

## Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 9 #44, July 29, 2022; 1 Av 5782; Matot Masei 5782; Rosh Hodesh Friday 1 Av  
Note: The Nine Days started Thursday evening, July 28

**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.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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Sefer Bemidbar opens with great hope, but a series of sins among the generation of the Exodus (starting with chapter 11) eventually leads to all the adults of that generation (except Caleb and Yehoshua) being doomed to die in the Midbar. The generation that follows Yehoshua and conquers the land is the children of the veterans of the Exodus.

The final story in Sefer Bemidbar concerns part two of the saga of the daughters of Zelophehad. Unlike so many members of the generation of the Exodus, those who would ask to return to "wonderful" Egypt whenever facing an emergency, the daughters request the portion in the land that would have gone to their father (27:1-11 and chapter 36). In the merit of these daughters, who so long for a share of the land that Hashem had promised to our ancestors, God reveals a mitzvah that when there is no son to inherit from a deceased man, his daughters would inherit instead so the holdings of the ancestor would remain intact after each Yovel year.

In agreeing that Reuven and Gad could inherit in "Israel Heights" (east of the Jordan River), Moshe adds half the tribe of Manasseh to that territory (formerly Moab). By following various threads in the Torah (26:29-34; 27:1-11; 32:39-40), we find that it is specifically the daughters of Zelophehad who inherit their portion in "Israel Heights," next to Reuven and Gad.

Rabbi David Fohrman ties the saga of Reuven, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh to earlier Jewish history. Generations earlier, when Yosef comes to check on his brothers, they abandon him in the Midbar and leave Yaakov to believe that he is dead. The brothers who decide to abandon Yosef are sons of Leah. Yosef is the older son of Rachel, and his brother Benyamin is not part of the plot, because he stays home with their father. (The daughters of Leah and Rachel's handmaids have a lower status in the family, and they are not part of the decision making.) When the Viceroy of Egypt (Yosef in disguise) insists that the brothers bring Benyamin if they want to purchase any more grain, Yehuda (a son of Leah) takes responsibility for Benyamin and offers himself as slave in place of the youngest brother. This incident is the beginning of the tikkun between the Leah and Rachel sides of B'Nai Yisrael. Moshe still fears that leaving two tribes from Leah alone east of the Jordan River will separate the tribes. He therefore wants part of one of the tribes from the Rachel side to be a bridge across the river, tying the tribes on the west and east sides together. The daughters of Zelophehad, who show the strongest love for the land and connection to God's promises to B'Nai Yisrael, make an obvious choice to be the bridge between Leah and Rachel, and among the tribes on the two sides of the Jordan River.

We always read Matot and Masei during the three weeks and typically during the nine days. The final stories in Bemidbar, Moshe's negotiations with Reuven and Gad over promises to permit them to settle east of the Jordan, and the saga of the daughters of Zelophehad, recall struggles to find unity among the various tribes. As we approach Tisha B'Av, we recall that sinat chinam, senseless strife and hatred, led to the destruction of the Second Temple. Rav Kook (see below) claims that we can only rebuild ourselves and our world through ahavat chinam – baseless love. Tikkun olam requires special efforts to improve our world.

We have a very long way to go to redeem the world. Anti-Semitism becomes worse all the time – at universities, among many political leaders, and with thugs going after Jews in many locations both in our country and many other parts of the world. Self hating Jews continue to support political movements that target Jews as immoral and dangerous. Should ADL

really worry about a football coach who goes to the ground for a private prayer after his team wins a football game? If so, will ADL next attack government offices that permit a Jewish minyan to daven mincha during the employees' lunch break? Does voluntary prayer in a public place really harm or threaten anyone? How far a step is it from objecting to voluntary prayer to attacking Israel as the source of all evil in the world?

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved to find hidden connections in the parsha (such as discovering that the half tribe of Manasseh with its portion next to Reuven and Gad was specifically the daughters of Zelophehad). He would have spoken out loudly about anti-Semitism in our universities and neighborhoods and suggested that ADL should have higher priorities than opposing voluntary prayer after football games or during lunch time in government offices. May we follow the example of the daughters of Zelophehad rather than the examples of those whose priorities seem to be backward. In doing so, may we do our small part to improve the world. Shabbat Shalom.

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**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](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

**Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers.** Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Hannah & Alan

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### **Dvar Torah: Matos Masei: What to Make of My Summer Break?!**

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2007

*"These are the journeys of the Children of Israel that went out of the Land of Egypt according to their legions under the hand of Moshe and Aaron." (Bamidbar 33:1)*

*There are the journeys of: Why are these journeys recorded? This is to make known the kindnesses of the Omnipresent... (Rashi)*

And they journeyed from Chashmonah and they camped in Mesorot. They journeyed from Mesorot and they camped in Yakan. (Bamidbar 33:30-31)

And He said to Avram, "Know with certainty that your offspring shall be aliens in a land, not their own-and they shall serve them and they will oppress them four hundred years. But also the nation that they will serve, I shall judge, and afterwards they will leave with great wealth." (Breishis 15:13-14)

What is the implied kindness of traveling from place to place? Why does the Chumash tell where they traveled from each time? Of course they traveled from the same place they last traveled to. Why is the record of the travel related to having left Egypt?

More than 25 years ago, when I was still a youngish Yeshiva student, we took a long journey from New York to Florida, where we set up shop learning Torah in North Miami Beach for a week. For the long trip home, we had four cars that traveled loosely together. We arranged to meet in Savannah, Georgia where we were all generously treated to a big Sunday brunch.

At that meal, one of the senior students spoke up and delivered a most fascinating Dvar Torah. He spoke about the mystical notion that as we travel from one place to another learning, praying and doing acts of kindness, we are like a

magnet attracting and elevating hidden sparks of holiness that have been embedded in this dark and lowly realm of existence.

We may have little real idea of the impact of our deeds at the time, but there are many sublime sparks that wait anxiously for some righteous individual or group to release them from the imprisonment of those husks that bind. It was certainly an interesting thesis, and I'm sure I was not the only one who didn't understand completely what he was talking about at the time.

We made our after- blessings and got back on the road. We met at an agreed upon exit along the way to pray the afternoon service and then set our sights on the next meeting place where we would convene for the evening prayer service. All four cars in our caravan came together that evening within a few minutes of each other. We found a large empty parking lot where under a concrete canopy we congregated briefly to pray. On the far side of the parking, an ice cream shop was open, and a small cluster of people and cars were gathered, but we had no near contact with anyone there in that Virginia shopping mall before getting back on our long and merry way home.

We arrived early in the morning, and later that exhausted day, it was discovered that a phone call was made to the Yeshiva outreach division and a message was left inquiring about Torah classes, and believe it, or not this call had come from, of all places on the planet, that small off the beaten path Virginia town where our modest group had stopped to pray just the night before.

To every place the Children of Israel traveled they brought an ever increasing treasure of holy sparks collected from the time of leaving Egypt. What's the ultimate value of all those gathered sparks? Writes the Ohaiv Yisroel, "When G-d sees portions of good and holiness are rescued from the hand of oppressors He has the greatest possible delight... These sparks rise from the deepest pit and are elevated to form a crown for G-d." All this makes we wonder, "What to make of my summer break?!"

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5767-matos/>

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## **The Long Journey --Thoughts for Matot-Masei**

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The Israelites, in meticulously reviewing their past travels, were also anticipating their entry into the Promised Land.** [emphasis added]

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.

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

<https://www.jewishideas.org/long-journey-thoughts-matot-masei>

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## **Jeremiah and the False Prophets**

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

Jeremiah began his prophetic career in 627 BCE, and gained national notoriety when he first prophesied the destruction of the Temple during the wicked King Jehoiakim's reign in 609 BCE. He warned that if the Judeans would not improve their religious behavior, the destruction of the Temple and exile would follow. Unwilling to listen, the wicked king, the nobility, and the priesthood persecuted Jeremiah and attempted to have him executed.

After the traumatic exile of Jehoiachin (Jehoiakim's son) and 10,000 other leading Judeans twelve years later, there was widespread concern. Suddenly, Jeremiah's bleak prophecies appeared to be materializing. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia was rapidly conquering the world, and the tiny nation of Judah was extremely vulnerable. However, a group of false prophets arose in Judah who predicted a miraculous downfall of Babylonia followed by the return of Jehoiachin and the other exiles.

On the political front, Egypt fanned the flames of revolt against Babylonia. This led King Zedekiah to host an international summit in 593 BCE to discuss the formation of an anti-Babylonian coalition. The religious and political establishments opposed Jeremiah's message of submission.

Jeremiah appeared at Zedekiah's summit wearing a yoke, symbolizing that all the nations should submit to the yoke of Babylonia:

*Thus said the Lord to me: Make for yourself thongs and bars of a yoke, and put them on your neck. And send them to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the Ammonites, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon, by envoys who have come to King Zedekiah of Judah in Jerusalem...The nation or kingdom that does not serve him — King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon*

— and does not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will visit — declares the Lord — with sword, famine, and pestilence, until I have destroyed it by his hands. As for you, give no heed to your prophets, augurs, dreamers, diviners, and sorcerers, who say to you, “Do not serve the king of Babylon.” For they prophesy falsely to you — with the result that you shall be banished from your land; I will drive you out and you shall perish. But the nation that puts its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serves him, will be left by Me on its own soil — declares the Lord — to till it and dwell on it )Jeremiah 27:2-11(.

After Jeremiah's dramatic presentation, the false prophet Hananiah son of Azzur publicly confronted Jeremiah, breaking his yoke and announcing that Babylonia would fall in two years )Jeremiah chapter 28(. Of course, we are privy to the course of history. Jeremiah was indeed the true prophet, and Hananiah was false.

However, in the real time of the story, one must ask: How were the people — even the most sincerely religious ones — to distinguish between true and false prophets? This question was not merely a matter of academic interest. Jeremiah's forecast of seventy years of Babylonian rule )Jeremiah 25:10-11; 29:10( came with political ramifications: remain faithful to Babylonia or they will destroy the country. By predicting the miraculous demise of Babylonia, the false prophets supported revolt against Babylonia. These debates were a matter of national policy and survival.

Some false prophets were easier to detect than others. Their flagrant disregard for the Torah discredited them as true prophets — at least for God-fearing individuals who were confused as to whom they should follow. However, Hananiah son of Azzur and Shemaiah the Nehelamite )Jeremiah 29:24-32( both sounded righteous. Neither preached idolatry or laxity in Torah observance, and both spoke in the name of God. After each prophet made his case, Jeremiah “went on his way” )Jeremiah 28:11(. There was no way for the people to know who was right, and therefore the nation would have to wait to see whose prediction would be fulfilled. Waiting, however, was not a helpful option. The false prophets were calling for revolt now, and Jeremiah was calling for loyalty to Babylonia now.

Elsewhere, Jeremiah bemoaned the mockery he endured for the non-fulfillment of his own predictions: “See, they say to me: ‘Where is the prediction of the Lord? Let it come to pass!’” )Jeremiah 17:15(. Although Jeremiah ultimately was vindicated by the destruction, the prediction test of prophetic veracity was difficult to apply.

To address these difficulties, Jeremiah presented alternative criteria by which to ascertain false prophets. He staked his argument in the Torah's assertion that a wonder worker who preaches idolatry is a false prophet regardless of successful predictions or signs:

*As for that prophet or dream-diviner, he shall be put to death; for he urged disloyalty to the Lord your God )ki dibber sarah al A-donai Elohekhem( — who freed you from the land of Egypt and who redeemed you from the house of bondage — to make you stray from the path that the Lord your God commanded you to follow. Thus you will sweep out evil from your midst )Deuteronomy 13:6(.*

Strikingly, Jeremiah extended the Torah's example of idolatry to include anyone who did not actively promote repentance. Since the false prophets predicted the unconditional downfall of Babylonia irrespective of any repentance on Israel's part, they must be fraudulent:

*In the prophets of Samaria I saw a repulsive thing )tiflah(: They prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray. But what I see in the prophets of Jerusalem is something horrifying )sha'ururah(: adultery and false dealing. They encourage evildoers, so that no one turns back from his wickedness. To Me they are all like Sodom, and ]all[ its inhabitants like Gomorrah )Jeremiah 23:13-14(.*

More subtly, the Torah uses the expression, “for he urged disloyalty to the Lord your God” )ki dibber sarah al A-donai Elohekhem(. This phraseology is used to refer to specific prophets only twice in Tanakh — when Jeremiah censured Hananiah and Shemaiah, the two false prophets who appeared the most righteous:

*Assuredly, thus said the Lord: I am going to banish you from off the earth. This year you shall die, for you have urged disloyalty to the Lord )ki sarah dibbarta el A-donai( )Jeremiah 28:16(.*

*Assuredly, thus said the Lord: I am going to punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his offspring. There shall be no man of his line dwelling among this people or seeing the good things I am going to do for My people — declares the Lord — for he has urged disloyalty toward the Lord )ki sarah dibber al A-donai( )Jeremiah 29:32(.*

Thus Jeremiah singled out the most undetectable false prophets so that those who genuinely wanted to follow God's word would understand that they were as good as idolaters as they led the nation away from God by predicting unconditional salvation for undeserving people.

Hananiah and Shemaiah may have been sincere dreamers who loved Israel. However, they were not driven to improve their society, and therefore necessarily were false prophets. In the end, their feel-good predictions contributed directly to the nation's doom. King Zedekiah eventually capitulated to his nobles' demands and revolted against the Babylonians, bringing about the destruction of the Temple and exile of the nation. During the final siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah scolded Zedekiah for having ignored his counsel:

*And Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What wrong have I done to you, to your courtiers, and to this people, that you have put me in jail? And where are those prophets of yours who prophesied to you that the king of Babylon would never move against you and against this land?" )Jeremiah 37:18-19(.*

Though some false prophets may have been sincere, there possibly also was some deficiency in that sincerity. While condemning false prophets, Jeremiah urged the Jews not to listen to them:

*For thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Let not the prophets and diviners in your midst deceive you, and pay no heed to the dreams they ]Heb. "you"[ dream )ve-al tishme'u el halomotekhem asher attem mahlemim( )Jeremiah 29:8(.*

The expression at the end of the verse is difficult to interpret, as is evidenced in the NJPS translation above. Radak submits the following:

*Mahlemim: this means that they cause them to dream ... i.e., you ]the people[ cause ]the false prophets[ to dream, for if you did not listen to their dreams, they would not dream these things )Radak on Jeremiah 29:8(.*

Following Radak's interpretation, Jeremiah's critique of the false prophets includes an accusation of their being at least partially driven by a desire to please the people. A vicious cycle was created between the false prophets, the political leadership, and the masses. In contrast, Jeremiah was committed to God's word no matter how unpopular that made him.

Tragically, the Judeans failed to listen to Jeremiah, did not improve their religious behavior, and rebelled against Babylonia. Although he failed during his lifetime, Jeremiah's staggering prophetic integrity, pitted against every echelon of society, remains immortalized in Tanakh as a shining model of standing against immorality and tyranny.

\* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/jeremiah-and-false-prophets> Unfortunately, parentheses did not convert properly when going across software for this article. Hopefully this shortcoming does not affect your appreciation for this fine Dvar.

## Ahab and His Yes Men

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

In the 9th century BCE, the wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel began a reign of terror in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. They made the worship of Baal into the official religion of Israel. Although people worshipped God also, they constantly wavered between God and Baal. Jezebel massacred the prophets of God and others who spoke up for the truth.

King Ahab struck an alliance with the righteous King Jehoshaphat of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Ahab's daughter Athaliah married Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram. Although the alliance united the two kingdoms on the political level, it caused terrible religious and physical harm to the Southern Kingdom.

The fiery Elijah served as the primary prophet who courageously opposed the wicked regime of Ahab and Jezebel. In one of the Ahab narratives 1 Kings chapter 22, a lesser-known prophet named Micaiah shines by maintaining his integrity against a powerful and corrupt establishment.

Following a three-year lull in an ongoing conflict between Israel and Aram, Ahab decides to attempt to regain control of Ramoth-gilead, which Aram had captured in earlier battles. Ahab invites his ally, King Jehoshaphat, to join him: "And [Ahab] said to Jehoshaphat, 'Will you come with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?' Jehoshaphat answered the king of Israel, 'I will do what you do; my troops shall be your troops, my horses shall be your horses'" 22:4.

However, the righteous Jehoshaphat insists that they first consult the prophets to obtain the word of God: "But Jehoshaphat said further to the king of Israel, 'Please, first inquire of the Lord'" 22:5. Ahab had some 400 prophets at the ready, and they offered a unified positive response to go to war: "So the king of Israel gathered the prophets, about four hundred men, and asked them, 'Shall I march upon Ramoth-gilead for battle, or shall I not?' 'March,' they said, 'and the Lord will deliver [it] into Your Majesty's hands'" 22:6.

With such a unanimous prophetic response, one might have expected Jehoshaphat to enter the war without further hesitation. However, the prophetic response somehow convinced Jehoshaphat that something was wrong: "Then Jehoshaphat asked, 'Isn't there another prophet of the Lord here through whom we can inquire?'" 22:7.

What signaled the need for a second opinion? The 400 prophets spoke in God's Name! Radak and Abarbanel consider this narrative in light of the overall Ahab narrative. Ahab and Jezebel supported Baal worship, and therefore these prophets must have been prophets of Baal. These idolaters tried to deceive Jehoshaphat by using God's Name, but the righteous king saw through their evil ruse. Although reasonable, this interpretation goes beyond the local text and requires interpretation from the global narrative.

It appears that the most likely approach requires a different way of thinking. Like the prophets of many ancient Near Eastern pagan nations, these 400 men were court prophets, on the king's payroll. Receiving large salary packages and great royal honor, they understood that they must always support the king's wishes. In this instance, Ahab clearly desired to go to war. Therefore, the 400 prophets repackaged the king's intent into prophetic words. Any other message would have resulted in their getting fired, or worse.

Jehoshaphat understood that these 400 "prophets" were like pagan prophets, under their king's thumb. True prophets of Israel served God alone. They regularly confronted kings and other powerful figures when they strayed from God's ways. Therefore, Jehoshaphat demanded a true prophet, one who would honestly reflect God's will.

There was indeed another prophet, Micaiah son of Imlah, available for consultation. The wicked Ahab despised him, and did all he could to cancel Micaiah and silence him.

First, Ahab expressed displeasure at the mere need to invite him: "And the king of Israel answered Jehoshaphat, 'There is one more man through whom we can inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, because he never prophesies anything good for me, but only misfortune — Micaiah son of Imlah.' But King Jehoshaphat said, 'Don't say that, Your Majesty'" 22:8.

When that strategy failed, Ahab let his henchmen intimidate the true prophet: "The messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him: 'Look, the words of the prophets are with one accord favorable to the king. Let your word be like that of the rest of them; speak a favorable word'" 22:13. Of course, the true prophet refused to kowtow to this pressure: "As the Lord lives," Micaiah answered, "I will speak only what the Lord tells me" 22:14.

When he arrives at the palace, Micaiah sarcastically mimics the false prophets. Irritated by the sarcasm, Ahab demands that Micaiah state God's true prophetic message: "When he came before the king, the king said to him, 'Micaiah, shall we march upon Ramoth-gilead for battle, or shall we not?' He answered him, 'March and triumph! The Lord will deliver [it] into Your Majesty's hands.' The king said to him, 'How many times must I adjure you to tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the Lord?'" 22:15-16.

Micaiah then replies with the true prophecy, suggesting that Ahab will perish if he goes to war against Aram: "Then he said, 'I saw all Israel scattered over the hills like sheep without a shepherd; and the Lord said, "These have no master; let everyone return to his home in safety'"") 22:17.

After dismissing the 400 prophets as false prophets who mislead Ahab, the prophets attempt to intimidate Micaiah: "Thereupon Zedekiah son of Chenaanah stepped up and struck Micaiah on the cheek, and demanded, 'Which way did the spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak with you?'" 22:24(. Micaiah stood his ground despite the insult and the overwhelming numerical superiority of the opposition.

Ahab had hoped his yes-men would convince Jehoshaphat. He attempted to discourage Jehoshaphat from inviting Micaiah. His emissary pressured Micaiah to join the 400 court prophets. Zedekiah struck Micaiah, attempting to intimidate the prophet. All of these strategies failed.

Unable to escape the truth of Micaiah's prophecy, Ahab therefore ordered that the prophet be imprisoned: "Then the king of Israel said... 'Put this fellow in prison, and let his fare be scant bread and scant water until I come home safe'" 22:26-27(.

The process of cancelling Micaiah was complete. Ahab followed his initial decision and went to war, and met his fate on the battlefield as prophesied by Micaiah. What happened to the imprisoned prophet? We never find out. Perhaps he was released after Ahab's death, perhaps he was forgotten and died in prison.

In addition to the tragic conclusions to the story, it is worth focusing on King Jehoshaphat's role. He initially demanded a true, God-fearing prophet to convey God's word. He knew Ahab's 400 court prophets were fraudulent. He witnessed Ahab's shameless intimidation of Micaiah. He heard Micaiah's prophetic words. And despite all that, Jehoshaphat joined Ahab in war, almost losing his own life (see the rest of the chapter). He was a king and a powerful ally, and certainly could have opposed Ahab with greater force. However, Jehoshaphat demonstrates that he no longer has the strength to stand by God's prophet against Ahab and his powerful establishment.

Ahab thus developed a self-serving and well-financed system of court prophets; he intimidated, silenced, and cancelled true prophets; and he kept righteous voices like those of Jehoshaphat adequately silent so that he could achieve whatever he wanted. If Jehoshaphat had shown more resolve, perhaps the story could have turned out differently.

\* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/ahab-and-his-yes-men>

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### **Parshas Maasei -- This is not normal...**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \* © 2014

Ask a group of Jews, "What is your most meaningful day on the Jewish calendar?" and you are bound to get a variety of answers. Some will say "Yom Kippur." After all it is the holiest day of the year. Others will say "Pesach." That's when we got started as a people. But for me, Tisha B'Av is most meaningful. Let me tell you why.

Tisha B'Av commemorates a fallout in the relationship between Hashem and His people. Until then, the Beis Hamikdash stood. The Beis Hamikdash was the love palace between the Jews and Hashem. It represented a closeness in relationship; it was where a Jew went to pray for special things. Eventually the relationship deteriorated, and the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. But even after it was destroyed, we still focus on it, because we were promised that one day it would be restored to us.

Jewish scripture, and the commentaries which follow, refer to the fallout which we commemorate on Tisha B'Av in ways that make it clear that this is a temporary fallout. In Eicha we find Yerusholayim described as a Niddah, one who is temporarily distanced from intimacy. Likewise we find the expression of Agunah is applied, as we anxiously wait for our Beloved to reconcile with us. We are still attached; we know that one day we will again be one.

During the long exile in which we are in, we sometimes forget the noble relationship that will one day be restored. Instead we focus on the struggle of daily living challenges, and sometimes we forget the big historical picture. The commentaries

describe this condition like a prince who was banished from the palace and therefore did the best he could to acclimate himself to the local conditions of the town in which he now lived. One day his father, the king, received a letter from the prince asking him to provide money for shoes, as his shoes were worn out. The king read the letter and wept. "Look how far my son has fallen," he cried, "He is asking me, his father, the king, for a pair of shoes. Doesn't he realize that instead of asking for one thing or two, he can ask to be restored to the palace, and I will provide for all his needs." That is the power of Tisha B'Av. A meaningful Tisha B'Av is to realize that we are living in exile, and that is not normal. Tisha B'Av is a time that we can contemplate restoration, instead of just trying to solve one issue or another.

I once read a story of a Rabbi who found that he was blessed with unusual perception into people and their needs. In an effort to help people he allocated specific times in which he would be available to talk with people and provide advice. One week he was visited by a man who was recently divorced and described the difficult life that he now had. Later in the week he was visited by a woman who described her very difficult situation as a recently divorced woman. From her description of the details it became clear to the Rabbi that she must have been the former wife of the man who came to him earlier in the week.

The Rabbi made a request, that the man and the woman come together to speak with him. When they were seated before him he said, "I guess by now you realize that you both came separately to me for advice on dealing with your difficult situation. You are both mourning the broken relationship, and you are both wondering how to properly care for the children. I do not know the reasons that you divorced, but you both strike me as very good and sincere people. I suggest that you try... that you try to get beyond whatever it is that broke you up... that you consider rebuilding your relationship... reconciliation... and that you get married to one another again."

The Rebbe of Koznitz writes that this time period preceding Tisha B'Av is one of the easiest times to approach and connect with Hashem. Usually Hashem is in his "palace," and you need a special appointment to get access to the inner chambers. )That is the gift described on Yom Kippur, when we are allowed a closer relationship, until Neilah, when the gates are closed.( During the season of Tisha B'Av Hashem wanders outside His "palace" lamenting the loss of the relationship that He once had with us, and wishing that He could rebuild the Beis Hamikdash. It is a time when He craves someone who will facilitate reconciliation. It is a time that He hopes we will realize that the lives we live, and the challenges we face, are not normal.

No, it is not normal that the Jewish people have to justify defending themselves.

No, it is not normal that countries who claim to be civilized should be troubled for days that rockets fall on the Land of Israel and Jews aren't getting killed. "It is unfair," they claim, as if the war with Hamas is a basketball game, of which they – from the comfort of their homes -- are keeping score of the dead.

No, it is not normal that Israel should be asked to be more tolerant as they need to demolish tunnels, destroy rocket launchers, and kill terrorist fighters in a region that was created with promises of peace. Perhaps some diplomats would like to take a shower in Sderot, a city where children are afraid to go into a shower, because they know that when rockets are fired at them, they will have only seconds of warning to scurry into the safety of the bomb shelters.

So we do our best under the circumstances. We observe "ordinary people" emerge as heroes through acts of courage and bravery. We watch righteous people throughout the world recognize that supporting Israel is about supporting good against evil, and that terrorist fighters who dress as civilians aren't as innocent as they look.

It is said that Napoleon was once walking outside on Tish B'Av night and witnessed the Jews sitting on the floor in mourning. In wonderment he asked his aide, "What's that?" His aide explained that the Jews were mourning the anniversary of the day the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed some 1700 years ago. Napoleon is said to have replied, "A people that mourns its past has a future."

We don't need Napoleon to set us straight, but his comment is truer than he realized. The world we live in is not normal. We mourn for and pray for a time of peace and prosperity. We yearn for a time when the convoluted Hamas aberration of glorifying death and tragedy will be silenced. We yearn for a time when our relationship with Hashem will be restored, and we will experience peace and closeness with Him. Yes, to me the Tisha B'Av season is very comforting. It reminds me that this is not normal.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 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](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

<http://www.teach613.org/parshas-maasei-this-is-not-normal/> 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.

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## **Haftoras Mas'ei - Is Punishment Really Bad?**

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer \* © 2020

Although the Haftorah usually relates to the weekly Torah reading, during the Three Weeks of Mourning we read Haftorah 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 Haftorah 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 Haftorah, 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 Haftorah.) G-d prefacing 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 believes 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?

\* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Am HaTorah moved recently. The new address is 5909 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD.

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## Parshat Pinchas

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*\*

[Rabbi Ovadia did not submit a Dvar Torah for this week. Watch this space for his future teachings.]

\*\* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's original in Sefaria.

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## Trips and Tribulations

By Rabbi Yonah Berman \*

Masei, the second of our two parshiot this week, starts off "These are the journeys of the Israelites, who had left Egypt in organized groups under the leadership of Moshe and Aharon" (Num. 33:1).

Abarbanel, a 15th and 16th Century Portuguese/Italian commentator, looks at this list and notices that some of the names don't appear in any other places in the Torah. How can these be the places where the children of Israel traveled from and to, if they were never mentioned beforehand, as the Torah recorded their earlier travels? He explains that Bnei Yisrael gave new names to specific locations based on the experiences that they had had there. If something profound happened to the Jewish people in a specific place, they would name that event and record it in our history with a moniker that would help them – and us – understand the significance of that event for future generations.

This past Tuesday was the 27th of Tammuz, the twelfth anniversary of the yahrzeit of Rav Yehuda Amital. Rav Amital was born in Hungary and spent World War Two in Nazi force-labor camps. He made Aliyah as the sole survivor of his immediate family and rebuilt his life, becoming a rabbi and master Jewish educator (and even a member of the Israeli government), founding Yeshivat Har Etzion, an institution which has had a profound effect on the fabric of Israeli society.

Rav Amital was someone who had gone through so many Masa'ot – so many journeys including so many difficulties in his early life, and so many challenges as a founder of the Hesder Yeshiva movement and as a fighter for his brand of religious Zionism. He would always remember the Torah that he learned as a child in his town in Hungary as well as his experiences in the Shoah and during Israel's War of Independence. He described those experiences firsthand to myself and so many others that appreciated his Torah, his love for humanity, and the way that he allowed everyone to feel a sense of connection to our tradition.

Rav Amital often described himself as a Yehudi pashut, a simple Jew. We all knew that he was a tremendous talmid chacham, a scholar, but he was also someone who was able to connect on a very human level to every single person in a very hasidic way.

As we read our parsha this week, let us consider the journeys of Am Yisrael as models for our own experiences. How do we experience God and humanity in the places we find ourselves this summer? What do we take from these experiences as we go about our lives?

Feeling a sense of connection to HaShem, feeling a sense of connection to Jewish community, and deepening our appreciation of this wonderful world that we live in. This is the legacy of being Jews who, like our ancestors, continue to feel God's presence in our lives' journeys and experiences, wherever we may find ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom.

\* Mashgiach, Director of Alumni Engagement and Chair of Professional Rabbinics, YCT Rabbinical School, Riverdale, NY.

## Matot - Masei

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\* © 2021

Rabbi Rube is extra busy with special programming for the Three Weeks. He hopes to resume his Devrei Torah soon.

\* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. The walls of a large residential building in Surfside, FL collapsed on June 24, 2021.

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## Rav Kook Torah

### Three Weeks: Rebuilding the World with Love

#### Rectifying Baseless Hatred

Why was the Second Temple destroyed? The Sages in Yoma 9b noted that the people at that time studied Torah, observed mitzvot and performed good deeds. Their great failure was in sinat chinam - baseless hatred. It was internal strife and conflict that ultimately brought about the Temple's destruction.

How may we rectify this sin of sinat chinam? Rav Kook wrote, in one of his most oft-quoted statements:

*"If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — ahavat chinam. (Orot HaKodesh vol. III, p. 324)*

This call for baseless love could be interpreted as following Maimonides' advice on how to correct bad character traits. In the fourth chapter of Shemonah Perakim, Maimonides taught that negative traits are corrected by temporarily overcompensating and practicing the opposite extreme. For example, one who is naturally stingy should balance this trait by acting overly generous, until he succeeds in uprooting his miserliness. Similarly, by going to the extreme of ahavat chinam, we repair the trait of sinat chinam.

This interpretation, however, is not Rav Kook's line of thought. Ahavat chinam is not a temporary remedy, but an ideal, the result of our perception of the world's underlying unity and goodness.

#### The Source of Hatred

Why do we hate others? We may think of many reasons why, but these explanations are not the real source for our hatred of other people. They are merely signs and indications of our hatred. It is a lack of clarity of thought that misleads us into believing that these are the true causes of hatred.

The true source of hate comes from our *otzar hachaim*, our inner resource of life. This fundamental life-force pushes us to live and thrive, and opposes all that it views as different and threatening. Ultimately, our hate is rooted in sinat chinam -- groundless and irrational animosity, just because something is different.

Yet even in hatred lies a hidden measure of love. Baseless love and baseless hatred share a common source, a love of life and the world. This common source hates that which is evil and destructive, and loves that which is good and productive.

How can we overcome our hatred? If we can uncover the depth of good in what we perceive as negative, we will be able to see how good will result even from actions and ideas that we oppose. We will then recognize that our reasons for hatred are unfounded, and transform our hatred into love and appreciation.

**"I Burn with Love!"**

This idea of ahavat chinam was not just a theoretical concept. Rav Kook was well-known for his profound love for all Jews, even those far removed from Torah and mitzvot. When questioned why he loved Jews distant from the ideals of Torah, he would respond,

*“Better I should err on the side of baseless love, than I should err on the side of baseless hatred.”*

Stories abound of Rav Kook's extraordinary love for other Jews, even those intensely antagonistic to his ways and beliefs. Once Rav Kook was publicly humiliated by a group of extremists who showered him with waste water in the streets of Jerusalem. The entire city was in an uproar over this scandalous act. The legal counsel of the British Mandate advised Rav Kook to press charges against the hooligans, promising that they would be promptly deported from the country. The legal counsel, however, was astounded by the Chief Rabbi's response.

*“I have no interest in court cases. Despite what they did to me, I love them. I am ready to kiss them, so great is my love! I burn with love for every Jew.”*

### **Practical Steps towards Ahavat Chinam**

In his magnum opus *Orot HaKodesh*, Rav Kook gave practical advice on how to achieve this love.

Love for the Jewish people does not start from the heart, but from the head. To truly love and understand the Jewish people - each individual Jew and the nation as a whole — requires a wisdom that is both insightful and multifaceted. This intellectual inquiry is an important discipline of Torah study.

Loving others does not mean indifference to baseness and moral decline. Our goal is to awaken knowledge and morality, integrity, and refinement; to clearly mark the purpose of life, its purity and holiness. Even our acts of loving-kindness should be based on a hidden Gevurah, an inner outrage at the world's — and thus our own — spiritual failures. If we take note of others' positive traits, we will come to love them with an inner affection. This is not a form of insincere flattery, nor does it mean white-washing their faults and foibles. But by concentrating on their positive characteristics — and every person has a good side — the negative aspects become less significant. This method provides an additional benefit. The Sages cautioned against joining with the wicked and exposing oneself to their negative influence. But if we connect to their positive traits, then this contact will not endanger our own moral and spiritual purity.

We can attain a high level of love for Israel by deepening our awareness of the inner ties that bind together all the souls of the Jewish people, throughout all the generations. In the following revealing passage, Rav Kook expressed his own profound sense of connection with and love for every Jewish soul:

*“Listen to me, my people! I speak to you from my soul, from within my innermost soul. I call out to you from the living connection by which I am bound to all of you, and by which all of you are bound to me. I feel this more deeply than any other feeling: that only you — all of you, all of your souls, throughout all of your generations — you alone are the meaning of my life. In you I live. In the aggregation of all of you, my life has that content that is called ‘life.’ Without you, I have nothing. All hopes, all aspirations, all purpose in life, all that I find inside myself — these are only when I am with you. I need to connect with all of your souls. I must love you with a boundless love....”*

*“Each one of you, each individual soul from the aggregation of all of you, is a great spark from the torch of infinite light, which enlightens my existence. You give meaning to life and work, to Torah and prayer, to song and hope. It is through the conduit of your being that I sense everything and love everything.”* (Shemonah Kevatzim, vol. I, sec. 163)

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh* vol. III, pp. 324-334; *Malachim K'vnei Adam*, pp. 262, 483-485.)

<https://www.ravkooktorah.org/TISHA-AV-70.htm>

## My Teacher: In Memoriam: Matot Masei (5780)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He was a master posek, as those who have read his Responsa will know. He knew the entire rabbinic literature, Bavli, Yerushalmi, Midrash Halachah and Aggadah, biblical commentaries, philosophy, codes and responsa. His creativity, halachic and aggadic, knew no bounds. He was a master of almost every secular discipline, especially the sciences. He had been a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Toronto and had written a book about probability and statistical inference. His supreme passion was the Rambam in all his guises, particularly the Mishneh Torah, to which he devoted some fifty years of his life to writing the multi-volume commentary Yad Peshutah.

By the time I came to study with the Rav, I had already studied at Cambridge and Oxford with some of the greatest intellects of the time, among them Sir Roger Scruton and Sir Bernard Williams. Rabbi Rabinovitch was more demanding than either of them. Only when I became his student did I learn the true meaning of intellectual rigour, shetihyu amelim ba-Torah, "labouring" in the Torah. To survive his scrutiny, you had to do three things: first to read everything ever written on the subject; second to analyse it with complete lucidity, searching for *omek ha-peshat*, the deep plain sense; and third, to think independently and critically. I remember writing an essay for him in which I quoted one of the most famous of nineteenth century Talmudic scholars. He read what I had written, then turned to me and said, "But you didn't criticise what he wrote!" He thought that in this case the scholar had not given the correct interpretation, and I should have seen and said this. For him, intellectual honesty and independence of mind were inseparable from the quest for truth which is what Talmud Torah must always be.

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

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

He and the late Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l were the Gedolei ha-Dor, the leaders and role models of their generation. They were very different, one scientific, the other artistic, one direct, the other oblique, one bold, the other cautious, but they were giants, intellectually, morally and spiritually. Happy the generation that is blessed by people like these. It is hard to convey what having a teacher like Rabbi Rabinovitch meant. He knew, for example, that I had to learn fast because I was coming to the rabbinate late, after a career in academic philosophy. What he did was very bold. He explained to me that the fastest and best way of learning anything is to teach it. So the day I entered Jews' College as a student, I also entered it as a lecturer. How many people would have had that idea and taken that risk?

He also understood how lonely it could be if you lived by the principles of intellectual integrity and independence. Early on, he said to me, "Don't be surprised if only six people in the world understand what you are trying to do." When I asked him whether I should accept the position of Chief Rabbi, he said, in his laconic way: "Why not? After all, maybe you can teach some Torah."

He himself, in his early thirties, had been offered the job of Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg, but turned it down on the grounds that he refused to live in an apartheid state. He told me how he was visited in Toronto by Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz who had held the Johannesburg position until then. Looking at the Rav's modest home and thinking of his more palatial accommodation in South Africa, he said, "You turned down that for this?" But the Rav would never compromise his integrity and never cared for material things.

In the end, he found great happiness in the 37 years he served as head of Yeshivat Birkat Moshe in Maale Adumim. The yeshiva had been founded six years earlier by Rabbi Haim Sabato and Yitzhak Sheilat. It is said that when Rabbi Sabato heard the Rav give a shiur, he immediately asked him to become the Rosh Yeshiva. It is hard to describe the pride with which he spoke to me about his students, all of whom served in the Israel Defence Force. Likewise it is hard to describe the awe in which his students held him. Not everyone in the Jewish world knew his greatness, but everyone who studied with him did.

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

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

#### **FOOTNOTES:**

[1] Makkot 10a.

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

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

[4] The phrase comes from the Zohar.

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

[6] Avot 4:12.

\* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most

recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/matot/my-teacher-in-memoriam/>

## Flirting With Futility ... or Embracing the Truth?

By Yossy Goldman \* © Chabad 2022

The Jewish calendar and the Parshah 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 Jeremiah<sup>1</sup> 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? <sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>*

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

\* Founding director of the first Chabad in South Africa (1976). Since 1986, rabbi of the iconic Sydenham Shul, where he is now Life Rabbi Emeritus. He is also 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](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5585087/jewish/Flirting-With-Futility-or-Embracing-the-Truth.htm)

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### **Why We Must Win The War Against Hatred**

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky \*

#### **The War Against Hatred**

*At the conclusion of the war with Midian, the officers of the army counted the soldiers in their charge and found that miraculously, not even one was missing. The officers said to Moses, “Not one man is missing from us” Numbers 31:49*

The war against Midian was a war against baseless hatred and strife. G-d commands us to wage this war constantly, in order that hatred, discord, and spite be replaced by loving-kindness, concord, and altruism.

Besides the obvious benefits for us as individuals and as a society, G-d “benefits” from this struggle as well. As the Talmudic sage Rabbi Akiva said, brotherly love is the foundation of the entire Torah.

G-d assures us that in our ongoing war against hatred—just as was the case with the original war against Midian—we will ultimately not suffer any losses: physical, spiritual, or even financial.

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#### Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

#### Conflict Resolution

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

That is why an episode in parshat Matot is of the highest consequence. It arose like this: The Israelites were on the last stage of their journey to the Promised Land. They were now situated on the east bank of the Jordan, within sight of their destination. Two of the tribes, Reuben and Gad, who had large herds and flocks of cattle, felt that the land upon which they were now encamped was ideal for their purposes. It was good grazing country. So they approached Moses and asked for permission to stay there rather than take up their share in the land of Israel. They said: "If we have found favour in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as our possession. Do not make us cross the Jordan." (Num. 32:5)

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

Moses reminded the men of Reuben and Gad what had happened in the incident of the spies. The spies demoralised the people, ten of them saying that they could not conquer the land. The inhabitants were too strong. The cities were impregnable. The result of that one moment was to condemn an entire generation

By Sari & Russell Mayer, Avi, Atara, and Arella  
on the occasion of the 38th yahrzeit of  
Sari's grandmother, Susie Mayer, z"l,  
(Tziril bas Reb Meir) on 3 Av

to die in the wilderness and to delay the eventual conquest by forty years. "And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the Lord even more angry with Israel. If you turn away from following Him, He will again leave all this people in the wilderness, and you will be the cause of their destruction." (Num. 32:14-15) Moses was blunt, honest and confrontational.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[1] Bava Kamma 20b.

[2] Roger Fisher and William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*, Random House Business, 2011.

### Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

“This is the matter that the LORD has commanded concerning the daughters of Tzelofhad, saying: Let them be married to whom they think best... Just as the LORD commanded Moses, so did the daughters of Zelophehad” (Numbers 36:6,10).

What can we do to transmit a love of the Land of Israel to the next generation? The Book of Numbers, by concluding with the case involving the five daughters of Tzelofhad, touches on this very issue. These women – Machla, Noa, Hogla, Milca and Tirza – moved all the way up the judicial and political ladder until they stood before Moses himself.

By insisting on their rights of inheritance so that Tzelofhad would also have a portion in the future eternity of Israel through his descendants' working and living in the Land of Israel, they won the case for female rights to inheritance, causing an entire addendum to be added to the previous inheritance laws of the Torah!

Who was this man, Tzelofhad, father of such special women, and how did he instill in them such a strong love of the Land of Israel? The Talmud (Shabbat 96b-97a) records a fascinating dispute that offers insights that have far-reaching implications as it relates to transmitting a love for the Land of Israel.

According to Rabbi Akiva, “the one who gathered wood [on the Sabbath and was stoned to death as a punishment] (Numbers 15:32-36) was Tzelofhad, as it is written, ‘and the People of Israel were in the desert and they found a man gathering wood,’ and later it is written, ‘our father [regarding Tzelofhad] died in the desert’ (ibid., 27:3). Just as the second case refers to Tzelofhad, so, too, does the first.”

The Talmud provides a different interpretation in the name of Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteyra, who even takes Rabbi Akiva to task for his commentary: “Akiva, whether or not you are correct in your identification [of Tzelofhad], you will eventually be punished. If it is as you say, then if the Torah saw fit to hide [the identification], why did you reveal it? And if you are mistaken, how dare you cast aspersions on such a righteous person? Rather, from where did Tzelofhad come? From the group of brazen climbers [ma’apilim] atop the mountain [who defiantly attempted to conquer

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Israel without God in their midst and without the Holy Ark (*ibid.*, 14:40-45)].”

From the perspective of this Talmudic discussion, we can glean much about Tzelofhad. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteyra sees Tzelofhad as one of the ma’apilim, the brazen would-be conquerors of Israel, the non-religious Zionists who storm the ramparts of the Land of Canaan with neither God nor the Holy Ark of the Torah in their midst, but nevertheless with a strong love for the land and the peoplehood of Israel.

They may have failed at their attempt in the desert, but it was apparently their passionate love for the land of Zion that produced these very special five daughters, who learned their love for the land from their father, and added to it an indomitable faith in God and in the equitability of His Torah.

In contrast, why did Rabbi Akiva identify Tzelofhad with the culpable gatherer of wood, a Sabbath desecrator who was condemned to death?

I believe that Rabbi Akiva is emphasizing a crucial foundational principle of Judaism: we are both a nationality as well as a religion, with each of these critical compartments of our faith having been worthy of a Divine covenant. The Torah (Genesis 15) records the national covenant with Abraham “between the pieces” in which He guaranteed the first patriarch progeny and a homeland, and the religious revelation at Sinai, a Divine covenant with the entire nation of Israel (Exodus 19 and 24).

And even though Tzelofhad, in desecrating the Sabbath, may have “lapsed” in terms of his religious obligations, this does not detract from his status as a member of Klal Yisrael, the historic Jewish nation. “A Jew, even though he sins, remains a Jew,” teach our Talmudic sages (Sanhedrin 44a).

And remember that the daughters' claim was that “the name of their father not be diminished” (Numbers 27:4) by his inability to bequeath a portion of land in Israel because he lacked male heirs. Certainly, there were some “sages” at the time who may well have claimed to the five sisters that they were not entitled to any land, to any parcel of the Israel patrimony, if their father had been a transgressor of the law.

Perhaps Rabbi Akiva specifically identifies Tzelofhad as the culpable wood-gatherer in order to stress that even though a Jew may tragically cut himself off from the religious covenant, he still remains an inextricable member of the national covenant, the historic nation of Israel. And although his five brilliant and righteous daughters re-established a profound relationship with the Hebraic laws and traditions, they undoubtedly received much of their Zionist fervor for the land from their father! Therefore, his share in the land

was indisputable, and deserved to be bequeathed to his daughters.

### The Person in the Parsha

#### Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

##### Honesty and Integrity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As helpful as is Covey's succinct definition of "integrity," it is also deceptively simple. There

is so much more that we need to know about integrity. And about "honesty," for that matter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Dvar Torah

##### Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

##### Remaining focused on the final destination...

Is change always a good thing? At the commencement of *Parashat Massei*, we find that Hashem had asked Moshe to keep a diary, so to speak, of all the journeys of the Israelites in the wilderness. And we are told "vayichтов Moshe et motza'eihem l'masseihem al pi Hashem", 'according to the word of Hashem, Moshe wrote all of their goings out, according to their journeys', "v'eila masseihem l'motza'eihem", 'and these are their journeys according to their goings out'. It's quite extraordinary that in one and the same verse we have a switch around in the order of these words and it begs for an explanation.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch brilliantly explains that the Godly way of proceeding in life is 'motza'eihem l'masseihem' – all of our departures, all the changes that we make in life, need to have the ultimate destination in mind – they need to be part of a master plan for a good and productive future. However, we see here that there was a frailty within the minds of the Israelites because what actually happened in the wilderness was "masseihem l'motza'eihem" – their journeys were according to their departures. The departure itself – the desire for change was uppermost in their minds.

Indeed it is human nature that often we crave change. We get bored of what we've got. We want novelty, we want variety, we want excitement in life. Sometimes this is relevant within our democracies when it comes to a general election. It happens so often that there is a mood for change – that people just get used to something and out of a sense of desire

for novelty they want to switch what they have for something else. Sometimes change is good and appropriate, but sometimes it is possible that we might actually be sacrificing our long term interest on the altar of change.

Hashem wants us always to remember that our way of life should be 'motza' eihem l'masseihem' – change should be viewed in the context of what is right, with a destination in mind.

When it comes to where we live, the schools our children attend, the appliances we have in our homes, our mindset with regard to the key issues in the countries within which we live – of course, change can sometimes be the very best way forward but sometimes it might be the worst mistake we ever have made.

Let us, therefore, adopt a Godly approach to change, and that is to have 'motza' eihem l'masseihem'. All the changes we make must have the ultimate destination in mind, our long term interests! Let's not change for the sake of change, but rather only for the best.

#### **Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values\***

##### **Revenge in Judaism (Matot)**

In the second verse in this week's Parsha of Matot, God commands the Jewish people to take revenge against the Midianites for what they did in trying to seduce the Jewish women to idol worship. It then says that the Israelites should take "God's revenge" (Numbers 31:2-3). But there is a specific prohibition against Jews taking revenge at any time stated previously in the Torah (Leviticus 19:18). So, how could choose act in revenge of God, but not themselves? Furthermore, when the verse states that Jews should follow God's steps (Deuteronomy 13:5) the Talmud (Sotah 14a) asks how can physical people follow a non-physical God? It answers that Jews should imitate the actions of God. Just as He is merciful, caring about animals, clothes the needy, visits mourners, etc., so, too, should Jews imitate His ways. If revenge is one of "His ways", they why prohibit revenge for Jews? What exactly is the Jewish view of revenge – permitted always, forbidden, or sometimes permitted? What do the sources tell us?

Revenge is defined as the infliction of punishment in return for injury or insult, or the desire to retaliate or repay an injury or wrong. It is a basic human emotion or action, which is both intense and natural. One can explain the second sin in history as Cain's revenge for God's favoring Abel over Cain (in their sacrifices to God), which drove Cain to murder his brother. If this emotion is so natural, can it be forbidden?

The Intensity of This Emotion - Unlike other sentiments, which may vary from person to person or situation to situation, Judaism recognizes the intensity of the emotion of

revenge. Meiri says that revenge is an emotion that "attacks the evil inclination" and forces man to give into it (Meiri commentary to Avot 3:4). Chinuch states that this emotion is so powerful that most people in the world will not stop searching after the person who wronged them until they pay back the evil or injury that was done to them (Chinuch, Mitzvah 241). The classic book of Jewish ethical behavior, *Mesilat Yesharim*, describes how difficult the sentiment of revenge is. A person cannot escape these feelings, as they cause him or her great pain, and the feeling of payback or revenge is indeed so sweet. Thus, resisting the urge to act upon this feeling is indeed difficult, and it is only easy for angels to ignore this emotion (Mesilat Yesharim, Chapter 11). In explaining the prohibition against taking revenge in the Torah, Chizkuni writes that the feeling of seething rage completely overtakes a human being (Chizkuni commentary to Leviticus 19:18). In another section, Chinuch explains that God does not expect a person to be wronged and pained by another, and to remain inert like a rock, without feeling the need to pay back (Chinuch, Mitzvah 338). If this is so, if the desire for revenge is so great, what then is a Jew supposed to do when confronted by these emotions?

Revenge Remains in God's Domain - In verse after verse (not in our Parsha), God tells us that revenge is to be left only to God. Even though we saw that normally Jews are supposed to imitate the ways of God, the realm of revenge is God's alone. Thus, it states in Psalms that vengeance and revenge belong only to God (Psalms 94:1). Isaiah says that God tells those who are afraid and who have been wronged that He will take revenge for what has been done (Isaiah 35:4). Sometimes God will take revenge against His own people, the Jews who have wronged Him by sinning, by letting the enemies of the Jews vanquish the Jewish people (Leviticus 26:25). But in most of Scripture, God's revenge is on behalf of the Jewish people, as God promises to put on the "cloak" of revenge and repay those who wronged the Jews (Isaiah 59:17-19). One prophet calls God a vengeful God, full of revenge towards those who have wronged God (Nachum 1:2-3), since God repeatedly promises revenge upon the enemies of the Jews who have wronged the Jewish people (Jeremiah 16:10, Ezekiel 25:17).

But why is it that in regard to all other traits and actions, Jews should imitate the behavior of God, and only in the case of revenge does God operate alone, not wanting His actions to be emulated? Perhaps it is precisely because revenge is such an intense and volatile feeling that God forbade it completely from the realm of man's actions. Human beings would not know how to use this feeling properly and repay a wrong in the proper proportion. Just as Cain murdered Abel as revenge for a sacrifice favored by God, which was certainly an "overreaction," perhaps no person can properly control rage and feeling the need for revenge,

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and therefore cannot administer it properly against another human being who is deserving of punishment. That is why it is left only to God to take revenge and avenge a sin properly, in a way that is exact compensation for a wrong committed. Chizkuni implies as much when he says that only God can assuage the feeling of revenge within man (Chizkuni commentary to Leviticus 19:18). The one place in the Torah where God does command the Jews to take revenge, in our Torah portion, it is for God, and not man.

One of the most famous narratives in the Torah where revenge apparently took place was the story of Dina, Jacob's daughter. Shechem, the son of Chamor, ruler of the town also named Shechem, kidnapped Dina and raped her. Dina's brothers were furious, and arranged a "deal" with the people of Shechem, who wanted their city and Jacob's family to become one. The brothers said that if the males of Shechem circumcised themselves, they would be able to marry into the Jewish family. After they were all circumcised, Simon and Levi walked into the town and killed not only Shechem and Chamor, but also the entire townspeople, who could not fight back. Jacob became very angry with his two sons for this act, but they defended themselves saying, "Should our sister be turned into a prostitute? (Genesis chapter 34)" How are we to understand this story? Was the act of Simon and Levi in killing the people of the town an act of revenge or not? Were their actions correct? Without delving too deeply into the story, there is considerable disagreement about whether Simon and Levi did the right thing or not. On the surface, Jacob was still angry at them many years later for their act of revenge, and he cursed Simeon and Levi on this deathbed (Genesis 49:5-7). Nachmanides states that the brothers were indeed wrong and sinful in their act of revenge (Nachmanides commentary on Genesis 34:13, 49:5). Even those commentaries who defend the action of these brothers explain their actions differently, never legitimizing revenge. Maimonides writes that the attack of the people of the town was indeed justified and deserved the punishment of death under Noahide law, for allowing the rape and kidnapping to continue without protest (Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 9:14). Maharal justifies Simeon and Levi's action as an act of war between two nations, not one family pitted against another family (Gur Aryeh commentary on Genesis 34:13).. But no commentary justifies the act of revenge by Simeon and Levi as legitimate.

Why is Revenge Forbidden for Jews? - If the feeling of revenge is such a basic and intense human emotion, then why should the Torah not let Jews act upon this feeling and let Jews retaliate when they feel they have been legitimately wronged? Why is revenge forbidden, especially it is a feeling that people often cannot control? Why should Jews have to

go against their nature to overcome their desire for revenge?

Chinuch gives a philosophical answer why Jews should not feel the emotion of revenge or act upon it (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 241). When something is done to a person, rather than blame the other person who did it, a believing Jew should realize that God desired, for some reason, that this person should experience this particular pain. The other individual who caused the pain was only a vehicle for this "punishment" mandated by God. Thus, blaming the other person (even though he did what he did out of free will) is pointless, since God desired for some reason that the person should feel this emotion. When a Jew realizes this, he or she will look at this action done to him and try to understand what caused God's punishment, rather than blame the "messenger" of the pain and seek revenge.

In defining heroism and true strength, the Mishna says that according to Judaism this is achieved by overcoming one's natural desires (Mishna Avot 4:1) (see chapter on "Jewish Heroes"). Much of the Torah and observance of Mitzvot-Commandments are God's desire for the Jew to go against his or her basic nature and act in a moral manner in observing the precepts of the Torah. Fighting one's basic desire to seek revenge is indeed difficult. But the Torah says this is certainly possible, and every Jew is commanded to do so. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato states that even though it is extremely difficult to overcome, and revenge is such a sweet feeling to any person, the Jew is commanded to overcome this tendency and nevertheless be strong (Mesilat Yesharim 11).

Another commentary (Semag, Lo Taase 12) states that while revenge is permitted for non-Jews who are not obligated to keep the Torah's precepts, for them not acting upon their emotions and not seeking revenge is an act of special kindness, since they fight and overcome their natural instincts. But for the Jew who is commanded to observe this commandment, there is an additional benefit. It says in the Talmud that for any Jew who is able to succeed and go against his or her natural inclinations (to keep the Mitzvot), all of that person's transgressions are removed from him or her (Rosh Hashana 17a). Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804-1886) gives a novel reason why a Jew should not take revenge (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 30:8). He writes that the "best" revenge is to do nothing against the person who has wronged him or her. When the wronged individual does not retaliate, the person who originally offended him or her will hear that this person such so special (in acting in this manner), and will begin to think about his or her own transgression that caused that natural feeling to retaliate. But if retaliation against does take place that person, it will give the individual actual pleasure knowing that he or she "got under his skin." Thus, by not taking revenge, the second person will come out the better and more respected person.

It should be noted that there is fine line between the concept of "justice," which is always advisable and legitimate, and one who seeks "revenge," which always has negative connotations and is forbidden. Almost everyone who seeks revenge will not call it revenge, but rather "justice," carried out in order to correct how that person has been wronged. And seeking justice is certainly a Mitzvah (Deuteronomy 16:20). Because of this rationalization that will become the mantra of anyone seeking revenge, that may be part of the reason why the Torah prohibited this sin altogether. The Jerusalem Talmud gives another reason to explain that revenge is philosophically absurd (Deuteronomy 16:20). If all Jews are considered like one body and all are connected, then any one Jew cannot seek revenge against another Jew. It would be analogous to a person who accidentally cut one hand with a knife in his other hand. The damaged hand would never "seek revenge" against that other hand since it belongs to the same body. Conceptually, it is no different when a Jew seeks revenge against another Jew.

Finally, the key to the reason that the urge for revenge and the urge to retain a grudge should be overcome and forgotten comes from the verse itself that prohibits this sin. It is not an accident that the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself is placed at the end of this verse prohibiting revenge (Leviticus 19:18). Since no one would want anyone to commit revenge upon him or her for something they did to another person, so too no one should not take revenge against any individual who feels wronged, and who feel he or she deserves to take that revenge. Because this is so difficult to do, it is the ultimate test of the verse to love one's neighbor as oneself. Any Jew who can bury this urge and not commit revenge can be said to truly love someone else as much as he loves himself.

### Ecology and Climate Change in Judaism (Masei)

In describing the 48 Levite cities to be built in the Land of Israel, the Torah portion this week commands that an "empty field" must be left surrounding each city. On this verse, Rashi explains that the purpose is for the "beauty of the city," and continues to elaborate by stating that one hundred cubits (about two thousand feet) outside the city must be completely empty, neither with buildings nor any crops (Numbers 35:2, with Rashi commentary). This is probably the first time that any ancient society seemed to care about the beauty of a city, the environment, and the potential danger of overcrowding with "civilization". What are the implications for us? How does Judaism, in general, view the environment, ecology and man's role in protecting the planet?

With the dramatic shift in weather patterns over the past few years, it is not surprising, that for many people today, this is the number

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one concern in the world today: according to many surveys, it is the threat to the environment caused by man's wants to utilize the resources of our planet for his survival. Judaism is sensitive both to man's needs as well as the importance of protecting the environment. Thousands of years ago, before ecology became a worldwide human concern, Judaism dealt at length with questions involving the environment, in a most sophisticated manner. The first indication occurs in the very first chapters of the Torah (Genesis 1:28) where God commands man to "fill the world and capture it." In his commentary on this verse, Nachmanides explains that the world is given to men for their needs "to do as they wish" and includes, as one of the examples, man digging up the ground to mine copper. Since strip mining of copper is a prime illustration of the destruction of the environment, it seems that the Torah permits man to use the world as he sees fit, with no need for ecological concerns or sensitivity. However, a few verses later (Genesis 2:15) the Torah tempers this commandment by telling us that God put man in the Garden (symbolic of the entire world) "to work it and to guard it." Since guarding something means preserving it, God essentially wants man to both use the world for his needs, but, at the same time, to preserve the world and not destroy it.

How can man do both? How can he use the world for his requirements, but at the same, time take care of it and save it? The answer comes from a third verse in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). When an army at war surrounds a city in siege and prepares to use a tree as a battering ram to smash the walled city, a fruit-bearing tree may not be used for this purpose, only a non-fruit bearing tree. What is the difference? If one uses the fruit-bearing tree, then the fruit will needlessly be destroyed, since the same objective could be accomplished just as well with a non-fruit bearing tree. However, a person *may* or should cut down a fruit tree when not cutting it down and simply doing nothing causes damage to other trees (Deuteronomy 20:19-20). This, then, highlights the Torah perspective on the environment. While man may use the world for his needs, he may never use any resource needlessly. Destroying anything in the world needlessly is called *Bal Tashchit*.

Sefer Hachinuch (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 529) states that included in this Mitzvah-commandment is the precept not to "cause any damage or loss. For instance, to set a fire, tear clothing or break a vessel for no purpose." Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 6:8) specifically says that the Torah prohibits cutting a fruit tree only if it is done in a destructive manner, i.e., it could have been avoided.

What is Considered Destructive? - Anything that can be considered a legitimate human need is not considered destructive. Monetary

benefit, for example, is considered a legitimate human need. Certainly, destroying something in performing a Mitzvah is legitimate and not considered wanton destruction. Two prominent examples are the custom to rip one's shirt or jacket as a sign of mourning for a close relative, a recognized Jewish custom, and the Mitzvah to burn and destroy all Chametz on the day before Passover, as outlined by the Torah. However, there is a limit to what Judaism considers a legitimate human need. A frivolous desire to destroy something because it gives a person joy is certainly not viewed as legitimate. The pure pleasure of destruction cannot justify ravaging the environment.

Returning to the contradictions, the Jewish view can now be applied. Regarding the building of a house, it is certainly permitted to destroy that ecosystem in a desolate area, since the need is legitimate, but only if there is no other place or similar house that could be built elsewhere, without destroying that environment. If there is no equal substitute, then clearly, it would be justified. Cutting down trees to create paper is certainly a legitimate human need, especially if the logs are the best source for paper and wood. If, however, equivalent paper and wood could be obtained (through similar effort and cost) in an equivalent environment less threatening to the ecological balance, then that would be the Jewish choice and obligation. This issue may be similar to the case mentioned in Shulchan Aruch (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:22), where a previous existing business now poses an ecological threat to the citizens of the city. The ruling is that the business must move out of the city, but if the business was established before the townspeople moved in, the businessman is entitled to compensation.

There is one further complication. If, as some environmentalists claim, it could be proved that cutting down these trees clearly endangers the survival of the entire planet, then there is another Jewish consideration, in addition to and separate from the ecological factor. Based on two verses (Deuteronomy 4:9 and 4:15), a Jew is not allowed to put himself or others in any form of danger and must prevent any possible precarious situation from occurring. Therefore, if it could be conclusively proved that cutting down these trees would place people in mortal danger, it would not be permitted to cut down the trees. (In practice, the logging industry today always plants many more trees than it cuts down, partially to allay the fears of ecology-sensitive people, and also to guarantee a future with a large supply of trees to cut down.)

**Judaism's Great Sensitivity to The Environment** - The specifics of these cases and the general Jewish principles discussed do not begin to reflect Judaism's heightened awareness of an environmental issues. The Torah's incredible sensitivity continues to be reflected by the Rabbis and their later rulings. All this, thousands of years before modern

ethical questions regarding ecology, climate change and preserving natural resources even became an issue that people spoke about.

The Torah also sensitizes man to ensure that he or she does not alter the world or destroy it. Commenting on a verse in the very first chapter of the Torah where the Torah commands each species to reproduce itself, Samson Raphael Hirsch (Genesis 1:11) writes about the Mitzvah given to Jews not to create a mixture of species in plants or animals in general or between wool and linen specifically (Deuteronomy 22:9-11). The Torah did not want man to alter the world God created, or "play God." Creating hybrids alters the commandment by God to keep species separate. The Talmud records a story about the son of Rabbi Yossi who needlessly destroyed a fruit tree. Rabbi Yossi got so angry because of this wanton destruction of the environment that he prayed that his son die prematurely (Taanit 24a). The Talmud even records that when a particular tree was sick, the scholars were instructed to pray for its health (Shabbat 67a).

In a very moving story, we see that Judaism not only cares about the environment of today's generation, but also tries to safeguard the environment for future generations. The Talmud describes that when Choni was traveling along, he saw an old man planting a carob tree. When enquiring how long it would take this tree to bear fruit, the man told Choni it would take seventy years. Choni asked how the man could be sure he would live that long. The man answered that he indeed would not be alive, but his grandfather planted a tree so that he could benefit, so he was planting so that his descendants could likewise benefit (Taanit 23a). This indicates the sensitivity to the future environment expected of a Jew.

All of these aphorisms and stories reflect a general Jewish attitude and sensitivity. But Judaism carried this sensitivity into specific laws that, when examined closely, are even more sophisticated than most of the environmental laws that exist today, even in the most environmentally conscious countries in the world.

**City Planning and Beautification** - As noted above in our Parsha, a healthy ecological balance dictates that there must remain distance between city and rural areas, as the Torah was concerned about zoning and city beautification. The Mishna (Bava Kama 2:7) states that even a tree had to be a distance of at least twenty-five cubits (37-50 feet) from the city, and some say fifty cubits, in order to allow proper growing of trees and prevent possible damage. In ancient times, before daily garbage collection was provided as a city service, Shulchan Aruch rules that one may not put out garbage in a public property, and if one did, the Rabbis would fine the person. In addition, if this garbage caused anyone damage, the person was liable (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 414:1). There were

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certain times of the year when it was permissible to put out the garbage in a public place, most notably during the rainy season where it would be washed away. However, even during the permitted times, if the garbage caused damage, the owner was responsible ().

**Air Pollution** - A granary causes an unpleasant odor and leaves a large carbon footprint (greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture are estimated to be responsible for 20% of all global emissions today). Therefore, the Mishna (Bava Batra 2:8) states that a granary must set fifty cubits away from the city in every direction and must keep the granary far from plants so that it does not do damage.

**Maimonides** (Maimonides, Hilchot Shechainim 11:1) not only forbids setting up a granary in one's home because of the odor it causes, but any activity which pollutes the air with dust that will reach a neighbor is also not permitted. Shulchan Aruch concurs (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:22), noting that the winds carry the odor (greenhouse gases?) and damage city residents if the granary is too close to the city. The same trend is followed with other kinds of odors that will cause possible damage such as animal carcasses, cemeteries and smoke. Both the Mishna (Bava Batra 2:9) and Code of Jewish Law (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:23) forbid these all of these within fifty cubits of the population. One opinion even speaks about the direction of the wind, as wind to the east of the city will cause damage while wind from the west will not. Shulchan Aruch mentions the prohibition against putting a horse stable near the area of fermenting wine since it will be damaged. Similarly, a person may not set up certain types of stores below a place where fruits are stored as it may damage the fruit.

Specifically, a painter and a baker are mentioned, because the fumes their work generates may cause damage (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 155:2). The Talmud explains () that all smokestacks were forbidden in the holy city of Jerusalem, because of the smoke they would cause (as Jerusalem had to remain a smokeless, pollution-free city), and Maimonides codifies this idea (Bava Kama 92b). Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Temidin Umusafin 2:15) also states that when the ashes from the holy sacrifices were removed from the Temple by the Kohen-Priest and put on the outskirts of the city, they had to be put in a place where there was no wind, so that they would not be swept up into the wind and back to the city. Although other types of damage may be permitted if a neighbor does not protest that damage, Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Shechainim 11:4) rules that damage causing air pollution, i.e., damage through smoke, dust, and noxious smells is not permitted even if no one protests. Apparently, Maimonides recognized that this type of harm to a society was more dangerous than other types of damages.

**Water Pollution** -- Shulchan Aruch rules (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 412:5) that

if water spilled out by a person seeps down into the earth and causes damage, then the person who poured it must pay for the damage.

Thus, the Jewish attitude to climate change and other ecological concerns is both very broad and very deep, covering many areas in detail. Perhaps the Midrash best sums up the overall Jewish view towards the world when it describes what happened at the very beginning of creation. God puts Adam among all the vegetation of the Garden of Eden and asks Adam to look at all His creations and how beautiful and good they are. God tells man that they were all put here for human beings. However, man must be careful that he does not damage this creation and cause the world to be destroyed, since once it is destroyed, the damage is irreparable (Midrash, Kohelet Rabbah 7:20).

\* These columns have been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at [nachum@jewishdestiny.com](mailto:nachum@jewishdestiny.com)

#### OTS Dvar Torah

##### Rabbanit Bili Rabenstein

###### The Conclusion of the Book of Numbers -

Parshat Masei concludes the book of Numbers, and true to its name, it summarizes the journey that the people of Israel took through the desert. Chapter 33 is dedicated to summarizing the journey, while chapter 34 lays out the borders of the Land of Israel and lists the names of those leaders who will inherit the land. Presumably, it would have made sense to conclude the Book of Numbers here, at the end of the account of the journey until that point, and when the next destination has been set.

However, contrary to what we would expect, after this logical conclusion, the Torah continues with a discussion of three more specific subjects, and the Book of Numbers ends only after those chapters. This surprising conclusion calls for further investigation. The three subjects discussed at this point are the Levitical cities, the "cities of refuge", and the decision that a daughter who inherits her father's estate must only marry one from her tribe. I'll try to briefly analyze these three subjects, and focus on the values they represent.

**Levitical cities** - Presumably, we could argue that the value underpinning this chapter is caring for the underprivileged. By choosing this point in the text to discuss the subject, the Torah has indicated that this is a central value, which will form the underpinnings for life in the land. However, if this were to be the statement the Torah was interested in making, it would have been best to have listed the other commandments tied to caring for the underprivileged in society, such as the laws regarding our dealings with orphans and widows. Therefore, the real focus of this

Parsha would seem to be the issue of inheritance. Every Israelite, both rich or poor, is given an inheritance. Only the portion of the Levites was held back, and in light of this, each of the tribes is asked not to stay holed up within the confines of their lands, but rather, to see past their borders and donate part of their inherited lands to the Levites. The Torah states that the Levitical cities must be given to them by the Israelites. The action of giving, by one party, and the action of receiving, by the other, sets out the relationship between Levites and Israelites, and leaves a lasting impression on the psyches of all involved.

**An inheriting daughter** - The third and last chapter in the Book of Numbers discusses the law regarding the daughters of Zelophechad, who inherited their father's portion, as described in Parshat Pinchas. Their fellow tribesmen told Moses of their concern that the daughters of Zelophechad would marry people from other tribes, and that this would cause the portion of the tribe of Menashe to shrink. We would have expected this story to have been recorded earlier, in Parshat Pinchas. The Ibn Ezra (and other later commentators) explains that this episode was recounted at this juncture to complement the chapters that deal with estates and how they are to be divided up, following the commandments on the establishment of Levitical cities.

**"Pleasant ways" – idealism meets reality** - I'd like to suggest that this chapter is a counterweight to the picture illustrated in the case of the Levitical cities. The underlying principle behind the designation of Levitical cities is national unity, to insure that all of the Israelites act together, as one. This commandment is designed to tear down the walls between the tribes and create a broader framework than the tribal system. A national framework.

However, Menashe's request returns us to the tribal framework. It calls on us to cling on to that system. Nahmanides mentions that apparently, this request, namely that the women of the tribe only marry fellow tribesmen, had only been heeded by that generation, since it would be virtually impossible to maintain this "tribal purity" in future generations. Moreover, when the Gemara discusses the factors that set apart the fifteenth of the month of Av, making it one of the two happiest dates in the history of the Jewish people, it lists a number of explanations. The first explanation is that on this day, the edict requiring inheriting daughters to only marry within their tribes was cancelled: "However, what is the special joy of the fifteenth of Av? Rav Yehuda said that Shmuel said: This was the day on which the members of different tribes were permitted to enter one another's tribe, by intermarriage. What did they expound, in support of their conclusion that this Halakha was no longer in effect? The verse states: "This is the matter that Hashem has commanded concerning the

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daughters of Zelophechad... They derived from the verse that this matter shall be practiced only in this generation". So, according to Shmuel's method of understanding the verse, the decision that an inheriting daughter would only marry within her tribe was a retroactive decision, and we should be glad that it was cancelled.

Here, we have a wonderful Biblical model for "Its ways are pleasant ways": one the one hand, the Torah unequivocally determines the objective and what we should aspire to – we aim to create the framework of a nation, without any walls to divide us, or tribal separations. On the other hand, the model recognizes the reality the nation was faced with at that point in time, and in that location. Each tribe was poised to enter the Land of Israel, and saw itself as a separate entity. It was almost overprotective of its own inheritance, which could be threatened by the other tribes. Halakha provides a solution that works within this reality. It doesn't take a stand against this tribalist thought, though the day the edict is cancelled will become a national holiday that expresses the achievement of our objective.

By connecting the discussion of the Levitical cities with that of inheriting daughters, the Torah charts out a path to uniting the nation, while recognizing the voices arising from people and letting those voices be heard.

**Cities of Refuge** - The two chapters discussed above – the designation of Levitical cities and the laws of inheriting daughters – are separated by another chapter: the discussion of the cities of refuge. There are several reasons that these chapters appear one after another. The first is that the Torah is dealing with different cities that the Israelites are commandment to set aside from the territories they had inherited, so that they could be used for the common good. The second is that the cities of refuge were all Levitical cities. I would propose that beyond this logical connection, the chapter on the cities of refuge appears at the very end of one of the Five Books of Moses because of the values it contains, values that are the building blocks for forging a society on its way to the Land of Israel.

In the text, a city to which someone who had accidentally killed someone else could flee is called a "city of refuge". The language changes when we transition from the Biblical text to rabbinical literature. In rabbinical literature, the cities are refuge are depicted as a place of banishment. The semantic gap between the words "refuge" and "banishment" is substantial, for several reasons. The word "refuge" carries the connotation of a place where one could escape to for protection and compassion. For that person, staying in that place of refuge is an opportunity. It has truly rescued him or her. However, the word "banishment", borrowed from the field of criminal law, connotes something entirely different. In this case, this is an individual

whom society is required to punish for his or her crimes.

It seems as though our sages had strayed from the simple reading of the text. If we revisit the text, we'll discover penal aspect of the cities of refuge implied in the Torah itself. First, we mustn't ignore the explicit language of the text: "[one who] murders accidentally". Second, the Torah states that the murderer must remain in the city of refuge "until the death of the high priest... after the death of the high priest, the murderer may return to his land holding." If these cities were only meant for providing protection, the death of the high priest would not remove the danger facing one who had accidentally murdered. By tying the death of the high priest to this law, the Torah leads us to the understanding that by living in a city of refuge, the accidental murderer was indeed serving out a sentence. Thus we can conclude that the sages had not created their own interpretation of the text *ex nihilo*. Rather, they have uncovered another layer hidden deep within the text itself, though this isn't stated explicitly.

**A world of complexities** - This in-depth reading of the chapter on the cities of refuge leads to formulating a complex principle with regard to accidental murderers. On the one hand, these individuals are in need of protection, and society must make sure they are safe. On the other hand, the Torah incisively maintains that taking another person's life isn't something that can be taken lightly, and that these incidents must rattle individuals and their surroundings.

Seemingly, with the Israelites at the doorstep to the Land of Israel as the book recounting the Israelites' wandering in the desert comes to a close, the Torah must present this double-sided picture, founded upon the value of the life of the accidental murder, a person that we must protect, for better or for worse, as well as the value of those lives that were lost, and the need to pay a price for their deaths.

In conclusion, the three final chapters of the Book of Numbers illustrate the necessity to perceive the complexities of reality.

On a national level, the tension between the chapter on Levitical cities and the chapter on the inheriting daughters is a symbolic manifestation of the tension between idealism and reality. The Torah discusses the ideal of erasing tribal borders, but it also recognizes that at that time, this was the Israelites' conception, and the Torah allows this view to be expressed in halakhic ordinances.

On a more personal level, the individual case of the accidental murder is examined in the chapter on cities of refuge, while considering various aspects of this picture: the need to protect a person who is being pursued, while punishing that person for the death he or she caused.

In this way, the conclusion of the Book of Numbers is directly tied to developing a more nuanced way of looking at things, which takes into consideration a combination of facts and a complete worldview. Perhaps, until this point in the Book of Numbers, the nation had never needed to perform this kind of introspection. Now, however, at the doorstep of the Promised Land, is the time to do so.

**Absolute truth** - This is one more point to raise, however. I believe that I'd be remiss to conclude the study of Parshat Masei with a mere statement that praises complexity. After all, even when studying complexity, we must adopt a complex method of contemplation.

The chapter on the cities of refuge ends with these words: "You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I Myself abide, for I, Hashem, abide among the Israelite people."

I feel within this complex picture involving the figure of an accidental murderer, the Torah unequivocally determines that our values must be clear and succinct: "... the land can have no expiation for blood that is shed on it". These verses teach us that the estate we inherited, which we forcefully took, is not promised to us for all time. This is the land where Hashem dwells, and if we defile it by spilling innocent blood, it might spew us out. Similarly, while charting a path that beckons us to contemplate things while taking in their complexity, and to be open to the various aspects of every case, the Torah sets clear red lines that are never to be crossed.

#### OU Dvar Torah

#### Lives Taken Unintentionally: We All Atone

##### Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

"I never saw the stop sign..."

"The baby was crying..."

"I only had a couple of glasses of wine..."

We are often distracted – by phones, by music, by audiobooks, by noises, by the stress of our lives – and how many times have we not seen the light change, or the car that "suddenly" shows up alongside us? How many times has the child "darted out" in front of us, chasing a bouncing ball? Or a bicyclist come "out of nowhere"? And all these times... we have breathed a sigh of relief and sighed, "Whew, that was close...."

But what about the time when it's not "close"? What about the time when the result – unintentionally, unwittingly, horribly – is tragedy?

God has established the supreme value of a human life. To intentionally and maliciously steal life, to murder, is a terrible sin. But what about that "gray area" where our behavior or

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our actions inadvertently result in the loss of life; what about when someone dies even if... especially if... such a terrible outcome was not our intent? Such a result often comes about in unforeseen (but foreseeable) ways. A doctor prescribes a medication with an unconsidered lethal interaction with another medication the patient is taking; a parent runs into a store "for only a moment," leaving her baby sweltering in a hot car; a homeowner does not secure his backyard swimming pool, only to have a curious neighbor child wander in....

When life is lost for whatever reason there must be an accounting.

In Masei, the Torah tells us that when one takes a life unintentionally, but with a clearly defined degree of carelessness – when, for example, he turns a corner holding a drawn knife and his victim, coming from a different direction, becomes impaled on it and dies – the perpetrator is to be exiled to one of the *arei miklat*, to a city of refuge. It is there that one who has unintentionally killed can escape the vengeance of the *goel ha'dam*, the avenger of the blood; and live in peace so long as he does not leave the boundaries of the *arei miklat*.

Rabeinu Bachaya teaches that this exile clearly shows that one's intent is key in assessing fault, certainly in the spiritual sense. Yes, a life was lost. Yes, the loss was as the result of this action. But, there was no intent for the action to result in the loss of life. The perpetrator's body committed a crime; his heart and soul did not, and we hold that a man cannot be condemned to death unless body, heart and soul agree as to the wrongdoing.

Rav Soloveitchik speaks powerfully on what it means to be sent to the *arei miklat*. He teaches that such an exile is not simply punishment but, in fact, atonement. When a life is lost atonement is required. Nothing captures this requirement so powerfully as Rav Soloveitchik's observation that if one were to be sentenced to exile for such an infraction and die before the sentence could be carried out, that is he never arrives at the *ir miklat*, he must be buried in one of the *arei miklat*. Likewise, if he should die while at the *ir miklat*, he is to be buried there.

One who kills *b'shgaga* must atone, even beyond his own days on earth.

If only such a sensibility existed in our own times and communities; if only responsibility would be accepted, and atonement sought.

"You shall designate cities for yourselves, cities of refuge shall they be for you, and a murderer shall flee there – one who takes a life *b'shgaga* (unintentionally)" (35:11) Six cities of refuge are spoken about in our parasha. These exist in addition to the other forty-two cities given to the *Levi'im*

We see here that, in the Torah, those who took a life unintentionally were granted a Divine gift – to escape the wrath of their avengers. But in doing so they were not escaping responsibility for their actions. They were banished to the arei miklat, all of which were cities inhabited by the Levi'im, of which there were forty-eight.

Why cities of the Levi'im? The Sefer HaChinuch (408) explains that Shevet Levi had been chosen for God's service, "...because of their great stature, skillful actions and the grace of their merit, their land was chosen to absorb anyone who took a life b'shgaga... since they are men of pure heart who are known for their sterling traits and venerable wisdom..." So, it was that the guilty were sent to the cities of the Levi'im not to be imprisoned but to be placed in an environment of learning and spirituality, a setting where atonement and self-forgiveness could readily be achieved.

When innocent life was lost, spiritual rehabilitation is required.

Forty-eight cities. In each, the focus was on spirit, atonement, on Torah learning. In each, true penitence was at hand. The Tana D'Vei Eliyahu teaches that there were forty-eight prophets among the Jewish people. That there were forty-eight prophets and forty-eight arei miklat was not, of course, mere coincidence.

Rav Gedalyah Shor explains in his Ohr Gedalyahu, the number forty-eight is, in Hebrew, mem ches. Mem ches spells moach – intellect, brains. The prophets are the moach of the Jewish people. Likewise, Torah is acquired through forty-eight methods.

Rav Shor Zt'l tells us how we can understand the Chinuch's explanation. The uniqueness of the Levi'im and their territory allowed them to absorb the unintentional killer who must have a way to find penitence and restore peace to his soul. In this, the Torah says, "...he shall escape to one of these cities and live."

How powerful! To truly wrestle with the loss of Jewish life demands an environment of moach – of forty-eight – prophets, cities, Levi'im. To be fully restored after causing the loss of an innocent life demands moach; it demands prophets, Levite cities, honesty and integrity not panels, not politics, not a 24-hour news cycle.

The pain of Meron is still fresh in our minds and souls, even as the horror of the Champlain Towers collapse is newly evident each hour. And the horror of the Givat Ze'ev - Jerusalem bleacher collapse where several hundred were injured and three killed, inside a crowded, unfinished, non-approved synagogue structure.

One makah after another. Each calamity deserving its own kinah and lamentations.

Yesterday after Shacharit, Reb Shimshon suggested that I write an essay discerning God's message in these tragedies. "It is not poshut," I responded, not simple. I said this not because, as is always the case, the Divine and its message is ever poshut but because I do not believe "God's message" should be our focus. If we must "drag God into it" I would ask, what does God expect of us in these circumstances?

In Masei we learn that when even a single life is taken, even unintentionally, there is accountability, there are answers owed to God and man. The day after such a tragedy cannot be as the day before; it cannot be as if nothing happened. To go forward, we must cling to our mem-ches, our moach; our forty-eight prophets to seek honesty and integrity, not anger, cynicism, self-interest or egotism. We must seek "cities" of refuge; cities occupied by Levi'im, who will inspire us to seek the truth, and not whitewash it.

There was no intent to kill but there was a posture in which a loss of life was only too possible. What human failings, negligence, corner-cutting, profit-seeking resulted in – b'shgaga – the loss of life? No prophets consulted, and no Levi'im teaching the value of human life. In each circumstance, there was a cascade of errors and poor judgement, resulting in a horrible outcome. At each step, the outcome could have been avoided – how many reports, advisories, summonses were delayed, ignored, dismissed?

At each step, the judgment rests on man, not God.

In Mishpatim (21:13), the Torah first teaches about cities of refuge, God says He, "...shall make for you a place to which he may flee." "For you" – implying these cities stand for each of us. "But wait! I am not a killer," you object.

Rav Dovid Feinstein Zt'l suggests otherwise. If unintentional killing takes place, it is a reflection on the entire society – we have all been lax in our respect for human life. Who are the nameless bureaucrats who "guaranteed" that all was safe for the thousands to gather at Mount Meron? Are they the same who insisted on praying in the Givat Ze'ev synagogue with its unapproved bleachers?

Religious greed. Financial greed. Hubris. Zealotry. It makes no difference. Life was lost. Atonement is due from all of us. This is the thrust of God's first message about cities of refuge. It is not only the one who killed unintentionally who must be banished to the arei miklat to seek atonement. No, it is all of us.

## Likutei Divrei Torah

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg  
The Legacy of Aharon Hakohein

At the beginning of Parshas Masei the Torah lists the forty-two different places in which Klal Yisrael camped during their travels through the desert. Most of the places are mentioned without comment. One notable exception is Hor Hahor. The Torah abruptly stops its quick-paced account of the travels and dwells on the fact that Aharon Hakohein died on Hor Hahor. Moreover, the Torah adds that Aharon died on Rosh Chodesh Av. Why does the Torah elaborate on the death of Aharon in the middle of the list of travels? What is the significance of the fact that Aharon died on Rosh Chodesh Av?

At the end of the parsha the Torah discusses the laws of a murderer (rotzei'ach). One who kills intentionally is put to death, and one who murders accidentally is required to run to an ir miklat (city of refuge) to atone for his sin and to escape the clutches of the go'el hadam, the relative of the victim who might want to take revenge. The posuk says that the unintentional murderer (rotzei'ach b'shogeg) must stay in the city of refuge "until the death of the kohein gadol" (35:25). Why should the death of the kohein gadol allow the murderer to return home?

Rashi quotes from Chazal that the kohein gadol bears some responsibility for the accidental murder because he should have prayed that this misfortune should not occur during his lifetime. The kohein gadol represents the concept of shalom (peace). After all, the original kohein gadol was Aharon who was a lover and a pursuer of peace (Avos 1:12), which is precisely why he was chosen to be the kohein gadol in the first place. Since a kohein gadol represents all of Klal Yisrael when he performs the avodah in the Beis Hamikdash, he must be someone who unifies all of Klal Yisrael and embodies the middah of shalom.

That is why the kohein gadol, more than anyone else, has a responsibility to pray that no murder should be committed by any Jew, because murder leads to the exact opposite of shalom. Certainly, one who kills intentionally acts in a way that runs counter to the middah of shalom. But even one who kills accidentally disrupts the peace and harmony of Klal Yisrael. He brings people to hatred, to feel a need to take revenge. He creates discord and friction. The kohein gadol, the model of shalom, is charged with the responsibility to daven that there should be only peace and harmony in Klal Yisrael during his lifetime.

But why should the death of the kohein gadol be a reason for the murderer to be able to return home? The answer is that Chazal say the death of the righteous serves as an atonement (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1). When a tzaddik dies, people think about his life and his personality traits. A person can be inspired by the memory

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a tzaddik and that can cause him to internalize the values of the tzaddik and to emulate his behavior. In that way, the death of the righteous person can be an atonement because his memory serves to motivate people to do teshuva and to improve their own lives.

Similarly, the death of the kohein gadol should cause the rotzei'ach to think about what the kohein gadol represents - the concept of shalom. That will hopefully cause the rotzei'ach to become more committed than ever to follow the model of the kohein gadol, to pursue peace and harmony and be sensitive to the feelings of other people, which will serve as an atonement for his sin of unintentional murder.

It is not a coincidence that Aharon Hakohein died on Rosh Chodesh Av. During the month of Av we mourn the loss of the Beis Hamikdash which was destroyed because of hatred and insensitivity within Klal Yisrael (Yoma 9b). The month of Av is a time to remember the model of Aharon and to appreciate the importance of pursuing shalom.

Perhaps the Torah elaborates on the death of Aharon in the middle of its discussion of the travels of Klal Yisrael because the journey of Klal Yisrael in the desert was guided by the ananei hakavod, the clouds of glory (see Beha'uloscha 9:15-23), and Chazal comment that the clouds of glory were given to Klal Yisrael in the merit of Aharon Hakohein (see Rashi, Masei 33:40). The clouds of glory were a symbol of the Shechina which rests on Klal Yisrael only when they are in a state of peace. As Chazal say, "When they gather together as one unit, and there is peace among them, then He is their king. (see Rashi, V'zos Habracha 33:5). The Torah in Parshas Masei is hinting to the fact that it was Aharon Hakohein, the ultimate pursuer and lover of peace, who was the catalyst that brought the Shechina, in the form of the clouds of glory, to dwell amongst Klal Yisrael and to give them direction in their travels through the desert.

The loss of the Beis Hamikdash created a distance between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. We no longer feel the same closeness to the Shechina. "The gates of tefilla are locked...a wall of iron separates between the Jewish people and their Father in heaven" (Brachos 32b). But this sense of distance is only a reflection of an ongoing lack of peace and harmony within Klal Yisrael. By emulating the actions of Aharon Hakohein, showing sensitivity and compassion toward each other, we draw the Shechina closer to us, and we can merit the fulfillment of the bracha of u'fros aleinu sukkas shlomecha - may You spread over us Your shelter of peace.

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**Torah.Org Dvar Torah**  
**by Rabbi Label Lam**

**We Are Climbing Continuously**

These are the journeys of the children of Israel who left the land of Egypt in their legions,

under the charge of Moshe and Aaron. Moshe recorded their starting points for their journeys according to the word of HASHEM, and these were their journeys with their starting points. (Bamidbar 33:1-2)

These are the journeys: Why were these journeys recorded? To inform us of the kind deeds of the Omnipresent (HaMakom)... – Rashi

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

It's a curious matter when and why different names of HASHEM are used. Rashi explains that the recording of the journeys is to inform us of the kindness of the Omnipresent-HaMakom, literally "The Place". Why is that particular "Name" employed here? Also, according to Rashi we are recalling all of the hardships and difficulties we experienced along the way. What is the benefit, the kindness of that review?

The Shla HaKodesh reveals a profound Pitgam- aphorism. It has endless depth. "Ain Rega Blo Pega! There is no moment that does not have its confrontation, conflict, problem, challenge, you name it! That is the human condition. A man's mind is either flooded with guilt about the past, temptations in the present, and worries about the future. There is no rest even if all is well. How long will all be well? This is where we find ourselves in every regard every moment of life.

Rebbe Nachaman has a fascinating explanation/ twist on this statement. One of the 13 expressions of prayer mentioned in Tanach is Pega... Rashi mentions it when Yaakov bumped into "The Place"! On his journey to exile he miraculously met up with the Holy Place of the Holy of Holies. He fell asleep there and had a dream of an endless ladder ascending to HASHEM.

When he awoke he declared that this is an "awesome place", the House of Elochim, and the gate to Heaven. It was in that place that Yaakov prayed, establishing for all time the evening prayer service, Maariv. He bumped into The Place" on his way out to a life in exile, he became occupied in prayer and he received a consoling dream.

Rebbe Nachman explains, there is no moment that does not have its "call to prayer". Every moment in life we are vulnerable and needy and prayer is prompted by needs. According to the Rambam prayer is not a time bound responsibility but a situational requirement. When we need, we call out to HASHEM. When are not needy?! Never! Ain Rega Blo Pega! There is no moment in life that is not an opportunity for prayer! The Talmud says, "It

## Likutei Divrei Torah

would be worthy for a person to pray all day!" King David said, I am prayer!" He responded at every REGA to every PEGA with Tefilla, all day!

I once heard directly from the mouth of Rabbi Shimshon Pinchus ztl., he said about himself, that he was traveling from America to Israel. He had a layover in England. As they were announcing the boarding of his connecting flight, he was Davening Mincha. He continued to Daven and they closed the gate and he missed his flight. It created a logistical nightmare and it was a world of inconvenience for him to find his baggage when finally arrived in Israel. Somebody asked him why or how he missed his flight. He told them that he was Davening. They asked, "But didn't you hear the announcement calling for passengers to board!?" He said, "I did! But I thought to myself, 'where am I going? I am talking with HASHEM'". AMAZING!

There are ways to travel horizontally in this world and ways to travel vertically. When we are Davening, praying, wherever we are, we are there! HASHEM is HaMakom. We are in HIM! He is The Place. We are never lost! When looking back we realize that the setbacks, and disappointments we experienced moving horizontally on this journey of life were only meant to spur us to move higher on the vertical ladder we are climbing continuously.



BS"D

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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON MATOS MASEI - 5782

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**TorahWeb**

**Rabbi Benjamin Yudin**

**Sensitive Soil, Lofty Land**

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

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

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

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

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

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

However, I would like to understand this verse literally in keeping with our above teachings, that the land and roads of Israel are literally mourning in the absence of the multitudes that came to celebrate the three pilgrim festivals annually. Similarly, on the Shabbos following Tisha B'Av, we read from Yishayahu (40:2) "Dabru al lev Yerushalyim - speak consolingly to the heart of Jerusalem" is not only to be understood as a message of consolation for the Jewish people after their lengthy exile, but also the holy city that housed two Batei Mikdash and will house the third is to be comforted. Additionally, Yirmiyahu (30:17) proclaimed "Tzion he, doresh ein la - She is Zion, no one cares about her," and based upon the above the Talmud teaches we are to care and literally feel the anguish, suffering and neglect of the Holy City.

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

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

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

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

More divrei Torah and shiurim from Rabbi Yudin  
More divrei Torah on Parshas Masei

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### RABBI SHALOM ROSNER

Rav Kehilla, Nofei HaShemesh Maggid Shiur, Daf Yomi, OU.org Senior Ra"M, Kerem B'Yavneh

#### Curbing Anger

In this week's parsha, Hashem instructs Moshe to go to battle with Midyan, in revenge for having caused Bnei Yisrael to sin with Ba'al Peor. Moshe relays the directive to the people who go to battle with Midyan. When they return from battle, Moshe realizes that Bnei Yisrael only destroyed the males of Midyan but took the women and children captive. The very same women who engaged in promiscuous activity with members of Am Yisrael and caused them to sin with Ba'al Peor, which resulted in a plague! Moshe is very upset with this result. The Torah states: Moshe became angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had returned from the campaign of war. Moshe said to them, Did you allow all the females to live?

The Oznayim L'torah inquires as to why the Torah repeats Moshe's name here. First we are told that Moshe is upset, then the Torah repeats that Moshe speaks. Vayikztof Moshe Yayomer Aleihem Moshe. The Torah could have simply stated Vayomer Aleiyem that he said- and it would be understood that Moshe was speaking, as he is the subject in the previous sentence. Why the need to repeat his name?

Perhaps we can derive a significant lesson from this repetition. There was a break between Moshe's immediate feeling of anger and the moment that he spoke. Moshe did not address the nation in the heat of the moment. He waited a little for his anger to subside and then he spoke to them. This is highlighted by the use of the word Vayomer which is typically identified as a softer form of speech as compared to Vayedaber.

In the midst of experiencing anger, a person does not always act rationally. Moshe took a breath, gathered himself and then spoke to the people. That is why his name is repeated a second time. To emphasize that it is not the same Moshe in his state of anger, who addressed the nation. It was Moshe in a peaceful state of mind who spoke in a respectful manner.

Several ba'ale mussar speak of a hassid who when he got angry would put on his designated "anger coat", which he kept in his attic. He purposely kept it there so that when he was angry, he would have to walk up three flights of stairs to get his coat, and after the tireless climb up all those stairs, his true anger would subside.

The Rambam suggests that when it comes to behavior, people should avoid extremes and steer towards the middle path. Yet when it comes to anger – the Rambam states in Hilchot Deot 2:3 that one should go to an extreme to avoid getting angry, as anger causes one to lose their senses.

During the three weeks as we recall the destruction of the Batei Hamikdash due to sinat chinam, we should contemplate ways of improving our relationships with our family and friends and being more tolerant of others who may have differing views or hashkafot. We ought to consider the way we react to others. If we get angry, which can happen, we should follow Moshe's lead and take a "break". Try not to react immediately while in the heat of the moment, so as not to say something we may later regret. As is stated in the Talmud: Bishlosah Devarhim Adam Nikar - BiKoso, BiKiso U'Bkaaso. Three things are very telling about a person, the way he acts when he drinks, contributes to charity and the way he reacts when angry.

May we be able to interact in a positive manner with each other so that we may be zoche to a geula shlema bimhera biyamenu!

<https://www.jewishpress.com/judaism/parsha/hashems-regret/2022/07/28/>

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#### Hashem's Regret

By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser

- 1 Av 5782 – July 28, 2022

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel (Bamidbar 33:1). R' Menachem Mendel of Kotzk observes that the various journeys of the Jewish nation in the desert following their redemption from Mitzrayim hint at the struggles and suffering the Jewish people will undergo in the future until the Final Redemption.

The Tzror HaMor states that this is intended to enroot within us bitachon and emunah even in the face of great challenges, travails and tribulation. Hashem will give us strength to continue and ultimately deliver us from galus. Just as in Mitzrayim we were subjected to the harshest servitude, and Hashem took us out even though we were not worthy of redemption, so too we will be redeemed in the future through Mashiach ben Yosef and Mashiach ben Dovid.

Three times daily we pray to Hashem to hasten the redemption and to rebuild the Holy Temple. R' Menachem Mendel of Rimanov cites the Talmud (Succah 52b) that there are four things that Hashem regrets creating: exile, the Kasdim, the Yishmaelim, and the Evil Inclination, as it says (Micha 4:6), "On that day I will assemble ... whomever I have harmed," because it is the entity of the Evil Inclination that led the Jewish nation to sin, thereby bringing about their exile. The Talmud (Brachos 3a) recounts how R' Yosi once entered the ruins of Yerushalayim in order to pray. The setting was particularly distressing, as it served as a powerful depiction of the prevailing galus, yet R' Yosi fortified himself to recite his prayers with great happiness. This was an impressive gesture, and Hashem's regret was once again passionately aroused. Upon his encounter with Eliyahu HaNavi, R' Yosi related that he had heard a Heavenly Voice cooing like a dove and saying, "Woe that I have destroyed My House, burned My Temple, and exiled My children among the nations."

The period of the Three Weeks is a time of judgment, and it often engenders a feeling of despair that makes it difficult to serve Hashem. We remember that we lost the protection of the Divine Providence and the Holy Temple was destroyed. Nevertheless, when we triumph over the Evil Inclination, and continue to fulfill the Torah and perform mitzvos, Hashem derives great pleasure and His regret is intensified. When we offer fervent heartfelt prayers to Hashem, lamenting our estrangement from Hashem without the Holy Temple, and beseech Him with deep longing and yearning for our redemption, we will inspire Hashem to redeem us speedily.

#### A Midnight Revelation

During the mid-1860s, a severe cholera epidemic raged through Yerushalayim and many lives were being lost. All the prayers and entreaties of the great sages of the city to annul the deadly decree were to no avail. All the inhabitants of the city raised their voices to Heaven but the Angel of Destruction did not set aside his sword.

When the great tzaddik and leader of his generation, R' Zundel of Salant, succumbed in Cheshvan along with many other talmidei chachamim, R' Meir Auerbach, the Rav of Kalish and author of the Imrei Binah, went to his mentor and teacher, the great R' Refoel Yedidyah Aboulafia, rosh yeshiva Yeshivat HaMekubalim Beit El, to gain insight into the reason for this devastating scourge. The two sat all night praying, and at sunrise R' Meir went to the mikvah and immersed 310 times in the cold water. They then went to pray vasikin (reciting the Shema moments before sunrise and then commencing Shemone Esrei exactly as the sun rises over the horizon – considered to be the ideal way to daven Shacharis) at the Bais HaMedrash Menachem Tzion. They spent the entire day wrapped in tallis and tefillin, without rest or food, steeped in Torah study and the service of Hashem.

In the evening, R' Auerbach immersed in the mikvah again, and after the Maariv prayers he made a she'eilas chalom (a procedure of writing on parchment for one who wishes to ask a question of Hashem while he is sleeping). He recited the Krias Shema before retiring and went to sleep with the piece of parchment beneath his pillow.

It was midnight when R' Meir awoke upon the revelation of black fire on top of white fire. When he saw the verse, "My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart – Behold! He is standing behind our wall, looking through the windows, peering through the lattice" (Shir HaShirim 2:9), he fainted. When

he was finally revived, he sat quietly trying to understand the explanation of the pasuk he had seen. He could not recall, though, any meforshim or commentaries that would apply to the community's plight. He dressed and, in the dark of night, ran to the home of R' Refoel Yedidyah, who was waiting for him by the door and greeted him enthusiastically. R' Refoel disclosed that at midnight he had heard a great noise, and a Heavenly Voice called out, "Who revealed the secret to My children?"

"I realized then," said R' Refoel, "that the reason for the decree and plague had, indeed, been revealed to you. We will now work together to bring salvation for our people." R' Refoel proceeded to explain that the pasuk referred to the Kosel HaMaaravi that longed for the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. He noted that the Jewish people cannot celebrate their joyous occasions unconditionally when the Holy Temple is in ruins. Yet, he observed, we bring bands and groups to play music at these events. "That is the reason why Hashem has allowed this plague to overwhelm us," he concluded.

R' Meir called together the heads of the Bais Din of Yerushalayim and told them about his dream. He then relayed to them the explanation that he had been given by the great R' Refoel Yedidyah Aboulafia. A directive, accepted throughout Yerushalayim for all generations, was enacted by the Bais Din disallowing music to be played in Yerushalayim. Everyone gathered at the Kosel HaMaaravi and poured out their hearts to Hashem in prayer, and within a few days the epidemic came to an end.

Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, a prominent rav and Torah personality, is a daily radio commentator who has authored over a dozen books, and a renowned speaker recognized for his exceptional ability to captivate and inspire audiences worldwide.

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### **Don't Mind Your Shivrei Luchos**

#### **Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh**

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given in the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Jul 12, 2018)

In this week's Parsha, Moshe sent Pinchas with an army to battle Midyan. And the pasuk says about Pinchas: U'klei ha-kodesh ve-chatzotzros ha-truah be-yado. Rashi asks: What are these Klei ha-kodesh? And he responds that they were the Aron and the Tzitz. Rashi quotes Chazal that there were two Aronos. One contained the unbroken Luchos Shnios that always stayed in the Kodesh Kodashim of the Mishkan. The other encased the shattered pieces of the First Luchos—Shivrei Luchos—that represented the Shechina accompanying them in their military expeditions and battles. Chazal tell us that they always took the Aron to milchama. And the pasuk says: Hashem Elokecha mis'halech be-kerev machanecha le-hatzilcha u-la-seis oyivecha lefanecha. The third Belzer Rebbe—Rav Yissachar Dov Rokeach (with the same name as the current Belzer Rebbe)—asks the obvious question. Why were the First Luchos broken? Because, as the gemara says, when Klal Yisroel made an Eigel ha-Zachav just 40 days after Ma'amad Har Sinai, they were like a kala aluva she-zinsa be-kerev chupasa—a chutzpadik bride, unfaithful during her wedding celebration. Hashem was very indignant, and therefore Moshe broke the Luchos. So why would they want to bring it out to the battlefield if it serves as a reminder of the chet ha-Eigel? If I go to a china shop and break something, I wouldn't want to bring it around everywhere I go to remind me of my failure. So how does it help to take the broken Luchos to milchamos? The Belzer Rebbe gives a beautiful answer. We all know that everyone messed up plenty in life. But they did not carry the Shivrei Luchos as a memento—a testament of sorts to the chet ha-Eigel. On the contrary, we carry these broken Luchos in an Aron to remind us that even if we did the worst sin—worshiped Avoda Zarah at Har Sinai—Hashem still loves us, and we are still the Am ha-Nivchar. Hashem still rests His Shechina amongst us. We are still special, valuable, and have potential even after we messed up. And the Shivrei Luchos are still a cheftza of kedusha and represent a ma'ala of Klal Yisroel. When you go out to war, you

are nervous, and you become ha-ish ha-yorei ve-rach ha-leivav. You start worrying and lose your morale because of everything you did wrong. You say to yourselves: Who are we that Hashem should care about us after we messed up with this or that? Therefore, the Torah tells us to bring those broken Luchos with us to remind us that even if it's true that we messed up, it's ok. And it doesn't mean that it's ok to mess up lechatchila. Nevertheless, Hashem still rests his Shechina amongst you. And it's very wonderous then why we have two Arons and two sets of Luchos. You need Luchos shleimos in the Mikdash because your mess-ups cannot turn into a lechatchila. There must be someplace that is Kodesh Kodashim—an ideal of doing everything perfectly. If you are not striving for perfection of a malach, you don't have the right goal in mind. None of us is perfect. But we should know what the Ideal is. It's not a compromise, and it is not mediocrity. The unbroken Luchos represent the Ideal. But at the same time, we ought to know that we can and do mess up—both a yachid and the tzibur. And nonetheless, Hashem still rests his Shechina amongst us and gives kedusha to the Luchos Shnios. And if we take this understanding to the battles that we fight in this world, then, im yirtze Hashem, we will remember that Hashem is with us, and we will be inspired to win them all.

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from: **Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein** <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: targumim@torah.org date: Jul 28, 2022, 12:13 PM subject: Reb Yeruchem - Look Inside For Real Torah

#### **Reb Yeruchem**

#### **Look Inside For Real Torah**

If a man takes a vow to Hashem, or swears an oath to create a prohibition upon himself, he may not desecrate his word.[2]

Vows are confusing. Sometimes they are recommended. Sometimes they are frowned upon. More confusing is how they work. A person takes something that is perfectly permitted according to Torah law, pronounces a verbal formula, and voila, it changes its spots. It turns into something impermissible. To boot, the Torah doesn't just suggest honoring one's word as an exercise in personal integrity. It views it as an actual, Torah-level prohibition like eating a cheeseburger or a BLT sandwich. How does this happen?

The explanation, I believe, is simple. It is axiomatic that Hashem demands of us not to be bound and shackled to our desires. We are directed countless times in our Torah to act in ways that are inconvenient and otherwise opposed by our perceived wants and needs. The Torah expects us to get past them; He expects that we can work our way free of their pressure, by reining in our passions and lusts.

Seen this way, the intended nature of vows is apparent. They are some of the tools to cut through the shackles that bind us to our desires. They can be an effective way for us to self-discipline, to restrain ourselves when our resolve weakens. Hashem provides them in our tool kit to get our assigned jobs done.

Moreover, we are taught that we are held accountable according to the extent of our understanding. The more we understand, the more Hashem expects – no, demands! – of us. When we realize that we need to protect ourselves by imposing individualized restraints on our behavior, those restraints rise to the level of Torah! They, too, become part of halachah – of what Hashem commands us to do.

This approach is the key to unlocking the meaning of a passage in the gemara.[3]

Porters broke a keg of wine belonging to Rabbah bar bar Chanan. He took their garments as payment. They went to complain to Rav, who said to Rabbah bar bar Chanan, "Give them back their garments." Rabbah bar bar Chanan asked Rav, "Is that the law?" Rav responded, "Yes, as it is written[4], 'In order that you go on the path of the good people.'" Rabbah bar bar Chanan gave them back their garments. The porters then said to Rav, "We are poor, we labored the entire day, and we are hungry and have nothing to eat." Rav then instructed Rabbah bar bar Chanan, "Pay them their

fee.” Rabbah bar bar Chanan asked Rav, “Is that the law?” Rav responded, “Yes, as the verse continues, ‘And keep the ways of righteous people.’”

Rav’s rulings sound...progressive, but they hardly can be called din/the law. A person has the right to say that he is not interested in performing a mitzvah min ha-muvchar/a choicely performed mitzvah. He can opt to stay within the letter of the law, without going beyond it. And that is exactly what Rabbah bar bar Chanan conveyed to Rav. “Is that the law? I wish to follow what the law asks of me, and nothing more!” Why did Rav instruct him to go beyond, and act on what we ordinarily call a midas chassidus/the way of the extremely pious?

The answer is as we explained above. Rav recognized Rabbah bar bar Chanan’s spiritual level, including what values he had fully comprehended and internalized. Rabbah bar bar Chanan fully understood the “right thing to do.” For him, that comprehension became normative. It became part of Torah, for which he would be held fully accountable.

For him, it had indeed become din.

1. Based on Daas Torah by Rav Yeruchem Levovitz zt”l, Bamidbar, pgs. 236-237 2. Bamidbar 30:3 3. Bava Metzia 83a ↑ 4. Mishlei 2:20 ↑  
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OU Torah Rabbi Sacks on Parsha

#### Oaths and Vows

#### Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

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

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

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

“These shall you offer to the Lord on your festivals, in addition to your vows and your freewill offerings.”

Num. 29:39

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

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

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

However, Judaism is particularly interested in one unusual use of language. The Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin called it “performative utterance.”[1] This happens when we use language not to describe something but to do

something. So, for instance, when a groom says to his bride under the chupah, “Behold you are betrothed to me,” he is not describing a marriage, he is getting married. When in ancient times the Beit Din declared the New Moon, they were not making a statement of fact. They were creating a fact, they were turning the day into the New Moon.

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

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

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

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

The other was Hannah Arendt, who in essence explained what Nietzsche meant. Human affairs are fraught with unpredictability. That is because we are free. We do not know how other people will behave or how they will respond to an act of ours. So we can never be sure of the consequences of our own decisions. Freedom seems to rob the human world of order. We can tell how inanimate objects will behave under different conditions. We can be reasonably sure of how animals will behave. But we cannot tell in advance how humans will react. How then can we create an orderly society without taking away people’s freedom?

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

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

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

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

They bend their tongues like bows;

They are valorous in the land for treachery, not for honesty;

They advance from evil to evil.

They do not heed Me – declares the Lord.  
 Beware of your friends;  
 Trust not even a brother,  
 For every one of them is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer.  
 Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth.  
 They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning.  
 You live in the midst of deceit; in their deceit they refuse to heed Me –  
 declares the Lord. Jer. 9:2–5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org)

## Retribution and Revenge

### MASEI

#### Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

Near the end of the book of Bamidbar, we encounter the law of the cities of refuge: three cities to the east of the Jordan and, later, three more within the land of Israel itself. There, people who had committed homicide could flee and find protection until their case was heard by a court of law. If they were found guilty of murder, in biblical times, they were sentenced to death. If found innocent – if the death happened by accident or inadvertently, with neither deliberation nor malice – then they were to stay in a city of refuge “until the death of the High Priest.” (See Num. 35:28) By residing there, they

were protected against revenge on the part of the goel ha-dam, the blood-redeemer, usually the closest relative of the person who had been killed.

Homicide is never less than serious in Jewish law. But there is a fundamental difference between murder – deliberate killing – and manslaughter, accidental death. To kill someone not guilty of murder as an act of revenge for an accidental death is not justice but further bloodshed; this must be prevented – hence the need for safe havens where people at risk from vigilantes.

The prevention of unjust violence is fundamental to the Torah. God’s covenant with Noah and humankind after the Flood identifies murder as the ultimate crime:

“One who sheds the blood of man – by man shall his blood be shed, for in God’s image man was made.”

Gen. 9:6 Blood wrongly shed cries out to Heaven itself. After Cain had murdered Abel, God said to Cain,

“Your brother’s blood is crying out to Me from the ground!”

Gen. 4:10 Here in Bamidbar we hear a similar sentiment:

“You shall not pollute the land in which you live; blood pollutes the land, and the land can have no atonement for the blood that is shed in it – except through the blood of the one who shed it.”

Num. 35:33 The verb ch-n-ph, which appears twice in this verse and nowhere else in the Mosaic books, means to pollute, to soil, to dirty, to defile. There is something fundamentally blemished about a world in which murder goes unpunished. Human life is sacred. Even justified acts of bloodshed, as in the case of war, still communicate impurity. A Kohen who has shed blood does not therefore bless the people.<sup>[1]</sup> David is told that he may not build the Temple “because you shed much blood.”<sup>[2]</sup> Death defiles. That is what lies behind the idea of revenge. And though the Torah rejects revenge except when commanded by God,<sup>[3]</sup> something of the idea survives in the concept of the goel ha-dam, wrongly translated as ‘blood-avenger.’ It means, in fact, ‘blood-redeemer.’

A redeemer is someone who rights an imbalance in the world, who rescues someone or something and restores it to its rightful place. Thus Boaz redeems land belonging to Naomi.<sup>[4]</sup> Redeemers are the ones who restore relatives to freedom after they have been forced to sell themselves into slavery.<sup>[5]</sup> God redeems His people from bondage in Egypt. A blood-redeemer is one who ensures that murder does not go unpunished.

However, not all acts of killing are murder. Some are bishgaggah, that is, unintentional, accidental, or inadvertent. These are the acts that lead to exile in the cities of refuge. Yet, there is an ambiguity about this law. Was exile to the cities of refuge considered a way of protecting the accidental killer, or was it a form of punishment – not the death sentence that would have applied to one guilty of murder, but punishment nonetheless? Recall that exile is a biblical form of punishment. Adam and Eve, after their sin, were exiled from Eden. Cain, after killing Abel, was told he would be “a restless wanderer on the face of the earth.” (Gen. 4:12) We say in our prayers, “Because of our sins we were exiled from our land.”

In truth both elements are present. On the one hand, the Torah says that “the assembly must protect the one accused of murder from the redeemer of blood and send the accused back to the city of refuge to which they fled.” (Num. 35:25) Here the emphasis is on protection. But on the other hand, we read that if the exiled person “ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which they fled and the redeemer of blood finds them outside the city, the redeemer of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder.” (Num. 35:26–27) Here an element of guilt is presumed; otherwise why would the blood-redeemer be innocent of murder?<sup>[6]</sup>

Let us examine how the Talmud and Maimonides explain the provision that those who are exiled must stay in the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. What had the High Priest to do with accidental killing? According to the Talmud, the High Priest “should have asked for mercy [i.e. should have prayed that there be no accidental deaths among the people] and he did not do so.”<sup>[7]</sup> The assumption is that had the High Priest prayed more fervently, God would not have allowed this accident to happen. Whether or

not there is moral guilt, something wrong has occurred and there is a need for atonement, achieved partly through exile and partly through the death of the High Priest. For the High Priest atoned for the people as a whole and, when he died, his death atoned for the death of those who were accidentally killed.

Maimonides, however, gives a completely different explanation in *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III:40). For him the issue at stake is not atonement but protection. The reason the man goes into exile in a city of refuge is to allow the passions of the relative of the victim, the blood-redeemer, to cool. The exile stays there until the death of the High Priest, because his death creates a mood of national mourning, which dissolves the longing for revenge – “for it is a natural phenomenon that we find consolation in our misfortune when the same misfortune or a greater one befalls another person. Amongst us no death causes more grief than that of the High Priest.”

The desire for revenge is basic. It exists in all societies. It led to cycles of retaliation – the Montagues against the Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Corleones and Tattaglias in *The Godfather* – that have no natural end. Wars of the clans were capable of destroying whole societies.<sup>[8]</sup>

The Torah, understanding that the desire for revenge as natural, tames it by translating it into something else altogether. It recognises the pain, the loss and moral indignation of the family of the victim. That is the meaning of the phrase *goel hadam*, the blood-redeemer, the figure who represents that instinct for revenge. The Torah legislates for people with all their passions, not for saints. It is a realistic code, not a utopian one.

Yet the Torah inserts one vital element between the killer and the victim’s family: the principle of justice. There must be no direct act of revenge. The killer must be protected until his case has been heard in a court of law. If found guilty, he must pay the price. If found innocent, he must be given refuge. This single act turns revenge into retribution. This makes all the difference.

People often find it difficult to distinguish retribution and revenge, yet they are completely different concepts. Revenge is an I-Thou relationship. You killed a member of my family so I will kill you. It is intrinsically personal. Retribution, by contrast, is impersonal. It is no longer the Montagues against the Capulets but both under the impartial rule of law. Indeed the best definition of the society the Torah seeks to create is nomocracy: the rule of laws, not men.

Retribution is the principled rejection of revenge. It says that we are not free to take the law into our own hands. Passion may not override the due process of the law, for that is a sure route to anarchy and bloodshed. Wrong must be punished, but only after it has been established by a fair trial, and only on behalf, not just of the victim but of society as a whole. It was this principle that drove the work of the late Simon Wiesenthal in bringing Nazi war criminals to trial. He called his biography *Justice, not Vengeance*.<sup>[9]</sup> The cities of refuge were part of this process by which vengeance was subordinated to, and replaced by, retributive justice.

This is not just ancient history. Almost as soon as the Berlin Wall fell and the Cold War came to an end in 1989, brutal ethnic war came to the former Yugoslavia, first in Bosnia then Kosovo. It has now spread to Iraq, Syria, and many other parts of the world. In his book *The Warrior’s Honor*, Michael Ignatieff wondered how these regions descended so rapidly into chaos. This was his conclusion:

The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between the generations; the violence it engenders is a ritual form of respect for the community’s dead – therein lies its legitimacy. Reconciliation is difficult precisely because it must compete with the powerful alternative morality of violence. Political terror is tenacious because it is an ethical practice. It is a cult of the dead, a dire and absolute expression of respect.

Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York: Henry Holt, 2000. p. 188. It is foolhardy to act as if the desire for revenge does not exist. It does. But given free rein, it will reduce societies to violence and bloodshed without end. The only alternative is to channel it through the operation of law, fair trial, and then either punishment or protection. That is what was introduced into civilisation by the law of the cities of refuge, allowing retribution to take the place of revenge, and justice the place of retaliation.

[1] Brachot 32b; Rambam, *Hilchot Tefillah* 15:3.

[2] I Chronicles 22:8.

[3] Only God, the Giver of life, can command us to take life, and then often only on the basis of facts known to God but not to us.

[4] See Ruth, chapters 3-4.

[5] See Lev. 25, where the verb appears 19 times.

[6] See Amnon Bazak, ‘Cities of Refuge and Cities of Flight,’ in Torah MiEtzion, *Devarim*, Maggid, Jerusalem, 2012, pp. 229-236.

[7] Makkot 11a.

[8] See Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

[9] New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1989.

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from: **Rabbi Chanan Morrison** <chanan@ravkooktorah.org> date: Jul 28, 2022, 3:49 AM

### **Tisha B’Av: Rebuilding the World with Love**

#### **Rectifying Baseless Hatred**

#### **Rav Kook Torah**

Why was the Second Temple destroyed? The Sages in *Yoma* 9b noted that the people at that time studied Torah, observed mitzvot and performed good deeds. Their great failure was in *sinat chinam* - baseless hatred. It was internal strife and conflict that ultimately brought about the Temple’s destruction.

How may we rectify this sin of *sinat chinam*? Rav Kook wrote, in one of his most oft-quoted statements:

“If we were destroyed, and the world with us, due to baseless hatred, then we shall rebuild ourselves, and the world with us, with baseless love — *ahavat chinam*. (*Orot HaKodesh* vol. III, p. 324)

This call for baseless love could be interpreted as following Maimonides’ advice on how to correct bad character traits. In the fourth chapter of *Shemonah Perakim*, Maimonides taught that negative traits are corrected by temporarily overcompensating and practicing the opposite extreme. For example, one who is naturally stingy should balance this trait by acting overly generous, until he succeeds in uprooting his miserliness. Similarly, by going to the extreme of *ahavat chinam*, we repair the trait of *sinat chinam*.

This interpretation, however, is not Rav Kook’s line of thought. *Ahavat chinam* is not a temporary remedy, but an ideal, the result of our perception of the world’s underlying unity and goodness.

**The Source of Hatred** Why do we hate others? We may think of many reasons why, but these explanations are not the real source for our hatred of other people. They are merely signs and indications of our hatred. It is a lack of clarity of thought that misleads us into believing that these are the true causes of hatred.

The true source of hate comes from our *otzar hachaim*, our inner resource of life. This fundamental life-force pushes us to live and thrive, and opposes all that it views as different and threatening. Ultimately, our hate is rooted in *sinat chinam* - groundless and irrational animosity, just because something is different.

Yet even in hatred lies a hidden measure of love. Baseless love and baseless hatred share a common source, a love of life and the world. This common source hates that which is evil and destructive, and loves that which is good and productive.

How can we overcome our hatred? If we can uncover the depth of good in what we perceive as negative, we will be able to see how good will result even from actions and ideas that we oppose. We will then recognize that our reasons for hatred are unfounded, and transform our hatred into love and appreciation.

#### "I Burn with Love!"

This idea of ahavat chinam was not just a theoretical concept. Rav Kook was well-known for his profound love for all Jews, even those far removed from Torah and mitzvot. When questioned why he loved Jews distant from the ideals of Torah, he would respond, "Better I should err on the side of baseless love, than I should err on the side of baseless hatred."

Stories abound of Rav Kook's extraordinary love for other Jews, even those intensely antagonistic to his ways and beliefs. Once Rav Kook was publicly humiliated by a group of extremists who showered him with waste water in the streets of Jerusalem. The entire city was in an uproar over this scandalous act. The legal counsel of the British Mandate advised Rav Kook to press charges against the hooligans, promising that they would be promptly deported from the country. The legal counsel, however, was astounded by the Chief Rabbi's response.

"I have no interest in court cases. Despite what they did to me, I love them. I am ready to kiss them, so great is my love! I burn with love for every Jew."

Practical Steps towards Ahavat Chinam In his magnum opus *Orot HaKodesh*, Rav Kook gave practical advice on how to achieve this love.

Love for the Jewish people does not start from the heart, but from the head. To truly love and understand the Jewish people - each individual Jew and the nation as a whole — requires a wisdom that is both insightful and multifaceted. This intellectual inquiry is an important discipline of Torah study. Loving others does not mean indifference to baseness and moral decline. Our goal is to awaken knowledge and morality, integrity, and refinement; to clearly mark the purpose of life, its purity and holiness. Even our acts of loving-kindness should be based on a hidden Gevurah, an inner outrage at the world's — and thus our own — spiritual failures. If we take note of others' positive traits, we will come to love them with an inner affection. This is not a form of insincere flattery, nor does it mean white-washing their faults and foibles. But by concentrating on their positive characteristics — and every person has a good side — the negative aspects become less significant. This method provides an additional benefit. The Sages cautioned against joining with the wicked and exposing oneself to their negative influence. But if we connect to their positive traits, then this contact will not endanger our own moral and spiritual purity. We can attain a high level of love for Israel by deepening our awareness of the inner ties that bind together all the souls of the Jewish people, throughout all the generations. In the following revealing passage, Rav Kook expressed his own profound sense of connection with and love for every Jewish soul: "Listen to me, my people! I speak to you from my soul, from within my innermost soul. I call out to you from the living connection by which I am bound to all of you, and by which all of you are bound to me. I feel this more deeply than any other feeling: that only you — all of you, all of your souls, throughout all of your generations — you alone are the meaning of my life. In you I live. In the aggregation of all of you, my life has that content that is called 'life.' Without you, I have nothing. All hopes, all aspirations, all purpose in life, all that I find inside myself — these are only when I am with you. I need to connect with all of your souls. I must love you with a boundless love....

Each one of you, each individual soul from the aggregation of all of you, is a great spark from the torch of infinite light, which enlightens my existence. You give meaning to life and work, to Torah and prayer, to song and hope. It is through the conduit of your being that I sense everything and love everything." (Shemonah Kevatzim, vol. I, sec. 163)

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Orot HaKodesh* vol. III, pp. 324-334; *Malachim K'venei Adam*, pp. 262, 483-485)

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from: OU Kosher <noreply@ounetwork.org> date: Jul 28, 2022, 8:01 AM  
subject: **Halacha Yomis** - Friday Rosh Chodesh Av, Showering

Q. When Rosh Chodesh Av occurs on Erev Shabbos, as it does this year, are there any restrictions on taking a shower?

A. During the Nine Days, a person may not shower or bathe (Rama OC 551:16) but may wash his hands, feet and face with cold water (Mishna Berura ibid. 94) without soap or shampoo (Magen Avraham ibid. 41).

In warm climates, where one tends to perspire, some poskim allow a brief shower in cold or lukewarm water, and when necessary soap may be used as well (See Piskei Teshuvos 551:48 and Moadei Yeshurun p. 132:14 and p. 156:80).

This year we have two Arvei Shabbosos during the Nine Days. The first occurs on Rosh Chodesh Av and the second is the one which falls on Erev Tisha B'Av. On the first Erev Shabbos, for one who always honors the Shabbos by bathing on Erev Shabbos, the mitzvah of kovod Shabbos overrides the restrictions of the Nine Days and one may wash his whole body in hot water (Mishna Berura 551:89) and use soap (see Dirshu MB, Beurim 551:104 in the name of Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach, zt"l) even when not required for hygienic purposes.

On the second Friday, Erev Shabbos Chazon, one may wash hands, face and feet with hot water. Nowadays, since people shower daily, Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l allowed bathing the entire body as well (Moadei Yeshurun p. 133:21 and Kitzur Hilchos Bein HaMitzrim p. 13:7).

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from: Ben Olam Haba <ben@halachafortoday.com> date: Jul 28, 2022, 8:15 PM subject: Week In Review: Week of Parashiyos Matos- Masei 5782  
www.HalachahForToday.com PARASHAS MATOS- MASEI 5782 When Reading in Shul, Do Not Read During Davening or Krias HaTorah

CURRENT TOPIC: HILCHOS BEIN HAMETZORIM Halachos for Sunday, July 24, 2022

1) The severity of the prohibitions of the 'three weeks' increase for the last 'nine days' from Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av through Tisha B'Av, and increase even further for the actual week in which Tisha B'Av falls. (See Shulchan Aruch Siman 551: 2 and 3) During the nine days we do not eat meat or poultry, and we don't drink wine. (See Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 58 and Aruch HaShulchan Siman 551:24. This includes minors; See Mishna Berura S"K 70) However, if someone is ill (this includes a mother of a newborn or similarly ill individual) and meat will make them feel better, he/she may eat meat. However, If possible, the ill person should abstain from meat from the 7th of Av (the day the idol worshipers entered the Heichal of the Bais HaMikdash) until after Tisha B'Av. (See Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 61) The prohibition against eating meat does not apply on Shabbos or at a Seudas Mitzvah (e.g. Bris, Pidyon Haben, and Siyum on a tractate of Talmud) (Rama Siman 551:10 and Mishna Berura S"K 73. We will discuss more details pertaining to "Seudas Mitzvah" tomorrow B'Ezras Hashem)

2) There is a discussion in the Poskim whether one may eat leftover meat and meat dishes from Shabbos on Motzaei Shabbos and Sunday. The prevalent custom, based on the consensus of most contemporary Poskim is to be stringent with this. (See Aruch Hashulchan Siman 551:24 and Birchei Yosef Siman 551:6 and Sha'arei Teshuva Siman 551 Os 29)

Regarding the cup of wine at Havdalah, according to many Poskim it is best to have a child drink it (This child must be old enough to understand that you are being Motzaei him with the Bracha of HaGafen but not too old that he comprehends how to mourn the Churban, and thus cannot drink wine either. Rav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach Zatzal and other Poskim maintained that such a child is hard to find and thus rule that it is always best to drink it yourself even if a child is available. See Rama Siman 551:10 and Mishna Berura S"K 70) If no child is available, the one who recited Havdalah may drink it.(ibid.)

Halachos for Monday, July 25, 2022

1) At a "Seudas Mitzvah" during the 'nine days', meat and wine (during the meal as well as for Birchaz Hamazon after the meal) are permitted.(Rama Siman 551:10 and Mishna Berura S"K 72 and 75) The allowance is not just for the one celebrating the "Simcha" but also for his wife, children as well as for his friends and any other man or woman who would otherwise have been invited to the meal had it not been during the 'nine days' as well. (See Mishna Berura S"K 73)

2) One who attends the Seudas Mitzvah just in order to eat meat and drink wine, but has no particular closeness or friendship to the one making the Simcha has not acted properly. (Mogen Avrohom in the name of the MaHaril, quoted in Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 76. In many summer camps and other such venues, often in the presence of Gedolei Yisroel, they do have someone make a siyum and then serve Fleishigs to the campers. Although this is seemingly not in accordance with halacha, there are those who are melamed zechus on this practice, especially for children. It is definitely best not to rely on this minhag if at all possible.) Only while actually in attendance at the Seudas Mitzvah is the meat and wine permitted; meat and wine sent from the Seudah to someone's home is prohibited. (Mishna Berura S"K 75) Once the actual week of Tisha B'Av arrives, only ten of the guests (besides the ones making the Simcha) may eat meat and drink wine, while the rest of the attendees must eat non-meat and wine items. (Rama ibid. and Mishna Berura S"K 77)

Halachos for Tuesday, July 26, 2022

1) A meal in conjunction with a Siyum upon completing a Masechta (tractate of Mishna or Talmud) is considered a Seudas Mitzvah and may contain meat and wine when celebrated during the 'nine days'. (Rama Siman 551:10)

2) If one would not otherwise have finished the Masechta he was learning in time for a Siyum in the 'nine days' he should not increase or decrease his speed of learning in order to have it "conveniently" fall out in time for a meat meal in the 'nine days'.(Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 73)

Likewise, if one would usually not make a Siyum with a meal for finishing whatever it is he finished, had it not been in the 'nine days', he should not make it during the 'nine days' either. (ibid.)

Halachos for Wednesday, July 27, 2022

1) Even those who did not finish the Masechta or even learn any part of it together with the one making the Siyum, may participate in the meal and partake of the meat and wine, provided that they would have participated in the meal had it taken place at a different time of year as well. (Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 73. See also Biur Halacha Dibur Hamaschil V'Siyum Maseches where he brings a more stringent opinion from Rav Yaakov Emden Zatzal regarding who may be on the Siyum guest list during the 'nine days') Like any Seudas Mitzvah, once the week of Tisha B'Av arrives, only ten of the guests (besides the ones making the Siyum) may eat meat and drink wine, while the rest of the attendees must eat non-meat and wine items. (Rama Siman 551 and Mishna Berura S"K 77)

2) A Seudas Bar Mitzvah taking place "Bo Bayom" is considered a Seudas Mitzvah and a meat meal may be served at the Bar Mitzvah celebration during the 'nine days'. If, however, the meal is taking place on a day other than the actual day on which the boy turns thirteen years of age, it may only be considered a Seudas Mitzvah, according to some Poskim, if the boy gives a speech with Torah content (See Chayei Adam Klal 133:16 and Mogen Avraham Siman 225:4 quoting the Yam Shel Shlomo Bava Kama Perek 5 Siman 37)

In the week in which Tisha B'Av falls, if it isn't the boy's actual thirteenth birthday, a Seudas Bar Mitzvah should not be scheduled, rather it should be postponed until after Tisha B'av.(Ruling of Harav Chaim Kanievsky Zatzal quoted in Sefer Yad B'Bein Hametzorim page 86 footnote 17)

Many people have the custom to make a Seudah on the eve before a baby's Bris. This is referred to as a "Vacht Nacht Seudah". (See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Siman 163:8) Some Poskim(Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Siman 122:8) prohibit serving meat and wine at such a Seudah that takes place during the

'nine days', while some (See Sha'arei Teshuva Siman 551:33) allow it, besides for the actual week in which Tisha B'av falls out. The Shvus Yaakov (Vol. 3 Siman 36, quoted in Sha'rei Teshuva above) allows only one item (either meat or wine) at such a Seuda, in order that there at least some sort of a remembrance of the Churban Bais HaMikdash.)

Halachos for Thursday, July 28, 2022

1) It is prohibited to launder clothing, or even to wear freshly laundered clothing or use freshly laundered linen, tablecloths and towels, during the nine days, except for on Shabbos. (Shulchan Aruch and Rama Siman 551:3) It is similarly prohibited to give clothing to an Aino-Yehudi dry cleaner or Laundromat (or an Aino-yehudi housekeeper) in this time period, even if the clothing isn't needed for the nine days, and will only be picked up and worn after Tisha B'Av. Clothing that is needed for very small children, may be laundered in small loads, as needed.(Rama ibid. and Mishna Berura S"K 83) If a Jew owns a dry cleaners or a Laundromat, he may clean clothing of Aino-Yehudim during the nine days, if his Parnassah depends on it. (See Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 42)

2) It is the accepted custom to prohibit showering the entire body at once in the regular manner during the nine days, even with cold water, besides for a shower on Erev Shabbos. (Rama Siman 551:16 and Mishna Berura S"K 94) If one is unable to go nine days without a shower, as is the case for most people nowadays, there are various leniencies discussed by the Poskim. Some allow showering without soap and shampoo. Some Poskim allow only cold showers (or at least not as hot as one is accustomed to). For Halacha L'Ma'aseh a Rav should be consulted.

Halachos for Erev Shabbos Kodesh, July 29, 2022 Double Portion L'Kavod Shabbos Kodesh Halachos for Erev Shabbos Kodesh 1) Obviously, for medical reasons regular hot showers are permitted during the 'nine days'. Thus, pregnant women, mothers of newborns, and other frail people may shower as necessary. (See Sha'ar HaTziyun Siman 551 os 94. According to many Poskim, one who is extremely sweaty may also shower, with cold water, to freshen up without shampoo and soap, as this isn't considered washing for pleasure. See Aruch Hashulchan Siman 551:38 and Igros Moshe Even HaEzer Vol. 4 Siman 84:4)

2) One who has the custom to immerse in a Mikvah every day, without fail, may immerse in a Mikvah during the 'nine days' provided the water is not hot. (See Aruch HaShulchan Siman 551:35) Likewise, one who has the custom to immerse in a Mikvah each Erev Shabbos, without fail, may do so on Erev Shabbos Chazon as well, provided the water is not hot. (Mishna Berura Siman 551 S"K 95 and Sha'ar HaTziyun os 98) For Halacha L'Ma'aseh, as always, a Rav must be consulted.

Halachos for Shabbos Kodesh 1) It is prohibited to sew any new clothing or shoes in the 'nine days', including socks and similar garments. (Shulchan Aruch Siman 551:7 and Mishna Berura S"K 46.) New shoes may also not be worn in the 'nine days'. (Mishna Berura S"K 47)

2) An article of clothing that ripped during the nine days may be mended and worn, as the prohibition against sewing clothing is only applicable to making new clothing. Similarly, if a button fell off a shirt or any other article of clothing, it may be sewn on during the nine days. (See Kaf HaChaim Siman 551:115) Halacha For Today sends a FREE daily email received by thousands of Yidden across the world, which contains practical Halacha and Chizuk for everyday life. To subscribe, send a request to Ben@HalachaForToday.com or sign up via the website www.HalachaForToday.com. To sponsor the daily email or this Week In Review Sheet please email Ben@HalachaForToday.com. The Halachos are based on my personal understanding of the Halachic texts quoted, and are for learning purposes only, NOT for Psak Halacha. If you have questions or require further source information, please email Ben@HalachaForToday.com and I will try to respond as soon as I can. For a Halacha L'Ma'aseh Psak, please contact your local Orthodox Rabbi

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from: Office of the Chief Rabbi <info@chiefrabbi.org> date: Jul 28, 2022, 7:14 AM

## Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

### Matot-Masei

#### The Torah on ‘cancel culture’

Video transcript: Where in the Torah do we find a warning against ‘cancel culture’? In Parshat Matot, we find that the tribes of Reuven, Gad and half the tribe of Menashe appealed to Moshe to allow them to dwell on the east side of the River Jordan. At first, Moshe questioned their sincerity, however, he then gave them a condition and said that if they would come to fight with the people in the conquest of Cana'an then, “Vehiyitem nekiim meiHashem umiYisroel,” - “You will then be innocent and good in the eyes of Hashem and in the eyes of the people of Israel.”

Now this is intriguing. Surely if the two and a half tribes were to achieve a distinction in a report card from Hashem, it would not be necessary to receive a report card as well from the people! If they were to be found to be innocent and good in Hashem’s eyes, why is it necessary to say in the eyes of the people as well?

R’ Zalman Sorotzkin in his book *Oznaim LeTorah* explains beautifully. He says that sometimes we find a weakness in the minds and in the hearts of some people. Perhaps they have feelings of inadequacy within themselves or perhaps they are jealous of others and this results in them trying to tear others apart, to highlight a little point where, a little point there, and as a result to declare the entire person to be ‘treif’. That is why, with regard to the two and a half tribes, Hashem says that they should be ‘nekiim meiHashem umiYisroel’ - if they are good in the eyes of Hashem, that should be good enough for us. And the view of the nation should follow automatically.

I find this to be of enormous relevance at our time, when cancel culture is gaining strength within our society.

In Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, we are taught, “Vehevi dan et kol ha’adam lekaf zechut.” - “You should judge every person favourably.” But some explain ‘kol haadam’ actually to mean the whole person, meaning that when we view others we should look at the entire person, kol haadam - not just one little point concerning them but rather to see them in their entire context and as a result we we’ll always be able to judge people favourably.

From Parshat Matot we learn that if someone or something is good enough in the eyes of Hashem, it should also be good enough for us.

Shabbat shalom

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from: The Lamm Heritage Archives <lammheritage@yu.edu> date: Jul 28, 2022, 5:02 PM subject: The Disciples of Aaron

### Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm zt”l

#### Matot Masei 1960

##### “The Disciples of Aaron”

כיוון שמת אהרון ונתקל ממה יירדו משה ואלעזר והיו כל ישראל עזזין ומצפין  
לאוות מפני שהיא אוהבת שלום ורודף שלום - ליק"ש רמז תשפ"ז הלו אמר: הוי מתלמידיו של  
אהרן, אהוב שלום ורודף שלום, אהוב את הבריות ומקרבן ל תורה - אבות פ"א מ"ב

The death of Aaron, recorded in this morning’s Sidra, is described in stirring and dramatic detail in the Midrash. The people mourned for Aaron even more than they later did for Moses, for Aaron was a man who loved peace and pursued peace. It was an eternal tribute to the first High-Priest of Israel that Hillel bade us regard ourselves as the disciples of Aron by emulating his noble qualities. They are four in numbers, and deserve to be spelled out clearly for all of us who so earnestly desire the ideals Aaron cherished.

Ohev shalom. To the man who is ambitious and opportunistic, peace is only a truce, a poor second-best to total victory for his own ruthless pursuits. In order to be a disciple of Aaron, you must not seek peace merely for its utilitarian value, not merely because it is the best arrangement under the conditions that prevail, but because you love peace, because peace is the normal, most desirable state of the world. One of G-d’s names is: Shalom. Shalom is a positive virtue in its own right, not merely the absence of strife. Hence, one must not only hate war but love peace. Peace is the kind of harmony that leads to perfection; Shalom leads to shalom. Rodef shalom. To pursue peace means not to be satisfied with finding it, but actively to engage

in seeking it out, in creating it where it is lacking. Aaron was a pursuer of peace. The Rabbis tell of Aaron going first to one antagonist and then to the other and telling each how the other regrets the state of enmity and wishes that bygones would be bygones. As a result of his active efforts, peace would reign.

There is yet another explanation of this felicitous phrase given by a Hasidic teacher. Peace, he says, is a virtue only when it unites decent people with each other. But peace amongst people of evil design can only lead to greater harm to the world. Therefore one must “pursue” peace, in the sense of chasing it away, when it concerns corrupt and malicious people. If we fail to “pursue” peace in this sense, then the Arab League might prove a more serious threat to Israel, the Chinese and Russians too powerful for the survival of democracy, and the gangsters of the country more influential than the forces of righteousness.

Ohev et ha-beriyot. The love of fellow man can come from many sources. I may love my fellow human because he is human. In a deeper sense, that means I love another man because I love myself, I see myself in him. There is nothing wrong with that kind of humanistic approach. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” implies we must first love ourselves. But there is always the danger that one does not really love himself. There is the danger that this kind of love exists only where I feel a kinship of some kind between myself and the other man. But where there are pronounced differences in color or belief or background or opinion, this kind of love breaks down. Hence, Hillel tells us, we must be disciples of Aaron who loved et ha-beriyot--creatures. He loved men because they were created by G-d. In loving man he loved G-d, for the love of created and Creator were intimately bound up with each other in his eyes. And when we love a man because he is G-d’s creature, then no differences between us can affect that love adversely. “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, I am the Lord.”

U’mekarvan le’Torah. The love of fellow creature may be expressed in many ways. Charity, respect, consideration, economic assistance, appreciation—all are signs of such love. But greatest of all is helping your fellow creature find meaning in life, assist[ing] him to appreciate why he is alive and how to spend his life in a manner that is worthy and dignified. The highest form of ohev et ha-beriyot is therefore mekarvan le’Torah. The “Netziv” of Volozhin used to say that this Mishnah urges us to love not only those who are devout and scholars, benei Torah, but--perhaps especially--those who are distant from Torah. For the Tanna pleads with us to love people and bring them close to Torah--which means that they originally were distant from Torah, and only through our love were brought close!

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

1

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 KEDUSHAH

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-Ellokim' - 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

## YERUSA & 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 the 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 sojourned'. 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 Syro-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 KEDUSHAH

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 I: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 kedushat ha-mikdash']. 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-hitnachaltem 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 'hachala'.

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'ydaber 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 Trmidim 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 parshiyah 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 pausk 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'ydaber 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 parshiyah! [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'ydaber Hashem el Moshe...". Ramban brings two other examples where commandments by Moshe that begin with ZEH HA'DAVAR are not prefaced with a "va'ydaber 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 be 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 halachic 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 parshiyah 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 '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 parshiyah 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 able to fulfill it. As the potential "chillul Hashem" is less, the Torah provides a special avenue through which she can annul her vow.

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

#### NEXT TIME

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

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

## PARASHAT MATOT: SECRET STRUGGLE

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

### SETTING THE SCENE:

In the end of our parasha, two shevatim (tribes) approach the leaders of the nation with a request. The tribes: Re'uven 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'uven 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'uven 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'uven 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 accordinig him great status.

#### **"THE LAND HASHEM HAS CONQUERED":**

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

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

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

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

#### **MOSHE RESPONDS (NOT):**

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

Why doesn't Moshe respond?

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

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

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

### **MOSHE RESPONDS (REALLY):**

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

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

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

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

### **LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE SECRET:**

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

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

making this a private conversation and then sweetening their offer.

### **THE NEW DEAL:**

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

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

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 Cana'anites 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 Cana’an, 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-hayyil, ve-lo be-kho’ah, ki im be-ruhi.”

#### **MESSAGE C: FAILURE IN RELATIONSHIP TO ERETZ YISRAEL:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom

## Parshios Matos & Masei: (Siyyum on Sefer Bamidbar)

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

### I. TRIBAL INTEGRITY AND FAMILY INTEGRITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why are these two presentations isolated from each other?

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

Another question of "placement" may be asked regarding the other significant "land-allotment challenge" at the end of Bamidbar. Chapter 32 is devoted to the "doubled condition" made with the members of the tribes of Gad and Re'uven (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'uven "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 Hukkat - 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 Siyum to our study of Sefer Bamidbar. First - a much more basic question about the Sefer.

### **III. LEKHTEIKH AHARAI BAMIDBAR - ?**

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

Several of the events about which we read - notably the incident with the scouts ("spies") the Korach rebellion and the incident at Shittim (Ba'al P'or) - lead to explicit Divine threats to destroy the people (or so it seems to Mosheh - see Bamidbar 16:21-22 and Rabbenu Hannanel ad loc.). Even though each of these threats was averted, the "mega-question" must be asked:

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

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

A: Chapters 1-10:

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

- 1-4: Census
- 1-2: General Census
- 3-4: Levite Census
- 5-6: Assorted Laws relating to Sanctity of the Camp
- 7: Dedication of the Mishkan
- 8-10: Preparation for leaving Sinai
- 8: Sanctification of the Levi'im
- 9 (1-14): Celebration of Pesach, Institution of Pesach Sheni
- 9 (15-23): Description of the 'Anan
- 10 (1-10): The Trumpets of Assembly
- 10 (11-28): Beginnings of Travel
- 10 (29-34): Invitation to Hovav
- 10 (35-36): Misplaced Parashah (see Rav Soloveitchik's shiur)
- B. Chapters 11-25: "The Troubles"
- 11-12: Challenges of Leadership
- 11:1-3: Mit'onenim ("complainers")
- 11:4-35: Mit'avim ("lusters")
- 12: Mosheh, Miriam and Aharon (Lashon haRa')
- 13-14: Scouts ("Spies")
- 13 - 14:39: M'raglim (Scouts)
- 14:40 - 45: Ma'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") from 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'uv'en. 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'uv'en 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 Hukkat, 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'uv'en 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'uv'en 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'uv'en 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'laket"!]

### **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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