomo* suggests that the root of *matos* is *yateh*, to turn. The *roshei ha'mattos* are the leaders of the people who have the ability to turn the hearts of the people toward a positive trajectory. The Torah commands them to guard and commit to whatever exits their mouths. In other words, they should not speak from "both sides of their mouths," saying one thing and personally doing another. They must be consistent in personally adhering to what they expect of the people. Only then will they earn the respect to have the ability to be *mateh*, turn, the nation in the correct direction.

Furthermore, it must be *zeh ha'davar asher tzivah Hashem*; "This is the commandment of Hashem." Hearsay is insufficient. The leader, or whoever is relating the law, must render the ruling based upon a clear and unimpeachable knowledge of and proficiency in *halachah*. The *Klausenberger rebbe, zl*, observed that all too often practices and even pseudo-*halachah* is based upon stories in which a *chassid* or follower relates what he has heard or seen, which is insufficient proof for establishing a practice. He was wont to say, "When a *chassid* says that he 'saw' a certain practice executed by his *Rebbe*, it means that he (only) heard about it. If he claims to have "heard" of it, one can be certain that it is a false report. *Halachos* should be established neither on stories nor on what one sees in practice. We have a *Shulchan Aruch*, Code of Jewish Law, for *halachah*, which should be our guidebook for executing our Divine mission in this world.

וד' יסלח לה כי הניא אביה אתה

And Hashem will forgive her, for her father had restrained her. (30:6)

The implication is that the girl sinned, and, as a result, she requires Hashem's forgiveness; but if her father had revoked her

nedarim, what prohibition did she transgress? This applies to a girl who was unaware that her *nedarim* had been revoked, and, despite being bound by *neder* (in her mind), she violated its terms. In actuality, she did not sin, but she certainly acted inappropriately, thus mandating for herself some form of repentance. *Chazal* compare this to one who meant to eat ham and instead ended up eating kosher meat. Technically, he did not sin, but his intention was sinful, requiring him to repent. Rabbi Akiva would weep concerning this *halachah*, noting that if one requires penance for a negative intention which did not actually achieve fruition, how much more so should he be vigilant not to commit the actual deed. Is Rabbi Akiva teaching us that one should not intentionally sin? Why is Rabbi Akiva concerned with the individual who executes his intentional sinful thoughts?

Horav Chizkiyah Eliezer Cohen, zl (*Rosh Yeshivah*, Bais Yosef, Gateshead), explains that Rabbi Akiva teaches an important lesson concerning the parameters of sin. We are accustomed to determining the egregiousness of a sin in accordance with its external image. Some deeds have greater negative appearances than others. People tend to assess the intensity of a crime by its external projection. Rabbi Akiva teaches us that a sin is not defined solely by its visible negative impact, i.e., by how people view the deed; the more revolting it is, the greater its iniquity. A sin is also measured by the thought behind the action, the intention that provokes and drives the deed.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* cites the *Chovos HaLevavos*, who teaches that a person be held accountable in accordance with his perception and discernment. One who has greater depth, who has the ability to comprehend his actions and their impact, both immediate and far-ranging, will be held to a different benchmark than one whose level of discernment is limited.

He analogizes this to one whose specialty and business expertise are limited to scrap metal. He owns a large junkyard where he compresses and melts the scrap. One day someone offers him the opportunity to purchase an expensive private jet, outfitted with the latest high-tech advances, at a sale price, but he is not interested in it. He prices the jet by how much metal it has – not by its technological ability. He will pay only for its metal weight. How a person views an item not only determines its value (to him), but also serves as an indication of his essence. A sin committed without aforethought is different from one executed by an intelligent, thinking individual, intent on transgressing Hashem's command.

ייעל אהרן הכהן אל הר ההר על פי ד' וימת שם

Aharon HaKohen went up to Har HaHar at the word of Hashem and died there. (33:38)

As believing Jews, we adhere to the concept of *Hashgachah Pratis*, Divine Providence, which means: The world's continued existence is directly/solely dependent upon the *ratzon Hashem*, will of G-d. Once a man creates an entity, the creation becomes a separate entity, apart from its creator. Veritably, he created it, but now, it exists in its own right. Furthermore, each individual creation often gains control over its creator. While human beings have within them the power and capability to be creative, to unleash forces or to combine them, they are unable to control their creations or bridle the forces they have unleashed. Once the "genie" is out of the bottle, it is out of their hands. Not so Hashem and His world. The world as a whole and all its parts – including all of the creatures within it – are His creations. Not only did they come into existence through His will, but they are maintained and continue to exist solely as a result of His will. Hashem is very much a part of each of our lives.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, cites the story of Yosef and his brothers as a paradigm of *Hashgachah Pratis*. Indeed, Yosef points out to his brothers how the entire chain of events clearly was a manifestation of Divine Providence. Hardly another story so cogently and vividly demonstrates the ways of Divine Providence. In this story, the threads are clearly revealed. Even one who is plagued with spiritual myopia can lucidly see the workings of Hashem.

I write this brief introduction as a segue to show how *Hashgachah Pratis* plays out. In *Parashas Beha'alozecha* (*Bamidbar*

9:6), the Torah relates that there were men who were *tamei*, ritually contaminated, and, as a result of their defilement, were unable to share in offering the *Korban Pesach* together with the rest of the nation. Chazal debate as to the identity of these men. Rabbi Akiva contends that they were Mishael and Elitzafan, Aharon *HaKohen's* nephews, who were charged with removing the bodies of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon *HaKohen's* sons, who perished during the dedication of the *Mishkan*. Mishael and Elitzafan attended to the bodies, removing them from *Machne Shechinah*. An obvious question presents itself: Nadav and Avihu died on *Rosh Chodesh*. Certainly, Mishael and Elitzafan had sufficient time to return from the burial and wait the necessary period (one week) to achieve purity, and then participate in the *Korban Pesach*.

The *Ben Yehoyada* (*Succah* 25b) explains that Nadav and Avihu were not buried where they died; rather, their bodies were taken to *Har HaHar*, the place where their father, Aharon, was to be buried. *Tzaddikim* derive much *nachas ruach*, spiritual pleasure, from being buried near their descendants. Accordingly, Mishael and Elitzafan did not have sufficient time to return from the burial and participate in the *Korban Pesach* in a timely fashion.

This is incredible! Aharon *HaKohen* was buried on *Har HaHar* thirty-eight years after his sons' untimely deaths. Thirty-eight years prior to his demise, Aharon *HaKohen's* gravesite was already determined. We believe that life and death are providential. We see now that Hashem determines even where and near whom one is buried, which presages one's death.

The *Megaleh Amukos*, Horav Nosson Nota Shapira, *zl*, was a holy *tzaddik* who was as comfortable in the Heavenly spheres as he was in this world. Eliyahu *HaNavi* studied with him. His lifetime was a glorious era for *Klal Yisrael*. The *Bach* and *Turei Zahav* were the leaders of *Klal Yisrael* at the time. Indeed, with such an unprecedented spiritual "lineup," Heaven decided that the time for the Redemption had arrived. *Satan* asked for a "reprieve," one more chance to cause the Jewish People to slide. He was given one last chance. He appeared to the *Bach*, claiming to be a Heavenly Angel who wanted to learn with him. The *Bach's* father appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to stay away. The *Megaleh Amukos* saw right through him. *Satan* tried the other Torah giants, to no avail. Finally, he found one scholar sufficiently gullible to become his victim: Shabtai Tzvi, who succeeded in leading thousands of Jews astray with his devastating cult.

The *Megaleh Amukos* died in 1623. Following his *petirah*, passing, a young man whom no one knew appeared in Cracow and immediately presented himself to the head of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Sacred Burial Society. His request was stranger than his appearance. He wanted to purchase the burial plot next to that of the *Megaleh Amukos*. The *gabbai* thought this man was unhinged. Not just anyone could be buried next to such a saint. "He was the greatest of the greats! "How dare you ask to be buried next to him?" was the *gabbai's* rejoinder to the strange man. With that, he drove the young man away. The young man refused to accept "no" for an answer. He returned a few days later and buttressed his request with cash. He pleaded to have the burial plot sold to him. Money was no object.

The *gabbai* conjectured that the spot was presently available. The young man would certainly live to a ripe, old age, while he, the *gabbai*, was getting on in years. In addition, the *Chevra Kaddisha* had fallen on difficult financial straits. An infusion of funds would make a difference. So, greed transcended merit, and he sold him the plot, after wishing him good health and a long life. How shocked the *gabbai* was to learn the very next day that the young man had died during the night. Since no one knew about the sale, except the *gabbai* and the deceased, the *gabbai* arranged for the deceased to be buried in an ordinary grave.

That night the *gabbai's* sleep was disturbed by the deceased, who appeared to him demanding his rightful plot. Although shaken up, the *gabbai* ignored the dream. After a few nights of interrupted sleep, however, he no longer could ignore the fact that he had acted unjustly and was being called to task. The next day, he presented his problem to the *Rav* of Cracow, the *Bach*, who responded that he tell the deceased

that *halachah* is decided in this world. If he has a dispute, he must appear before the *bais din* on a certain day, at a specific time.

On the agreed upon day, a partition was set up in the *bais din*, so that no one would see the deceased. They heard a rustling sound behind the partition, which was a sign that he had "arrived." The *Bach* commanded the deceased to present his case – which he did. The *Bach* then turned to the *gabbai* to explain his actions, which he apologetically did. The deceased was asked to reveal his identity, so that his worthiness for being buried next to the *Megaleh Amukos* could be determined. He refused to divulge his name.

The *Bach* rendered his decision: "The sale should be valid. However, since we do not know the identity of the deceased, and in which case he might not be on a spiritual plane that would allow him to be a suitable 'neighbor' to our late *Rav*, we will allow for the deceased to 'prove' his suitability. The grave next to the *Rav* will be opened, as will be the present grave of the deceased. If the deceased is worthy of being the *Rav's* neighbor, he should 'arrange' for his body to be moved over. If not, we are free of our obligations."

The *Chevra Kaddisha* opened both graves. The next day, they were shaken to discover that the grave of the deceased was empty, and the grave next to the *Megaleh Amukos* was now filled. Understanding that the deceased was a holy, covert *tzaddik*, they engraved the following on his *matzeivah*, tombstone: "Here lies the unknown *avreich* (young man) – *ya'id alav rei'o* (his neighbor, the *Megaleh Amukos*, attests to his greatness).

Masei

וּנְסָה רָצַח מִכָּה נֶפֶשׁ בְּשִׁגְגָה

And a murderer shall flee the one who takes a life unintentionally. (35:11)

The word *rotze'ach*, murderer, followed by *makeh nefesh*, one who takes a life, is seemingly redundant. Why does the Torah repeat itself? Horav Chaim Toito, *Shlita*, employs the following story as a means for distinguishing between the two terms. A devout, G-d-fearing Jew lived in a small village not far from Sanz. He earned a living by using his house as an inn and restaurant. It was a lucrative business. One day, a poor man dressed in tattered clothes appeared at his inn. Being a kind-hearted man, the innkeeper gave this man a decent, nourishing meal, after which he took out some money and gave it to him. The poor man refused the donation. Thinking that it was too paltry a sum to cover the poor man's needs, the innkeeper doubled his donation. The poor man explained, "I do not require your financial assistance. I am, *baruch Hashem*, quite wealthy and not in the need of money."

Obviously, the innkeeper was taken aback. The man clearly appeared destitute. He certainly did not dress like a wealthy man. He ate his meal in a manner that indicated that his last meal had been some time ago. "Let me explain," he began. "I live in *Fist* (a suburb of Premishlan) where I own fields, vineyards, and a number of businesses. Let it suffice that I am quite comfortable. A few years ago, a considerable amount of money was missing from my house. Immediate suspicion was focused on an orphan girl who had been working for me as a maid. I brought her to the judge in the community, where she was put under corporeal pressure in order to obtain a confession. She suffered beatings, but remained adamant in her claim of innocence. As a result of the beatings she sustained, she became ill and succumbed to her illness.

"Two weeks after the girl's passing, the lost money was discovered. Apparently, it had been misplaced. I realized that I was guilty of *chosheid b'k'sheirim*, wrongful suspicion, which inadvertently led to the untimely death of a poor orphan girl. I was miserable. In my attempt to seek atonement and learn what was the proper form of *teshuvah*, I traveled to the *tzaddik*, Horav Meir, *zl*, m'Premishlan.

"The *Rebbe* told me to choose one of three punishments: to die immediately, which would allow me to enter *Olam Habba*, the World to Come; to be gravely ill for three years; or to go into *galus*, exile, as one who is guilty of *retzichah b'shogeg*. I was unable to cope – neither with immediate death, painful illness, or banishment to a life of exile. I bid the *Rebbe*, 'Good day,' and left.

“Two weeks passed, and I developed a headache. At first, it was a dull ache, but, after a few days, it became devastatingly painful, preventing me from functioning. My family sent for a doctor, who, after giving me a thorough check up, said that I had no hope. My body was shutting down. He was at a loss to prevent the illness from advancing further. He gave me a few days to live. I felt that this was the work of the saintly *Premishlaner*, who had selected death as my atonement. I immediately dispatched a letter to the *Rebbe* asking for his blessing that I regain my strength. I would then travel to Premishlan to meet with him once again.

“When I entered the holy *Rebbe*’s home, he said, ‘You have time to die, and, veritably, you have already been ill. I select for you the punishment of exile. However, I will teach you the meaning of exile. First of all, whatever you have with you – clothes, money – you will leave with me. I will give you old tattered clothes to wear. You should always be on the move. In other words, never sleep in the same place two nights in a row. Never beg for food. If someone gives you – good; if not, you will just have to wait. No donations. Only if someone gives you a meal out of the goodness of his heart may you partake. You may not return for three years, except, once each year, you may come to the outskirts of the city and request that your wife bring you the books to your business to determine if you are losing money. Only if you are in sad financial shape may you end your exile prematurely. I guarantee you, however, that this will not be the case. You will do well, despite your absence. All your travels must be on foot. After three years, you will return to me, and I will return all of your belongings to you.”

“I accepted the *Rebbe*’s guidelines and his blessings and set out on my imposed exile. Two years passed, and I discovered that the saintly *Premishlaner* has passed from this world. I did not know what to do. I heard that a holy *Rebbe* is in the city of Sanz (*Horav Chaim*, זל). It is to him that I am now traveling. Perhaps he can guide me concerning what to do.”

When the innkeeper heard the incredible story, he elected to accompany the man to Sanz in order to find out the end of the story. They waited in the home of the *Sanzer* to be greeted with, “You shall go home by way of Premishlan, stop at the grave of the *Premishlaner* and inform him that the *Rebbe* of Sanz has determined that two years of exile are sufficient punishment, since you did not in any way deviate from his guidelines. Your *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, in seeking atonement earned your place among the worthy penitents.”

Wonderful, inspirational story – with a frightening message. One does not have to commit murder with his two hands in order to be deserving of *galus*. Even if his inadvertent error caused another Jew to suffer and succumb – he is guilty. He must be exiled. This is to what the Torah is alluding when it writes *rotzeach b’shogeg* – an unintentional murder and *makeh nefesh*, one who takes a life. There is the individual who might use his hands – direct action – albeit unintentionally, to murder a person. There is also the *makeh nefesh*, who does not outright use his hands, but, by virtue of his actions – or inactions – brings about a person’s untimely death. He is also included. It goes without saying that the latter is much more frightening, and a situation concerning which we must be constantly vigilant.

Va’ani Tefillah

המברך את עמו ישראל בשלום – *HaMevarech es Amo Yisrael ba’shalom*. Who blesses His nation Yisrael with peace.

External peace is the barometer of our internal spirituality. One who is in control of his spiritual dimension manifests an outward, relaxed calm. Personal peace is achieved only when our physical and spiritual personas unify in a harmonious relationship. We do not seek separate identities for our physical and spiritual selves. As such, one who is at peace with himself is one whose physical and spiritual ethos are fused together to comprise his identity. Such a person is *ba’shalom*, at peace with himself. This fusion does not just happen. It requires Hashem’s blessing, which is attained when we attempt to connect our physical and spiritual identities and not promote one exclusive of the other. To put it simply: We cannot attend to our physical drives while ignoring our spiritual requirements. Once our physical drives have been

checked and our spiritual need satisfied, we may truly feel at peace with ourselves. Such peace is the greatest blessing one can have.

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זכה בת"ר יעקב אייזיק ע"ה נפטרה ו' אב תשנ"ה

זכתה לראות דורות עוסקים בתורה ויראת שמים

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

My Vows I Shall Fulfill

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Quiz question

Can performing a mitzvah become a liability?

Question #2: Is this a “klutz question?”

What does it mean that I am doing something “bli neder?”

Question #3: A frum question

“My friend Billy Nader says bli neder on almost everything. Is this being too frum?”

Answer:

What is a neder?

It is rather obvious why we are studying this topic this week – since Parshas Matos begins with the laws pertaining to vows.

Someone who recites a vow, an oath or a pledge is required to fulfill it (see Bamidbar 30:3). By virtue of the vow, oath or pledge, one creates a Torah obligation that he is otherwise not required to observe. For example, someone who declares that he will begin studying daf yomi every day is now obligated to do so, even on a day when it is inconvenient. Similarly, one who pledges tzedakah at yizkor or pledges a contribution to a shul upon receiving an aliyah becomes fully obligated, min haTorah, to pay the donation. In the case of a pledge to tzedakah, one must redeem it as soon as practical; otherwise, he risks violating an additional prohibition, bal te’acheir leshalmo, “Do not delay paying it” (see Devarim 23:22).

In general, one should be careful not to make vows or pledges. For one thing, one who does so has now created a stumbling block for himself, since he runs the risk that he will not observe his commitment (see Nedarim 20a, 22a). Furthermore, he has created an accusation against himself, for by committing to observe something that the Torah did not require, he implies that he is so skilled at observing mitzvos that he can add a few of his own. The satan can now level accusations against his occasional laxities in a much stronger fashion (see Nedarim 22a, based on Mishlei 20:25). (There are a few circumstances in which one is encouraged to make vows, but we will leave that topic for a different time.) For this reason, it is better not to pledge to contribute to tzedakah: if you have the money available, donate it; if it is not currently available, don’t pledge it! (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 203:4). It is very important that gaba’im be in the habit of declaring that people’s pledges are bli neder, and a similar wording should appear on pledge cards.

Different types of obligations

There are six main ways to create an obligation upon oneself, either to fulfill something or to abstain from doing something.

(1) Nedarim – vows

A neder – a vow, in which one declares that something otherwise permitted is now prohibited – such as declaring that certain foods are prohibited.

Example:

In her desire to keep to her diet, Yaffah states: “I am going to prohibit all chocolate on myself.” Yaffah has now created a neder, which prohibits her, min haTorah, from eating chocolate.

(2) Shevuos – oaths

A shevuah – an oath, in which one swears to fulfill or refrain from some activity – such as swearing that one will fast on a certain day, or that one will say Tehillim every day.

Example:

To repair his somewhat sloppy record at making it to minyan every morning, Shachar makes a shevuah that he will be in shul for shacharis for the next three days. Should he fail to make it to shacharis any of those days, he would be breaking his shevuah, which contravenes a Torah prohibition.

Whether a specific declaration constitutes a neder or a shevuah depends on halachic technicalities, usually contingent on how one makes the declaration. Several halachic differences result from whether someone made a neder or a shevuah, including that violating a shevuah is a more serious infraction (Ran, Nedarim 20a). Later in this article I will mention another important difference between them.

(3) Kabbalas mitzvah, declaring that one will perform a good deed

Someone who declares: I will arise early and study this chapter or that mesechta has declared a great vow to the G-d of Israel (Nedarim 8a). Someone who expresses these plans, intending to perform an exemplary act, has now obligated

himself, even though he did not use the terms “vow,” “oath,” or “pledge” (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 213:2).

Example:

Asking others to say certain chapters of Tehillim can create a stumbling block. Specify that it is being done bli neder.

(4) Kabbalas tzedakah, intending to donate charity

In the specific instance of contributing tzedakah funds, even deciding to give tzedakah without verbalizing one's intention creates an obligation to donate tzedakah (Rema, Yoreh Deah 259:13; see also Choshen Mishpat 212:8; based on Shevuos 26b).

(5) Performing a stringency

Someone who is aware that performing a certain hiddur in halacha is not obligatory, and begins to keep it with the intention of observing it regularly, becomes required to continue the practice as a form of vow. It becomes a binding obligation, requiring hataras nedarim, annulling vows – even if the individual fulfilled the practice only one time, and even if he did not declare that he intends to continue the practice (Nedarim 15a; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 214:1).

Examples:

Someone who begins standing during kerias haTorah, intending to continue the practice, becomes obligated to do so, unless he specified that he is doing so bli neder. He should perform hataras nedarim at the first opportunity, so as to avoid violating the prohibition of abrogating observance of a vow. After performing hataras nedarim, he may continue the practice of standing during kerias haTorah, but should have in mind that he is doing it bli neder.

A woman began lighting a third Shabbos candle in her own home after her first child was born. This practice might now become an obligation. She then did so the first time she visited her parents' house; most women who kindle more than two lights before Shabbos do so only in their own home, but kindle only two when they are guests in someone else's home. She asked a shaylah whether she should have hataras nedarim on the practice of kindling a third light, and she was told to do so.

(6) Three times

Someone who performs a stringent practice three times without saying bli neder must continue to fulfill the hiddur, even if he had not planned to observe it always (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:7).

Saying “bli neder”

Should I not observe hiddurim? I want to do these mitzvos, but I certainly do not want to be punished if I fail to continue performing them! How do I avoid becoming obligated?

To avoid creating this commitment, someone expressing intent to perform a good deed should be careful to say that he/she is acting bli neder, without accepting it as an obligation (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:4). Similarly, someone who begins practicing a halachic hiddur should say that he is not accepting it as an obligation. Example:

Hadassah decides that she will eat only glatt kosher meat or will use only chalav Yisroel products, both meritorious activities. She should state that she is doing it “bli neder.”

Similarly, when pledging money during yizkor, while making a mishebeirach or making any other oral commitment to donate charity, one should be careful to say bli neder. When others are pledging to tzedakah and one feels pressured to participate, specify that the pledge is bli neder (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 257:4). It is still proper to donate the money, but stating that it prevents bli neder a mishap should one forget or later be unable to do so.

Saying “bli neder” even for a non-mitzvah

Some authorities recommend saying bli neder on all one's activities, even those that do not fulfill a mitzvah, so that the habit helps prevent one from inadvertently creating nedarim (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:4).

Example:

Chavah tells her husband, “I am going to exercise class this morning, bli neder.” Although the statement that she plans to exercise does not create any obligation on her part, habituating herself to say bli neder is a good practice to develop.

We can now answer one of the questions asked above. “I have a friend who says bli neder on almost everything. Is this being too frum?” The answer is that your friend is being astutely cautious and following the advice of halachic authorities. Don't delay paying

In addition to the abovementioned concerns involved in pledging tzedakah, the Gemara rules that the mitzvah of bal te'achar, not to delay the donation of a korban, applies also to tzedakah (Rosh Hashanah 6a). This means that someone who pledges money to a charitable cause is required to pay the pledge as soon as he can.

To quote the Rambam: Tzedakah is included in the laws of vows. Therefore, someone saying, “I am obligated to provide a sela coin to tzedakah,” or, “This sela shall go to tzedakah,” must give it to poor people immediately. If he subsequently delays redeeming the pledge, he violates bal te'acher, since he could have given it immediately, as there are poor people around. If there are no poor people, he should set aside the money until he finds a poor person. However, if, at the time of his pledge, he specified that he is not intending to redeem the pledge until he locates a poor person, he is not required to set aside the money (Hilchos Matanos Aniym 8:1).

Someone who declares that he will give tzedakah to a certain poor person is not required to give the money until he sees that person (Rema, Yoreh Deah 257:3). However, someone who pledged to contribute to destitute people, without qualifying which poor people he meant, is required to fulfill his pledge immediately (Mordechai, Bava Basra 491).

What is hataras nedarim?

Now that we realize that creating obligations is rather extensive, we want to find out, quickly, how to release ourselves from these vows.

Chazal derive from the Torah that one can be absolved from a vow, pledge or other such commitment, by a process called hataras nedarim. Hataras nedarim does not, in the slightest way, diminish the reward that one receives for the good deeds performed. It simply removes the continuing obligation to fulfill the vow from the individual who created that vow. Therefore, in the vast majority of circumstances, someone who made a neder should undergo hataras nedarim, so that he releases the obligation from himself and therefore does not violate the neder (see Nedarim 22a).

How does one undergo hataras nedarim?

The person who made the vow or other commitment goes to three Jewish men who understand the logic of halacha and know the basics of how hataras nedarim operates (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:1 and commentaries). These three form a type of ad hoc beis din for the purpose of releasing vows. One of the three should be a talmid chacham, proficient in the laws of hataras nedarim – and he should be knowledgeable concerning which vows one may not annul (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:14; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 67:8).

The nodeir, the person who made the vow, shares with the three (or, at least, with the talmid chacham who is proficient in the laws of nedarim) the content of the vow, oath, or good practice from which he desires release and why he seeks relief. The talmid chacham asks the nodeir several questions that must be answered truthfully. The talmid chacham thereby determines whether there are valid grounds to release the nodeir from the commitment (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 228:14). Only a talmid chacham who understands the very complicated laws of vows should undertake hataras nedarim, because many details must be met for the hataras nedarim to be valid. (The details of what constitutes an adequate basis for hataras nedarim are beyond the scope of this article.)

Once the talmid chacham feels that there are adequate grounds for hataras nedarim, the beis din declares the neder or other commitment annulled by declaring, “mutar lach, mutar lach, mutar lach” – the activities prohibited by the vow are now permitted. Of course, in the case of a vow to do something, the words mutar lach mean the reverse – the person is no longer obligated to carry out the vow.

Someone who violated his vow prior to performing hataras nedarim has sinned, and is required to perform teshuvah for his or her infraction.

The difference between a neder and a shevuah

There is a halachic difference between performing hataras nedarim to release someone from the obligation he created with a neder, and performing hatarah after someone recited a shevuah. Whereas, in most instances, one should arrange to release someone from a neder, one annuls a shevuah only under extenuating circumstances (Rema, Yoreh Deah 203:3; Rambam end of Hilchos Shvuos). Explaining why this is so will need to wait for a future article.

When has a vow or an oath been created? We'll discuss that next week -- bli neder – when we continue this article.

לע"נ

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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.]

=====

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

=====

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 ZE H HA'DAVAR (32:2) and it states in regard to SHCHUTEI CHUTZ [offering a sacrifice outside the Mishkan] the phrase ZE H 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' ['baal 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

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. LEKHTEIKH 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'p'ilim (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'rumot 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'uvén 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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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 ayyin) — 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 Yisrael 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

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOS MASEI • 30 TAMMUZ 5781 JULY 10, 2021 • VOL 28 NO. 31

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Sticks and Stones

“...an utterance of her lips...” (30:07)

We are all so delicate. Our egos are so fragile. Our Sages tell us to run away from honor, but we all need self-worth.

One of the names for the soul is *kavod* – honor. As we say each day in our prayers, “So that my soul (*kavod*) might sing to you and not be silenced...” (Mizmor Shir Chanukat HaBayit). If you take all honor away from someone, they either die or go crazy. This was exactly what those Nazi monsters tried, and in some cases succeeded, to do to our brothers and sisters in the Second World War era. And when someone goes crazy and imagines himself to be someone else, he doesn't just think that he is the local bank manager. Rather, he imagines himself to be the most illustrious person he can think of, someone with the greatest honor. He imagines himself to be Napoleon, or herself to be the Queen of England.

One of the reasons why the Second Beit Hamikdash was destroyed was the incident of Kamtza and Bar Kamtza: A certain man had a friend named Kamtza and an enemy called Bar Kamtza. He once made a party and said to his servant, “Go and bring Kamtza.” The man went and brought Bar Kamtza by mistake. When the man who gave the party found Bar Kamtza there, he said, “What are you doing here? Get out!” Said the other, “Since I am already here, let me stay and I will pay you for whatever I eat and drink.” Said the host, “Absolutely not.” “Then let me give you half the cost of the party.” The host refused. “Then let me pay for the whole party.” Still the

host refused, and took him by the hand and threw him out.

Bar Kamtza was prepared to pay an enormous sum to save himself from humiliation. And if Bar Kamtza came to the party, it meant that he assumed that the host wanted to be his friend now – which could only have crushed him further.

No one can second-guess the Master of the World. No one can say *this* happened because of *that*. But when tragedies happen – and especially when they are close to home – each one of us must do more than a little soul searching.

This year, 45 holy Jews were crushed to death in Meron on Lag B'Omer. On Erev Shavuot, two more of our holy brethren were crushed to death and over 180 injured in Jerusalem.

As I write this, five people have died and 156 remain missing as a result of the collapse of an apartment building in Miami, Florida. The area is more than a third Jewish, with a large Orthodox population.

Stones can crush, and bodies can crush – but words can crush just as effectively.

It's not just sticks and stones that break bones.

Q & A

Questions – Matot

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?

Questions - Masei

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 Matot

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 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.

Answers Masei

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

Welcome to Rooster City

One of the stops that the Jews made in their forty-year sojourn through the wilderness was at a place called Etzion Gever (Num. 33:35-36, Deut. 2:8). This city is later mentioned in the Bible when King Solomon stationed his navy there (I Kings 9:26, II Chron. 8:17), and when King Jehoshaphat's ships broke down there (I Kings 22:49, II Chron. 20:26). Targum Yonatan (to Num. 33:35) translates the name Etzion Gever as "The City of the Rooster," thus assuming that the word *gever* means "rooster." Similarly, the Mishna (*Yoma* 1:8, *Sukkah* 5:4, *Tamid* 1:2) thrice uses the term "the call of the *gever*" to refer to daybreak, with the word *gever* understood as referring to a "rooster" (see *Yoma* 20b). In this essay we will explore the etymologies and implications of four Hebrew terms that refer to "chickens": *gever*, *sechvi*, *ziz* *sadai*, and *tarnegol*.

While the word *gever* sometimes means "rooster," it more often means "man/male" and seems to be a cognate of the word *gevurah* ("power" or "strength"). Interestingly, Rabbeinu Efrayim writes that a "rooster" is called a *gever* because its voice differs from that of other birds, as a man's voice differs from a woman's.

The Talmud (*Berachot* 7a) teaches that every morning there is one fleeting moment when G-d is especially angry, and a person who knows exactly when that happens can harness G-d's wrath to curse other people. The way the Talmud puts it, this moment can be determined by "seeing when the rooster's red crest turns white." In light of this, Rabbeinu Efrayim writes that Balaam called himself a *gever* (Num. 24:3, 24:15) because just like a rooster (*gever*) knows when G-d is angry, so too was he able to figure out the exact moment when G-d would be angry enough that a curse would prove effective. (Interestingly, a 2021 paper by Dr. Jessica L. Lamont of Yale University demonstrates that chickens were particularly associated with curse rituals in Ancient Greece.)

Peirush HaRokeach offers another reason why Balaam called himself a *gever*: Just as roosters engage in frequent copulation (see *Berachot* 22a), Balaam was likewise "one-

track minded." *Siddur HaRokeach* adds that just as the rooster closes one eye when G-d is angry, so too was Balaam blind in one eye, and just as the rooster stands on one foot when G-d is angry, so too was Balaam lame in one foot. Rabbeinu Bachaya (to Num. 24:3) adds that just as the rooster crows seven times (see *Perek Shirah* ch. 4, which attributes seven songs to the rooster), so did Balaam receive seven prophetic oracles.

Peirush HaRokeach explains that Etzion Gever was so-called because in that city lived people who were especially good at giving advice and had certain intuitions that resemble the rooster's ability to intuit the time of day. Rabbi Menachem Tziyyoni (1340-1410) similarly writes in the name of "the Kabbalists," that some of Etzion Gever's inhabitants were fluent in a certain form of esoteric wisdom called "The Knowledge of the Chicken" – which is alluded to in the name of the city.

The Hebrew word *sechvi* appears only once in the Bible, making it a *hapax legomenon* and a word whose actual meaning is quite unclear. The verse in which it appears reads: "Who places wisdom in the kidneys and who gives understanding to the *sechvi*?" (Iyov 38:36). But what is a *sechvi*? The Rabbis report that in some foreign place(s), people used the word *sechvi* for "roosters." The Babylonian Talmud (*Rosh Hashanah* 26a) identifies that place as Kennesrin (in North Syria), the Jerusalem Talmud (*Berachot* 9:1) identifies it as Rome, and the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 25:5), as Arabia. Be that as it may the rabbinic assumption is that the word *sechvi* means "rooster." Indeed, the Talmud (*Berachot* 60b) rules that when one hears the rooster's crow in the morning, one should recite the blessing, "Blessed are You... Who gave the *sechvi* the understanding to discern between day and night."

Nonetheless, most commentators understand that the word *sechvi* means "heart" – or, at least, *also* means "heart." These commentators include Ibn Janach in *Sefer HaShorashim*, Rabbeinu Chananel (to *Rosh Hashanah* 26a), Rashi (to Iyov 38:37), Ibn Ezra (there), Radak (*Sefer HaShorashim* and to Ps. 73:7), Rosh

(Berachot 9:23), Tur (Orach Chaim 46), and others. Siddur HaRokeach similarly explains that *sechvi* refers to a *neshama* (“soul”). Daat Mikra (to Iyov 38:36) cites other scholars as explaining the passage in Iyov as referring to different types of clouds, accordingly explaining that *sechvi* means “cloud.”

The way Rashi explains it, *sechvi* is related to the word *socheh* (“seeing” / “gazing,” see Targum to I Shmuel 17:42 and Isa. 21:8), referring to the “heart” as the machine that tries to “see” the future results and repercussions of a given action, or to the “rooster,” which has a special ability to “see” (things that are far away – Abudraham). Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) clarifies that the “seeing” in question refers to an intellectual sort of seeing, but not a physical seeing. He connects the word *sechvi* to the words *hasket* (which means to “listen” in an intellectual way, as opposed to the simple act of “hearing”) and *maskit* (attention-grabbing pictures engraved on a stone).

In a slight departure from these sources, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) understands *sechvi* to mean “skull.” He traces *sechvi* to the two-letter root SAMECH-CHET (“covering” or “barrier”). This root gives us words such as *sukkah* (“hut”), a covered enclosure; *nesech* (“pouring,” “libations”), covering a given spot with liquid, and *sichah* (“smearing,” “anointing”), layering something with oil. In that sense, *sechvi* refers to the “skull” which covers over the brain and serves as a protective barrier to shield that important organ.

The Bible relates that after the Assyrians conquered the Kingdom of Israel, they populated the area with Mesopotamian foreigners, each of whom imported their own native deities and idols to the Holy Land. More specifically, the people of Babylon brought their god Succoth Benoth, while the people of Cutha made images of their god Nergal (II Kings 17:30). The Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 63b) relates that Succoth Benoth was an idol in the shape of a hen, while Nergal was a rooster-shaped idol. Based on this, Rabbi Chaim Futernik surmises that the term *sechvi* as “rooster” actually relates to the name of the Babylonian god Succoth Benoth.

Before we turn to the popular post-Biblical word *tarnegol*, there is another possible Biblical Hebrew term for “chicken/rooster”: *ziz sadai*. This term appears twice in Psalms (Ps. 50:11, 80:14), where it clearly refers to

some sort of bird. The Targum (there) always translates this term as *tarnegol bara* (“wild chicken”). Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Felix (1921-2004) points out that *tarnegol bara* also refers to the *duchifat* bird (Lev. 11:19), commonly identified as the hoopoe bird (see *Gittin* 68b).

The word *tarnegol* does not appear in the Bible, but appears many times in the Mishna (*Terumot* 11:9, *Maasrot* 3:7, *Shabbat* 5:4, 18:2, 24:3, *Pesachim* 2:7, 5:7, *Nedarim* 5:1, *Bava Kama* 2:1, 7:7, 10:9, *Bava Metzia* 5:4, *Bava Batra* 3:5, *Eduyot* 6:1, *Avodah Zarah* 1:5, *Chullin* 3:5, 12:1, *Meilah* 3:5, *Keilim* 8:5, *Parah* 5:6, *Taharot* 3:8). In fact, this word is also used in the Dead Sea Scrolls (11QT^c) when speaking about the prohibition of raising chickens in Jerusalem, a prohibition also codified in the Mishna (*Bava Kama* 7:7).

Esteemed etymologist Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) reveals that the word *tarnegol* is borrowed from the Akkadian *tar-lugallu* (“cock”), assuming the interchangeability of NUN and LAMMED. This Akkadian term is itself a portmanteau of the Sumerian words *tar* (“bird”, similar to the Hebrew *tor*, “pigeon”) and *lugal* (“king”), perhaps an allusion to the rooster’s crest, which resembles a king’s crown. What’s fascinating is that Bilaam’s patron, the Moabite king Balak, was the son of somebody named Tzippor (whose name literally means “bird”), thus connecting Bilaam, who called himself a “rooster,” with somebody who is associated with “bird” and “king.”

As mentioned above, the Cuthean deity Nergal was an idol in the shape of a rooster, which Rabbeinu Chananel specifies looked like a wild rooster. Rabbi Meir HaLevi Abulafia (1170-1244) explains that the name Nergal alludes to a “rooster” because the word *tarnegol* contains the same letters as *nergal*. Alternatively, he explains that the name Nergal is related to the Hebrew word *ragil* (“frequent”), an allusion to the rooster, which is, as mentioned above, the animal understood to copulate the most frequently. Interestingly, the Jerusalem Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 3:2) understands that Nergal was a foot-shaped idol, thus associating this god’s name with the Hebrew word *regel* (“foot”), and assuming the letter NUN of *nergal* is not integral to its core meaning.

For more about the Babylonian deities Nergal and Succoth Benoth, check out the encyclopedia section of my book *God versus Gods: Judaism in the Age of Idolatry* (Mosaica Press, 2018).

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSINGS OVER TEFILLIN: ONE BLESSING OR TWO?

(PART 2)

"I am not emotional about being the oldest man in the world, but it does mean something to me that I have donned tefillin for longer than anyone else."

Yisrael Kristal, 1903-2017, was officially recognized as the oldest living Holocaust survivor in 2014. In January 2016 he was recognized by the Guinness World Records as the world's oldest man.

The Talmud (Brachot 60b) teaches that there are two blessings recited over *tefillin*. On putting on the arm *tefillin*, we say, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to put on *tefillin*." And on putting on the head *tefillin*, we say, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us regarding the commandment of *tefillin*." However, in Tractate Menachot (36a) a second possibility is raised: The second blessing is recited only if a person spoke in between putting on the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin*.

According to Jewish Law, speaking after putting on the arm *tefillin* and before putting on the head *tefillin* is a transgression. Making an unwarranted break in between makes a clear interruption between the two mitzvahs. Halachically, a disruption implies that the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin* are two completely independent mitzvahs. Subsequently, the first blessing no longer includes the head *tefillin*, and a new, separate blessing must now be recited.

In order to reconcile the two different versions in the *Gemara*, some commentaries say that the statement in Tractate Brachot – that two independent blessings are recited – is also referring to someone who makes an unnecessary break between putting on the two *tefillin*.

Rashi is of the opinion that the second blessing is recited only when a break is made between putting on the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin*. However, Rabbeinu Tam, one of Rashi's grandsons, rules that two blessings are *always* recited over wearing *tefillin*, even when there is no interruption made between putting them on. The first blessing is said over the arm *tefillin* and the second over the head *tefillin*. Rabbeinu Asher (often known by the honorific title of the "Rosh") points to an interesting divergence to be seen in these opinions of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam. According to Rashi, it transpires that a person who can wear only *head tefillin* (because he has injured his arm such that it is not possible to wear the arm *tefillin*, or because the only *tefillin* available at that time are the head *tefillin*) will recite the first blessing: "... has commanded us to put on *tefillin*" although this is normally the blessing said over the *arm tefillin*. However, according to Rabbeinu Tam, that person would need to recite both the first blessing *and* the second one over the head *tefillin*.

The Halachic authorities who follow Rashi's ruling are, among others, the Rif and the Rambam. This halacha is codified by Rabbi Yosef Karo in the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 25), and reciting just one blessing over both the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin* is the accepted practice of the Sephardic communities.

On the other hand (please excuse the pun), Rabbeinu Tam's opinion – to make two separate blessings – is accepted, among others, by the Ba'al Halachot Gedolot and the Rosh. It is codified by Rabbi Moshe Isserles, and is the accepted ruling for the Ashkenazic communities.

Fascinatingly enough, some authorities – Rashba, Ohr Zaruah and others – in explanation of Rashi, make a connection between how many blessings are recited and whether or not the mitzvah of *tefillin* is considered one mitzvah with two parts, or whether it is two completely separate mitzvahs. Accordingly, they suggest that if it is one mitzvah, only one blessing should be recited. But if it is two mitzvahs, each one deserves its own blessing. However, it is clear that not all authorities who say that only one blessing is recited are also of the opinion that *tefillin* is only one mitzvah.

According to Rabbeinu Tam, not only are two blessings recited, but the second blessing is actually the more important one. The first blessing is recited as the mitzvah is beginning, and the second mitzvah is articulated as the mitzvah comes to its complete fulfillment. Together with that is the fact that the head *tefillin* are considered to be on a higher level of sanctity than the arm *tefillin*, which seems to indicate that the blessing over the head *tefillin* is also of greater holiness. Rabbeinu Tam suggests that the loftier significance of the head *tefillin* is reflected in its being comprised of four different compartments, and that it has the Hebrew letter “*shin*” embossed on two of its sides. This is unlike the arm *tefillin*, which has only one compartment and no “*shins*” embossed on its sides.

In any event, the question remains as to why only one blessing would be said if the arm *tefillin* and the head *tefillin* are regarded as being two distinct mitzvahs. As a rule, each blessing is designed specifically for its precise purpose. For this reason, there are many different blessings that exist, in general. Why, then, is it considered acceptable here to recite just one blessing? Rambam, Shitat Rabbeinu Tam and Bet Ephraim all explain that since they share the same appellative – *tefillin* – and since the head *tefillin* are put on *immediately* after the arm *tefillin*, they may share the same blessing.

Whether one blessing is recited or two, about one thing, at least, there is no disagreement among the halachic authorities: The mitzvah of *tefillin* contains within it the most extraordinary blessings for whoever performs it!

To be continued...

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Matot-Masei: Yoma 79-85

The Nature of the Ninth

Rabbi Chiya bar Rav from Difti taught, "Whoever eats on the ninth (of Tishrei) is considered as having fasting on both the ninth and the tenth."

Rabbi Chiya bar Rav from Difti explains the basis for this novel mitzvah of eating prior to Yom Kippur and that the act of eating is deemed by Hashem as an act of fasting: The Torah states (in Vayikra 23:32), "You will afflict yourselves on the ninth day of the month (of Tishrei) at evening." "Do we fast on the *ninth*?" says the Sage rhetorically. "Rather, we fast on the *tenth* (i.e. Yom Kippur)! It must be that this verse is teaching that whoever eats on the ninth (and then fasts on the tenth) is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and the tenth."

Rashi explains the rationale for this derivation. The Torah says, "And you will afflict (*v'anitem*) yourselves on the ninth of the month in the evening." This means that there is a mitzvah to prepare on the ninth in order to be able to fast on the tenth, meaning that there is a mitzvah *to eat* on the ninth. And since the Torah chose to express one's *eating* on the ninth with the Hebrew word that the Torah uses for the *affliction of fasting* on Yom Kippur – *inui* – it follows that one who eats on the ninth is considered akin to fasting on that day, as well as fasting on the following day of Yom Kippur.

The upshot: Just as there is a mitzvah to fast on Yom Kippur, there is similarly a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur, and one who eats on the ninth is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and the tenth.

This mitzvah of eating on the ninth of Tishrei is codified as halacha in Shulchan Aruch Orach

Chaim 604. Most authorities rule that this is Torah mitzvah, derived from this verse. Some, however, say that it is a rabbinically enacted mitzvah, and that the verse is an *asmachta* to the future institution of this mitzvah by the rabbis.

Rashi here and in Berachot 8b writes that the purpose of the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is as a lead-up in preparation for fasting well on Yom Kippur (to improve one's ability to confess to Hashem one's wrongdoings and attain atonement).

In this sense, eating on the ninth is intrinsically connected with the mitzvah to fast on the next day and can be viewed, in a sense, as "one long mitzvah." However, Rashi in Rosh Hashana 9a and other Rishonim seem to indicate that the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is of an independent nature, and, therefore, an independent mitzvah that is not part of the mitzvah to fast on the tenth.

The commentaries discuss numerous practical differences in halacha that result from these two different understandings of the mitzvah to eat on the ninth. Here we will briefly try to touch on two of these matters of halacha.

One topic is whether the mitzvah to eat on the ninth applies to women (See Rabbi Akiva Eiger's responsa, #15). If the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is inherently tied to the mitzvah to fast on the tenth, one should conclude that women are obligated in the mitzvah to eat on the ninth in the same way as are men. However, if eating on the ninth is an *independent* mitzvah, one would assume that women would be *exempt* from the requirement to fulfill the mitzvah of eating on the ninth (although common sense would almost certainly dictate for women to eat on the ninth, nevertheless, in order to facilitate their fasting on the tenth!) This exemption would be based on the rule that women

are exempt from a *mitzvah aseh she'hazman grama* – a “time-bound” mitzvah to do something (in this case, to eat at a specific time, i.e. on a specific date).

An additional matter to examine when considering these two ways of looking at the nature of the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is to determine whether the mitzvah *begins on the night* that begins the ninth day of Tishrei, or if the mitzvah applies *only in the daytime* that precedes Yom Kippur. If the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is meant to better fast on Yom Kippur, as Rashi writes on our *daf*, it stands to reason that the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is only in the daytime hours preceding the Yom Kippur fast. However, Rabbbeinu Nissim (Nedarim 63b) writes that the mitzvah should begin on the evening that begins the ninth, and continue throughout the day of the ninth. This would be consistent with the view that the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is comparable to eating on any

other independent Yom Tov, which begins with a special meal from at the onset of its date.

As a final note on this topic for now, we should not forget to address a seemingly obvious question when discussing the mitzvah to eat on *erev* Yom Kippur. The commentaries ask why the mitzvah to eat on the ninth is expressed in the terminology of *fasting* – *inui* – rather than of *eating* (*achila*). The key to answering this question is to know that one receives greater reward for doing a mitzvah that might be uncomfortable than for performing a pain-free mitzvah (“*lfum tzaarah agra*”). For this reason, the Torah expresses the mitzvah *to eat* on the ninth in terms of *fasting* – to teach that one who eats on the ninth receives the greater Divine reward of fulfilling this enjoyable mitzvah of eating, as if fulfilling it with the discomfort of fasting.

• Yoma 81b

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. info@ohr.edu

Contributing authors, editors and production team: Rabbi Nota Schiller – Rosh HaYeshiva,
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz - Rav of Kehillos Ohr Somayach, Avi Kaufman, Rabbi Reuven Chaim
Klein, Rabbi Reuven Lauffer, Rabbi Yaakov Meyers, Mrs. Rosalie Moriah, Rabbi Moshe
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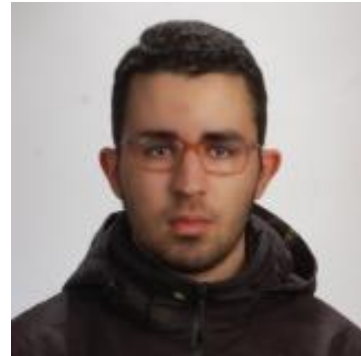
The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach
by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

Netzach Mann (21)
Born: Szczecin, Poland
Home: Volos, Greece

Raised in Szczecin, Poland; Thessaloniki, Greece;
Windhoek, Namibia; Pretoria, South Africa;
Vienna, Austria; Jakarta, Indonesia; Birmingham,
United Kingdom; Dublin, Ireland

Education: University of Szczecin, Poland – BA in
Marketing and Business

Mechina Program 2021



As one can tell from the above list of the places Netzach has lived, his parents moved quite often. Netzach's father was born on a farm in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) to parents who moved there from Poland. Not that Netzach's grandparents were Polish. They were *Romaniote* Jews from Greece. After surviving the Nazis in Greece during the Second World War by living in the mountains with the Greek partisans, they moved to Poland in 1946 where there was a small Romaniote community. They later moved to Rhodesia, where his grandfather tried his hand at farming. When Rhodesia became Zimbabwe, almost all of the white people left, including Netzach's father's family. They moved back to Poland.

His mother's family is from Salonika (now known as Thessaloniki after the Greeks captured it from the Ottoman Empire in 1913). A significant Adriatic seaport since antiquity, it became the only large city in the world with a majority Jewish population, as a result of the influx of Jews from Spain after the Expulsion of 1492. It was also the home of famous Sephardic Rabbis, including Rabbi Yosef Caro, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch* and Shlomo Alkabetz, the famous Kabbalist and author of *Lecha Dodi*. It also happens to be the birthplace of Dr. Albert

Bouria, the CEO of Pfizer, the developer of a COVID-19 vaccine.

If you have never heard of the Romaniotes, do not be surprised. I had never heard of them either until I saw Netzach's application to the Yeshiva and wondered how a Jew could end up in Volos, Greece, a city whose existence I previously was unaware of, yet was an important one in Romaniote history and which still has a *Beit Knesset* and a small Romaniote community.

Jews have lived in Greece since the time of Alexander the Great, about 2300 years ago. They were, in fact, the first settlement of Jews in Europe. Major communities were located in Volos, Salonika, Ioannina, Arta, Preveza, Chalcis, Chania, Thebes, Corinth, Patras and on the islands of Corfu, Crete, Zakynthos, Lesbos, Chios, Samos, Rhodes and Cyprus.

They speak *Yavanis* (or *Yavanic*), which is to Greek as Yiddish is to German or Ladino is to Spanish. It is basically Greek mixed with Turkish and Hebrew. It is still spoken today, and Netzach is fluent in both Yavanis and Modern Greek (along with English and Polish).

Netzach's father is an economist and diplomat who worked for the Polish Foreign Ministry since completing his education. After living in Rhodesia, where he grew up speaking English and Afrikaans for his first fourteen years, the family moved to Poland, where he finished high school and university. He did graduate work in the States and received a PhD in Economics from Columbia University. He was appointed to various Polish missions in various countries — hence, the family moved around the world.

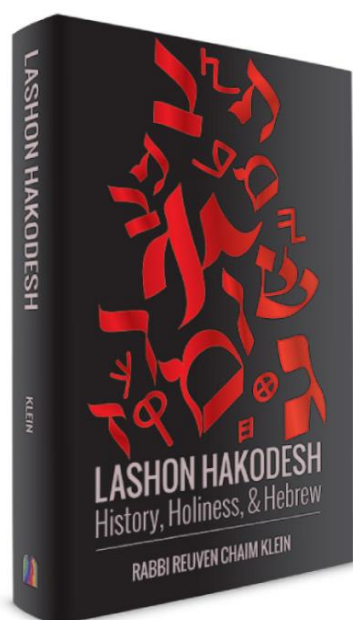
Netzach spent his first years in Poland, and when he was three his father was fortunate to be posted to Thessaloniki, Greece, home to Netzach's mother's family. At eight years old, they moved to Namibia in South West Africa. Then came a series of shorter moves, to Indonesia, Austria and Ireland. At the age of twelve they were in Pretoria, the capital of South Africa. They stayed for two-and-a-half years. When Netzach was fifteen they had moved to Birmingham in the UK for a year, and then back to Namibia and Greece. At seventeen, Netzach was back in Poland,

where he earned a BA in Marketing and Business at the University of Szczecin.

The family was always religious, keeping kosher and Shabbat as well as they could, given the difficulties one might expect to find in places like Namibia or Indonesia. Netzach *davened* and put on *tefillin* and kept those mitzvahs that he knew. After a year or so in university, he had grown lax in his observance and realized that to strengthen his connection to Judaism he needed to learn in yeshiva.

“As I began to study more about the history of the Jews, especially in Eastern Europe, I came to believe strongly in our traditions and our faith, which is so much greater than the individual. I want to serve Hashem and the Jewish People. I hope to learn all that the Yeshiva has to offer and then to establish a family and become active in my community.”

We are confident that Netzach will succeed *b'ezrat Hashem*.



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LETTER AND SPIRIT

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Masei

Life and Land

The Jews are at the end of their forty-year sojourn in the desert, and the Torah reviews all of the encampments. Then, Moshe informs the people that they are about to cross over the Jordan into the Land of Israel, where they will conquer and apportion the Land. Moshe is then told to convey the mitzvah of setting up six cities of refuge – three on either side of the Jordan.

These cities were established for individuals who committed manslaughter to seek refuge. A manslayer was not granted asylum if he acted intentionally or was criminally negligent. Neither did one need to be exiled if the death was a result of an unforeseeable accident. The cities of refuge absorbed those who killed unintentionally, but with some degree of carelessness – such as in circumstances where a cautious person acting responsibly would have recognized the possibility of a deadly result and would have been more careful.

The Torah warns that one may not accept ransom money in lieu of the death penalty for an intentional murderer or in lieu of flight to the city of refuge for an unintentional manslayer. In explaining this prohibition, the Torah writes, *Do not turn the Land in which you are into a hypocrite, for the blood turns the Land into a hypocrite, and there can be no atonement for the Land for the blood that is spilled in it, except by the blood of the one who spilled it.*

What does it mean that the Land would be turned into a hypocrite?

This is the soil that is destined to bear abundant fruit beneath G-d's blessed dew and sunshine. But the soil, the dew and the sunshine deceive, for no blessed seed germinates from within to give life and joy to mankind. G-d warns, *if you tolerate deliberate murder and careless manslaughter in your midst, you turn the Land in which you are rooted into a hypocrite!* The Land will disappoint your expectations and withhold the blessing that was meant to come from it. Human blood is the most precious sap nurtured by the Land, and innocent blood that is spilled turns the Land into a "hypocrite."

A human society that does not regard the blood of its members as sacred, and does not demand a reckoning for the spilling of innocent blood, breaks the terms under which it may possess its Land. Instead, in order to claim the Land and its bounty, society must demand that reckoning. The survival of a deliberate murderer is an affront to the higher dignity of man and is a breach of the contract under which G-d gave the earth to man and the Land to Israel. By committing murder, he forfeits his right to live.

These commandments were given just as the people are told that they will inherit the Land because they emphasize the sanctity of human life and represent the basic condition for Israel's right to possess the Land and enjoy its fruits.

- Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 35:11, 33

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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. The *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 the *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 western 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 the *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

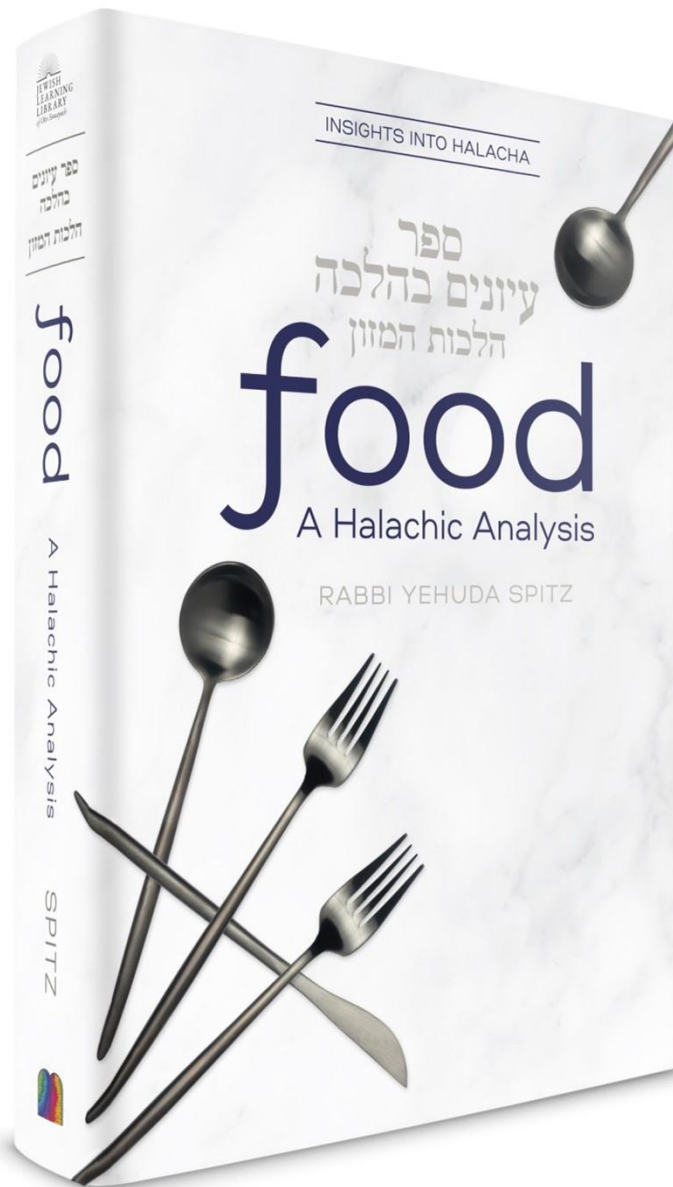
The Torah names all 42 encampments of the *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem commands the *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. The *Bnei 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.

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12:45 pm	Rav Yitzchak Breitowitz
1:45 pm	Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh Hayeshiva
2:45 pm	Rabbi Dovid Kaplan
3:35 pm	Rabbi Avraham Rockmill
4:25 pm	Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb
5:15 pm	Rabbi Reuven Lauffer
6:05 pm	Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
7:00 pm	Mincha
7:45 pm	Rabbi Yehuda Samet
8.09 pm	Maariv
8.14 pm	End of Fast

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Ezras nashim will be open throughout the day.