

Potomac Torah Study Center

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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 more than 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 archives.

The final parsha of Bemidbar (Masei) opens as Moshe briefly recounts forty years of journeys in the desert to the generation about to enter the land. Rabbi Marc Angel observes that if we stop studying the journeys of our people getting to where we are now, we shall stagnate and regress. Rabbi David Fohrman focuses on the 42 specific stops that Moshe mentions. In recounting the stories of our people since leaving Egypt, the Torah does not mention every stop that Moshe mentions in Masei. There are only three stops where Moshe goes into detail about our experiences: no water at Refidim; Aharon's death at Har HaHor in the 40th year; and the king of Arad's learning of their approach from his location in the south of Canaan. Rabbi Fohrman explains that B'Nai Yisrael learn important lessons at these stops, lessons that solidify their faith that Hashem is with the people, will provide and protect them; and that they can go directly to God (without needing Aaron, Moshe, or any other person assisting) to seek His help. (For more detail, see my message from this double parsha from 5780, available at PotomacTorah.org.) These three stops then are what Moshe considers the most significant during their 40 year wanderings.

As the history of B'Nai Yisrael, from Avraham to the end of Moshe's life, comes to a close, my mind goes to one of Agatha Christie's novels, *Elephants Can Remember*. The key to this mystery is that Hercule Poirot must find some "elephants," people with long memories, to solve a murder mystery. Moshe plays the role of an elephant in the Torah, and he frequently reminds the people how current events tie in to earlier stories and lessons from Jewish history. (Rabbi Fohrman often opens a Dvar Torah by asking, "Where have we heard these words before," or "what story from earlier in the Torah fits this exact pattern?") For one example, when Reuven and Gad want to inherit land east of the Jordan ("Israel Heights"), Rabbi Fohrman asks when before do some of the brothers leave another brother alone, and what is the result (Yosef's abduction and sale into slavery in Egypt)? Moshe requires a promise from Reuven and Gad that they will fight on the front lines until B'Nai Yisrael capture all the land before permitting the tribes to inherit east of the Jordan, and he includes half the tribe of Manasseh with them as a bridge to connect the tribes on both sides of the river.)

Jewish history, which is so important to Moshe, is part of a focus on education that has been extremely important to Jews for many centuries. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, elaborates on this point, going back to Misrash. Rabbi Sacks adds that Rashi attributes a focus on education as a primary priority for Moshe in his negotiation with Reuven and Gad (see below).

Buying in to our mitzvot and Hashem's promises to our Avot is part of Moshe's focus on Jewish education as a high priority for living our lives and raising our children. As Rabbi Mordechai Rhine discusses, the five daughters of Tzelafchad are unable to find husbands when they approach Moshe to ask that they inherit the holding of their father (because he is dead and had no sons). Once they receive the holding and the condition that they must select husbands only from among Manasseh, they soon all find husbands. Rabbi Rhine explains that by following Hashem's requirements (blessings), we find our destiny. This interpretation is similar to Rabbi Fohrman's "tap on the shoulder," a way that Hashem sends messages to us if we are open to receive and respond to the messages. (I have discussed this lesson numerous times.)

On many occasions, I have mentioned that my close friend, Rabbi Yehoshua Singer, Rabbi of Am HaTorah in Bethesda, Maryland for the past ten years, has been a mentor and teacher to me for several years – despite my not living close enough to attend his shul on Shabbat or Yom Tov. Many times Rabbi Singer has kept me from making errors in my weekly Torah messages, and as often his insightful comments have led me to improve my presentation. Rabbi Singer heard Hashem's tap on his shoulder and has accepted a position as head of the outstanding kollel at B'Nai B'Rith Jacob shul in Savannah, GA. My father and step-mother retired to Savannah some years ago, and we spent many occasions enjoying the shul and community in Savannah while they were alive. Am HaTorah is having a farewell reception for the Singers this coming Sunday. The Savannah kollel has made an exceptional selection in bringing the Singer family to Savannah. Rather than focusing on the loss to our community, let us focus our appreciation for ten wonderful years with the Singer family and wish them the best in Savannah.

My first mentor in studying our heritage was Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, my beloved Rebbe, mentor, and close friend for half a century. I remember Rabbi Cahan making some of the points that the Devrei Torah below discuss in one of his Torah discussions from thirty or more years ago. Rabbi Cahan's love of Eretz Yisrael and the history of our people came through virtually every time we talked or I learned from him in shul. Our sons grew up learning these lessons from Rabbi Cahan with us, and we now try to teach them to our grandchildren. Indeed, we are planning a family trip to Israel for a few weeks next year – a fitting way to reinforce the lessons from our double parsha.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Arye Don ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Matos: How Far it Might Travel By Rabbi Label Lam © 5765

Moshe said to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven:

"Shall your brothers go out to battle while you settle here? Why do you dissuade the heart of the Children of Israel from crossing to the land that HASHEM has given them? This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land." (Bamidbar 32:6-8)

The Malbim points out that from here we find out something that was not clearly stated earlier. We had the impression that the main problem of the spies was that they had spoken badly about the land. Now, forty years later, we learn that the more serious crime was that they had spoken words that were discouraging to the Children of Israel. A whole generation

later and Moshe is still extremely guarded on this issue. How vulnerable then is the average person to being discouraged. See how important it is to lend encouragement to others and not to do or say anything that might soften their resolve.

On our way out of town one Erev Simchas Torah we stopped by to visit Rabbi Hershel Mashinsky ztl. He was sitting in his Sukkah. He greeted each of us individually with his usual warmth. As we were speaking one of the young children reached uninvited into a bowl with sugar cubes and grabbed one. I quickly tried to stop him. Rabbi Mashinsky with his sweet softness said to the child, “Nu?! A brocho!?” The child said the appropriate blessing to which we all answered, “Amen!” Then Rabbi Mashinsky chimed in, “That was a smart brocho!” We carry that phrase till today and employ it daily - “A smart brocho!”

On the flip side, my wife told me that she had taken the time and expense to buy something new for one of our young daughters. The little girl had selected an outfit she liked very much and the first day she was proudly wearing it, another child said to her, “Where did you get that shmata???” She refuses to wear it again!

A teacher of thousands over the past 29 years told me this week the disheartening words spoken to him by a teacher of his more than three decades ago and how it hurt him so. “You’ll never achieve anything.” Still, he attends the dinner each year, remembers clearly, but never says a word.

A woman keeps a framed note on her table from an educator that met her son once, years ago, and took the time to write that he’s a fine boy! How simple it is to add zest to another’s day or entire life! A husband, with glowing praise, eulogizes his young wife by recalling that he had purchased a van that his wife had advised him strongly not to buy and after it turned out to be a lemon she said nothing at all.

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin writes in Gateways to Happiness, “Be aware of the positive traits and behaviors of the people with whom you come into contact and help them build upon their strengths. Encouragement is a much more powerful tool for change and growth than blaming and condemning. You can bring about miracles in a person’s life if you believe in their potential.” (P. 388) With the casual power of remote control, and in a given moment, one can easily turn someone on or turn them off, and never know how far it might travel.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5765-matos/>

You and Your Shulkhan Arukh Are Going to Treif Up My Kitchen!

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014, 2023

A story is told that when Rav Soloveitchik’s wife Tonya, z”l, was hospitalized due to an illness, he and Haym had the run of the house. Following technical laws of kashrut, they ate cold milkhig food on fleishig dishes. When Tonya returned, she was apoplectic. The Rav explained he was doing nothing more than following the Shulkhan Arukh, to which Tonya replied: “You and your Shulkhan Arukh are going to treif up my kitchen!”

This gets to the heart of what separate dishes is about. Classically, it is treated as concern that flavor seeped into the walls of the dish and will transfer to the food in it — if there is no heat to transfer taste, it shouldn’t be a problem. Alternatively, it may be about maintaining a strict division, of keeping like with like — milkhig food gets milkhig dishes, fleishig food gets fleishig dishes.

When the people come back from war against the Midianites in this week’s parsha, they bring booty of war, including vessels and clothing. Elazar instructs them what must be done:

Everything that goes through fire, you shall make it go through fire, and it shall be clean: nevertheless it shall be purified with sprinkling water; all that does not go through fire you shall make go through water (Numb. 31:23).

The simple meaning is this purification process is since the people came in contact with dead bodies. The “sprinkling

water” is from the ashes of the red heifer. This is certainly true regarding the purification of clothes in the following verse. However, this would not explain why the vessels must be passed through fire or water. Rather than view this as a new purification process, the Rabbis understand a different issue is at play.

These cooking vessels, say the Rabbis, must not only be purified due to contact with the dead but purged of the non-kosher tastes they have absorbed. Vessels used directly over the fire, such as a spit, must be purified or kashered by putting it over a fire. Similarly vessels used with boiling water, such as a pot, must be kashered with boiling water. This is the principle of *ki'bolo kakh polto*, as it absorbs taste, so it expels it.

But maybe not. Maybe this whole process is not primarily about removing problematic absorbed taste. Maybe it is about changing the identity of the vessel, taking a treif vessel and redefining it, through this ritual, as a kosher one.

What is the evidence? First, this verse appears in the context of ritual purification, all about effecting a change of status. Second, the Rabbis learn from this verse there is a mitzvah to immerse even brand new vessels purchased from non-Jews, the mitzvah of tevilat keilim. This is most easily understood as a ritual to change the status of the vessel — from non-Jewish to Jewish. The juxtaposition in the verse of this requirement to kashering suggests the two are serving a similar function — change of status. Reflecting and reinforcing this is the Mishna in Avoda Zara (75b) which deals with kashering and toveling in the same discussion. Taken together, it seems we are dealing with issues of status and not necessarily absorbed taste.

Other halakhot and Talmudic discussions support this. When we kasher a vessel, we only look at its primary use — with boiling water, on fire, etc. — and not all the ways it might have absorbed taste. After we do the kashering we have the custom of immersing the vessel in cold water, akin to purification. More significant, the requirement to kasher these dishes from Midian may not fit the general rules of absorbed taste. This is either because the taste would have been spoiled, lifgam (Pesachim 44b), or as the 13th century Rav Aharon HaLevi (Ra'ah) points out, because there would not be enough to be considered the true taste of the original food (Chezkat HaBayit on Torat HaBayit 4:1, 11a).

If this isn't about the taste of the absorbed food, what is it about? Ra'ah states, in the name of his teacher Ramban, that the prohibition to use vessels used with non-kosher food is because of what they are. Don't use treif vessels. Whatever is in their walls doesn't matter, if they were used to cook treif food, they are treif. In this way, kashering vessels is a form of purifying them, of changing their status and transforming them.

So who was right? The Rav or Tonya? Is it the vessel, or is it what is in it? The truth is both of these approaches exist within halakha, and an ongoing dialectical tension exists between them.

So it should be. Rebbe Yehudah haNasi taught “*Do not look at the vessel, but at what is inside it.*” But the reality is we are always looking at the vessel, and this is not necessarily a bad thing (Pirkei Avot 4:20). We need to organize reality. We need to label, categorize, understand where one thing stands in relation to others. The way a thing or person appears, identity they project, helps us do this in an efficient and effective way. There is a reason doctors wear white coats and stethoscopes. It is true this might lead to us dismissing someone who is not wearing that white coat or to giving too much weight to one who is, even if she is not such an expert, but it is better than the alternative — not having any idea who is who and how to navigate our way.

Tonya was right. Eating cold cheese on a fleishig plate might be halakhically permissible. But blurring the boundaries and mixing categories is also a sure way to treif up the kitchen.

This approach is central to the halakhic system, or any legal system. Halakha mostly operates with formalistic categories. Certain concrete, objective, quantifiable criteria are assessed, and dictate what category something is in and what halakhot apply. What halakha doesn't do, except rare cases, is look at context, the circumstances of an individual or thing, and apply one law to the whole as a category rather than apply a different law for each facet of the case. This is the principle of lo plug — we don't make distinctions. It would be highly inefficient, if not impossible, to have a legal system that operated on principles and not on formal categories. Looking at the vessel is absolutely necessary.

But if Tonya was right, so was Rebbe Yehudah haNassi. A system that only looks at status and identity, that places labels

on people and things and makes decisions on that basis, will lead to cases of error and injustice, to marginalization and exclusion. The woman in the white coat may not be a doctor. Even if she is, she may not know what she is talking about. We need to stretch and go past quick, easy categorization and its conclusions. We need to do research, find out what truly is contained in the vessel.

Similarly with halakha. While a non-formalist approach undermines the halakhic system, an overly formalist approach can be blind to real people and real human suffering. At times we have to push ourselves and find ways to look at not just the category, but the real live person in it. There are ways halakha accommodates this — such as *sha'at ha'dechak*, an exigency where exceptions can be made, or times we don't say lo plug, where situations are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. And there are times when, like the laws of kosher vessels, the two exist in an ongoing dialectic relationship, where the particular circumstances and context can influence how formal categories are defined.

In the end, we must find a way to keep our kitchens kosher, and find a way to know and care what each and every vessel contains.

Shabbat shalom!

<https://library.yctarah.org/2023/07/you-and-your-shulkhan-arukh-are-going-to-treif-up-my-kitchen/>

Journeys and Beyond: Thoughts for Matot/Masei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In John Steinbeck's story, "The Leader of the People," an old man is fixated on his past role leading a wagon train across America in the 19th century. He endlessly repeats stories of his adventures, much to the annoyance of his son-in-law. His daughter is more sympathetic; she understands that the meaning of her father's life was bound to his journey across the country. His heart must have sunk when he first caught sight of the Pacific Ocean; the goal had been reached. There was nowhere further to go. The highlight of his life was in the past.

A lesson: the journey itself is ultimately more valuable — in certain ways — than achieving the goal. As long as the journey continues, there is excitement, anticipation, hope.

This week's Torah reading concludes the first four books of the Bible. Fittingly, the last parasha is entitled Masei — journeys. In a sense, the entire first four books of the Torah describe a journey, beginning with the history of humanity, the emergence of the People of Israel and its unique relationship with God, and the experiences from slavery to redemption to forty years wandering in the wilderness. With parashat Masei, they are reaching the conclusion of their journey as they ready themselves to enter the Promised Land. The last book of the Torah, Devarim, is essentially Moses's recap of the history and laws as recorded in the first four books.

It is noteworthy that the Torah is centered on the role of the journey; it does not include new chapters about the Israelites actually entering the Promised Land. In our religious tradition, we celebrate the redemption from Egypt on Pessah, the Revelation at Sinai on Shavuoth, and God's providence over Israel in the wilderness on Succoth. We don't have a festival celebrating the day Israel entered the Promised Land.

Tractate Berakhot ends with a passage declaring that Torah scholars have no peace, not in this world and not in the next world. They are constantly involved in facing new challenges; they go "*mehayil el hayil*," from one battle to the next, from strength to strength. They thrive because they stay in process, moving from one goal to the next. The message is true for all who wish to live productive forward-looking lives: keep moving, keep engaged. When you reach one goal, immediately set out on your way to a new goal.

The old man in Steinbeck's story hit a psychological block and couldn't get beyond it. He had achieved something great in the past but he didn't go "*from strength to strength*." The journey of his life was in the past, and now he was simply marking time remembering and retelling stories of the old times.

The Torah teaches us not to fall into that situation. We are to see life as a journey with an unfolding road ahead. When we reach one goal, we should then look ahead to our next goal. Once we stop this process, our lives stagnate and regress into the past.

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

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3140>

The Long Journey --Thoughts for Matot-Masei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We do not succumb to the frustration or despair that confronted Alexander the Great, because we have a different

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

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

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

Lamentations: Putting the Mouth before the Eye

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

INTRODUCTION

For over forty years preceding the destruction of the first Temple (627-586 B.C.E.), Jeremiah incessantly warned his people that Jerusalem, the Temple, and their lives were in the gravest jeopardy. The people mocked, threatened, and physically mistreated the prophet. Most scorned his message, thereby sealing their own doom.

Finally, Jeremiah's nightmarish visions became a reality. The Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem, killing and plundering, and burning the city to the ground. Other nations, including spurious allies, mocked Israel, looted her wealth, and even turned Jewish captives over to the Babylonians. The Temple was destroyed, and most of the humiliated survivors were dragged into captivity, wondering if they would ever see their homeland again.

The Book of Lamentations describes this calamity from the perspective of an eyewitness. It contains five chapters. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 contain twenty-two verses each, and chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses (three verses per letter). Chapters 1-4 are arranged in aleph-bet acrostics. There is meaning in the content of Lamentations, and in its structure. Both make the book particularly poignant.

Chapter 1 casts the destroyed Jerusalem as a woman whose husband has abandoned her. While this initial imagery evokes pity, the chapter then adds that she took lovers and therefore deserved this abandonment. Israel admits that she has sinned and asks for mercy and for God to punish her enemies.

Chapter 2 asks: how could God be so harsh? The tone shifts from one of shame and despair to one of anger. There also is a shift of emphasis from Jerusalem as a victim to God as the Aggressor. At the end of the chapter, there is another plea for God to help.

Chapter 3 presents the voice of the individual who begins in a state of despair but who then regains hope. He expresses a desire to restore order and return to the pre-destruction state.

Chapter 4 is a painful step-by-step reliving of the destruction. It also contains lamenting over how the destruction could have happened, and it curses Israel's enemies.

Chapter 5 depicts the people left behind as looking at the ruins, absolutely miserable. They call on God for help, but conclude with disappointment and uncertainty as to what the future will bring.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRAGEDY[1]

Chapter 1 acknowledges that the destruction of Jerusalem is God's work (1:12-15). While the main theme of chapter 1 is mourning, the author repeatedly vindicates God for the disaster, blaming it squarely on Israel's sins (see 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22).

Throughout chapter 1, the author adopts a rational, transcendent perspective. Reflecting an ordered sense of the world, the aleph-bet order is intact, poetically showing a calculated sense of misery.[2]

While chapter 1 acquits God, chapter 2 adopts a different outlook. Suddenly, the author lashes out at God:

How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of his anger!...He has bent His bow like an enemy...He has poured out His fury like fire... (Lam. 2:1-4)

Chapter 1 gave the author a chance to reflect on the magnitude of this tragedy: death, isolation, exile, desolation, humiliation. In this context, the point of chapter 2 is clear: although Israel may be guilty of sin, the punishment seems disproportionate to the crimes. Nobody should have to suffer the way Israel has. The deeper emotions of the author have shattered his initial theological and philosophical serenity.

This emotional shift is reflected in the aleph-bet order of chapter 2. While the chapter maintains the poetic acrostic order, the verse beginning with the letter peh precedes the verse beginning with ayin. Why would Lamentations deviate from the usual alphabetical order? At the level of peshat, one might appeal to the fluidity of the ancient Hebrew aleph-bet, where the order of ayin and peh was not yet fixed in the biblical period. If this is the case, then there is nothing unusual or meaningful about having different orders since each reflects a legitimate order at that time.[3]

On a more homiletical level, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 104b) offers a penetrating insight. The Hebrew word peh means “mouth,” and ayin means “eye.” The author here put his mouth, that is, words, before what he saw. In chapter 1, the author evaluates the crisis with his eyes, in that he reflects silently, and then calculates his words of response. But in chapter 2, the author responds first with words (peh) that emerge spontaneously and reflect his raw emotions.

In the first section of chapter 3, the author sinks further into his sorrow and despairs of his relationship with God (verses 1-20). However, in the midst of his deepest sorrow, he suddenly fills with hope in God’s ultimate fairness (3:21-41). The sudden switch in tone is fascinating:

And I said, My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord; Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul remembers them, and is bowed down inside me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. The grace of the Lord has not ceased, and His compassion does not fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. (Lam. 3:18-24)

The final section of chapter 3 then vacillates between despair, hope in God, and a call to repentance:

Let him sit alone and be patient, when He has laid it upon him. Let him put his mouth to the dust — there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the smiter; let him be surfeited with mockery. For the Lord does not reject forever, but first afflicts, then pardons in His abundant kindness. For He does not willfully bring grief or affliction to man...Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in heaven: We have transgressed and rebelled, and You have not forgiven. You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us, You have slain without pity. (Lam. 3:28-43)

In chapter 4, there are further details of the destruction. Horrors are described in starker terms, climaxing with a description of compassionate mothers who ate their own children because of the dreadful famine preceding the destruction (4:9-10). The author blames God for the destruction (4:11), blames Israel for her sins (4:13), and expresses anger at Israel’s enemies (4:21-22). In both chapters 3 and 4, the poetic order remains with the peh before the ayin, reflecting the author’s unprocessed painful feelings. The author’s conflicting emotions create choppy order and logic:

Those who were slain with the sword are better than those who are slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken by want of the fruits of the field. The hands of compassionate women have

boiled their own children; they were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people. The Lord has accomplished His fury; He has poured out His fierce anger, and has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations...It was for the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her. (Lam. 4:9-13)

Chapter 5 opens with a desperate appeal to God, a profound hope that He will restore His relationship with Israel. After further descriptions of the sufferings, the book ends wondering whether the Israelites would ever renew their relationship with God:

You, O Lord, are enthroned forever; Your throne is from generation to generation. Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long? Turn us to You, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us. (Lam. 5:19-22)

Such a painful confusion leaves the reader uneasy. The author does not propose any solutions or resolution to the state of destruction. Reflecting this passionate plea, chapter 5 has no aleph-bet acrostic at all. With no clear end of the exile in sight, the author loses all sense of order. Perhaps the fact that chapter 5 still contains 22 verses suggests a vestige of hope and order amidst the breakdown of the destruction and exile.

To review: the aleph-bet pattern goes from being completely ordered in chapter 1, to a break in that order for three chapters. The last chapter does not follow the controlled aleph-bet order at all, signifying a complete emotional outburst by the community. The book ends on a troubling note, questioning whether or not it is too late for Israel to renew her relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Although Lamentations attempts to make sense of the catastrophe of the destruction, powerful and often conflicting emotions break the ordered poetic patterns. This sacred work captures the religious struggle to make sense of the world in a time of tragedy and God's ways and the effort to rebuild damaged relationships with God following a crisis.

Our emotional state in the aftermath of tragedy often follows the pattern of Lamentations — we begin with an effort to make sense of the misfortune, but then our mouths come before what we see — that is, our deeper turbulent emotions express themselves. Ideally, we come full circle until we again turn to God. Our expression of persistent hope has kept us alive as a people.

In the wake of catastrophe, people have the choice to abandon faith, or hide behind shallow expressions of faith, but even while emotionally understandable, both are incomplete responses. We must maturely accept that we do not understand everything about how God operates. At the same time, we must not negate our human perspective. We must not ignore our emotions and anxieties. In the end, we are humbled by our smallness and helplessness — and our lack of understanding of the larger picture. Through this process, the painful realities of life should lead to a higher love and awe of God.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The remainder of this chapter was adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Confronting Tragedy: A Perspective from Jewish Tradition," in Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (NY: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 279-295. This chapter is predicated on the assumption that the Book of Lamentations is a unified poem that should be treated as a literary unit. For a scholarly defense of this position, see Elie Assis, "The Unity of the Book of Lamentations," CBQ 71 (2009), pp. 306-329.

[2] Walter Bruggemann observes that Psalms 37 and 145 also are arranged according to the aleph-bet sequence and similarly display orderliness (*Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* [Oregon: Cascade Books, 2007], p. 3).

[3] See Aaron Demsky, "A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and its Implications for the

History of the Alphabet," *Tel Aviv* 4:1-2 (1977), pp. 14-27; Mitchell First, "Using the Pe-Ayin Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms," *JSOT* 38:4 (2014), pp. 471-485. First notes that in the Dead Sea text of *Lamentations*, the peh verse precedes the ayin verse in chapter 1, as well. For an attempt to explain the intentional deviation of the acrostics based on word patterns, see Ronald Benun, "Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in Ekha," at http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_55.pdf.

* National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. He teaches advanced Tanakh classes at Yeshiva University, and is the author of many books and articles on Tanakh topics.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/lessons-goses-dying-person>

Parshas Matos Maasei -- Do you know your Alef Bais?

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Rabbi listened closely to their story and to their research. He then said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Rabbi Rhine is on summer vacation for some weeks. During this time, with his blessing, I am posting some of his outstanding archived Devrei Torah. To find more of Rabbi Rhine's Devrei Torah, go to Teach613.org and search by parsha.

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-maasei-do-you-know-your-alef-bais/>

Mattos Mas'ei -- Even Balance Needs To Be Balanced

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

As we reach the end of Moshe's life, Hashem tells Moshe clearly that his time in this world is limited. He has one more mission of leadership and then it would be time for him to depart this world. *"Avenge the vengeance of the Children of*

Israel from the Midianites; after you will be gathered unto your nation." (Bamidbar 31:2) The Torah describes how Moshe then began instructing the Jewish people in this final mission. Rash"i notes, based on the Sifri, that Moshe engaged joyously and wholeheartedly with this mitzvah. Even though he understood fully that once this mitzvah was completed his life would end, Moshe did not drag his feet. Instead, he engaged in this final mission with alacrity and joy.

It is beyond difficult for us to begin to put ourselves into Moshe's shoes. He was a man who lived in Heaven, learning privately from G-d and speaking privately with G-d, for a total of one hundred and twenty days; a man who understood G-d's purpose in the world, and our place in G-d's world, as no man before or after; the one individual chosen to bring the Torah from Heaven to Earth, from a realm of spirituality to a realm of physicality. Nonetheless, when the Torah tells us of Moshe's emotional framework, it is intended for us to learn from him, to understand him as best we can and to aspire to reach as close as we can to his lofty, noble G-dliness.

If we try, though, to imagine Moshe's situation, it doesn't quite sit right. He was just informed of the upcoming schedule of events in the history of the Jewish people. First, there will be a war, and then it will be time for him to pass away and for his successor, Yehoshua, to begin to lead the nation. As human beings, we fear death and are pained by it. The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni tells us that when Avrohom bound his son Yitzchak on the altar, Avrohom was crying bitter tears. Despite his willingness to fulfill G-d's will no matter what the cost, he was human and he felt the pain. How is it that Moshe did not feel the anguish of his impending death, and was able to engage in this mitzvah with pure joy?

Moshe was certainly human and must have felt the pain of his death. However, unlike Avrohom, that death was not part of the mitzvah at hand. When Avrohom focused on the mitzvah at hand, he saw the loss of his dear son Yitzchok. When Moshe focused on the mitzvah at hand, all he focused on was the war with Midian. Moshe was able to live in the moment and lose sight of what would come afterwards. In this fashion, he was able to engage in this mitzvah with the same joy and alacrity that he did for every other mitzvah.

If we again try to put ourselves in Moshe's shoes, though, this still doesn't quite sit right. Moshe was called Moshe Rabbeinu – Moshe, Our Teacher -- for he was the penultimate wise man. He was one who had a unique capacity to see the whole picture, to never lose the forest for the trees. His wisdom was based in balancing all the factors and keeping them all in mind. The Oral Law which Moshe taught us, at its core, is the knowledge of any and all relevant Torah factors in any given practical situation and properly balancing all those factors to determine a course of action. Moshe was a man whose greatness was bound up entirely in leading a life of careful balance. How could such a man lose himself so completely in his current mission that he could even momentarily forget that his own death is imminent?

I would suggest that Moshe understood that even balance has to be balanced. Hashem created us with many varied traits and abilities, and even those traits which seem detrimental have their place. Normally, losing perspective is not healthy, and Moshe was a master of maintaining perspective. Yet, he had the ability to let go and focus in when necessary, and to utilize that human trait of being swept up in the moment. Moshe saw that now was such a time. He had a mitzvah to do, and he had decided that now was the time. At that moment, he let go to do the mitzvah properly. It was time for the greatest balancing act – balancing balance itself.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Note: Rabbi Singer is leaving our community at the end of July to become the head of the Savannah Kollel, associated with Congregation B'Nai Brith Jacob. The Savannah Kollel is one of the treasures of the South, and Rabbi Singer will be a distinguished Chief Rabbi for the Kollel. Hopefully Rabbi Singer will continue to instruct us from his new position at one of the great synagogues and kollels in the South.

Matot Massei

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

[Rabbi Hefter did not send a Devar Torah this week. Watch for future Devrei Torah from Rabbi Hefter in this spot.]

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Mattot: Forgive Me, For I have Vowed

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

In Parashat Mattot we are introduced to the legal intricacies of making vows. I am using the word “vow” here in its halakhic sense, which is a commitment to perform or avoid a certain action. The rabbis of the Mishnah argued that vows can be undone if it can be proven that the one who took the vow was not fully aware of its implications. For example, R. Akiva’s father-in-law vowed not to give his daughter even a penny of his possessions, because she married an ignoramus. Years later, when he regretted his vow, he was asked if he would have still made the vow had he known that his son-in-law will become a learned man. He answered negatively, and the rabbi who happened to be R. Akiva himself declared the vow null and void. However, the rabbis also stated in the Mishnah that there is no logical or biblical basis for the practice of undoing a vow. R. Ovadia of Bertinoro explains that there was an oral tradition which allowed a court to nullify vows, but it is also possible that the process was created by the rabbis to fight the phenomenon of excessive vowing. If one would ask how can the rabbis nullify a vow which according to the Torah is binding for life, we will have to say that once the rabbis introduced the idea of a conditional vow, the possibility of undoing a vow became built into the process.

As I mentioned, Mishnaic rabbis faced a serious problem as people tended to take vows upon themselves and to swear in an uncalled for manner. The situation was so bad that Mishnaic sages mentioned the possibility of filing for divorce because one’s spouse makes too many vows. One of those sages, Rabbi Tarphon, swore at five different occasions that a certain Halakha is incorrect and said that if he is mistaken his sons should die. That reality raises two questions: why did people feel the urge to make vows, and why were the rabbis concerned about it?

The answer to the first question is that making a vow is usually a result of weakness. We bind ourselves with a commitment which cannot be nullified and which has a religious status, so we will not be tempted to break it. When trying to start a diet, for example, one might make a vow which will deprive him of a favorite activity every time he breaks the diet. In that sense vows are helpful, because they demonstrate one’s awareness of possible pitfalls in the future, and the willingness to set protective devices while still in control. This concept is beautifully illustrated in Homer’s Odyssey, as Odysseus prepares himself to pass near the dreadful sirens, mythical creatures who would entice sailors with their enchanting singing and then devour them. He tells his crewmen to tie him to the mast and plug their ears, so he alone will be able to hear the song, but will also be rendered unable to control the ship:

...first of all, we should guard against the wondrous voices of the Sirens in their flowery meadows... I alone should listen to them. But you must tie me down with cruel bonds, so I stay where I am and cannot move, standing upright at the mast. You must fix the rope at both its ends onto the mast. If I start ordering you to set me free you have to tie me down with still more rope.

It is interesting to note that the same root is used in Hebrew for tying or binding and for making a prohibitive vow – אסר. Odysseus knows that he would not be able to resist the temptation and therefore, while still in possession of his faculties, requests to be tied to the mast. When the dieter says that if he eats a piece of cake he will punish himself by not playing video games for a week, he binds himself into obedience before he is tempted.

So, if vows can help us control ourselves, why did the rabbis fear excessive vowing? Because we should be able to control ourselves without turning every commitment into a religious one, or without including a self-inflicted punishment. The dieter could replace the punishment with thoughts of fitting into more complementing clothes or feeling healthier, instead of implicating himself in new sets of regulations. This insight is also applicable to education. To succeed in parenting or teaching, there should be few rules, which can be easily forced, while the major part of the educational process should rely on the parents and teachers serving as role models.

In that vein, I suggest we read in the following manner the conclusion of the most famous nullification of vows, the Kal Nidrei, recited on the eve of Kippur

All religious vows, oaths, and prohibitions, which we unnecessarily took upon ourselves, are declared null and void. We will strive to gradually improve our behavior by sheer willpower, without the aid of fear-inducing vows and oaths. May God forgive our iniquities, and help us overcome our weaknesses and embark on a path of a greater self-awareness.

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Shavuon Matot Massei

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

What place is on your bucket list?

Perhaps you'd like to see the Eiffel tower and taste the divine pastries in Paris, France. Or maybe you want to climb Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. India? Mongolia? Alabama? Take your pick.

For me, I'd love to visit Almon Divlasaymah. That is one of the exotic sounding places listed in our Torah portion as one of the stops Israel made in its 40 year desert sojourn. I don't know exactly where it is, and I'm guessing that right now, there's nothing but lots of sand there. But because I have a personal connection to it through my ancestors, I think I'd enjoy staying there. Because if I have history with a place, it becomes precious to me in a way that the more "Instagram-worthy places that would make everyone else jealous" just can't measure up to.

Because when we travel, we not only go to a place, WE go to the place. We become transformed by it. And if we have a personal connection or can forge one, that place can transform us as well. You don't really get to see that personal transformation apart from a social media post. That's the part that's just for you. Whether that place has huge mountains or is full of sand makes no difference. The question is how you relate to it.

So it leaves me to wonder how my ancestors related to Almon Divlasaymah. Were they hungry and thirsty when they got there? Was it a metropolis or a nomadic settlement? Did they laugh at the silly-sounding name or was Divlasaymah the name of the local warlord?

Such questions to me matter a lot more than who built the Eiffel Tower.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Brandeis is 'Anything But' Bad for Observant Jews

by Rabbi Seth Winberg *

"Brandeis was founded by Jews. But, it's anything but Orthodox."

A double-page advertisement from Brandeis University bearing these words ran in June 25's issue of The New York Times Magazine, to the dismay of many observant Jews. Thankfully, the university president sent a written apology to Orthodox students less than a week after the ad ran.

I am one of the observant Jews who found the ad poorly worded and unfortunately, insensitive. I also proudly serve as

rabbi and Hillel director at Brandeis. The ad was doubly surprising — almost shocking — to me as someone intimately involved in Jewish life at Brandeis, given how inclusive and comfortable the university is for Jews, including observant Jews.

Brandeis was a trailblazer in making Jewish observance comfortable. It was the first university in the country to have strictly kosher dining under university auspices, thanks to the pioneering efforts of its first Hillel director, Rabbi Irving “Yitz” Greenberg, in 1957. Today there is kosher food)and plenty of other food(available in both dining halls.

Brandeis has had an eruv to make Sabbath observance easier for the last 40 years. In fact, another predecessor at Hillel)a Reform rabbi(joined with local Orthodox rabbis and the university to construct it. For many students today, checking the eruv is a social highlight of the week.

More recently, I helped the athletics center offer an option for separate swimming hours for women and men, which benefits both observant Jews and Muslims.

There is a strong culture of communal Shabbat dinners at Brandeis, and significantly for the observant, Shabbat lunches. Students coordinate Orthodox services, extracurricular Torah learning, and plenty of social activities. We also offered Sephardic High Holiday services and cultural events this year for a steadily growing community.

In a partnership between Hillel and the Orthodox Union, students have had the Torah guidance and home hospitality of two Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus educators for the last 23 years. Leading Orthodox educators from Israel and the U.S. often visit to teach Torah.

A popular Chabad House is just off campus, and many students move between all these opportunities comfortably.

On most major Jewish holidays and for all of Passover, there are no classes. When the current university administration determined in 2021 that it could not allow travel off campus during the pandemic, it undertook — at great expense — to make sure Passover could be observed on campus for the entire week. It was a remarkable achievement of what can be done when students, professionals, professors and the administration work together.

Students have access to one of the world’s most distinguished Jewish studies departments, and professors in various fields who are personally observant. Many faculty at Brandeis are committed to the Jewish community and care deeply about students.

For all of these reasons, we should not let the ad be the last word or leave us with a false impression.

Of course, the university does not conform to or require anyone to follow Jewish practices. Professor Marvin Fox, who taught at Brandeis from 1974 to 1993, once wrote in *CrossCurrents*, the academic journal about religion, that “At Brandeis you know you are in a Jewish neighborhood,” and also at “a ‘Jewish’ university which is a distinguished member of the larger academic world.”

Brandeis is, in fact, not Orthodox or Reform or Conservative — it is religiously neutral. And it is a respectful and comfortable environment for observant Jews)not only students(.

There are virtually no other schools in North America with the combined infrastructure of Hillel at Brandeis and Brandeis University for the full range of Jewish expression and commitment.

None of this negates the fact that Brandeis is also an excellent school for students of all sorts of other Jewish commitments and for students of other backgrounds. It just means that observant Jews can live, study, research and work in a normal academic institution without compromising on their religious integrity.

To contact the author, email opinion@forward.com.

* Rabbinical Ordination, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah)2011(. Reprinted from the *Forward*)July 5, 2020(.

Rav Kook Torah **Massei: The Merit of Building the Land of Israel**

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

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

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

The Yemenite Visitor

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

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

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

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

"What is disturbing you, my son?"

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

"Ask, my son, ask."

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

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

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

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

"Sit," the rabbi repeated.

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

The Dream

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/MASSEI-74.htm>

Priorities (Matot Masei 5770, 5779)

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

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

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

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

The members of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, though, begin to have different thoughts. Seeing that the land through which they were travelling was ideal for raising cattle, they decide that they would prefer to stay there, to the east of the Jordan, and propose this to Moses. Unsurprisingly, he is angry at the suggestion: *“Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, ‘Are your brothers to go to war while you stay here? Why would you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the Lord has given them?’”* (Num. 32:6–7). He reminds them of the disastrous consequences of the earlier discouragement on the part of the spies. The whole nation will suffer.

This decision would show not only that they are ambivalent about God’s gift of the land but also that they have learned nothing from history.

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

Then they came up to him and said, *“We would like to build sheepfolds for our flocks and towns for our children. But we will then arm ourselves and go as an advance guard before the Israelites until we have established them in their home. Meanwhile our children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance. We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan.”* Num. 32:16–19

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

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

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

As Rashi notes:

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

A Midrash² makes the same point by way of an ingenious interpretation of a verse in Ecclesiastes: *“The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left”* (Eccl. 10:2). The Midrash identifies “right” with Torah and life: *“He brought the fire of a religion to them from his right hand”* (Deut. 33:2). “Left,” by contrast, refers to worldly goods:

*Long life is in her right hand;
In her left hand are riches and honour.* Prov. 3:16

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

This turned out to be not a minor incident in the wilderness long ago, but rather, a consistent pattern throughout much of Jewish history. The fate of Jewish communities, for the most part, was determined by a single factor: their decision, or lack of decision, to put children and their education first. Already in the first century, Josephus was able to write: *“The result of our thorough education in our laws, from the very dawn of intelligence, is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls.”*^[3] The Rabbis ruled that *“any town that lacks children at school is to be excommunicated”* (Shabbat 119b). Already in the first century, the Jewish community in Israel had established a network of schools at which attendance was compulsory (Bava Batra 21a) – the first such system in history.

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

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

The most important item in the family budget is the tuition fee that must be paid each term to the teacher of the younger boys’ school. Parents will bend the sky to educate their son. The mother, who has charge of household accounts, will cut the family food costs to the limit if necessary, in order to pay for her son’s schooling. If the worst comes to the worst, she will pawn her cherished pearls in order to pay for the school term. The boy must study, the boy must become a good Jew – for her the two are synonymous.^[6]

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

^[2] Numbers Rabbah 22:9.

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

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

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

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

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

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE:

]1[How was Reuben and Gad's request not to enter the Land of Israel different from the previous story of the spies?

]2[Do you think the request these two tribes made was reasonable?

]3[How does Rashi explain Moses' criticism of Reuben and Gad, and his message to them?

]4[How does Rabbi Sacks take this criticism further, contrasting their priorities with the priorities of the Jewish people throughout history?

]5[Why have Jews always been so passionate about their children's education, and what impact has this had in Jewish history?

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/matot/priorities/>

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.

The Empowering Art of Framing

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2023

There are many positions on a baseball team, and one of the most grueling is that of the catcher, the one who crouches behind home plate and catches 100-mile-an-hour fastballs from the pitcher while cracking his kneecaps.

Baseball analysts claim that one of the most valuable things a catcher provides is something called "framing." This is the art of catching the ball in a way that when it's just off the edge of the strike zone and can be called a ball, the way the catcher positions his glove when grabbing the incoming pitch makes it look like a strike.

The moral of the story?

You, too, should be good at "framing."

Travelogue

The opening words of the Torah portion of Massei recount the Jewish journey through the desert:

These are the journeys of the children of Israel who left the land of Egypt in their legions, under the charge of Moses and Aaron.

Moses recorded their starting points for their journeys according to the word of G d, and these were their journeys with their starting points.¹

Why is it important to list the journeys? The Torah isn't a history book, nor is it a travelogue, so what's the purpose of this list?

The Midrash explains:

It is analogous to a king whose son became sick, so he took him to a faraway place to have him healed. On the way back, the father began citing all the stages of their journey, saying to him, "This is where we sat, here we were cold, and here you had a headache." Likewise, G d

*instructed Moses to list all the places the Jewish people angered G d. Thus, it is stated, "These are the journeys."*²

So it turns out that recounting all the journeys was to recall the difficult times and challenges the people underwent as they traveled through the vast desert.

But that doesn't really answer our question, what's the point? Why go through the psychologically and emotionally painful process of listing these locations and their negative associations? Why bring up this national trauma now that it was all behind them and they were poised to finally enter the Promised Land?

Failure Is a Springboard

The purpose of this collective therapy session was to re-experience the pitfalls and recognize them for what they really were — springboards for growth.

To explain:

Perhaps one of the more refreshing ideas developed in the canon of Chassidic work is the notion that every "fall" is to facilitate greater growth. From things as banal as a kid on a trampoline pressing down on the fabric to soar high in the air, all the way to deep challenges of grief, pain, and trauma, it is axiomatic that such challenges exist only as a springboard to lift the protagonist to greater heights.

The thing is, however, in the thick of the challenge, it is difficult to see it. Of course, "hindsight is 20/20," so looking back, it's easy to see how losing your job pushed you to finally start your own successful business. "All's well that ends well," they tell you. But in those weeks, months, or years without a job, when you were racking up considerable debt, it's almost certain that you didn't think you were on the way up.

For this reason, it is important to pause after the fact, after you have reached safe ground and are indeed "up," to revisit the "down" and reframe it for yourself. By doing so, you are able to gain proper perspective and understand how those low moments were, in fact, exactly what you needed to bring you to the Promised Land.

And next time things go off the rails and life looks like a dumpster fire, you're ready. You know that it's only a matter of time until the sun peaks above the horizon and you inevitably fling up right through your next glass ceiling.

So, just prior to entering the Land, after a long and arduous journey replete with many "downs," the people revisited and reexamined all of those downs, now able to understand how they were really just springboards for the next and final "up" — to bring them to the doorstep of redemption.

The precision of the Midrash's analogy is now clear: The king points out all the locations with negative associations on the way back home. In the analogy of life, this is exactly how it works: on the way down, while we experience material, moral, and spiritual pitfalls, we are only able to see them as negative. It is on the climb back up that we can point and say, "Ah... now I see how losing my job was the best thing that could have happened to me!"

Proper Framing

Oh, how tremendously healing it is to be a good framer! When you take the time and effort to look through time and see how past challenges and failures are what brought you to the current plateau, it is eminently empowering.

Think back to past failures or challenging moments. If you're human, they must have happened. And now, take a moment to see if and how they were ultimately necessary steps to your next success. If you can't see it right away, be a persistent framer, and try again. Be stubborn, and you'll find it.

And when you rack up a record of failures-turned-success, you will possess an invaluable asset: practical immunity to the next challenge. Of course, if and when the inevitable hit-on-your-head comes your way it's going to hurt, it will be

challenging, and it may just stretch your nerves and your wherewithal to the limit.

But you know the secret. If you're falling this hard and this low, the diving board of life is going to toss you up so high, it will be exhilarating. It's hard to see it right now, but it's right around the corner.

Hold on tight, and you'll be there very soon.³

FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 33:1-2.
2. Midrash Bamidbar Rabah 23:3, cited in Rashi to the verse, with slight differences.
3. This essay is based on Likkutei Sichot, vol. 18 p. 393-395.

* Writer, editor and rabbi; editor of Jewish Learning Institute's popular Torah Studies program,

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5175324/jewish/The-Empowering-Art-of-Framing.htm

Matot Masei: To Jericho and Beyond!

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

To Jericho and Beyond!

These are the commandments and ordinances that G-d commanded the Israelites through Moses in the plains of Moab, by the Jordan River opposite Jericho.)Bamidbar. 36:13(

Jericho is the first locale that Joshua conquered when the Israelites crossed into the Land of Israel.

Allegorically, transforming Canaan into the Land of Israel means transforming our bodies and animating souls into holy entities. In this context, Jericho, the preliminary conquest, alludes to the most external aspect of our bodies and animating souls, our means of expression: action, speech, and thought. The word Jericho means “*scent*,” and scent is an external aspect of our being, something that other people can readily sense.

Conquering our modes of expression is the key to ultimately sanctifying and transforming our emotions)alluded to by the seven nations of Canaan(and intellect)alluded to by the future conquest of the three nations of Transjordan(, just as Jericho was the “key” fortress that “unlocked” the way into the Land of Israel.

The path toward spiritual growth and life therefore begins with learning how to exercise control over action, speech, and thought. From there, we can proceed to refining our emotions and intellect.

— from *Daily Wisdom* 3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Shabbat Parashat Matot-Masei

5783 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Oaths and Vows

The parsha of Matot begins with a passage about vows and oaths and their annulment. It uses vocabulary that was later to be adopted and adapted for Kol Nidrei, the annulment of vows on the eve of Yom Kippur. Its position here, though – near the end of the book of Numbers – is strange.

The Torah has been describing the last stages in the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land. The command has been given to divide the land by lot between the tribes. Moses has been told by God to prepare for his death. He asks God to appoint a successor, which He does. The role goes to Joshua, Moses' apprentice for many years. The narrative then breaks off to make way for an extended account of the sacrifices to be brought on the various days of the year. Following that comes the section with which parashat Matot begins, about vows and oaths.

Why is it here? There is a superficial answer. There is a verbal link with the penultimate verse of the previous parsha:

"These shall you offer to the Lord on your festivals, in addition to your vows and your freewill offerings." Num. 29:39

Having mentioned vows, the Torah now states the laws that apply to them. That is one explanation.

However there is another answer, one that goes to the very heart of the project on which the Israelites were about to embark once they had crossed the Jordan and conquered the land. One problem, perhaps the problem, to which the Torah is an answer is: Can freedom and order coexist in the human sphere? Can there be a society which is both free and just at the same time? The Torah sets out for us the other alternatives. There can be freedom and chaos. That was the world full of violence before the Flood. And there can be order without freedom. That was the Egypt from which the Israelites were liberated. Is there a third alternative? And if so, how is it created?

The answer the Torah gives has to do with language. Recall that it was with language that God created the world: "And God said, Let there be... and there was..." One of the first gifts God gave humanity was language. When the Torah says that "God formed man from the dust of the land and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7), the Targum translates the

last phrase as "and man became a speaking being." For Judaism, speaking is life itself.

However, Judaism is particularly interested in one unusual use of language. The Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin called it "performative utterance." [1] This happens when we use language not to describe something but to do something. So, for instance, when a groom says to his bride under the chupah, "Behold you are betrothed to me," he is not describing a marriage, he is getting married. When in ancient times the Beit Din declared the New Moon, they were not making a statement of fact. They were creating a fact, they were turning the day into the New Moon.

The key example of a performative utterance is a promise. When I promise you that I will do something, I am creating something that did not exist before, namely an obligation. This fact, small though it might seem, is the foundation of Judaism.

A mutual promise – X pledges himself to do certain things for Y, and Y commits himself to do other things for X – is called a covenant, and Judaism is based on covenant, specifically the covenant made between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai, which bound them and still to this day binds us. In human history, it is the supreme case of a performative utterance.

Two philosophers understood the significance of the act of promising to the moral life. One was Nietzsche. This is what he said:

To breed an animal with the prerogative to promise – is that not precisely the paradoxical task which nature has set herself with regard to humankind? Is it not the real problem of humankind?... Man himself will really have to become reliable, regular, necessary, even in his own self-image, so that he, as someone making a promise is, is answerable to his own future! That is precisely what constitutes the long history of the origins of responsibility. On the Genealogy of Morality [2]

The other was Hannah Arendt, who in essence explained what Nietzsche meant. Human affairs are fraught with unpredictability. That is because we are free. We do not know how other people will behave or how they will respond to an act of ours. So we can never be sure of the consequences of our own decisions. Freedom seems to rob the human world of order. We can tell how inanimate objects will behave under different conditions. We can be reasonably sure of how animals will behave. But we cannot tell in advance how humans

will react. How then can we create an orderly society without taking away people's freedom?

The answer is the act of promising. When I promise to do something, I am freely placing myself under an obligation to do something in the future. If I am the kind of person who is known to keep his word, I have removed one element of unpredictability from the human world. You can rely on me, since I have given my word. When I promise, I voluntarily bind myself. It is this ability of humans to voluntarily commit themselves to do, or refrain from doing, certain acts that generates order in the relations between human beings without the use of coercive force. [3]

"When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath binding himself to an obligation, he must not break his word; whatever he speaks, that he must fulfil" (Num. 30:3). It is no accident that this, the second verse of parashat Matot, is stated shortly before the Israelites approach the Promised Land. The institution of promising, of which vows and oaths to God are a supreme example, is essential to the existence of a free society. Freedom depends upon people keeping their word.

One instance of how this plays out in real life appears later in the parsha. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, decide that they would rather live to the east of the Jordan where the land is more suitable for their livestock. After a fraught conversation with Moses, who accuses them of shirking their responsibilities to the rest of the people, they agree to be on the front lines of the army until the conquest of the land is complete. Everything depends on their keeping their word.

All social institutions in a free society depend on trust, and trust means honouring our promises, doing what we say we will do. When this breaks down, the very future of freedom is at risk. There is a classic example of this in Tanach. It appears in the book of Jeremiah, where the Prophet is describing the society of his time, when people could no longer be trusted to keep their word:

They bend their tongues like bows;
They are valorous in the land for treachery,
not for honesty;
They advance from evil to evil.
They do not heed Me – declares the Lord.
Beware of your friends;
Trust not even a brother,

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For every one of them is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer.

Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth.

They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning.

You live in the midst of deceit; in their deceit they refuse to heed Me – declares the Lord. *er.* 9:2–5

That was the condition of a society that was about to lose its freedom to the Babylonians. It never fully recovered.

If trust breaks down, social relationships break down. Society will then depend on law enforcement agencies or some other use of force. When force is widely used, society is no longer free. The only way free human beings can form collaborative and cooperative relationships without recourse to force is by the use of verbal undertakings honoured by those who make them.

Freedom needs trust. Trust needs people to keep their word, and keeping your word means treating words as holy, vows and oaths as sacrosanct. Only under very special and precisely formulated circumstances can you be released from your undertakings. That is why, as the Israelites approached the Holy Land where they were to create a free society, they had to be reminded of the sacred character of vows and oaths.

The temptation to break your word when it is to your advantage to do so can sometimes be overwhelming. That is why belief in God – a God who oversees all we think, say, and do, and who holds us accountable to our commitments – is so fundamental. Although it sounds strange to us now, the father of toleration and liberalism, John Locke, held that citizenship should not be extended to atheists because, not believing in God, they could not be trusted to honour their word.^[4]

Understanding this, we can now appreciate that the appearance of laws about vows and oaths at the end of the book of Numbers, as the Israelites are approaching the land of Israel, is no accident, and the moral is still relevant today. A free society depends on trust. Trust depends on keeping your word. That is how humans imitate God – by using language to create. Words create moral obligations, and moral obligations, undertaken responsibly and honoured faithfully, create the possibility of a free society. So never break a promise. Always do what you say you are going to do. If we fail to keep our word, eventually we will lose our freedom.

[1] J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. Carol Diethe and ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 35–36.

[3] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 243–44.

[4] John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689).

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

This week's double portion records how the Jews finally cross the Jordan River on their way to conquer the Promised Land. The tribes of Gad and Reuven and half the tribe of Menashe possess a great multitude of cattle, and "paradise" for cattle is good grazing land, which happens to be what these two and a half tribes find in their present location of Trans-Jordan. They then petition Moses with a special request. "If you would grant us a favor, let this land be given to us as our permanent property, and do not bring us across the Jordan." (Numbers 32:5)

Moses' response is sharp. "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here? Why are you trying to discourage the Israelites from crossing over to the land that God has given them? This is the same thing your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land" (Numbers 32:6–8). Moses' reference is an especially damning one: just as the scouts decided to remain in the desert because they lacked the courage and will to fight for the Promised Land, you are acting similar to them by your desire to stay where you are, saving yourselves from the harrowing experience of war. And Moses makes this comparison even though Trans-Jordan is considered to be part of the holy land (Mishnah Kelim 1,10).

What moved these two and a half tribes to remain in Trans-Jordan? According to Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm, they petitioned not to have to cross the Jordan because of their cattle, which expresses a certain degree of materialistic greed on their part; it doesn't take a great flight of the imagination to see the correspondence between cattle and grazing lands in those days to economic opportunities in the work place today.

Why do Jews continue to live outside of Israel, further away than the other side of the Jordan – on the other side of the Atlantic? Because they've found good grazing lands for their cattle and it's a shame to give that up, especially since our present-day descendants of Gad and Menashe rarely question a contemporary Rabbinic authority about their choice. If they did, he would more than likely repeat Moses' message "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here?" (Numbers 32:61).

After all, world Jewry has certainly benefited from the State of Israel, ever since its inception and to this very day. After the Holocaust, which resulted in the tragic loss of 1/3 of our people and 4/5 of our religious, intellectual and cultural leadership, it seemed as if Judaism had finally faded from the world stage of viable "peoples", nations and religions. The renowned historian Alfred Toynbee called the Jews a "fossil" in the history he published in 1946, the Chief Rabbi of Rome converted to

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Christianity and immediately following the Holocaust, conversion was rampant on every campus in America.

Not only did world Jewry experience a miraculous renaissance after the declaration of Israeli statehood – and then again with the liberation of Jerusalem after the Six Day War in 1967 – but Israel is now the greatest provider of religious and educational leadership for Jewish communities throughout the world as well as the most effective fount of inspiration for searching and struggling assimilated Jews whose lives become significantly transformed through programs like Birthright Israel. All of the successful diaspora Jewish communities today owe their development in no small measure to the Jewish State.

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama gives a slightly different interpretation. The author of the *Akedat Yitzchak* describes the two and a half tribes as practical materialists who nevertheless are planning to eventually join their siblings in Israel's heartland – but only eventually, not right now. At present, the personal needs of the family and the tribe must come first – until the leader of the family can amass sufficient material goods to make the big move to the middle east a less risky venture. Their personal needs – and not historic Israel's national needs – must come first. Therefore, Moses took them to task.

The Ohr Hachayim approaches the situation in its simplest, most "religious" terms: suggesting that the two and a half tribes built their argument around Divine intervention: "The land which God conquered on behalf of the congregation of Israel is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle." (32:41). In other words, this is the land that God conquered for us and therefore this is the land we wish to remain in. If God wants us somewhere else, let Him take us there, let Him conquer that land too. Until then, this is where we're going to stay and this is where our cattle will stay. It is good for our cattle and therefore it is good for us.

In many ways, the Ohr Hachayim's reading sees the two and a half tribes as being the counterparts of the devotees of *Natura Karta*. They are waiting for God Himself to bring them to Israel – and if not God, then at least His Messiah! When God is good and ready to redeem Israel completely, He'll do it in His own time. Everything depends on God, and we are more than happy to wait it out in our pleasant grazing land until then. ...

The truth is that Gad, Reuven and half of Menashe had forgotten their history. They cannot rest on their grazing laurels while the rest of the nation fights their wars for them. When the Israelites reached the Reed Sea chased by the Egyptian hordes they asked Moses to pray to God. "Why are you crying out to me?" God says to Moses. "Speak to the Israelites and let them start moving." (Exodus

14:15). The sea does not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav and Caleb ben Yefuna jump in.

Similarly, when Moses tells the two and a half tribes that they have to bear arms and fight, he's really pointing out that God's promise to Israel is that everyone has to be partners – God with the nation, and the nation with one another, sharing in a mutual responsibility and privilege. At the end of the day, if our fledgling State proves to be even more vulnerable than we think by dint of less manpower in war and a smaller population than is required, Jews will have only themselves to blame for not rising to the challenge offered by the greatest Jewish adventure in 2000 years.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
"The Kiss of Hope"

Would you ever imagine that our holy Sages had a lot to say about a kiss? Would we not assume that kisses would be judged unworthy of their consideration?

But such is not the case. They had much to say about kisses.

The significance of the kiss was brought home to me recently when I came across a street sign advertising a film. It read, "Is not a kiss the very signature of love?" Indeed it is, so much so that the kiss plays a role in the spiritual realm. Thus, the Song of Songs, the biblical book which is traditionally interpreted as a description of the passionate love affair between God and His people, begins with the phrase, "Let Him give me of the kisses of His mouth."

The Midrash (Genesis Rabbah 70:12) distinguishes between three significant types of kisses. One is the "kiss of greatness," which is exemplified by the prophet Samuel's kissing Saul when he anointed him king. Another is the "kiss of special occasions"—Aaron's kissing Moses upon their reunion. The third kiss is the "kiss of separation," the kiss given at the moment we take leave from one another. It is the "kiss of departure".

This third kiss comes with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we are bidding farewell to a beloved friend and are saddened to say goodbye. On the other hand, we are leaving for a reason—to encounter a new friend or a new opportunity. This is a tearful kiss, but it is also a kiss of anticipation, a kiss of hope, a kiss which signifies the beginning of a new journey.

In the second of this week's two Torah portions, Matot and Masei (Numbers 30:2-36:13), we read of no less than fifty such journeys. The Torah describes the long and arduous procession of the people of Israel as they left Egypt and marched toward the Promised Land. They stopped at fifty stations along the way.

We can assume that after they settled in to one station, they had some reluctance to leave a familiar place, a place of shelter, and to plunge ahead into the unknown. But we can also imagine the joyous emotions they experienced, knowing that they were taking another step toward their desired destination.

This is the way of all journeys. Moreover, it is the very essence of life itself. We settle in to one place, to one role, to one stage of life. It becomes familiar to us, and we feel comfortable there. Moving on to a new place, a new role, a new stage of life, feels threatening. Often we are tempted to remain in that place, to continue to live in the status quo. We don't want to kiss this familiar station goodbye.

On the other hand, we often find this old place tiring, boring. We no longer feel the challenges we felt when we first came to this station, to this point in our lives. We relish the opportunity to move on, in spite of the uncertainty that lies ahead. We look forward to the novelty of a new place, a new role, a new stage of life.

There is a contemporary poet whose works I admire. Here is how he puts it:
 I envy those
 who live in two places
 New York, say, and London...
 There is always the anticipation
 of the change, the chance that what is wrong
 is the result of where you are. I have
 always loved both the freshness of
 arriving and the relief of leaving. With
 two homes every move would be a
 homecoming.
 I am not even considering the weather, hot
 Or cold, dry or wet: I am talking about hope.
 (Gerald Locklin, *Where We Are*).

It is no secret that many of us find the first fifty or so verses of Parshat Masei repetitive and dry. "These were the marches of the Israelites who started out from the land of Egypt... Their marches, by starting points, were as follows: They set out from Rameses... And encamped at Succoth. They set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham... They set out from Etham and turned about toward Pi Hahiroth, which faces Baal Zephon, and they encamped before Migdol... They set out from the hills of Abarim and encamped at the steppes of Moab, at the Jordan near Jericho..."

Of what possible interest can this long list of stations in the wilderness be to the average reader? What can he possibly learn from these verses?

Commentators throughout the ages have struggled with these very questions and have offered various approaches to answering them. I would like to advance an original approach, a metaphorical one. We suggest that just as the Israelites embarked upon a journey when they left Egypt, so do we all embark upon a journey the moment we are born. This journey entails many stations along the way before it is

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completed. Each station is necessary for the individual's development, but no one station can be permanent.

Psychologists discuss the concept of "developmental tasks." Each stage of life has its developmental task. The infant must learn to crawl, but his failure to move on from the crawling stage to the walking stage is a symptom of pathology. The two- or three-year-old who has mastered the human need to become attached to his parents must soon proceed to the next stage and learn to separate from them.

While all this is true at the physical level, it is also true of intellectual development. The ten-year-old who is still reading the books he read when he was five has a stunted intellect. But so does the fifty-year-old who has not transcended the literary interests he had when he was twenty.

The need to progress from station to station is especially true when it comes to spirituality. It has been said, correctly, that children are naturally spiritual. But childlike spirituality cannot slake the spiritual thirst of the adolescent. And the adult whose spirituality has not progressed beyond adolescence is a spiritual cripple. The inner resources that serve the adolescent well are of no help in coping with the challenges of adulthood.

And so it goes from stage to stage until the end of life.

Rabbi Judah ben Tema put it this way: "Five years old is the age to begin studying Scripture; ten for Mishnah; thirteen for the obligation of the commandments; fifteen for the study of Talmud; eighteen for marriage; twenty for seeking a livelihood; thirty for full strength; forty for understanding; fifty for giving counsel; sixty for old age; seventy for ripe old age; eighty for exceptional strength; and ninety for a bent back; at one hundred, one is as if he were dead and had left and gone from the world." (Avot 5:25)

Fifty stations were necessary for the Israelites to reach the Promised Land. At least as many are required of all of us if we are to reach our God-given potential as mature human beings. As we journey from station to station in our lives, we need to learn to kiss the kiss of departure, which is also the kiss of hope.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

The most important lesson every leader should hear. This is what I believe Moshe taught us just before he passed away. In Parshat Pinchas, Hashem gives Moshe the sad news that he will die before entering into the Holy Land. Immediately Moshe's response was, "Please God appoint my successor in my lifetime."

And what was the reason why this was so important? "Velo tiyeh adat Hashem katzon asher ein lahem roeh." – "In order that the

people of the Lord should not be like sheep without a shepherd.” (Bamidbar 27:17)

Now, many of our mefarshim want to know why there are so many words. We know of course that the Torah always uses the briefest possible way to present an idea. Surely the Torah here should have said that the nation should not be ‘katzon bli roeh’ – like sheep without a shepherd? Why is it ‘katzon asher ein lahem roeh’ – sheep who ‘don’t have any shepherd for them’? So the Ktav Sofer explains beautifully. He says this is a long-winded approach in order to include the word ‘lahem’ – for them. What Moshe was saying to Hashem about his successor was that the nation needed to have somebody who was there for them, not someone who’s there for the sake of their own ego, power or control. Rather, the mark of a true leader is somebody who is there in the interests of those who they are serving.

Now that’s such an important lesson for all of us. We should be parents for the sake of our children, teachers for the sake of those who are in the classroom, heads of communities for the sake of the members of the communities, and of course heads of nations for the sake of the interests of every single citizen.

The all important message conveyed to us by Moshe is: you can only be a good shepherd if you’re there for every single member of your flock.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Putting Things in Writing Before Entering the Land of Israel – Miri Westreich

Parshat Masei, which is the final portion of the Book of Bamidbar, marks the seamline between the desert and the entrance into the Land of Israel. It is a moment of transition which constitutes a culmination of all that was, but also provides a peek into the future.

Those who log onto the portion of Masei without having read the entire account of the Israelites’ journeys may find themselves somewhat perplexed, as they encounter verses with apparent missing information: Why did the People have no water to drink at Refidim? Who was it that stayed behind in Kivrot Ha’Ta’ava? What difficulty did the springs of water and the 70 palm trees serve to alleviate? And first and foremost – what are the climactic moments and the low points of this voyage through the vast and formidable wilderness? What transpired at the giving of the Torah at Sinai, the Sin of the Golden Calf and the Sin of the Spies?

All that remains of all those stories at this point are mere names of places. Only those who had followed all the previous portions closely can identify the hidden code embedded into the names that are listed, and recognize that each such name carries episodes of crisis, as well as moments of great faith. The very

fact that they are mentioned serves to echo a much greater story.

In order to try and understand the need for this encrypted list of names, let us examine the verse which introduces it and which expands on how this list was compiled:

“These are the journeys of the children of Israel, by which they went forth out of the land of Egypt by their hosts under the hand of Moshe and Aharon. And Moshe wrote their goings forth, stage by stage, by the commandment of the Lord; and these are their stages at their goings forth” (Bamidbar 33: 1-2).

The reference to Moshe as the writer of these accounts is somewhat surprising. After all, Moshe wrote the entire Torah. Why then, is this fact emphasized here of all places, when the different journeys and stops in the desert are mentioned?

The exegetes tried to explain this point in numerous ways: To show the great love for the People of Israel who withstood all the voyages (as Rashi says quoting Midrash Tanhuma: “This is likened to a king whose son was ill, and so took him on a long journey to a distant place where he might be healed. After returning home, the father recounts all the places they had been.”).

Another reason that is given is that the verse teaches us about the fashion in which Moshe wrote down all the events in the desert. He would record what all the happenings in each location as these transpired, but now he wrote down an overall summary of all he had previously recorded (as the Ohr HaChayim puts it: “It appears that the Torah wished to teach us that the sequence of the journeys was not written in a single day; rather, the events were written in the order of things as these transpired, by the command of God, starting from the time of the Exodus... in such manner that each specific journey was recorded chronologically until they arrived in the planes of Moab, at which point God told Moshe to arrange all that had been written into Torah verses in the same order as these were listed in his chronicles.”).

Let us then examine the significance of putting things in writing as a leitmotif which runs through the wanderings in the desert, with a special focus on the special need to perpetuate events in writing right before entering the Land.

The process of writing plays a significant role when any two parties enter a covenant or contract, and even more so when the covenant in question is between God and His people. Let us look at a number of examples in which this leitmotif appears – the most significant being the giving of the Torah at Sinai. This historic event was accompanied by repeated acts of writing, not only of the Tablets of the Law – “And He gave unto Moshe, when He

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had made an end of speaking with him upon mount Sinai, the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God” (Shemot 31:18) – but also of the Book of the Covenant.

In Shemot 24, the Torah gives an account of the writing of the Book of the Covenant, Sefer HaBrit, when Moshe approaches the People at Mt. Sinai and recounts the words of the Lord to the People, and they, in turn, answer “so we shall do” – na’ase. Later Moshe writes down all the words that had been spoken, then reads out to the People all he had written, upon which they answer – “so we shall do and obey” – na’ase venishma.

“And Moshe wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and built an altar under the mount, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel... And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people; and they said: All that the Lord has spoken will we do, and obey.” (Shemot 24: 4-7)

Only towards the end of this sequence does Moshe go up to receive the Tablets of the Law:

“And the Lord said unto Moshe: Come up to Me into the mount and be there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written, that you may teach them.” (Shemot 24:12)

What is described here is a dual writing process: both on God’s part as well as on the People’s part. This dual process finalizes the covenant between God and the People, which is ultimately manifest in the giving of the Torah at Sinai. Similarly, when the Second Tablets are given (in the portion of Ki-Tisa) we find the same leitmotif again – the process of writing. Moshe begs God to forgive the People, and says that should God refuse to forgive – “then blot me, I pray Thee, out of Your book which You have written” (Shemot, 32:32). It follows then that the very act of putting words in writing is what makes the covenant between the People and God valid.

Furthermore, the same leitmotif appears time and time again in the description of the giving of the Torah at Sinai in the Book of Devarim:

“These words the Lord spoke unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice, and it went on no more. And He wrote them upon two tablets of stone, and gave them unto me.” (Devarim 5:18)

It must be noted that oftentimes when the Torah speaks of the act of writing, it also cautions not to break the covenant. The warning is both for the entire People – “If you will not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awful Name, the Lord thy God. Then the Lord will make your plagues extraordinary, and the plagues of your seed,

even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance” (Devarim 28:58-59) – as well as for the individual who might have thoughts of breaking the covenant:

“And it come to pass, when he hears the words of this curse that he bless himself in his heart, saying: ‘I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart—that the watered be swept away with the dry. The Lord will not be willing to pardon him, but then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy shall be kindled against that man, and all the curse that is written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under the heaven’. (Devarim 29:18-19)

Upon entering the land, the breach in contract, which is expressed by engaging in idolatry – “Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them” (Devarim 11:16) – can be reversed in the following manner: “And you shall write them upon the door-posts of your house, and upon your gates.” (Devarim 20:11)

The theme of writing comes up once again at the end of the Book of Devarim (31:19): “Now therefore write you this song for you, and teach you it the children of Israel; put it in their mouths.” The song which is perpetuated in writing serves as a dual testimony. When the people are at a low point, during moments of hester panim (when God’s face is hidden), the written words of the song will remind the People of their God: “Then it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are come upon them, that this song shall testify before them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed; for I know their imagination how they do even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore” (Devarim 31: 21).

But no less important – the written words will also remind God Himself of His people: “... that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel” (Devarim 31:19). This testimony will ultimately give rise to the Redemption when the People return to the Land.

This notion is also reflected in Parshat Masei. Upon learning that Moshe wrote down the chronology of the journeys in the desert, and in keeping with the abovementioned examples, the following explanation presents itself: perhaps these voyages are a type of covenant between God and the People. This explanation seems all the more feasible in light of Yirmihayu’s retrospective prophecy likening the Israelites’ wanderings in the desert to the love of two betrothed persons: “Thus says the Lord: I remember the affection of your youth, the love of your espousals; how you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown” (Yirmiyahu 2: 2).

The act of writing, which is highlighted in the description of the numerous journeys in the desert, reinforces the dimension of remembrance and covenant. The wanderings in the wilderness and all that these entailed – as encoded in the list of short names; the transformation the People underwent as they moved from one location to the next, falling down and rising up again; the metamorphosis from a nation of slaves into a nation about to enter the Land; the People’s faith and the very fact that they trekked through an unsown land, a wilderness – all of these facts led to the inception of the covenant with God and served to reinforce it.

And now, at the final stop before entering the Land, there is nothing more apt than to recall the long journey upon which the People had embarked, and the physical and emotional progress they had made as they journeyed from one stop to the next. The act of writing, which symbolizes the moments of na’ase ve’nishma at Mt. Sinai, serves to highlight the bond that grew all the stronger during the long years in the desert.

It is also the reason why at the point when the long journey is finally over and all the events are put in writing, the People, who are about to enter the Land, are warned against idolatry: “Then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images, and demolish all their high places” (Bamidbar 33:52). Even once the People leave the desert, they must not forget to fulfill the contract and honor the covenant, nor must they ever forget the long and winding road they had travelled and all they had learned from this difficult journey. The lesson here is that the People must continue to listen to that inner language, comprised of encrypted names of places, which conceal an internal code, and the writing of which gives it shape and form in reality.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Benjamin Yudin

Sensitive Soil, Lofty Land

This Shabbos all of Israel is united and finishes Sefer Bamidbar. It is not coincidental that we read Matos and Masei, which highlight Eretz Yisrael, in the period of the three weeks, and especially as we celebrate Rosh Chodesh Av this Friday. According to the Ramban, Parshas Masei contains the biblical mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisrael, imploring all Jews to come up with a good reason why they are not yet living in Eretz Yisrael, as found in Bamidbar (33:53) “you shall possess the Land and you shall settle it in.”

In Chapter 35, the Torah gives us in detail the laws of the accidental murderer who is to go to an ir miklat, and that of the intentional murderer who is to be executed. This is spelled out most succinctly. Then (35:31-32) the Torah warns that an accidental murderer is not to be given the opportunity to pay a ransom instead

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of going to a city of refuge, and likewise a murderer is not to be given the opportunity to pay a ransom, build a hospital or benefit society instead of the death penalty.

The Torah then (35:33-34) adds, “Do not bring guilt on the land, in which you are living because bloodshed is that which brings guilt upon the land, and the land will not be forgiven for the blood that is shed in it except through the blood of the person who shed it.” Finally, the next verse reads, “do not defile the land in which you dwell in the midst of which I dwell, because I Hashem dwell among the children of Israel.” Given there are no extra words in the Torah, at first glance the last two verses seem superfluous. Murder is forbidden universally, regardless of where the act is committed. Why does the Torah mention the word “land” four times even though this is certainly not a mitzvah dependent on the land of Israel?

The Ramban answers this question (v.33) by stating that while murder is indeed universally prohibited, the Torah is teaching that it is especially so in the land where G-d’s Shechinah is present. The land of Israel, more than any other geographic location, cannot tolerate murder. The land itself is especially sensitive. Similarly, we find at the end of Parshas Acharei Mos, where the Torah clearly warns the Jewish people against repeating the sins of immorality of the nations that lived in the land before them, lest they too be evicted from the land.

Morality is a norm that is to be practiced in every society. Yet, there too in Vayikra (18:27-28), the Torah highlights the offense and effect of immorality upon the land of Israel. The land of Israel has character and personality and due to its higher level of sanctity, simply cannot tolerate both immorality and murder.

We pray that Tisha B’Av will speedily become a holiday as prophesized by the Zechariah (8:19), that the fast of the fifth month will be to the House of Judah for joy and for gladness and for a happy festival. In the event that we are not privileged for this yet, we will read on the night of Tisha B’Av the book of Eicha, written by the Yirmiyahu. In Chapter 1, verse 4, the Yirmiyahu relates “the roads of Zion are mourning for lack of festival pilgrims.” One can argue that this is a poetic continuation of the prior verse which describes that “Judah has gone into exile because of suffering and great servitude.”

However, I would like to understand this verse literally in keeping with our above teachings, that the land and roads of Israel are literally mourning in the absence of the multitudes that came to celebrate the three pilgrim festivals annually. Similarly, on the Shabbos following Tisha B’Av, we read from Yishayahu (40:2) “Dabru al lev Yerushalym - speak consolingly to the heart of Jerusalem” is not only to be understood as a message of consolation for the

Jewish people after their lengthy exile, but also the holy city that housed two Batei Mikdash and will house the third is to be comforted. Additionally, Yirmiyahu (30:17) proclaimed "Tzion he, doresh ein la - She is Zion, no one cares about her," and based upon the above the Talmud teaches we are to care and literally feel the anguish, suffering and neglect of the Holy City.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian zt"l had a condition that necessitated him to expectorate. When he came to Eretz Yisrael, he refused to spit on the ground. The land itself is holy and has feelings. This may be substantiated by the Gemara (Kesubos 112b) that Rav Chiya bar Gamda rolled in the dust of Eretz Yisrael, to fulfill that which is found in Psalms (112:15) "for your servants have cherished our stones and favored her dust." Interestingly, this verse is the source of the custom among some to place some soil from Eretz Yisrael upon the dead who are buried in the Diaspora. Similarly, the Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 5:10) teaches that great sages would kiss the borders of Eretz Yisrael, kiss its stones and roll in its dust.

The Gemara (Megillah 29a) teaches that the synagogues and study halls in Bavel are destined to be established in Eretz Yisrael in the Messianic age. The Maharsha in his commentary on this Gemara writes that the land of Israel in its entirety has a Kedusha - a holiness similar to a Beis HaKenesis. Based upon the above, the Vilna Gaon at the end of his prayers would walk an additional four cubits in his synagogue in Vilna, fulfilling to the best of his ability the rabbinic dictum to walk four cubits in the land of Israel.

The message that emerges from the above may be found most succinctly in the Gemara (Kesubos 75a), where R. Meysha explains the verse (Tehillim 87:5) "and to Zion it shall be said ish v'ish yulad bah - this man and this man was born in her." He explains this phrase to mean that both one who is born in Tzion and one who yearns to see Tzion are considered its sons. Rashi explains the above verse to refer to the future time when the nations of the world will bring them back to Zion, saying about "each Jew this one is a son of Tzion, he was born there, let us bring him back to her."

The first lesson is that we must consider ourselves sons of Tzion. This is demonstrated by our longing to be there and our endeavoring to enhance and improve the process of settling the land. Not only are we to attempt to go to recharge our batteries and to connect firsthand with the land of constant miracles, but in our prioritization of our tzedaka allotments, yeshivas in Eretz Yisrael should be one of our priorities, allowing us to literally participate in the mitzvah of yishuv Eretz Yisrael. Finally, let's not forget the kedusha of Eretz Yisrael. The Bach (Orach Chaim 208) teaches that the land itself has kedusha, thus the trees that bear fruit have kedusha. When we imbibe the fruit of Eretz Yisrael, we are ingesting kedusha and become uplifted spiritually.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

History and Your Story

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

These are the journeys: Why were these journeys recorded? To inform us of the kindness of the Omnipresent...-Rashi

This is the introduction to the 42 journeys made by the Jewish People during their 40-year stay in the desert. There are a few points to take note of here. Their journeys were "at the bidding of HASHEM". They were not wandering aimlessly. Every move was according to Divine guidance. Also, it seems that Moshe is keeping a journal, a travel log and writing down all of the journeys. What would be the purpose of documenting all the traveling that the Jewish People did? Rashi tells us that it is in order to inform us of HASHEM's kindness. How so?!

Years ago, I started a big project traveling throughout New York City and the New York Metropolitan area. I was charged with learning Torah with big businessmen, doctors, lawyers, men of industry, and influence. Before taking my first baby step onto the field I realized I had a problem. I had been learning in Yeshiva for years and teaching in Hebrew Day School but I had little experience in the business world and I was feeling outmatched and ill equipped to sit before people with vastly more practical and worldly experience than I had. So, I approached a senior colleague for some advice. Here was a man with many-many years of experience in the field. For sure he could answer my burning question. I asked him, "Which periodicals shall I subscribe to? What should I be reading and studying in order to remain current and in the conversation?" He looked at me oddly. Then he gave an answer I never expected but it turned out to be priceless for this project and ever since. He said, "You don't need to subscribe to any particular periodical. Just know your own story! Know your story!" I was more than a little surprised but I took it to heart. I went home and started writing my life story.

It was an amazingly therapeutic process and it has proven to be very practical. I have learned to spell out some version of that "story" whether I have 2 minutes in the elevator or an hour in front of a large audience. People are always fascinated and beyond curious to hear about me and how I transitioned from being an all American-Jewish kid who went to public school and was captain of the football, basketball, and baseball teams, but ended up in Yeshiva and is raising a Torah family. How does one get from here to there or there to here?

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Maybe that explains why over and over again the Torah records not only where the Jewish People traveled to but where they came from each time. That's part of the story. Each move is a fascinating chapter by itself. How does one transition from there, wherever it is we came from, to here, to where we find ourselves now? Life is way too interesting. Truth is stranger and more symphonic than fiction!

King Solomon writes, "Trust in HASHEM with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways know Him, and He will make your ways straight." (Mishlei 3:5-6) What is King Solomon the wisest of all men telling us here? This is how to live a successful life. Trust in HASHEM with your whole heart. We cannot possibly manage enough details in life to create a guaranteed result. We need to work with our Supreme Partner, HASHEM. That is Bitachon. It's a division of labor. I do my job and my All-Knowing Partner I must trust will take care of the rest. What is my job? Know HASHEM in all my ways. We follow daily Torah instructions, some spiritual by nature and others quite earthy. We are painting by numbers. Standing up close to the canvas of life it is hard to discern what we are doing. When we stand back and observe where we have been, a beautiful picture is revealed. We just tried to do the right thing at each moment and in the end a masterpiece emerges. "Who wrote this beautiful story?!" It can only be attributed to the author of all existence and the playwright of history and your story.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Truth or Peace? Legislation or Arbitration?

In the parasha of Masei, always read around Rosh Chodesh Av, is the only date of a *yahrzeit* mentioned specifically in the Torah – that of Aharon HaKohen, on the first of Av.

Why is it so important at this difficult time of year to recall the life and legacy of Aharon?

Chazal were already creating the solution to the problem. What is the antidote to the causeless hatred that caused the destruction of the Second Temple? Aharon's legacy as the great peacemaker.

Moshe was a person of justice and truth, while Aharon was all about peace. If Moshe was about legislation, Aharon was about arbitration.

In all of our interpersonal relationships, it is not always about who is right and legislating that, but about arbitrating views.

Home Weekly Parsha MATOT – MAASEI
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai concludes with the parshiyot of this week. All of the occurrences, successes and failures that marked this forty year trek in a wasteland wilderness are alluded to in the count of Israel in last week's parsha - and in the listing of all of the way stations of that excursion.

The Torah seems to be determined to remind all later generations of Jews of the experiences in the desert. Moshe, in his final oration in the book of Dvarim, will once again review the events of the desert for a new generation of Jews distanced in time and circumstance from Egyptian bondage. The Torah is aware of human forgetfulness.

It will take only one generation to forget Egypt and even Mount Sinai. History is boring and quite irrelevant to new generations. Yet forgetting the Jewish past is the ultimate betrayal of Judaism and Jewish hopes. All of us, as we become older, begin to feel a psychological and spiritual need growing within us to be remembered.

The Baal Shem Tov is reputed to have said: "Forgetting is the true exile." Of course it is obvious that ignorance is the true partner of forgetfulness. In fact, if one never knew anything then one cannot be accused of having forgotten it. The Torah emphasizes the repetition of all the facts and experiences of Jewish life in the desert of Sinai so that this knowledge will enable and strengthen the powers of national remembrance.

Much of the Jewish world today suffers from a severe case of, hopefully temporary but nevertheless intense, amnesia. In spite of all of the efforts of the survivors, the museums, the academic courses and books relating to the Holocaust, this event is rapidly disappearing from world and even Jewish memory.

Religious Jewry has found no way, as of yet, to ritually remember the Holocaust. Without ritual and holiness, it tragically will continue to fade from the memory of the coming generation. In distributing films and audio lectures about the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel to Jewish schools worldwide I am already encountering apathy if not sometimes even outright opposition to the insertion of the subject into the curriculum of schools.

One principal asked me: "Will it help my students to be admitted to Harvard or Yale?" And on the other end of the spectrum of Jewish education another principal told me: "Will it increase their ability to study Talmud properly?" I responded that the Torah listed all of the desert way stations even though knowing them would also not guarantee Talmudic proficiency or admission to Harvard or Yale.

It is not only the amnesia regarding even our very recent past that afflicts us. It is our inability to grasp that the knowledge of this immediate past is vitally essential to our present and to our future. Without knowledge of the events of the past, dating back all of the way to the events of the desert of Sinai, we are creating for our descendants a new desert, a wasteland of ignorance, falsehoods and disillusion. It is not too late to correct this. If our schools won't do so, let our homes and families attempt to do so.

Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazeik.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Complexity of Human Rights
MATOT, MASEI

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ZTL
MATOT, MASEI • 5776, 5783

The book of Bamidbar comes to a close that is very strange indeed. Earlier in the parsha of Pinchas we read of how the five daughters of Tzelophehad came to Moses with a claim based on justice and human rights.[1] Their father had died without sons. Inheritance – in this case, of a share in the land – passes through the male line, but here there was no male line. Surely their father was entitled to his share, and they were his only heirs. By rights that share should come to them:

"Why should our father's name be disadvantaged in his family merely because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father's brothers."

Num. 27:4

Moses had received no instruction about such an eventuality, so he asked God directly. God found in favour of the women.

"The daughters of Tzelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them."

He gave Moses further instructions about the disposition of inheritance, and the narrative then passes on to other matters.

Only now, right at the end of the book, does the Torah report on an event that arose directly from that case. Leaders of Tzelophehad's tribe, Menasheh, son of Joseph, came and made the following complaint. If the land were to pass to Tzelophehad's daughters and they married men from another tribe, the land would eventually pass to their husbands, and thus to their husband's tribes. Thus land that had initially been granted to the tribe of Menasheh might be lost to it in perpetuity.

Again, Moses took the case to God, who offered a simple solution. The daughters of Tzelophehad were entitled to the land, but so too was the tribe. Therefore, if they wish to take possession of the land, they must marry men from within their own tribe. That way both claims could be honoured. The daughters did not lose their right to the land but they did lose some freedom in choosing a marriage partner.

The two passages are intimately related. They use the same terminology. Both Tzelophehad's daughters and the leaders of the clan "draw near". They use the same verb to describe their potential loss: yigara, "disadvantaged, diminished". God replies in both cases with the same locution, "kein ... dovrot/dovrim," rightly do they speak.[2] Why then are the two episodes separated in the text? Why does the book of Numbers end on this seemingly anticlimactic note? And does it have any relevance today?

Bamidbar is a book about individuals. It begins with a census, whose purpose is less to tell us the actual number of Israelites than to "lift" their "heads", the unusual locution the Torah uses to convey the idea that when God orders a census it is to tell the people that they each count. The book also focuses on the psychology of individuals. We read of Moses' despair, of Aaron and Miriam's criticism of him, of the spies who lacked the courage to come back with a positive report, and of the malcontents, led by Korach, who challenged Moses' leadership. We read of Joshua and Caleb, Eldad and Medad, Dathan and Aviram, Zimri and Pinchas, Balak and Bilam and others. This emphasis on individuals reaches a climax in Moses' prayer to "God of the spirits of all flesh" to appoint a successor (Bamidbar 27:16) – understood by the Sages and Rashi to mean, appoint a leader who will deal with each individual as an individual, who will relate to people in their uniqueness and singularity. That is the context of the claim of Tzelophehad's daughters. They were claiming their rights as individuals. Justly so. As many of the commentators pointed out, the behaviour of the women throughout the wilderness years was exemplary while that of the men was the opposite. The men, not the women, gave gold for the golden calf. The spies were men: a famous comment by the Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550 –1619) suggests that had Moses sent women instead, they would have come back with a positive report.[3] Recognising the justice of their cause, God affirmed their rights as individuals.

But society is not built on individuals alone. As the book of Judges points out, individualism is another name for chaos: "In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Hence the insistence, throughout Bamidbar, on the central role of the tribes as the organising principle of Jewish life. The Israelites were numbered tribe by tribe. The Torah sets out their precise encampment around the Mishkan and the order in which they were to journey. In Naso, at inordinate length, the Torah repeats the gifts of each tribe at the inauguration of the Mishkan, despite the fact that they each gave exactly the same. The tribes were not accidental to the structure of Israel as a

society. Like the United States of America, whose basic political structure is that of a federation of (originally thirteen, now fifty) states, so Israel was (until the appointment of a king) a federation of tribes.

The existence of something like tribes is fundamental to a free society.[4] The modern state of Israel is built on a vast panoply of ethnicities – Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Jews from Eastern, Central and Western Europe, Spain and Portugal, Arab lands, Russia and Ethiopia, America, South Africa, Australia and other places, some Hassidic, some Yeshiva-ish, others “Modern”, others “Traditional”, yet others secular and cultural.

We each have a series of identities, based partly on family background, partly on occupation, partly on locality and community. These “mediating structures”, larger than the individual but smaller than the state, are where we develop our complex, vivid, face-to-face interactions and identities. They are the domain of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, and they make up what is collectively known as civil society. A strong civil society is essential to freedom.[5]

That is why, alongside individual rights, a society must make space for group identities. The classic instance of the opposite came in the wake of the French revolution. In the course of the debate in the French Revolutionary Assembly in 1789, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre made his famous declaration, “To the Jews as individuals, everything. To the Jews as a nation, nothing.” If they insisted on defining themselves as a nation, that is, as a distinct subgroup within the republic, said the Count, “we shall be compelled to expel them.”

Initially, this sounded reasonable. Jews were being offered civil rights in the new secular nation state. However, it was anything but. It meant that Jews would have to give up their identity as Jews in the public domain. Nothing – not religious or ethnic identity – should stand between the individual and the state. It was no accident that a century later, France became one of the epicentres of European antisemitism, beginning with Édouard Drumont’s vicious *La France Juive*, 1886, and culminating in the Dreyfus trial. Hearing the Parisian crowd shout “Mort aux Juifs”, Theodor Herzl realised that Jews had still not been accepted as citizens of Europe, despite all the protestations to the contrary. Jews found themselves regarded as a tribe in a Europe that claimed to have abolished tribes. European emancipation recognised individual rights but not collective ones.

The primatologist Frans de Waal, whose work among the chimpanzees we mentioned in this year’s *Covenant & Conversation* on Korach, makes the point powerfully. Almost the whole of modern Western culture, he says, was built on the idea of autonomous, choosing individuals. But that is not who we are. We are people with strong attachments to family, friends, neighbours, allies, co-religionists and people of the same ethnicity. He continues:

A morality exclusively concerned with individual rights tends to ignore the ties, needs and interdependencies that have marked our existence from the very beginning. It is a cold morality that puts space between people, assigning each person to his or her own little corner of the universe. How this caricature of a society arose in the minds of eminent thinkers is a mystery.[6]

That is precisely the point the Torah is making when it divides the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad into two. The first part, in parshat Pinchas, is about individual rights, the rights of Tzelophehad’s daughters to a share in the land. The second, at the end of the book, is about group rights, in this case the right of the tribe of Menasheh to its territory. The Torah affirms both, because both are necessary to a free society.

Many of the most seemingly intractable issues in contemporary Jewish life have appeared because Jews, especially in the West, are used to a culture in which individual rights are held to override all others. We should be free to live as we choose, worship as we choose, and identify as we choose. But a culture based solely on individual rights will undermine families, communities, traditions, loyalties, and shared codes of reverence and restraint.

Despite its enormous emphasis on the value of the individual, Judaism also insists on the value of those institutions that preserve and protect our identities as members of groups that make them up. We have rights

as individuals but identities only as members of tribes. Honouring both is delicate, difficult and necessary. Bamidbar ends by showing us how.

[1] The word “rights” is, of course, an anachronism here. The concept was not born until the seventeenth century. Nonetheless it is not absurd to suggest that this is what is implied in the daughters’ claim, “Why should our father’s name be disadvantaged?”

[2] These two passages may well be the source of the story of the rabbi who hears both sides of a marital dispute, and says to both husband and wife, “You are right.” The rabbi’s disciple asks, “How can they both be right?” to which the rabbi replies, “You too are right.”

[3] *Kli Yakar* to Num. 13:2.

[4] See most recently Sebastian Junger: *Tribe: On homecoming and belonging*, Fourth Estate, 2016.

[5] This is the argument made most powerfully by Edmond Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville.

[6] Frans de Waal, *Good Natured*, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 167.

Customs of the Three Weeks

Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

When listening to music from an electric device, a distinction should be made between happy music, which is prohibited from the 17th of Tammuz, and regular music that has no special joy, which is only prohibited from Rosh Chodesh Av * When holding an educational-cultural event, it is permissible to play music that fits the nature of the event * At se’udat mitzvah meals, singing and dancing in a circle are permitted as is customary, and even after Rosh Chodesh Av * From Rosh Chodesh Av, recreational swimming is forbidden, but if the swimming is for health purposes, as is the custom of people used to swimming every day for about half an hour in the pool, it is permitted until Shabbat Chazon

The Three Weeks, which begin on the night of the 17th of Tammuz and continue through Tisha Be-Av, are a painful time. This period is often known as ‘Bein Ha-metzarim’, recalling the verse, “All her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places [bein ha-metzarim]” (Eicha 1:3). And although our Sages did not make any special enactments to mark the suffering and mourning of the Three Weeks, the Jewish people adopted some mourning customs, and therefore refrain from music and dancing (Magen Avraham 551:10).

Included in this, it is customary to avoid playing musical instruments. Therefore, dance classes, concerts, and happy sing-alongs should not be held during the Three Weeks, and one should not participate in them.

Listening to Music on Personal Electronic Devices

The poskim of the previous generation were divided on whether it is permissible to listen to musical instruments by way of personal electronic devices during the Three Weeks. It seems that in practice, according to the lenient view, we should divide all songs into three categories: 1) joyous songs, like those played at weddings; 2) songs that are neither especially joyous nor especially sad, which includes most contemporary music and most classical compositions; 3) sad songs, like those played or sung when mourning a death or the destruction of the Temple, which are permitted to be heard even during the Nine Days.

Lower the Volume

It also seems that when one listens to loud music, even if it is a neutral song, the force of the sound makes it more festive and practically transforms it into a joyous song. Thus, one may not listen to loud music even if it is the type of music that is permitted during the Three Weeks.

Furthermore, it seems that one may not attend a concert featuring sad music (requiems) during the Three Weeks. Even though the music is mournful, concerts are festive and joyous events.

Music in an Educational Context

When holding an educational-cultural event, it is permitted to play music that fits the nature of the event. And even during the Nine Days it is permissible to play sad songs that express sorrow for the destruction of the Temple, and songs of longing for the building of the Torah, the Nation, and the Land (see, *Peninei Halakha: Zemanim* 8:4-5).

Aerobics Class

One may hold or attend an aerobics class, whose main purpose is exercise, until the end of Tammuz, but should try to play appropriate music that is not happy.

Playing Music for the Purpose of Learning

Since the reason music is prohibited is that it brings people joy, music teachers may continue giving lessons until the week of Tisha Be-Av, because neither the teacher nor the students experience joy through music lessons. In addition, canceling the lessons will cause the teacher financial loss, and the students will have to expend extra effort afterward to return to their normal learning pace, possibly even requiring extra classes. It is best to learn sad melodies during the Three Weeks. If the teacher and students usually take a break from their lessons at some point in any event, it is preferable, if possible, to schedule the break for the Three Weeks. (Peninei Halakha: Zemanim 8:3).

Playing and Singing at a Se'udat Mitzvah

During the Three Weeks, one may sing happy songs at a se'udat mitzvah, like the meal at a brit mila, pidyon ha-ben, or sheva berakhot, and until the end of the month of Tammuz it is also permitted to play music as is customary throughout the year.

When the month of Av arrives, one should not play happy songs from an electronic device, and only the songs that relate to the joy of a mitzvah are permitted to be sung, and even dancing in a circle is permitted, as many people do to celebrate the joy of a brit mila.

Playing Music at Havdala and Melave Malka

Families customary to play shirey kodesh (Jewish religious songs) on Motzei Shabbat can continue to do so until Rosh Chodesh Av, because the atmosphere of Shabbat, in which mourning customs are absent, still applies during the adjacent hours intended for a se'udat Melave Malka. In addition to that, the songs played are shirey kodesh.

Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

Until Rosh Chodesh Av, one may also celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah during this period, but only on the actual day that the child comes of age, and it is also permissible to hire musicians, provided that this is their custom throughout the year.

When it is difficult to hold the party on the day the boy or girl come of age, and want to hold it on one of the close days, it is appropriate for the bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah to make a siyum on an important religious book at the beginning of the event, and thus be able to hold the simcha with music or musicians, as usual all year round. And if they cannot make a siyum, bediavad, they can rely on a siyum done by one of their relatives. When there is no such possibility, with no other choice, they can rely on the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah drasha (speech) which is an important drasha with divrei Torah, and from which the joy of a mitzvah is derived.

However, during the Nine Days it is not possible to hold a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah as is customary all year round, since it is customary to hold it with a lot of people and with music, and this is forbidden during the Nine Days. Therefore, it is correct to postpone the big party until after Tisha B'Av, and on the day of coming of age, one may hold a se'udah at home, with meat and wine, and a limited number of guests.

Excursions and Vacation in a Hotel

Some poskim maintain that one must refrain from hiking and swimming or bathing in the sea or a swimming pool during the Three Weeks, in order to limit our enjoyment during this mournful period. Furthermore, since these days are prone to calamity, one must avoid potentially dangerous activities.

From a halakhic standpoint, however, these activities are not prohibited. After all, our Sages only instructed us to curtail our joy from the first day of Av. They did not prohibit engaging in pleasurable and enjoyable activities before then. The only thing one should avoid is special celebrations, like parties, concerts, and dances. Therefore, one may go hiking and swimming and one may vacation in a hotel until the end of Tammuz. In addition, the concern about engaging in potentially dangerous activities is not so serious that one must be more cautious than one generally should be throughout the year. Thus, one may go hiking and engage in similar activities during the Three Weeks, while

taking particular care to follow the safety precautions that apply to such activities throughout the year.

“When Av arrives, we curtail our joy” (Ta'anit 26b). Therefore, one must refrain from outings and recreational activities that are mainly designed to provide pleasure and joy. However, one may go on a trip or vacation that is designed primarily for educational or therapeutic purposes during the Nine Days.

Swimming

From the first day of the month of Av, one must refrain from recreational swimming. However, if the swimming is for a health purpose, such as those who swim every day for about half an hour in the pool, it is permitted until Shabbat Chazon, and after Shabbat Chazon, it is correct to be machmir (stringent). One who needs to swim for medical purposes, may swim until erev Tisha B'av (see, Peninei Halakha: Zemanim 8:6).

Reciting She-he'eyanu During the Three Weeks

It is customary to refrain from reciting the She-he'eyanu blessing during the Three Weeks, for how can we say, “Blessed are You, Lord...Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time” during a period of such misfortune? And although some poskim are machmir about it even on Shabbat, in practice, on Shabbat, one may recite the blessing.

One who is presented the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that requires one to recite She-he'eyanu, like a brit mila or a pidyon ha-ben, recites the berakha, because he did not determine the timing of the berakha. Rather, God granted him the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that requires one to recite She-he'eyanu during the Three Weeks.

Similarly, one who sees a close friend after not seeing him for thirty days, and is happy to see him, should recite She-he'eyanu, since if he does not recite it immediately, he loses the opportunity to recite the berakha.

Marriage

It is customary in most Jewish communities that weddings are not held during the Three Weeks. This is the custom of all Ashkenazi communities, and most Sephardic communities, including communities from Turkey, Morocco, Babylon, and Yemen.

And there are communities of Sephardic origin who are customary to refrain from marriage only during the Nine Days, and so wrote the Shulchan Aruch (551:2; Yibi'ah Omer 6:43).

Grooms from communities that are customary to hold weddings until the end of the month of Tammuz are permitted to hire a regular orchestra for their wedding, as there is no joy of a bride and groom without musical instruments. And even those whose custom is not to marry on these days, may participate and dance in their joy, for it is the joy of a mitzvah.

Engagement

Until the first of Av, one may hold a modest, small-scale engagement party. Since such a party is a celebration of the couple's agreement to get married, the event contains a mitzvah component and is thus permitted. One may not, however, hold a large-scale engagement party during the Three Weeks. During the Nine Days, when we must curtail our joy, one may not hold even a modest, small-scale party. However, the parents of the couple may meet, even during the Nine Days, in order to decide on the details of the wedding, and refreshments may be served at this meeting. Even though this, too, involves joy, it is permissible because such a meeting transforms the couple's relationship into an accomplished fact, which brings them closer to the mitzvah of marriage. It is also permissible for singles to date for the sake of marriage during the Nine Days (ibid. 8:9).

Haircut during the Three Weeks and Nine Days

Our Sages instituted prohibitions against cutting one's hair and washing one's clothes during the week of Tisha Be-Av (Ta'anit 26b). Accordingly, Shulchan Aruch (551:3) rules that one may not cut one's hair from the beginning of the week in which Tisha Be-Av falls, and many Sephardim follow this practice.

However, in many Jewish communities it is customary to be machmir, and not cut their hair during the Three Weeks. This is the custom of

Ashkenazim and some Sephardim – including Jews from Morocco and Djerba, and those who follow Arizal's customs – to be stringent and avoid haircuts during the entirety of the Three Weeks (Rema 551:4; Kaf Ha-hayim 551:80; Kitzur SA [Toledano] 387:8; Brit Kehuna 2:12). There are those who are lenient until the end of the month of Tammuz, and machmir from Rosh Chodesh, including Jews from Tunisia, Algeria and Libya.
Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Shabbat Shalom: Matot-Masei (Numbers 30:1-36:13)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditEfrat, Israel – This week's double portion records how the Jews finally cross the Jordan River on their way to conquer the Promised Land. The tribes of Gad and Reuven and half the tribe of Menashe possess a great multitude of cattle, and "paradise" for cattle is good grazing land, which happens to be what these two and a half tribes find in their present location of Trans-Jordan. They then petition Moses with a special request. "If you would grant us a favor, let this land be given to us as our permanent property, and do not bring us across the Jordan." (Numbers 32:5)

Moses' response is sharp. "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here? Why are you trying to discourage the Israelites from crossing over to the land that God has given them? This is the same thing your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land" (Numbers 32:6-8). Moses' reference is an especially damning one: just as the scouts decided to remain in the desert because they lacked the courage and will to fight for the Promised Land, you are acting similar to them by your desire to stay where you are, saving yourselves from the harrowing experience of war. And Moses makes this comparison even though Trans-Jordan is considered to be part of the holy land (Mishnah Kelim 1,10).

What moved these two and a half tribes to remain in Trans-Jordan? According to Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm, they petitioned not to have to cross the Jordan because of their cattle, which expresses a certain degree of materialistic greed on their part; it doesn't take a great flight of the imagination to see the correspondence between cattle and grazing lands in those days to economic opportunities in the work place today.

Why do Jews continue to live outside of Israel, further away than the other side of the Jordan – on the other side of the Atlantic? Because they've found good grazing lands for their cattle and it's a shame to give that up, especially since our present-day descendants of Gad and Menashe rarely question a contemporary Rabbinic authority about their choice. If they did, he would more than likely repeat Moses' message "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here?" (Numbers 32:61).

After all, world Jewry has certainly benefited from the State of Israel, ever since its inception and to this very day. After the Holocaust, which resulted in the tragic loss of 1/3 of our people and 4/5 of our religious, intellectual and cultural leadership, it seemed as if Judaism had finally faded from the world stage of viable "peoples", nations and religions. The renowned historian Alfred Toynbee called the Jews a "fossil" in the history he published in 1946, the Chief Rabbi of Rome converted to Christianity and immediately following the Holocaust, conversion was rampant on every campus in America.

Not only did world Jewry experience a miraculous renaissance after the declaration of Israeli statehood – and then again with the liberation of Jerusalem after the Six Day War in 1967 – but Israel is now the greatest provider of religious and educational leadership for Jewish communities throughout the world as well as the most effective fount of inspiration for searching and struggling assimilated Jews whose lives become significantly transformed through programs like Birthright Israel. All of the successful diaspora Jewish communities today owe their development in no small measure to the Jewish State.

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama gives a slightly different interpretation. The author of the Akedat Yitzchak describes the two and a half tribes as practical materialists who nevertheless are planning to eventually join their siblings in Israel's heartland – but only eventually, not right now.

At present, the personal needs of the family and the tribe must come first – until the leader of the family can amass sufficient material goods to make the big move to the middle east a less risky venture. Their personal needs – and not historic Israel's national needs – must come first. Therefore, Moses took them to task.

The Ohr Hachayim approaches the situation in its simplest, most "religious" terms: suggesting that the two and a half tribes built their argument around Divine intervention: "The land which God conquered on behalf of the congregation of Israel is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle." (32:41). In other words, this is the land that God conquered for us and therefore this is the land we wish to remain in. If God wants us somewhere else, let Him take us there, let Him conquer that land too. Until then, this is where we're going to stay and this is where our cattle will stay. It is good for our cattle and therefore it is good for us.

In many ways, the Ohr Hachayim's reading sees the two and a half tribes as being the counterparts of the devotees of Natura Karta. They are waiting for God Himself to bring them to Israel – and if not God, then at least His Messiah! When God is good and ready to redeem Israel completely, He'll do it in His own time. Everything depends on God, and we are more than happy to wait it out in our pleasant grazing land until then....

The truth is that Gad, Reuven and half of Menashe had forgotten their history. They cannot rest on their grazing laurels while the rest of the nation fights their wars for them. When the Israelites reached the Reed Sea chased by the Egyptian hordes they asked Moses to pray to God. "Why are you crying out to me?" God says to Moses. "Speak to the Israelites and let them start moving." (Exodus 14:15). The sea does not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav and Caleb ben Yefuna jump in.

Similarly, when Moses tells the two and a half tribes that they have to bear arms and fight, he's really pointing out that God's promise to Israel is that everyone has to be partners – God with the nation, and the nation with one another, sharing in a mutual responsibility and privilege. At the end of the day, if our fledgling State proves to be even more vulnerable than we think by dint of less manpower in war and a smaller population than is required, Jews will have only themselves to blame for not rising to the challenge offered by the greatest Jewish adventure in 2000 years.
Shabbat Shalom

[CS - Late breaking - so added it

from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiiy@theyeshiva.net>

date: Jul 13, 2023, 10:30 PM

subject: The First Marriage Therapist in History - New Maasei Essay by

Rabbi YY Jacobson

The First Marriage Therapist in History

The Only Yartzeit Mentioned in the Torah is Aaron's. Why?

Why Aaron?

The Torah never mentions the yartzeit—the day of the passing—of any of its protagonists. We do not know the day when Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Sarah, or Rachel passed away. Even Moses' day of passing is omitted in the Torah.[1]

There is one single exception: Aaron, the older brother of Moses and the High Priest of Israel. His death is recorded in the weekly portion with a date:

מסעי לג, לח: וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הָהָר הַהוּא עַל־פִּי ה' וַיָּמָת שָׁם בַּשָּׁנָה הָאֲדָמָה לְצֹאת
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁמִינִי בָּאֶהָד בְּאֶהָד לַחֹדֶשׁ:

Numbers 33:38: Aaron the priest ascended Mount Hor, at the behest of G-d, and died there, in the fortieth year after the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month.

Why Aaron? Even with his own siblings, Miriam and Moses, we don't see in the Torah the date of their passing. Why was his passing day enshrined in the biblical text?

What is more, the date of his death is not mentioned in the actual story of his passing (back in Chukas, Numbers ch. 20), where it would seem to belong, but rather in the portion of Massei (Numbers ch. 33), while discussing the forty-two journeys that the Israelites traveled in the desert—en route from Egypt to the Promised Land. In this context,

apparently not relevant to the discussion, that the Torah takes a detour:[2] "They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. Aaron the High Priest ascended Mount Hor at G-d's behest and died there..."

The Peacemaker

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once offered a moving insight, demonstrating the eternal relevance of Torah.[3]

Aaron, we know, was the ultimate peace lover and peacemaker among the Jewish people. As Hillel says in the Ethics of the Fathers:[4] "Be of the disciples of Aaron—a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah." Aaron dedicated his life to bringing peace between rivals and quarreling spouses.[5]

When the Torah describes his death, it states:[6] The whole congregation saw that Aaron had expired, and the entire house of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days.

Why the "entire house of Israel"? When Moses passes away, the Torah states[7] that the "sons of Israel wept for Moses"; but here it was the "entire house." Why the distinction? Rashi explains: "Both the men and the women, for Aaron had pursued peace; he promoted love between disputing parties and between husbands and wives."

The Talmud relates[8] that 80,000 young men who were all given the name "Aaron" came to eulogize Aaron after his passing. They were the children born from parents who wanted to get divorced, and Aaron saved their marriages. They named their babies Aaron, in tribute to the person who saved their marriage and allowed these children to be born.

This means that over forty years in the wilderness, Aaron restored peace and trust to 80,000 Jewish couples. He must have been a busy marriage therapist!

His efforts were rewarded in kind, with the appearance of Clouds of Glory that served as a unifying force, molding the entire Israelite encampment into a cohesive unit.

The Remedy

Now, we can understand, on a homiletical level, why the yartzeit of Aaron is specified in the Torah—on the first day of the fifth month of the year, which is the Hebrew month of Av.

1500 years after the death of Aaron, the first of Av would usher in a period known in Jewish law as the "Nine Days," referring to the first nine days of the Hebrew month of Av, a time dedicated to mourning the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples in Jerusalem, which were both burned down on the 9th day of AV (the first by Babylon in 586 BCE, the second by Rome in 70 CE).

The Talmud states:[9] "The second Temple, why was it destroyed? Because the Jews harbored baseless hatred towards each other." This was also true on a political level: The Romans exploited the in-fighting between the Jewish people to defeat Judea.

During the first Temple era, too, it was the ongoing conflicts between the two kingdoms of Israel that weakened the nation, and the violence among Jews which spelled disaster, as the prophets explicitly warn.

"G-d provides the remedy before the disease," says the Talmud.[10] Before any challenge in life, G-d provides the energy to deal with it. The yartzeit of a person, the day when their life-journey is completed, is a day in which their energy and light is manifest in a uniquely potent way in the world.[11] So on the first day of Av, when we usher in the Nine Days of grief over our discord and hatred, the Torah tells us we have the yartzeit of Aaron the great peacemaker and unifier—a day in which can connect with Aaron's energy and legacy of love and unity, to repair and heal the rifts and mistrust that caused our exile, and usher in a new era of redemptive consciousness.

That is why the Torah places the day of the yartzeit in the portion of Maasei, which according to Jewish tradition is always read on or right before the very day of his yartzeit—the first day (Rosh Chodesh) of the month Av. It is during this time of the year that the Torah wants to empower us with the energy of Aaron to restore cohesion, trust, and love among our people.

On every first day of Av, as one can smell the flames of destruction, Aaron casts upon us his power of love, reminding us that we are capable of transcending our fears and our egos, and creating a revolution of love

among our eternal but fragmented people. If baseless hatred was the cause of our destruction, baseless love will create our redemption.

A Healthy Heart

A story:[12]

Moshe Tzur, an Israeli Air Force veteran, who has a skill for activism and leadership, returned to Judaism later in his life, and at a visit to the US in the 1970s he visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him what he was doing to help the Jewish people and the community. Moshe was not that excited about getting involved.

The Rebbe asked him, "Why is the heart of the human being on the left side? Everything important in Judaism is on the right side. We put on tefillin with the right hand, we put the mezuzah on the right side of the door, we shake hands with the right hand, we hold the Torah scroll on our right side, Joseph wanted the blessing of the right arm of his father for his oldest son; in the Temple they always walked to the right, so why is the heart—the organ responsible giving us vitality—on the left?"

The Rebbe shared his vintage answer:

"Your heart is indeed on your right side! Because what is the true function of a heart? To feel and experience the heart of the person standing in front of you; and for the person in front of you, your heart is on the right side. When your heart is linked with others, then indeed your heart is on the "right" side.

Moshe continued to relate his story:

"This message really spoke to me, and I adopted it as the center of my philosophy of life. Since then, my mission in life has been to reach the heart of every Jew that I meet. I returned to Israel, and I established two important yeshivot. One yeshiva is called Aish HaTalmud; it is a yeshiva high school with almost two hundred boys enrolled. The other is called Torat Moshe, with about ninety-five boys. I have also established four kollelim, study groups for married men, with almost a hundred-twenty enrolled."

"In addition, I founded an organization to support poor families for Rosh Hashanah and Passover. These are people who don't have much income, and we help them with food and money. All this because of the words of the Rebbe – that the key is to help others – which changed my perspective on life and shaped my life's mission."

[1] The Talmud and the Midrash deduce from the verses which dates they passed on, but it is not explicit in the Torah.

[2] Numbers 33:37-38

[3] Sichas 29 Tamuz, 5735 (1975). Sichas Motzei Shabbos Matos-Maasei 5739 (1979). Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Matos-Maasei pp. 411-412. A similar idea I saw in Sefas Emes Maasei 5659.

[4] 1:12

[5] Avos chapter 1. Avod D'Rabi Nosson ch. 12

[6] Numbers 20:29. See also Rashi Rash Devarim 34:8.

[7] Deuteronomy 34:8

[8] Tractate Kallah ch. 3

[9] Yuma 9b

[10] Megilah 13b

[11] See Tanya Igeres Hakodesh ch. 27-28

[12]

https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/3779581/jewish/Its-Their-Right.htm

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subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Construct-ive CriticismRabbi Benjamin Yudin

Construct-ive Criticism

In Parshas Matos (perek 32) the Torah relays the story of the two shevatim, Reuven and Gad, who seek and are given land on the eastern side of the Jordan which had previously been owned by Sichon and Og. The two tribes come to Moshe and inform him that they are blessed with an abundance of sheep and this land is appropriate for livestock, and therefore they request, "do not bring us across the Jordan." Moshe then reproves them for following in the evil ways of the meraglim who thirty-

nine years ago dissuaded the Jewish nation from entering the Promised Land and he was fearful that their request would once again undermine the national desire for their homeland. They respond to Moshe and declare (32:16), "Corrals for the flock we will build here for our livestock, and cities for our small children. We shall arm ourselves and join our brethren in their conquest of the land and stay with them till the land of Canaan is settled and our small children will stay in the fortified cities here." Rashi cites from the Tanchuma that Moshe chastises the two tribes and accusing them of having faulty priorities, i.e. for their prioritizing their financial concerns over the welfare of their children, as we can see in their request wherein they stated, "We will build corrals for our sheep and cities for our children". Moshe taught them this is improper, rather let the primary values be primary and the secondary values be secondary; build cities for your children first and then take care of the needs of the sheep.

The Be'er Yosef (Rev Yosef Salant zt"l) comments that at first glance, this is most difficult to understand. How could the dor deah, which was raised in an aura of spirituality, make such a glaring mistake of putting their material concerns before the welfare of their families? He then proceeds to give the following fascinating explanation, as follows: note that when the Jewish nation asked the two kings, first Sichon then Og, to pass through their lands (see Parshas Chukas) they were not only rebuffed, but each of these kings brought their armies to the desert and attacked the Jewish people, and the young Jewish nation was victorious over both kings and defeated them. It is interesting to note that since the battles occurred in the desert the cities of Sichon and Og were not in any way war-torn or disturbed. Perhaps a screen door here and a broken window there needed replacement, but for the most part Reuven and Gad believed that these cities were open, available, and ready for their families to move in. It is here, the Be'er Yosef explains, that Moshe disagrees with the two tribes. Don't think, Moshe said, that you can simply take the wreath off the door, put a Mezuzah up, and then you can move your families in. Since these homes were steeped in idolatry they cannot be used for raising a Jewish family. Moshe Therefore instructs them (32:24) "Build for yourselves cities for your small children and tents for the flocks". Indeed, the two tribes listen to Moshe, and therefore we are taught (32:34-38) that the children of Gad and Reuven built many cities in that area.

Is this really the halacha, that before one moves into a home that was inhabited by non-Jews that they have to make some significant structural change to the home? Indeed, this is the halacha regarding the conversion of a church into a synagogue. Many poskim were against this practice including the Chasam Sofer (Orach Chaim 42) and Maharam Shik (Yoreh Deah 142). The late Reb Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:49) writes that he is not comfortable with the converting of a church to a synagogue, however if it was done with panim chadashos, meaning structural changes within the building, then he could agree to its usage as a synagogue. Why, then, did Moshe insist upon this more rigid application of the law where we are talking about homes for the tribes of Reuven and Gad and not synagogues? I'd like to suggest two possibilities.

Firstly, I believe we can understand this by utilizing a halachic principle found in Hilchos Channukah. The Pnei Yehoshua (Shabbos 21b) asks why did the Chashmonaim insist on finding pure oil to light the menorah when there is the halachic principle (as found in Pesachim 77a) that the laws of tumah are hutra b'tzibbur, i.e. the laws of impurity are suspended in a situation when we are dealing with the majority of the Jewish nation? His question, therefore, is: why did we need a miracle and why make a fuss over the one cruse of oil when they could have used the impure oil? Reb Yosef Engel (Gilyonai Hashas, Shabbos 21b) answers that the principle of tumah hutra is applicable when we have a functioning Beis HaMikdash. However, to initiate and start a Beis HaMikdash anew requires a stronger foundation of total purity, and therefore they insisted on using pure oil.

Hashem said (Vayikra 14:34) that when Klal Yisrael would enter the Land of Canaan, He will place a tzara'as affliction houses in the land. The Medrash Rabbah (Vayikra 17:6) teaches that this was a good tiding

for the Jewish nation because Amori people hid their treasured possessions in the walls of their homes so that the Jewish people would not find them, and as a result of the process of dealing with tzara'as in a house which includes opening the wall, the Jews were enriched with these hidden possessions. The Zohar (Parshas Tazria 50a) asks that if the purpose of the tzara'as was to benefit the Jewish nation, why could they not replace the stones they removed from the wall to find the treasure? Why did they have to remove the stones to outside their cities? The Zohar answers that the tzara'as was Divinely sent because the homes of the Amorites were spiritually contaminated by the idolatry worshipped therein, and this would prevent a foundation of kedusha from being laid for a Jewish home. Therefore, it was necessary to remove the stones and have them replaced, and oftentimes demolish the house, in order to facilitate and construct a Jewish home.

The settling of the two tribes in eiver haYarden was the beginning of the settlement of the Jewish nation, albeit in the "annex" of the Land of Israel. Just as reinaugurating the Beis HaMikdash required a strong foundation of total purity, so too this settlement of the land had to be al pi taharas hakodesh, in the most pure and pristine manner, and therefore they had to re-construct the homes to facilitate them being imbued with the highest levels of kedusha.

A second possibility as to why Moshe adopted a stringent standard for the homes of the tribes of Reuven and Gad was to intimate that each and every Jewish home is really a mikdash me'at (a miniature Temple) and therefore he applied the halacha that is afforded a synagogue, namely to reconstruct the building. An interesting proof of the spiritual potential of each home may be found in the Talmud (Brachos 16b) which brings many examples of the personal prayer that different Amoraim recited at the conclusion of their Shemoneh Esrei. Aside from the Torah, avodah and gemilas chasadim that each Jew must bring to their home, Rebbe Elazar added the following prayer to his amidah: "May it be Your will Hashem our G-d, that You cause to dwell in our lot, love brotherhood, peace and companionship." We see that in addition to man's initiative and actions, he has to pray to Hashem that he be successful in this holy endeavor.

I'm going to give an example of the beautiful chessed that emerges from a sensitive Jewish home. The Vishnitzer Rebbe would ordinarily spend but a few moments each night at the many weddings he was invited to. He once made an exception, stayed for a long time and before he left he said to the father of the chassan, "Please call me whenever you get home". The man insisted it could be very late, perhaps one or two in the morning. The rebbe said, "I don't care. Make sure you call me when you get home." The man reluctantly called the Rebbe after two in the morning and the Rebbe started to ask him many, of what seemed to be mundane questions, especially from a most holy rav. He asked how the food was, was it plentiful, was it served nicely? He asked how the music was, was it too loud? The rebbe engaged him in very down to earth questions regarding the evening's proceedings. When the call was over his shamash, who had answered the call and was privy to this entire conversation, asked the rebbe at the end "What's going on here? Since when are you concerned with such trivial issues?" The rebbe answered that the man had lost his wife only a few months prior to the wedding. "Ordinarily, when the parents of the kallah or chassan get home from the wedding they go over each and every detail of the wedding. What was it like on your side? How was the food? How was the music? This man, unfortunately, came home to an empty home. He had no one to rehash the events of the evening with. I, therefore, called him to give him that opportunity and experience." WOW! That is an example of generating a creative house of chessed.

In the period of the three weeks that we find ourselves in, the tefillah with which we conclude every Shemoneh Esrei is sheyiboneh Beis haMikdash bimhayra biyamaynu. This is usually translated as "Please rebuild the Beis haMikdash speedily in our days". The Rav Naftali of Rupchitz zt"l interpreted this alternatively in the following way: "May you speedily rebuild the Temple with our days", that is to say that the positive actions, Torah and mitzvos, performed in our homes each day, contribute another brick to the building of the Beis haMikdash on high.

In reality, each individual is a living Beis haMikdash, as the Torah teaches (Shemos 25:9) "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell in each and every one of them." Therefore, it is most significant that we do some serious introspection regarding the personal Beis haMikdash within ourselves. It is not sufficient to resolve to no longer speak lashon hara, rather, this is the time to ask, why do I have the tendency to be jealous of others and to knock others? It is a time for deep constructive criticism to reconstruct the Mikdash within ourselves. There are so many factors that divide the Jewish people from one another, and when we think about and analyze these factors, we see that in reality they are, for the most part, inconsequential. Maybe there are differences in hashkafa but these differences are certainly no excuse nor license to hate another. If we look to the giants of the previous generation, such as the late Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l, the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l, they had a neshama that embraced all Jews. Reb Aryeh Levin zt"l visited, and extended love to, Jewish criminals and prisoners. It is purported that Reb Tzvi Yehuda Kook zt"l said that he heard from his father that he did not hate anybody except for Ben Yehuda as they had studied together in Volozhin and he became an apikores. However, he added, that he was working on it. The message, I believe, is very clear. We have to learn from what Moshe told the tribes of Reuven and Gad, i.e. that we all need to accept constructive criticism and ensure that our foundations are laid al pi taharas haKodesh.

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Science of Speech

Rebbetzin Shira Smiles

Our parashah begins with the laws of vows, obligations, and the power one's words have to create new realities. What are some relevant lessons here for us to learn and apply to our day-to-day living?

It is well known that the quality of speech is what makes people unique. In characterizing the various dimensions in this world, Chazal list inanimate objects, vegetative growth, animal species, and finally the world of the 'medaber,' the one who speaks. The "ruach memala," the power of speech, the spirit of G-d blown into man, brings his G-dliness to the fore. "Ish ki yidor neder laHashem oh hishava shevua le'esor issar al nafsho lo yachel devaro – if a man makes a vow to G-d or makes an oath to obligate himself he must not break his word." (Bamidbar 30:3) Rashi comments on the words, "lo yachel devaro," when one makes a vow, "lo yechalel devaro," one should be careful not to make his words profane. "Chilul" is taking something holy and treating it in a way that disrespects its sacred purpose. Vayomer Yehudah explains that we must uphold whatever words come out of our mouths, even words that are not said as a promise. We must understand that even casual words have power that should be used carefully and appropriately.

The Netivot Shalom quotes Rabbeinu Yonah who teaches that when one who sanctifies his mouth, it becomes a "klei sharet," a holy vessel. Indeed, the purpose of our creation is to praise Hashem, and as such, the mouth becomes the medium of this holy mandate. It is therefore not surprising that the essential mitzvot of a Jew involve speech: learning Torah, prayer, remembering Shabbat. Words spoken from a mouth that has been refined have the status of kedushah and are inherently more elevated.

In Lekutei Torah the Ariz"l explains that a malach, an angel, is created with every word that emanates from one's mouth. It can either be a positive force or a negative one. "Lo yachel devaro" tells a person that no speech is profane, a spiritual force is created from everything he says. Just as it is prohibited to use a "kli sharet" for mundane purposes, likewise, all speech should be measured carefully. Shabbat is a time, as Yeshaya Hanavi teaches us, that our speech must be even more elevated than during the week. Our Torah learning takes on a different dimension on Shabbat, and some are careful to be more mindful how they use any words on Shabbat.

The Talmud teaches that even one's casual conversations will be presented at his final judgment. After his passing, Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer

came to his student Rabbi Chaim Berlin in a dream and related that the harshest judgement is in the area of speech. Rav Biderman explains the following pasuk quoted in the Gemara, "u'magid l'adam mah secho – and declares to man what his speech is" (Amos 4:13). After one's lifetime he will be shown how much his tefillah could have impacted the dynamics of the world globally and individually had he used this power to the fullest. Let us take this meaningful lesson to invest in our words, holy and casual, to elevate ourselves and those around us.

From the Virtual Desk of the OU Vebbe Rebbe Hagomel After Losing the Way

Rabbi Daniel Mann

Question: My son and I went hiking in a quite isolated area (no cell phone service) and took a wrong turn and walked a couple hours without seeing signs of civilization. We were almost out of water and weak before finding someone who directed us to safety. How should we thank Hashem for getting us through the danger?

Answer: There are four main possible steps to thank Hashem for being saved from danger. 1) Reciting Birkat Hagomel in front of a minyan (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 219:1-3). 2) Making a seudat hodaya (thanksgiving meal to thank Hashem) (see Living the Halachic Process VI, G-8.) 3) Giving tzedaka (Mishna Berura 218:32). 4) Reciting the beracha of "she'asa li nes bamakon hazeh" when one comes to the place of his miraculous salvation (Shulchan Aruch, OC 218:4).

We will deal first with the easier questions. The Shulchan Aruch does not mention seudot hodaya, and it apparently is never an obligation. On the other hand, a few gemarot relate to such a practice, and it can be very positive (see Living the Halachic Process ibid.) and is essentially without "risk." So, if you perceive you were in real danger, a seudat hodaya is a wonderful albeit optional expression of gratitude. The same is true of giving tzedaka.

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 218:9) cites two opinions whether the beracha upon coming to the place of his miracle is only for miracles that seem to defy nature or even for more commonplace salvations. He recommends making the beracha without Hashem's Name. From your description, it sounds unlikely that the prospects for survival were low enough to qualify the salvation as a miracle on any level. Therefore, if you ever make it back to that place, no beracha seems warranted, certainly not with Hashem's Name.

Is Hagomel called for? The gemara (Berachot 54b) prescribes reciting Birkat Hagomel for people who emerged safely from the following predicaments, which are referred to in Tehillim 107's description of thanking Hashem: traveling by sea and through a midbar, disease, and prison. The Shulchan Aruch (219:9) brings two opinions as to whether the beracha is prescribed for any danger (e.g., a dangerous animal attacked him, a wall collapsed on him). While he recommends making the beracha without Hashem's Name in such cases, the accepted minhag, based on multiple Acharonim, is to make the regular beracha for extrication from any danger (Mishna Berura ad loc. 32; Igrot Moshe, OC II:59). However, as above, it is difficult to ascertain whether the level and perhaps type of danger you were in qualifies as warranting a beracha that is not found in the "official list."

Might this case fit into the category of those who travel in a midbar? The Rambam (Berachot 10:8) lists, as one of the four situations for Hagomel, walking on roads outside the city (without mentioning desert). The Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 7) cites the Sephardi minhag to recite Hagomel after traveling outside the city a parsah (app., 4 kilometers; Yabia Omer I, OC 13 says that it goes by the time it takes to walk a parsah = 72 minutes). (This is the criterion for tefillat haderech – ibid. 110:7). This is because of a general assumption of danger in inter-city roads. The Ashkenazi minhag is to make Hagomel only after a "midbar," where there are bandits and wild animals, and not for uneventful land travel (regarding air, see Igrot Moshe ibid.).

The Mishna Berura (219:31) says that if a traveler on a normal road is attacked by robbers, all agree he recites Hagomel. The combination of factors (road plus danger) justifies the beracha (see Sha'ar Hatziyun ad loc. and Igrot Moshe ibid.), making it equivalent to a desert, and that

applies to your case – lost with little water on path. Furthermore, walking lost in an isolated area is walking in a midbar (which includes wilderness) itself, one of the four definite Hagomel cases. While poskim mention animals and bandits, that is in addition to what the p'sukim (Tehillim 107:4-7) discuss – being lost in a wilderness with limited food and drink (see Ish Matzliach, II, OC 11; Imrei Shefer 29).

TORAH SHORTS:Matot-Masai 5783

by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz

Levels of Control (Matot-Masai)

Nothing is more dangerous than a friend without discretion; even a prudent enemy is preferable. -Jean de La Fontaine

Moses addresses the leaders of the tribes of Israel. He instructs them as to the laws of vows. He instructs them about literally, “what comes out of your mouths.” The Bat Ayin on Numbers 30:2 connects the fact that Moses is addressing the leaders of the tribes to a person’s ability to control their mouth.

It seems that Israel’s judicial, military, and most likely political leadership during their years of wandering in the desert was organized in a hierarchical system, as initially proposed by Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro. Back in the Book of Exodus, shortly after the nation of Israel is miraculously freed from Egypt, crosses the Reed Sea and camps out at the foot of Mount Sinai, Jethro gives Moses much needed advice. He saw Moses attending individually to every single person in Israel, tells him it’s unsustainable and recommends a hierarchical meritocracy. Moses implements Jethro’s plan and establishes the roles of Captains of Ten, Captains of Fifty, Captains of One Hundred and Captains of One Thousand.

The Bat Ayin suggests that a person achieved a higher rank based on their ability to control their mouth. Those who exhibited the greatest control over what they said, how they said it, when they said it, to whom they said it, and perhaps most importantly, what they didn’t say – those people merited the highest rank within the leadership of Israel. The less prudent, less sensitive, less cautious and less circumspect a person was in their dialogue, the lower their rank, and ostensibly, those with little control of their speech were not given any positions of responsibility.

However, the control of their tongue was a product of their awe and reverence of God. The stronger a person understood their divine responsibilities and obligations, the more a person sought sanctity and transcendence. The more they used their powers of speech for noble and holy purposes, the more they were elevated.

May we always use caution and deliberation in what we say and achieve greater levels of divine connection.

Shabbat Shalom,
Ben-Tzion

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Matos

Putting People First

During the presidential run of 1992, candidate Bill Clinton published a book entitled Putting People First. He had it right. He just wasn’t the first one to write the book. This week we’ll explore how Moshe — very subtly — taught his nation that people, especially the children, come first.

The Jews were camped on the bank of the Jordan River, about to enter the land of Israel. Representatives of the tribes of Gad and Reuben approached Moshe with a very brazen request. Numbers 32:3-5: “We don’t want to enter Israel,” they exclaimed. “The land here is very suited for our cattle, and it would be quite beneficial if we were to remain here.” Moshe, recalling the calamity of the ten spies who dissuaded an entire nation from entering Israel, reacted in shock. “Do you remember what happened 40 years ago? Do you want to, once again, demoralize your brothers and sisters as did the spies? Do you remember that your parents and an entire generation perished in the dessert due to that sin?” Moshe then recounted, in full detail, the misfortune of that fateful event. “And now,” he concluded, “you have risen in place of your fathers to

rekindle the burning wrath of G-d?” The representatives, sat quietly through the denunciation and then spoke. “No, Moshe,” they exclaimed. “It was never our intent just to remain here. We’ll build stables for our livestock and homes for our children. Then we will join our brethren in the fight for Israel. Only after all is conquered will we return home and settle.” Moshe, obviously pacified by the quick and obviously well prepared response, reviewed the stipulations. “OK,” he countered, “you shall arm yourself for battle, cross the Jordan and fight with your brothers until Hashem drives out the enemy. Once the Land is conquered and settled, you can come back here and this land will be a heritage for you.” After Moshe reiterated all the prerequisites involved in the deal, he warns them. “If you transgress your commitment you will bear a terrible sin before Hashem.” Then, in what is seemingly out of place he adds the following. “Build cities for your children and pens for your livestock, and thus you shall observe the words that left your mouth.” Two questions bother me: Why is Moshe adding his comments on the domestic portion of their request? Isn’t his only concern that the tribes should join their brothers in the conquest of the land of Israel?

Rashi notes that Moshe switches the order of the request. The tribes said they will “build stables for our livestock and homes for our children.” Moshe switches the order and tells them “build cities for your children and pens for your livestock.” Why is this followed by the words, “thus you shall observe the words that left your mouth.”? Didn’t he already warn them of the consequence of retraction?

Henry Hirsch, the president of the Welbilt Co., one of America’s leading oven and major appliance manufacturers, had another labor of love. He was the president of one of America’s premier Torah institutions, Yeshiva Torah Voda’ath. At a board meeting, at which many of the yeshiva’s prominent lay leaders were present, the school’s cook prepared a beautiful supper in honor of the eminent supporters. As one of the students was serving the executives, Mr. Hirsch looked at the delicious meal. “Excuse me,” he asked the young scholar. “What are they serving you in the main dining hall?” The boy looked sheepishly at Mr. Hirsch and stammered, “I think we’re having egg salad sandwiches.”

The renowned philanthropist turned to the executive board and the representatives of the Yeshiva administration. “We are all here for the sake of the Yeshiva boys, I think it is they who should be eating this chicken dinner. Let’s send it to them and we’ll have the egg salad instead.”

Moshe was pleased with the offer to fight. However, he noted a major problem in the honorable plans of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. They prefaced their commitment with a very suspect phrase. “We will build pens for our livestock and then we will build cities for our children.” Moshe listens, reviews their offer and is doubtful. People who put monetary values before humans tend to worry about finances before family. And people who put money first often change their position, when their holdings are at stake. Thus Moshe reiterates their pledge with one major amendment. He says to them, “build cities for your children and then pens for your livestock; thus you shall keep the word that left your mouth.” If the children come first, then he will trust them. He knows and believes their values are in order and they will uphold their pledge. A major provision in the deal was not only a military commitment, but a philosophy that will guide the Jews for centuries. Put the people first!

Good Shabbos!

Office of the Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Matot Massei: What difference does it make where we live?

The maths doesn’t add up.

In Parshat Maasei we’re told how six cities of refuge were established for our people: three which were to be west of the River Jordan, in Israel proper, and three in Transjordan, called Ever HaYarden, east of the River Jordan. These were cities which were wisely established for people guilty of homicide. There was a danger that family members of the victim might seek revenge, and so the person who had killed

somebody inadvertently needed to flee, for his or her safety, to a city of refuge.

But the maths doesn't add up. Because in Israel proper there were nine and a half tribes, and in Transjordan there were only two and a half tribes: Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe. So why would there be three cities of refuge on each side?

The Talmud explains that outside of the holy territory of the land of Israel, people had less respect for the sanctity of life, therefore there was a greater need for cities of refuge in that area.

Reb Itzele of Volozhin, a great 19th century scholar, adds a further dimension. He talks about the primary problem being the threat from members of the family of the victim. Outside of the land of Israel they wanted to seek revenge but inside Israel proper, they were more likely to consider: seeing as one person has already died, what sense will it make for another person to die? These people therefore controlled their urges. As a result there were fewer people who came into the category of 'goel hadam' – somebody seeking to take revenge.

From here emerges a hugely important lesson for all of us. It's all about the impact of our surroundings. Our environment sets a tone for our lives. I believe that there are two primary messages here.

First of all we should carefully select where we live where we raise our children because the influences of our environment will always have an impact on us. Secondly and more importantly, let us also guarantee that within our own family circles the tone of morality and ethics that we establish will be such that those growing up within the family will be committed to leading a responsible life.

If we see to it that our homes are a place of kedusha, of much sanctity, that will hopefully make all the difference to the ways of life of those within them.

Shabbat shalom.

Toiveling Keilim

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

"Last time I went to immerse some cutlery, a lady immersing some aluminum bowls asked me to include her with my beracha. When I asked her whether she wanted me to help her recite her own beracha on the mitzvah, she responded softly that she received a psak not to recite a beracha when toiveling aluminum, although she did not know the reason. Why would she not recite the beracha?"

Question #2:

"I have a gift business in which I sell candy dishes with candies, fruits, and nuts already in the glass dishes. Must I toivel these dishes before I fill them?"

Introduction:

In Parshas Matos, the Torah teaches: Only the gold and the silver; the copper, the iron, the tin and the lead: any item that was used in fire needs to be placed in fire to become pure [meaning "kosher"], yet it must also be purified in mikveh water. And that which was not used in fire must pass through water" (Bamidbar 31:22-23). These verses serve as the basis for teaching three different sets of laws:

1. Absorbing Concepts

How to kasher vessels that were used to cook non-kosher foods. An item that was used directly in fire, such as a spit or grate that broiled non-kosher, is kashered only by burning it directly in fire; an item used to cook on top of a fire, such as a pot that cooked non-kosher, may be kashered via a process similar to the way it was used, etc.

2. Tainted Metal

Which items are susceptible to tumah. The Torah here teaches that implements made of metal become tamei (spiritually impure) through contact with a tamei item (such as an animal carcass), and that immersing them in a mikveh restores them to tahor status. An item is susceptible to tumah only when the Torah informs us of this fact – if the Torah never taught that an item can become tamei, it does not, and therefore most items in the world are not susceptible to tumah. (Unfortunately, these laws have limited practical application until Moshiach comes and we again have the parah adumah. At that time, we

will be able to live according to the tahor status necessary to observe the mitzvos related to the Beis Hamikdash, terumah and maaser sheini.)

3. Immersed in Holiness

The mitzvah to immerse implements in a mikveh or spring prior to using them for food. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 75b) notes that this immersion is required even if the vessel has never been used. In other words, this mitzvah is unrelated to the requirement of kashering equipment that was used to prepare non-kosher food and to the laws related to purifying implements that became tamei.

Materials that require tevilah

The Torah teaches that utensils owned by a non-Jew that are made of gold, silver, copper, iron, tin or lead require immersion in a kosher mikveh or spring when they are transferred to Jewish ownership. According to most authorities, this mitzvah is a Torah requirement, although there is a minority opinion that this mitzvah is required only midrabbanan (Rambam, as understood by Pri Chadash). We will assume that the requirement to immerse gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead implements is Torah-ordained. (Bear in mind that, although we would not use lead as an ingredient because of valid concerns about lead poisoning, this medical problem was not discovered until the nineteenth century. Therefore, we find much earlier halachic literature discussing immersion of lead or lead-lined utensils.)

There is no requirement to immerse food utensils made of wood, earthenware, ivory, bone, leather, stone or most other materials. We will soon discuss glass and plastic.

Mechiras Chometz and Tevilas Keilim

As we all know, before Pesach one is required to rid one's house and all one's possessions of chometz. However, some items, such as toasters, mixers, wooden kneading bowls, and flour bins are difficult, if not impossible, to clean. Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chayim 442:11) recommend giving wooden kneading bowls and flour bins and the chometz they contain as a gift to a non-Jew before Pesach, with the understanding that the gentile will return them after the holiday. Today, the standard mechiras chometz that we perform includes selling this chometz and these appliances in the sale. However, what do I do if I have metal appliances that may be full of chometz, such as mixers and toasters? If I sell these appliances to a gentile and then purchase the appliance back from him, will I now need to immerse the appliance in a mikveh?

The halachic authorities note that someone selling his or her chometz to a gentile before Pesach should be careful not to sell utensils that require tevilas keilim. Instead, one should rent the appliances to a gentile and sell the chometz they contain (Chachmas Odom; Noda Beyudah, cited in Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 120:13). An item rented to a gentile does not require immersion when it is returned to the Jewish owner.

Cleavers versus Graters!

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 75b) quotes Rav Sheishes as suggesting that anything purchased from a gentile, even a clothing shears, should require immersion. Rav Nachman responded that the mitzvah of tevilas keilim applies only to kelei seudah -- literally, implements used for a meal, which includes both utensils used to prepare food, such as pots and knives, and those utilized to eat or drink, such as drinking cups and tableware (Avodah Zarah 75b).

Grates and Grills

One is required to immerse only those items that usually touch the food directly. Therefore, stove grates, blechs, hotplates, knife sharpeners, trivets, can openers and corkscrews do not require tevilah (see Yoreh Deah 120:4), but grills, peelers, funnels, strainers, salt shakers, pepper mills and tongs do require tevilah, since they all touch food.

What about storage vessels?

Is one required to immerse a metal container or glass jar used to store foodstuffs, but that is not suitable for preparing or consuming food?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (on Yoreh Deah 120:1, quoting Keneses Hagedolah [Beis Yosef 18]) discusses whether storage vessels require tevilah, and concludes that it is unclear whether they should be immersed. Therefore one should immerse them without reciting a beracha, because in case there is no mitzvah to immerse them, reciting a beracha al tevilas keilim

before immersing them is reciting a beracha levatalah, a beracha in vain. A better solution is to immerse them at the same time that one immerses an item that definitely requires a beracha.

Kelei Sechorah -- "Merchandise"

The halachic authorities note that a storekeeper does not toivel vessels he is planning to sell, since for him they are not kelei seudah, but items he intends to sell. Later authorities therefore coined a term "kelei sechorah," utensils used as merchandise, ruling that these items do not require immersion until they are purchased by the person intending to use them (based on Taz, Yoreh Deah 120:10). Furthermore, several halachic authorities contend that the storekeeper cannot immerse the vessels prior to sale, since there is as yet no requirement to immerse them (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 8:70). This is based on a statement of the Rema that implies that a tevilah performed before one is obligated to immerse a vessel, such as while it is still owned by the gentile, does not fulfill the mitzvah and must be repeated after it becomes the property of a Jew (Rema Yoreh Deah 120:9).

Based on this discussion, we can now address one of our above-mentioned questions:

"I have a gift business in which I sell candy dishes with candies, fruits, and nuts already in the glass dishes. Must I toivel these dishes before I fill them?"

This question is a modification of a situation in which I was involved. I once received a glass candy dish from someone, with a note from the business stating that the dish has already been toiveled. I called the proprietor of the business to inform him that, in my opinion, not only is he not required to toivel the dish, but I suspect that it does not help. My reasoning is that, although the proprietor fills his dishes with nuts and candies, from his perspective this is still merchandise that he is selling. The dish therefore qualifies as kelei sechorah which one need not immerse, and, therefore, immersing them does not fulfill the mitzvah. As a result, not only is the proprietor not obligated to immerse the dishes, but doing so fulfills no mitzvah, and it is a beracha levatalah for him to recite a beracha on this immersion. Including a note that the dish was toiveled is detrimental, since the recipient will assume that he has no requirement to toivel this dish, whereas, in fact, the end-user is required to immerse it. For these reasons, I felt it incumbent on myself to bring this to the attention of the owner of the business.

The proprietor was very appreciative. He told me that, in truth, it was a big hassle for him to toivel the dishes, but he had been assuming that halacha required him to do so before he could fill the dishes.

Some Immersing Details

When immersing the utensil, one should not hold it very tightly in one's hand, since this will cause the part of the utensil he is holding to not be immersed properly. Instead, one should either hold the utensil somewhat loosely, or alternatively, one should dip one's hand into the mikveh water before holding the utensil that will be immersed (Rema, Yoreh Deah 120:2; see Taz and Shach).

Prior to immersing a utensil, one must remove all rust and dirt from the utensil. If one immersed the utensil and it had rust or dirt that most people would not want on the appliance, one must clean it, and then re-immersing it (Yoreh Deah 120:13).

When one is immersing an item that definitely requires tevilah, immediately prior to dipping it, one should recite the beracha, Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu al tevilas keili. If one immerses more than one vessel he should conclude instead al tevilas keilim (Yoreh Deah 120:3). Although some authorities mention alternative texts to the beracha, I have quoted the commonly used text, which follows the majority opinion.

If it is uncertain whether the item requires tevilah, one should not recite a beracha. It is preferable, if possible, to immerse it at the same time that one immerses a different utensil that definitely requires tevilah, so that both items are included in the beracha.

May a child toivel keilim?

If a child tells you that he immersed a vessel in a kosher mikveh, may you rely that this indeed happened?

The halacha is that if an adult supervised the child immerse the vessel correctly, one may use the utensil, but one may not rely on the child attesting that he or she immersed the utensil properly (Yoreh Deah 120:14; see also Gr"a ad locum and Pri Megadim, Orach Chayim, Mishbetzos Zahav 451:6). Apparently, this is not a well-known halacha, since one often finds children being used as agents to immerse utensils for their parents.

People eating from glass dishes...

The Gemara teaches that food utensils made of glass must be immersed prior to use, since glassware is similar to metalware in that when it becomes broken it can be melted and repaired, what we usually call recyclable. One recites a beracha prior to immersing glassware, just as one recites a beracha prior to immersing metalware.

Of course, this leads us to a question about plasticware, since many forms of plastic are recyclable in ways very similar to metal and glass. Does repairable plasticware require tevilah just as glassware does? Most people assume that plasticware is not included in the mitzvah of tevilas keilim, but why?

This takes us to an earlier discussion between 19th-century poskim concerning a type of boneware, which, when broken or cracked, could be repaired by melting and melding it. (I personally have no experience with this material, but I imagine that one could probably melt and repair bone, just as one can repair horn by melting and melding. There is much halachic discussion about the repair of a damaged shofar by melting and melding the crack.) Rav Avraham Shaag, the rebbe of Rav Yosef Chayim Sonnenfeld (later the Rav of the old Yishuv of Yerushalayim and Eretz Yisrael), concluded that just as one is required to immerse glassware because it is repairable, one is required to immerse boneware (Shu't Ohel Avraham #24, quoted by Darkei Teshuvah). This position was disputed by Rav David Zvi Hoffman, the preeminent posek of Germany in his day, who contended that since the immersion of glassware is required only midrabbanan, one need immerse only those items that Chazal specifically required, but a newly developed material, albeit similar to glassware, would not require immersion (Shu't Melamed Leho'il, Yoreh Deah #49).

The late authorities debate whether plastic items require immersion prior to use. Indeed, some authorities (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 3:76) require the immersion of reusable plastic plates and the like, because they follow the logic of Rav Avraham Shaag -- although without a beracha, since perhaps Rav Dovid Hoffman is halachically correct. Nevertheless, most authorities conclude that one is not required to immerse plasticware (Shu't Yabia Omer 4: Yoreh Deah: 8; Tevilas Keilim page 226).

Other Metals

When teaching that metal implements become tamei and that one must immerse food utensils before use, the Torah specifies the six metals that were available in ancient times: gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead. (Bronze and brass are both alloys whose main component is copper; in bronze, the most significant minority element is tin, and in brass it is zinc.) However, over the last two hundred years, mankind developed the means to extract and process several other metals, including platinum, chromium, aluminum, and titanium. Do these "new" metals have the same halachic status as the six mentioned in the Torah? Are platinum rings, aluminum urns and titanium airplanes susceptible to tumah? Do chrome pots and aluminum trays require tevilas keilim?

The Tiferes Yisrael, in his extensive introduction to the Order of Taharos, rules that the newly discovered metals have the same halachic status as the six mentioned explicitly by the Torah, and they are all capable of becoming tamei (Yevakeish Daas #44). It follows from his line of reasoning that one is required min haTorah to immerse food vessels made of the new types of metal, and indeed this is how many authorities rule (Tevilas Keilim page 225). Many authorities contend that, although one is required to immerse aluminum pots, one is not required to immerse aluminum items that are disposable. Since they are meant to be disposed after use, they are not considered "keilim" that require immersion.

On the other hand, other poskim dispute the Tiferes Yisrael's conclusion that all types of metal become tamei, contending that since the Torah mentions six specific metals (and the Torah could certainly have used a generic term for all metal items that would have been much briefer), choosing a lengthy way of listing six types of metal demonstrates that these are the only types of metal that become tamei, and that any newly developed metals are not susceptible to tumah (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 2:164; letter from Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky published at end of the sefer Tevilas Keilim).

According to the latter approach, one can argue that chrome pots and aluminum implements do not require tevilas keilim. The prevalent accepted practice is to assume that they do require tevilas keilim, although some authorities consider this a sufficient enough doubt to omit the beracha prior to immersing these items.

Conclusion

According to Rav Hirsch, metal vessels, which require mankind's mining, extracting and processing, represent man's mastery over the earth and its materials. Whereas vessels made of earthenware or wood only involve man shaping the world's materials to fit his needs, the manufacture of metal demonstrates man's creative abilities to utilize natural mineral resources to fashion matter into a usable form. Consuming food, on the other hand, serves man's most basic physical nature. Use of metal food vessels, then, represents the intellectual aspect of man serving his physical self, which, in a sense, is the opposite of why we were created, which is to use our physical self to assist our intellect to do Hashem's will. Specifically in this instance, the Torah requires that the items hereby produced be immersed in a mikveh before we use them, in order to endow them with increased kedusha before they are put to food use. This demonstrates that although one may use one's intellect for physical purposes, when doing so one must first sanctify the item, to focus on the spiritual.

Parshas Mattos-Masei

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe ben Yitzchak.

Only as Good as His Word

And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Jewish people saying; "this is what Hashem has commanded. If a man vows a vow to Hashem, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to whatever comes out of his mouth" (30:2-3).

Maimonides, in the introduction to his commentary on Mishna, ponders why Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, compiler of the Mishna, chose to place the tractate of Nedarim (vows) in the section of Nashim (the laws related to women). He answers that the placement is appropriate as Nedarim deals with vows made by a woman that can be annulled either by her father or her husband. However, the laws regarding a father or husband annulling vows do not appear until the tenth chapter of Nedarim; clearly this isn't a focus of the tractate.

Perhaps an alternative answer to Maimonides' question can be suggested. The vast majority of tractate Nedarim is concerned with the language and articulation of a vow – which words and/or statements bind a person to a commitment and which do not. The tractate also focuses on which words properly communicate one's intent and which phrases do not. This means that to bind oneself to a commitment requires the correct words, the proper intent, and the listener's understanding.

As Nedarim is essentially about articulating intent and how communications are understood, it is incredibly relevant to the section of Nashim. Interaction with wives (and mothers and daughters, of course) are all about understanding communication. Men have to understand that conversation isn't just about saying what's on their minds. They have to begin by considering how their words will be interpreted and understood (or not) and then choose their words carefully. Even then, men often fail (as we are reminded). It must be understood that through speech – which is a reflection of our soul and a God-given ability through His breath –

one has the power to convey thoughts and create obligations by articulating commitments.

Perhaps this is why the only transaction that requires actual speech is that of the marriage ceremony. The message being delivered is that marriage can only begin with a man articulating his intent through his words – and in a manner that his bride finds acceptable.

Don't Focus on Yourself – Be Happy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Avenge the people of Israel from the Midianites; afterwards you shall be gathered to your people. And Moshe spoke to the people saying, "Arm some of yourselves for the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and do the Lord's vengeance in Midian. From every tribe a thousand [...] twelve thousand armed for war" (31:1-5).

This week's parsha relates Moshe's final responsibility as leader of the Jewish people: to exact vengeance on the Midianites who had caused devastating human losses to the Jewish people. Hashem informed Moshe that after completing this final mission Moshe would die. Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Midrash Tanchuma: "Even though Moshe knew that at the end of this final task he would die, he did it with joy and didn't delay." How do Chazal know that he did it with joy if it doesn't appear anywhere in the pesukim?

Rashi (verse four) explains that the words "from every tribe" include even the tribe of Levi. In other words, every tribe sent one thousand armed soldiers for war against the Midianites. The commentators (Mizrahi and others ad loc) ask a very difficult question on Rashi: If Moshe indeed sent one thousand from every tribe including the tribe of Levi, that would equal 13,000 armed soldiers, so why does verse five say that only 12,000 were given over to war?

Rashi (verse five) explains that the 12,000 armed men had to "be given over" to duty because they had heard that after this final mission Moshe would die. The men were very reluctant to go and had to be coerced. So even though Moshe had gone about his final task with joy, the Jewish people were very sad. Why this dichotomy?

As the baby boomer generation ages, the burden of their care falls on a large portion of our population – their children. Why is it that some of these children view caring for their aging parents as their greatest privilege and are thrilled to be able to do this for their parents, while other children see it as an overwhelming burden? This isn't limited to caring for others; often two people in the same predicament (e.g. a serious health issue) have polar opposite attitudes to life and living. Why? What is the root cause of this difference?

The answer is focus. A person who is constantly, and solely, focused on what he can do for others is always happy as his main currency of life is defined with what he can do for others. Conversely, a person who is focused solely on himself is devastated when anything about him is diminished. Therefore, an outwardly focused individual looks at caring for a parent as a tremendous opportunity; not only to do a great kindness, but also to repay a debt of gratitude. While an inwardly focused person only sees how his life is "diminished" by this added responsibility.

This, of course, is a cause for sadness. The inwardly focused individual doesn't feel a deep sense of gratitude because, after all, everything is coming to him. This sense of entitlement (i.e. I am owed everything I receive because everything is about me) causes these individuals to lead a frustrating and unhappy life because they are always waiting on the largesse of others. On the other hand, the person with the healthy giving attitude is always happy because he is in control of his own destiny; he isn't frustrated by waiting for others to give him what he "deserves."

Moshe was an outwardly focused individual. Even though Hashem told him that he would die after this final mission, he was happy because his sole focus was what he could do for others. Anytime he had something to accomplish he did it with joy. We see this clearly in the pesukim: Hashem tells Moshe to take revenge for the Jewish people, yet when he tells the Jewish people he changes the purpose of the war to be revenge for Hashem. He is telling the Jewish people that this isn't about us, this is about Hashem. When someone attacks Hashem's children (the Jewish people), it is an attack on Hashem and we have to avenge His honor.

The problem with the perspective of the Jewish people was that they were focused on their loss (i.e. Moshe dying after this final mission) and had to be “given over” because they didn’t want to lose Moshe. Only the tribe of Levi, Moshe’s tribe and the one tribe that was historically outwardly focused on what Hashem wanted (e.g. they never participated in the golden calf, they were the only tribe to keep the mitzvah of circumcision in the desert, etc.), wasn’t reluctant to go to war. It is for that reason that only 12,000 men had to be given over to the war. Only the other tribes were reluctant, the tribe of Levi was already ready to go on this final mission.

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.]

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

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

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

THE LAND PROMISED TO AVRAHAM AVINU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2) At BRIT MILA: / 'ERETZ CANAAN'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO BORDERS / TWO TYPES OF KEDUSHA

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

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

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

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

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM

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

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

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

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

BRIT MILA (Breishit chapter 17)

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

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

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

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

(A) The NATIONAL aspect

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

[See Rambam, Hilchot Trumot, first chapter!]

(B) The PERSONAL aspect -

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

The following table summarizes our analysis thus far:

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

YERUSHA & ACHUZA

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

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

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

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

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

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

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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

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

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

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

THE 'KERNEL'

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

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

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

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

EXPANDING KEDUSHA

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

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

THE RAMBAM'S DEFINITION OF ERETZ YISRAEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'LAND FOR PROGRESS'

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====

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 [ba'al t'acher"/ see Mesechet Rosh Ha'shana 4a.]

Therefore, Rashbam maintains that God told Moshe these laws of "nedarim" at the same time that he told him the laws of the korbanot of the holidays in Bamidbar chapters 28->29. Since those laws began with "va'yadaber Hashem...", there is no need to repeat that phrase once again. Instead, the Torah tells us that after Moshe told the people the laws of the korbanot (see 30:1):

"he [Moshe] went to the tribal leaders - WHO are their JUDGES - to tell them to teach these laws concerning NEDARIM to ALL of Bnei Yisrael. When he did this, Moshe told them: God has just commanded me to tell you that everyone must offer the NEDARIM and NEDAVOT during the holidays (see 29:39), therefore should anyone make a vow [neder]... they should not BE LATE in fulfilling it..."

First of all, note how beautifully Rashbam explains the phrase "LO YACHEL DEVARO". Usually, "yachel" is translated - he should not PROFANE (or break his pledge/ JPS). Based on his interpretation, Rashbam translates "yachel" as DELAY, and brings excellent examples from Breishit 8:10 and Shoftim 3:25.

[Note also how he boldly states that according to pshat, any other translation of "yachel" here is a MISTAKE!]

In summary, Rashbam claims that chapter 30 is simply direct continuation of chapter 29, for one is obligated to fulfill his vows (chapter 30) on the holidays (chapter 29). By recognizing this point, note how Rashbam manages to answer ALL of the questions raised in our introduction, and adds a brilliant translation for the word "yachel" within this context.

If you don't read him carefully (while paying attention to the opening questions), you won't appreciate how clever his pirush is!

[Note as well how the division of chapters makes a 'futile' attempt to solve Rashbam's opening question, by starting chapter 30 with the last pasuk in Parshat Pinchas. [Did you notice this?]] Note how CHAZAL's division according to parshiyot must be correct, i.e. beginning the new topic in 30:2 - BECAUSE 30:1 forms the completion of 28:1-2, and hence SHOULD be the LAST pasuk in chapter 29 instead of the first pasuk in chapter 30.]

RAMBAN

Ramban begins his commentary dealing with the same question that bothered Rashbam, but offers a very different answer! [Note also how Ramban also takes for granted that the reader has already been bothered by these questions.]

"The pasuk does not tell us first that God told these laws to Moshe... like it says by SHCHUTEI CHUTZ and most all other parshiyot, INSTEAD we are told this at the END of this parshiya! [There we find a summary:] "These are the laws that GOD COMMANDED MOSHE... (see 30:17)"

Note how clever this Ramban is! He answers the question by paying careful attention to the **conclusion** of this unit. [Again, this is a classic example of the comprehensive nature of Ramban's approach.]

Ramban brings a parallel example from SHCHUTEI CHUTZ (see Vayikra 17:1-2), clearly in reaction to Rashi's pirush (which he will soon argue with), even though he doesn't quote Rashi directly!

[Ramban expects that the reader of his commentary is already familiar with Rashi, as he himself was!]

But even without this concluding pasuk (i.e. 30:17) Ramban proves that we need not be bothered by the fact that Moshe's instruction to the "rashei ha'matot" is not prefaced by "va'yadaber Hashem el Moshe...". Ramban brings two other examples where commandments by Moshe that begin with ZEH HA'DAVAR are not prefaced with a "va'yadaber Hashem el Moshe...":

[Furthermore], in Parshat Shmini it states ZEH HA'DAVAR (see Vayikra 9:6 and its context) without a preface that God had commanded this, and in relation to keeping the manna [next to the aron] it states ZEH HA'DAVAR... (see Shmot 16:32)"

Once again, we see the comprehensive nature of Ramban's methodology, always considering parallel occurrences of similar phrases or patterns.

After explaining WHO these tribal leaders are (possibly those leaders mentioned later in Bamidbar 34:17-29), Ramban offers an interpretation which is exactly the opposite of Rashi's, claiming that indeed these laws were given intentionally ONLY to the tribal leaders:

"And the reason for Moshe saying these laws to the "rashei ha'matot" - BECAUSE there is no need to teach all of Bnei Yisrael that a father (or husband) can annul the vow of his daughter (or wife). Maybe these laws need to kept 'hidden' so that people will not take their words lightly (should they know that their promises can be annulled). However, the judges and leaders of Israel MUST know these laws..."

Note how Ramban prefers the 'simple pshat' of the pasuk over Chazal's interpretation (i.e. the Sifri quoted by Rashi) - and provides a very good reason that supports his preference.

On the other hand, Ramban does accept the halacha that Chazal infer from these psukim, relating this to the special style that the Torah uses to record this commandment:

"And this does HINT to the MIDRASH CHAZAL that tribal leaders have special privileges in relation to nedarim that a "yachid mumche" (expert) can annul a vow on his own..."

Ramban concludes his commentary by noting, as Rashbam did, the thematic connection to the laws of Tmidim u'Musafim (based on 29:39), nevertheless reaching a different conclusion.

IBN EZRA

Ibn Ezra also deals with the thematic connection between these laws of "nedarim" and the 'neighboring' topics in Sefer Bamidbar. However, instead of looking 'backward' to the halachik sections of Parshat Pinchas, he looks forward to what transpires in the stories that are recorded in Parshat Matot, i.e. the war against Midyan and the story of Bnei Gad and Reuven (chapters 31 & 32).

"In my opinion, this parshiya was given AFTER the war against MIDYAN (chapter 31), and that is why THAT story is recorded immediately afterward! [Ibn Ezra then brings an example of this style from Bamidbar chapter 12.]

This interpretation is also very creative, for it claims that these laws were actually given in reaction to an event that took place at that time! As you study this Ibn Ezra, note how he also deals with most all of the above questions, yet offers very different answers. Let's take a look:

"Then, (after that battle) the pasuk tells us that Bnei Gad and Reuven came to Moshe and Elazar and the PRINCES and requested [to keep Transjordan / see 32:1-5]. At the conclusion of their discussion, [when the deal is finalized] it states:

"Then Moshe gave instructions [concerning Bnei Gad] to Elazar and Yehoshua and the RASHEI AVOT HA'MATOT L'BNEI YISRAEL" (see 32:28),

after Moshe had just forewarned Bnei Gad u'Reuven that '**whatever you PROMISE - you must keep**' " (see 32:24)..."

Ibn Ezra prefers both this thematic (making and keeping promises) and textual ("rashei ha'matot") parallel to chapter 30, in order to explain the location of this parshiya at this point in Sefer Bamidbar; over Rashbam's and Ramban's parallel to Parshat Pinchas.

Note also how Ibn Ezra agrees with Rashi that the "rashei ha'matot" were supposed to relay these laws to Bnei Yisrael; however he provides a different proof, based on the LAMED in L'BNEI YISRAEL in 30:2!

CHIZKUNI

Chizkuni opens with yet another creative answer to our original question. He states:

"k'dei l'hachirach et ha'am" - in order to enforce this upon the people"

Like Rashi, he agrees that these laws were indeed intended to be taught to EVERYONE (arguing with Ramban). However, Chizkuni provides a different reason for why the "rashei ha'matot" are singled out. Unlike Rashi who claims that it is an issue of 'honor', he claims that they are taught first, for it is their responsibility to enforce these laws. Chizkuni understands that the Torah wants the leaders to make sure that unnecessary vows are annulled (by those who can), OR that the leaders should make sure that the people keep their promises.

Afterward, Chizkuni continues by quoting from both Ibn Ezra and Rashi.

SEFORNO

Finally, Seforno adds a very creative explanation for the phrase ZEH HA'DAVAR. He claims as follows:

In the original commandment at Har Sinai - "Do not to make an oath in God's Name (and not fulfill it) lest God's Name be desecrated" (see Vayikra 19:12) - one may conclude that this would refer to anyone making a vow.

Here in Parshat Matot, claims Seforno, the Torah makes an exception. That law applies only to males - for they are 'their own bosses' ["b'rshut atzmo"]. However, a wife or a daughter, because

she is under the jurisdiction of her father (or husband), should she not fulfill a vow, it would not be such a terrible desecration of God's Name, for the person hearing this vow being made immediately realizes that she may not be able to fulfill it. As the potential "chillul Hashem" is less, the Torah provides a special avenue through which she can annul her vow.

This original interpretation (even though it may sound a bit chauvinist) takes into consideration the details of these laws in relation to a similar law recorded earlier, and explains both the phrase ZEH HA'DAVAR as well as the nature of the specific details of these laws.

NEXT TIME

Hopefully, our shiur has highlighted how "parshanut" can be better understood by spending a little time first considering possibilities, instead of just reading right away what each one has to say. In other words, if you study Chumash the same way the commentators themselves did (thinking first), you'll have a better chance of appreciating the treasure that they have left us.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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 "eretz 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 Yizrael proper.

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

Parshios Matos & Masei: (Siyyum on Sefer Bamidbar)

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

I. TRIBAL INTEGRITY AND FAMILY INTEGRITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why are these two presentations isolated from each other?

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

Another question of "placement" may be asked regarding the other significant "land-allotment challenge" at the end of Bamidbar. Chapter 32 is devoted to the "doubled condition" made with the members of the tribes of Gad and Re'uvan (and, later on, a few Menashe-ite families. Two interesting side points, beyond the scope of this shiur, relate to the role of this tribe to the end of Bamidbar. First of all, why did they jump on the Gad-Re'uvan "bandwagon" in the middle of the

negotiations with Mosheh? Second, note that they are the tribe of Tz'lofchad; thus, they are involved in all of the "land-allotment" issues at the end of Bamidbar...something worth investigating).

B'nei Gad and B'nei Re'uven 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'uven 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 ("lusts")

12: Mosheh, Miriam and Aharon (Lashon haRa')

13-14: Scouts ("Spies")

13 - 14:39: M'raglim (Scouts)

14:40 - 45: Ma'pilim (those who tried to enter the Land prematurely)

[15: Various Laws]
 16-17: Korach
 [18: Laws of Gifts given to Levi'im and Kohanim]
 [19: Laws of The Red Heifer]
 20 - 21:10: Dissolution of Leadership
 20:1: Death of Miriam
 20:2-13: "Mei M'rivah" - the decree against Mosheh and Aharon
 [20:14-21: Edom]
 20:22-29: Death of Aharon
 [21:1-3: K'na'ani War]
 21:4-10: Complaints, the Snakes and the Copper Serpent
 [21:11 - 22:1: War with Sichon and Og]
 [22:2-24:25: Bil'am]
 25: Ba'al P'or
 25:1-6: The Sin and the Plague
 25:7-15: Pinchas
 25:16-18: God's command to avenge the seduction

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

C: Chapters 26-36:

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

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

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

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

IV. METHODOLOGY NOTE: CHIASMUS AND BOOKENDS

As we discussed at length in an earlier shiur, it is possible to discern a chiasmic 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 chiasmically related, it follows

that the events at the end of the first section should be mirrored at the beginning of the third section.

One more bit of methodology before proceeding:

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

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

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

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

V. REVERSING THE DIRECTION OF LEGAL TRANSMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enter the daughters of Tz'lofchad:

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

Again, the initiative came from individuals who were concerned that as a result of the normative legislation, some level of

inclusion will be threatened (in the first case, their inclusion among the people; in this one, the integrity of their father's house within the tribe).

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

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

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

VI. REDEMPTION DEMANDS UNITY

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

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

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

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

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

Note also the famous statement in the Yerushalmi:

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

VII. THE "SINS OF THE DESERT"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

What was the reason for this dispute? We could answer based on the notion of Kibbush Yachid. As the Rambam (MT T'rumat 1:3) points out, any land outside of the "commanded borders" which is conquered, even if done by the King and with the support of the people and the Sanhedrin, is considered Kibbush Yachid (individual conquest) if it was done before the complete conquest of the Land within the commanded borders. Land which is the result of Kibbush Yachid is only quasi-sanctified with the sanctity of Eretz Yisra'el.

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

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

IX. MENASHEH'S CHIEFTAINS REVISITED

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

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

X. POSTSCRIPT

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

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Lamentations: Putting the Mouth before the Eye

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

INTRODUCTION

For over forty years preceding the destruction of the first Temple (627-586 B.C.E.), Jeremiah incessantly warned his people that Jerusalem, the Temple, and their lives were in the gravest jeopardy. The people mocked, threatened, and physically mistreated the prophet. Most scorned his message, thereby sealing their own doom.

Finally, Jeremiah's nightmarish visions became a reality. The Babylonians breached the walls of Jerusalem, killing and plundering, and burning the city to the ground. Other nations, including spurious allies, mocked Israel, looted her wealth, and even turned Jewish captives over to the Babylonians. The Temple was destroyed, and most of the humiliated survivors were dragged into captivity, wondering if they would ever see their homeland again.

The Book of Lamentations describes this calamity from the perspective of an eyewitness. It contains five chapters. Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 contain twenty-two verses each, and chapter 3 contains sixty-six verses (three verses per letter). Chapters 1-4 are arranged in aleph-bet acrostics. There is meaning in the content of Lamentations, and in its structure. Both make the book particularly poignant.

Chapter 1 casts the destroyed Jerusalem as a woman whose husband has abandoned her. While this initial imagery evokes pity, the chapter then adds that she took lovers and therefore deserved this abandonment. Israel admits that she has sinned and asks for mercy and for God to punish her enemies.

Chapter 2 asks: how could God be so harsh? The tone shifts from one of shame and despair to one of anger. There also is a shift of emphasis from Jerusalem as a victim to God as the Aggressor. At the end of the chapter, there is another plea for God to help.

Chapter 3 presents the voice of the individual who begins in a state of despair but who then regains hope. He expresses a desire to restore order and return to the pre-destruction state.

Chapter 4 is a painful step-by-step reliving of the destruction. It also contains lamenting over how the destruction could have happened, and it curses Israel's enemies.

Chapter 5 depicts the people left behind as looking at the ruins, absolutely miserable. They call on God for help, but conclude with disappointment and uncertainty as to what the future will bring.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TRAGEDY[1]

Chapter 1 acknowledges that the destruction of Jerusalem is God's work (1:12-15). While the main theme of chapter 1 is mourning, the author repeatedly vindicates God for the disaster, blaming it squarely on Israel's sins (see 1:5, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22).

Throughout chapter 1, the author adopts a rational, transcendent perspective. Reflecting an ordered sense of the world, the aleph-bet order is intact, poetically showing a calculated sense of misery.[2]

While chapter 1 acquits God, chapter 2 adopts a different outlook. Suddenly, the author lashes out at God:

How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not His footstool in the day of his anger!...He has bent His

bow like an enemy...He has poured out His fury like fire... (Lam. 2:1-4)

Chapter 1 gave the author a chance to reflect on the magnitude of this tragedy: death, isolation, exile, desolation, humiliation. In this context, the point of chapter 2 is clear: although Israel may be guilty of sin, the punishment seems disproportionate to the crimes. Nobody should have to suffer the way Israel has. The deeper emotions of the author have shattered his initial theological and philosophical serenity.

This emotional shift is reflected in the aleph-bet order of chapter 2. While the chapter maintains the poetic acrostic order, the verse beginning with the letter peh precedes the verse beginning with ayin. Why would Lamentations deviate from the usual alphabetical order? At the level of peshat, one might appeal to the fluidity of the ancient Hebrew aleph-bet, where the order of ayin and peh was not yet fixed in the biblical period. If this is the case, then there is nothing unusual or meaningful about having different orders since each reflects a legitimate order at that time.[3]

On a more homiletical level, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 104b) offers a penetrating insight. The Hebrew word peh means "mouth," and ayin means "eye." The author here put his mouth, that is, words, before what he saw. In chapter 1, the author evaluates the crisis with his eyes, in that he reflects silently, and then calculates his words of response. But in chapter 2, the author responds first with words (peh) that emerge spontaneously and reflect his raw emotions.

In the first section of chapter 3, the author sinks further into his sorrow and despairs of his relationship with God (verses 1-20). However, in the midst of his deepest sorrow, he suddenly fills with hope in God's ultimate fairness (3:21-41). The sudden switch in tone is fascinating:

And I said, My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord; Remembering my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul remembers them, and is bowed down inside me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. The grace of the Lord has not ceased, and His compassion does not fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. (Lam. 3:18-24)

The final section of chapter 3 then vacillates between despair, hope in God, and a call to repentance:

Let him sit alone and be patient, when He has laid it upon him. Let him put his mouth to the dust — there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to the smiter; let him be surfeited with mockery. For the Lord does not reject forever, but first afflicts, then pardons in His abundant kindness. For He does not willfully bring grief or affliction to man...Let us search and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord; Let us lift up our hearts with our hands to God in heaven: We have transgressed and rebelled, and You have not forgiven. You have clothed Yourself in anger and pursued us, You have slain without pity. (Lam. 3:28-43)

In chapter 4, there are further details of the destruction. Horrors are described in starker terms, climaxing with a description of compassionate mothers who ate their own children because of the dreadful famine preceding the destruction (4:9-10). The author blames God for the destruction (4:11), blames Israel for her sins (4:13), and expresses anger at Israel's enemies (4:21-22). In both chapters 3 and 4, the poetic order remains with the peh before the ayin, reflecting the author's unprocessed painful feelings. The author's conflicting emotions create chopiness in the thematic order and logic:

Those who were slain with the sword are better than those who are slain with hunger; for these pine away, stricken by want of the fruits of the field. The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people. The Lord has accomplished His fury; He has poured out His fierce anger, and has kindled a fire in Zion, which

has devoured its foundations...It was for the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, who have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her.
(Lam. 4:9-13)

Chapter 5 opens with a desperate appeal to God, a profound hope that He will restore His relationship with Israel. After further descriptions of the sufferings, the book ends wondering whether the Israelites would ever renew their relationship with God:

You, O Lord, are enthroned forever; Your throne is from generation to generation. Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us for so long? Turn us to You, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us. (Lam. 5:19-22)

Such a painful confusion leaves the reader uneasy. The author does not propose any solutions or resolution to the state of destruction. Reflecting this passionate plea, chapter 5 has no aleph-bet acrostic at all. With no clear end of the exile in sight, the author loses all sense of order. Perhaps the fact that chapter 5 still contains 22 verses suggests a vestige of hope and order amidst the breakdown of the destruction and exile.

To review: the aleph-bet pattern goes from being completely ordered in chapter 1, to a break in that order for three chapters. The last chapter does not follow the controlled aleph-bet order at all, signifying a complete emotional outburst by the community. The book ends on a troubling note, questioning whether or not it is too late for Israel to renew her relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Although Lamentations attempts to make sense of the catastrophe of the destruction, powerful and often conflicting emotions break the ordered poetic patterns. This sacred work captures the religious struggle to make sense of the world in a time of tragedy and God's ways and the effort to rebuild damaged relationships with God following a crisis.

Our emotional state in the aftermath of tragedy often follows the pattern of Lamentations — we begin with an effort to make sense of the misfortune, but then our mouths come before what we see — that is, our deeper turbulent emotions express themselves. Ideally, we come full circle until we again turn to God. Our expression of persistent hope has kept us alive as a people.

In the wake of catastrophe, people have the choice to abandon faith, or hide behind shallow expressions of faith, but even while emotionally understandable, both are incomplete responses. We must maturely accept that we do not understand everything about how God operates. At the same time, we must not negate our human perspective. We must not ignore our emotions and anxieties. In the end, we are humbled by our smallness and helplessness — and our lack of understanding of the larger picture. Through this process, the painful realities of life should lead to a higher love and awe of God.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The remainder of this chapter was adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Confronting Tragedy: A Perspective from Jewish Tradition," in Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (NY: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 279-295. This chapter is predicated on the assumption that the Book of Lamentations is a unified poem that should be treated as a literary unit. For a scholarly defense of this position, see Elie Assis, "The Unity of the Book of Lamentations," CBQ 71 (2009), pp. 306-329.

[2] Walter Bruggemann observes that Psalms 37 and 145 also are arranged according to the aleph-bet

sequence and similarly display orderliness (*Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* [Oregon: Cascade Books, 2007], p. 3).

[3] See Aaron Demsky, "A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and its Implications for the History of the Alphabet," *Tel Aviv* 4:1-2 (1977), pp. 14-27; Mitchell First, "Using the Pe-Ayin Order of the Abecedaries of Ancient Israel to Date the Book of Psalms," *JSOT* 38:4 (2014), pp. 471-485. First notes that in the Dead Sea text of *Lamentations*, the peh verse precedes the ayin verse in chapter 1, as well. For an attempt to explain the intentional deviation of the acrostics based on word patterns, see Ronald Benun, "Evil and the Disruption of Order: A Structural Analysis of the Acrostics in Ekha," at http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_55.pdf.

* National Scholar of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. He teaches advanced Tanakh classes at Yeshiva University, and is the author of many books and articles on Tanakh topics.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/lamentations-putting-mouth-eye>

Home Weekly Parsha MATOT – MAASEI
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai concludes with the parshiyot of this week. All of the occurrences, successes and failures that marked this forty year trek in a wasteland wilderness are alluded to in the count of Israel in last week's parsha - and in the listing of all of the way stations of that excursion.

The Torah seems to be determined to remind all later generations of Jews of the experiences in the desert. Moshe, in his final oration in the book of Dvarim, will once again review the events of the desert for a new generation of Jews distanced in time and circumstance from Egyptian bondage. The Torah is aware of human forgetfulness.

It will take only one generation to forget Egypt and even Mount Sinai. History is boring and quite irrelevant to new generations. Yet forgetting the Jewish past is the ultimate betrayal of Judaism and Jewish hopes. All of us, as we become older, begin to feel a psychological and spiritual need growing within us to be remembered.

The Baal Shem Tov is reputed to have said: "Forgetting is the true exile." Of course it is obvious that ignorance is the true partner of forgetfulness. In fact, if one never knew anything then one cannot be accused of having forgotten it. The Torah emphasizes the repetition of all the facts and experiences of Jewish life in the desert of Sinai so that this knowledge will enable and strengthen the powers of national remembrance.

Much of the Jewish world today suffers from a severe case of, hopefully temporary but nevertheless intense, amnesia. In spite of all of the efforts of the survivors, the museums, the academic courses and books relating to the Holocaust, this event is rapidly disappearing from world and even Jewish memory.

Religious Jewry has found no way, as of yet, to ritually remember the Holocaust. Without ritual and holiness, it tragically will continue to fade from the memory of the coming generation. In distributing films and audio lectures about the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel to Jewish schools worldwide I am already encountering apathy if not sometimes even outright opposition to the insertion of the subject into the curriculum of schools.

One principal asked me: "Will it help my students to be admitted to Harvard or Yale?" And on the other end of the spectrum of Jewish education another principal told me: "Will it increase their ability to study Talmud properly?" I responded that the Torah listed all of the desert way stations even though knowing them would also not guarantee Talmudic proficiency or admission to Harvard or Yale.

It is not only the amnesia regarding even our very recent past that afflicts us. It is our inability to grasp that the knowledge of this immediate past is vitally essential to our present and to our future. Without knowledge of the events of the past, dating back all of the way to the events of the desert of Sinai, we are creating for our descendants a new desert, a wasteland of ignorance, falsehoods and disillusion. It is not too late to correct this. If our schools won't do so, let our homes and families attempt to do so.

Chazak, chazak, v'nitchazeik.

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Complexity of Human Rights
MATOT, MASEI

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ZTL
MATOT, MASEI • 5776, 5783

The book of Bamidbar comes to a close that is very strange indeed. Earlier in the parsha of Pinchas we read of how the five daughters of Tzelophehad came to Moses with a claim based on justice and human rights.[1] Their father had died without sons. Inheritance – in this case, of a share in the land – passes through the male line, but here there was no male line. Surely their father was entitled to his share, and they were his only heirs. By rights that share should come to them:

"Why should our father's name be disadvantaged in his family merely because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father's brothers."

Num. 27:4

Moses had received no instruction about such an eventuality, so he asked God directly. God found in favour of the women.

"The daughters of Tzelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them."

He gave Moses further instructions about the disposition of inheritance, and the narrative then passes on to other matters.

Only now, right at the end of the book, does the Torah report on an event that arose directly from that case. Leaders of Tzelophehad's tribe, Menasheh, son of Joseph, came and made the following complaint. If the land were to pass to Tzelophehad's daughters and they married men from another tribe, the land would eventually pass to their husbands, and thus to their husband's tribes. Thus land that had initially been granted to the tribe of Menasheh might be lost to it in perpetuity.

Again, Moses took the case to God, who offered a simple solution. The daughters of Tzelophehad were entitled to the land, but so too was the tribe. Therefore, if they wish to take possession of the land, they must marry men from within their own tribe. That way both claims could be honoured. The daughters did not lose their right to the land but they did lose some freedom in choosing a marriage partner.

The two passages are intimately related. They use the same terminology. Both Tzelophehad's daughters and the leaders of the clan "draw near". They use the same verb to describe their potential loss: yigara, "disadvantaged, diminished". God replies in both cases with the same locution, "kein ... dovrot/dovrim," rightly do they speak.[2] Why then are the two episodes separated in the text? Why does the book of Numbers end on this seemingly anticlimactic note? And does it have any relevance today?

Bamidbar is a book about individuals. It begins with a census, whose purpose is less to tell us the actual number of Israelites than to "lift" their "heads", the unusual locution the Torah uses to convey the idea that when God orders a census it is to tell the people that they each count. The book also focuses on the psychology of individuals. We read of Moses' despair, of Aaron and Miriam's criticism of him, of the spies who lacked the courage to come back with a positive report, and of the malcontents, led by Korach, who challenged Moses' leadership. We read of Joshua and Caleb, Eldad and Medad, Dathan and Aviram, Zimri and Pinchas, Balak and Bilam and others. This emphasis on individuals reaches a climax in Moses' prayer to "God of the spirits of all flesh" to appoint a successor (Bamidbar 27:16) – understood by the Sages and Rashi to mean, appoint a leader who will deal with each individual as an individual, who will relate to people in their uniqueness and singularity. That is the context of the claim of Tzelophehad's daughters. They were claiming their rights as individuals. Justly so. As many of the commentators pointed out, the behaviour of the women throughout the wilderness years was exemplary while that of the men was the opposite. The men, not the women, gave gold for the golden calf. The spies were men: a famous comment by the Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550 –1619) suggests that had Moses sent women instead, they would have come back with a positive report.[3] Recognising the justice of their cause, God affirmed their rights as individuals.

But society is not built on individuals alone. As the book of Judges points out, individualism is another name for chaos: "In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Hence the insistence, throughout Bamidbar, on the central role of the tribes as the organising principle of Jewish life. The Israelites were numbered tribe by tribe. The Torah sets out their precise encampment around the Mishkan and the order in which they were to journey. In Naso, at inordinate length, the Torah repeats the gifts of each tribe at the inauguration of the Mishkan, despite the fact that they each gave exactly the same. The tribes were not accidental to the structure of Israel as a

society. Like the United States of America, whose basic political structure is that of a federation of (originally thirteen, now fifty) states, so Israel was (until the appointment of a king) a federation of tribes.

The existence of something like tribes is fundamental to a free society.[4] The modern state of Israel is built on a vast panoply of ethnicities – Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Jews from Eastern, Central and Western Europe, Spain and Portugal, Arab lands, Russia and Ethiopia, America, South Africa, Australia and other places, some Hassidic, some Yeshiva-ish, others “Modern”, others “Traditional”, yet others secular and cultural.

We each have a series of identities, based partly on family background, partly on occupation, partly on locality and community. These “mediating structures”, larger than the individual but smaller than the state, are where we develop our complex, vivid, face-to-face interactions and identities. They are the domain of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, and they make up what is collectively known as civil society. A strong civil society is essential to freedom.[5]

That is why, alongside individual rights, a society must make space for group identities. The classic instance of the opposite came in the wake of the French revolution. In the course of the debate in the French Revolutionary Assembly in 1789, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre made his famous declaration, “To the Jews as individuals, everything. To the Jews as a nation, nothing.” If they insisted on defining themselves as a nation, that is, as a distinct subgroup within the republic, said the Count, “we shall be compelled to expel them.”

Initially, this sounded reasonable. Jews were being offered civil rights in the new secular nation state. However, it was anything but. It meant that Jews would have to give up their identity as Jews in the public domain. Nothing – not religious or ethnic identity – should stand between the individual and the state. It was no accident that a century later, France became one of the epicentres of European antisemitism, beginning with Édouard Drumont’s vicious *La France Juive*, 1886, and culminating in the Dreyfus trial. Hearing the Parisian crowd shout “Mort aux Juifs”, Theodor Herzl realised that Jews had still not been accepted as citizens of Europe, despite all the protestations to the contrary. Jews found themselves regarded as a tribe in a Europe that claimed to have abolished tribes. European emancipation recognised individual rights but not collective ones.

The primatologist Frans de Waal, whose work among the chimpanzees we mentioned in this year’s *Covenant & Conversation* on Korach, makes the point powerfully. Almost the whole of modern Western culture, he says, was built on the idea of autonomous, choosing individuals. But that is not who we are. We are people with strong attachments to family, friends, neighbours, allies, co-religionists and people of the same ethnicity. He continues:

A morality exclusively concerned with individual rights tends to ignore the ties, needs and interdependencies that have marked our existence from the very beginning. It is a cold morality that puts space between people, assigning each person to his or her own little corner of the universe. How this caricature of a society arose in the minds of eminent thinkers is a mystery.[6]

That is precisely the point the Torah is making when it divides the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad into two. The first part, in parshat Pinchas, is about individual rights, the rights of Tzelophehad’s daughters to a share in the land. The second, at the end of the book, is about group rights, in this case the right of the tribe of Menasheh to its territory. The Torah affirms both, because both are necessary to a free society.

Many of the most seemingly intractable issues in contemporary Jewish life have appeared because Jews, especially in the West, are used to a culture in which individual rights are held to override all others. We should be free to live as we choose, worship as we choose, and identify as we choose. But a culture based solely on individual rights will undermine families, communities, traditions, loyalties, and shared codes of reverence and restraint.

Despite its enormous emphasis on the value of the individual, Judaism also insists on the value of those institutions that preserve and protect our identities as members of groups that make them up. We have rights

as individuals but identities only as members of tribes. Honouring both is delicate, difficult and necessary. Bamidbar ends by showing us how.

[1] The word “rights” is, of course, an anachronism here. The concept was not born until the seventeenth century. Nonetheless it is not absurd to suggest that this is what is implied in the daughters’ claim, “Why should our father’s name be disadvantaged?”

[2] These two passages may well be the source of the story of the rabbi who hears both sides of a marital dispute, and says to both husband and wife, “You are right.” The rabbi’s disciple asks, “How can they both be right?” to which the rabbi replies, “You too are right.”

[3] *Kli Yakar* to Num. 13:2.

[4] See most recently Sebastian Junger: *Tribe: On homecoming and belonging*, Fourth Estate, 2016.

[5] This is the argument made most powerfully by Edmond Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville.

[6] Frans de Waal, *Good Natured*, Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 167.

Customs of the Three Weeks

Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

When listening to music from an electric device, a distinction should be made between happy music, which is prohibited from the 17th of Tammuz, and regular music that has no special joy, which is only prohibited from Rosh Chodesh Av * When holding an educational-cultural event, it is permissible to play music that fits the nature of the event * At se’udat mitzvah meals, singing and dancing in a circle are permitted as is customary, and even after Rosh Chodesh Av * From Rosh Chodesh Av, recreational swimming is forbidden, but if the swimming is for health purposes, as is the custom of people used to swimming every day for about half an hour in the pool, it is permitted until Shabbat Chazon

The Three Weeks, which begin on the night of the 17th of Tammuz and continue through Tisha Be-Av, are a painful time. This period is often known as ‘Bein Ha-metzarim’, recalling the verse, “All her pursuers overtook her in the narrow places [bein ha-metzarim]” (Eicha 1:3). And although our Sages did not make any special enactments to mark the suffering and mourning of the Three Weeks, the Jewish people adopted some mourning customs, and therefore refrain from music and dancing (Magen Avraham 551:10).

Included in this, it is customary to avoid playing musical instruments. Therefore, dance classes, concerts, and happy sing-alongs should not be held during the Three Weeks, and one should not participate in them.

Listening to Music on Personal Electronic Devices

The poskim of the previous generation were divided on whether it is permissible to listen to musical instruments by way of personal electronic devices during the Three Weeks. It seems that in practice, according to the lenient view, we should divide all songs into three categories: 1) joyous songs, like those played at weddings; 2) songs that are neither especially joyous nor especially sad, which includes most contemporary music and most classical compositions; 3) sad songs, like those played or sung when mourning a death or the destruction of the Temple, which are permitted to be heard even during the Nine Days.

Lower the Volume

It also seems that when one listens to loud music, even if it is a neutral song, the force of the sound makes it more festive and practically transforms it into a joyous song. Thus, one may not listen to loud music even if it is the type of music that is permitted during the Three Weeks.

Furthermore, it seems that one may not attend a concert featuring sad music (requiems) during the Three Weeks. Even though the music is mournful, concerts are festive and joyous events.

Music in an Educational Context

When holding an educational-cultural event, it is permitted to play music that fits the nature of the event. And even during the Nine Days it is permissible to play sad songs that express sorrow for the destruction of the Temple, and songs of longing for the building of the Torah, the Nation, and the Land (see, *Peninei Halakha: Zemanim* 8:4-5).

Aerobics Class

One may hold or attend an aerobics class, whose main purpose is exercise, until the end of Tammuz, but should try to play appropriate music that is not happy.

Playing Music for the Purpose of Learning

Since the reason music is prohibited is that it brings people joy, music teachers may continue giving lessons until the week of Tisha Be-Av, because neither the teacher nor the students experience joy through music lessons. In addition, canceling the lessons will cause the teacher financial loss, and the students will have to expend extra effort afterward to return to their normal learning pace, possibly even requiring extra classes. It is best to learn sad melodies during the Three Weeks. If the teacher and students usually take a break from their lessons at some point in any event, it is preferable, if possible, to schedule the break for the Three Weeks. (Peninei Halakha: Zemanim 8:3).

Playing and Singing at a Se'udat Mitzvah

During the Three Weeks, one may sing happy songs at a se'udat mitzvah, like the meal at a brit mila, pidyon ha-ben, or sheva berakhot, and until the end of the month of Tammuz it is also permitted to play music as is customary throughout the year.

When the month of Av arrives, one should not play happy songs from an electronic device, and only the songs that relate to the joy of a mitzvah are permitted to be sung, and even dancing in a circle is permitted, as many people do to celebrate the joy of a brit mila.

Playing Music at Havdala and Melave Malka

Families customary to play shirey kodesh (Jewish religious songs) on Motzei Shabbat can continue to do so until Rosh Chodesh Av, because the atmosphere of Shabbat, in which mourning customs are absent, still applies during the adjacent hours intended for a se'udat Melave Malka. In addition to that, the songs played are shirey kodesh.

Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

Until Rosh Chodesh Av, one may also celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah during this period, but only on the actual day that the child comes of age, and it is also permissible to hire musicians, provided that this is their custom throughout the year.

When it is difficult to hold the party on the day the boy or girl come of age, and want to hold it on one of the close days, it is appropriate for the bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah to make a siyum on an important religious book at the beginning of the event, and thus be able to hold the simcha with music or musicians, as usual all year round. And if they cannot make a siyum, bediavad, they can rely on a siyum done by one of their relatives. When there is no such possibility, with no other choice, they can rely on the Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah drasha (speech) which is an important drasha with divrei Torah, and from which the joy of a mitzvah is derived.

However, during the Nine Days it is not possible to hold a Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah as is customary all year round, since it is customary to hold it with a lot of people and with music, and this is forbidden during the Nine Days. Therefore, it is correct to postpone the big party until after Tisha B'Av, and on the day of coming of age, one may hold a se'udah at home, with meat and wine, and a limited number of guests.

Excursions and Vacation in a Hotel

Some poskim maintain that one must refrain from hiking and swimming or bathing in the sea or a swimming pool during the Three Weeks, in order to limit our enjoyment during this mournful period. Furthermore, since these days are prone to calamity, one must avoid potentially dangerous activities.

From a halakhic standpoint, however, these activities are not prohibited. After all, our Sages only instructed us to curtail our joy from the first day of Av. They did not prohibit engaging in pleasurable and enjoyable activities before then. The only thing one should avoid is special celebrations, like parties, concerts, and dances. Therefore, one may go hiking and swimming and one may vacation in a hotel until the end of Tammuz. In addition, the concern about engaging in potentially dangerous activities is not so serious that one must be more cautious than one generally should be throughout the year. Thus, one may go hiking and engage in similar activities during the Three Weeks, while

taking particular care to follow the safety precautions that apply to such activities throughout the year.

“When Av arrives, we curtail our joy” (Ta'anit 26b). Therefore, one must refrain from outings and recreational activities that are mainly designed to provide pleasure and joy. However, one may go on a trip or vacation that is designed primarily for educational or therapeutic purposes during the Nine Days.

Swimming

From the first day of the month of Av, one must refrain from recreational swimming. However, if the swimming is for a health purpose, such as those who swim every day for about half an hour in the pool, it is permitted until Shabbat Chazon, and after Shabbat Chazon, it is correct to be machmir (stringent). One who needs to swim for medical purposes, may swim until erev Tisha B'av (see, Peninei Halakha: Zemanim 8:6).

Reciting She-he'eyanu During the Three Weeks

It is customary to refrain from reciting the She-he'eyanu blessing during the Three Weeks, for how can we say, “Blessed are You, Lord...Who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this time” during a period of such misfortune? And although some poskim are machmir about it even on Shabbat, in practice, on Shabbat, one may recite the blessing.

One who is presented the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that requires one to recite She-he'eyanu, like a brit mila or a pidyon ha-ben, recites the berakha, because he did not determine the timing of the berakha. Rather, God granted him the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that requires one to recite She-he'eyanu during the Three Weeks.

Similarly, one who sees a close friend after not seeing him for thirty days, and is happy to see him, should recite She-he'eyanu, since if he does not recite it immediately, he loses the opportunity to recite the berakha.

Marriage

It is customary in most Jewish communities that weddings are not held during the Three Weeks. This is the custom of all Ashkenazi communities, and most Sephardic communities, including communities from Turkey, Morocco, Babylon, and Yemen.

And there are communities of Sephardic origin who are customary to refrain from marriage only during the Nine Days, and so wrote the Shulchan Aruch (551:2; Yibi'ah Omer 6:43).

Grooms from communities that are customary to hold weddings until the end of the month of Tammuz are permitted to hire a regular orchestra for their wedding, as there is no joy of a bride and groom without musical instruments. And even those whose custom is not to marry on these days, may participate and dance in their joy, for it is the joy of a mitzvah.

Engagement

Until the first of Av, one may hold a modest, small-scale engagement party. Since such a party is a celebration of the couple's agreement to get married, the event contains a mitzvah component and is thus permitted. One may not, however, hold a large-scale engagement party during the Three Weeks. During the Nine Days, when we must curtail our joy, one may not hold even a modest, small-scale party. However, the parents of the couple may meet, even during the Nine Days, in order to decide on the details of the wedding, and refreshments may be served at this meeting. Even though this, too, involves joy, it is permissible because such a meeting transforms the couple's relationship into an accomplished fact, which brings them closer to the mitzvah of marriage. It is also permissible for singles to date for the sake of marriage during the Nine Days (ibid. 8:9).

Haircut during the Three Weeks and Nine Days

Our Sages instituted prohibitions against cutting one's hair and washing one's clothes during the week of Tisha Be-Av (Ta'anit 26b). Accordingly, Shulchan Aruch (551:3) rules that one may not cut one's hair from the beginning of the week in which Tisha Be-Av falls, and many Sephardim follow this practice.

However, in many Jewish communities it is customary to be machmir, and not cut their hair during the Three Weeks. This is the custom of

Ashkenazim and some Sephardim – including Jews from Morocco and Djerba, and those who follow Arizal's customs – to be stringent and avoid haircuts during the entirety of the Three Weeks (Rema 551:4; Kaf Ha-ḥayim 551:80; Kitzur SA [Toledano] 387:8; Brit Kehuna 2:12). There are those who are lenient until the end of the month of Tammuz, and machmir from Rosh Chodesh, including Jews from Tunisia, Algeria and Libya.
Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Shabbat Shalom: Matot-Masei (Numbers 30:1-36:13)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditEfrat, Israel – This week's double portion records how the Jews finally cross the Jordan River on their way to conquer the Promised Land. The tribes of Gad and Reuven and half the tribe of Menashe possess a great multitude of cattle, and "paradise" for cattle is good grazing land, which happens to be what these two and a half tribes find in their present location of Trans-Jordan. They then petition Moses with a special request. "If you would grant us a favor, let this land be given to us as our permanent property, and do not bring us across the Jordan." (Numbers 32:5)

Moses' response is sharp. "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here? Why are you trying to discourage the Israelites from crossing over to the land that God has given them? This is the same thing your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land" (Numbers 32:6-8). Moses' reference is an especially damning one: just as the scouts decided to remain in the desert because they lacked the courage and will to fight for the Promised Land, you are acting similar to them by your desire to stay where you are, saving yourselves from the harrowing experience of war. And Moses makes this comparison even though Trans-Jordan is considered to be part of the holy land (Mishnah Kelim 1,10).

What moved these two and a half tribes to remain in Trans-Jordan? According to Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm, they petitioned not to have to cross the Jordan because of their cattle, which expresses a certain degree of materialistic greed on their part; it doesn't take a great flight of the imagination to see the correspondence between cattle and grazing lands in those days to economic opportunities in the work place today.

Why do Jews continue to live outside of Israel, further away than the other side of the Jordan – on the other side of the Atlantic? Because they've found good grazing lands for their cattle and it's a shame to give that up, especially since our present-day descendants of Gad and Menashe rarely question a contemporary Rabbinic authority about their choice. If they did, he would more than likely repeat Moses' message "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here?" (Numbers 32:61).

After all, world Jewry has certainly benefited from the State of Israel, ever since its inception and to this very day. After the Holocaust, which resulted in the tragic loss of 1/3 of our people and 4/5 of our religious, intellectual and cultural leadership, it seemed as if Judaism had finally faded from the world stage of viable "peoples", nations and religions. The renowned historian Alfred Toynbee called the Jews a "fossil" in the history he published in 1946, the Chief Rabbi of Rome converted to Christianity and immediately following the Holocaust, conversion was rampant on every campus in America.

Not only did world Jewry experience a miraculous renaissance after the declaration of Israeli statehood – and then again with the liberation of Jerusalem after the Six Day War in 1967 – but Israel is now the greatest provider of religious and educational leadership for Jewish communities throughout the world as well as the most effective fount of inspiration for searching and struggling assimilated Jews whose lives become significantly transformed through programs like Birthright Israel. All of the successful diaspora Jewish communities today owe their development in no small measure to the Jewish State.

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama gives a slightly different interpretation. The author of the Akedat Yitzchak describes the two and a half tribes as practical materialists who nevertheless are planning to eventually join their siblings in Israel's heartland – but only eventually, not right now.

At present, the personal needs of the family and the tribe must come first – until the leader of the family can amass sufficient material goods to make the big move to the middle east a less risky venture. Their personal needs – and not historic Israel's national needs – must come first. Therefore, Moses took them to task.

The Ohr Hachayim approaches the situation in its simplest, most "religious" terms: suggesting that the two and a half tribes built their argument around Divine intervention: "The land which God conquered on behalf of the congregation of Israel is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle." (32:41). In other words, this is the land that God conquered for us and therefore this is the land we wish to remain in. If God wants us somewhere else, let Him take us there, let Him conquer that land too. Until then, this is where we're going to stay and this is where our cattle will stay. It is good for our cattle and therefore it is good for us.

In many ways, the Ohr Hachayim's reading sees the two and a half tribes as being the counterparts of the devotees of Natura Karta. They are waiting for God Himself to bring them to Israel – and if not God, then at least His Messiah! When God is good and ready to redeem Israel completely, He'll do it in His own time. Everything depends on God, and we are more than happy to wait it out in our pleasant grazing land until then....

The truth is that Gad, Reuven and half of Menashe had forgotten their history. They cannot rest on their grazing laurels while the rest of the nation fights their wars for them. When the Israelites reached the Reed Sea chased by the Egyptian hordes they asked Moses to pray to God. "Why are you crying out to me?" God says to Moses. "Speak to the Israelites and let them start moving." (Exodus 14:15). The sea does not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav and Caleb ben Yefuna jump in.

Similarly, when Moses tells the two and a half tribes that they have to bear arms and fight, he's really pointing out that God's promise to Israel is that everyone has to be partners – God with the nation, and the nation with one another, sharing in a mutual responsibility and privilege. At the end of the day, if our fledgling State proves to be even more vulnerable than we think by dint of less manpower in war and a smaller population than is required, Jews will have only themselves to blame for not rising to the challenge offered by the greatest Jewish adventure in 2000 years.
Shabbat Shalom

[CS - Late breaking - so added it

from: Rabbi YY Jacobson <rabbiiy@theyeshiva.net>

date: Jul 13, 2023, 10:30 PM

subject: The First Marriage Therapist in History - New Maasei Essay by

Rabbi YY Jacobson

The First Marriage Therapist in History

The Only Yartzeit Mentioned in the Torah is Aaron's. Why?

Why Aaron?

The Torah never mentions the yartzeit—the day of the passing—of any of its protagonists. We do not know the day when Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Sarah, or Rachel passed away. Even Moses' day of passing is omitted in the Torah.[1]

There is one single exception: Aaron, the older brother of Moses and the High Priest of Israel. His death is recorded in the weekly portion with a date:

מסעי לג, לח: וַיַּעַל אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הָהָר הַהוּא עַל־פִּי ה' וַיָּמָת שָׁם בַּשָּׁנָה הָאֲדָמָה לְצֹאת
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם מִצְרַיִם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָשְׁמִינִי בָאֲדָמָה לַחֹדֶשׁ:

Numbers 33:38: Aaron the priest ascended Mount Hor, at the behest of G-d, and died there, in the fortieth year after the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month.

Why Aaron? Even with his own siblings, Miriam and Moses, we don't see in the Torah the date of their passing. Why was his passing day enshrined in the biblical text?

What is more, the date of his death is not mentioned in the actual story of his passing (back in Chukas, Numbers ch. 20), where it would seem to belong, but rather in the portion of Massei (Numbers ch. 33), while discussing the forty-two journeys that the Israelites traveled in the desert—en route from Egypt to the Promised Land. In this context,

apparently not relevant to the discussion, that the Torah takes a detour:[2] "They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. Aaron the High Priest ascended Mount Hor at G-d's behest and died there..."

The Peacemaker

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once offered a moving insight, demonstrating the eternal relevance of Torah.[3]

Aaron, we know, was the ultimate peace lover and peacemaker among the Jewish people. As Hillel says in the Ethics of the Fathers:[4] "Be of the disciples of Aaron—a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah." Aaron dedicated his life to bringing peace between rivals and quarreling spouses.[5]

When the Torah describes his death, it states:[6] The whole congregation saw that Aaron had expired, and the entire house of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days.

Why the "entire house of Israel"? When Moses passes away, the Torah states[7] that the "sons of Israel wept for Moses"; but here it was the "entire house." Why the distinction? Rashi explains: "Both the men and the women, for Aaron had pursued peace; he promoted love between disputing parties and between husbands and wives."

The Talmud relates[8] that 80,000 young men who were all given the name "Aaron" came to eulogize Aaron after his passing. They were the children born from parents who wanted to get divorced, and Aaron saved their marriages. They named their babies Aaron, in tribute to the person who saved their marriage and allowed these children to be born.

This means that over forty years in the wilderness, Aaron restored peace and trust to 80,000 Jewish couples. He must have been a busy marriage therapist!

His efforts were rewarded in kind, with the appearance of Clouds of Glory that served as a unifying force, molding the entire Israelite encampment into a cohesive unit.

The Remedy

Now, we can understand, on a homiletical level, why the yartzeit of Aaron is specified in the Torah—on the first day of the fifth month of the year, which is the Hebrew month of Av.

1500 years after the death of Aaron, the first of Av would usher in a period known in Jewish law as the "Nine Days," referring to the first nine days of the Hebrew month of Av, a time dedicated to mourning the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples in Jerusalem, which were both burned down on the 9th day of AV (the first by Babylon in 586 BCE, the second by Rome in 70 CE).

The Talmud states:[9] "The second Temple, why was it destroyed? Because the Jews harbored baseless hatred towards each other." This was also true on a political level: The Romans exploited the in-fighting between the Jewish people to defeat Judea.

During the first Temple era, too, it was the ongoing conflicts between the two kingdoms of Israel that weakened the nation, and the violence among Jews which spelled disaster, as the prophets explicitly warn.

"G-d provides the remedy before the disease," says the Talmud.[10] Before any challenge in life, G-d provides the energy to deal with it. The yartzeit of a person, the day when their life-journey is completed, is a day in which their energy and light is manifest in a uniquely potent way in the world.[11] So on the first day of Av, when we usher in the Nine Days of grief over our discord and hatred, the Torah tells us we have the yartzeit of Aaron the great peacemaker and unifier—a day in which can connect with Aaron's energy and legacy of love and unity, to repair and heal the rifts and mistrust that caused our exile, and usher in a new era of redemptive consciousness.

That is why the Torah places the day of the yartzeit in the portion of Maasei, which according to Jewish tradition is always read on or right before the very day of his yartzeit—the first day (Rosh Chodesh) of the month Av. It is during this time of the year that the Torah wants to empower us with the energy of Aaron to restore cohesion, trust, and love among our people.

On every first day of Av, as one can smell the flames of destruction, Aaron casts upon us his power of love, reminding us that we are capable of transcending our fears and our egos, and creating a revolution of love

among our eternal but fragmented people. If baseless hatred was the cause of our destruction, baseless love will create our redemption.

A Healthy Heart

A story:[12]

Moshe Tzur, an Israeli Air Force veteran, who has a skill for activism and leadership, returned to Judaism later in his life, and at a visit to the US in the 1970s he visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him what he was doing to help the Jewish people and the community. Moshe was not that excited about getting involved.

The Rebbe asked him, "Why is the heart of the human being on the left side? Everything important in Judaism is on the right side. We put on tefillin with the right hand, we put the mezuzah on the right side of the door, we shake hands with the right hand, we hold the Torah scroll on our right side, Joseph wanted the blessing of the right arm of his father for his oldest son; in the Temple they always walked to the right, so why is the heart—the organ responsible giving us vitality—on the left?"

The Rebbe shared his vintage answer:

"Your heart is indeed on your right side! Because what is the true function of a heart? To feel and experience the heart of the person standing in front of you; and for the person in front of you, your heart is on the right side. When your heart is linked with others, then indeed your heart is on the "right" side.

Moshe continued to relate his story:

"This message really spoke to me, and I adopted it as the center of my philosophy of life. Since then, my mission in life has been to reach the heart of every Jew that I meet. I returned to Israel, and I established two important yeshivot. One yeshiva is called Aish HaTalmud; it is a yeshiva high school with almost two hundred boys enrolled. The other is called Torat Moshe, with about ninety-five boys. I have also established four kollelim, study groups for married men, with almost a hundred-twenty enrolled."

"In addition, I founded an organization to support poor families for Rosh Hashanah and Passover. These are people who don't have much income, and we help them with food and money. All this because of the words of the Rebbe – that the key is to help others – which changed my perspective on life and shaped my life's mission."

[1] The Talmud and the Midrash deduce from the verses which dates they passed on, but it is not explicit in the Torah.

[2] Numbers 33:37-38

[3] Sichas 29 Tamuz, 5735 (1975). Sichas Motzei Shabbos Matos-Maasei 5739 (1979). Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Matos-Maasei pp. 411-412. A similar idea I saw in Sefas Emes Maasei 5659.

[4] 1:12

[5] Avos chapter 1. Avod D'Rabi Nosson ch. 12

[6] Numbers 20:29. See also Rashi Rashid Devarim 34:8.

[7] Deuteronomy 34:8

[8] Tractate Kallah ch. 3

[9] Yuma 9b

[10] Megilah 13b

[11] See Tanya Igeres Hakodesh ch. 27-28

[12]

https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/3779581/jewish/Its-Their-Right.htm

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subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Construct-ive CriticismRabbi Benjamin Yudin

Construct-ive Criticism

In Parshas Matos (perek 32) the Torah relays the story of the two shevatim, Reuven and Gad, who seek and are given land on the eastern side of the Jordan which had previously been owned by Sichon and Og. The two tribes come to Moshe and inform him that they are blessed with an abundance of sheep and this land is appropriate for livestock, and therefore they request, "do not bring us across the Jordan." Moshe then reproves them for following in the evil ways of the meraglim who thirty-

nine years ago dissuaded the Jewish nation from entering the Promised Land and he was fearful that their request would once again undermine the national desire for their homeland. They respond to Moshe and declare (32:16), "Corrals for the flock we will build here for our livestock, and cities for our small children. We shall arm ourselves and join our brethren in their conquest of the land and stay with them till the land of Canaan is settled and our small children will stay in the fortified cities here." Rashi cites from the Tanchuma that Moshe chastises the two tribes and accusing them of having faulty priorities, i.e. for their prioritizing their financial concerns over the welfare of their children, as we can see in their request wherein they stated, "We will build corrals for our sheep and cities for our children". Moshe taught them this is improper, rather let the primary values be primary and the secondary values be secondary; build cities for your children first and then take care of the needs of the sheep.

The Be'er Yosef (Rev Yosef Salant zt"l) comments that at first glance, this is most difficult to understand. How could the dor deah, which was raised in an aura of spirituality, make such a glaring mistake of putting their material concerns before the welfare of their families? He then proceeds to give the following fascinating explanation, as follows: note that when the Jewish nation asked the two kings, first Sichon then Og, to pass through their lands (see Parshas Chukas) they were not only rebuffed, but each of these kings brought their armies to the desert and attacked the Jewish people, and the young Jewish nation was victorious over both kings and defeated them. It is interesting to note that since the battles occurred in the desert the cities of Sichon and Og were not in any way war-torn or disturbed. Perhaps a screen door here and a broken window there needed replacement, but for the most part Reuven and Gad believed that these cities were open, available, and ready for their families to move in. It is here, the Be'er Yosef explains, that Moshe disagrees with the two tribes. Don't think, Moshe said, that you can simply take the wreath off the door, put a Mezuzah up, and then you can move your families in. Since these homes were steeped in idolatry they cannot be used for raising a Jewish family. Moshe Therefore instructs them (32:24) "Build for yourselves cities for your small children and tents for the flocks". Indeed, the two tribes listen to Moshe, and therefore we are taught (32:34-38) that the children of Gad and Reuven built many cities in that area.

Is this really the halacha, that before one moves into a home that was inhabited by non-Jews that they have to make some significant structural change to the home? Indeed, this is the halacha regarding the conversion of a church into a synagogue. Many poskim were against this practice including the Chasam Sofer (Orach Chaim 42) and Maharam Shik (Yoreh Deah 142). The late Reb Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:49) writes that he is not comfortable with the converting of a church to a synagogue, however if it was done with panim chadashos, meaning structural changes within the building, then he could agree to its usage as a synagogue. Why, then, did Moshe insist upon this more rigid application of the law where we are talking about homes for the tribes of Reuven and Gad and not synagogues? I'd like to suggest two possibilities.

Firstly, I believe we can understand this by utilizing a halachic principle found in Hilchos Channukah. The Pnei Yehoshua (Shabbos 21b) asks why did the Chashmonaim insist on finding pure oil to light the menorah when there is the halachic principle (as found in Pesachim 77a) that the laws of tumah are hutra b'tzibbur, i.e. the laws of impurity are suspended in a situation when we are dealing with the majority of the Jewish nation? His question, therefore, is: why did we need a miracle and why make a fuss over the one cruse of oil when they could have used the impure oil? Reb Yosef Engel (Gilyonai Hashas, Shabbos 21b) answers that the principle of tumah hutra is applicable when we have a functioning Beis HaMikdash. However, to initiate and start a Beis HaMikdash anew requires a stronger foundation of total purity, and therefore they insisted on using pure oil.

Hashem said (Vayikra 14:34) that when Klal Yisrael would enter the Land of Canaan, He will place a tzara'as affliction houses in the land. The Medrash Rabbah (Vayikra 17:6) teaches that this was a good tiding

for the Jewish nation because Amori people hid their treasured possessions in the walls of their homes so that the Jewish people would not find them, and as a result of the process of dealing with tzara'as in a house which includes opening the wall, the Jews were enriched with these hidden possessions. The Zohar (Parshas Tazria 50a) asks that if the purpose of the tzara'as was to benefit the Jewish nation, why could they not replace the stones they removed from the wall to find the treasure? Why did they have to remove the stones to outside their cities? The Zohar answers that the tzara'as was Divinely sent because the homes of the Amorites were spiritually contaminated by the idolatry worshipped therein, and this would prevent a foundation of kedusha from being laid for a Jewish home. Therefore, it was necessary to remove the stones and have them replaced, and oftentimes demolish the house, in order to facilitate and construct a Jewish home.

The settling of the two tribes in eiver haYarden was the beginning of the settlement of the Jewish nation, albeit in the "annex" of the Land of Israel. Just as reinaugurating the Beis HaMikdash required a strong foundation of total purity, so too this settlement of the land had to be al pi taharas hakodesh, in the most pure and pristine manner, and therefore they had to re-construct the homes to facilitate them being imbued with the highest levels of kedusha.

A second possibility as to why Moshe adopted a stringent standard for the homes of the tribes of Reuven and Gad was to intimate that each and every Jewish home is really a mikdash me'at (a miniature Temple) and therefore he applied the halacha that is afforded a synagogue, namely to reconstruct the building. An interesting proof of the spiritual potential of each home may be found in the Talmud (Brachos 16b) which brings many examples of the personal prayer that different Amoraim recited at the conclusion of their Shemoneh Esrei. Aside from the Torah, avodah and gemilas chasadim that each Jew must bring to their home, Rebbe Elazar added the following prayer to his amidah: "May it be Your will Hashem our G-d, that You cause to dwell in our lot, love brotherhood, peace and companionship." We see that in addition to man's initiative and actions, he has to pray to Hashem that he be successful in this holy endeavor.

I'm going to give an example of the beautiful chessed that emerges from a sensitive Jewish home. The Vishnitzer Rebbe would ordinarily spend but a few moments each night at the many weddings he was invited to. He once made an exception, stayed for a long time and before he left he said to the father of the chassan, "Please call me whenever you get home". The man insisted it could be very late, perhaps one or two in the morning. The rebbe said, "I don't care. Make sure you call me when you get home." The man reluctantly called the Rebbe after two in the morning and the Rebbe started to ask him many, of what seemed to be mundane questions, especially from a most holy rav. He asked how the food was, was it plentiful, was it served nicely? He asked how the music was, was it too loud? The rebbe engaged him in very down to earth questions regarding the evening's proceedings. When the call was over his shamash, who had answered the call and was privy to this entire conversation, asked the rebbe at the end "What's going on here? Since when are you concerned with such trivial issues?" The rebbe answered that the man had lost his wife only a few months prior to the wedding. "Ordinarily, when the parents of the kallah or chassan get home from the wedding they go over each and every detail of the wedding. What was it like on your side? How was the food? How was the music? This man, unfortunately, came home to an empty home. He had no one to rehash the events of the evening with. I, therefore, called him to give him that opportunity and experience." WOW! That is an example of generating a creative house of chessed.

In the period of the three weeks that we find ourselves in, the tefillah with which we conclude every Shemoneh Esrei is sheyiboneh Beis haMikdash bimhayra biyamaynu. This is usually translated as "Please rebuild the Beis haMikdash speedily in our days". The Rav Naftali of Rupchitz zt"l interpreted this alternatively in the following way: "May you speedily rebuild the Temple with our days", that is to say that the positive actions, Torah and mitzvos, performed in our homes each day, contribute another brick to the building of the Beis haMikdash on high.

In reality, each individual is a living Beis haMikdash, as the Torah teaches (Shemos 25:9) "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, so that I may dwell in each and every one of them." Therefore, it is most significant that we do some serious introspection regarding the personal Beis haMikdash within ourselves. It is not sufficient to resolve to no longer speak lashon hara, rather, this is the time to ask, why do I have the tendency to be jealous of others and to knock others? It is a time for deep constructive criticism to reconstruct the Mikdash within ourselves. There are so many factors that divide the Jewish people from one another, and when we think about and analyze these factors, we see that in reality they are, for the most part, inconsequential. Maybe there are differences in hashkafa but these differences are certainly no excuse nor license to hate another. If we look to the giants of the previous generation, such as the late Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l, the Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l, they had a neshama that embraced all Jews. Reb Aryeh Levin zt"l visited, and extended love to, Jewish criminals and prisoners. It is purported that Reb Tzvi Yehuda Kook zt"l said that he heard from his father that he did not hate anybody except for Ben Yehuda as they had studied together in Volozhin and he became an apikores. However, he added, that he was working on it. The message, I believe, is very clear. We have to learn from what Moshe told the tribes of Reuven and Gad, i.e. that we all need to accept constructive criticism and ensure that our foundations are laid al pi taharas haKodesh.

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Science of Speech

Rebbetzin Shira Smiles

Our parashah begins with the laws of vows, obligations, and the power one's words have to create new realities. What are some relevant lessons here for us to learn and apply to our day-to-day living?

It is well known that the quality of speech is what makes people unique. In characterizing the various dimensions in this world, Chazal list inanimate objects, vegetative growth, animal species, and finally the world of the 'medaber,' the one who speaks. The "ruach memala," the power of speech, the spirit of G-d blown into man, brings his G-dliness to the fore. "Ish ki yidor neder laHashem oh hishava shevua le'esor issar al nafsho lo yachel devaro – if a man makes a vow to G-d or makes an oath to obligate himself he must not break his word." (Bamidbar 30:3) Rashi comments on the words, "lo yachel devaro," when one makes a vow, "lo yechalel devaro," one should be careful not to make his words profane. "Chilul" is taking something holy and treating it in a way that disrespects its sacred purpose. Vayomer Yehudah explains that we must uphold whatever words come out of our mouths, even words that are not said as a promise. We must understand that even casual words have power that should be used carefully and appropriately.

The Netivot Shalom quotes Rabbeinu Yonah who teaches that when one who sanctifies his mouth, it becomes a "klei sharet," a holy vessel. Indeed, the purpose of our creation is to praise Hashem, and as such, the mouth becomes the medium of this holy mandate. It is therefore not surprising that the essential mitzvot of a Jew involve speech: learning Torah, prayer, remembering Shabbat. Words spoken from a mouth that has been refined have the status of kedushah and are inherently more elevated.

In Lekutei Torah the Ariz"l explains that a malach, an angel, is created with every word that emanates from one's mouth. It can either be a positive force or a negative one. "Lo yachel devaro" tells a person that no speech is profane, a spiritual force is created from everything he says. Just as it is prohibited to use a "kli sharet" for mundane purposes, likewise, all speech should be measured carefully. Shabbat is a time, as Yeshaya Hanavi teaches us, that our speech must be even more elevated than during the week. Our Torah learning takes on a different dimension on Shabbat, and some are careful to be more mindful how they use any words on Shabbat.

The Talmud teaches that even one's casual conversations will be presented at his final judgment. After his passing, Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer

came to his student Rabbi Chaim Berlin in a dream and related that the harshest judgement is in the area of speech. Rav Biderman explains the following pasuk quoted in the Gemara, "u'magid l'adam mah secho – and declares to man what his speech is" (Amos 4:13). After one's lifetime he will be shown how much his tefillah could have impacted the dynamics of the world globally and individually had he used this power to the fullest. Let us take this meaningful lesson to invest in our words, holy and casual, to elevate ourselves and those around us.

From the Virtual Desk of the OU Vebbe Rebbe Hagomel After Losing the Way

Rabbi Daniel Mann

Question: My son and I went hiking in a quite isolated area (no cell phone service) and took a wrong turn and walked a couple hours without seeing signs of civilization. We were almost out of water and weak before finding someone who directed us to safety. How should we thank Hashem for getting us through the danger?

Answer: There are four main possible steps to thank Hashem for being saved from danger. 1) Reciting Birkat Hagomel in front of a minyan (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 219:1-3). 2) Making a seudat hodaya (thanksgiving meal to thank Hashem) (see Living the Halachic Process VI, G-8.) 3) Giving tzedaka (Mishna Berura 218:32). 4) Reciting the beracha of "she'asa li nes bamakon hazeh" when one comes to the place of his miraculous salvation (Shulchan Aruch, OC 218:4).

We will deal first with the easier questions. The Shulchan Aruch does not mention seudot hodaya, and it apparently is never an obligation. On the other hand, a few gemarot relate to such a practice, and it can be very positive (see Living the Halachic Process ibid.) and is essentially without "risk." So, if you perceive you were in real danger, a seudat hodaya is a wonderful albeit optional expression of gratitude. The same is true of giving tzedaka.

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 218:9) cites two opinions whether the beracha upon coming to the place of his miracle is only for miracles that seem to defy nature or even for more commonplace salvations. He recommends making the beracha without Hashem's Name. From your description, it sounds unlikely that the prospects for survival were low enough to qualify the salvation as a miracle on any level. Therefore, if you ever make it back to that place, no beracha seems warranted, certainly not with Hashem's Name.

Is Hagomel called for? The gemara (Berachot 54b) prescribes reciting Birkat Hagomel for people who emerged safely from the following predicaments, which are referred to in Tehillim 107's description of thanking Hashem: traveling by sea and through a midbar, disease, and prison. The Shulchan Aruch (219:9) brings two opinions as to whether the beracha is prescribed for any danger (e.g., a dangerous animal attacked him, a wall collapsed on him). While he recommends making the beracha without Hashem's Name in such cases, the accepted minhag, based on multiple Acharonim, is to make the regular beracha for extrication from any danger (Mishna Berura ad loc. 32; Igrot Moshe, OC II:59). However, as above, it is difficult to ascertain whether the level and perhaps type of danger you were in qualifies as warranting a beracha that is not found in the "official list."

Might this case fit into the category of those who travel in a midbar? The Rambam (Berachot 10:8) lists, as one of the four situations for Hagomel, walking on roads outside the city (without mentioning desert). The Shulchan Aruch (ibid. 7) cites the Sephardi minhag to recite Hagomel after traveling outside the city a parsah (app., 4 kilometers; Yabia Omer I, OC 13 says that it goes by the time it takes to walk a parsah = 72 minutes). (This is the criterion for tefillat haderech – ibid. 110:7). This is because of a general assumption of danger in inter-city roads. The Ashkenazi minhag is to make Hagomel only after a "midbar," where there are bandits and wild animals, and not for uneventful land travel (regarding air, see Igrot Moshe ibid.).

The Mishna Berura (219:31) says that if a traveler on a normal road is attacked by robbers, all agree he recites Hagomel. The combination of factors (road plus danger) justifies the beracha (see Sha'ar Hatziyun ad loc. and Igrot Moshe ibid.), making it equivalent to a desert, and that

applies to your case – lost with little water on path. Furthermore, walking lost in an isolated area is walking in a midbar (which includes wilderness) itself, one of the four definite Hagomel cases. While poskim mention animals and bandits, that is in addition to what the p'sukim (Tehillim 107:4-7) discuss – being lost in a wilderness with limited food and drink (see Ish Matzliach, II, OC 11; Imrei Shefer 29).

TORAH SHORTS:Matot-Masai 5783

by Rabbi Ben-Tzion Spitz

Levels of Control (Matot-Masai)

Nothing is more dangerous than a friend without discretion; even a prudent enemy is preferable. -Jean de La Fontaine

Moses addresses the leaders of the tribes of Israel. He instructs them as to the laws of vows. He instructs them about literally, “what comes out of your mouths.” The Bat Ayin on Numbers 30:2 connects the fact that Moses is addressing the leaders of the tribes to a person’s ability to control their mouth.

It seems that Israel’s judicial, military, and most likely political leadership during their years of wandering in the desert was organized in a hierarchical system, as initially proposed by Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro. Back in the Book of Exodus, shortly after the nation of Israel is miraculously freed from Egypt, crosses the Reed Sea and camps out at the foot of Mount Sinai, Jethro gives Moses much needed advice. He saw Moses attending individually to every single person in Israel, tells him it’s unsustainable and recommends a hierarchical meritocracy. Moses implements Jethro’s plan and establishes the roles of Captains of Ten, Captains of Fifty, Captains of One Hundred and Captains of One Thousand.

The Bat Ayin suggests that a person achieved a higher rank based on their ability to control their mouth. Those who exhibited the greatest control over what they said, how they said it, when they said it, to whom they said it, and perhaps most importantly, what they didn’t say – those people merited the highest rank within the leadership of Israel. The less prudent, less sensitive, less cautious and less circumspect a person was in their dialogue, the lower their rank, and ostensibly, those with little control of their speech were not given any positions of responsibility.

However, the control of their tongue was a product of their awe and reverence of God. The stronger a person understood their divine responsibilities and obligations, the more a person sought sanctity and transcendence. The more they used their powers of speech for noble and holy purposes, the more they were elevated.

May we always use caution and deliberation in what we say and achieve greater levels of divine connection.

Shabbat Shalom,
Ben-Tzion

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Matos

Putting People First

During the presidential run of 1992, candidate Bill Clinton published a book entitled Putting People First. He had it right. He just wasn’t the first one to write the book. This week we’ll explore how Moshe — very subtly — taught his nation that people, especially the children, come first.

The Jews were camped on the bank of the Jordan River, about to enter the land of Israel. Representatives of the tribes of Gad and Reuben approached Moshe with a very brazen request. Numbers 32:3-5: “We don’t want to enter Israel,” they exclaimed. “The land here is very suited for our cattle, and it would be quite beneficial if we were to remain here.” Moshe, recalling the calamity of the ten spies who dissuaded an entire nation from entering Israel, reacted in shock. “Do you remember what happened 40 years ago? Do you want to, once again, demoralize your brothers and sisters as did the spies? Do you remember that your parents and an entire generation perished in the dessert due to that sin?” Moshe then recounted, in full detail, the misfortune of that fateful event. “And now,” he concluded, “you have risen in place of your fathers to

rekindle the burning wrath of G-d?” The representatives, sat quietly through the denunciation and then spoke. “No, Moshe,” they exclaimed. “It was never our intent just to remain here. We’ll build stables for our livestock and homes for our children. Then we will join our brethren in the fight for Israel. Only after all is conquered will we return home and settle.” Moshe, obviously pacified by the quick and obviously well prepared response, reviewed the stipulations. “OK,” he countered, “you shall arm yourself for battle, cross the Jordan and fight with your brothers until Hashem drives out the enemy. Once the Land is conquered and settled, you can come back here and this land will be a heritage for you.” After Moshe reiterated all the prerequisites involved in the deal, he warns them. “If you transgress your commitment you will bear a terrible sin before Hashem.” Then, in what is seemingly out of place he adds the following. “Build cities for your children and pens for your livestock, and thus you shall observe the words that left your mouth.” Two questions bother me: Why is Moshe adding his comments on the domestic portion of their request? Isn’t his only concern that the tribes should join their brothers in the conquest of the land of Israel?

Rashi notes that Moshe switches the order of the request. The tribes said they will “build stables for our livestock and homes for our children.” Moshe switches the order and tells them “build cities for your children and pens for your livestock.” Why is this followed by the words, “thus you shall observe the words that left your mouth.”? Didn’t he already warn them of the consequence of retraction?

Henry Hirsch, the president of the Welbilt Co., one of America’s leading oven and major appliance manufacturers, had another labor of love. He was the president of one of America’s premier Torah institutions, Yeshiva Torah Voda’ath. At a board meeting, at which many of the yeshiva’s prominent lay leaders were present, the school’s cook prepared a beautiful supper in honor of the eminent supporters. As one of the students was serving the executives, Mr. Hirsch looked at the delicious meal. “Excuse me,” he asked the young scholar. “What are they serving you in the main dining hall?” The boy looked sheepishly at Mr. Hirsch and stammered, “I think we’re having egg salad sandwiches.”

The renowned philanthropist turned to the executive board and the representatives of the Yeshiva administration. “We are all here for the sake of the Yeshiva boys, I think it is they who should be eating this chicken dinner. Let’s send it to them and we’ll have the egg salad instead.”

Moshe was pleased with the offer to fight. However, he noted a major problem in the honorable plans of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. They prefaced their commitment with a very suspect phrase. “We will build pens for our livestock and then we will build cities for our children.” Moshe listens, reviews their offer and is doubtful. People who put monetary values before humans tend to worry about finances before family. And people who put money first often change their position, when their holdings are at stake. Thus Moshe reiterates their pledge with one major amendment. He says to them, “build cities for your children and then pens for your livestock; thus you shall keep the word that left your mouth.” If the children come first, then he will trust them. He knows and believes their values are in order and they will uphold their pledge. A major provision in the deal was not only a military commitment, but a philosophy that will guide the Jews for centuries. Put the people first!

Good Shabbos!

Office of the Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Matot Massei: What difference does it make where we live?

The maths doesn’t add up.

In Parshat Maasei we’re told how six cities of refuge were established for our people: three which were to be west of the River Jordan, in Israel proper, and three in Transjordan, called Ever HaYarden, east of the River Jordan. These were cities which were wisely established for people guilty of homicide. There was a danger that family members of the victim might seek revenge, and so the person who had killed

somebody inadvertently needed to flee, for his or her safety, to a city of refuge.

But the maths doesn't add up. Because in Israel proper there were nine and a half tribes, and in Transjordan there were only two and a half tribes: Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe. So why would there be three cities of refuge on each side?

The Talmud explains that outside of the holy territory of the land of Israel, people had less respect for the sanctity of life, therefore there was a greater need for cities of refuge in that area.

Reb Itzele of Volozhin, a great 19th century scholar, adds a further dimension. He talks about the primary problem being the threat from members of the family of the victim. Outside of the land of Israel they wanted to seek revenge but inside Israel proper, they were more likely to consider: seeing as one person has already died, what sense will it make for another person to die? These people therefore controlled their urges. As a result there were fewer people who came into the category of 'goel hadam' – somebody seeking to take revenge.

From here emerges a hugely important lesson for all of us. It's all about the impact of our surroundings. Our environment sets a tone for our lives. I believe that there are two primary messages here.

First of all we should carefully select where we live where we raise our children because the influences of our environment will always have an impact on us. Secondly and more importantly, let us also guarantee that within our own family circles the tone of morality and ethics that we establish will be such that those growing up within the family will be committed to leading a responsible life.

If we see to it that our homes are a place of kedusha, of much sanctity, that will hopefully make all the difference to the ways of life of those within them.

Shabbat shalom.

Toiveling Keilim

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

"Last time I went to immerse some cutlery, a lady immersing some aluminum bowls asked me to include her with my beracha. When I asked her whether she wanted me to help her recite her own beracha on the mitzvah, she responded softly that she received a psak not to recite a beracha when toiveling aluminum, although she did not know the reason. Why would she not recite the beracha?"

Question #2:

"I have a gift business in which I sell candy dishes with candies, fruits, and nuts already in the glass dishes. Must I toivel these dishes before I fill them?"

Introduction:

In Parshas Matos, the Torah teaches: Only the gold and the silver; the copper, the iron, the tin and the lead: any item that was used in fire needs to be placed in fire to become pure [meaning "kosher"], yet it must also be purified in mikveh water. And that which was not used in fire must pass through water" (Bamidbar 31:22-23). These verses serve as the basis for teaching three different sets of laws:

1. Absorbing Concepts

How to kasher vessels that were used to cook non-kosher foods. An item that was used directly in fire, such as a spit or grate that broiled non-kosher, is kashered only by burning it directly in fire; an item used to cook on top of a fire, such as a pot that cooked non-kosher, may be kashered via a process similar to the way it was used, etc.

2. Tainted Metal

Which items are susceptible to tumah. The Torah here teaches that implements made of metal become tamei (spiritually impure) through contact with a tamei item (such as an animal carcass), and that immersing them in a mikveh restores them to tahor status. An item is susceptible to tumah only when the Torah informs us of this fact – if the Torah never taught that an item can become tamei, it does not, and therefore most items in the world are not susceptible to tumah. (Unfortunately, these laws have limited practical application until Moshiach comes and we again have the parah adumah. At that time, we

will be able to live according to the tahor status necessary to observe the mitzvos related to the Beis Hamikdash, terumah and maaser sheini.)

3. Immersed in Holiness

The mitzvah to immerse implements in a mikveh or spring prior to using them for food. The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 75b) notes that this immersion is required even if the vessel has never been used. In other words, this mitzvah is unrelated to the requirement of kashering equipment that was used to prepare non-kosher food and to the laws related to purifying implements that became tamei.

Materials that require tevilah

The Torah teaches that utensils owned by a non-Jew that are made of gold, silver, copper, iron, tin or lead require immersion in a kosher mikveh or spring when they are transferred to Jewish ownership. According to most authorities, this mitzvah is a Torah requirement, although there is a minority opinion that this mitzvah is required only midrabbanan (Rambam, as understood by Pri Chadash). We will assume that the requirement to immerse gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead implements is Torah-ordained. (Bear in mind that, although we would not use lead as an ingredient because of valid concerns about lead poisoning, this medical problem was not discovered until the nineteenth century. Therefore, we find much earlier halachic literature discussing immersion of lead or lead-lined utensils.)

There is no requirement to immerse food utensils made of wood, earthenware, ivory, bone, leather, stone or most other materials. We will soon discuss glass and plastic.

Mechiras Chometz and Tevilas Keilim

As we all know, before Pesach one is required to rid one's house and all one's possessions of chometz. However, some items, such as toasters, mixers, wooden kneading bowls, and flour bins are difficult, if not impossible, to clean. Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chayim 442:11) recommend giving wooden kneading bowls and flour bins and the chometz they contain as a gift to a non-Jew before Pesach, with the understanding that the gentile will return them after the holiday. Today, the standard mechiras chometz that we perform includes selling this chometz and these appliances in the sale. However, what do I do if I have metal appliances that may be full of chometz, such as mixers and toasters? If I sell these appliances to a gentile and then purchase the appliance back from him, will I now need to immerse the appliance in a mikveh?

The halachic authorities note that someone selling his or her chometz to a gentile before Pesach should be careful not to sell utensils that require tevilas keilim. Instead, one should rent the appliances to a gentile and sell the chometz they contain (Chachmas Odom; Noda Beyudah, cited in Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 120:13). An item rented to a gentile does not require immersion when it is returned to the Jewish owner.

Cleavers versus Graters!

The Gemara (Avodah Zarah 75b) quotes Rav Sheishes as suggesting that anything purchased from a gentile, even a clothing shears, should require immersion. Rav Nachman responded that the mitzvah of tevilas keilim applies only to kelei seudah -- literally, implements used for a meal, which includes both utensils used to prepare food, such as pots and knives, and those utilized to eat or drink, such as drinking cups and tableware (Avodah Zarah 75b).

Grates and Grills

One is required to immerse only those items that usually touch the food directly. Therefore, stove grates, blechs, hotplates, knife sharpeners, trivets, can openers and corkscrews do not require tevilah (see Yoreh Deah 120:4), but grills, peelers, funnels, strainers, salt shakers, pepper mills and tongs do require tevilah, since they all touch food.

What about storage vessels?

Is one required to immerse a metal container or glass jar used to store foodstuffs, but that is not suitable for preparing or consuming food?

Rabbi Akiva Eiger (on Yoreh Deah 120:1, quoting Keneses Hagedolah [Beis Yosef 18]) discusses whether storage vessels require tevilah, and concludes that it is unclear whether they should be immersed. Therefore one should immerse them without reciting a beracha, because in case there is no mitzvah to immerse them, reciting a beracha al tevilas keilim

before immersing them is reciting a beracha levatalah, a beracha in vain. A better solution is to immerse them at the same time that one immerses an item that definitely requires a beracha.

Kelei Sechorah -- "Merchandise"

The halachic authorities note that a storekeeper does not toivel vessels he is planning to sell, since for him they are not kelei seudah, but items he intends to sell. Later authorities therefore coined a term "kelei sechorah," utensils used as merchandise, ruling that these items do not require immersion until they are purchased by the person intending to use them (based on Taz, Yoreh Deah 120:10). Furthermore, several halachic authorities contend that the storekeeper cannot immerse the vessels prior to sale, since there is as yet no requirement to immerse them (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 8:70). This is based on a statement of the Rema that implies that a tevilah performed before one is obligated to immerse a vessel, such as while it is still owned by the gentile, does not fulfill the mitzvah and must be repeated after it becomes the property of a Jew (Rema Yoreh Deah 120:9).

Based on this discussion, we can now address one of our above-mentioned questions:

"I have a gift business in which I sell candy dishes with candies, fruits, and nuts already in the glass dishes. Must I toivel these dishes before I fill them?"

This question is a modification of a situation in which I was involved. I once received a glass candy dish from someone, with a note from the business stating that the dish has already been toiveled. I called the proprietor of the business to inform him that, in my opinion, not only is he not required to toivel the dish, but I suspect that it does not help. My reasoning is that, although the proprietor fills his dishes with nuts and candies, from his perspective this is still merchandise that he is selling. The dish therefore qualifies as kelei sechorah which one need not immerse, and, therefore, immersing them does not fulfill the mitzvah. As a result, not only is the proprietor not obligated to immerse the dishes, but doing so fulfills no mitzvah, and it is a beracha levatalah for him to recite a beracha on this immersion. Including a note that the dish was toiveled is detrimental, since the recipient will assume that he has no requirement to toivel this dish, whereas, in fact, the end-user is required to immerse it. For these reasons, I felt it incumbent on myself to bring this to the attention of the owner of the business.

The proprietor was very appreciative. He told me that, in truth, it was a big hassle for him to toivel the dishes, but he had been assuming that halacha required him to do so before he could fill the dishes.

Some Immersing Details

When immersing the utensil, one should not hold it very tightly in one's hand, since this will cause the part of the utensil he is holding to not be immersed properly. Instead, one should either hold the utensil somewhat loosely, or alternatively, one should dip one's hand into the mikveh water before holding the utensil that will be immersed (Rema, Yoreh Deah 120:2; see Taz and Shach).

Prior to immersing a utensil, one must remove all rust and dirt from the utensil. If one immersed the utensil and it had rust or dirt that most people would not want on the appliance, one must clean it, and then re-immersing it (Yoreh Deah 120:13).

When one is immersing an item that definitely requires tevilah, immediately prior to dipping it, one should recite the beracha, Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu al tevilas keili. If one immerses more than one vessel he should conclude instead al tevilas keilim (Yoreh Deah 120:3). Although some authorities mention alternative texts to the beracha, I have quoted the commonly used text, which follows the majority opinion.

If it is uncertain whether the item requires tevilah, one should not recite a beracha. It is preferable, if possible, to immerse it at the same time that one immerses a different utensil that definitely requires tevilah, so that both items are included in the beracha.

May a child toivel keilim?

If a child tells you that he immersed a vessel in a kosher mikveh, may you rely that this indeed happened?

The halacha is that if an adult supervised the child immerse the vessel correctly, one may use the utensil, but one may not rely on the child attesting that he or she immersed the utensil properly (Yoreh Deah 120:14; see also Gr"a ad locum and Pri Megadim, Orach Chayim, Mishbetzos Zahav 451:6). Apparently, this is not a well-known halacha, since one often finds children being used as agents to immerse utensils for their parents.

People eating from glass dishes...

The Gemara teaches that food utensils made of glass must be immersed prior to use, since glassware is similar to metalware in that when it becomes broken it can be melted and repaired, what we usually call recyclable. One recites a beracha prior to immersing glassware, just as one recites a beracha prior to immersing metalware.

Of course, this leads us to a question about plasticware, since many forms of plastic are recyclable in ways very similar to metal and glass. Does repairable plasticware require tevilah just as glassware does? Most people assume that plasticware is not included in the mitzvah of tevilas keilim, but why?

This takes us to an earlier discussion between 19th-century poskim concerning a type of boneware, which, when broken or cracked, could be repaired by melting and melding it. (I personally have no experience with this material, but I imagine that one could probably melt and repair bone, just as one can repair horn by melting and melding. There is much halachic discussion about the repair of a damaged shofar by melting and melding the crack.) Rav Avraham Shaag, the rebbe of Rav Yosef Chayim Sonnenfeld (later the Rav of the old Yishuv of Yerushalayim and Eretz Yisrael), concluded that just as one is required to immerse glassware because it is repairable, one is required to immerse boneware (Shu't Ohel Avraham #24, quoted by Darkei Teshuvah). This position was disputed by Rav David Zvi Hoffman, the preeminent posek of Germany in his day, who contended that since the immersion of glassware is required only midrabbanan, one need immerse only those items that Chazal specifically required, but a newly developed material, albeit similar to glassware, would not require immersion (Shu't Melamed Leho'il, Yoreh Deah #49).

The late authorities debate whether plastic items require immersion prior to use. Indeed, some authorities (Shu't Minchas Yitzchak 3:76) require the immersion of reusable plastic plates and the like, because they follow the logic of Rav Avraham Shaag -- although without a beracha, since perhaps Rav Dovid Hoffman is halachically correct. Nevertheless, most authorities conclude that one is not required to immerse plasticware (Shu't Yabia Omer 4: Yoreh Deah: 8; Tevilas Keilim page 226).

Other Metals

When teaching that metal implements become tamei and that one must immerse food utensils before use, the Torah specifies the six metals that were available in ancient times: gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead. (Bronze and brass are both alloys whose main component is copper; in bronze, the most significant minority element is tin, and in brass it is zinc.) However, over the last two hundred years, mankind developed the means to extract and process several other metals, including platinum, chromium, aluminum, and titanium. Do these "new" metals have the same halachic status as the six mentioned in the Torah? Are platinum rings, aluminum urns and titanium airplanes susceptible to tumah? Do chrome pots and aluminum trays require tevilas keilim?

The Tiferes Yisrael, in his extensive introduction to the Order of Taharos, rules that the newly discovered metals have the same halachic status as the six mentioned explicitly by the Torah, and they are all capable of becoming tamei (Yevakeish Daas #44). It follows from his line of reasoning that one is required min haTorah to immerse food vessels made of the new types of metal, and indeed this is how many authorities rule (Tevilas Keilim page 225). Many authorities contend that, although one is required to immerse aluminum pots, one is not required to immerse aluminum items that are disposable. Since they are meant to be disposed after use, they are not considered "keilim" that require immersion.

On the other hand, other poskim dispute the Tiferes Yisrael's conclusion that all types of metal become tamei, contending that since the Torah mentions six specific metals (and the Torah could certainly have used a generic term for all metal items that would have been much briefer), choosing a lengthy way of listing six types of metal demonstrates that these are the only types of metal that become tamei, and that any newly developed metals are not susceptible to tumah (Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 2:164; letter from Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky published at end of the sefer Tevilas Keilim).

According to the latter approach, one can argue that chrome pots and aluminum implements do not require tevilas keilim. The prevalent accepted practice is to assume that they do require tevilas keilim, although some authorities consider this a sufficient enough doubt to omit the beracha prior to immersing these items.

Conclusion

According to Rav Hirsch, metal vessels, which require mankind's mining, extracting and processing, represent man's mastery over the earth and its materials. Whereas vessels made of earthenware or wood only involve man shaping the world's materials to fit his needs, the manufacture of metal demonstrates man's creative abilities to utilize natural mineral resources to fashion matter into a usable form. Consuming food, on the other hand, serves man's most basic physical nature. Use of metal food vessels, then, represents the intellectual aspect of man serving his physical self, which, in a sense, is the opposite of why we were created, which is to use our physical self to assist our intellect to do Hashem's will. Specifically in this instance, the Torah requires that the items hereby produced be immersed in a mikveh before we use them, in order to endow them with increased kedusha before they are put to food use. This demonstrates that although one may use one's intellect for physical purposes, when doing so one must first sanctify the item, to focus on the spiritual.

Parshas Mattos-Masei

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moshe ben Yitzchak.

Only as Good as His Word

And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Jewish people saying; "this is what Hashem has commanded. If a man vows a vow to Hashem, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to whatever comes out of his mouth" (30:2-3).

Maimonides, in the introduction to his commentary on Mishna, ponders why Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, compiler of the Mishna, chose to place the tractate of Nedarim (vows) in the section of Nashim (the laws related to women). He answers that the placement is appropriate as Nedarim deals with vows made by a woman that can be annulled either by her father or her husband. However, the laws regarding a father or husband annulling vows do not appear until the tenth chapter of Nedarim; clearly this isn't a focus of the tractate.

Perhaps an alternative answer to Maimonides' question can be suggested. The vast majority of tractate Nedarim is concerned with the language and articulation of a vow – which words and/or statements bind a person to a commitment and which do not. The tractate also focuses on which words properly communicate one's intent and which phrases do not. This means that to bind oneself to a commitment requires the correct words, the proper intent, and the listener's understanding.

As Nedarim is essentially about articulating intent and how communications are understood, it is incredibly relevant to the section of Nashim. Interaction with wives (and mothers and daughters, of course) are all about understanding communication. Men have to understand that conversation isn't just about saying what's on their minds. They have to begin by considering how their words will be interpreted and understood (or not) and then choose their words carefully. Even then, men often fail (as we are reminded). It must be understood that through speech – which is a reflection of our soul and a God-given ability through His breath –

one has the power to convey thoughts and create obligations by articulating commitments.

Perhaps this is why the only transaction that requires actual speech is that of the marriage ceremony. The message being delivered is that marriage can only begin with a man articulating his intent through his words – and in a manner that his bride finds acceptable.

Don't Focus on Yourself – Be Happy

And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Avenge the people of Israel from the Midianites; afterwards you shall be gathered to your people. And Moshe spoke to the people saying, "Arm some of yourselves for the war, and let them go against the Midianites, and do the Lord's vengeance in Midian. From every tribe a thousand [...] twelve thousand armed for war" (31:1-5).

This week's parsha relates Moshe's final responsibility as leader of the Jewish people: to exact vengeance on the Midianites who had caused devastating human losses to the Jewish people. Hashem informed Moshe that after completing this final mission Moshe would die. Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Midrash Tanchuma: "Even though Moshe knew that at the end of this final task he would die, he did it with joy and didn't delay." How do Chazal know that he did it with joy if it doesn't appear anywhere in the pesukim?

Rashi (verse four) explains that the words "from every tribe" include even the tribe of Levi. In other words, every tribe sent one thousand armed soldiers for war against the Midianites. The commentators (Mizrahi and others ad loc) ask a very difficult question on Rashi: If Moshe indeed sent one thousand from every tribe including the tribe of Levi, that would equal 13,000 armed soldiers, so why does verse five say that only 12,000 were given over to war?

Rashi (verse five) explains that the 12,000 armed men had to "be given over" to duty because they had heard that after this final mission Moshe would die. The men were very reluctant to go and had to be coerced. So even though Moshe had gone about his final task with joy, the Jewish people were very sad. Why this dichotomy?

As the baby boomer generation ages, the burden of their care falls on a large portion of our population – their children. Why is it that some of these children view caring for their aging parents as their greatest privilege and are thrilled to be able to do this for their parents, while other children see it as an overwhelming burden? This isn't limited to caring for others; often two people in the same predicament (e.g. a serious health issue) have polar opposite attitudes to life and living. Why? What is the root cause of this difference?

The answer is focus. A person who is constantly, and solely, focused on what he can do for others is always happy as his main currency of life is defined with what he can do for others. Conversely, a person who is focused solely on himself is devastated when anything about him is diminished. Therefore, an outwardly focused individual looks at caring for a parent as a tremendous opportunity; not only to do a great kindness, but also to repay a debt of gratitude. While an inwardly focused person only sees how his life is "diminished" by this added responsibility.

This, of course, is a cause for sadness. The inwardly focused individual doesn't feel a deep sense of gratitude because, after all, everything is coming to him. This sense of entitlement (i.e. I am owed everything I receive because everything is about me) causes these individuals to lead a frustrating and unhappy life because they are always waiting on the largesse of others. On the other hand, the person with the healthy giving attitude is always happy because he is in control of his own destiny; he isn't frustrated by waiting for others to give him what he "deserves."

Moshe was an outwardly focused individual. Even though Hashem told him that he would die after this final mission, he was happy because his sole focus was what he could do for others. Anytime he had something to accomplish he did it with joy. We see this clearly in the pesukim: Hashem tells Moshe to take revenge for the Jewish people, yet when he tells the Jewish people he changes the purpose of the war to be revenge for Hashem. He is telling the Jewish people that this isn't about us, this is about Hashem. When someone attacks Hashem's children (the Jewish people), it is an attack on Hashem and we have to avenge His honor.

The problem with the perspective of the Jewish people was that they were focused on their loss (i.e. Moshe dying after this final mission) and had to be “given over” because they didn’t want to lose Moshe. Only the tribe of Levi, Moshe’s tribe and the one tribe that was historically outwardly focused on what Hashem wanted (e.g. they never participated in the golden calf, they were the only tribe to keep the mitzvah of circumcision in the desert, etc.), wasn’t reluctant to go to war. It is for that reason that only 12,000 men had to be given over to the war. Only the other tribes were reluctant, the tribe of Levi was already ready to go on this final mission.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה