

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) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

While the episodes in Sefer Bemidbar essentially end with Pinchas, Matot and Masei wrap up the Sefer. When we turn to Sefer Devarim, Moshe provides extended speeches to inform the generation about to enter the Promised Land about the history of the forty year exodus and to review and update the people about Hashem's mitzvot.

Despite many sins of the people of the second generation, God finds them worthy of entering and building new lives in Hashem's special land. Why is the second generation more qualified than the generation of the Exodus? The generation of the Exodus, recently freed slaves, are constantly afraid of any challenge. Despite being witnesses to God's many miracles, the people of the Exodus do not trust Hashem, are afraid to ask God directly for help, and always ask Moshe and Aharon to intervene for them. On numerous occasions, they regret leaving Egypt and want to find a leader to take them back to the land of their slavery. With rose colored rear view glasses, this generation remembers Egypt's tremendous variety of delicious foods – something unlikely to be what they had really experienced as slaves.

The second generation, in contrast, is impatient to finish their journey in the Midbar. They look forward to living normal lives in Canaan (Israel), even needing to work hard rather than having God provide everything for them. When they face challenges, they pray directly to God and ask Hashem to help them move forward. When they become tired of waiting in the Midbar, they complain that the desert does not have milk, honey, pomegranates, figs – the special products of Israel. Rather than looking back to Egypt as a promised land, this generation accepts Hashem's greatest gift to B'Nai Yisrael – His special land – and is impatient to get there. They realize that in Canaan, Hashem's miracles will be Hester Panim – His hidden face – out of sight of the people. Even so, they believe that God will be with the people, helping them to be successful as long as they obey His mitzvot.

The sins that eventually lead to God expelling B'Nai Yisrael from the land are primarily idolatry, sinat chinam (senseless hatred), and failure to care for the disadvantaged members of society (widows, orphans, and immigrants). In the Midbar, and especially in Sefer Bemidbar, individuals who go after idolatry and rebels (such as Korach) die for these sins and do not survive to the end of the Sefer. However, we do not see evidence of sinat chinam or abuse of disadvantaged members of society. By Matot and Masei, those who go after idolatry (such as at Baal Peor) are already dead, victims of their own sins. Considering that three million Jews (600,000 adult males and the rest of their families) spend forty years living together under harsh conditions, the absence of serious fights among the people is astonishing.

The daughters of Tzelofchad and the leaders of Reuven, Gad, and Manasseh demonstrate how the people about to enter the land treat each other with respect. The daughters want to have a piece of the promised land in the name of their deceased father. They take that request to Moshe, and God amends the rules of land ownership to cover the situation where there are no sons to inherit family property. The leaders of Reuven and Gad successfully negotiate with Moshe to take their land holdings in Israel Heights (east of the Jordan River) and are willing to fight in the front lines as long as necessary to show that they support Klal Yisrael (all the shevatim). The leaders of Manasseh also raise their issues with respect. Their concern is that if the daughters of Tzelofchad marry outside their shevat, their husbands' tribes will bring their land into the husbands' shevatim. Moshe immediately solves the problem by requiring that the current generation of daughters marry only husbands from Manasseh, so their land holdings will stay within Manasseh. Moshe also places the daughters of Tzelofchad with Reuven and Gad east of the Jordan and places the rest of Manasseh west of the Jordan. Once the daughters find husbands – across the river – this arrangement ensures that there will be frequent travel across the river as families visit close relatives who live on the other side.

Sefer Bemidbar opens with great anticipation as B'Nai Yisrael prepare to depart from the base of Har Sinai for a short final journey to Canaan. Because of sins of the people, especially rejecting Hashem's greatest gift, His special land (Shelach), God decrees that the generation of the Exodus will die out over forty years and only the children will live to enter the land. Matot and Masei conclude the Sefer happily, with the new generation impatient to enter the land. First, however, Moshe has a "few" words to relate to the people.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Parshat Matot-Masei: Spiritual Leaders Staying in their Lanes

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * 5785 / 2025
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

This week's OTS Devrei Torah are dedicated in memory of Hymie Charif, z"l, whose yahrzeit is on 2 Av, by Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney Australia.

One of the key verses in this week's haftarah is Jeremiah's famous indictment of the Israelite leaders: "*The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' The teachers of the Torah did not know Me. The shepherds betrayed Me. The prophets prophesied in the name of Baal. They pursued that which was useless*")2:8(. With these words, Jeremiah clearly decries the betrayal of God by the different echelons of the Israelite elite, even – or perhaps especially – by those of whom we would expect to know better, given their positions as His messengers.

Any of these offices can be misused, but the corruption of all of them, conveyed in the haftarah, is a sign that the people's spiritual fabric has entered a stage of advanced decay.

At the same time, in the process of this criticism, Jeremiah gives us a window into the various types of leaders that the Jewish people looked to in his day. It is only by understanding the characteristics and roles of the different types of leaders — both in Jeremiah's time and today — that we can strengthen and renew our spiritual state and connection to God.

For example, the "*shepherds*" are the political leaders, involved in the government and secular administration of the people, responsibilities that also require a degree of holiness. Meanwhile, the "*teachers of the Torah*" are those who are entirely dedicated to educating the nation in God's ways and laws. The "*priests*," which Jeremiah also refers to, were responsible for the proper functioning of the Temple and its services; and the "*prophets*" were charged with bringing God's messages to the populace.

Focusing on these last two categories of priests and prophets, it is especially important to note the distinctions between them: Not only do these two classes of leaders have very different responsibilities, but the manner in which they are qualified and chosen differs dramatically. A priest is defined by the external markers of lineage and dress: Only direct male-line descendants of Aaron can be priests, and they may only serve in the Temple while clothed in very specific garments.

A prophet, on the other hand, is defined by internal factors: One attains the potential for prophecy through internal, spiritual improvement and struggle)see *Guide for the Perplexed book II*, 32(. And God can choose a person for prophecy regardless of parentage or extraction – think of King David's humble origins and the prophetess Chuldah.

While they differ in many aspects, the priests and the prophets both are meant to be a spiritual north star for the people. The difference in the nature of their offices, therefore, symbolizes an important tension that exists within the world of Jewish spirituality. The priest is subject to formal, external qualifications because he bears the burden of ensuring that the public rituals of the Temple service are carried out correctly and consistently, day after day and year after year.

There is something to be said for the rooting of tradition in eternal and unchanging rituals. When I recite the same prayers that my grandmother recited, or when I use the same kiddush cup that graced my grandfather's table, I gain a sense of the perpetuity of the Jewish experience. This feeling of sacred constancy was the priests' charge; they were to ensure that the rituals and symbols at the heart of our national lives would never be compromised.

The job of the prophet, on the other hand, is to infuse these rituals and symbols with life and meaning. Ritual without meaning becomes rote, and symbols that signify nothing become empty. Such religious service is repugnant, as Isaiah bitingly critiques in next week's haftarah: "*Why, says the Lord, would I want all these offerings?*")Isaiah 1:11(.

By contrast, when the prophets convey the divine ethos that stands behind the formalities of Judaism, they empower us to use our traditions to connect deeply and communicate freely with God and our fellow Jews, in every time and place. This allows not just for continuity, but lets us find spiritual meaning. Shabbat becomes not just about tradition, but about truly understanding its divine source and relevance today. When priesthood and prophecy are understood in this way, we can see that in our modern context, each and every one of us needs to be both the priest and a prophet. On the one hand, we

must adhere scrupulously to our rituals. On the other, we must ensure that all our rites and practices are imbued with meaning.

In our haftarah, Jeremiah reminds us that when both the priest and the prophet cease to perform these functions – even if they are viewed as otherwise effective and inspiring leaders – they doom the Jewish people to a state of spiritual exile – disconnected from God and the deeper purpose of our rituals – even while physically living in the Land of Israel.]emphasis added[

Today, we must seek out and cultivate modern spiritual leaders who understand the roles of the priest and the prophet – who can convey the beauty of the rituals, and who can also communicate the deeper significance that these practices are meant to embody for us in every age.

In addition, coming back to the roles of “*shepherds*” and “*teachers of Torah*,” the haftarah also reminds us that these positions have a unique job, with built-in limits and borders. After all, according to the Rambam *Hilkhot Shemita Veyovel* 13:13(, the devotion and self-sacrifice of such teachers of Torah gives them a sanctified status just like the priests or Levites. That also implies they should have certain ethics and standards in how they carry out their roles.

Perhaps this haftara reminds us to be wary when “*teachers of torah*” – rabbis and spiritual mentors – stray from these missions and encroach on the responsibilities of other types of leaders – shepherds. Endorsing political movements or candidates, for example, takes the teacher of Torah far from the realm of Judaism’s form and content, into fields less familiar and suited to his or her expertise. While there are occasional exceptions to this rule, we as a people are better served when we look to the appropriate “*shepherds*” to help us navigate the political world, allowing our modern-day priests and prophets – men and women of Torah and Jewish education – to focus fully on their true mission. They are our spiritual compass, our guides, and they must be free to give us the vision we need to lead productive and meaningful Jewish lives.

Special note: In the wake of October 7th, something remarkable has happened: an unprecedented surge of religious young women stepping forward to serve in the IDF. Indeed, last year, close to fifty percent of the women graduating from Religious Zionist high schools enlisted, with an astonishing ten percent of these seeking roles in combat units. In response, the IDF requested a partnership with Ohr Torah Stone’s *Maaminot BeMadim* program to create the first-ever combat unit exclusively for religious women — ensuring these trailblazers could serve their country without compromising their values.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

Dvar Torah: Masei: Close Enough? (5767)

By Rabbi Label Lam

And you shall not defile the land where you reside, in which I dwell, for I am HASHEM Who dwells among the Children of Israel.)Bamidbar 26:34(

...in which I dwell: You should not cause Me to dwell amidst its uncleanness.)Rashi(

...for I am HASHEM Who dwells among the Children of Israel: Even when they are unclean, the Divine Presence resides with them.)Rashi(

We are treated here to “good news” and “bad news.” The “good news” as spelled out in the verse is that HASHEM dwells in the in our land, in the Land of Israel. Furthermore, we find out that HASHEM dwells in the midst of the Children of Israel “*even when they are unclean*” as Rashi spells out. Not only is that “good news” but it is “great news”! There is no way to rid ourselves of the Divine Presence. Hope beats eternal! Now we can march forth with nothing but confidence and good cheer.

After all, King David had said, “*As for me, being close to G-d is my good...*” (Tehillim 73:28) Therefore we are already living in a state of success in proximity to Divinity. Just as in real estate the three most important ingredients that factor into the value of a property are “location, location, location,” so too it is in spiritual terms. What raises a person’s esteem and true value in this world and the next is “closeness to HASHEM.”

I know a person who rented a summer apartment with a window looking directly out onto the plaza of the Kossel. The view was stunning beyond words. It is impossible to imagine the value of that piece of property, on so many levels. Why then does King David say that that’s what’s good for him, his being close to HASHEM? Is it not also what’s good for everyone else also?

Why is “my good” my being close to HASHEM? And what’s the “bad news” associated with knowing that HASHEM is amongst his people even when they are unworthy?

There’s a Mishne in Pirke Avos that says, “*Let your house be a meeting place for sages...*” (Avos 1:4) (Rabeinu Yona confirms the notion that one’s home should be a place where the wise congregate. However, we confront a practical difficulty when trying to implement the overt meaning of the Mishne. There will always be more homes than sages to fill them up. Can each and every home be expected to host the Torah Shiur or the parlor meeting? How can everyone share a mandate that their house should be a meeting place for sages? How are all of us to fulfill this universal maxim?

When we look carefully at the words of the Mishne the answer appears. It states, “*Yehi Beis’cha...Let your house be...*” Your home should be the type of environment that the sages would feel as comfortable entering as you would be hosting them. Imagine that the Chofetz Chaim or the Steipler is coming over, not to visit for a day or a week but to move in. How much of an adjustment would that be? What would we have to hide or hinder to host comfortably? How ashamed would we be to wildly misbehave in their presence?! The pursuit of that standard may be the source of the common practice amongst Jews world-wide to hang pictures of Gedolim on the walls, if only to remind us of the company we keep.

Therefore the “good news” is that HASHEM is in our midst and the “bad news” that HASHEM is in our midst. We can forget about HASHEM but we are reminded that HASHEM never forgets about us. HASHEM can be so close to me, but am I to HASHEM **close enough**?

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5774-masei/>

A Thought on the Parsha (Pinchas): A New Leadership? Yes We Can!

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012

The Israelites have been wandering through the Wilderness for forty years, and they are now on the cusp of entering into the Land of Canaan. Things will be different now. There will no longer be the cloud of God to lead them during the day and the pillar of fire to lead them at night. There will no longer be manna from Heaven to feed them and the miraculous well to quench their thirst. And their leaders will all be different. Miriam has died, Aharon has died, and now, in parashat Pinchas, Moshe is told to prepare for his death as well.

From the time of the Exodus until now, the main players of the Biblical story have been God, Moshe, and Aharon. The Children of Israel have had very little identity other than that of chronic complainers. But now things are about to change. The larger-than-life leaders are dead or soon to be so, and God will soon step back as well and become a more distant

player in the future events of the people. It is now the nation's story that will be told; it is now the story not of the leaders, but of the people.

It is thus that we find that the Children of Israel have been moving more and more into the foreground – and Moshe more and more into the background – in these recent parshiyot. In parashat Chukat, immediately after Aharon dies, the king of Arad goes to war against Israel, and then – who is the protagonist? Not Moshe, but Israel. For it is then that Israel takes the initiative, that Israel makes a vow to God, and that Israel goes to war against Arad. And it is then that God responds not to Moshe's prayers, but to the prayers of Israel – *“And the Lord listened to the voice of Israel”* (21:3) – and the people were victorious.

And so it goes. It is in that parasha that there is a song to the well, and song that opens not with *“az yashir Moshe,”* *“then Moshe sang,”* (Shemot 15:1) but rather *“az yashir Yisrael,”* then Israel sang (Bamidbar 21:17). It is then that messengers are sent to the neighboring countries for safe passage. Moshe does come briefly to the fore here – he sends messengers to Edom – but they are rebuffed and the mission fails. But at the next encounter, it is not Moshe who sends messengers, but Israel (21:21). And here – when they are likewise rebuffed by Sichon, king of the Amorites – the result is unexpected and phenomenal: Israel is brought to war against him (21:23), Israel defeats him and his army in battle (21:24), and Israel conquers all his territory (21:25). The story, clearly, is no longer about Moshe, but about Israel.

The absence of Moshe from almost the entirety of the next parasha, then, should not take us by surprise. The story of Balak and Balaam is a story of one nation plotting against another nation, and Moshe is nowhere to be seen. When Moshe does finally reemerge at the end of the parasha, it is to deal with a situation that Israel – again as an independent actor, as an initiator – has created. Israel has dwelled in Shittim (25:1), Israel has whored after the Moabite women (25:2), and Israel has worshiped the Ba'al of Peor (25:3). Moshe, on God's command, steps up and tries to take control of the situation. And then what happens? A new leader emerges. Pinchas is the one who takes charge and who does what is needed.

One can even hear in this story the echo of another leader who, when he saw a terrible act being committed, and when he saw that no one else was rising up, did what was necessary and slew the Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave. That earlier act of smiting the Egyptian was the leadership needed at that time – a leadership to protect an enslaved and oppressed people. Pinchas' smiting of Zimri, on the other hand, was the leadership needed for a free people, for a people who had choice and opportunity and who could easily go astray as a result. It was the leadership for a people about to enter and possess a land, a people about to become a sovereign nation.

And yet it was not Pinchas who was to lead them. A new leadership had to come to the fore, but ironically, those who were chosen were not the most obvious candidates. Pinchas was the Kohen who took initiative, and yet it was Elazar who would be the next Kohen Gadol, who would be the religious head of the people. And who was to be the political head? Not Caleb, the one who had the courage to stand up to the people, to silence their rebellious murmurings. Not Caleb, the one of who had *“a different spirit in him.”* No, it was not Caleb. It was Yehoshua. Why? Why not the obvious choice of Pinchas and Caleb? Why rather the quiet and unassuming leadership of Elazar and Yehoshua?

The answer is clear. Israel had just had two larger-than-life leaders – they had had Moshe and they had had Aharon. These were the founders of the nation. But if the nation were to succeed, were to stand on its own, it could not be by virtue of the personalities or the charisma of their leaders. It would have to be by virtue of their own character, their own national identity. The story would have to be theirs.

After a larger-than-life leader, what is needed is stability, continuity, and consolidation. What is not needed is another charismatic leader. After Avraham, we needed not another Avraham, but a Yitzchak. After Moshe and Aharon we needed not a Calev and a Pinchas, but a Yehoshua and an Elazar.

This transition of leadership is paralleled by the transition in their relationship with God. In the Wilderness, God had been a powerful, indeed overwhelming, presence: the cloud and the pillar of fire, the Tabernacle and the Glory which appeared in the cloud, hearing God's direct communication, and feeling God's direct punishment. All of that would soon change. As

they were tilling the land and harvesting their crops, as they were working to create a government and its laws, they would have to exert serious effort and observe many mitzvot to ensure that they would keep God in mind, that they would remember the God who took them out of Egypt. In short, their religious leadership, their political leadership, and even their relationship with God would have to be a less imposing, less overwhelming. All these would have to step back so that the nation of Israel, and the people of Israel, could come into its own.

And the daughters of Tzelaphchad paved the way. According to the law that had been received from God, the daughters of Tzelaphchad would not receive any of their father's portion of the land. But they would have none of that. That was not going to be the end of the conversation. These women had a legitimate complaint, and they would be heard. And heard they were – and the law – God's law – changed as a result. In this, they proved themselves to be the generation fit to enter the land. They demonstrated not only their passion for the land, but their intuitive understanding that now they must stand up for themselves. Their relationship with their leaders would be different, and their relationship with God would be different. The human reality could be brought to God, could be brought in conversation with the law that was to govern their lives, and a truer law would emerge.

The Sefat Emet makes this point nicely:

The meaning is that now, for the generation entering the Land, a new way of life was beginning. It is for this reason that there was a new census (at this time, as we read in this parasha)... This was all a function of the transformation of this generation, which was now beginning a way of life based on human effort and "bestirring from below." This is in the (theological) category of the "Oral Torah," that everything was given at Sinai, but the Children of Israel must bring (this Torah) from potential into reality.

Until now, one book, one story, was being written. It was the Written Torah, the Five Books of Moses, and it was the story of Moshe, of Aharon, of God. Now, as the people prepare to enter the land, another story, another book, must start to be written. It is the Oral Torah. It is the Torah that emerges when the people come into their own. It is the Torah that emerges when the people don't experience God's overwhelming presence, but when they work to find God who is so often hidden in the world. It is the Torah that emerges when the people not only receive the Torah but engage in true conversation with the Torah. It is this Torah and this leadership – one of engagement and empowerment – which is needed to bring us into the land. It is this Torah and this leadership which allows us to flourish as a people on the land.

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives.

True to Your Word: Thoughts for Matot/Masei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"When a person makes a vow unto the Lord or swears an oath to bind one's soul, one shall not break one's word; one should act according to one's words" (Bemidbar 30:3).

Jewish tradition stresses the importance of keeping commitments. This is true not only for "vows unto the Lord" but for all our interactions. When we give our word, people should be able to rely on our integrity to fulfill our agreements. When we fail to live up to our commitments, we are dishonorable to ourselves, to others, and to the Almighty.

A member of my congregation was a highly successful international banker. He once told me: *"When I deal with honorable people, I can trust their word. They won't renege on their commitments. But when dealing with others, I not only can't rely on their word, I can't even rely on their written contracts. They will find loopholes and reinterpretations. I avoid dealing with people whose words are not trustworthy."* I think this policy was a major factor in his success!

How people keep their word is a key indicator of their general trustworthiness. Honorable people will meet their commitments. If they take on a responsibility, they will fulfill it to the best of their ability. You can count on them.

Rabbi Benzion Uziel (1880-1953) was a young student when his father passed away. In order to earn income, he sought jobs as a tutor. He soon realized, though, that he was unable to devote himself properly to his students since he was tired by the end of his own school day. Although he needed the income, he decided it was unfair — and dishonorable — to take pay for tutoring when he was not able to do so with fullness of effort. Rabbi Uziel recognized that being “religious” entailed doing one’s best to fulfill commitments. In his writings, he stressed the importance of working to one’s capacity to fulfill responsibilities as rabbis, teachers, employers, employees.

Just as employers are obligated to deal fairly with employees, employees are obligated to deal fairly with their employers. Halakha demands that workers be paid fairly and on time. It also demands workers to fulfill their duties with diligence. When people renege on their commitments, they not only reflect badly on their own character but they undermine the proper functioning of society in general.

In delineating responsibilities of employers and employees, Maimonides (*Hilkhot Sekhirut* 13:7) writes:

“Just as the employer is warned not to steal the wage of the poor person [employee] or to withhold it from him, the poor person [employee] is forewarned not to steal from the work due his employer and neglect his work slightly here and there, spending the entire day in deceit. Instead, he is obligated to be precise with regard to his time.... Similarly, a worker is obligated to work with all his strength, for Jacob the righteous man said (Genesis 31:7): I served your father with all my strength.”

When we give our word and make commitments, our personal honor is at stake. Halakha expects us to be our best and do our best. Falling short of this standard is a sign of moral — and religious — deficiency.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3366>

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The Past as Prelude: Thoughts for Matot-Masei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

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

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

Another explanation is that he realized that his tremendous accomplishment really amounted to very little. Earth is a speck in the universe; even if one were to rule the entire earth, there was a vast universe over which he did not rule. Moreover, humans are mortal; whatever we accomplish, however impressive, is short lived. In a thousand years or a million years —

who will know or care what we've done? What difference will it have made? Thus, Alexander cried at the sheer vanity of life, the ultimate emptiness of his life's deeds.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/index.php/past-preludethoughts-matot-masei>

Parshas Matos – The Jewish Army

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Wishing you and yours 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.

Note: Rabbi Rhine is on vacation for a few weeks, and he has authorized me to reprint selected Devrei Torah from his archives during this period.

Haftoras Mas'ei - Is Punishment Really Bad?

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2020

Although the Haftarah usually relates to the weekly Torah reading, during the Three Weeks of Mourning we read Haftarah portions relating to the destruction of the Temple to stir us to reflect upon our own actions and upon our current situation in exile. Despite the harsh and painful tones of these prophecies, it was established that each week we should end on a positive note. Each week's Haftarah ends with a focus on the promise of G-d's everlasting love for us and the promise of future redemption and return to Israel.

To find the positive note for this week's Haftarah, we conclude with Chapter 3 verse 4. This verse, though, does not appear to present a very positive note. In Chapter 3, Jeremiah is speaking of a time when G-d has brought a drought due to our sins. At that time we continued to deny our sins or that we had done anything wrong. Verse 3 states, *"Did you now call me your Father,)saying(You are my Powerful Master since my youth?"* The commentaries explain that G-d was rebuking us for not recognizing His dominion over us even after He had brought the drought. How is the verse presenting a positive note? Where is the message of G-d's everlasting love or His promise of a future redemption?

Perhaps we can understand the positive message if we look at the verses at the beginning of Chapter 2, which precede Jeremiah's prophecy of rebuke that we read this week.)These verses are read as the concluding verses for last week's Haftarah.(G-d prefaces the prophecy of rebuke by instructing Jeremiah, *"Go and call out in the ears of Jerusalem saying, 'So says G-d, 'I remember for you the kindness of your youth the love of your bridal days, how you walked after Me in the desert in a land that was not planted.' Holy is Israel to G-d the first of His produce, all those who consume him will be found guilty, evil will come upon them" The word of G-d."*)Jeremiah 2:2-3(Before G-d even begins to rebuke us and warn us of destruction, He makes His never ending love for us known and declares that all who bring about our destruction will be punished.

The Malbi"m notes that this message is intended as a general introduction for all of the prophecies of rebuke throughout the Book of Jeremiah. G-d is telling us here that through all of the rebuke and punishments that would be brought upon us, His love for us is forever intact. The Malbi"m compares this to the sentiments of a father with a wayward child. The father may willingly hand the child over to harsh educators or reform centers to rebuke and straighten out the child's path in life. Yet, at the same time, the father would feel great pity for the child and great anguish at the child's plight while he is at the reform center. This was G-d's introduction to the prophecies of rebuke and calamity. He was telling us that no matter what happens, He will always love us and be concerned for us. So much so that He would even take retribution from those who would willingly choose to be our tormentors and bring about those punishments.

From this perspective, perhaps we can understand why the verse of rebuke from Chapter 3 provides a positive note. There are two types of punishment and rebuke. Sometimes rebuke and punishment can be given as an expression of rejection. It can be a statement that one is no longer wanted. However, rebuke and punishment can also be given for a constructive purpose. It can be given as a means of guiding someone to something greater. It is then a statement of belief in the potential of the one being punished. It is a statement that I care enough about you to do whatever it takes, so you can become the best you.

This is the message of the verse in Chapter 3. The rains were stopped for a purpose. G-d wants us to understand that He is involved in our lives and loves us, and for us to reciprocate. He knows we can realize it and act on it. He believe in us and He won't give up on us. Can there be a more positive message than knowing that G-d believes in us and our potential for spiritual greatness even when we don't believe in ourselves?

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

Parashat Devarim: Learn Well, Seek Justice! *

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia **

[* I have only one Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia on Matot-Masei, and I have run it the last two years. Rabbi Ovadia has provided several Devrei Torah on Devarim, so I am using this Devar Torah as an introduction to Tisha B'Av, which starts one week from Motzi Shabbat. For Devazrim next week, I shall present a different Devar Torah for Devarim by Rabbi Ovadia.]

At some obscure turning-point in the history of Jewish observance, three religious practices were chosen to become the yardstick by which one's religiosity is measured. Beside the external appearance and Shul attendance, you can bet that when someone is defined as "very religious," "somewhat religious," or "not religious at all," the speaker thinks of Shabbat, Kosher, and family purity. Synagogues, schools, and communities – as well as the whole State of Israel – divide along these lines. It is very rare to hear nowadays a sane voice such as that of my late grandfather, Hakham Shaul Fetaya, who refused to use the terms religious and secular. We are all observant, he used to say, only that each one chooses different Mitzvot to observe.

Reading this week's Haftarah, it becomes obvious that the prophet Isaiah would not have given anyone a pass of religiosity based on Shabbat observance. God, speaking through him, rebukes those who observe Shabbat and holidays, rejects their sacrifices, and asks them to stop frequenting the Temple:

What will I do with your many sacrifices? I have had enough of your burnt rams and the fat of sheep, and I do not want to see the blood of oxen, sheep, and goats. You come to see My face, but who asked you to do that, to trespass my property? Bring no more false offerings and abominable incense! I do not wish to attend your profane gatherings on Shabbat and the New Month. I detest your months and holidays, they have become a burden I cannot tolerate. Even if you]drop the sacrifices and simply[raise your hands in prayer, I will look away. I will not hear your many prayers since your hands are soiled with blood and stolen money!

Isaiah's audience was probably shocked by his words. Looking at each other, they would probably ask what is he talking about. We are good Jews, they'd say, we come to Temple every Shabbat, we do our prayers, we only eat kosher animals. But the prophet goes on to remind them that they failed the religiosity test on civics and business ethics. They do not take care of the widow and the orphan. They do not pay attention to the needs of the weaker strata of society. They embezzle and deceive each other. This is not what God wants. First, Isaiah says, clean your act, return what you have stolen, establish justice and act with loving kindness, then you will be redeemed.

I used to say in my classes, based on this and other biblical passages, mainly from the prophets, that if grades were given on religiosity, and we had to grade one who only keeps the mitzvot between us and God, and one who only keeps the mitzvot between us and other humans, the latter will have a better grade. Some of my listeners, however, argued that we cannot grade observance and that we do not know God's calculation system. I have therefore decided to present the question differently:

Assuming that to be an "Observant Jew", one must observe the whole package, who of the following two has a better chance of doing so?]the characters have been intensified for dramatization, as no such people exist[:

A. The shul goer, who keeps Shabbat, Kosher, and family purity, but is lax when it comes to business ethics, civility, respect for the law, and contribution for his country, or

B. The “non-observant,” who serves his country, takes good care of family, is honest and polite in all his dealings, and who has great respect for other humans and for the planet.

Most [honest] people will admit, albeit after some deliberations, that the second person is much closer to achieving the coveted title of “Observant Jew,” whether because of the intuitive understanding that the whole purpose of the Torah is to educate us to be better people and to create a better human society, or the acknowledgement that it is much more difficult to change the behavior of the first person than the religious beliefs of the second.

Let us heed the call of Isaiah and put aside religious yardsticks, measuring tapes, and labels. Let us start obsessing over the exact amounts, measures, times, formulas, and actions needed to fulfill the Mitzvot between us and other human beings, just as we obsess over them when needed to fulfil our obligations towards God.

God will be much happier if we did that, and more importantly, the world will be a much better place for all mankind.

Shabbat Shalom.

** Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(.

Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Matot-Masei: Which Haftorah to Read?

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

It's a Shabbat of contradictions this week. On the one hand, we bring in the month of Av, the month where we mourn the Destruction of the Temple and all of our people's tragedies throughout history. On the other hand, this Shabbat we celebrate Rosh Chodesh. Every beginning of the month represents a holiday of sorts where we pray and be joyful for new beginnings.

This contradiction shows up in the differing customs of which Haftorah to read. We will read the Haftorah for Rosh Chodesh, but other congregations read Haftorahs on the topic of the Temple's destruction.

In a miniature form, this is the contradiction every Jew lives with now, especially in Israel. Life goes on. We celebrate Shabbat and holidays but the plight of the hostages weighs heavy on our minds at all times.

I know the month of Av is not a month of good omens or good luck. But maybe the fact that it's Shabbat Rosh Chodesh can give us more hope that this Av will be more joyful and we will see the quick return of all the hostages and victory over those who seek to destroy us.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

Rav Kook Torah

Matot: Two Paths to Purity

After the victory over the Midianites, Elazar the High Priest explained to the soldiers how to kasher and purify the metal utensils captured in the war:

“As far as the gold, silver, copper, iron, tin and lead are concerned: whatever was used over fire must be passed through fire, and it will be clean. However, it must be then purified with the sprinkling water.”)Num. 31:22-23(

The Midianite vessels had become defiled in battle, through contact with death. They needed to be purified, by sprinkling over them water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer. This is the standard process of purification, a process that takes a week to complete.

Instant Purity

There exists a second way to purifying utensils — more drastic, but immediate. One simply makes the utensil unusable by boring a large hole in it. Then it is no longer considered a vessel. When the puncture is mended, it is as if a new utensil has been formed, without any residual impurity.

The Talmud)Shabbat 15b(relates that the Hasmonean queen Shlomzion)circa 100 BCE(once held a celebration in honor of her son. Tragically, one of the guests died during the party. As a result, the royal cutlery and dishes became ritually impure. The queen wanted to avoid waiting a week to purify them, so she commanded that the utensils be rendered unusable, and then forged anew.

The rabbis informed the queen, however, that her shortcut was not acceptable. Rabbi Shimon ben Shatach — the queen's brother — had already ruled that impure utensils that are broken still retain their original impure state after they are fixed.

What led the Sages to make this decree? They were afraid that the ritual of red heifer ashes would fall into disuse if everyone used the faster method of boring a large hole and then fixing the implement.

How to Rectify an Imperfect World

There is, however, a deeper significance to Rabbi Shimon Ben Shatach's decree. The laws of ritual purity may seem distant from modern life. But upon closer examination, they can have much to teach us — about imperfections in the world, and in each individual.

There are two ways to purify oneself from past follies. The more drastic method is to totally destroy those areas into which evil has rooted itself, and then rebuild from the raw materials left over. This was the method used in the time of Noah, when God purged an utterly corrupt world with the devastating waters of the Flood.

An individual may similarly choose to eliminate deeply rooted personality defects by afflicting his body and soul. With the breakdown of his powers, the evil is also destroyed. Then he can rebuild himself in a moral, just fashion.

Given the rampant level of violence and immorality that have become so entrenched among the human race, the world certainly deserves to have been destroyed. Yet, God in His kindness established another method of purification. The preferred path is to gradually rectify moral defects over time, so that even those unbridled forces may be utilized for good. Only in extreme cases is it necessary to purify through destruction.

The rabbinical decree not to purify utensils by breaking them now takes on a deeper significance. We should not become accustomed to this drastic form of purification, which weakens constructive energies as it purges impurities. It is better to

use the slower method of red heifer ashes, thereby allowing the vessel to become pure while retaining all of its original strength.

)*Gold from the Land of Israel* pp. 282-284. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. III, pp. 47-48.(

<https://ravkooktorah.org/PINHAS58.htm>

Matot, Masei: The Danger of Suspicion (5763, 5773)

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

It is a fascinating story, and from it comes one of the great principles of Judaism. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, see that the land east of the Jordan is ideally suited as pasture for their large herds and flocks of livestock. They approach Moses and ask to have permission to settle there rather than cross the Jordan. Moses is initially furious at their request. It is, he says, bound to demoralise the rest of the people: *"Shall your fellow countrymen go to war while you sit here?"* Had they learned nothing from the sin of the spies who, by de-motivating others through their behaviour, condemned an entire generation to forty years of wandering in the desert?

The Reubenites and Gadites take the point. They explain that they have no wish to exempt themselves from the struggles of their fellow Israelites. They are fully prepared to accompany them into the promised land and fight alongside them. *"We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance."* Moses makes them take a public pledge to this effect and grants their request on condition that they fulfil their word. *"When the land is then conquered before God you may then return, free of any obligation before God and Israel and this land will be yours as your permanent property before God."*

The italicised phrase - literally you will be innocent before God and Israel - became in the course of time an ethical axiom of Judaism. It is not enough to do what is right in the eyes of God. One must also act in such a way as to be seen to have done the right in the eyes of one's fellow man. One must be above suspicion. That is the rule of *veheyitem neki'im*, *"You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel."*

How did this translate itself into Jewish law and life? The Mishnah in Shekalim speaks of the three periods in the year when appropriations were made from the collective donations stored in the Temple treasury. The Mishnah states:

"The person who made the appropriation did not enter the chamber wearing a bordered cloak or shoes or tefillin or an amulet, so that if he subsequently became poor, people would not say that he became poor because he committed an offence in the chamber, and so that if he became rich people would not say that he did so by misappropriating contributions in the chamber - for we must be free of blame in the eyes of people just as we must be free of blame before God, as it is said, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.'"

Similarly the Tosefta states: *"When one went in to take up the offering of the chamber, they would search him when he went in and when he came out, and they continue chatting with him from the time he goes in until the time he comes out."*

Not only must there be no wrongdoing when coins are taken from the Temple treasury; there must be no suspicion of wrongdoing. Hence the person who gathered the money should not wear any item of clothing in which coins could be hidden. He was to be searched before and afterwards, and even engaged in conversation so that he would not be tempted to secrete some of the money in his mouth.

Two rabbinic teachings from the Second Temple period speak of families famous for their role in Temple life and the lengths they went to place themselves beyond suspicion. The Garmu family were expert in preparing the showbread. It was said of them that *"their memory was held in high esteem because fine bread was never found in their children's*

homes, in case people might say, they feed from the preparation of the showbread." Likewise the Avtinan family were skilled in making the incense used in the Temple. They too were held in high regard because "Never did a bride of their family go forth perfumed, and when they married a woman from elsewhere, they stipulated that she was not to go out perfumed, in case people should say, They perfume themselves from the preparation of the Temple incense."

The general principle is stated in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

*R. Samuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Jonathan: In the Mosaic books, the Prophets and the Writings, we find that a person must discharge his obligations before men just as he must discharge them before God. Where in the Mosaic books? In the verse, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.' Where in the prophets? In 'God, the Lord God, He knows and Israel too shall know.' Where in the Writings? In the verse, 'You shall find grace and good favour in the eyes of God and men.' Gamliel Zoga asked R. Yose bar Avun,. Which verse says it most clearly? He replied, **'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.'** "]emphasis added[*

This concern became the basis of two halakhic principles. The first is known *aschashad*, "suspicion," namely that certain acts, permitted in themselves, are forbidden on the grounds that performing them may lead others to suspect one of doing something forbidden. Thus, for example, R. Shimon bar Yochai held that one of the reasons why the Torah prescribes that peah [the corner of the field left unharvested for the poor] should be left at the end of harvesting was because of suspicion. If the owner of the field had set aside an unharvested corner at the beginning or middle, the poor would come and take what is theirs before the end of harvesting, and a passer-by might think that no corner had been set aside at all. Likewise the rabbis ordained that if a house has two doors on different sides, Hanukah candles should be lit at both so that a passer-by, seeing one door but not the other, should not think that the owner of the house had failed to fulfil the command.

A closely related halakhic principle is the idea known as *marit ha-ayin*, "appearances." Thus for example, before milk substitutes became common, it was forbidden to drink milk-like liquids)made, for example, from almonds(together with meat on the grounds that people might think it was milk itself. Similarly it is forbidden on Shabbat to hang out garments that had become wet)for example, by falling into water(to dry, in case people think that one has washed them on Shabbat. In general one is not allowed to perform actions which, permitted in themselves, lend themselves to misinterpretation.

The connection or contrast between these two principles is a matter of some debate in the rabbinic literature. There are those who see *chashad* and *marit ha-ayin* as very similar, perhaps even two names for the same thing. Others however see them as different, even opposites. *Chashad* represents the possibility that people might think you have done something forbidden and thus think badly of you. *Marit ha-ayin* concerns cases where people, knowing that you are not the sort of person to do something forbidden, draw the mistaken conclusion that because you are doing X, Y is permitted, because X is easily mistaken for Y. Thus, to take one of the cases mentioned above, people seeing you hanging out clothes to dry on Shabbat might conclude that clothe-washing is permitted, which it is not.

This concern for appearances is, on the face of it, strange. Surely what matters is what God thinks of us, not what people think of us. The Talmud tells us of a moving encounter between the dying Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and his disciples:

They said to him: Master, bless us. He said to them: May it be God's will that the fear of heaven should be as important to you as the fear of [the opinions of] human beings. They said: Is that all? He said: Would that you were able to attain this [level of spirituality]. You can see [how difficult it is] because when someone wants to commit a sin, he says, I hope no one will see me [thus placing his fear of human beings above the fear of God who sees all].

What is more, it is forbidden to suspect people of wrongdoing. The rabbis said, "One who suspects the innocent is [punished by being] bodily afflicted" and "One should always judge a person in the scale of merits." Why then, if the onus

is on the observer not to judge harshly, should we -- the observed - be charged with the duty of acting above suspicion?

The answer is that we are not allowed to rely on the fact that others will judge us charitably, even though they should. Rashi makes a sobering comment on the life of Moses:

If he left his tent early, people would say that he had had a row with his wife. If he left late, they would say, He is devising evil plots against us.

Even Moses, who devoted his life with total selflessness to the people of Israel, was not able to avoid their suspicion. R. Moses Sofer goes so far as to say that he was troubled throughout his lifetime by the challenge of the command, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel,' adding that it was far easier to fulfil the first half of the command 'in the eyes of God' (than the second 'in the eyes of Israel'). Indeed he wondered if it was possible for anyone to fulfil it in its entirety. Perhaps, he said, this is what Ecclesiastes meant when he said, *"There is not a righteous man on earth who only does what is right and never sins."*

Yet there is a profound idea embedded in the concept of *veheyitem neki'im*, 'You shall be innocent.' The Talmudic sage Rava was scathing of those who stood in the presence of a Torah scroll but not in the presence of a Torah sage. To be a Jew is to be summoned to become a living *sefer Torah*. People learn how to behave not only from the books they study but also - perhaps more so - from the people they meet. Jewish educators speak of 'text-people' as well as 'text-books,' meaning that we need living role models as well as formal instruction. For that reason, Rabbi Akiva used to follow Rabbi Yehoshua to see how he conducted himself in private, saying 'This too is part of Torah, and I need to learn.' The twin principles of *chashad* and *marit ha-ayin* mean that we should act in such a way as to be held as a role-model (by being above suspicion - the rule of *chashad* (and that, just as a book of instructions should be unambiguous, so should our conduct) by not laying itself open to misinterpretation - the idea of *marit ha-ayin*). People should be able to observe the way we behave and learn from us how a Jew should live.

The fact that these rules apply to every Jew, not just to great Sages, is eloquent testimony to the spiritual egalitarianism of the halakhah. Each of us is bidden to become a role-model. The fact, too, that these rules exist despite the fact that we are commanded not to suspect others of wrongdoing, tells us something else about Judaism, namely that it is a system of duties, not just of rights. We are not allowed to say, when we have acted in a way conducive to suspicion, 'I have done nothing wrong; to the contrary, the other person, by harbouring doubts about me, is in the wrong.' To be sure, he is. But that does not relieve us of the responsibility to conduct our lives in a way that is above suspicion. Each of us must play our part in constructing a society of mutual respect.

This brings us back to where we began with the request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad to settle the land east of the Jordan. Moses, we recall, granted their request on condition that they first joined the other tribes in their battles. They did so. Years later, Joshua summoned them and told them that they had fulfilled their promise and were now entitled to return to the place where they had built their homes (Joshua 22).

However, by a profound historical irony, suspicion was aroused again, this time for a quite different reason, namely that they had built an altar in their territory. The other tribes suspected that they were breaking faith with the God of Israel by constructing their own place of worship. Israel was on the brink of civil war. The suspicion was unfounded. The Reubenites and Gadites explained that the altar they had built was not intended to be a place of worship, but rather a sign that they too were part of the Israelite nation - a safeguard against the possibility that one day, generations later, the tribes living in Israel proper (west of the Jordan) would declare the Reubenites and Gadites to be foreigners since they lived on the other side of the river:

That is why we said, *'Let us get ready and build an altar - but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices.'* On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the Lord at the Sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, 'You have

no share in the Lord.' And we said, *'If they ever say this to us or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of*

the Lord's altar which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.'

Civil war was averted, but only just.

Suspicion is a pervasive feature of social life, and it is intensely destructive. Judaism - a central project of which is the construction of a gracious society built on justice, compassion, mutual responsibility and trust - confronts the problem from both directions. On the one hand it commands us not to harbour suspicions but to judge people generously, giving them the benefit of the doubt. On the other, it bids each of us to act in a way that is above suspicion, keeping [as the rabbis put it] *"far from unseemly conduct, from whatever resembles it, and from what may merely appear to resemble it."*

Being innocent before God is one thing; being innocent before one's fellow human beings is another, and far more difficult. Yet that is the challenge - not because we seek their approval (that is what is known as pandering) but because we are summoned to be role models, exemplars, living embodiments of Torah, and because we are called on to be a unifying, not a divisive, presence in Jewish life. As the Chatam Sofer said, we will not always succeed. Despite our best endeavours, others may still accuse us (as they accused Moses) of things of which we are utterly innocent. Yet we must do our best by being charitable in our judgement of others and scrupulous in the way we conduct ourselves. [emphasis added]

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/matot/the-danger-of-suspicion/> No footnotes or discussion questions have been preserved for this Devar Torah. 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 Devar.

Flirting With Futility ... or Embracing the Truth?

By Yossy Goldman *

The Jewish calendar and the Parsha of the week are always deeply connected, and it is never coincidental that a particular portion is read at a particular time of the year.

The two Parshahs we read this week, Matot and Massei, are no exceptions. They are always read during the Three Weeks of mourning when we recall the destruction of our Holy Temple. I am not going to focus on these latent connections but prefer to look at the Haftarah and the message of the Prophet Jeremiah¹, which is also especially chosen for this week.

One thing is certain: the prophets of old didn't mince their words. They were the original preachers who pounded their pulpits with fire and brimstone. Here, Jeremiah castigates the Jewish people:

Listen to the word of G d, O' House of Jacob ... What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they distanced themselves from Me and went after [gods of] emptiness and became empty themselves?²

They are guilty on two counts, laments the prophet:

They have forsaken Me [G d], the spring of living waters, [and furthermore, they did so] to dig for themselves wells, broken cisterns that hold no water.³

What is Jeremiah saying?

If they exchanged G d and Torah for some other noble, exalted philosophy, or for another highly principled ideology, at least there might be some imagined justification. But for what have they exchanged the lofty moral truths of G d and Torah? For futility, emptiness, and nothingness. A terrible double blow.

If we pursue emptiness, we risk becoming empty-headed ourselves. If we have no higher purpose in life, then our lives will be filled with nothing more than empty materialism. People like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet are giving their billions away. Their single-minded focus on amassing wealth has been more than vindicated by their unprecedented philanthropy, which, I must say, is simply breathtaking. But materialism for its own sake, with no higher purpose whatsoever, is futile and empty and can only lead to becoming vacuous.

Some generations sinned by denying G d. Philosophical and ideological rebels, they were atheists or agnostics who genuinely struggled with their faith. We believe that every Jew believes, but some never dig deeply enough into the recesses of their own souls to tap into their inner faith, and they may remain non-believing. We believe they are wrong, but, to their credit, they are searchers for truth. Jeremiah, however, wept for a generation that did not search for anything deeper at all. They had no appreciation of conceptual principles and ideals. It was a generation that worshipped nonsense and empty escapism.

Generations ago, Jewish parents cried bitter tears because they lost their children to communism, socialism, hippie-ism, or other anti-establishment ideologies. The tragedy of our time is that we are losing our youth not to any form of political activism or social consciousness, but to emptiness and futility, to drugs and raves. At least the misguided rebels of old believed in a cause. Right or wrong, they were trying to build a better world. Today, it's 'to hell with the world, pass the beer!'

Jeremiah pleads with us to forsake this fling with futility and empty cisterns, and to embrace the eternal spring of living waters — the authentic truths of Torah and the way of G d.

Today, thank G d, we can also state with confidence that millions of our own generation have heard Jeremiah loud and clear. We are witnessing millions of genuine seekers of truth, particularly young people, who are embracing the authentic Jewish way of life. It is a global phenomenon, and it is nothing short of inspirational.

May we all lead our children towards meaningful spirituality and sanctity.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Jeremiah Chapter 2
2. Jeremiah 2:5
3. Jeremiah 2:13

* Life Rabbi Ereritus of the iconic Sydenham Shul in Johannesburg, South Africa and president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5585087/jewish/Flirting-With-Futility-or-Embracing-the-Truth.htm

Matot-Masei: Preparing for Refuge by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky

G-d instructed the Israelites to designate three cities of refuge in Transjordan and three in the Land of Israel proper.

You must provide three cities in Transjordan and three cities in Canaan to serve as cities of refuge.)Num. 35:14(

Transjordan was the first territory to be settled by the Jewish people. The tribes of Reuben and Gad preferred to live as shepherds in Transjordan rather than as farmers in the Land of Israel proper, because the life of a shepherd allows more time for spiritual pursuits (such as meditation and study) than does the life of a farmer. G-d agreed on the condition that they assist the rest of the people to conquer the Land of Israel.

Allegorically, the “*shepherd’s life*” alludes to the time we devote to spiritual growth in our formative years, preparing us for the “*farmer’s life*” of engaging the material world as adults. It also alludes to the time we devote to spiritual renewal every morning, preparing us to engage the material world during the balance of the day. But besides these preparatory periods, we need to set aside “*cities of refuge*” – fixed times for the study of the Torah – both during adulthood in general and during each day of our daily lives.

In this way, we can confidently engage the material world, assured that rather than succumbing to its material attractions, we will refine and elevate it spiritually.

– From *Daily Wisdom* #3

* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshaot Matot-Masei from our *Daily Wisdom* #3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

May G-d grant continued wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Shabbat Parashat Matot-Masei

5785 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Prophetic Voice

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha b'Av, as we recall the destruction of the Temples, we read three of the most searing passages in the prophetic literature, the first two from the opening of the book of Jeremiah, the third, next week, from the first chapter of Isaiah.

At perhaps no other time of the year are we so acutely aware of the enduring force of ancient Israel's great visionaries. The prophets had no power. They were not kings or members of the royal court. They were (usually) not priests or members of the religious establishment. They held no office. They were not elected. Often they were deeply unpopular, none more so than the author of this week's Haftara, Jeremiah, who was arrested, flogged, abused, put on trial, and only narrowly escaped with his life. Only rarely were the prophets heeded in their lifetimes.[1] Yet their words were recorded for posterity and became a major feature of Tanach, the Hebrew Bible. They were the world's first social critics, and their message continues through the centuries. As Kierkegaard almost said: when a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies his influence begins.[2]

What was distinctive about the prophet was not that he foretold the future. The ancient world was full of such people: soothsayers, oracles, readers of runes, shamans, and other diviners, each of whom claimed inside track with the forces that govern fate and "shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Judaism has no time for such people. The Torah bans one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Deut. 18:10-11). It disbelieves such practices because it believes in human freedom. The future is not pre-scripted. It depends on us and the choices we make. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded; if a prophecy comes true it has failed. The prophet tells of the future that will happen if we do not heed the danger and mend our ways. He (or she – there were seven biblical prophetesses) does not predict; he or she warns.

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

Several things made the prophets unique. The first was his or her sense of history. The prophets were the first people to see God in history. We tend to take our sense of time for granted. Time happens. Time flows. As the saying goes, time is God's way of keeping everything from happening at once. But actually there are several ways of relating to time and different civilisations have perceived it differently.

There is cyclical time: time as the slow turning of the seasons, or the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Cyclical time is time as it occurs in nature. Some trees have long lives; most fruit flies have short ones; but all that lives, dies. The species endures, individual members do not. In Kohelet we read the most famous expression of cyclical time in Judaism:

"The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course ... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then there is linear time: time as an inexorable sequence of cause and effect. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace gave this idea its most famous expression in 1814 when he said that if you "know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed," together with all the laws of physics and chemistry, then "nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present" before your eyes. Karl Marx applied this idea to society and history. It is known as historical inevitability, and when transferred to the affairs of humankind it amounts to a massive denial of personal freedom.

Finally there is time as a mere sequence of events with no underlying plot or theme. This leads to the kind of historical writing pioneered by the scholars of ancient Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Each of these has its place, the first in biology, the second in physics, the third in secular history, but none was time as the prophets understood it. The prophets saw time as the arena in which the great drama between God

and humanity was played out, especially in the history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish.

If it was unfaithful it would fail. It would suffer defeat and exile. That is what Jeremiah never tired of telling his contemporaries.

The second prophetic insight was the unbreakable connection between monotheism and morality. Somehow the prophets sensed – it is implicit in all their words, though they do not explain it explicitly – that idolatry was not just false. It was also corrupting. It saw the universe as a multiplicity of powers that often clashed. The battle went to the strong. Might defeated right. The fittest survived while the weak perished. Nietzsche believed this, as did the social Darwinists.

The prophets opposed this with all their force. For them the power of God was secondary; what mattered was the righteousness of God. Precisely because God loved and had redeemed Israel, Israel owed Him loyalty as their sole ultimate sovereign, and if they were unfaithful to God they would also be unfaithful to their fellow humans. They would lie, rob, cheat, etc. Jeremiah doubts whether there was one honest person in the whole of Jerusalem (Jer. 5:1). They would become sexually adulterous and promiscuous:

"I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife." Jer. 5:7-8

Their third great insight was the primacy of ethics over politics. The prophets have surprisingly little to say about politics. Yes, Samuel was wary of monarchy, but we find almost nothing in Isaiah or Jeremiah about the way Israel/Judah should be governed. Instead we hear a constant insistence that the strength of a nation – certainly of Israel/Judah – is not military or demographic but moral and spiritual. If the people keep faith with God and

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one another, no force on earth can defeat them. If they do not, no force can save them. As Jeremiah says in this week's Haftara, they will discover too late that their false gods offered false comfort:

They say to wood, 'You are my father, 'and to stone, 'You gave me birth. 'They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us! 'Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah. Jer. 2:27-28

Jeremiah, the most passionate and tormented of all the prophets, has gone down in history as the prophet of doom. Yet this is unfair. He was also supremely a prophet of hope. He is the man who said that the people of Israel will be "as eternal as the laws of the sun, moon, and stars" (Jer. 31:35). He is the man who, while the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem, bought a field as a public gesture of faith that Jews would return from exile: "For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land." Jer. 32:15

Jeremiah's feelings of doom and hope were not in conflict: they were two sides of the same coin. The God who sentenced His people to exile would be the God who brought them back, for though His people might forsake Him, He would never forsake them. Jeremiah may have lost faith in people; he never lost faith in God.

Prophecy ceased in Israel with Haggai, Zekhariah, and Malachi in the Second Temple era. But the prophetic truths have not ceased to be true. Only by being faithful to God do people stay faithful to one another. Only by being open to a power greater than themselves do people become greater than themselves. Only by understanding the deep forces that shape history can a people defeat the ravages of history. It took a long time for biblical Israel to learn these truths, and a very long time indeed before they returned to their land, re-entering the arena of history. We must never forget them again.

[1] The one clear exception was Jonah, and he spoke to non-Jews, the citizens of Nineveh.

[2] Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins." Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, 352.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

To Advance by Going Back

"These are the journeys of the children of Israel... these are the starting points towards their [destination] journeys... and these are their [destination] journeys toward their starting points." (Numbers 33:1-2)

Undoubtedly the Exodus from Egypt stands unparalleled as the central event of our nation's collective consciousness, the very epicenter of our history, an event we invoke daily in our recitation of the Shema, on the Sabbath, festivals, and after each and every meal. Still, when we consider the painstaking detail that our portion of Masei devotes to recording all forty-two stops along the way during the forty-year sojourn, we're somewhat taken aback at what seems to be a largely inconsequential travelogue.

Starting with verse 5 in chapter thirty-three of the book of Bemidbar, and continuing until verse 49, the Torah lists all of the forty-two locations, and since each location is not only a destination to encamp but also a location to journey away from each place-name is mentioned twice. So for forty-four verses the Torah challenges us with its geographical accuracy, reminding us to what length the Torah goes to in order to name names and construct maps – not only in time, which is what the genealogies in Genesis do, but also in space, as we find in our portion.

But forty-two place names must be a record; even if we count Adam to Noach, and Noach to Abraham, and Abraham to Moses, we're still a far cry from forty-two generations. Why such details now?

Different commentators take different approaches to this question, from Sforno's argument – that the plethora of locations is a way of highlighting the merit of the Jewish people, who, in the lovingkindness of youth, followed after God in the desert, a land not sown – to the Sfat Emet (Masei 5753) who speaks of each location in the desert as a potential for tikkun olam, transforming the barrenness of the wilderness into a singing garden by means of divine words. But I would like to concentrate on the commentary of Nahmanides. Apparently, he is not only troubled by the delineation of the forty-two stages, but also by the additional declaration in the verse that "Moses inscribed...their destination journeys towards their starting points [of origin]" (Numbers 33:2). How may we understand the significance of such detailed travel stations and this very strange formation?

In approaching the issue, Nahmanides first quotes Rashi's comment (who cites the words of Rabbi Moshe the Preacher) that Moses "set his mind to write down the journeying. It was his intention thereby to inform [future generations] of the loving kindness of God"; after all, He protected His nation throughout their manifold travels and way stations, despite their kvetching complaints.

After quoting Rashi, he then turns to Maimonides (*Guide for the Perplexed*, iii:50), who understands the necessity of detail as a

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means of corroborating the historical truth of the narrative. Moreover, later generations might think "that they sojourned in a desert that was near to cultivated land, and in which man can [easily] live...places in which it

was possible to till and to reap or to feed on plants that were to be found there...or that it was natural for the manna to always come down in those places, or that there were wells of water in those places...." Hence the enumeration of all these way-stations lacking the amenities delineated above is in order to emphasize the extent of the miracle of Israeli subsistence under such difficult physical conditions.

After quoting these views, Nahmanides concludes with a most intriguing and esoteric comment: "Thus the writing down the journeying was a commandment of God, either for reasons mentioned above, or for a purpose the secret of which has not been revealed to us."

By speaking of "secrets" Nahmanides seems to be telling us – if not beseeching us – to probe further. And I would submit that the secret may be the secret of the Jewish survival. After all, the concept of *ma'ase avot siman lebanim* (the actions of the fathers are a sign of what will happen to the children) is well known to the sages, and is one of the guiding principles of Nahmanides' biblical commentary.

It may very well be that the interior, hidden message of this text is the fact that we are being given an outline as well as an assurance of what we should expect over the course of Jewish history. From the time of the exile after the destruction of the Temple, the "goings-forth" of the Jewish people – until our present arrival in the Land of Israel – would certainly add up to at least forty-two distinct stages: Judea, Babylon, Persia, Rome, Europe, North Africa, and the New World. And each particular Diaspora was important in its own right, made its own unique contribution to the text (Oral Law) and texture (customs) of our Jewish civilization, of the kaleidoscope which is the Jewish historical experience; and each is worthy of being recorded and remembered. Are not the Holocaust memorial books, these heroic remains of survivors trying to preserve what little that can be preserved of lost, destroyed worlds, examples of our sense that God commanded us to "write" things down – to remember?!

Perhaps the Jews didn't invent history, but they certainly understood that more important than those hieroglyphics which exalt and praise the rulers in their battles are the places of the Jewish wanderings, the content of the Jewish lifestyle, and the miracle of Jewish survival.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why was a whole tribe split in two? At the end of the book of Bemidbar, we're told the fascinating details of how two and a half tribes, Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe, requested special permission to live east of the River Jordan, outside of the borders of the Holy Land.

Now, Reuven and Gad were whole tribes, they wanted to stay together in one place, they were pastoralists, they needed suitable land for their cattle to graze on, it made a lot of sense.

But how come, half the tribe of Menashe was with them and half remained in the Holy Land?

If you study the text carefully, you will see that it was actually Moshe who decided that Menashe should be split in two.

And the Degel Machane Ephraim gives a wonderful Peirush. He says as follows: Moshe was worried, because with two tribes geographically distanced from the rest of the people, there was the possibility that they would attain their own national identity and that would be disastrous, because it would be the end of the unity of the Jewish people.

Consequently Moshe created a bridge, the tribe of Menashe was to be that bridge, half in the Holy Land, half outside of it and they would be travelling backwards and forwards all the time and as a result, the nation would be kept together.

We're currently continuing to endure a very tragic war, and it is so comforting to see the unity of the Jewish people inside Israel and throughout the world.

It is of such crucial importance for us now to maintain that achdut, that sense of Jewish unity.

We need to strengthen the bridges that exist in Israel and between Israel and the Jewish Diaspora, in order to guarantee that, while sometimes we might have different points of view, nonetheless, we need to respect each other and the views that other people have.

It is from Moshe in our Parsha that we learn, that it is from the unity of the Jewish people that we will achieve the strength of the Jewish people.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Their Departures According to Their Journeys" - Yosef (Gosey) Schwartz

"And Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys at the command of the Lord, and these were their journeys

according to their departures." (Bemidbar 33:2)

This verse raises several questions:

A. What is the meaning of the phrase "their departures according to their journeys"?

B. Why the repetition?

C. What is the significance of the shift from the beginning of the verse ("departures according to their journeys") to its conclusion ("journeys according to their departures")?[1] The Degel Machane Ephraim offers an explanation for these questions: "This, perhaps, is what the verse hints at in its concise wording: 'And Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys at the command of the Lord'"—that is, from each point of departure, infused with Divine connection, a line was drawn and extended through every stage of their journey.

"And these were their journeys according to their departures" (mas'eihem le'motza'chem)—this unusual phrasing alludes to the idea that all their travels were bound to, and flowed from, their original source. Every journey remained tethered to that beginning, and all journeys ultimately moved in a single direction—like a stream flowing from a spring: though it travels onward, its head remains united with its source, as explained above. And the wise shall understand." (Degel Machane Ephraim, Parashat Mas'ei)

It follows then that all of Am Yisrael's journeys emanated from a single point of origin—one that was "at the command of the Lord." Though the path, as journeys often are, was long and fraught with hardship, it always remained connected at its head to that Divine source.

The Toldot Yaakov Yosef (on Parshat Mas'ei) offers a related insight. He teaches that every person must "engrave upon the tablet of his heart" the beliefs by which he walks. One who succeeds in living this way will find that the entirety of his life's path ultimately leads him back to his source. This is the deeper meaning of the phrase "their journeys according to their departures."

The Sfat Emet takes a slightly different approach: "...The Exodus and all the journeys served as a path and a teaching for Bnei Yisrael throughout the generations — to find salvation within the straits (meitzarim) themselves; not to flee from them, but to discover a path through them... This is why this portion was designated to be read during Bein HaMeitzarim (the Three Weeks between the 17th of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av), for it is said: The Holy One, Blessed be He, answers both in a time of favor and in a time of distress." (Sefat Emet, Parshat Mas'ei, 5664)

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The message the Sefat Emet conveys is that the journeys of the Children of Israel were meant to teach them to find salvation precisely within their afflictions. Throughout the generations, the journeys of Israel have been marked by hardship and pain in many forms. And yet, we are called upon to find within each situation a point of light — to recognize how suffering, when confronted with openness and faith, can be transformed and lead us closer to a better world.

When life presents us with journeys — or more accurately, with trials — our task is to seek the opportunity embedded within them: the possibility they hold for drawing nearer to God.[2]

To conclude, we bring the words of the Rebbe of Piasetzna, from Aish Kodesh:[3] "And Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys." Rashi, citing the Midrash, explains this with a parable: "It is like a king whose son was ill' ...Here we slept, here we were warned, here your head hurt.'" These hardships, however, were all like birth pangs leading to the revelation of God's light—"their departures according to their journeys, at the command of the Lord" (al pi Hashem). For the kingship of speech (malchut peh)—as described in Petach Eliyahu—means that even the journeys and afflictions were departures at the command of the Lord, intended to express the sovereignty of Heaven.

And this is the deeper meaning behind the words "And Moshe recorded"—that by the time Moshe committed these words to writing, the journeys and their accompanying hardships had already ended. It had already become clear that "their departures according to their journeys were at the command of the Lord"—in other words, that the ultimate purpose of all the journeys and wanderings was to give expression to the word of God (pi Hashem). "And these were their journeys according to their departures"—this reversal teaches that in hindsight, the Divine purpose is revealed. But during the journeys themselves, the suffering came first, and only afterward was its deeper source and meaning uncovered—for in the moment, they felt only the pain.

Another layer of meaning in the verse "And Moshe recorded their departures..." lies in the idea that the spirit of Moshe Rabbeinu extends into every generation. In the future, he will also be the Mashiach, as is taught in the Tikkunei Zohar, which alludes to the verse "That which was is that which shall be"—the Hebrew initials of which spell Moshe. Through his act of writing, Moshe ensured that in every generation—and especially in the generation of the Mashiach—the hardships and journeys would no longer be experienced first and foremost as suffering, but would be recognized immediately as expressions of the

word of God. In this way, God's great Name will be magnified and sanctified through the redemption of Israel.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

In Hashem's Hands

One of the highlights of the Torah reading of Parshas Masei is the ba'al koreh's rhythmic chant of the forty-two encampments of the Jewish people in the desert. The Meforshim grapple with the question as to why the Torah felt the need to list each one of the forty-two different places. The Ramban (33:1) quotes the Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:50) who suggests that the Torah wanted to emphasize just how miraculous it was that the Jewish people were able to survive for forty years in the desert.

For those who experienced yetzias Mitzrayim and kriyas yam suf, those who ate the man and drank the water of Miriam's well, the miracles of the desert were real. They knew what happened to them because they saw the miracles with their own eyes (see Eikev 11:2-7). But sometime in the future, there might be those who would deny that any miracle took place. They would say that surely the Jewish people passed through parts of the desert that were close to inhabited spaces, where they were able to find plants to eat and water pits from which to drink.

In order to prevent such a misconception, the Torah lists all forty-two encampments of the Jewish people to show that these places were far from civilization. And the only way they could survive in such uninhabitable areas was through divine intervention. Hashem protected them from physical harm in the frightening desert which was full of snakes and scorpions, and He provided them with man to eat and water to drink and shade to rest (see Eikev 8:14-16).

This, says the Rambam, is the deeper meaning behind the language of the posuk, "And Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys by the word of Hashem - al pi Hashem" (Masei 33:2). Ibn Ezra explains that al pi Hashem refers to the travels of Klal Yisrael. "By the word of Hashem they would encamp, and by the word of Hashem they would travel" (Beha'aloscha 9:23). But the Rambam suggests that al pi Hashem refers to Moshe's writing of the forty-two encampments. The list itself was divinely inspired to teach all future generations the lesson of divine providence.

Time and time again, the Torah reminds us not to forget the miracles of the past (see for example, Eikev 8:11-18). But it is a constant struggle. In this week's haftorah, Hashem bemoans the fact that Klal Yisrael seemed to

have forgotten Him. "What wrong did your forefathers find in Me, that they distanced themselves from Me and pursued futility, and became futile? And they did not say, 'Where is Hashem, Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us in the Wilderness, in a land of desert and pit, in a land of waste and the shadow of death, in a land through which no man passed and where no person settled'" (Yirmiyahu 2:5-6). Chazal say that the first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because the Jewish people violated the worst sins (Yoma 9b). But Yirmiyahu reveals that the source of all that wrongdoing was the fact that the people were distant from Hashem and they did not feel dependent on Him.

"Not by bread alone does man live, but by all that emanates from the mouth of G-d does man live" (Eikev 8:3). Only Hashem can provide man's sustenance. This was the purpose of the miracles of the desert - to teach the lesson of hashgacha pratit. As the Ramban (end of Parshas Bo) famously notes, "From the great and well-known miracles a person comes to appreciate the hidden miracles." And that recognition should naturally cause a person to want to reciprocate and follow Hashem's command (see Rav Yerucham Levovitz, Daas Torah, Matos-Masei). This is the clear implication of the psukim in Parshas Eikev (10:21, 11:1), "He is your praise and He is your G-d, Who did for you these great and awesome things that your eyes saw...And you shall love Hashem, your G-d, and you shall safeguard His charge, His decrees, His laws and His commandments, all the days." When one experiences divine miracles, which are really an expression of Hashem's love, one should naturally feel the desire to respond with his own expression of love toward Hashem through an enhanced observance of mitzvos. But when the miracles are forgotten, a person's connection to Hashem weakens and things begin to unravel.

The Maharsha (Bechoros 8a) comments that the twenty-one days of the three weeks correspond to the twenty-one days from Rosh Hashana until Hoshana Rabba. What is the connection between these two very different periods of time on the Jewish calendar? What's more, according to this calculation, the twenty-second day after the seventeenth of Tamuz which is Tisha B'Av must correspond to Shemini Atzeres, the day after Hoshana Rabba. But these two days seem like polar opposites. Shemini Atzeres is a day that we celebrate Hashem's unique connection to Klal Yisrael, while Tisha B'Av is a day of mourning for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. How can we compare these two very different days?

Tisha B'Av is referred to as a moed (a special time), as in the posuk, "Kara alay moed - He proclaimed a set time against me. (Eicha 1:15)" The Mordechai (Ta'anis 635) writes that

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for this reason we do not recite Selichos, Avinu Malkeinu or Tachanun on Tisha B'Av just as these tefillos are not said on yom tov. Presumably this means that Tisha B'Av is treated like a yom tov, a moed, because we hope that when the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt, all days which were previously designated as days of mourning for the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash will become days of festive celebration. As a result, we omit any prayer which would be inappropriate for a yom tov.

But some suggest that perhaps Tisha B'Av is referred to as a moed for a different reason. The root of the word moed is va'ad which means meeting. Every yom tov is an opportunity to connect and to bond - to meet - with Hashem. And Tisha B'Av is also a time we "meet" Hashem because we are forced to confront His omnipotence and our weakness. One can see Hashem in times of joy and happiness, and one can also see Hashem in times of loss and destruction, because when a person feels vulnerable and powerless he naturally reaches out to the One he knows is in control.

This is the thematic link between the twenty-one days of Tishrei and the twenty-one days of the three weeks. During the month of Tishrei we seek out Hakadosh Boruch Hu - dirshu Hashem b'himatzo - and we try to strengthen the bonds of affection between us and Him. The climax of that process is the day of Shemini Atzeres when we sing of our great love for Hakadosh Boruch Hu and His Torah, and His everlasting love for Klal Yisrael. On the other hand, the period of the three weeks culminating in Tisha B'Av is a time that we are forced to confront our human frailty, to appreciate how vulnerable we are without Hashem's protection.

As some of the Chassidic masters put it, one of the highlights of Shemini Atzeres (and Simchas Torah) is the lively recitation of a series of psukim which begins with Ata harei'sa. "You have been shown (the miracles of the desert) in order to know - ata harei'sa lada'as - that Hashem is the G-d; there is none beside Him - ein od milvado" (Va'eschanan 4:35). Similarly, the Torah reading on Tisha B'Av also includes the posuk of Ata harei'sa lada'as because Tisha B'Av and Shemini Atzeres share the same theme. One can achieve an awareness that ein od milvado through the joy and happiness of Shemini Atzeres, and one is forced to confront the understanding that ein od milvado through the pain and destruction of Tisha B'Av.

If there is one thing that the events of this past Shemini Atzeres and their aftermath have taught us, it is that ein od milvado; we are totally dependent on Hashem's protection and

His mercy. May we see yeshuos Hashem b'karov.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Bring us not over the Jordan

Rav Yishai Jeselsohn

I. Halakhic Details in Interpreting Narrative Sections of the Torah - The relationship between the Written Law and the Oral Law has raised questions and debates from the earliest times. Whereas the Written Law is often formulated in a narrative form that "ignores," as it were, weighty halakhic issues, the Oral Law delves into the finest details of everything a person does.

Sometimes the absence of halakhic discussion in a Biblical account screams out for explanation (e.g., in the story of Yaakov marrying two sisters), but sometimes the story is told in a natural and understandable way even without these details.

There are, however, many commentators, such as the Kelei Chemda and others, who make great efforts to reconcile the plain meaning of the verses with the halakhic details of the Oral Law. The Or Ha-Chaim also takes this approach in many places, and Parashat Matot provides a clear and beautiful example.

The children of Gad and Reuven appeal to Moshe with a request to remain on the east bank of the Jordan and not go with the rest of Israel to conquer the land. The Torah's description of their request contains certain interesting details:

The children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and spoke to Moshe, and to Elazar the priest, and to the princes of the congregation, saying: Atarot, and Divon, and Yazer, and Nimra, and Cheshbon, and El'aleh, and Sevam, and Nevo, and Be'on, the land which the Lord smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle. And they said: If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; bring us not over the Jordan. (Bamidbar 32:2-5)

The Or Ha-Chaim notes that there is a redundancy in the argument put forward by the children of Gad and Reuven: Why did they have to spell out all the names of the cities they wished to claim as their inheritance? Why did they not simply say: "the land which the Lord smote, etc.?" Or, they could have detailed districts as described in 32:1: "the land of Yazer and the land of Gilad."

Furthermore, what need was there to say: "the land which the Lord smote"? Were there other lands with the same names, that it was necessary to distinguish these places from them? And if [the purpose was] to say that God smote them – who did not know this? (Or Ha-Chaim 32:3)^[1]

In verse 3, the children of Gad and Reuven list the names of the specific cities they wished to settle, and immediately afterwards, in verse 4, they refer to the cities more generally as "the land which the Lord smote." Why do they need this twofold description of the land in question? After all, both Moshe and the children of Gad and Reuven knew which cities God smote before the people of Israel. Why then is the account given twice?

The difficulty in this duplication opens a window for the Or Ha-Chaim to see in these verses a full,

detailed dialogue between Moshe and the children of Gad and Reuven, that contains much more nuance than we may see at first glance.

II. The Solution Before the Problem - According to the plain sense of the verses, the children of Gad and Reuven ask for the land on the east bank of the Jordan, because they have a lot of cattle, and Moshe responds with the famous argument: Shall your brothers go to war, and shall you sit here? (Bamidbar 32:6)

Apparently, the children of Gad and Reuven had not thought of this as a problem at all.

However, this simple reading is a little difficult – after all, the children of Gad and Reuven had been living and journeying in the wilderness together with the rest of the people of Israel and were presumably familiar with God's promise to Moshe concerning the conquest of the land. They knew there was a holy land to be reached, and they knew that conquering it would involve war. Why, then, would they present such a strange request – to give up the land that God had designated for them and refrain from participating in the war together with the rest of the people of Israel?

On the face of it, this is indeed a baseless request that focuses exclusively on the needs of the two tribes without any consideration for God and His commandments, or for their brothers, the people of Israel!

In the Or Ha-Chaim's understanding, however, the children of Gad and Reuven did not in fact put forward such a baseless and illogical claim. In order to understand this, and to answer the question of the redundancy that we saw above as well, the Or Ha-Chaim reads the verses carefully, with scholarly halakhic eyes.

The Or Ha-Chaim points out three arguments that could be made against the request of the children of Gad and Reuven – and he shows how they already addressed these three arguments in the careful wording of their brief initial appeal to Moshe.

Let us open with the arguments: The fact is that these tribes were astute enough to present their claims in a manner which would not expose them to any objections. Theoretically, there could have been several objections.

1) Seeing that the lands in question had been conquered by the people as a whole, by what right did two tribes claim all of it for themselves? (Or Ha-Chaim Bamidbar 32:3)

In Parashat Pinchas, we learned how the Land of Israel is destined to be divided by lots; there is an assumption that the land belongs to all of the people of Israel, not to individuals. With what justification do the children of Gad and Reuven seek to take land that belongs to all of Israel and turn it into their private property?

2) How could these two tribes even have imagined that they would be allowed to live securely in a land which had already been conquered, while the other tribes would have to face war in order to secure their heritage? Why wouldn't every tribe want to be awarded the territory the tribe of Gad and Reuven were interested in, claiming that they too had no desire to endanger themselves in the forthcoming battle against the Canaanites? All this relates to going

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against the desire of Moshe and Israel. (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

This argument is indeed raised by Moshe, according to the plain meaning of the verses, and it is the most blatant argument. What is the justification for refraining from participating in a war commanded by God and leaving the danger to others?

3) Moreover, these two tribes exposed themselves to the taunt that they had chosen to live outside the boundaries of the Holy Land! (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

The last argument is concerned with an implied insult to the sanctity of the land. There is an explicit mitzvah to conquer the land,^[2] and even before the Israelites enter the land, the children of Gad and Reuven are already asking to leave it!

These three arguments certainly require explanation. The Or Ha-Chaim suggests seeing the redundancy found in verses 3-4 as arguments put forward by the children of Gad and Reuven in order to counter the clear difficulties arising from their request.

We will answer the three arguments in order.

III. Ownership of the Land - We saw above that after spelling out the names of the places, the children of Gad and Reuven go on to include all the places under the heading, "the land which the Lord smote." The Or Ha-Chaim understands that this generalization comes to make an important point regarding the ownership of the land:

The tribes Reuven and Gad were therefore careful to word their initial request with a view to neutralizing the objections which we have just listed. They incorporated the answers to the three objections we described in their opening statement. This is why they mentioned both Atarot, etc., as well as "the land which God smote." Concerning the argument that the lands of Sichon and Og had been conquered by all the tribes, they replied that these lands had not been conquered by natural means but that God had smitten those kings, so the claim of the other tribes to have waged a battle for these lands simply did not stand up to examination. As a result of Divine intervention, these lands were God's to allocate, and their claim did not interfere with the rights of the other tribes. (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

The children of Gad and Reuven challenge the simple assumption that the land belongs to the people of Israel and argue that in fact it belongs to the Master of the Universe. Although "the heavens are the heavens of the Lord; but the earth has He given to the children of man" (Tehillim 115:16), before the Land of Israel was divided up among the tribes, it did not belong to a particular person, or even to the people of Israel as a whole, but rather it was God's property. After the division, the land belonged to the people of Israel, but the request of the children of Gad and Reuven was made before that, when the land still fell under the heading, "the land which the Lord smote"; it belonged to God, not to man. Thus, we can see why the children of Gad and Reuven appealed to Moshe and not to the nation.^[3]

IV. The War - The same redundancy provides an answer for the second argument – how could the children of Gad and Reuven remove themselves from the war fought by the rest of Israel?

As to the second argument, that the other tribes would have to endanger themselves while the tribes of Reuven and Gad were "sitting pretty," they said that such an argument could only be sounded if the Israelites had to conquer the Canaanites by their own effort. Seeing that it was God who would fight on their behalf, the conquest of Canaan would proceed on the same lines as that of the lands of Sichon and Og. The other tribes would therefore not be in greater danger than they had been when the lands of Sichon and Og were conquered.... In view of this assurance, Reuven and Gad felt that the other tribes could not claim they were being abandoned and would have to face danger all by themselves. (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

The Land of Israel was not conquered by way of a natural war. We know this after the fact from the war of Jericho, the conquest of Ai, and the stopping of the sun in Giv'on and of the moon in the Ayalon valley. While it is true that the children of Gad and Reuven had not yet encountered these events, they were very familiar with God's promise regarding the wars of the Land of Israel.

The argument of the children of Gad and Reuven, therefore, is quite logical: since the conquest of the land will in any event be miraculous, their participation in the war, or abstention from it, will not change anything. There is no issue here of fear or concern, but the recognition of God's promise that He will fight the battle, not those going out to war.

This approach of the Or Ha-Chaim seems to be flawed, because Moshe himself makes this very argument against the children of Gad and Reuven, as we already mentioned. If they preempted this argument by noting that it is God who will smite the inhabitants of the land, why does Moshe still argue that they should not remain behind when the rest of the people are fighting? If the Or Ha-Chaim is right about the words of the children of Gad and Reuven, then Moshe's response seems to be meaningless.

However, the Or Ha-Chaim suggests a novel interpretation of Moshe's claim, one that sharpens the exceedingly complex relationship between faith in God and the need for human action: He also responded to the argument that in the future too, God would do the fighting so that their participation was irrelevant. He told them that it was quite true that God would do the fighting, but the army of the Israelites had to be present and prepared to do battle. (Or Ha-Chaim, *Bamidbar* 32:6)

It is true that it is God who will fight on behalf of the Israelites in the land of Canaan, but the Israelites must be present as the tools of war in His hand. Israel's wars of conquest were full of miracles, but those miracles were always performed together with the people who were engaged in battle. The Or Ha-Chaim learns this from a precise reading of Moshe's words:

He did not say: "Shall your brothers do battle," but rather he said: "Shall your brothers go to war," indicating that he was asking only about their coming to the battle. Moshe accused the two tribes of contradicting themselves, as they were well aware that even though God had done the fighting that resulted in the conquest of the lands

of Sichon and Og, nonetheless, it had involved great effort by the men of Israel. The same would occur in the future. By what right did they think they could merely reap the benefits of others' efforts? (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

Indeed, the children of Gad and Reuven were not needed for the fight, but they had to "come" to the battle. The very effort of going with the camp of Israel is one regarding which they should not separate themselves from the rest of Israel.

The words of the Or Ha-Chaim here reflect the delicate relationship between faith in God and the need for human action. God fights on behalf of the people of Israel, but in order to succeed in war, a person must make himself present in it. God does not act in a vacuum; rather, after man opens a small opening down below, God opens for him an opening the size of a hall up above (see *Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah* 5, 2).

V. Leaving the Land of Israel - The third argument relates to the idea of preferring to live outside the Promised Land. The discussion relating to this argument is essentially an examination of the status of territory that does not fall within the boundaries of the Promised Land, but nevertheless was conquered by Israel. A similar issue arose in the days of King David, who conquered Syria, which is not included in the country's borders. The Or Ha-Chaim notes that this conquest did not make Syria part of the Holy Land.

The Rambam writes as follows in chapter 1 of *Hilkhot Terumot*: "Whenever mention is made of the Land of Israel, the intent is the lands conquered by a King of Israel or a prophet with the consent of the entire Jewish people. This is called 'a conquest of the community.' If, however, an individual Jew, a family, or a tribe go and conquer a place for themselves – even in the land given to Avraham – it is not considered as the Land of Israel."^[4] And he writes further there concerning the lands conquered by David: "Why was its level considered lower than that of the Land of Israel? Because David conquered them before he conquered all of the Land of Israel. Instead, there were still members of the seven nations there." (Or Ha-Chaim 32:2)

From the Rambam's explanation it appears that territory conquered by an individual prior to the conquest of the entire land does not become fully sanctified. Thus, the cities conquered before Israel entered the land do not have the full sanctity of the Land of Israel and the argument against the two tribes' desire to remain on the east bank of the Jordan seems to be valid!

The children of Gad and Reuven address this issue in two ways.

First, these cities were considered a "conquest of the community," and not of an individual, as may be learned from a precise reading of the verse: This is what the children of Gad and Reuven meant when they said: "the land which the Lord smote before the congregation of Israel." That is to say, this territory has the sanctity of the Land of Israel, as it was conquered before the congregation of Israel, and the conquest of the community is treated like the Land of Israel for all purposes. (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

In addition, this territory was conquered at the commandment of God and was part of the

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conquest of the land, and therefore it is not at all a conquest that preceded the conquest of all of Israel:

As for the statement in the *Sifrei* that territory conquered outside the Land of Israel prior to the conquest of the Land of Israel does not enjoy the status of the Land of Israel, and the land of Sichon and Og was conquered before the Land of Israel, they negated this argument [as well] with the statement: "which the Lord smote," that is to say, this conquest was different, as it was at the word of God, as He said to Moshe about the land of Sichon: "Begin to possess his land," as is stated in *Parashat Devarim* (2:31)...

There is also good logic to support such a view – for we are not dealing with two conquests, one of the Land of Israel and one outside the Land of Israel, and that outside the Land was conquered before the Land, as David did when he conquered Aram Tzova before taking possession of the Yevusites.... On the contrary, the conquest of the land of Sichon and Og was necessary for the conquest of the Land of Israel, so that they could pass through it to conquer Israel. They had already sent words of peace asking for passage through his land, but he did not agree. Hence, there is no complaint against their request from God or from Israel. (Or Ha-Chaim, *ibid.*)

VI. Conclusion - We have seen how, in his usual manner, the Or Ha-Chaim brilliantly combines several worlds.

On the one hand, the plain sense of the verses, which raises both textual and logical questions: What brought the children of Gad and Reuven to make such a strange request?

On the other hand, the Torah scholarship that deals with the sanctity of the Land of Israel and with ownership of it.

In addition, the Or Ha-Chaim demonstrates his ability to integrate into all of this principles of faith regarding the relationship between trust in God and the need for human effort. This rare combination is one of the outstanding characteristics of the Or Ha-Chaim, Rabbi Chaim Ben Attar, who succeeds in his broad-minded manner in combining all the different ends into a single interpretation.

You, the reader, are invited to examine in detail the Or Ha-Chaim's commentary on the entire parasha, where there is much more than the drop from the sea that we have brought here.

(Translated by David Strauss)

^[1] Editor's note: Excerpts from the Or Ha-Chaim's commentary are primarily taken from the explanation in English of Rabbi Eliyahu Munk, available at Sefaria.org, and may not be direct translations.

^[2] The Rambam lists this as the fourth positive commandment omitted by the Rambam. The Rambam does not have an explicit mitzva relating the settlement of the Land of Israel, but it is clear from his words elsewhere that leaving the land is halakhically problematic. See, for example, *Hilkhot Ishut* 13:19 and *Hilkhot Melakhim* 5:9.

^[3] See at length the Or Ha-Chaim's commentary to verse 2, where he explains why the children of Gad and Reuven appealed not only to Moshe, but also to Elazar and the princes of the congregation: "In order for this distribution to be valid and not

subject to complaints at a later date, it had to be confirmed by the king, i.e., Moshe, by the High Priest, i.e., Elazar, and by the lay leaders, i.e., the princes. Each one of these leaders possessed an exclusive authority."

^[4] Ostensibly, in our case it was the conquest of all of Israel, and not of an individual, and therefore there should have been no room for the argument brought against the children of Gad and Reuven, as the territory had the sanctity of the Land of Israel. But the Rambam later states explicitly that the Land of Israel had to be divided by lots in order to be considered "the conquest of the community," for if a tribe took territory by itself, it would have been considered "the conquest of an individual: "For this reason, Yehoshua and his court divided the entire Land of Israel into tribal portions, even though it was not conquered [entirely] at that time. In this way, when every tribe would ascend and conquer its portion, it would not be considered as merely an individual conquest."



BS"D

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Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

From the Mishkan to Eretz Yisroel

Sefer Bamidbar begins and concludes with what appears to be two different images of Klal Yisroel. The sefer starts with the elaborate description of the temporary encampment in the desert. Everything revolves around the Mishkan. The inner camp of Levi'im and outer one of Yisra'elim surround the Mishkan. Meticulous care is given as to how to dismantle and transport the Mishkan. Much of parshas Naso is dedicated to the dedication of the Mishkan. The nesi'im are the ones who represent their tribes for the joyous celebration of chanukas haMishkan.

As we read the end of sefer Bamidbar there is a switch of emphasis from the temporary traveling Mishkan to the permanent state of being in Eretz Yisroel. Yet, many of the themes of life surrounding the Mishkan appear in parshas Masei concerning Eretz Yisroel, albeit in different manifestations. Unlike the transient borders of the moving Mishkan, the permanent boundaries of Eretz Yisroel are established. Levi'im and Yisra'elim areas are designated, but unlike in the Mishkan, permanent cities for Levi'im are set up. The nesi'im once again have a central role as the representatives of the people. In parshas Masei they are the ones who assist in dividing the land into permanent portions for every individual. They are no longer only involved in the inauguration of the temporary structure of the Mishkan. Emerging from these two images of the Mishkan and Eretz Yisroel is the idea that what the Mishkan was supposed to accomplish on a temporary basis would become permanent upon entering Eretz Yisroel. We think of the Beis Hamikdash as the permanent succession to the Mishkan. What is the role of Eretz Yisroel as the continuation of the Mishkan?

The Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash had two distinct roles. They were the center of avodas haKorbanos as well as of talmud Torah. The halacha requires that the Sanhedrin sit in the Beis Hamikdash next to the mizbeach to highlight that these dual roles merge together. "לשכנו תדרשו" - you should search out Hashem's presence" encompasses the essence of the Mikdash. It is

this proximity to Hashem that enables this relationship. Hashem allows us to approach Him through avodah and He responds to us by sharing with us His Torah. Within kedushas haMikdash there are different gradations of sanctity. The mishna in Keilim lists ten distinct areas which are endowed with different degrees of holiness. The last of these areas is Eretz Yisroel. The meforshim note that by placing Eretz Yisroel in the context of kedushas haMikdash, Chazal are highlighting that Eretz Yisroel is an extension of Mikdash.

Although actual korbanos are not brought outside of the Beis Hamikdash, we see that Eretz Yisroel, as part of the Mikdash, has unique qualities of avodah. Even in chutz la'aretz one faces Eretz Yisroel as our tefilos, which correspond to korbanos, are directed to the area in which the Shechina is present. "ארץ אשר עיני ה' אלוהיך בה", the land on which Hashem's eyes are focused on.

As an extension of makom haMikdash, we know Eretz Yisroel is the source of talmud Torah for the entire world. This is reflected in the halachos that govern semicha. The original semicha that was the formal transmission of Torah from Moshe to Yehoshua and then to subsequent generations can only be conferred in Eretz Yisroel. Only those who receive semicha are eligible to judge in many areas of halacha such as cases concerning דיני קנסות - penalties, and קידוש החודש - declaring Rosh Chodesh. Because this semicha can only be conferred in Eretz Yisroel, eventually this semicha process ended as the Jewish community in Eretz Yisroel diminished after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash.

Another dimension of Torah that is limited to Eretz Yisroel is the declaration of Rosh Chodesh and subsequently the establishment of yomim tovim. Only a beis din in Eretz Yisroel is authorized to decide when Rosh Chodesh will occur. Even today when Rosh Chodesh is established based on a set calendar, Eretz Yisroel has a central role. The Rambam teaches us that it is the Jewish community of Eretz Yisroel that follows the calendar established by the last functioning beis din for קידוש החודש in Eretz Yisroel that "declares" Rosh Chodesh for the entire world.

These two aspects of Torah, conferring semicha and establishing the yomim tovim emanate from the Beis Hamikdash.

Chazal saw in these two areas of halacha a fulfillment of the words of Yeshayahu, "כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלים", that Eretz Yisroel as the outermost section of the Beis Hamikdash is integral to the spread of dvar Hashem. The tradition beginning at Har Sinai and the yomim tovim cycle are dependent upon Eretz Yisroel.

The sanctity of Eretz Yisroel that emanates from the Beis Hamikdash has its original roots in Har Sinai. The Ramban in his introduction to Vayikra explains that the Har Sinai experience would be replicated in the Beis Hamikdash. We come to the Beis Hamikdash to be in close proximity to the luchos in the aron housed in the kodosh haKodoshim to reenact standing at Har Sinai. Just as we offered korbanos at Har Sinai celebrating our relationship with Hashem, we return to that kedusha that is housed in the Beis Hamikdash and rekindle our closeness to Hashem. The Beis Hamikdash serves as a permanent manifestation of "תעבדו את האלוהים על ההר הזה" - serving Hashem through Torah and korbanos on Har Sinai. Throughout Eretz Yisroel we are granted the special gift to reconnect with the Divine Presence that we encountered at Har Sinai. We have a unique opportunity for talmud Torah and avodas Hashem through tefilah corresponding to korbanos. As we mourn the loss of the Beis Hamikdash and eagerly anticipate its rebuilding, we are so grateful to Hashem for the gift in our days of Eretz Yisroel. We hope to merit to continue to serve Hashem through Torah and tefilah especially in Eretz Yisroel. We turn to Hashem to watch over the great treasure of Eretz Yisroel He has granted us. May Hashem protect the soldiers who guard Eretz Yisroel and continue to bless them as they enable all of Klal Yisroel to live safely in our beloved land of Torah and avodas Hashem. May we merit to see the end of all the troubles of Klal Yisroel including the return of the hostages and genuine peace in Eretz Yisroel. We hope to see this Tisha B'Av transformed to become the great yom tov celebrating the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and the fulfillment in the fullest sense.

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Thoughts for Masei: **The Unpromised Land**

By **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

Date: July 21 2025

For forty years we wandered the desert, passing through forty-two desolate locations. What was meant to be a short journey from Egypt to Israel, lasting just a few months, became a drawn-out odyssey. The original generation that left Egypt was not prepared for the challenges of life in Israel. A new generation had to emerge, and that transformation demanded forty years on the clock and forty-two stops in the wilderness. Not all forty-two desert stops were alike. Roughly fourteen of them took place during the first year, as part of the initial journey toward the promised land. After that first year, the mission was suspended; over the next thirty-eight years of aimless wandering, we camped at twenty additional locations—without clear direction and without any itinerary leading to Eretz Yisrael. We traveled in circles. In the fortieth year, the pilgrimage to Eretz Yisrael resumed, and we advanced through another eight encampments, back on track toward the promised land. The fourteen stops of the first year and the eight of the final year both reflected purposeful movement toward Israel—interrupted by a long, wandering detour. Two years of purposeful stride, swallowed by thirty-eight years of wandering—until at last, the journey reclaimed its path. And yet, the Torah does not restrict itself to the fourteen stops of the first year or the eight of the final year—those purposeful steps toward Eretz Yisrael. It records all forty-two, including the twenty scattered encampments across those barren years of delay. We scarcely know where these places lay, and they seem to hold no lasting religious significance. Just names written in the sand—twenty desert stretches without clear meaning. And still, each one is documented with exactness: the arrival, the departure. A ledger of movement without progress. Traveling without ever arriving. All included within Parshat Masei – a map with no end.

Footsteps That Still Count

By recording these stops to nowhere, the Torah validates the lives of those who wandered through this unpromised land. These were a generation stripped of their future. The promised land was no longer theirs. They were a generation destined to perish in a wilderness—walking across dry sands carrying dreams that had long since dried up. And yet, they lived. Their loss did not drain their lives of meaning. They found purpose in days that led nowhere and built lives rooted firmly in the fragile present. This generation had witnessed miraculous liberation from Egypt, seen the hand of God part the sea, and heard His voice at Sinai. Though barred from entering the promised land, they carried these moments deep within—and wove them into our national memory. For thirty-eight quiet years, without spectacle or overt miracles, they lived steady lives of faith and resolve. Even without final fulfillment, they lived lives of profound meaning.

To affirm those lives, the Torah meticulously records each stop, carefully marking every place they camped—even when no promise awaited them at journey's end. The list of desert stops honors lives lived fully in the moment, even without the long-term goal of entering the promised land. Without a future to grasp, they found meaning in the present—reminding us that the moment itself holds value, not only what lies ahead.

Doing Vs. Being

Modern culture centers on goals. We are judged by how productive and efficient we are. Technology accelerates the pace of life—speeding up communication, information flow, and action. This rapid pace closes the gaps between events and decisions and compresses our sense of time. We treat time like a resource to manage instead of something to live through. Under these conditions life becomes an endless treadmill of constant striving. “Being” produces no measurable output, so we become narrowly focused on “Doing”—on goals, milestones, and deadlines. Our worth is tied to what we accomplish, not who we are. As we climb the ladder of success, it becomes more difficult to breathe and savor the moment. We dream of becoming

something, not simply being. Goals and projects replace meaning and relationships.

Speeding Through Destiny

Life in Israel is intensely goal-oriented—not in pursuit of personal success or material gain, but in service of our national story. We have returned to our homeland with a deep sense of historical mission, guided by a larger destiny. There is a constant drive to advance that mission, to push our shared story forward. This calling shapes our national consciousness and defines our collective identity. We live with urgency and direction, always pressing toward the next stage of our historical journey—deeply goal-oriented at our core.

This national urgency is only heightened by the pace of daily life in Israel. The news cycle here moves at a relentless speed. We are currently facing a war on seven fronts, while still grappling with the challenge of rebuilding our fractured social fabric. Today's headlines quickly become tomorrow's history, often before we've had a chance to absorb or process them. Life in Israel is deeply meaningful and often inspiring—but it can also leave us breathless and dizzy.

Writing History While Trying to Breathe

If life in Israel is generally shaped by national goals, the past two years have only intensified that mindset. In the shadow of crisis and war, we have worked tirelessly toward clear, urgent objectives: removing the threats facing our country on multiple fronts and bringing our hostages home safely. These goals have become the measure of our collective energy, hope, and frustration. Thank God, we have seen meaningful successes—but some of these goals remain painfully out of reach, stubborn and unyielding despite our efforts. An entire nation shares common goals, even if we sometimes differ on which to prioritize. It has become increasingly difficult to live in the moment. We are living through visionary events, with our eyes constantly fixed on the future. We know that future generations will record the very days we are now experiencing. We are aware that we are writing history—and we are willing to make sacrifices for that historical calling. Yet alongside that drive, there is value in trying to live in the moment—to “be”, not only to “do”. It means allowing ourselves to experience life as it unfolds, even as our attention is pulled toward what lies ahead. Easier said than done.

Oasis in the Unpromised Land

Beyond its lesson about the power of “being” over mere “doing,” the story of the desert encampments carries a quiet but enduring historical resonance. For thousands of years, Jews lived in exile without hope of return. The idea of even visiting the homeland was a distant dream, beyond the reach of time and possibility. Yet during those desert stops, our people built rich lives of meaning and spirit. They clung to faith under difficult circumstances and never abandoned the dream of returning to the land.

In modern Israel, there is a tendency to undervalue this period of Jewish history. It doesn't fit neatly into the contemporary narrative of a strong country inhabited by strong people. In secular sectors especially, it can be difficult to reconcile the struggles of exile with the achievements of the modern state. Religious Jews find this connection more natural, as the chain of tradition and mitzvot binds past to present.

It is crucial not to sever modern Jewish history from the desert experience of the past two thousand years. The Torah records an anonymous desert dunes simply because Jews lived there and infused them with meaning. Likewise, we must not overlook the many places where Jews have lived for millennia—places where they built lives of deep religious and historical meaning. We lived in the desert but built an oasis of Jewish spirit.

Life in the unpromised land still counts.

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from: The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust <info@rabbisacks.org>

subject: Covenant and Conversation
COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

The Prophetic Voice

Matot, Masei

time symbols with sundial and sea moon ancient scroll clock and prophecy scroll copy

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha b'Av, as we recall the destruction of the Temples, we read three of the most searing passages in the prophetic literature, the first two from the opening of the book of Jeremiah, the third, next week, from the first chapter of Isaiah.

At perhaps no other time of the year are we so acutely aware of the enduring force of ancient Israel's great visionaries. The prophets had no power. They were not kings or members of the royal court. They were (usually) not priests or members of the religious establishment. They held no office. They were not elected. Often they were deeply unpopular, none more so than the author of this week's Haftara, Jeremiah, who was arrested, flogged, abused, put on trial, and only narrowly escaped with his life. Only rarely were the prophets heeded in their lifetimes.[1] Yet their words were recorded for posterity and became a major feature of Tanach, the Hebrew Bible. They were the world's first social critics, and their message continues through the centuries. As Kierkegaard almost said: when a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies his influence begins.[2]

What was distinctive about the prophet was not that he foretold the future. The ancient world was full of such people: soothsayers, oracles, readers of runes, shamans, and other diviners, each of whom claimed inside track with the forces that govern fate and "shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Judaism has no time for such people. The Torah bans one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Deut. 18:10-11). It disbelieves such practices because it believes in human freedom. The future is not pre-scripted. It depends on us and the choices we make. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded; if a prophecy comes true it has failed. The prophet tells of the future that will happen if we do not heed the danger and mend our ways. He (or she – there were seven biblical prophetesses) does not predict; he or she warns.

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

Several things made the prophets unique. The first was his or her sense of history. The prophets were the first people to see God in history. We tend to take our sense of time for granted. Time happens. Time flows. As the saying goes, time is God's way of keeping everything from happening at once. But actually there are several ways of relating to time and different civilisations have perceived it differently.

There is cyclical time: time as the slow turning of the seasons, or the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Cyclical time is time as it occurs in nature. Some trees have long lives; most fruit flies have short ones; but all that lives, dies. The species endures, individual members do not. In Kohelet we read the most famous expression of cyclical time in Judaism:

"The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course ... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then there is linear time: time as an inexorable sequence of cause and effect. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace gave this idea its most famous expression in 1814 when he said that if you "know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed," together with all the laws of physics and chemistry, then "nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present" before your eyes. Karl Marx applied this idea to society and history. It is known as historical inevitability, and when transferred to the affairs of humankind it amounts to a massive denial of personal freedom.

Finally there is time as a mere sequence of events with no underlying plot or theme. This leads to the kind of historical writing pioneered by the scholars of ancient Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Each of these has its place, the first in biology, the second in physics, the third in secular history, but none was time as the prophets understood it. The prophets saw time as the arena in which the great drama between God and humanity was played out, especially in the history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish.

If it was unfaithful it would fail. It would suffer defeat and exile. That is what Jeremiah never tired of telling his contemporaries.

The second prophetic insight was the unbreakable connection between monotheism and morality. Somehow the prophets sensed – it is implicit in all their words, though they do not explain it explicitly – that idolatry was not just false. It was also corrupting. It saw the universe as a multiplicity of powers that often clashed. The battle went to the strong. Might defeated right. The fittest survived while the weak perished. Nietzsche believed this, as did the social Darwinists.

The prophets opposed this with all their force. For them the power of God was secondary; what mattered was the righteousness of God. Precisely because God loved and had redeemed Israel, Israel owed Him loyalty as their sole ultimate sovereign, and if they were unfaithful to God they would also be unfaithful to their fellow humans. They would lie, rob, cheat, etc. Jeremiah doubts whether there was one honest person in the whole of Jerusalem (Jer. 5:1). They would become sexually adulterous and promiscuous:

"I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife."

Jer. 5:7-8 Their third great insight was the primacy of ethics over politics.

The prophets have surprisingly little to say about politics. Yes, Samuel was wary of monarchy, but we find almost nothing in Isaiah or Jeremiah about the way Israel/Judah should be governed. Instead we hear a constant insistence that the strength of a nation – certainly of Israel/Judah – is not military or demographic but moral and spiritual. If the people keep faith with God and one another, no force on earth can defeat them. If they do not, no force can save them. As Jeremiah says in this week's Haftara, they will discover too late that their false gods offered false comfort:

They say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth.' They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!' Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.

Jer. 2:27-28 Jeremiah, the most passionate and tormented of all the prophets, has gone down in history as the prophet of doom. Yet this is unfair. He was also supremely a prophet of hope. He is the man who said that the people of Israel will be "as eternal as the laws of the sun, moon, and stars" (Jer. 31:35). He is the man who, while the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem, bought a field as a public gesture of faith that Jews would return from exile: "For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land." Jer. 32:15 Jeremiah's feelings of doom and hope were not in conflict: they were two sides of the same coin. The God who sentenced His people to exile would be the God who brought them back, for though His people might forsake Him, He would never forsake them. Jeremiah may have lost faith in people; he never lost faith in God.

Prophecy ceased in Israel with Haggai, Zekhariah, and Malachi in the Second Temple era. But the prophetic truths have not ceased to be true. Only by being faithful to God do people stay faithful to one another. Only by being open to a power greater than themselves do people become greater than themselves. Only by understanding the deep forces that shape history can a people defeat the ravages of history. It took a long time for biblical Israel to learn these truths, and a very long time indeed before they returned to their land, re-entering the arena of history. We must never forget them again.

[1] The one clear exception was Jonah, and he spoke to non-Jews, the citizens of Nineveh. [2] Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his

rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins.” Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals*, 352.

[Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski's 85th Yahrtzeit is this coming Wednesday
Heh Av 5700]

**Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky zt”l: A Life of Torah Leadership in a
Turbulent Era**
May 13, 2025

By **Rabbi Yair Hoffman** Early Life and Background in Historical Context
Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky zt”l was born in 1863 (5623) in Ivye, a small town near Vilna, during a period of significant transition for European Jewry. The 1860s marked a time when the Russian Empire, under Czar Alexander II, initially implemented more liberal policies toward Jews, only to be followed by increased restrictions and pogroms after his assassination in 1881. Rabbi Chaim Ozer was born into a family with a distinguished rabbinic lineage at a time when traditional Jewish life was beginning to face modern challenges including the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment), secularization, and political movements that would transform Jewish communities.

His father, Rabbi David Shlomo, served as Rav of Ivye for forty years, a position previously held by Chaim Ozer’s grandfather for forty years before that. His father was a student of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Mussar movement, establishing a family connection to this ethical tradition that would influence Rabbi Chaim Ozer throughout his life. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter had established the Mussar movement in response to the spiritual and ethical challenges facing 19th-century Lithuanian Jewry, and this connection would shape Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s approach to leadership in times of rapid change.

From his earliest years, Chaim Ozer displayed extraordinary intellectual gifts. He possessed what many described as an infallible memory—something he himself noted he never experienced “forgetting” until his old age. This remarkable ability was demonstrated at his Bar Mitzvah when, instead of delivering the customary drashah (sermon), he invited guests to “open any page in the Ktzos Hachoshen or in the Nesivos Hamishpat (classic commentaries on Shulchan Aruch), and I’ll recite it from memory.” The guests took up his challenge, and he responded—page after page—without missing a word.

Torah Education and Marriage

At age fifteen, Chaim Ozer entered the renowned Volozhin Yeshiva, which was the premier center of Torah learning in Eastern Europe and the model for the modern Lithuanian yeshiva system. This was during the tenure of Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv), who served as the head of Volozhin from 1853 to 1892. Despite his youth, Chaim Ozer was immediately accepted into Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik’s (Rabbi Chaim Brisker’s) select study group—a testament to his exceptional abilities. The analytical “Brisker method” of Talmud study pioneered by Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik would become one of the dominant approaches in the yeshiva world, and Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s early exposure to this methodology helped shape his own approach to Torah learning.

During this era, the Volozhin Yeshiva was facing increasing pressure from the Russian government to include secular studies in its curriculum, which the leadership resisted. This tension ultimately led to the yeshiva’s forced closure in 1892, illustrating the difficult position of traditional Jewish institutions under Imperial Russian rule—a challenge that would inform Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s later leadership during similar political pressures. At twenty, while passing through Vilna, his reputation preceded him. After delivering an impressive shiur (Torah lecture) to a learned group there, he became the target of every matchmaker in the city. Following his father’s advice—who was a student of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter—he married the daughter of Reb Lazer, a dayan (judge) in Vilna and son-in-law of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter.

A fascinating din Torah (legal dispute) actually arose regarding Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s marriage. One claimant argued that since he had given the young

scholar his “derech in lernen” (approach to Torah study), he held a spiritual claim over him. Reb Lazer countered that he had a physical claim, having arranged Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s “green billet” (exemption slip) from the Czar’s army. This exemption was particularly valuable as military service for Jews in Czarist Russia often lasted up to 25 years and made religious observance nearly impossible. After Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, the revered Kovno Rav, had a Torah discussion with the young man, he remarked, “If I had a daughter, I would want him for my own son-in-law.” Neither knew that, under his father’s guidance, Rabbi Chaim Ozer had already made his own selection.

He had initially expected to dedicate himself exclusively to Torah study in his father-in-law’s house, following the traditional kollel arrangement common in Lithuanian Jewish society. However, after just two years, Reb Lazer passed away, and the Vilna community requested that the young Chaim Ozer take his father-in-law’s position. At only twenty-two years old, he joined Vilna’s rabbinate—a group of elderly, scholarly dayanim that had governed the city’s religious affairs since the time of the Vilna Gaon, as Vilna traditionally had no official rabbi.

Leadership in Vilna and Beyond

Over the next fifty-five years, Rabbi Chaim Ozer emerged as the unofficial Rav of Vilna. His tenure spanned dramatic historical periods including the end of Czarist Russia, World War I, the Russian Revolution, the brief independence of Lithuania, and the lead-up to World War II. Vilna itself changed hands multiple times during this period, moving from Russian to German to Polish and finally Lithuanian control. These political shifts created enormous practical challenges for the Jewish community, requiring Rabbi Chaim Ozer to navigate relationships with multiple governments and adapt communal institutions to changing legal frameworks.

His vast Torah knowledge, complemented by great wisdom, made him an indispensable leader. Soon, no convention of Torah leaders (gedolim) took place without his participation—usually as the presiding officer. It became a common sight to see elder Torah scholars, great in learning and years, leaning forward to catch every word from the lips of the young man with the jet-black beard.

His leadership extended far beyond Vilna. Communities worldwide, from Jerusalem to Lomza, consulted him when seeking a Rav or Rosh Yeshiva. His recommendations were always perfectly suitable, as he knew the unique character of each community and could match them with the right leader. For Dvinsk, he recommended an unknown young man learning in his father-in-law’s house in Bialystok—Rabbi Meir Simcha, later known by the name of his sefer, the Or Same’ach. For Lomza, he recommended his student, the Rav of his hometown Ivye, Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes.

Among those who received semicha (rabbinic ordination) and kaballah (recognition of advanced status) from Rabbi Chaim Ozer was Rav Avrohom Hoffman z”l, the great-grandfather of this biographical account’s author—a testament to Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s far-reaching influence on subsequent generations of rabbinical leaders.

The Special Relationship with Rav Eliezer Silver

Rabbi Chaim Ozer had a particularly close relationship with Rav Eliezer Silver, who would become one of the most prominent American rabbinic leaders of the 20th century. Their connection began when Rav Silver was a young student in Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s unique “Kibbutz” in Vilna. Rav Silver quickly distinguished himself through his brilliance and dedication, becoming one of Rabbi Chaim Ozer’s closest disciples.

When Rav Silver emigrated to America in 1907, unlike many European rabbis who viewed America as a spiritual wasteland (the “treife medinah”), Rabbi Chaim Ozer saw an opportunity. He charged his student with a sacred mission: to establish authentic Torah Judaism in America and create institutions that would preserve traditional learning and observance in the New World. This foresight was remarkable at a time when most European rabbinical leaders had little hope for American Jewry’s spiritual future. Their correspondence continued for decades, with Rabbi Chaim Ozer providing guidance on the complex halachic questions arising in America and advice on building Jewish institutions in a secular environment. When

Rav Silver became a leading figure in American Orthodox Judaism as the Rav of Cincinnati and later as the founding president of Agudath Israel of America, he continued to consult with his mentor on all major decisions. During the interwar period, Rav Silver made several return trips to Europe to meet with Rabbi Chaim Ozer. These meetings were not merely student-teacher reunions but strategic planning sessions for the future of Torah Judaism. Rabbi Chaim Ozer entrusted Rav Silver with raising funds from American Jews for the struggling yeshivas of Eastern Europe, which faced financial collapse after World War I due to the economic devastation and political changes in the region.

Their relationship became even more crucial in the late 1930s as the Nazi threat grew. Rabbi Chaim Ozer relied heavily on Rav Silver's American connections to secure visas and affidavits for European rabbinic leaders and yeshiva students. Rav Silver, following his mentor's guidance, became instrumental in establishing the Vaad Hatzalah (Rescue Committee) in America, which would save countless lives. Though Rabbi Chaim Ozer did not live to see the full horrors of the Holocaust, his preparatory work with Rav Silver laid the groundwork for rescue efforts that would preserve a remnant of European Torah scholarship.

In his eulogy for Rabbi Chaim Ozer, Rav Silver recalled that his teacher had once told him, "The fire of Torah that has burned in Europe for centuries must not be extinguished. If it dims here, you must ensure it blazes in America." This charge shaped Rav Silver's life mission and contributed significantly to the post-Holocaust rebuilding of Torah Judaism in America.

Political and Organizational Leadership

The European Political Climate

Rabbi Chaim Ozer's leadership unfolded against a backdrop of profound political upheaval. The early 20th century saw the Russian Empire's collapse, followed by World War I, the Russian Revolution, the creation of independent Baltic states, Polish independence, and the rising threats of Soviet communism and German Nazism.

During World War I (1914-1918), Vilna and surrounding areas were occupied by German forces, creating severe hardships for the Jewish population. Food shortages, forced labor, and restrictions on movement disrupted communal life. Rabbi Chaim Ozer worked tirelessly with relief organizations to distribute food and medicine to the suffering population. The war's aftermath brought further challenges as borders were redrawn and new nation-states emerged from the fallen empires.

The Treaty of Versailles and subsequent arrangements placed Vilna under Polish control, despite Lithuanian claims to the city as their historical capital. This created a complicated political situation where Vilna's Jews had to adapt to Polish governance, language requirements, and educational policies that often disadvantaged minorities. Rabbi Chaim Ozer became adept at negotiating with Polish authorities to protect Jewish religious and educational institutions from interference.

In 1909, he participated in a meeting in Hamburg, Germany, that was the precursor to Agudath Israel, whose main goal was to combat both secular Zionism and religious Zionism. Rabbi Chaim Ozer was one of the founders of Agudath Israel (officially established in Kattowitz, Silesia, in 1912) and served as the first chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages), a position he held throughout his life.

He also co-founded and actively led the Va'ad ha-Yeshivot (Council of the Yeshivot), an umbrella organization based in Vilnius that provided material and spiritual support for yeshivot throughout eastern Poland from 1924 to 1939. Through this organization, he helped sustain Torah learning during economically and politically challenging times, particularly during the Great Depression which devastated the already fragile economies of Eastern Europe.

His influence extended to America as well. When his student Rabbi Eliezer Silver became the founding president of Agudath Israel of America, Rabbi Chaim Ozer sent personal greetings. He also instructed Rabbi Shlomo Heiman, Rosh Yeshiva of Mesifita Torah Vodaath, to participate in the first American Agudath Israel Convention in Far Rockaway in 1937 and to accept the vice-presidency of the organization, despite Rabbi Heiman's usual

reluctance toward public affairs. Rabbi Chaim Ozer urged him to make an exception since "to associate with Agudath Israel in any way possible is a Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of God's name)."

Even the Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan) would not initiate any public action or sign any public document without first consulting Rabbi Chaim Ozer, whom he considered a living embodiment of Torah. Their mutual respect was evident in an incident when both were to sign a public proclamation—the Chofetz Chaim insisted Rabbi Chaim Ozer sign first as he represented "Kavod HaTorah" (the honor of Torah) and was the "Moreh of Klal Yisrael" (teacher of all Israel). Rabbi Chaim Ozer countered that the Chofetz Chaim embodied both "Kavod HaTorah and venerable old age." Eventually, Rabbi Chaim Ozer prevailed by citing "Vekidashto—you shall sanctify the kohen," noting that the Chofetz Chaim was a kohen. The Chofetz Chaim agreed, but only on condition that Rabbi Chaim Ozer sign alongside his signature, not on the following line.

Supporting Rav Aharon Kotler and Kletzk Yeshiva

Among the many yeshivas that Rabbi Chaim Ozer supported, his relationship with Rav Aharon Kotler and the Kletzk Yeshiva was particularly significant. Rav Aharon Kotler, who would later become a transformative figure in American Torah Judaism as the founder of Beth Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, was then the young Rosh Yeshiva of Kletzk, having assumed leadership of the institution in 1921 at the age of 30.

The economic situation in interwar Poland was extremely challenging for yeshivas. The country's economy had been devastated by World War I, and the Polish zloty suffered from severe inflation throughout the 1920s. The global Great Depression that began in 1929 further exacerbated these difficulties, as American and Western European donors—who had traditionally supported Eastern European yeshivas—could no longer provide the same level of assistance.

During this crisis, Rav Aharon Kotler would frequently write to Rav Chaim Ozer. The letters were often centered on the dire financial situation at Kletzk Yeshiva, where students sometimes went without food and basic necessities. On multiple occasions, Rabbi Chaim Ozer would immediately contact wealthy supporters or redirect funds from his own charitable collections to ensure that Kletzk Yeshiva could continue operating.

One particularly harsh winter in the early 1930s, when economic conditions in Poland had reached a breaking point, Rav Kotler wrote him with news that the yeshiva was about to close its doors. The building had no heat, there was no money for food, and creditors were threatening legal action. Rabbi Chaim Ozer, despite managing the financial crises of dozens of yeshivas simultaneously, took special interest in Kletzk because of his deep respect for Rav Kotler's brilliance and teaching methods, which he saw as vital to the future of Torah scholarship.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer immediately arranged an emergency meeting with several wealthy businessmen in Vilna. According to witnesses, he told them, "In Kletzk, Rav Aharon is developing a new generation of Torah giants who will preserve our tradition through whatever difficulties lie ahead. If you want a share in the world to come, this is your opportunity." Within hours, he had secured enough funds to cover the yeshiva's immediate debts and operating expenses for several months.

The relationship between these two Torah giants extended beyond financial matters. Rabbi Chaim Ozer greatly respected Rav Kotler's innovative approach to Talmudic analysis and would often discuss complex halachic issues with him. For his part, Rav Kotler considered Rabbi Chaim Ozer his primary mentor in communal leadership and would later apply many of the lessons learned from him when establishing Torah institutions in America after World War II.

Vaad Hatzalah and Rescue Work

As Europe descended into chaos with the rise of Nazism, Rabbi Chaim Ozer became a central figure in rescue efforts. His work with the Vaad Hatzalah (Rescue Committee) was crucial in saving numerous lives, particularly those of Torah scholars and yeshiva students.

The Nazi rise to power in Germany in 1933 immediately raised alarms for Rabbi Chaim Ozer, who recognized the existential threat long before many

political leaders did. He began working with international Jewish organizations to help German Jews emigrate and find refuge in other countries. His extensive network of contacts with rabbinic leaders worldwide proved invaluable in securing placements for displaced scholars and students.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Rabbi Chaim Ozer played an instrumental role in preserving Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian yeshivas by arranging for them to relocate to Lithuanian cities, which remained neutral initially. This effort became even more urgent when the Soviets occupied eastern Poland as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, putting yeshivas in those territories at risk of forced closure under Communist rule.

The Soviet annexation of the Baltic states in June 1940 created a narrow window of opportunity for many refugees to obtain transit visas through the efforts of diplomats like Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul in Kaunas, and Jan Zwartendijk, the Dutch consul. Rabbi Chaim Ozer was instrumental in coordinating these rescue efforts, working tirelessly despite his failing health.

For people worldwide, organizations like the Joint Distribution Committee, Vaad Hatzalah, and the Haffkine Fund all had one address for both donors and recipients: Rabbi Chaim Ozer's home. Regarding the Haffkine Fund—established by Dr. Waldemar Haffkine, who became a ba'al teshuvah (returnee to religious observance) after inventing a serum that arrested a cholera epidemic—Rabbi Chaim Ozer remarked, "Dr. Haffkine devised not only a serum against cholera but also a serum for Klal Yisrael—that is, for the yeshivos."

Personal Character and Chessed (Kindness) Rabbi Chaim Ozer's home was open to all, day and night, without appointments. His house was constantly filled with people—the sick, widows, orphans, rabbis, heads of yeshivas, and visitors from around the world. Observers wondered when he found time for study, yet he published three volumes of his monumental responsa, *Achiezer*, which addressed complex contemporary halachic issues.

His compassion extended to individuals in need. Once, when a young orphan girl came to him for financial help before her wedding, he discovered she had not learned the laws of family purity. He invited her to his office and, while looking out the window to preserve her dignity, instructed her in detail about these essential laws.

Despite his busy public life, his mind remained disciplined for Torah study. He would simultaneously write responsa on halakhah, give orders to secretaries, and speak on the telephone. This remarkable ability to manage multiple complex tasks reflected the disciplined thinking developed through decades of intensive Talmudic study.

Perhaps most remarkable was his spiritual stamina. When his only child, a girl of seventeen, became ill and was bedridden for three years before passing away at twenty, his communal activities and scholarly writing did not diminish. This personal tragedy occurred during a particularly difficult period for European Jewry, and Rabbi Chaim Ozer reportedly said, "Now I can better understand and share the pain of my people."

Summer at Druskenik

Druskenik, a town surrounded by forests and known for its "dry air," was a popular recuperation spot recommended by Polish doctors. Being close to both Grodno and Vilna, Rabbi Chaim Ozer, along with other Torah giants like Rabbi Shimon Shkop, Rabbi Boruch Ber of Kamenitz, and Rabbi Aharon Kotler, would vacation there.

The local Jewish community eagerly awaited these summer months when every house became a "hotel" with all available space rented out. Despite the commercialization, Torah students in need of respite were never without accommodation, as the local rabbi and his son headed a committee arranging free room and board for them. This created a "yeshiva corner" in the forest, away from more worldly activities.

When Rabbi Chaim Ozer arrived in Druskenik, the local rabbi would struggle to find suitable accommodation for him. Though Rabbi Chaim Ozer claimed to need only a bed for himself and a bookcase for his sefarim (books), the rabbi knew better—as leader of world Jewry, the hundreds of

daily letters with questions and problems had to be answered even during vacation, and visitors, dignitaries, and government officials continued to seek his counsel.

In a characteristic display of his concern for others, upon being shown a suitable house in Druskenik, Rabbi Chaim Ozer insisted on checking with "her" before accepting it. When onlookers assumed he meant his wife (though he was a widower), it turned out he was referring to his cook. The kitchen was far from the dining room, and he worried the distance would be too tiring for her when serving meals. Only after the cook arrived and approved the quarters did he accept the accommodation.

These summer gatherings in Druskenik also served an important strategic purpose, providing an opportunity for the leading Torah authorities to discuss pressing issues facing Jewish communities throughout Europe. Many significant policy decisions of Agudath Israel and the Va'ad ha-Yeshivot were formulated during these seemingly casual summer conversations among the rabbinic leadership.

The Political Climate and Final Years

The political situation surrounding Rabbi Chaim Ozer's final years was dire. Nazi Germany loomed to the west and south, threatening physical annihilation, while Soviet troops positioned themselves to the east and north, poised to obliterate Jewish spiritual life. Lithuania's defenses were minimal—one observer derisively noted their "crack troops" consisted merely of "a dozen small tanks, followed by an army on bicycles wearing white gloves, with rifles hanging from their shoulders."

On October 10, 1939, the Soviets forced Lithuania to grant them military bases in exchange for returning Vilna as their capital, adding Vilna's Jews to the existing Lithuanian Jewish community. With Germany's attack on Poland in September 1939, Lithuania became overwhelmed with yeshiva students and thousands of other refugees fleeing Poland. Nine months later, on June 14, 1940, the Soviets delivered an ultimatum to the Lithuanian government, and by July 21, they had annexed Lithuania as a Soviet Republic.

For four years, only Rabbi Chaim Ozer and his immediate family knew that he suffered from cancer. He showed no visible signs of his terrible suffering, maintaining a smile on his face. He refused hospitalization, aware of his responsibilities to world Jewry and the yeshivas that rested on his shoulders. When he finally did enter the hospital, his communal work continued—including answering the steady stream of halachic queries from around the world.

Final Hours and Legacy

On the last Thursday night of his life, Rabbi Chaim Ozer issued orders regarding the dispersal of all charity funds in his care. To visitors in his room, he said, "Good night," then whispered, "Who can be zocheh (merit) to having a good night? Even so, I have no tynes (grievances), chas veshalom, to the Ribono Shel Olam (G-d)."

He passed away on Friday, August 9, 1939 (5 Av 5700), just weeks before World War II officially began with Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1. The hospital was three kilometers from the city, but as soon as news of his passing reached Vilna, the entire road filled with mourners. Torah scholars were assigned to carry his remains on their shoulders to the city limits, then placed them on a wagon, fearing Soviet authorities' reaction to any unusual demonstration. His body was placed in the room where he had studied Torah, rendered decisions on halachic questions, and dispensed chesed and tzedakah for fifty-five years. There, until Sunday, Torah scholars recited Tehillim (Psalms) and studied his sefarim day and night.

Those arranging his funeral were haunted by a previous experience with the Soviets at the funeral of Reb Lazer, the Minsker Gadol, when authorities arrested all the eulogizers and many mourners. Some suggested a quiet funeral for Rabbi Chaim Ozer, but this was deemed impossible—surely all of Vilna would attend regardless. The decision was made to hold a public funeral without securing Soviet permission, with Rabbi Yoseif Shuv, Rabbi Chaim Ozer's secretary, taking full responsibility should authorities challenge the proceedings.

On Sunday morning, Vilna's entire Jewish populace gathered, joined by yeshiva students and refugees to whom he had been a father figure. The first eulogy was delivered at his house by the head of the rabbinical court, the aged Rabbi Henoch Eigesh. The procession then moved to the big shul (synagogue), where Rabbi Shatzkes and Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin (Lutsker Rav) spoke. The procession continued, stopping every few blocks, with makeshift platforms erected for speakers. In total, forty eulogies were delivered. Rather than interfering, the Soviets dispatched militiamen to preserve order. At the graveside, thousands of tzetlach (notes) with requests were thrown into the grave—the soldiers ensuring they all reached their destination, fearing some might contain anti-Soviet propaganda.

The timing of Rabbi Chaim Ozer's passing, just weeks before the outbreak of World War II, was viewed by many as significant. Some quoted the Talmudic teaching that God sometimes takes the righteous before calamity strikes so they will not witness the suffering of their people. Others noted that his death marked the end of an era of relative stability for Eastern European Jewry, which would soon be devastated beyond recognition.

His Final Decisions

Rabbi Chaim Ozer's last three halakhic rulings reflected his principled leadership:

When students of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin who had escaped to Vilna wanted to join Yeshivas Mir, he ruled against it, explaining that every yeshiva has a rightful place in Klal Yisrael (the Jewish nation), and no one has the right to dissolve a yeshiva, especially one like Chachmei Lublin. While he did appoint Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes as Rosh Yeshiva for the Grodno yeshiva when its students arrived in Vilna, he did not appoint anyone for Chachmei Lublin, apparently because he did not know a qualified Hasidic Torah scholar in Vilna, which was essential to preserve the yeshiva's character.

When asked who should receive the limited visas to leave Vilna—older rabbis and Roshei Yeshiva or younger ones—a life-and-death question as everyone expected to eventually fall victim to either the Russians or Germans—he ruled that older rabbis should receive priority, believing they would work tirelessly to secure visas for those left behind. (Rabbi Chaim Ozer himself could have gone to the country of his choice but refused to abandon Vilna.)

His final recorded responsum, addressed to the Swiss Rabbinate regarding whether stunning animals with electric shock before ritual slaughter was permissible to conform with Swiss law (as Nazi occupation had cut off kosher meat imports), was a resounding “No.” He concluded: “The Jews are an ancient people—old and gray from tzaros (troubles) and enemies. Yet all its enemies of the past have vanished and the Jews are still in existence. In times such as these, every one is called upon to demonstrate mesiras nefesh (self-sacrifice) even for a rabbinical ordinance—most assuredly in our case, when a Torah prohibition is involved.”

Conclusion

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky was called “Ish Ha'Eshkolos—The Man of Clusters,” a Talmudic term explained as “a man who has everything in him.” Rashi elaborates: “True understanding of Torah, without falsehood, without forgetfulness, nor is he argumentative.”

His passing came as the third devastating blow to Klal Yisrael in ten months. On 9 Cheshvan, the Jewish world had lost Rabbi Shimon Shkop, who had been Rosh Yeshiva in Telshe for 25 years, then in Brainsk and in Grodno. The beloved Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Boruch Ber Levovitz of Kamenitz, died on 5 Kislev. And now the Rav of all Rabbanim, the leader of all yeshivos, supreme authority over the poskim—Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky—had left them. As one witness described, “Each individual was personally wounded, as was evident as old men cried like children. One hundred thousand weeping people!”

With his passing, many believed a tekufah (era) had come to an end, as explained by the Dubner Maggid—when a man of such greatness who lights up the world with his knowledge and wisdom passes, a darkness fills the world, marking the end of one era and the beginning of another. In his eulogy for the Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman quoted this

explanation from the Dubner Maggid regarding the Vilna Gaon, applying it equally to the Chofetz Chaim—and now it applied to Rabbi Chaim Ozer as well. The ensuing era was aptly described by Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman as “Ikvesa D'meshicha”—the chaotic period immediately preceding the Messiah's arrival.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer's legacy continues through the institutions he supported and the leaders he mentored. In America, his students Rav Eliezer Silver and later Rav Aharon Kotler would become pillars of Orthodox Judaism, building upon the foundations he had established. The rescue networks he helped create saved thousands during the Holocaust, and his halachic decisions continue to guide contemporary poskim. Perhaps most importantly, his model of selfless leadership, combining vast Torah knowledge with practical wisdom and limitless compassion, remains an inspiration for Jewish leaders facing the challenges of modern times.

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subject: Tidbits • Parashas Mattos-Masei 5785

Parashas Mattos-Masei • July 26th • Rosh Chodesh Av 5785

The sorts of tidbits my father, Rav Meir Zlotowitz zt”l, made sure his family was up to date on from the mundane, to the profound, to the ‘thanks for reminding me!’

Klal Gavoah in Memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL

Shabbos Rosh Chodesh

Parashas Mattos-Masei • July 26th • Rosh Chodesh Av 5785

This Shabbos is Rosh Chodesh Av. Yaaleh Veyavo is included in Shemoneh Esrei and Bircas Hamazon. Hallel is added after Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharis. Two Sifrei Torah are taken out; maftir for Rosh Chodesh is leined (Bamidbar 28:9-15) from the second sefer. Although it is Rosh Chodesh, most congregations lein the haftarah of Masei (“Shim'u”) - the second in the series of the Shalosh D'Puranusa (three Haftaros of Chastisement) - instead of the haftarah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. Some, however, do lein the haftarah of Rosh Chodesh (Yeshaya 66:1-24) or add select verses from this Haftarah. Av Harachamim is omitted. Shabbos Rosh Chodesh's “Ata Yatzarta” replaces the standard Mussaf of Shabbos. Borchy Nafshi is said at the end of davening. Tzidkas'cha is omitted at Mincha.

The Nine Days

The Nine Days begin on the evening of Rosh Chodesh Av, Friday night, July 25th at shekiya. The restrictions of the Three Weeks remain in effect (see Tidbits on Parashas Balak - The Three weeks) in addition to the following restrictions: Consuming Meat and Wine. Eating meat or chicken is prohibited. Wine is prohibited, but alcoholic beverages not from grapes are permitted. There are no restrictions on Shabbos or at a Seudas Mitzvah. There is room for leniency for health reasons. Children above the age of 3 should preferably not be fed meat unless the child refuses other foods. One who customarily uses wine for Havdalah may drink the wine. However, many have the minhag to give it to a boy who is a minor of chinuch age (6 or 7, but preferably a child who does not understand the concept of mourning). Some simply use beer instead. Purchasing Clothing and Expensive Items. This prohibition includes all types of clothing. There is room for leniency for: newborns and young children; an uncommon sale; an item that will be unavailable after Tishah B'Av; exchanging an item for a similar item; and footwear for Tishah B'Av.

Fashioning & Alterations of New Garments. Laundering and Dry Cleaning. There is room for leniency for: young children, spot cleaning, laundering to prevent permanent stains, laundry needed for a mitzvah, picking up previously cleaned clothes from dry cleaners, washclothes used for cleaning, ironing Shabbos clothes and tablecloths. Wearing New or Freshly Laundered Clothes and Linen. Before the Nine Days begin, one should briefly wear freshly laundered clothing and briefly utilize any fresh towels or linen to remove its freshness. A newly arrived guest may use fresh linens. Freshly laundered clothes may be worn on Shabbos of the Nine Days. (Note, clothes which are worn on Shabbos, even briefly, lose their freshness and become

suitable for the Nine Days. However, clothing which is not suitable for Shabbos may not be worn solely for the purpose of removing its freshness due to the prohibition of hachanah. Home Decorating and Moving. Swimming and Showering. Washing hands, face, and feet with cool water is permissible. The purpose of the prohibition is to feel some level of discomfort, and should not be regarded lightly. Nevertheless, one who feels very uncomfortable or is very sensitive may take a quick cool shower. Soap should be used only if necessary. There is a dispute among the Poskim if one may take a regular shower on Erev Shabbos Chazon (Parashas Devorim). Wearing Shabbos Clothing on a Weekday. There may be room for leniency for select baalei simchah in the case of a Bris, Pidyon Haben or Bar Mitzvah, as well as for a date or an engagement party. Brand new clothes, however, may not be worn. Dangerous Activities. One should be extra careful not to engage in hazardous activities during this period as it is an inauspicious time. Many Sefardim observe these restrictions only during the week in which Tishah B'Av falls, which may not be applicable during a year such as this one when Tishah B'Av is Sunday.

Reminders

Most shuls read the haftarah for Parashas Masei, the second in the series of the Shalosh D'Puranusa (the Three Haftarahs of Chastisement). See Parasha in a Paragraph for further details. The prevalent minhag is to wait until Motza'ei Tishah B'Av to recite Kiddush Levana. Kiddush Levana may not be recited before Monday night, July 28th. The final opportunity is at 10:43 PM on Friday night, August 8th. Pirkei Avos: Perek 2 Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Avodah Zara 40 • Yerushalmi: Pesachim 58 • Mishnah Yomis: Zevachim 4:5-6 • Oraysa (coming week): Moed Katan 11a-13a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 189:6-191:End Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbe to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Next on the Calendar

Rosh Chodesh Av is this Shabbos Parashas Mattos-Masei, July 26th. This marks the beginning of the Nine Days. Shabbos Chazon is next Shabbos, Parashas Devarim. Tishah B'Av begins Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Devarim, August 2nd. Shabbos Nachamu is Shabbos Parasha Va'eschanan, August 9th and is also Tu B'Av.

Parshah in a Paragraph

MATTOS: The laws of vows • Attacking Midian to avenge their incitement to sin • Purifying the spoils of war • Laws of Hagalah ('Kashering') • Division of the spoils between hekdes, the soldiers and the nation • Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven request to settle the land across the Jordan River • Moshe is angered at first • Moshe conditionally accepts their proposition, if they first assist the Nation conquer and settle the Land. MASEI: The journeys and campings through the desert are listed • Instructions for conquering and occupying the land • The Land's borders • Yehoshua, Elazar and the Nesiim are named as leaders • Cities for the Leviim and the Migrash surrounding them • Ir Miklat • To keep the integrity of the tribes' initial borders, the Bnos Tzelafchad who receive ancestral land must marry within their tribe • Chazak Chazak V'nis'chazeik! Haftarah: The haftarah for Parashas Masei is read. Yirmiyah (2:4-28, [3:4, 4:1-2]) chastises the nation for abandoning Hashem despite all the material good they were given and the spiritual opportunities He has provided.

Taryag Weekly

Parashas Mattos: 112 Pesukim • 1 Obligation • 1 Prohibition 1) Abide by the laws of vows and their annulment. 2) Do not violate a vow. Parashas Masei: 132 Pesukim • 2 Obligations • 4 Prohibitions 1) Provide cities for the dwelling of Kohanim and Leviim in Eretz Yisrael. 2) Do not kill a murderer without a trial in Beis Din. 3) Exile an accidental killer. 4) A witness may only state his testimony, and not his legal opinion. 5-6) Do not substitute the punishment for a murderer or an accidental killer. Mitzvah Highlight: The power of a neder is to prohibit items as if they are holy like a korban. Thus, violating a neder is tantamount to stating that one does not believe in the holiness of korbanos (Sefer HaChinuch).

For the Shabbos Table

כִּי הֵדֵם הוּא יִתְּנֶיךָ אֶת-הַזָּרִין

For the blood will bring guilt upon the land (Bamidbar 35:33) In condemning acts of murder, the Torah describes it as "chanifah" - flattering of the land. In what sense is murder considered to be flattery? Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l explains that while murder is considered immoral by every nation, their reasoning differs from ours. They eschew murder for its negative impact on society; the drawback of this viewpoint is that at times society as a whole or even an individual can deem 'murder' as a "benefit to society," tolerating assisted suicide, failing to extend the lives of the elderly, taking cost concerns into account, etc. In the eyes of the Torah, however, the evil of murder comes from the inherent value and sanctity of Life. We violate almost any mitzvah to save the life of even a sick or elderly person, and even to extend life for moments. Thus, the Torah describes 'murder' as "flattering [the society of] the land," since it lends more importance to societal concerns than to the value of each moment of a Jew's life.

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Tefillin of Rashi and Tefillin of Rabbenu Tam

Revivim

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Tefillin of Rashi and Tefillin of Rabbenu Tam

A major dispute exists regarding the order of the four passages of tefillin * According to Rashi, the order of the passages is as their order in the Torah * According to Rabbenu Tam, the third passage is "Ve-haya im shamo'a", and the fourth is "Shema" * The kabbalists explained that there is value to both methods, and optimally, there is place to put on both pairs of tefillin * In the Shulchan Aruch, it was decided that the custom is like Rashi, and a God-fearing person should put on both pairs * Most of those who practice today according to the kabbalah, to also put on tefillin of Rabbenu Tam, are Hasidim of Ashkenazi origin

The Dispute

As is well-known, a major dispute exists regarding the order of the four passages of tefillin: "Kadesh" (Exodus 13:1-10), "Ve-haya ki yeivi'acha" (Exodus 13:11-16), "Shema" (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), "Ve-haya im shamo'a" (Deuteronomy 11:13-21). When in simple terms, according to every opinion, one who practices according to the second opinion does not fulfill the commandment, because as the Gemara says: "Rav Chananel said that Rav said: If one exchanged its passages, i.e., placed them in a different order within the compartment, the phylacteries are unfit." (Menachot 34b). According to Rashi, the order of the passages is as their order in the Torah. That is, when standing facing the person who puts on tefillin, on the right side is found the passage of "Kadesh", after it the passage of "Ve-haya ki yeivi'acha", after it, "Shema" and last from the left "Ve-haya im shamo'a", in other words, parshot ke'sidran (passages in their order). However, according to Rabbenu Tam, the third passage is "Ve-haya im shamo'a" and the fourth is "Shema". That is "havayot in the middle" (passages "Ve-haya" and "Ve-haya" in the middle). And they also disagreed regarding tefillin of the hand (though according to Smak 153, regarding tefillin of the hand, Rabbenu Tam agrees with Rashi).

The dispute is based on the interpretation of the words of our Sages: "Our rabbis taught: How does one arrange them? 'Kadesh li' 'Ve-haya ki yeivi'acha' – on the right, 'Shema' 'Ve-haya im shamo'a' – on the left" (Menachot 34b). According to Rashi, the order is continuous, as the order in the Torah. And according to Rabbenu Tam, if the order were continuous, it would have been necessary to say the order of the passages continuously, and from the fact that they said two on the right and two on the left, we learned that the two on the right begin from the right side inward, and similarly the two on the left begin from the left side inward.

Longstanding Dispute

Apparently, one could ask: Rabbenu Tam is the grandson of Rashi, and it is well-known that all his family members grew up on his Torah, and presumably, the tefillin that Rabbenu Tam received in his youth were according to the method of Rashi; how then suddenly, did he decide to disagree with his great grandfather, and change from the tradition?! But in

truth, this dispute has older roots, and for many generations there were many communities that practiced “havayot in the middle” (like Rabbenu Tam), and therefore, when Rabbenu Tam inferred precisely from the Gemara that this is the correct order, he disagreed with his grandfather, and joined in this issue the opinion of the poskim (Jewish law arbiters) who preceded him, as brought in Tosafot (Menachot 34b, “Ve-ha-korei”).

According to the method of Rashi held the Geonim of the Land of Israel and the author of ‘Shimusha Rabba’, and so emerges from the Mechilta of Rabbi Ishmael (Masechet De-Pascha 18), and according to the method of Rabbenu Tam, held Rav Saadia Gaon, Rabbenu Chananel, and the Rif. And according to the opinion of several Rishonim, so practiced also Rav Sherira Gaon and his son Rav Hai Gaon (Tosafot and Rosh). And so it is brought in Tikkunei Zohar (Introduction 9a) in the name of the Jerusalem Talmud.

Testimony of the RambamThe Rambam, who was born about forty years after Rabbenu Tam, ruled (Laws of Tefillin 3:5) to establish the passages in their order (like Rashi). Following this, the sages of Lunel asked him why he changed from the custom, was it not that “we learned from our teachers and from the Geonim, and Rav Hai Gaon at their head z”l, that we need havayot in the middle” (like Rabbenu Tam). The Rambam answered them (Responsa 489), that initially, his opinion was like their opinion, and so were his tefillin when he was in the Western lands (Spain and North Africa), but when he came to Egypt, he saw that all the people of the Land of Israel and its surroundings practice like Rashi, and he received testimony that so practiced the Geonim of the Land of Israel and Rav Hai Gaon, and therefore, he changed his custom to the method of Rashi. His testimony about the custom of the West matches the words of Rabbi Yehuda of Barcelona who lived about two generations before him, from whose words it emerges that he was not familiar with the method of Rashi.

The Process of Decision

Apparently, until the days of Rashi and Rabbenu Tam, this question had not yet arisen in its full sharpness, and consequently, the law was also not decided, but there were important communities that practiced like Rashi, and there were those who practiced like Rabbenu Tam, and following the objection of Rabbenu Tam to Rashi, as brought in Tosafot, the dispute came to the order of the day. There were those who continued in their custom, and there were those who accepted one of the methods, and there were those who instructed God-fearing people to put on two pairs of tefillin in order to remove the doubt (Terumah, Rosh, Tur and Rabbenu Yerocham). However, in the study hall of the Ramban, they decided to practice according to the method of Rashi, and did not take into consideration the method of Rabbenu Tam. As wrote the Rashba (Meyuchasot 234), that so practiced Ramban and Rabbenu Yonah. In parallel, also in Ashkenaz the custom of Rashi took root and was established (Mordechai, Laws of Tefillin 669), and so wrote Maharil (137), that they practice like Rashi, and only one who is muchzak u’mifursom b’chasedut (someone with a well-recognized reputation for exceptional religious devotion and righteousness) puts on both pairs.

How the Dispute Arose

A great question arises from the dispute: How is it possible that in a matter where the tradition continued from generation to generation, there arose a fundamental dispute, to the extent that according to each method, one does not fulfill the obligation according to the other method? It is possible to explain, that indeed, this is the disaster of exile, that following the upheavals of exile and evil decrees, the traditions became confused, and thus, an erroneous custom was created, and the Rishonim disagreed what is the correct custom, and what is the mistaken one.

Opinion of the Kabbalists that Both Pairs Have Place

However, the kabbalists explained that there is value to both methods, that each method expresses its own intention and unification, and if so, le’chatchila (optimally), there is place to put on both pairs of tefillin, in order to hint at both intentions. According to this, it is understood that both traditions have ancient roots, and as was clarified when tefillin from the days of the Tannaim were found, that there were some according to the method of Rashi, and others according to the method of Rabbenu Tam.

The Ari wrote (Sha’ar Ha-Kavanot Drushei Tefillin Drush 6), that tefillin of Rabbenu Tam emerge from “mochin de-abba”, and those of Rashi from “mochin de-ima”, and in this world the law is like Rashi, and in the future, like Rabbenu Tam. The foundation of his words is in Tikkunei Zohar Chadash (14a). And the Ben Ish Chai (Vayera 21) even elaborated and wrote that from the days of Moses our teacher, they put on two pairs.

They Did Not Hold that the Order of Passages is Invalidating

As a continuation of this, it can be explained that initially they did not rule that the order of passages is maakev (invalidating), and all the discussion was how it is more proper to fulfill the commandment, and naturally it is understood that there were different methods in this. Moreover, there are interpreters that also the words of the Gemara that the order of passages is maakev, is only according to the method of Abaye, but in truth, the method of Rava (Menachot 35a) is that the order of passages is not maakev. And also, according to those who hold that the order of passages is invalidating, from the Torah it is not maakev (Beshamayim Rosh 24; Rabbi Yitzchak Tayeb author of Erech Ha-Shulchan; Maharsham in ‘Da’at Torah’ 34b; and Rabbi Kasher in supplements to ‘Torah Shleimah’ sign 1).

Ruling of the Shulchan Aruch

In the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 34:1-3) it is ruled that the custom is like Rashi, and a God-fearing person should put on both pairs, however he emphasized: “One should not do so, except if he has a well-recognized reputation for exceptional religious devotion and righteousness.” And he wrote that one who puts on both pairs should bless on those of Rashi, and should be careful to intend that he is fulfilling the commandment with the pair that is proper according to the truth, while the other is like mere straps, because if not, according to the opinion of many, he will transgress the prohibition of bal toseef from the Torah (the commandment not to add to the Torah’s commandments, or to perform more than what is required) [Bach], or rabbinically (Taz and Machatzit Ha-Shekel), as explained in Mishnah Berurah (34:7), and Yabia Omer (part 1, Orach Chaim 3).

Custom of the Kabbalists

However, the kabbalists disagreed with the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch in two matters. The first, in their opinion one should intend to fulfill the commandment with both pairs, because there is virtue in both of them. The second, in their opinion it is proper for every Jewish male to put on two pairs, and not only for God-fearing people who have a well-recognized reputation for exceptional religious devotion and righteousness (Machazik Berachah Orach Chaim 34:2). So wrote Ben Ish Chai (Vayera 22), and explained that we do not bless on those of Rabbenu Tam because of their exalted status, that we do not have the power to draw down the light that flows from their level.

Opinion of the Gaon of Vilna

In contrast, the opinion of the Gaon of Vilna is that even a God-fearing person with a well-recognized reputation for exceptional religious devotion and righteousness does not need to put on tefillin of Rabbenu Tam, because the law has been decided like Rashi and Rambam. And if we worry about all the different methods in the laws of tefillin, we will need to put on, according to his calculation, twenty-four pairs of tefillin, or sixty-four pairs each day (this is not the place to expand, but indeed, there are additional doubts on the scale of the dispute of Rashi and Rabbenu Tam), but the way to fulfill the commandments of the Torah is as the law that was decided, and as the custom of Israel which is Torah, and therefore, it is sufficient to put on one pair only.

It is told that Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin asked the Gaon of Vilna in his sweet, gentle, respectful manner: “Granted, that our master (the Gra, who wore tefillin all day long) does not put on tefillin of Rabbenu Tam, so as not to nullify even one moment from tefillin, and those of Rashi z”l are primary. But I, who in any case nullify several hours from tefillin, what is the matter if I put on some hours in the day, and fulfill the obligation of tefillin according to all opinions? And he answered him: If you want to fulfill all opinions, you will need to put on 24 pairs”. And in Siach Eliahu, it reads ‘64 pairs’. He further asked: “Behold, it is found in the Zohar about tefillin of Rabbenu Tam that they are of the World to Come. And he answered him that

the simple meaning of the Zohar is not so, and one who beautifies after the World to Come, should put them on. And from the day he heard words of the living God from his holy mouth, he stopped putting them on”.

The Practical Halakha

In practice, those who’s custom is to follow the halachic poskim, both from Ashkenazi and Sephardic origin, are accustomed to put on tefillin of Rashi only, and only God-fearing people who have a well-recognized reputation for exceptional religious devotion and righteousness, put on also those of Rabbenu Tam, and make a condition that they fulfill the commandment only with the tefillin that are correct according to the truth. And so was the custom in Syria, Iraq and Egypt (Pada et Avraham part 2, p. 292). In Tunisia, they practiced that only the rabbis put on two pairs (Aleí Hadas Tefillin 32). In Yemen even the rabbis did not practice to put them on (Etz Chaim, Laws of Tefillin ‘Ve’seder Ha’parshiyot’; Pe’ulat Tzaddik part 3, 216).

So is the custom of students of the Gaon of Vilna, and most of all those who pray in Ashkenazi liturgy, that also most of all the rabbis do not put on tefillin of Rabbenu Tam. So is the custom of Morocco, that almost no one put on tefillin of Rabbenu Tam, including rabbis (Shemesh U-Magen part 3, Orach Chaim 58:4). Those who practice according to the kabbalah put on both pairs, and do not make a condition, because according to the Ari, both pairs are needed, and both are true. In practice, most of those whose custom goes according to the kabbalah to put on also tefillin of Rabbenu Tam, are Hasidim of Ashkenazi origin. Another group practices to put on like Rabbenu Tam, and they are those who practice according to the kabbalah as guided by Rabbi Yosef Chaim, author of ‘Ben Ish Chai’. In practice, it is proper for every person to go according to the custom of his fathers. And if he has a rav muvhak (someone’s primary rabbi, or halachic authority) – as his rabbi’s instruction.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Matos

Kohein-in-Waiting

There is a fascinating law in this week’s portion. The Torah tells us that one who kills accidentally must be banished to a city of refuge. The Torah refers to an accident that is tinged with a bit of negligence, not a total mishap or a death tainted with intent. The cities of refuge were the home of the Levites, whose life’s mission was service to others. Thus a lesson in care and concern during the murderer’s stay would elevate of his soul.

The Torah tells us very unique terms of release. The killer was to stay in the city of refuge until the Kohein Gadol (High Priest) died. Of course, the scene among his Levite neighbors, who were the protégés of the Kohein Gadol mourning the loss of their beloved leader, would put the murderer’s joy of freedom in perspective. It would be almost impossible to be exuberant with his own release amongst the thousands of residents mourning their leader – and that would be another lesson, before his new life in society.

But the Torah identifies the Kohein Gadol, whose death results in the killer’s release, in a strange way. “He (the killer) shall remain (in the city of refuge) until the passing of the Kohein Gadol who he anointed”(Numbers 35:25). The Talmud in Makos is baffled by the words who he anointed. It somewhat implies that the killer had to do with the Kohein’s anointing – and that just cannot be. After all wasn’t the Kohein anointed way before the accident occurred?

The Talmud answers. True. This verse implies that if, after the time of the accident but before its judicial resolution, a new Kohein Gadol is anointed, then the killer only is released after the new Kohein’s death. The Talmud asks why? This new Kohein Gadol was not around during the accident? True he was appointed before the verdict, but he was appointed after the death occurred. Why is he somehow involved the verdict of the accused? Why is his death the redeeming factor for the accused? Why is he punished? The Talmud answers that if there was a trial during the new Kohein’s tenure, he should have prayed for the welfare of the accused. He should have

interceded and prayed in order to mitigate a verdict of exile. Therefore, if the verdict came in his tenure, the man is released with his death.

It is quite difficult to understand. How is an incoming Kohein Gadol, during the most exciting and prestigious period of his career expected to worry about the verdict of a man, he has never heard of, who is accused of manslaughter.

Rabbi Chaim Kanievski, of B’nei Berak, Israel, the son of the Steipler Gaon of blessed memory, is known for his amazing breadth of Torah Knowledge which is only paralleled by his great diligence in Torah study. With the passing of his father more than a decade ago, people from all walks of life line up in front of his home seeking answers to complex Torah and personal questions.

But his greatness and wisdom were known to hundreds in the yeshiva world for many years.

Many years ago, as a student in the Ponovez Yeshiva, I heard an amazing story. A young man came to Reb Chaim with a long list of questions. Reb Chaim seemed a bit preoccupied but the visitor insisted in asking the questions, to which Reb Chaim responded, one by one.

Suddenly Reb Chaim began tidying himself up and put on a recently pressed kapote and new hat, and asked the young man’s indulgence. He had to go somewhere but he allowed the visitor to accompany him. The younger man did, peppering him with questions the entire way.

They walked a few blocks until they reached a wedding hall. Upon entering, Reb Chaim embraced the groom with a warm hug and kiss and apologized for the delay. Reb Chaim sat himself among the prestigious Rabbonim who graced the dais as they prepared the marriage documents. The persistent questioner was almost oblivious to the scene and continued to ask as more questions and eliciting responses. Reb Chaim tried to juggle the needs of the groom while trying to accommodate the visitor who had besieged him with problems.

But the persistent questioner received the shock of his life when, as the music began, heralding the march to the badeikin, where the groom, flanked by his father and father-in-law, met the bride and covered her face with the veil. The groom rose from his seat and immediately his future father-in-law took hold of his arm. The groom’s father took hold of the other arm. But before he did so, the groom’s father turned around and apologized to the stranger who he had been talking to for the last hour or so. He said that would be unable to help him until after the ceremony. And then Rabbi Kanievski nodded Mazel Tov to the hundreds of well-wishers and began the procession to his own son’s wedding!

The Torah tells us that the Kohein Gadol-elect, waiting to be anointed to the most spiritual position in Judaism has a responsibility to worry about the welfare of the common man – even those accused of manslaughter. He should worry about his welfare and the verdict on his life. There is no greater inauguration to the responsibilities of priesthood than the concern for every single one of us.

from: Michal Horowitz <michalchorowitz@g...>

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Matos 5785: Time-Filled Lessons from Reuven & Gad

This Shabbos is Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av, Shabbos Chazak, and the yartzheit of Aharon Ha’Kohen. On Shabbos, we read the double parshios of Matos-Masei, and close the book of Bamidbar once again. The parshios deal with matters pertaining to the readiness and preparedness of the nation to enter into the land of Israel.

In Matos, we learn of the disturbing request of the Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven: to remain on ever la’Yarden - the eastern side of the Jordan River.

The perek begins with:

מִקֵּהָ רַב הָיָה לִבְנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְלִבְנֵי גָד עֲצוּם מְאֹד וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת-אַהֲרֹן יִשְׁעֵר וְאֶת-עֲרֹץ גִּלְעָד וְהַגָּה הַמִּקְהָה מִקְהוֹם מִקְהָה

“And abundant livestock had the children of Reuven and the children of Gad — exceedingly great — and they saw the land of Ya’zer and the land of Gil’ad, and behold, the place was a place of livestock.” (Bamidbar 32:1).

Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah points out that the first words of the perek are not “The children of Reuven and the children of Gad,” but rather: “מִקְנֵה רֶבֹּא - abundant livestock.”

Immediately, we are cued in to the fact that the most important asset to these tribes was their wealth (the Medrash elaborates on this point, and Chazal do not view these tribes with favor).

Later in the perek, when these tribes are negotiating the terms of their inheritance on the eastern side of the Yarden - while promising to cross armed before the Children of Israel into Canaan to help with the conquer and conquest of the land - they say to Moshe:

נִבְנָה לְמִקְנֵנוּ פֶּה — pens for our animals we will build here, and cities for our children (32:16). Once again, their flocks and animals (i.e.: wealth) are placed before all else - even the care of their children!

On these words, Rashi teaches: נִבְנָה לְמִקְנֵנוּ פֶּה. חֲסִים הָיוּ עַל מְזֻנָּם יוֹתֵר מִבְּנֵיהֶם וּבְנוֹתֵיהֶם, שֶׁהִקְדִּימוּ מִקְנֵיהֶם לְטָפֵם. אָמַר לָהֶם מֹשֶׁה לֹא כֵן. עָשׂוּ הָעֵקֶר עֵקֶר וְהַטָּפֵל טָפֵל, בְּנוּ לָכֶם תְּחִלָּה עָרִים לְטָפְכֶם וְאַחֵר כֵּן גְּדֻרוֹת לְצִאֲנְכֶם (תנחומא)

They were more concerned about their money, more than their concern for their sons and daughters, for they gave precedence to their animals before their children. And Moshe said to them, This is not so! Make what is primary (your families) primary, and what is secondary (your material wealth) secondary. Hence, Moshe instructed them to reverse the order of what they would do.

Hence, Moshe rebukes them when he says to them בְּנוּ־לָכֶם עָרִים לְטָפְכֶם וּגְדֻרָתְכֶם, build for yourselves cities for your children, and pens for your flocks (32:24).

Notably, Moshe instructs them to care for their families before they care for their animals.

This is a lesson, not only for the Bnei Gad and Reuven, but for us as well. Each person must ask himself: what are my priorities in life? Do we make the ikar, ikar, and keep the tafel, tafel?

While Chazal criticize the actions of these two tribes, they are further teaching us a lesson for our lives as well.

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin writes, “The centuries-old failure of the tribes of Reuven and Gad, in full sight of their intended goal, speaks volumes to us concerning the causes of personal failure in our own lives. We often seem to fall short of our own goals for the same reasons that the two tribes fell short of theirs.

“Mistaken priorities ... For many of us, such recognition only arrives in retrospect. Day after day, our drive towards personal success and professional advancement regularly overwhelms our attempts to carve out time for ourselves and our families. Whatever scarce downtime we do have is marred by the demands created by instant accessibility. We become as available as the closest handheld device, expected to answer an e-mail, text or call, under all circumstances and at a moment’s notice. [We must note if this was true when Rabbi Goldin penned these words almost fifteen years ago, what shall we say today...?] In spite of our good intentions, we inevitably find ourselves giving ‘pens for our livestock’ precedence over ‘cities for our children.’

“To compensate for this lack of availability to our families, today’s society has popularized the notion of ‘quality time.’ Quality, we reason, is better than quantity. I can’t be with my family often but I can at least ensure that the limited time we spend together is filled with value and experience.

“While such planned experiences are certainly worthwhile, however, what our loved ones need most from us is not quality time, but time, period... Given that we cannot predict which moment of our shared lives will be important, the better part of wisdom dictates that we optimize our opportunities. The more time we spend in the company of those we care about, the greater the chance that we will be there when it matters” (Unlocking the Torah Text, Bamidbar, p.314-315).

The frenetic pace of our modern world is more demanding on our time than ever (in the history of mankind!). We must be ever-more cognizant to be mindful, present, and attentive in our interactions with others - and certainly, must always strive to put “cities for our children,” before “enclosures for our livestock.”

By giving our time, attention, resources, interest to our loved ones, we are demonstrating to them - and to Hashem - that we focus on the ikkarim in life. In this merit, may Hashem continue to bless us with His boundless blessings, as we utilize our (limited time in this world) time wisely and well.

בברכת מנחם אב ושבת שלום

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Ohr Somayach

Insights into Halacha

Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

Of Haftaros and Haydalah

Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av 5785

As detailed in previous articles over the course of the year, our current year 5785, is not only a rare one, but calendrically speaking, actually the hands-down rarest of them all. תשפ"ה is classified as a ש"א year in our calendars. This abbreviation is referring to Rosh Hashana falling out on Thursday (hei), both months of Cheshvan and Kislev being shalem (shin - 30 day months instead of possibly 29; these are the only months that can switch off in our set calendar), and Pesach falling out on Sunday (aleph). A HaSh"א year is the rarest of years, and out of the 14 possibilities in Tur's 247-year calendar cycle,[1] this year type occurs on average only once in about 30.19 years (approximately 3.3 percent of the time).[2] Indeed, at times there are 71 years (!) in between HaSh"א years. The last time this year type occurred was 31 years ago in 5754 / 1994. The next time will be 20 years hence in 5805 / 2044. The next several times after that are slated to be 27 years further, in 5832 / 2071 and then a 51 year gap in 5883 / 2122.

The reasons and rules governing the whys and whens this transpires are too complicated for this discussion; suffice to say that when the Mishnah Berurah discusses these issues he writes “ain kan makom l'ha'arich,” that this is not the place to expound in detail,[3] which is certainly good enough for this author.

Obviously, such a rare calendar year contains many rare occurrences. Let's continue our journey through this unique year.

One interesting issue that arises is that for most of world Jewry, the special haftarah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh was not leined since the beginning of our year, and will not be leined for a year and half - until the middle of next year.

Delayed Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh Haftara?

The first Shabbos Rosh Chodesh of 5785 was Rosh Chodesh Marcheshvan, Parashas Noach - in which the haftarah for Shabbos Rosh Chodesh “Hashamayim Kisi” (Yeshaya Ch. 66:1) was leined. However, as mentioned previously, although there are and will be several more Shabbosei Rosh Chodesh over the course of this year, nonetheless, this special haftarah will not be leined for another year and a half from its previous reading right after Sukkos. The second Shabbos Rosh Chodesh this year was Rosh Chodesh Adar, which also was Parashas Shekalim, which as one of the Arba Parshiyos, knocked off any other haftarah.[4] Yet, the third occurrence of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, the upcoming Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av, this Shabbos, Parashas Mattos/Masei is when it gets interesting.

But first some background is in order. As we know, most haftaros share some similarity with at least one concept presented in the Torah reading. The Gemara Megillah discusses the proper haftarah readings for the various holidays throughout the year.[5] The Gemara states that whenever Rosh Chodesh falls out on Shabbos, a special haftarah is read: “Hashamayim Kisi,” as it mentions both the inyanim of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh.[6]

Head-To-Head Haftaros

Our dilemma arises when that rule goes head-to-head with another rule. The Pesikta, (an early Midrash cited by many early authorities including Tosafos and the Abudraham)[7] continues the teachings of Chazal as to the proper haftarah readings starting from the Fast of Shiva Assur B'Tamuz.

During the ‘Three Weeks’ from 17 Tamuz until Tisha B'Av, we read ‘T'lasa D'Poranusa,’ - ‘Three Readings of Misfortune.’ After Tisha B'Av (starting with Shabbos Nachamu, dubbed so due to its haftarah, Nachamu Nachamu Ami)[8] until Rosh Hashana, ‘Shiva D'Nechemta,’ or ‘Seven Readings of Consolation’ are read.[9] This is followed by a reading of Teshuva,[10] during the Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, aptly named ‘Shabbos Shuva,’ for its repentance-themed haftarah starting with ‘Shuva Yisrael.’[11] The Abudraham as well as Rabbeinu Tam, conclude that these special haftarah readings are so important, that they are never pushed off!

The \$64,000 question becomes, what happens when Rosh Chodesh Av falls out on Shabbos? Which ruling trumps which? Do we follow the Gemara or the Pesikta? Do we stick with the ‘T'lasa D'Poranusa’ or the special Rosh Chodesh reading? The answer is that there is no easy answer! The Beis Yosef writes that the ikar halacha follows the Abudraham as he was considered the expert in these topics.[12]

Consequently, in the Shulchan Aruch, he only mentions that during the “Three Weeks” the ‘T’lisa D’Poranusa’ are read.[13] Hence on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av, the Sefardic minhag is to only read the regularly scheduled haftarah of “Misfortune”: “Shimu,”[14] (along with the first and last psuk of Hashamayim Kisi).[15] Prague vs. Posen

Yet, figuring out the Ashkenazic minhag is not so simple.[16] Aside from this being a divergence of minhag between the cities of Prague[17] and Posen,[18] as well as a machlokes Rishonim, it is also a machlokes of Tosafos in different Masechtos.[19] And although several Poskim conclude that whichever of the two haftaros is read is fine,[20] nevertheless, the majority consensus seems to be that the minhag to read “Shimu” is the most prevalent,[21] following the Mishnah Berurah’s citing of the Vilna Gaon’s position as the final word on the matter.[22] Accordingly, to most of the world, the special Shabbos Rosh Chodesh haftarah of “Hashamayim Kisi” will not be read again 5785.[23]

Although in other year make-ups Sefardic and Ashkenazic minhag diverge on this point, nonetheless, on a practical level, this year, they concur. Accordingly, to most of the world, the special Shabbos Rosh Chodesh haftarah of “Hashamayim Kisi” will not be read from the beginning of 5785 all the way until Parashas Tazria-Metzora, Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5786 - eighteen months later.[24] This is due to the next Shabbos Rosh Chodesh being Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Teves 5786, which as occurring on Chanuka, Chanuka’s special haftarah trumps it due to Pirumei Nissa. Hence, for most of Klal Yisrael, ‘Hashamayim Kisi’ will practically not be leined until the following Shabbos Rosh Chodesh - Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5786.

Similar will occur this year regarding “Machar Chodesh,” the special haftarah ordinarily read on Shabbos directly preceding a Sunday Rosh Chodesh,[25] which was leined as the haftarah for Parashas Toldos, and will not be read again by the majority of Klal Yisrael[26] until Parashas Bamidbar 5786, a year and a half later.[27] This is due to “Machar Chodesh” being practically pushed off for Parashas Hachodesh, Shiva D’Nechemta, and two-day Rosh Chodeshes respectively, the next several times that a Sunday Rosh Chodesh occurs over the next year.

The Nine Days

The Mishnah in Maseches Ta’anis famously teaches that “Mishenichnas Av Mema’atin Besimchah, When the month of Av arrives (Rosh Chodesh Av), we lessen our joy.” This is due to the heralding of the beginning of the tragedies that took place prior to the destruction of both Batei Hamikdash, from the breaching of the walls of ancient Jerusalem on the 17th of Tamuz, until the actual destruction of the Beis Hamikdash on the Ninth of Av. As detailed in the Mishnah and Gemara Taanis, both of these days have since become communal Fast Days, in remembrance of the tragedies that happened on these days.[28] In order to properly commemorate and feel the devastation, halacha dictates various restrictions on us during this period, getting progressively stricter up until Tisha B’Av itself.[29]

These ‘Nine Days’ restrictions include not eating meat or chicken, not drinking wine,[30] not doing laundry, nor wearing freshly laundered clothing, nor pleasure bathing.[31] Many of these restrictions are generally still in effect until midday (Chatzos) of the next day, the tenth of Av with some being makpid the whole next day for some of the restrictions (unless in a year when Tisha B’Av is actually being observed on the tenth of Av, since it fell out on Shabbos).[32]

Ashkenazicor Sefardic Halacha?

However, this aforementioned timeline follows the general Ashkenazic minhag. On the other hand, many Sefardim start most restrictions on beginning of the week that Tisha B’Av falls out on, a.k.a ‘Shavua Shechal Bo.’

Although there is no mention of such in the Gemara, these restrictions are indeed binding Ashkenazic practice as instituted by many Rishonim[33] and later codified by the great Ashkenazic authorities including the Rema, Derech Hachaim, Shevus Yaakov, Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Hashulchan, and Mishnah Berurah.[34]

While several later Sefardic authorities maintain that it is proper for Sefardim to follow the Ashkenazic minhag and start the restrictions from Rosh Chodesh Av,[35] nevertheless, most Sefardim are only noheg the majority of the restrictions from the actual week of Tisha B’Av, as per the actual ruling of the Shulchan Aruch.[36]

This year, Tisha B’Av falls out on a Sunday. This means that accordingly, without an actual ‘Shavua Shechal Bo Tisha B’Av,’ generally speaking, this year Sefardim will not undertake any Nine Days restrictions, save for the proscription of partaking of meat and wine.[37] Sefardim may shower, shave, and do their laundry all the way up until Shabbos Chazon – which is Erev Tisha B’Av this year. On the other hand, Ashkenazim do not share this dispensation, and would still need to keep all the Nine Days’ restrictions.[38]

How to Havdalah?

But now that Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Av ends, another question arises. How do we make Havdalah on this Motzai Shabbos? Indeed, the proper way to perform Havdalah on the Motzai Shabbos of the Nine Days (usually Motzai Shabbos Chazon) is one annual issue that seems to always have disparate approaches.

The main problem is that the very essence of Havdalah is ending Shabbos, resulting in the fact that it is actually recited during ‘chol,’ weekday. That is fine for an ordinary week, but this Motzai Shabbos is generally halachically part and parcel of the Nine Days. And one of the Nine Days’ restrictions prohibits drinking wine.[39] the mainstay of Havdalah.[40] So how are we supposed to synthesize making Havdalah while not transgressing this restriction?[41]

Actually, this year, 5785, this dilemma is doubled, as there are two Havdalahs in question. The first Havdalah is this coming Motzai Shabbos, Motzai Parashas Mattos–Masei and the second, the following week, with the Taanis of Tisha B’Av commencing immediately after Shabbos’s conclusion, its Havdalah gets pushed off until Sunday night (this fascinating topic will IY”H be discussed at length in next week’s article, to help alleviate any compounded confusion).

Just Drink It!

The first approach to this quandary is the Shulchan Aruch’s.[42] He maintains that whoever makes the Havdalah should just drink the wine himself. The Gr”a explains this position (and is later echoed by the Mishnah Berurah) that Havdalah is no worse than a Seudas Mitzva; just as at a Seudas Mitzva (such as a Bris) one may drink the wine even if it falls out during the week of Tisha B’Av.[43] so too by Havdalah. They add that according to the Shulchan Aruch, these restrictions were never intended to negate a Mitzva. This ruling is accepted and followed by Sefardic Jewry, and this Motzai Shabbos, their psak is to drink the Havdalah wine as usual.[44] [45]

Child Care

The Rema’s opinion is a bit more complicated.[46] He maintains that it is preferable to find a child and let him drink the Havdalah wine. That way, the one who actually makes the Havdalah does not have to transgress this prohibition. He concludes however, that mei’ikar hadin the Shulchan Aruch is correct, and if one cannot find a child to drink the wine, then an adult may do so.

But one detail the Rema does not mention is how old this child should be. The Magen Avraham (and clarified by the Machatzis Hashekel and Dagul Mervava ad loc.) qualifies the Rema’s ruling. He explains that the child must not be old enough to be able to mourn the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, for if a child is able to understand and properly mourn, there is no halachic advantage gained by having him drink the cup.

Additionally, the child must be ‘higia l’chinuch,’ old enough to understand the need to make a bracha before drinking, for, if not, the Havdalah would end up being a ‘bracha levattala,’ in vain, unless an adult drinks the wine. So basically, to fulfill the Rema’s ruling lechatchila, the child must be in the ballpark of 6 to 9 years old.[47] otherwise, it would be preferable for an adult to drink it. This ruling is followed by most mainstream Ashkenazic authorities, including the Magen Avraham, Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, and Mishnah Berurah.[48]

Can You Beer It?

However, there is a third opinion, that of the Aruch Hashulchan.[49] He maintains that the best solution to our concern is to make Havdalah on this Motzai Shabbos using beer instead of wine. Since beer is cited throughout the ages as a ‘Chamar Medina,’ a ‘drink of the land’ on which Havdalah is permitted to be made,[50] it would therefore be the simplest resolution to our problem.

However, many authorities remain hesitant to rely on this l’maaseh. The reason for this is that there is no clear-cut delineation of what ‘Chamar Medina’ actually is or how to properly define it, resulting in different poskim having very different understandings of its parameters.

For example, many authorities maintain that one may only rely on using ‘Chamar Medina’ if wine cannot be found anywhere in the city.[51] Others maintain that it must be a popular drink that people would always serve at a proper meal.[52] A different definition cited is that it must be a drink that one would serve to honor someone.[53] Others define it as a drink that can be intoxicating, making having alcoholic content a prerequisite.[54] Another view is that it must be a drink that has inherent importance.[55] Others say it refers to a drink that one has ‘chavivus,’ an affection for or affinity to drinking.[56]

Although our ubiquitous beer fits many of these definitions, still the Magen Avraham and Vilna Gaon ruled that in Ashkenaz, beer has lost its status of ‘Chamar Medina’.[57] Also, due to the whole machlokes regarding defining ‘Chamar Medina,’ as well as the fact that many authorities rule that if wine is available, it trumps beer’s use for Havdalah, consequently, many poskim are hesitant about fulfilling the mitzvah of Havdalah with beer in this day and age. Additionally, based on how beer is viewed nowadays, and especially in Eretz Yisrael, several poskim, including the Chazon Ish,[58] rule that beer would no longer be considered ‘Chamar Medina.’

Conversely, many contemporary authorities do indeed confirm beer as ‘Chamar Medina,’ even nowadays, especially in America and Europe; yet, they still generally maintain wine’s superiority for Havdalah.[59]

What To Drink?

So now that we explained that there is a three-way machlokes, what’s the bottom line? Generally speaking, Sefardim follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, and therefore the adult who makes the Havdalah should drink the wine. Most mainstream

Ashkenazim follow the Rema's psak and try to find a child in the proper age range (approx. 6 - 9). If one cannot be found, then an adult should drink the wine. Yet, surprisingly, several contemporary Ashkenazic poskim, including Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, the Chazon Ish, and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, held that it is preferable to follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and an adult should rather drink the wine than a child. Rav Moshe Feinstein is quoted as holding this way as well.[60] However, it is important to note that drinking the wine oneself, several authorities point out that it is preferable to only drink a minimum shiur of wine.[61] But what of the Aruch Hashulchan's beer solution? Certainly the authorities mentioned previously who allow beer's use for Havdalah year round would permit one to do so Motzai Shabbos in the Nine Days as well. Rav Dovid Feinstein zt"l is quoted as maintaining beer's actual preference for Havdalah on Motzai Shabbos during the Nine Days.[62] Indeed, this author has likewise heard from Rav Efraim Greenblatt zt"l (the renowned Rivevos Efraim)[63] that one may make Havdalah with beer on Motzai Shabbos during the Nine Days (usually Motzai Shabbos Chazon) with no compunction.[64]

In somewhat of a contrast, mv"r Rav Yaakov Blau zt"l told this author that although he personally held that it was preferable for an adult to drink the Havdalah wine, nonetheless, he gave dispensation to one who was accustomed to making Havdalah on beer, or one who's minhag was to do so specifically on Motzai Shabbos Chazon, to continue doing so, even in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l is quoted as holding similarly.[65]

Interestingly, it is reported that 'Meine Altere Shuchin,' the Bobover Rebbe zy"a, would make Havdalah on Motzai Shabbos during the Nine Dayson wine and drink it himself, but when Tisha B'Av would fall out on Motzai Shabbos (as it does this year), on that Motzai Tisha B'Av he would make that Havdalah specifically on beer.[66]

However one ends up making Havdalah this Motzai Shabbos [make sure to discuss this with your local rabbinic advisor in advance], it is important for us all to remember that these restrictions were instituted by our Rabbanim as a public show of mourning during the most devastating time period on the timeline of the Jewish year. Our goal should be to utilize these restrictions as a catalyst for inspiration towards

Teshuva.[67] It is worthwhile to do so, as well. As the Gemara relates, everyone who observes and properly demonstrates their personal mourning over the destruction of Yerushalayim will merit seeing its rejoicing.[68] B'Ezras Hashem, may this year be the one that Tisha B'Av is finally transformed into a full 'Mo'ed!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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His first English halacha sefer, "Insights Into Halacha: Food: A Halachic Analysis," (Feldheim/Mosaica) featuring over 500 pages focusing on the myriad halachos related to food, is now back in stock and available in Jewish bookstores worldwide.

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

If we accept the notion that the first and third sections ("Before" and "After" the Troubles) are chiastically related, it follows

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

One more bit of methodology before proceeding:

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

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

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

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

V. REVERSING THE DIRECTION OF LEGAL TRANSMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enter the daughters of Tz'lofchad:

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI. REDEMPTION DEMANDS UNITY

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

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

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

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

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

Note also the famous statement in the Yerushalmi:

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

VII. THE "SINS OF THE DESERT"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IX. MENASHEH'S CHIEFTAINS REVISITED

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

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

X. POSTSCRIPT

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

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PARASHAT MATOT: SECRET STRUGGLE

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

SETTING THE SCENE:

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

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

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

ANTICIPATING RESISTANCE:

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEGOTIATING POSTURE:

The use of "avadekha" is also reminiscent of the negotiations over the cave and field of Mahpela which Avraham purchases from Efron as a gravesite for Sara (Parashat Hayyei Sara). Each party to the negotiations attempts to outmaneuver the other by being super-courteous, giving the appearance of generosity while truly struggling for a more powerful position. Avraham casts himself as the pitiful stranger and wanderer, his wife's corpse lying before him awaiting

burial. He tries to force his opponent(s) to yield the cave he wants by making it seem like refusing would be an act of great callousness to a poor stranger. The Bnei Het, Avraham's interlocutors, know exactly what Avraham is up to, and try to take the wind out of his sails by denying that he is a pitiful wanderer, insisting that he is not a "ger ve-toshav," but instead a "nesi Elokim," a prince of God, a powerful noble. On the surface, they pay tribute to Avraham, but in truth, they are trying to weaken his bargaining position by according him great status.

"THE LAND HASHEM HAS CONQUERED":

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

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

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

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

MOSHE RESPONDS (NOT):

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

Why doesn't Moshe respond?

A few weeks ago, we talked about Bil'am and how Hashem asks him questions. First, when Balak's men arrive to summon Bil'am to curse Bnei Yisrael, Hashem asks him, "Who are these men with you?" Now, Hashem knows the answer to the question, and Bil'am knows He knows. But instead of acknowledging that Hashem is telling him that he is on the wrong track, Bil'am simply answers the question: "Oh, these fellows are Balak's men." Hashem's unnecessary question hints to him that he should really just forget about cursing Bnei Yisrael and ask Balak's men to go home, but, blinded by Balak's shimmering promises of gold, he refuses to see. (Similar scenes occur when Hashem asks Adam, who has just eaten from the tree of knowledge, "Where are you?", or when Hashem asks Kayyin, who has just killed Hevel,

“Where is your brother?”, see the shiur on Parashat Balak for more details.) Hashem even speaks to Bil’am through his donkey, asking him three further unnecessary questions, but it is no use: Bil’am simply answers the questions instead of going home as he is supposed to. Bil’am doesn’t truly “see” until after Hashem has blessed Bnei Yisrael twice through his own mouth; then, finally, he “sees” that Hashem desires to bless Bnei Yisrael, and he adds his own blessing.

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

MOSHE RESPONDS (REALLY):

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

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

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

- 1) “Mil’u aharei Hashem” — this phrase figuratively means to be faithful to Hashem, but here Moshe uses it in a more literal sense: to follow Hashem into the Land, versus “ki teshuvun me-aharav,” not to follow Him into the Land. Yehoshua and Calev are “mil’u aharei Hashem” not simply because they follow His instructions and remain faithful to Him, but because they are ready to go literally “aharav” — to follow Him into the Land. On the other hand, those who reject the Land are “shav me-aharav,” meaning not only figuratively that they do not “follow Him,” but literally that they do not follow Him — into the Land.
- 2) “Teni’un / va-yeniem” — Moshe accuses Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein of breaking the resolve of the other shevatim and weakening their courage: “teni’un,” “preventing” or “weakening.” Hashem’s reaction to the last time this happened was a very similar word: “va-yeniem,” He tossed the people into the desert for 40 years. Moshe is basically telling the Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein that their action of “meni’a” (with an alef) is tantamount to an action of “meni’a” (with an ayyin) — that by breaking the people’s courage, they are directly responsible for what will surely be Hashem’s terrible reaction.

LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE SECRET:

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

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

making this a private conversation and then sweetening their offer.

THE NEW DEAL:

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

1) They will build structures for their animals and families.

2) They will lead the military charge into Eretz Yisrael, forming the avant garde, first to face the enemy's slings and arrows.

3) They will return to their cities only once all of Bnei Yisrael have received their own portions in Eretz Canaan.

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

SUB-SURFACE STRUGGLE:

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

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

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

1) **FIRST TASK:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein state that their first task will be to build protective structures things for their precious possessions (cattle and children); according to Moshe, their first task will be to lead the charge into Eretz Yisrael.

2) **CITIES OR CORRALS:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein state that their first task in building structures to hold their possessions will be to build corrals for their beloved cattle; only afterward do they mention building cities for their children. According to Moshe, their first task is to build cities for their children, and only then to build corrals.

3) **BEFORE WHOM?:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein offer to lead the charge "Lifnei Bnei Yisrael" ("before Bnei Yisrael"); Moshe describes their task as to lead the charge "Lifnei Hashem" ("before Hashem").

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

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

6) **NAHALA OR AHUZA:** Bnei Gad and Bnei Re'uvein refer to the land they desire as a "nahala" — an inheritance ("For our inheritance has come to us on the other side of the Jordan, to the West") — while Moshe refers to it as an "ahuza," a

“holding,” not an inheritance.

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

TRIPLE PLAY:

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

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

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

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

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

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

MESSAGE C: FAILURE IN RELATIONSHIP TO ERETZ YISRAEL:

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

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

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

So which cliché is more 'correct'?

THE BORDERS IN PARSHAT MAS'EI

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

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

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

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

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

THE EASTERN FRONTIER

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

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

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

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

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

THE LAND PROMISED TO AVRAHAM AVINU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2) At BRIT MILA: / 'ERETZ CANAAN'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO BORDERS / TWO TYPES OF KEDUSHA

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

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

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

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

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM

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

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

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

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

BRIT MILA (Breishit chapter 17)

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

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

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

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

(A) The NATIONAL aspect

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

[See Rambam, Hilchot Trumot, first chapter!]

(B) The PERSONAL aspect -

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

The following table summarizes our analysis thus far:

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

YERUSHA & ACHUZA

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

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

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

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

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

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

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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

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

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

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

THE 'KERNEL'

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

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

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

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

EXPANDING KEDUSHA

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

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

THE RAMBAM'S DEFINITION OF ERETZ YISRAEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'LAND FOR PROGRESS'

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. MITZVAT KIBBUSH ERETZ CANAAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARSHAT MATOT [Parshanut]

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

LOTS OF QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

EXCLUSIVITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PSHAT vs. DRASH

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

In contrast, other commentators such as Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, and Ramban will usually anchor their interpretation in what they feel is the simple understanding ["pshat"] of the pasuk - even if that understanding may contradict a Midrash. Nonetheless, they will usually consider the opinion raised by the Midrash with the utmost respect - but they do not automatically accept it.

Let's see how this will help us understand the interpretations advanced by Rashbam and Ramban, as they relate to the topics discussed by Rashi. Afterward, we will discuss Ibn Ezra, Chizkuni and Seforno.

RASHBAM

Rashbam, clearly bothered by all of the questions that we raised above, approaches all of them from a very different angle. His first consideration is the juxtaposition of these laws to the laws of Tmidim u'Musafim that were found at the end of Parshat Pinchas.

In essence, Rashbam considers this section of laws concerning "nedarim" as a direct continuation of the laws that concluded Parshat Pinchas; and hence, we no longer have a strangely worded introductory pasuk, since it isn't introductory! Carefully follow how he presents his key points:

"I was asked a question in the city of Loshdon, Aniyob (somewhere in France): 'According to pshat - where else do find such a parshiya that begins in this manner, [where Moshe commands mitzvot] but does not begin with VA'YDABER HASHEM EL MOSHE... [informing us first that God told these laws to Moshe]?' -

and this was my [Rashbam's] answer:

Above [at the end of Parshat Pinchas/ 29:39] it states:

"These [korbanot] you shall bring on your holidays in ADDITION to your VOWS [nedarim & nedavot...]"

[This paus teaches us that] you must offer all of your voluntary korbanot [that you had taken upon yourself by a **vow**] during one of the three pilgrimage holidays - in order that you do not transgress the commandment of 'keeping a promise on time' ["baal t'acher"/ see Mesechet Rosh Ha'shana 4a.]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAMBAN

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

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

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

Ramban brings a parallel example from SHCHUTEI CHUTZ (see Vayikra 17:1-2), clearly in reaction to Rashi's pirush (which he will soon argue with), even though he doesn't quote Rashi directly! [Ramban expects that the reader of his commentary is already familiar with Rashi, as he himself was!]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IBN EZRA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHIZKUNI

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

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

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

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

SEFORNO

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

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

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

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

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

NEXT TIME

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem