

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 13 #39, July 10-11, 2026; 26 Tammuz 5786; Matot-Masei 5786
Rosh Hodesh Av (start of Nine Days) is Tuesday evening and Wednesday

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

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Note: My upcoming schedule for Devrei Torah: Devarim (July 17): hope to prepare and send out. Vaetchanan (July 24) – short week with Tisha B'Av. Unlikely to print. July 31 (Eikev) – away, no issue. August 7 (Re'eh) – away, no issue. August 14 (Shoftim): soon after our return – no promises but will try to print. During my absence, visit my archives at PotomacTorah.org for issues from the last several years.

The chronology of the Torah essentially ends with God telling Moshe to climb a certain mountain and view the land of Israel – and then Moshe would die (27:12). Neither Sefer Bemidbar nor the Torah ends at this point. The Torah presents the korbanot (ch. 28, 29), the revenge war against Midian, Matot-Masei, and all of Sefer Devarim before the Torah concludes. Sefer Devarim is a special category – the final words of Moshe (rather than the words of Hashem, as in the earlier parts of the Torah) – discussion to come in future weeks. My focus here is on Masei. Why is this material an appropriate conclusion to Sefer Bemidbar?

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, focuses on the closing of Robert Frost's poem, "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

The woods are lovely dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Several of the Devrei Torah below make similar points. To quote Rabbi Sacks, "life is a journey, not a destination." As Rabbi Marc Angel states, the journey itself is ultimately more valuable – in certain ways – than achieving the goal. Rabbi Angel recounts John Steinbeck's story, "The Leader of the People." An old man does fine on a cross country trip, but when he reaches the Pacific Ocean, he has a psychological block, nowhere further to go. He cannot find a new goal, a new journey, to keep engaged in life. The Torah gives us this message: when we reach one goal, to move forward we must find and start working toward a new goal. In Masei, the Torah reports all 42 places where B'Nai Yisrael stop and camp during their 40 years in the Midbar. Our ancestors continue on their journey for 40 years before entering the Promised land.

Two books of the Torah (Shemot and Bemidbar) focus on our journey from Egypt to the border of Israel. (Vayikra focuses primarily on mitzvot – laws that Hashem gives us through Moshe.) The Torah ends with B'Nai Yisrael at the border. The

most important material is the journey, not our entering Israel. Our festivals celebrate the redemption from Egypt, Revelation at Sinai on Shavuot, and God's protection in the Midbar (related most closely to Sukkot). As Rabbi Marc Angel puts it, Jews do not have a festival celebrating the day that B'Nai Israel enter the Promised Land.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander expands the discussion via the Haftorah, from Yirmiyahu. King Yoshiyahu becomes king as a young child following the reigns of his wicked father and grandfather. Yoshiyahu aggressively fights idolatry. During this time, Chilkiah, the Kohen Gadol, discovers an old Torah scroll while the king has the Temple renovated. (Apparently no one had seen or read the Torah for many years during the wicked times of Yoshiyahu's father and grandfather.) Although Yoshiyahu rids the country of virtually all signs of idolatry, his efforts do not change the private practices of many of the Jews of the time. King Yoshiyahu goes against Yirmiyahu and eventually dies trying to defend his kingdom.

Rabbi Brander observes that Israel faces the same challenge today. Young Israelis often go against our religion, because commitments to the mitzvot require internal, individual commitments to "God, purpose, faith, and spirituality." Parents and teachers cannot impose these commitments from the top down. Every young person is on a journey. Many who go away from the mitzvot when young ultimately return when they mature and build families of their own. Rabbi Brander states that "older generations must safeguard the wholeness of our children and families in private" so the younger generations can cultivate a genuine passion for God and Torah. (This goal is an important reason why I add a Devar Torah by an inspiring graduate of an Ohr Torah Stone high school after Rabbi Brander's Devar Haftorah each week.)

Sara Lamm of TheIsraelBible.com and Israel365 Publications focuses on the much too frequent sight of injured young Israelis. Too many of them must navigate with crutches, accessibility scooters, or other support devices because of the vicious attack by Hamas and resulting war that has not yet ended. She focuses on the story of Ehud, a grossly fat Jew who was able to kill the most powerful man in Moab because no one thought that he could possibly be a threat (Judges ch. 3). As Ms. Lamm observes, Ehud follows a personal journey. He helps Israel, because he does not sit back – he moves. His story fits in with the theme of Masei.

All of us have our own personal journeys. Even as I graduate from middle age to elderly status, I have a journey and hopefully many miles to go before I die. Part of my journey is to encourage my children and grandchildren to feel a part of the long history of our people and to include mitzvot in their own journeys.

In Matot, Reuven and Gad request that Moshe permit them to remain on the east side of the Jordan River, because the grazing area is much better from their large holdings of livestock. After negotiating, Moshe permits this request – but adds putting half of the tribe of Manasseh on the east side with Reuven and Gad. In Masei, Manasseh requests of Moshe that the daughters of Zelophehad marry only within the tribe of Manasseh so that the daughters' holdings remain within their tribe (since the holdings follow a husband's tribe). Moshe agrees. The result is that the daughters of Zelophehad must marry from families on the west side of the Jordan River – thus their families will have in-laws on the opposite side of the river. This result guarantees that Manasseh will have families on both sides of the Jordan – an excellent way to unify Jews on both sides.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, loved pointing out unstated implications in the Torah that become obvious once someone points them out. Creating paths to bring various parts of the Jewish community closer was a priority for Rabbi Cahan, as it is now for Rabbi Brander. May the renewed closeness of Israelis continue in our future, and may the future be brighter for Jews throughout the world.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

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

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

Haftarat Parashot Matot-Masei: What the King Could Not Command

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Ian and Bernice Charif of Sydney, Australia dedicate the Devrei Torah from Ohr Torah Stone this week in memory of Hymie Charif z"l, whose yahrzeit is 2 Av.

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftarot this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

The haftarah for this week's parsha is drawn from the earliest prophecies in the book of Yirmiyahu, first delivered in the reign of Yoshiyahu, king of Judah, whose rule began fifty-three years before the destruction of the First Temple. As we move through the Three Weeks between Shiva Asar Be'Tamuz and Tisha Be'Av, it is worth pausing on the tension at the heart of this haftarah. The struggle Yoshiyahu faces reveals something deeper: **the difference between building a religious society and merely policing one, a distinction that is critical for today's leaders and educators to understand.** [emphasis added]

Yoshiyahu was nothing like his father, Amon, or his grandfather Menashe, both of whom were steeped in idolatrous practice. Even as a child, Yoshiyahu sought connection with God (II Chronicles 34:3). Once he came to power, he moved aggressively to root out idolatry, not only within the kingdom of Yehuda but in the regions of Ephraim and Menashe and the territory of Naphtali as well. He personally supervised the work, and when his reforms met resistance, that resistance was answered with force (see II Kings 23:20). Yoshiyahu did not stop at legislating against idolatrous practices.

He was determined that his people adhere to the Torah's laws, in sharp contrast to his father and grandfather, and he threw himself into refurbishing the Beit HaMikdash, purifying it after its desecration and restoring its service to Torah norms. II Chronicles 34:9 describes him raising funds to rebuild the Temple, an effort that met with real success. In the course of that renovation, Chilkiyahu, the High Priest, discovered a Torah scroll written long before, perhaps as far back as the days of Moshe Rabbeinu himself (II Kings 22:8), a discovery that only deepened Yoshiyahu's resolve to purify the land, its government, and the region of Judea of every trace of idolatry. As II Chronicles 34 closes: "*Yoshiyahu removed all the abominations from all the territories belonging to the Israelites, and required all who were in Israel to worship the Lord their God; all his days, they did not turn away from following the Lord, God of their ancestors*" (34:33).

Given all this, it is striking that Yirmiyahu's prophecies in this very haftarah denounce the people of Yehuda and Jerusalem for their idolatrous ways. Hadn't Yoshiyahu gone further than any king before him to eradicate the worship of foreign gods? The answer emerges in the chapter that follows our haftarah, where Yirmiyahu observes that despite all of Yoshiyahu's efforts and reforms, the hearts of the people remained unfaithful: "*Yehuda did not return to Me with all her heart, but with deception, declares the Lord*" (Jeremiah 3:10). Clandestinely, people continued their idolatrous practices. For all his labor, Yoshiyahu could not truly transform the inner lives of ordinary people.

There is an important message here for us, drawn from this episode in which even a king's best intentions were met with resistance and quiet evasion. As I noted in last week's column, top-down leadership, however forceful, achieves only so

much when it comes to matters of God, purpose, faith, and spirituality. These are commitments that cannot be legislated. Leadership can and should create a context that inspires, but that inspiration must be bottom-up as much as top-down.

This is precisely the challenge we face today whenever we imagine that faith and mitzvah observance can simply be taught rather than nurtured within the right spiritual environment. It is also why I believe the oft-cited communal anxiety within the Religious Zionist world over *datlashim*, young people who step away from observance, is overstated. **Every young person is on a journey. Many ultimately return, as they mature and build families of their own, reconnecting with the education and experiences of their childhood. Those homes may look slightly different from their parents' or grandparents' homes, but they will be intentional rather than rote, animated by a genuine search for purposeful engagement with God, and filled with a living spirit of religious commitment.** [emphasis added]

A second message emerges as well. Yirmiyahu reminds us that beyond the public work of confronting corruption in society, there is always a subtler, more difficult private struggle. As we work to build a better society, we cannot fix our attention on the public sphere alone. If we do, we ignore the private space – the quiet lives of ordinary people – at our own peril. Yirmiyahu captures this with the image of a thief caught in the night: *“Like the shame of a thief when he is found out, so will the House of Israel be shamed”* (2:26), a metaphor for the hidden betrayals of God that happen behind closed doors.

We face our own version of this danger when teachers and youth advisors, whether through negligence or lack of awareness fail the children entrusted to them at critical moments in their development. Preventing this requires clear, carefully designed protocols to respond to challenges that youth are facing in their observance or general relationship with Judaism. But **beyond systems and safeguards, religious education must also reach the inner world of our students, listening to them, understanding their questions, and engaging seriously with how they think and feel about Judaism, both in belief and in practice. This is especially important today, as Am Yisrael deals with internal division alongside the ongoing pressures of war and rising antisemitism.** [emphasis added]

As we navigate the Three Weeks and prepare for Tisha Be'av, we are reminded that **our task is not only to construct a healthy public religious life, but just as urgently to safeguard the wholeness of our children and families in private, so that a genuine passion for God and Torah is cultivated continuously.** Yoshiyahu could command the destruction of every idol in the land, but his authority could not shape the people's hearts. Our aspiration must reach further than his: not merely a nation with the right leaders, but a whole people, publicly and privately, dedicated to building a more perfect society. [emphasis added]

Shabbat Shalom.

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parashot-matot-masei-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp>

Parshat Matot-Mas'ei: “Their Departures According to Their Journeys”

By Yosef (Gosey) Schwartz * (2025)

“And Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys at the command of the Lord, and these were their journeys according to their departures.” (Bemidbar 33:2)

This verse raises several questions:

- A. What is the meaning of the phrase *“their departures according to their journeys”*?
- B. Why the repetition?
- C. What is the significance of the shift from the beginning of the verse (*“departures according to their journeys”*) to its conclusion (*“journeys according to their departures”*)?[1]

The Degel Machaneh Ephraim offers an explanation for these questions: *“This, perhaps, is what the verse hints at in its concise wording: ‘And Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys at the command of the Lord’”* — that is, from each point of departure, infused with Divine connection, a line was drawn and extended through every stage of their journey.

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

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

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

The Sfat Emet takes a slightly different approach:

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

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

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

To conclude, we bring the words of the Rebbe of Piasetzna, from Aish Kodesh:[3]

“And Moshe recorded their departures according to their journeys.” Rashi, citing the Midrash, explains this with a parable: “It is like a king whose son was ill... ‘Here we slept, here we were warmed, here your head hurt.’” These hardships, however, were all like birth pangs leading to the revelation of God’s light—“their departures according to their journeys, at the command of the Lord” (al pi Hashem).

For the kingship of speech (malchut peh) — as described in Petach Eliyahu — means that even the journeys and afflictions were departures at the command of the Lord, intended to express the sovereignty of Heaven.

And this is the deeper meaning behind the words “*And Moshe recorded*” — that by the time Moshe committed these words to writing, the journeys and their accompanying hardships had already ended. It had already become clear that “*their departures according to their journeys were at the command of the Lord*” — in other words, that the ultimate purpose of all the journeys and wanderings was to give expression to the word of God (pi Hashem).

“*And these were their journeys according to their departures*” — this reversal teaches that in hindsight, the Divine purpose is revealed. But during the journeys themselves, the suffering came first, and only afterward was its deeper source and meaning uncovered — for in the moment, they felt only the pain.

Another layer of meaning in the verse “*And Moshe recorded their departures...*” lies in the idea that the spirit of Moshe Rabbeinu extends into every generation. In the future, he will also be the Mashiach, as is taught in the Tikkunei Zohar,

which alludes to the verse *“That which was is that which shall be”* — the Hebrew initials of which spell Moshe.

Through his act of writing, Moshe ensured that in every generation — and especially in the generation of the Mashiach — the hardships and journeys would no longer be experienced first and foremost as suffering, but would be recognized immediately as expressions of the word of God. In this way, God’s great Name will be magnified and sanctified through the redemption of Israel.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] The Baal Shem Tov, commenting on our Torah portion, explains the concept of the journeys by drawing a parallel between the travels of the Children of Israel and the journey of each individual throughout his life:

“These are the journeys of the Children of Israel...” I heard in the name of my revered grandfather, of blessed memory, that all the journeys numbered forty-two, and they correspond to those experienced by every person from the day of his birth until his return to his eternal home. To understand this: from the moment of birth — his emergence from his mother’s womb — this is considered the Exodus from Egypt, as is known. From there, he continues journeying from station to station until his arrival in the higher Land of Life.” (Baal Shem Tov, Parashat Mas’ei)

This comparison between the nation’s journey and the individual’s personal path will serve us later on as well.

[2] A similar idea is expressed by Rabbi Soloveitchik:

“What am I supposed to do when I encounter evil? How should I respond in the face of evil?” This latter question poses a powerful challenge to man, and it is man’s duty to face this challenge with strength and courage. According to Judaism, suffering must not be purposeless or squandered in vain. Out of suffering, an ethical norm should emerge — a call to repentance and to personal elevation. Judaism seeks to transform the painful and frustrating experience into a force that tempers, refines, and redeems.” (Ish al ha-Edah, Letter 69)

He addresses this theme in many other places as well: Kol Dodi Dofek (pp. 65–71), “A Halakhic Approach to Suffering” (*Out of the Whirlwind*, pp. 97–124), and *Out of the Whirlwind* (pp. 125–156).

[3] These teachings were delivered by Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira from within the Warsaw Ghetto. They were hidden and discovered after the Holocaust.

Dedication:

On Shabbat Simchat Torah 5784, we embarked on a long and arduous journey — both as a people and as individuals. In those early weeks of the war, we knew exactly why we were fighting and how we hoped it would end.

It was our belief in the justice of our cause that carried us through the hardships and the long, drawn-out weeks. After each mission and every incident, after each injury and every loss, it was only our unwavering commitment to the path we had chosen that gave us the strength to continue. As a soldier and as a commander, confronting all this was both demanding and deeply challenging. But the shared conviction that we were walking a just and righteous path gave us the fortitude to persevere.

David z”l, my older brother, was defined by his profound sense of justice. It guided him in his personal life, through yeshiva, the army, and university — and it was all the more evident during the war, where he led and commanded with moral clarity. The faith and confidence with which he carried himself radiated to everyone around him. He was a role model for me throughout my life — a role that only deepened after the war began.

In recent times, voices have arisen seeking to cast doubt on the just path we have chosen.

Yet we must strengthen our resolve and hold fast to our faith — to remember where we came from and where we are headed. We must “cling to the source and origin, and see how all flows toward one place.” We are called to rise to the greatness of this moment, to recognize that we are part of the unfolding journey of the people of Israel in its land — part of the renewed return to Zion.

May these words be in memory of David ben Sarah and Yair Schwartz.

* Yosef (Gosey) Schwartz, a graduate of OTS's Derech Avot High School for boys, completed his fifth year at Yeshivat Har Etzion in 2025 and has completed his first year studying electrical engineering and physics at Hebrew University.

[Ed. note: from OTS: Among this year's overseas students at Midreshet Lindenbaum's Maria and Joel Finkle Overseas Program, 16 young women - 27% of the cohort - have chosen to remain in Israel next year to serve the country, whether in the IDF or some other form of National Service.]

<https://ots.org.il/matot-masei-yosef-gosey-schwartz/> Ed: this web location includes a photo of Gosey with David, z”l.

Dvar Torah: Matos-Masei: You Can't Get More Local or Global Than That!

By Rabbi Label Lam * (© 2007)

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel saying: This is the thing that HASHEM has commanded: If a man takes a vow to HASHEM or swears an oath to establish a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do. (Bamidbar 30:2-3)

Why is this subject of vows connected to “Matos” – the heads of the tribes? Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch ztl. explains that Matos are literally “branches” and these community leaders are to look at the tribe as a branch of the of the great nation as a whole. *“It was the task of the heads of the tribes to guide and then to keep the manners and customs which arose from the special tendencies of each of the “branches.”*

Here we shift focus from a general overview of the structure of the national calendar and the formal placement of tribes within the context of the whole unit and we turns to a more and more local level of self-governance. Why is the subject of honesty in vows and the laws concerning such utterances within the privacy of the home relevant here?

Again, we look to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentaries on the Haggadah. In the Mid-1800's he writes perhaps prophetically, or maybe it's another case of, as the phrase goes, *“the more things change the more they stay the same”*:

To inherit a home and to build a home – this encompasses a Jew's ethical vocation on earth. Is it not the sine qua non for the hopes and perfection of all nations? If only this great Magna Carta were consulted wherever education and culture, peace and salvation of men and mankind are discussed. For the fate of men, their success or failure, is decided neither in the chambers of rulers nor on the battlefield. It is not decided in business concerns, in colleges and institutions of arts and sciences or in houses of worship. It is sealed only in one place, in the parental home...

There exists no substitute for the home, and if one is looking elsewhere for the source of peace and prosperity, he is searching in vain. All of a nations politics and diplomacy, its theories of national economy and institutions for mass education, its trade and industry, its schools and community centers – none of these will save the people from extinction if they let the parental home become a parody.

Are children born for the sake of the state's false concern instead of the warm love of parents? Does the census show ever-growing numbers of children without parents and parents without children? Does the nation's high society make a mockery of morality and modesty? If so, then all

the palaces it is building are founded on quicksand."

There's bumper sticker I agree with strongly. I believe it expresses what may be one of the most central points of Torah life: **"THINK GLOBAL! ACT LOCAL"** I know it sounds pretty simple. It even seems too obvious. We are to fix the world by making ourselves as much as possible in the image of G-d and not the other way around!

Imagine how upside down the world begins to get or just look around – when common people and leaders instead "think locally" – primarily about their own personal interests while acting global – being critical of everyone they see or read about or even launching seemingly well-meaning initiatives to fix specifically those matters they have not yet cured within themselves at home!

The Torah recognizes here that the Nation of Israel and society as a whole are built not just from tribes, and families, and individuals, but from the integrity of their words. After all the whole world was created from and is maintained by the everlasting word of HASHEM, as we recite daily, *"Blessed is He Who speaks and does (what He says)!"* Is that not the stuff on which the world reliably stands!? **You can't get more global or local than that?**

[Ed. note: this Dvar Torah fits beautifully with Rabbi Brander's message (above)]

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5773-matos/>

Matot/Masei: Words that Create Worlds

By Rabbi Dov Linzer*

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016, 2019

Words have power. They can cut deep, creating lasting scars in one's psyche, or they can comfort, console, encourage, and inspire. Words can also convince and persuade when used in a cogent argument, as when the daughters of Tzelafchad approached Moshe to voice their claim of inheritance over their father's land in last week's parasha. God affirmed the justness and rightness of their words, *"Properly have the daughters of Tzelafchad spoken,"* and the law was changed. In this week's parasha, the tribes of Reuven and Gad approach Moshe and make a reasonable argument as to why they should inherit the land east of the Jordan. Moshe initially resists, but through promises, conditions, and stipulations, they come to an agreement, and the request is granted. This is the power of words to influence someone's thinking, to bring about a meeting of minds, and to affect another's actions.

As great as it is, this is a mundane power, but as evidenced in Parashat Balak, words also contain metaphysical and spiritual power. The subtext of the entire narrative is obvious: had Balak succeeded in cursing Bnei Yisrael, great tragedy would have befallen them. God did us a great kindness by not allowing those words to be spoken, *"But the Lord thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the Lord thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the Lord thy God loved thee"* (Devarim 23:6).

But words do more than impart a blessing or a curse; words create our reality. It was with words that God created the world. And as human beings created in the image of God, we have the ability to create spiritual realities through our words, to shape the world in which we live, and to bring sanctity into the world.

This theme opens this week's parasha: *"If a man vows a vow unto the Lord, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth"* (Bamidbar 30:3). The Torah mentions an oath and a vow. Making an oath is swearing about the past or the future in God's name, calling on God to witness the veracity of your statement, or that you will keep to your word. It is less about creating something new than it is about using God's name falsely. A vow, on the other hand, is understood by the Rabbis to be a way of using one's words to create a new, metaphysical reality. Just as a person can sanctify an animal with his words and make it holy and fit to be brought as a sacrifice, so too can he imbue any object with holy-like status, making its use or any derived benefit forbidden.

It is not obvious if or how vows can also bring holiness into the world. The Talmud makes it clear, however, that many people expressed their religiosity in this way, as a form of personal expression beyond conforming to the laws and rituals by

which we are all bound. Imposing fasts (also, according to the Rabbis, a type of vow) and increasing the scope of forbidden foods and pleasures are ways to expand and deepen one's religious reality, at least to the degree that one experiences religiosity as a form of self-denial and separation from the world.

The Rabbis were not always happy with this form of religious expression. At times they critiqued the very notion of self-denial as a religious goal, stating that, in the end, we will be accountable for the ways in which we failed to derive pleasure from the world that God has given us (Yerushalmi Kiddushin, ch. 4). A story is told that Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch was criticized for going to Switzerland on vacation. He was asked, *"Why not stay at home and learn more Torah?"* Rav Hirsch replied, *"After 120 years, I don't want to go up to heaven and have God say to me: 'Shimshon, what about My Alps? Have you seen My Alps?'"*

At other times the Rabbis' critique was directed at the way in which this personal expression of religiosity undercut the shared forms of religious expression: *"Whoever takes a vow is as if he has built a bamah, a private altar. And whoever fulfills it is as if he has offered a sacrifice on the altar"* (Nedarim 22a). Worship at a private altar is acceptable if there is no Temple, but once there is a Temple, such acts represent a breaking away from shared worship and a diminishing of its importance.

Words, then, can create metaphysical realities, but that is not necessarily a good thing. The goal is to use them to increase and reinforce the kedusha in the world rather than compete with or undercut it. [emphasis added]

Consider Shabbat. The sanctity of Shabbat comes from God and hearkens all the way back to the first days of creation: *"And God blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it."* Nevertheless, with our words we can add to and intensify that sanctity. We make kiddush, verbally recognizing and pronouncing its sanctity. This act, coming from us, makes the kedusha of Shabbat more real; it connects us to Shabbat in a personal way. And when we share thoughts on the parasha or sing zemirot, the kedusha of Shabbat is deepened and intensified, giving us a form of individual religious expression and a way to make that kedusha our own. We can even accept Shabbat early, bringing the sanctity of Shabbat into the week with our words. But our words can also do the opposite, creating a reality that competes with the sanctity of Shabbat: *"And you shall honor it from not doing your own ways ... or speaking your own mundane words"* (Yesha'yahu 58:13). If we speak of weekday matters like business, profession, and money, or even if we speak of trivial matters rather than holy ones, we have — through our words — diminished the sanctity of Shabbat. We have made it that much more like any other day of the week.

In so many ways, our words create the world in which we live. This is certainly true for ritual words like the kiddush of Shabbat, which, as we have seen, brings greater sanctity to the day. We make blessings over a piece of fruit and change it from a human product or something taken for granted into a gift from God. We make a blessing over mitzvot and transform them from rote ritual into a religious act imparting sanctity to the one who performs them (*"Blessed are You, God, who has sanctified us with Your mitzvot and commanded us..."*). We make blessings over lifecycle events: At a bris we make a kiddush-like brakha over a cup of wine, making this into a sanctified, covenantal act. And we do the same at a wedding, turning the marriage into a kiddushin, a sanctified bond that brings holiness to the entire Jewish people (*"Who sanctifies His people Israel through chuppah and kiddushin."*)

But words need not be ritualized to shape our reality. When we say our daily prayers with sincerity, we bring God into our world. When we say *im yirtzeh Hashem*, God willing, and we really mean it, we bring God into our world. When we pray on account of someone who is sick or offer up a few brief, personal words to God, words of thanks or supplication, we bring God into our world. And in the home, when we speak to our children of a life of serving God and Klal Yisrael, of learning Torah and of keeping mitzvot, we shape their reality and our own; we create sources of holiness and meaning. But if we speak of a world in which the wealthy are to be envied, in which getting ahead is what matters, then we rob their world and ours of its kedusha. **If we are not careful, our vows, our speech acts, can be like the building of private altars, creating a world populated by sources of meaning and value that compete with the sources of true kedusha.** [emphasis added]

Perhaps Abraham Joshua Heschel said it best in *The Insecurity of Freedom*:

One of the major symptoms of the general crisis existent in our world today is our lack of sensitivity to

words. We use words as tools. We forget that words are a repository of the spirit. The tragedy of our times is that the vessels of the spirit are broken. We cannot approach the spirit unless we repair the vessels. Reverence for words — an awareness of the wonder of words, of the mystery of words — is an essential prerequisite for prayer. By the word of God the world was created.

Words create the world in which we live. It is up to us to decide what that world will look like.

Shabbat Shalom!
Shabbat Shalom.

From my archives

Insights from Chassidic Tradition

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

[Ed. note: Rabbi Katz will be on hiatus for July and August. His outstanding parsha messages, including insights from the Chassidic tradition, will resume when he returns.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

Paired Perspectives on the Parashah Mattot: A Misunderstanding or a Leadership Triumph?

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

In his work, *Iyyunim BeParashot HaShavua* (series 1, 2002), Rabbi Elhanan Samet presents a meaningful analysis of a debate between Rabbi Yitzhak Arama (Spain, 1420-1494) and Rabbi Yitzhak Abarbanel (Spain, Italy 1437-1508). The following essay is based on Rabbi Samet's study.

The request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Numbers chapter 32 appears straightforward. Having seen the fertile grazing lands east of the Jordan, they ask Moses for permission to settle there rather than receive territory west of the river. Moses responds with surprising severity. He accuses them of abandoning their brethren and compares them to the spies whose discouraging report had doomed an entire generation to die in the wilderness.

Why does Moses react so strongly? Were the tribes guilty of selfishness, or did Moses misread a generation that was fundamentally different from the one that had left Egypt? The medieval commentators offer two sharply different perspectives, and each illuminates an important dimension of leadership and communal responsibility.

The first perspective, advanced by Abarbanel and associated with Ramban, sees Moses's rebuke as based upon a misunderstanding. The tribes never intended to avoid military service. Their request focused on where their families and livestock would reside, not on whether they would participate in the conquest of Canaan. The key phrase appears at the end of their initial request: *"Do not bring us across the Jordan."* According to this reading, they refer to their inheritance and permanent residence, not to their personal participation in the campaign.

From this perspective, the episode reveals a growing gap between Moses and the generation preparing to enter the Land of Israel. Unlike the generation of the spies, these Israelites have already demonstrated courage in battle against Sihon and Og. They are not fearful of conquest. They are eager and prepared to fight. Just as Abarbanel sees tensions between Moses and the younger generation in the episodes of Mei Merivah (Numbers 20) and Baal Peor (Numbers 25), so too here he detects a leader whose assumptions are shaped by the failures of an earlier generation.

The second perspective, developed by Rabbi Yitzhak Arama in his *Akedat Yitzhak*, views Moses's response very

differently. Moses correctly perceived a grave danger lurking beneath the tribes' request. Even if Reuben and Gad did not intend to evade military service, their proposal threatened to create the same practical result as the sin of the spies. Once a large and fertile territory had already been conquered, why continue crossing the Jordan?

Moses therefore confronts not a crisis of faith but a crisis of national destiny. Unlike the spies, Reuben and Gad do not doubt God's promises or fear the Canaanites. Nevertheless, their request could weaken the nation's resolve to complete its mission. The danger lies not in their motives but in the consequences their proposal might produce.

Several details in the text support Rabbi Arama's reading. After Moses's rebuke, the Torah records a break in the narrative and then states, "*They approached him and said...*" Why did they need to approach him again? The Akedah suggests that the closed parashah break indicates a pause during which the tribal leaders consulted among themselves and reformulated their proposal. They did not merely clarify a misunderstanding; they strengthened their commitment.

Indeed, their revised proposal goes well beyond what would have been necessary to correct Moses's impression. They promise not only to fight alongside their brethren but to march "before" them. They pledge to remain engaged until all the tribes are securely settled in their inheritances. This expanded commitment later finds fulfillment when the eastern tribes participate in the conquest under Joshua before returning home.

Yet even if Rabbi Arama is correct, the story ultimately highlights the greatness of the new generation. Moses identifies a potentially dangerous challenge, but the tribes respond not with resentment or defiance. Instead, they rise to the occasion. They place themselves at the forefront of the national effort and transform a questionable request into an extraordinary demonstration of solidarity.

The debate between Abarbanel and the Akedah therefore centers on a larger question: Is the Torah criticizing Moses or praising him? Abarbanel emphasizes Moses's inability fully to appreciate the character of the generation about to inherit the land. Rabbi Arama emphasizes Moses's courage in confronting a threat before it matured into disaster. For Abarbanel, the episode exposes the limitations of an aging leader; for the Akedah, it demonstrates the enduring necessity of vigilant leadership.

Perhaps the enduring lesson is that both insights contain truth. The generation entering the land was indeed different from the generation that left Egypt. It possessed confidence, initiative, and a willingness to fight for the nation's future. At the same time, Moses's leadership ensured that this strength would be directed toward collective responsibility rather than tribal self-interest. History did not have to repeat itself. Through courageous leadership and a willing response from the people, a moment that could have echoed the tragedy of the spies instead became a model of national unity and shared destiny.

* National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, and faculty of Yeshiva University for many years. Rabbi Angel is a prolific scholar who speaks frequently at many venues.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3465>

Journeys and Beyond: Thoughts for Matot/Masei

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In John Steinbeck's story, "The Leader of the People," an old man is fixated on his past role leading a wagon train across America in the 19th century. He endlessly repeats stories of his adventures, much to the annoyance of his son-in-law. His daughter is more sympathetic; she understands that the meaning of her father's life was bound to his journey across the

country. His heart must have sunk when he first caught sight of the Pacific Ocean; the goal had been reached. There was nowhere further to go. The highlight of his life was in the past.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Parshas Matos -- "... are you expecting. . .?"

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine © 2014

One of the commandments of the Torah is "*You shall be proper in front of G-d, and in front of people.*" That is to say, if you are doing something which is perfectly allowed but appears to people as "*very non-kosher*," you should either not do it, or you should explain to them what you are doing. The fact that you know, and G-d knows, that you are acting properly, is not sufficient. Not only must you do what is good in front of G-d, but you must also be clean in the eyes of people.

The Talmud gives examples of people who fulfilled this commandment correctly. The Talmud relates that the Avtinus family

was in charge of the spices used in the Beis Hamikdash. The women of that family would not use perfume... because someone might think that they pilfered good perfumes from the holy coffers.

Likewise the Garmu family, who was in charge of making the showbreads, would never serve bread made of fine flour on their own table. They were concerned that someone might think that they had derived personal benefit from the communal flour.

The question that confronts us is that these behaviors would have been normal and legitimate. It is normal for women to apply perfume, and for people to serve fine bread. Just because someone might think that they did wrong...? Is that a reason not to live life normally? Why should we care what others think?

One reason to care about what others think is that if we don't care, the momentum of goodness is diminished. Even if nothing bad occurred, if it looks like immoral activity occurred that alone is a desecration of G-d's Name.

But there is another – far more personal reason – to care about what other people will think.

I recall hearing of an eighth grade class that was on a fourth grade reading level. A new teacher was assigned to the class, and by the end of the year she had raised their reading level to that of a normal eighth grade. At the graduation she was commended for her success, but she made light of it saying, *"When I saw their IQs written in the roll book, on the first day of school, I knew they would succeed. With a class with such high IQs there really was nothing to it."*

The principal listened to the teacher's words with astonishment. Only he knew that the numbers in the roll book were not IQ numbers, but rather locker numbers.

The lesson is that if someone thinks a certain way about you, you are bound to fulfill their expectations. People's perceptions of us can make an enormous impact on our lives.

A number of weeks ago I was walking in a shopping area with my family. I was fairly preoccupied with the goings on of my children, so I didn't notice much of the people around me. But as we passed one of the clothing stores I noticed one of the local young men sitting in front of the store reading a book. I courteously waved and continued walking, not giving much thought as to why he was there. But as I continued walking he ran after me and said, *"I just want you to know that I am driving my grandmother around shopping today. She is in that store buying things for herself, so I am waiting."*

I wondered why he felt the need to explain himself. Quite frankly I am not so judgmental and I hadn't given it much thought. But the truth is that he was correct in sharing. Because there is a risk that one could wonder what a nice Jewish teen is doing sitting in front of a women's clothing store. What would someone's perception of him be when they think of who to invite for a Torah class or another mitzvah endeavor? **A young man will become what people think of him.** Knowing that he spent his Sunday afternoon chauffeuring Grandma is a most uplifting piece of information. [emphasis added]

People's perceptions of us are self fulfilling. A family that is thought of as stealing perfume from the Beis Hamikdash will one day come to steal from the Beis Hamikdash. One of the questions we should ask of our friends and mentors is, *"What... are you expecting... of me?"* Because the expectations of those closest to us, are the realities of tomorrow.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

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

From my archives.

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

Mattos Mas'ei – Even Balance Needs To Be Balanced

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

As we reach the end of Moshe's life, Hashem tells Moshe clearly that his time in this world is limited. He has one more mission of leadership and then it would be time for him to depart this world. *"Avenge the vengeance of the Children of Israel from the Midianites; after you will be gathered unto your nation."* (Bamidbar 31:2) The Torah describes how Moshe then began instructing the Jewish people in this final mission. Rash"i notes, based on the Sifri, that Moshe engaged joyously and wholeheartedly with this mitzvah. Even though he understood fully that once this mitzvah was completed his life would end, Moshe did not drag his feet. Instead, he engaged in this final mission with alacrity and joy.

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

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

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

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

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

greatest balancing act – balancing balance itself.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. The RI Torah Network included this Dvar Torah in a booklet for Shavuot 5786. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Dvar Torah for Matot - Masei

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

[I have only one Dvar Torah from Rabbi Ovadia on our parsha, and I have run it twice in the past three years. Watch this space for additional insights from Rabbi Ovadia.]

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

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>**. The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

We conclude this week the Book of Bamidbar with the double Parsha of Matot-Masei, retracing our journey through the desert. The Torah records every stop along the way, those that seem monumental and those that appear insignificant. Together, they form the complete story of our travels.

As we journeyed through the wilderness, the destination was not always clear, and we could not always understand why we needed to pass through each place. Yet with hindsight, we can see that every step had a purpose. Every challenge, every pause, and every milestone became part of the path that brought us closer to the Promised Land.

This week also marks the 122nd yortzeit of Binyamin Ze'ev Theodor Herzl. During the final decade of his life, he dedicated himself tirelessly to the dream of returning the Jewish people to our homeland. He passed away 44 years before the establishment of the State of Israel and never witnessed the fulfillment of the vision for which he sacrificed so much. Yet because he believed in a future he would never see, generations after him were able to come home. [Ed. note: Herzl's yahrzeit is 20 Tammuz, which was last Sunday.]

That is the story of the Jewish people. We do not always understand the road before us, but we continue to walk it with faith. We trust in Hashem, knowing that every step has meaning, and we build not only for ourselves but for our children and grandchildren, just as those who came before us built for us.

May we continue to journey together with faith and hope, and may we soon merit to complete the greatest journey of all, welcoming Mashiach in Yerushalayim together with all of Am Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom
B'Ahavat Yisrael

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

The Left-Handed Rescue

By Sara Lamm * (July 9, 2026)

One of the tragic side effects of living in a war for the past three years is that on any given day, especially in more populated areas, you will see more than one, if not quite a few, young men (mostly men) moving through the world on crutches, in an accessibility scooter, or leaning on some other support device. Most of them are amputees. It is one of the quietest and most harrowing visual reminders of what Israeli men and women have been sacrificing every single day since October 7th, 2023. This morning, as I was dropping my kids at camp, I watched two young men walk out of the synagogue together. Both were missing a leg. They were wrapped in tefillin, the small leather boxes containing scrolls of parchment that men above the age of thirteen bind to their arm and forehead every morning during prayer. Inside those boxes sit the words of the Shema, the declaration from Deuteronomy that Israel has recited for three thousand years: **“Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokeinu, Hashem Echad. Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is One.”**

I love watching people pray with their bodies, not just their lips. And I think what moved me so deeply in that moment was watching these two young men maintain that physical connection to God after living through what I can only assume was hell. Their bodies had been changed by war. Their devotion had not.

That moment gave me a Torah flashback to the prophet Ehud. If you don't know Ehud's story, buckle up, because it does not read like a typical Bible narrative. Israel is under the thumb of Eglon, king of Moav, a man so obese the text describes him as “a very stout man”:

He presented the tribute to King Eglon of Moab. Now Eglon was a very stout man. Judges 3:17

God raises up Ehud ben-Gera, a Benjamite, to deliver Israel. Ehud straps a homemade double-edged dagger to his right thigh, gets a private audience with Eglon under the pretense of delivering a secret message, and then, with the guards having checked only his left side (because that's where right-handed men carried their weapons), Ehud reaches across his body with his left hand, draws the blade, and drives it into the king. He locks the doors on his way out. The servants, assuming the king is simply using the bathroom, wait so long to check on him that Ehud is long gone before anyone finds the body.

It's a wild story. But look at the actual Hebrew describing Ehud. Judges 3:15 says:

Then the Israelites cried out to Hashem, and Hashem raised up a champion for them: the Benjaminite Ehud son of Gera, a left-handed man. It happened that the Israelites sent tribute to King Eglon of Moab through him. Judges 3:15

It describes a hand that was bound or restricted. (For the record, two of my own kids are lefties, so I'm not knocking the left hand here. If anything, this story makes the case for it.)

So here's the question worth sitting with: of all the men in Israel, why did God pick the one nobody would have put money on? Because Ehud was not anyone's obvious choice for a national deliverer, and he did not wait around for someone to

convince him otherwise. He did not spend years building his resume, training an army, or waiting for the right moment when Israel finally believed in him. He strapped a blade to his thigh, walked up to the most powerful man in Moav, and did the thing. The guards checked the side where a right-handed man would carry a weapon and never thought to check the other, not because Ehud had a secret advantage, but because nobody was watching him closely at all. He was the guy nobody expected. He used exactly that.

This is not a small theological point, and I don't think it's an accident that this story ambushed me on a morning I watched two amputee soldiers walking into shul wrapped in tefillin. What struck me wasn't that they'd overcome something. It's that they didn't wait for their circumstances to look a certain way before they kept showing up to pray, to serve, to live. Neither did Ehud. He didn't wait for the timing to feel right or for Israel to hand him a title. He picked up what he had and moved.

If you are waiting until you feel like the obvious choice, the qualified one, the person everyone would pick, stop waiting. Ehud was not that guy, and he still walked into the palace of a king and changed the course of his nation's history. **Israel's deliverance did not come from Ehud matching anyone's idea of a hero. It came from the fact that he moved.** [emphasis added]

The next time you talk yourself out of something because you don't feel like the obvious choice, remember the judge nobody expected. God was never waiting for the obvious choice either. He was waiting for someone to move.

* Content editor for TheIsraelBible.com and Israel365 Publications. **[Ed. none: if you are unfamiliar with Israel365, go to <https://israel365.com/> and learn about this very productive and outstanding organization that connects lovers of Israel from all over the world.]** Some Hebrew text omitted because of software issues – but all omitted text is translated into English.

https://theisraelbible.com/40909/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=The%20Left-Handed%20Rescue&utm_campaign=I365%20-%20Daily%20-%20July%2009%2C%202026

Rav Kook Torah

Massei: The Merit of Building the Land of Israel

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

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

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

The Yemenite Visitor

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

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

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

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

"What troubles you, my son?"

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

"Ask, my son, ask."

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

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

For several minutes, Rav Kook remained deep in thought. Suddenly, he rose from his seat, pointed to his chair, and instructed the man, "Sit."

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

"Sit," the rabbi repeated firmly.

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

The Dream

As soon as he settled in he chair, his head dropped to the desk and he fell into a deep sleep. A short while later, he awoke, startled.

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

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

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

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

"These," the angel responded, "are your sins and transgressions from your earthly days. Everything is accounted for."

Hearing this, my spirits sank.

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

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

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

“Trembling, I stared at the side of merits. I watched as it dipped lower and lower, lifting the opposite side. Finally, the side of merits stopped moving. It came to a halt as it outweighed the sins, but just barely.”

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

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

<https://ravkooktorah.org/massei-74>

Masei: Miles to Go Before I Sleep (5778)

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

Etre ailleurs, “To be elsewhere – the great vice of this race, its great and secret virtue, the great vocation of this people.” So wrote the French poet and essayist Charles Peguy (1873-1914), a philosemite in an age of Anti-Semitism. He continued: *“Any crossing for them means the crossing of the desert. The most comfortable houses, the best built from stones as big as the temple pillars, the most real of real estate, the most overwhelming of apartment houses will never mean more to them than a tent in the desert.”*^[1]

What he meant was that history and destiny had combined to make Jews aware of the temporariness of any dwelling outside the Holy Land. **To be a Jew is to be on a journey.** That is how the Jewish story began when Abraham first heard the words *“Lech Lecha,”* with their call to leave where he was and travel *“to the land I will show you.”* That is how it began again in the days of Moses, when the family had become a people. And that is the point almost endlessly repeated in parshat Masei: *“They set out from X and camped at Y. They set out from Y and camped at Z”* – 42 stages in a journey of forty years. **We are the people who travel. We are the people who do not stand still. We are the people for whom time itself is a journey through the wilderness in search of the Promised Land.** [emphasis added]

In one sense this is a theme familiar from the world of myth. In many cultures, stories are told about the journey of the hero. Otto Rank, one of Freud’s most brilliant colleagues, wrote about it. So did Joseph Campbell, a Jungian, in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Nonetheless, the Jewish story is different in significant ways:

[1] The journey – set out in the books of Shemot and Bamidbar – is undertaken by everyone, the entire people: men, women and children. It is as if, in Judaism, we are all heroes, or at least all summoned to an heroic challenge.

[2] It takes longer than a single generation. Perhaps, had the spies not demoralised the nation with their report, it might have taken only a short while. But there is a deeper and more universal truth here. **The move from slavery to the responsibilities of freedom takes time.** People do not change overnight. Therefore evolution succeeds; revolution fails. The Jewish journey began before we were born and it is our responsibility to hand it on to those who will continue it after us.

[emphasis added]

[3] In myth, the hero usually encounters a major trial: an adversary, a dragon, a dark force. He (it is usually a he) may even die and be resurrected. As Campbell puts it: *"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."*[2] The Jewish story is different. The adversary the Israelites encounter is themselves: their fears, their weaknesses, their constant urge to return and regress.

It seems to me, here as so often elsewhere, that the Torah is not myth but anti-myth, a deliberate insistence on removing the magical elements from the story and focussing relentlessly on the human drama of courage versus fear, hope versus despair, and the call, not to some larger-than-life hero but to all-of-us-together, given strength by our ties to our people's past and the bonds between us in the present. The Torah is not some fabled escape from reality but reality itself, seen as a journey we must all undertake, each with our own strengths and contributions to our people and to humanity.

We are all on a journey. And we must all rest from time to time. That dialectic between setting out and encamping, walking and standing still, is part of the rhythm of Jewish life. **There is a time for Nitzavim, standing, and a time for Vayeilekh, moving on.** Rav Kook spoke of the two symbols in Bilaam's blessing, *"How goodly are your tents, Jacob, and your dwelling places, Israel."* **Tents are for people on a journey. Dwelling places are for people who have found home.** [emphasis added]

Psalm 1 uses two symbols of the righteous individual. On the one hand he or she is on the way, while the wicked begin by walking, then transition to standing and sitting. On the other hand, the righteous is compared to a tree, planted by streams of water, that gives fruit in due season and whose leaves do not wither. We walk, but we also stand still. We are on a journey but we are also rooted like a tree.

In life, there are journeys and encampments. Without the encampments, we suffer burnout. Without the journey, we do not grow. And life is growth. There is no way to avoid challenge and change. The late Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l once gave a beautiful shiur[3] on Robert Frost's poem, 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,' with its closing verse:

The woods are lovely dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

He analyses the poem in terms of Kierkegaard's distinction between the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of life. The poet is enchanted by the aesthetic beauty of the scene, the soft silence of the falling snow, the dark dignity of the tall trees. He would love to stay here in this timeless moment, this eternity-in-an-hour. But he knows that life has an ethical dimension also, and this demands action, not just contemplation. He has promises to keep; he has duties toward the world. So he must walk on despite his tiredness. He has miles to go before he sleeps: he has work to do while the breath of life is within him.

The poet has stopped briefly to enjoy the dark wood and falling snow. He has encamped. But now, like the Israelites in Masei, he must set out again. For us as Jews, as for Kierkegaard the theologian and Robert Frost the poet, ethics takes priority over aesthetics. **Yes, there are moments when we should, indeed must, pause to see the beauty of the world, but then we must move on, for we have promises to keep, including the promises to ourselves and to God.** [emphasis added]

Hence the life-changing idea: life is a journey, not a destination. We should never stand still. Instead we should constantly set ourselves new challenges that take us out of our comfort zone. Life is growth. [emphasis added]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Charles Peguy, *Basic Verities*, New York, Pantheon, 1943, 141.

[2] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, New World Library, 2008, 23.

[3] <http://etzion.org.il/en/woods-are-lovely-dark-and-deep-reading-poem-robert-frost>

Life-Changing Idea #39: Life is a journey, not a destination. We should constantly set ourselves new challenges that take us out of our comfort zone. Life is growth.

* 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://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/matot/miles-to-go-before-i-sleep/>

Anxious Parshah: Are You a Kosher Duck?

By Eliezer Shemtov * © Chabad

One source of anxiety and anguish is uncertainty about where one should be. Should I stay where I am, or try to move forward? Should I be content with my situation, or never be satisfied? Which is better — ambition or acceptance?

Is what I have enough? Is what I do enough? Can I rest without guilt?

An interesting answer is embedded in the very names of this week's combined Torah portions, Matot and Masei. Matot, means "tribes"; Masei, means "journeys." Matot opens with Moses addressing the heads of the tribes, and Masei begins with a recounting of the 42 journeys the Jewish people made during their 40 years in the desert on the way to the Promised Land.

Leaving the actual content aside, the contrast between the two names is itself striking and instructive.

The Torah uses two words for "tribe": *mateh* (plural: *matot*) and *shevet* (plural: *shevatim*). Both also mean "branch." The difference: **a shevet is a branch still connected to the tree, or freshly cut and still flexible. A mateh is a branch that has been detached, dried out, and hardened.** [emphasis added]

Isn't it strange, then, to pair a name suggesting rigidity and rootedness (*Matot*) with one that suggests constant movement (*Masei*)?

Herein lies the key to answering the question we posed at the outset. There is no contradiction between stability and movement. In fact, each depends on the other. Stability should not be confused with stagnation, and growth has nothing to do with instability. On the contrary: genuine growth is possible only when grounded in stability. Constant movement without roots produces neither stability nor real growth.

This apparent conflict arises often when people feel they must choose between their ancient traditions and the changing values of the modern world. Many frame it as a choice between stagnation and progress: "Do I hold on to the traditions of the past, or move with the current of the present?"

But is that really the choice? Must we disconnect from our roots to enter the future?

The dual name of this week's parshah suggests another perspective: the two are not opposites but complements, even mutually dependent. **Real progress is possible only from a strong foundation. Without roots, there is no genuine**

progress, only floating. You may have the sensation of movement, but you are being carried by the current, not generating movement yourself. [emphasis added]

A halachic example comes to mind.¹ For meat to be kosher, the animal must come from an acceptable species and must be healthy. One criterion for health: if an animal has fallen from a height, we check whether it might be fatally injured. For a four-legged animal or a chicken, the check is whether it can walk a certain distance without difficulty. For a duck, there is an additional option: it is placed in a river. If it swims against the current, it is healthy and kosher. But it is also kosher if it swims with the current — provided it moves faster than a stick placed alongside it. This shows it is not merely being carried by external force, but is generating its own movement.

The true sign of progress is when you can move forward under your own power. Movement driven by external currents is more a symptom of personal stagnation.

P.S. After writing these lines, I experienced something that illustrates the concept perfectly. I got into the car to visit a friend. My smartphone battery was low, so I plugged it into the car charger to use the GPS. To my horror — the cable didn't work! Fortunately, I had another one and was able to continue the journey. You see? To move forward, you need to be well connected.

The tool for this week: Work on two things simultaneously: 1) strengthen your connection to your own essence; 2) work to express the unique and novel contribution that only you can offer. For that, you need to be well-connected — like a phone that can only navigate when it has power.

FOOTNOTE:

1. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah 58:7

* Chabad-Lubavitch emissary in Montevideo, Uruguay.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/7414132/jewish/Are-You-a-Kosher-Duck.htm

Matot-Ma'se: Shining Life

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

Moses agreed to the proposal of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and also settled half of the tribe of Manasseh on the east bank of the Jordan River. The tribes of Reuben and Gad fortified certain cities that were now in their possession. After this, some members of the tribe of Manasseh conquered additional territory.

Ya'ir son of Manasseh went and conquered the villages, and he named them "The Villages of Ya'ir." (Num. 32:41)

The word used here for "villages" (*chavot*) is related to the word for "life" (*chai*), and the name Ya'ir means "*will shine*." Thus, "*The Villages of Ya'ir*" means "*Locales of life where light will shine*."

This name expressed the spiritual transformation that Ya'ir intended for these formerly idolatrous villages to undergo. Idolatry, the antithesis of Divine consciousness, is equivalent to spiritual death: the idolater severs himself from G-d, the source of life. By including these villages in the Jewish national homeland, Ya'ir was transforming them from domains of death into gardens of life.

Similarly, whenever we take any aspect of material reality, which by the very nature of materiality opposes Divine consciousness, and utilize it for Divine purposes, we "*resurrect*" it, releasing it from the realm of death and transforming it

into a source of life and light.

– From *Daily Wisdom* *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

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Shabbat Parashat Matot-Masei

5786 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Prophetic Voice

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

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

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

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not

Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

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

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

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

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

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

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

history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land." Jer. 32:15

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Power of the Word

"This is the thing which God commanded. When a man vows a vow unto God, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do all that proceeds out of his mouth." (Numbers 30:2-3)

At first glance, the inclusion of the law of vows and oaths in the portion of Matot seems puzzling and out of place.

Why here, why now? We have been dealing with desert wanderings and land distributions, conflicts and narratives, rebellions and wars, transgressions and punishments – but not legal codes and prohibitions. Moreover, at the conclusion of this segment of vows, we resume the saga of the Midianite struggle with the Israelites, a conflict which initially broke out when Balak hired the services of Bileam to curse the Hebrews in the previous portion. And everything that follows in our portion deals with aspects of war, including the final section wherein Gad and Reuben, their eyes fixed on the rich grazing land, petitioned Moses to remain on this side of the Jordan where they could easily feed their abundant cattle. Moses insisted that their request could not be honored until they agreed to join with the rest of their compatriots in the war of conquest.

Hence, given the themes of the portion as a whole, the subject of "vows and oaths" serving as the introduction to our Torah reading seems stunningly inappropriate.

I would maintain that a reading between the lines of the Bible will reveal a profound contrast between the word and the sword, the power of the voice and the power of the fist – a contrast which will clearly explain the placement of "oaths and vows" as a most fitting bridge between our victory over Bileam and our impending battle with Midian in the desert.

If we turn back a few chapters to the portion of Chukat, we are confronted with a glaring contradiction between verbal communication and physical aggression: Moses' transgression which results in a dire punishment. The context of this tragedy was the whining complaint of the Israelites thirsting for water, leading God to instruct Moses to speak to the rock after which water would emerge from the lifeless stone. Moses, however, had exhausted his tolerance for the nation's constant kvetching. Instead of addressing the rock with words, he used his staff to hit the rock with strength, not only once but twice. Water did emerge, enough for the entire nation. Nonetheless, God deemed Moses' act of physically striking the rock so sinful that He punished the great leader-prophet by preventing him from ever entering the Promised Land, from ever realizing his life's goal.

And why such harsh punishment? Perhaps the reason is because Moses didn't grasp the moment which would enable him to express the ultimate mission of Israel: there is no power as great as the word – by means of which water can spring forth from a rock. And the word symbolizes verbal communication – the "Ten Words" we received from Sinai; the Torah, a book of words. The physically

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aggressive rock which was Rome, Babylon, Egypt – all these have turned to dust over the ages. No remnant of these once-proud civilizations stands as a beacon of inspiration – indeed, is constantly influencing the world round about – as do our Ten Words of the Divine revealed at Sinai. The word is the symbol of Israel just as the sword is a symbol of our gentile enemies.

The fact that this contrast is indeed the essence is underscored by the biblical text, which – immediately after Moses' sin – records how Moses sends messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, declaring:

"This is what your brother Israel says: 'You know all the sufferings that we have experienced. Our fathers went down to Egypt, the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. And when we cried out to God, He heard our voice, and sent an angel, and brought us out of Egypt.'" (Numbers 20:14-15)

The prophet concludes with the plea that the Israelites be permitted to pass through their land, promising neither to touch any object nor drink any of their water.

Edom's answer cuts to the quick. "You better not pass over my land lest I go against you with the sword" (Numbers 20:18).

Rashi's comment emphasizes the clash between two incompatible values, Edom's sword and Israel's word. He writes:

"[Edom taunted]: 'You take pride in your voice [kol], which your fathers [specifically Jacob, whose distinctive voice always invokes God and sanctity] bequeathed to you; therefore you said, "And we cried out to God and He heard our voice." Nevertheless, I will come out against you with that which my father bequeathed to me. "And by your sword shall you live!" "[from Isaac's blessing to Esau, ancestor of Edom]" (Rashi on Numbers 20:18)

Rashi is also implying that when Moses opted to strike the rock rather than speak to it, he was stepping outside the boundaries which God had chosen for His people: a people of the word, a people of the Torah, a people committed to resolving conflicts by "words" and not by "swords."

Indeed, Rashi again discerns this theme of sword vs. word in his explanation of the first text that follows the subject of oaths and vows in our portion. We read of an army of twelve thousand gathered by Moses to fight the Midianites, finally to put an end to their constant attempts to seduce the nation with harlotry and idolatry. "And they warred against Midian...and they slew every male. And they slew the kings of Midian" (31:7-8). And then

we read that “Bileam they killed by the sword” (Numbers 31:8). Of all the thousands killed, why does the Torah stress the instrument of death used to kill Bileam? Explains Rashi:

“Bileam came against Israel, by exchanging his expertise for the expertise of the Israelites. After all, the victory of the Israelites is only from their mouths, by means of their prayers and beseeching. But he [Bileam] came and used their expertise to curse them with his mouth. So now they [the Israelites] exchanged their expertise with the expertise of the nations by coming against [Bileam] with a sword.” (Rashi on Numbers 31:8)

One might even argue that on a certain level Rashi is rebuking the Israelites for resorting to the sword. However, it seems to me that in a deeper sense Rashi is soberly acknowledging that until “words” alone are recognized by all of humanity as the true element of persuasion and teaching, we have no choice but to face sword with sword. Jacob must wear the outer skins of Esau, the voice of Jacob must learn to utilize the hands of Esau, in order to make certain that the good and the true are not destroyed by our enemies. However, although behaving in such a manner may be necessary, it is never our ideal. The Almighty wanted Moses to speak to the rock, and the words of Torah have proved mightier than the hordes of soldiers, and more eternal than the tallest of pyramids. And in the messianic age, the prophet declares about the Messiah, king of Israel: “With the spirit of his mouth will he slay the wicked” (Daniel 11:4).

Hence, the introduction to our battle with Midian and the postscript of our victory over Bileam are the laws of oaths and promises, laws which demonstrate the enormous power of words, laws which emphasize how “life and death are in the hands of the tongue”; these laws prove that words are much more than a movement of the mouth, but rather they create in their wake new realities. The proper word at the right moment can bring an errant lost soul back to his roots and moorings, but a wrong word or even inflection can alienate and drive away. A positive response to a particular individual’s name can earn him a livelihood as well as a place in the community, whereas a negative response can literally destroy a life. The Almighty created and destroyed worlds through His usage of speech – and so do we. “A slap goes away, a word is here to stay,” declares an old Yiddish proverb (a patch dergeht, a vort basheteht). This is why we open the most solemn and fateful day of the Jewish calendar – Yom Kippur (The Day of Forgiveness) – with Kol Nidrei, the absolution of oaths. And this is why our Torah reading mediates between Bileam’s blessings and the Midianite battle by reminding us how words

are more powerful than swords and must be used only with caution and sensitivity.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

What We Can Learn From Machir

Avi Schmell

There are figures in the Torah whose roles are unmistakable: Avraham, the father of the nation; Moshe, the leader and redeemer; Yehoshua, the one who brings Israel into the Land. Yet there are other figures, seemingly marginal, whom the Torah chooses to place at pivotal moments—perhaps because they represent an idea rather than an event.

Such is the figure of Machir, son of Menashe.

His first appearance comes at the very end of the Book of Bereshit (50:23): “The children of Machir son of Menashe were born on the knees of Yosef.”

This verse is puzzling. The Torah is about to bring the Book of Bereshit to a close. It has already recounted the lives of the Patriarchs, the descent of the family to Egypt, and the death of Yaakov. Now Yosef is preparing to depart this world, leaving his sons with the promise of redemption. Why is it important for us to know that Machir’s children were born on Yosef’s knees?

Machir appears again hundreds of years later, in our portion, toward the end of the Book of Bamidbar. The sons of Machir set out to conquer the Gilead, and Moshe grants them the territory they have captured. Once again, we encounter a moment of historical transition: the generation of the wilderness is drawing its mission to a close, and the people of Israel stand poised to enter the Land.

It seems that the Torah intentionally links these two endings.

Bereshit concludes at the moment when a family becomes a nation. Bamidbar concludes when that same nation stands on the threshold of becoming a society with territory, borders, and a political structure. These are two distinct stages of the same redemptive process. And in both transitions, Machir appears.

The question is: what does Machir represent?

One may suggest that Machir embodies one of the most central questions in the Bible: the relationship between national identity and tribal identity.

We often tend to read the Torah as a story of unification. The twelve tribes, initially quite distinct from one another, gradually converge into a shared framework. The Exodus from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, and the journey through the wilderness create a new collective

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consciousness. Yet the Torah never seeks to erase tribal identity. On the contrary.

As the people of Israel draw closer to their land, tribal identity becomes increasingly significant. The division of the land is carried out according to tribes. The princes are tribal leaders. The flags in the wilderness are tribal flags. And the Book of Bamidbar itself concludes with concern over the blurring of territorial boundaries between the tribes in the episode of the daughters of Tzelofchad (Machir’s great-granddaughters).

The Torah seeks to create a single people without imposing uniformity. The challenge is not to erase differences, but to establish a broader framework within which they can continue to exist—and Machir stands as one of the clearest examples of this.

We tend to assume that as a historical process unfolds, the significance of local identities gradually diminishes. Once a nation is formed, family and tribe are expected to recede into the background. Yet among the people of Israel, almost the opposite occurs: the stronger the national framework becomes, the more pronounced the importance of its constituent units grows.

The reason is that the Jewish people are founded not upon the principle of uniformity, but upon the principle of covenant. A covenant does not require complete sameness among its partners. Rather, it demands loyalty to a shared purpose while preserving the distinctiveness of each participant. Thus, the Torah can regard the differences among the tribes of Yehudah, Yissachar, and Menashe as something of value. They are not a problem to be solved, but a resource to be cultivated.

Machir, who appears at both ends of the period stretching from Yosef to Yehoshua, symbolizes the ability to preserve a particular identity within the course of a broader national process. His journey reflects the process experienced by the nation as a whole. At the end of the Book of Bereshit, Machir is not an active figure but is mentioned merely as a member of Yosef’s family. By the end of the Book of Bamidbar, however, Machir and his descendants have become actors in their own right: they take initiative, conquer territory, and receive an inheritance. This transition is significant, for it teaches that genuine continuity occurs when a new generation takes what it has received and transforms it into responsibility. It also reflects one of the deepest definitions of tradition: not the replication of the previous generation, but the ability to carry its story forward under new circumstances. In this context, it is striking that Machir is consistently mentioned in the Torah together with his descendants: the children of

Machir are born on Yosef's knees, the sons of Machir conquer the Gilead, and, of course, the daughters of Tzelofchad who lay claim to their inheritance.

Perhaps this also explains why our Sages, in the tractate of Bava Batra (121b), describe Machir as having lived for hundreds of years—from the days of Yaakov until the entry into the Land. There is no need to understand this solely as a biographical description. It may instead be read as a conceptual statement: Machir embodies continuity. He is the figure who ensures that familial and tribal identity remain unbroken, even as the people of Israel undergo the two greatest transformations in their history—the descent into Egypt and the entry into the Land.

In the educational world in which we live, this question is especially relevant. We are constantly engaged in fostering a sense of shared belonging. This is a genuine need. Yet at times, in our desire to create unity, we risk blurring the distinctiveness of the groups and individuals that comprise it.

Machir offers a different model.

He teaches that the path to building a strong collective does not lie in erasing differences, but in making room for the sub-identities within it. Precisely because there are different tribes, there is a people. Precisely because there are different voices, harmony can emerge. And precisely because Machir remains “Machir son of Menashe” both at the end of Bereshit and at the end of Bamidbar, he is able to serve as a bridge between two historical eras.

The end of the Book of Bereshit is not merely the conclusion of the patriarchal narrative. It is also the beginning of the national story. The family of Yaakov is about to be drawn into the long history of Egypt, and the reader may well wonder what will remain of all that has been built thus far.

The end of Bamidbar poses the same question from the opposite direction. The wilderness generation passes from the stage, Yehoshua assumes leadership, and the nation enters an entirely new reality. Here, too, the question arises: what will remain of the long journey they have traversed?

In both cases, Machir appears—not as a central figure, not as a prophet, and not as a leader.

He represents those quiet forces of historical continuity: the ability of a family, a tribe, and a distinct identity to pass from one era to the next without losing themselves and without becoming detached from the larger collective.

It is worth getting to know Machir.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

From the Mishkan to Eretz Yisroel

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

As we read the end of sefer Bamidbar there is a switch of emphasis from the temporary traveling Mishkan to the permanent state of being in Eretz Yisroel. Yet, many of the themes of life surrounding the Mishkan appear in parshas Masei concerning Eretz Yisroel, albeit in different manifestations. Unlike the transient borders of the moving Mishkan, the permanent boundaries of Eretz Yisroel are established. Levi'im and Yisra'elim areas are designated, but unlike in the Mishkan, permanent cities for Levi'im are set up. The nesi'im once again have a central role as the representatives of the people. In parshas Masei they are the ones who assist in dividing the land into permanent portions for every individual. They are no longer only involved in the inauguration of the temporary structure of the Mishkan.

Emerging from these two images of the Mishkan and Eretz Yisroel is the idea that what the Mishkan was supposed to accomplish on a temporary basis would become permanent upon entering Eretz Yisroel. We think of the Beis Hamikdash as the permanent succession to the Mishkan. What is the role of Eretz Yisroel as the continuation of the Mishkan?

The Mishkan and later the Beis Hamikdash had two distinct roles. They were the center of avodas haKorbanos as well as of talmud Torah. The halacha requires that the Sanhedrin sit in the Beis Hamikdash next to the mizbeach to highlight that these dual roles merge together. “לשכנו תדרשו” – you should search out Hashem's presence” encompasses the essence of the Mikdash. It is this proximity to Hashem that enables this relationship. Hashem allows us to approach Him through avodah and He responds to us by sharing with us His Torah. Within kedushas haMikdash there are different gradations of sanctity. The mishna in Keilim lists ten distinct areas which are endowed with different degrees of holiness. The last of these areas is Eretz Yisroel. The meforshim note that by placing Eretz Yisroel in the context of

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kedushas haMikdash, Chazal are highlighting that Eretz Yisroel is an extension of Mikdash.

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

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

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

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

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

The sanctity of Eretz Yisroel that emanates from the Beis Hamikdash has its original roots in Har Sinai. The Ramban in his introduction to Vayikra explains that the Har Sinai experience would be replicated in the Beis Hamikdash. We come to the Beis Hamikdash to be in close proximity to the luchos in the aron housed in the kodesh haKodoshim to reenact standing at Har Sinai. Just as we

offered korbanos at Har Sinai celebrating our relationship with Hashem, we return to that kedusha that is housed in the Beis Hamikdash and rekindle our closeness to Hashem. The Beis Hamikdash serves as a permanent manifestation of תעבורון את האלוקים על החר הזה - serving Hashem through Torah and korbanos on Har Sinai. Throughout Eretz Yisroel we are granted the special gift to reconnect with the Divine Presence that we encountered at Har Sinai. We have a unique opportunity for talmud Torah and avodas Hashem through tefilah corresponding to korbanos.

As we mourn the loss of the Beis Hamikdash and eagerly anticipate its rebuilding, we are so grateful to Hashem for the gift in our days of Eretz Yisroel. We hope to merit to continue to serve Hashem through Torah and tefilah especially in Eretz Yisroel. We turn to Hashem to watch over the great treasure of Eretz Yisroel He has granted us. May Hashem protect the soldiers who guard Eretz Yisroel and continue to bless them as they enable all of Klal Yisroel to live safely in our beloved land of Torah and avodas Hashem. May we merit to see the end of all the troubles of Klal Yisroel including the return of the hostages and genuine peace in Eretz Yisroel. We hope to see this Tisha B'Av transformed to become the great yom tov celebrating the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and the fulfillment in the fullest sense.

כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלים

Shabbat B'Shabbato - Zomet Institute

The Secret of the Desert

Esti Rosenberg

Midrasha for Women, Migdal Oz

Massei, the last Torah portion of Bamidbar, begins with a list of the segments of the journey of Bnei Yisrael and ends with the sanctuary cities and the laws pertaining to the daughters of Tzelofchad and their heritage. In this way, on one hand the portion serves as a microcosm for the entire book of Devarim, with the events of the long journey according to the commands of G-d as an abstract of the entire book. On the other hand, it demonstrates the attempt of the nation to live a life of Torah in a day-to-day situation where people might kill others by accident and where unexpected dilemmas can arise in the attempt to apply the Divine laws in a practical way. Moshe and the nation are required to figure out how to live a holy life under suboptimal conditions in the middle of the desert, while involved in the day-to-day hardship of their journey.

This tension is evident in the great lengths of the descriptions of the segments of the journey. The Ramban quotes Rashi and the Rambam who give an explanation why this detailed record appears, and he then analyzes the second verse in the Torah portion: "And Moshe wrote down their starting points for

their travels as commanded by G-d, and these are their travels according to their starting points" [Bamidbar 33:2]. The Ramban adds his own suggestion:

"The writing of the segments was a commandment of G-d, something which has a secret meaning that has not been revealed. The phrase 'as commanded by G-d' is linked to 'Moshe wrote down their starting points' and not to the travel route, which was already described in detail before this."

The phrase "as commanded by G-d" refers to the command to Moshe to write down the list of segments in detail. The Holy One, Blessed be He, commanded Moshe to retrace the long shared journey that the people went through in the desert.

What is the "secret" that is hidden between the lines within the details of the journey segments?

I suggest that there are hints here of two secret meanings.

One hidden message points at the foundation of our religious life. This is the almost impossible encounter between the Divine ideal and practical human living. Revealing this secret and writing it explicitly would interfere with the constant human attempt to rise up to the level of the heavens and to reach the end of our journey. Thus, gently and through hints, the long list tells us about the human experience which is the challenge of the book of Bamidbar – to be in the desert, with all of its challenges, but to still continue to follow the word of G-d.

Another message is the secret of the existence of the nation of Yisrael. Throughout all the generations, the nation of Yisrael travels and wanders on a journey as commanded by G-d, moving from one place to another with great sacrifice, in the challenging surroundings of the desert. This is the secret - to continue in the desert, in unplanted land, following the Creator of the World, even when the Glory Clouds have ceased to give off their light.

"And Moshe wrote down their starting points for their travels." We follow the instructions of G-d and move from one point to the next, however, as is written in the verse, in the book of Bamidbar the nation of Yisrael also learned to move at times on a winding path, one that was not common: "These are their travels according to their starting points." This is indeed an important secret – to go on the shared and almost impossible journey of the chosen nation, guided by the Creator who chose His nation.

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Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez - The Avengers – Revenge or Avenge

Is revenge ever justified? This week's parasha, Matot-Masei, presents a complex tension. Hashem commands Moshe to strike the Midianites for their role in bringing a deadly plague upon the Jewish people, suggesting that retaliation can be a mitzvah. Yet, in Parashat Kedoshim, we are told explicitly not to take revenge. Rambam even calls vengeance a destructive character trait.

So which is it? As in many areas of Jewish thought, the answer depends on intent. If revenge comes from personal anger, it leads to a cycle of destruction. But when the motive is justice, when innocent blood has been spilled, it becomes a moral obligation to respond. That's not revenge. It's avenging.

Rashi distinguishes between Moav, who had geopolitical fears, and Midian, who attacked without cause. Evil done for its own sake, he says, must be answered.

The horrors of October 7 were unprovoked acts of brutality. Justice demands that those responsible be held accountable, not out of hate, but to honor the innocent. We pray that Hashem avenges their blood, not with vengeance, but with righteousness.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

Piloted by the Past

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 goings out for their journeys according to the word of HASHEM, and these were their journeys for their goings out. (Bamidbar 33:1-2)

It would seem that there are two types of journeys being spoken about here. One is "their goings out for their journeys" and the other is "their journeys for their goings out". The first one is "under the charge of Moshe and Aaron and according to the word of HASHEM. What then is the second one referring to?

There are two particular trees that are spoken about in the Garden of Eden, one is the Tree of Life and the other was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What is the difference between these two trees and the practical application to us? The Tree of Life is in reference to the Torah. It maps out for us a way of living, how to happily navigate through this life and reach the bliss of Olam Haba. The Talmud refers to this approach as "the long way which is the short way". There is a requirement of labor and study and dutiful obedience but in the long run, it is a fruitful path. When assembling anything, it always

helps to have instructions. The more complex the item the bigger the user's manual. A bicycle is a page or two and a car is already a thicker book. How about the Book of Life?! How full and rich and sophisticated must that be!?

Shlomo HaMelech writes in Mishlei (3:5-6), "Trust in HASHEM with all your heart and do not rely upon your understanding. Know Him in all your ways, and He will make your paths straight." What are his instructions for life listed here? Don't rely on your own assessments but rather to trust in HASHEM wholeheartedly. Do the right thing at each moment, and then you will have created, with HASHEM, a beautiful picture. Life is like a paint by number painting. "Plan A" produces results that are well beyond our wildest and limited imaginations. This is the objective way to engage the subjectivity of life.

The second tree is the School of Hard Knocks. It is driven by experimentation and chock full of trials and errors. It's a whole other way of learning. The tuition for this school is temptingly low. In fact, it is zero. It costs nothing up front, however, in the end it is very expensive. This is the subjective way to arrive at objectivity and it may cost us years and decades of life, valuable relationships, health, and more, to discover what could have been learned much earlier. This is "the short way which is the long way".

Sometimes a kid will be sent to my office. He will enter very upset. I will ask him to wait and then, when he is more at ease, I will ask him what happened. I am usually met with a barrage of claims about how everyone is to blame and it's not his fault at all. I then calm him down by telling him, "You are not in trouble!" His facial expression immediately relaxes and normalizes. I will explain, "I honestly don't know what happened. Not only are you not in trouble, but today could be a great day, if we learned from what just happened. This may be the reason you came to school today or this year. However, if you fail to learn something, then you are in trouble but not with me. You are in trouble with your-self. This problem will likely repeat itself again and again throughout your life until you figure out what you need to learn. It is probably better for you to learn it here and now and with me helping you rather than after a lifetime of denial. Now let's figure this out together. Slowly, now, what happened?"

It is said that the most successful person is not the one who makes the fewest mistakes but rather the one who learns the most from his mistakes. I once took my whole family on a boat trip. I was the captain of that excursion, and I required "a crash course". (not a very inspiring term) I learned that a boat steers

unlike a car. The rudder is moved in the back and the boat moves in the opposite direction. A car steers from in front and goes where the wheels point. Sometimes we look into the future and often we are piloted by the past.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

The Disciples of Aaron

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 Aaron 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

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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!



BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON MATOS - MASEI - 5786

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From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>

Matos — Wealth, Shlichus, and the Other Side of the Jordan *Adopted from Nechama Leibowitz, Iyunim B'Sefer Bamidbar Career or Shlichus*

Near the end of Parshas Matos, just as Klal Yisrael stands ready to enter Eretz Yisrael, a new crisis appears. It is not the crisis of the meraglim, who feared the land and tried to turn the nation back. It is not the longing for Mitzrayim, for fish, cucumbers, and familiar food. This time the danger comes from success.

Note that this parsha speaks to a modern question as well: the choice between career and shlichus, between private advancement and the responsibility of helping build the national life of Israel. The story of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven is therefore not only a question of geography. It asks what happens when material success, comfort, and a settled life compete with the larger calling placed upon Klal Yisrael.

The lands of Sichon and Og have already been conquered on the eastern side of the Jordan. Bnei Yisrael are standing in Arvos Moav, about to cross the river and enter the land Hashem promised to the Avos. But two shevatim, Reuven and Gad, see something else. They see fertile grazing land. They see a place that fits their wealth, their

livestock, and their settled economic life. Before crossing into the land of destiny, they ask to remain outside it.

This is not a simple question of real estate. It is a question of values. What does a person see first? The mission or the opportunity? The promise of Hashem or the economic advantage? The place where he is needed, or the place where his possessions will flourish?

The Torah introduces the story with a revealing pasuk: ומקנה רב היה לבני ראובן ולבני גד עצום מאד ויראו את ארץ יעזר ואת ארץ גלעד והנה המקום מקנה *The children of Reuven and the children of Gad had very great livestock, and they saw the land of Yazer and the land of Gilad, and behold, the place was a place for livestock* (Bamidbar 32:1). The pasuk begins with מקנה, livestock, and ends with מקנה. Their eyes are drawn to the land because of what it can do for their possessions. The phrase is not neutral. It tells us what they saw first.

A Land Seen Through Possessions

There are many ways to see a land. Moshe sees Eretz Yisrael as the fulfillment of Hashem's promise, the next stage in the life of Klal Yisrael, the place where Torah will be lived as a nation. But Bnei Reuven and Bnei Gad first see ארץ מקנה, a land for livestock. They do not begin by saying that they want to separate from Klal Yisrael or refuse the national mission. They speak indirectly. They list the cities and then say: הארץ אשר הכה השם לפני עדת ישראל ארץ מקנה *The land that Hashem struck before the assembly of Israel is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock* (32:4). Their words are carefully chosen. They do not yet ask. They state two facts, the land is good for livestock and they have livestock, and leave Moshe to draw the implication.

This explains the unusual double language of the pesukim. First the Torah says ויאמרו אל משה (32:2), and only afterward, once the cities and the land have been described, it says again ויאמרו, and they said (32:5). The first אמירה is hesitant. They hint. They wait. They hope Moshe will make the suggestion for them.

But Moshe does not respond to the hint. He does not complete their sentence. Only then do they say clearly: אם מצאנו חן בעיניך יתן את הארץ לנו *If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not bring us across the Jordan* (32:5). Now the hidden request is open. They want the land here. They do not want to cross the Jordan.

Moshe Hears the Meraglim Again

Moshe's response is immediate and sharp: האחיכם יבאו למלחמה ואתם תשבּוּ פה (32:6).

Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here? (32:6). Moshe hears more than a practical request. He hears the echo of an earlier national failure: ולמה תניאון את לב בני ישראל מעבר אל הארץ אשר *Why will you discourage the heart of Bnei Yisrael from crossing to the land that Hashem has given them?* (32:7). The word תניאון is the key. Moshe sees in their request a danger similar to the sin of the meraglim. Their refusal to cross could weaken the heart of the nation, suggesting that Eretz Yisrael is not worth the struggle, that a comfortable inheritance outside the land is preferable to the demanding destiny inside it.

Moshe therefore recalls the whole story of Kadesh Barnea. The meraglim saw the land and caused the people to fear entering it. Hashem's anger burned, and the generation was left to wander in the midbar for forty years. Now Moshe says: והנה קמתם תחת אבותיכם תרבות *And behold, you have*

That is why money is called נכסים, says the Midrash, because נכסים, hidden from one and revealed to another. It is called נכסים, because נכסים, זוזים, they move from one person and are given to another. And מה אתה מונה ממן itself is questioned: מה אתה מונה אינו כלום, what are you counting? It is nothing.

This does not mean that money is evil. The Torah does not despise wealth. But wealth becomes destructive when it becomes the lens through which a person sees his future, his family, his land, and his mission.

The Lesson of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven

The story of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven is not only about where two shevatim lived. It is about how people choose. They stood on the edge of Eretz Yisrael, but their first words were about מקנה, livestock. They saw a place of economic possibility before they saw the mission of the nation.

Moshe teaches them three corrections.

First, do not discourage your brothers: האחיכם יבאו למלחמה ואתם תשבו, shall your brothers go to war while you sit here? A private decision can weaken the heart of others.

Second, do not reduce the mission to a human arrangement. The war for Eretz Yisrael is not only before Bnei Yisrael. It is לפני השם, before Hashem.

Third, do not let wealth reorder your values: בנו לכם ערים לטפכם וגדרתם, לצאנכם, build for yourselves cities for your children and pens for your sheep. Children before cattle. Family before property. Ikar before tafel.

Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven accepted Moshe's correction, and that is to their credit. But the Midrash still warns that their original desire left a mark. They loved their wealth, settled outside Eretz Yisrael, and were exiled first.

The question of the parsha remains alive for me. When comfort and calling stand opposite each other, what do we see first? Do we see מקום, a place for our possessions, or the place of our shlichus? Do we count our money, or do we count what Hashem asks of us? The Torah does not ask a person to ignore practical needs, but it demands that practical needs remain in their proper place. Wealth may be a gift, but it must not become a guide. Comfort may be useful, but it must not become a destiny. The main thing must remain the main thing, and the secondary thing must remain secondary: העיקר עיקר והטפל טפל, the main thing main and the secondary thing secondary.

The Halachos of the Three Weeks and the Nine Days - 5786

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Based on the Mishna Brurah, including Shulchan Aruch and Rema, Orach Chaim 551, with additions from R' Shimon Eider, R' Eliezer Melamed, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Hershel Schachter and other contemporary poskim.

Structure. The restrictions develop in stages. Some begin from the Seventeenth of Tamuz; a more serious level begins from Rosh Chodesh Av; and the strictest level is *shavua shechal bo*, the week in which Tisha B'Av falls.

Haftaros and public mourning. Before Tisha B'Av, the three haftaros of punishment, שלשה דפורענותא, are read; afterward come the seven haftaros of consolation, שבעה דנחמתא, and then the two haftaros of teshuvah. If the first was missed and the regular haftarah was read, the later haftaros may be adjusted. When Rosh Chodesh Av falls on

Shabbos, the common practice is to read the ordinary haftarah of Rosh Chodesh. On Shabbos Chazon, some call the rav for maftir, and the custom is for the Haftarah to be read with the tune of Eichah; a minor should not be called for this haftarah.

Danger during Bein HaMetzarim. The Three Weeks are treated as a time of danger, and one should avoid unnecessary risks. Many delay elective surgery during this period where feasible.

Weddings and engagements. Ashkenazim do not make weddings from the Seventeenth of Tamuz until after Tisha B'Av, even without a festive meal and even if the person has not fulfilled *peru u'rvu*. Most authorities hold that the Three Weeks begin the evening of Shiva Asar B'Tamuz. In a case of need, some permit making the chuppah before the Three Weeks begin, even if the meal continues into the evening of Shiva Asar B'Tammuz. Piskei Teshuvos cites this from the Steipler Gaon and Rav Moshe.

Engagements and shidduchim are permitted because delay may cause a *davar ha'aved*, but the simchah must be limited. Until Rosh Chodesh Av, engagements and *tena'im* may take place even with a *seudah*. From Rosh Chodesh Av until after Tisha B'Av, they may take place without a *seudah*, though refreshments such as cake are permitted.

Music. Dancing and musical instruments are prohibited during the Three Weeks. A professional musician may play for non-Jewish audiences until Rosh Chodesh. A music teacher earning a livelihood may continue until Rosh Chodesh Av and practicing music lessons is likewise generally allowed until Rosh Chodesh.

Most authorities prohibit listening to recorded music in the Three Weeks, e.g., Igros Moshe O.C. 1:166 and 3:87, though a minority view would allow non-live music, but this is generally not followed except in need. So a driver concerned about falling asleep may listen to music. Many permit listening to a cappella recordings.

Live singing without instruments is more lenient, especially *zemiros* on Shabbos, songs of praise to Hashem, soulful tunes at a *kumsitz*, singing to children, or singing at a *seudas mitzvah* without instruments. During the Nine Days, even vocal singing should be more restrained, especially if it has a performance or dance-like character.

Movies, theater, and spectator ball games. Regarding movies, theater, and spectator ball games, where the music is incidental, some allow this before Rosh Chodesh Av (see views in Peninei Halacha). Rav Soloveitchik was stricter and held that all entertainment is prohibited during the Three Weeks because this period corresponds to the twelve months of *aveilus* for a parent. During the Nine Days, recreational entertainment should generally be avoided. Educational, professional, therapeutic, or child-management needs are different.

Social meals / seudas merei'im. Rav Soloveitchik held the Three Weeks, Nine Days, and Tisha B'Av as corresponding to the twelve months of *aveilus*, *shloshim*, and *shivah*. On Rav Soloveitchik's approach, a *seudat merei'im*, such as inviting multiple families for a meal, is inappropriate even during the Three Weeks, and certainly during the Nine Days. The Aruch HaShulchan is also strict regarding *simchas merei'us* in the context of *eirusin* or *shidduchim* from Rosh Chodesh Av onward.

Shehecheyanu. The minhag is not to recite *Shehecheyanu* during the Three Weeks on a new fruit, garment, or similar item, because it is inappropriate to say וקיימנו והגיינו during days of calamity. Exceptions include a *mitzvah* such as *pidyon haben*, a fruit that will

not last, a pregnant woman who craves it, or a sick person who needs it. Many permit *Shehecheyanu* on Shabbos.

Before Rosh Chodesh Av, the issue with a new garment is mainly *Shehecheyanu*. R' Eider permits buying and wearing insignificant new garments that do not require *Shehecheyanu*, such as shoes, undergarments, socks, or shirts, until Rosh Chodesh Av, but not during the Nine Days. During the Nine Days, even new garments that do not require *Shehecheyanu* may not be worn.

Haircuts, shaving, and grooming. Ashkenazim do not take haircuts from the Seventeenth of Tamuz until Chatzos on the tenth of Av. This includes hair of the head, beard, and body. Combing is permitted. A mustache may be trimmed if it interferes with eating, though there is a stricter view during *shavua shechal bo*. The restriction applies to men, women, and children, though some limit the child-haircut restriction to *shavua shechal bo*. Source: Mishna Brurah.

R' Eider adds that a woman may remove excess hair around the temples when needed, and a married woman may shave her body even during the Nine Days. For a bris, the father, mohel, and sandak may take a haircut and shave, but only until *shavua shechal bo*.

Shaving would generally also not be permitted during the Three Weeks. Rav Moshe Feinstein permits shaving during the Three Weeks where not shaving may cause financial loss, though certainly not during *Shavua shechal bo*. Rav Hershel Schachter holds that for one who shaves daily, shaving may be ordinary dignity rather than simcha, and certainly before Shabbos because of kavod Shabbos. Peninei Halacha records that some permit shaving before Rosh Chodesh Av, especially for kavod Shabbos, but not from Rosh Chodesh Av and certainly not during *shavua shechal bo*. Ask your Rav.

Cutting nails. Cutting nails is permitted during the Three Weeks and is restricted only during *shavua shechal bo*. Even then, it is permitted for mitzvah need, such as tevilah preparation or a mohel preparing for a bris, and may be permitted for kavod Shabbos.

Rosh Chodesh Av. Mishenichnas Av mema'atin b'simchah. One reduces simchah and avoids undertakings requiring special mazal. Litigation with a non-Jew should be postponed if possible. Some communities did not do Birchas Hachodesh for Rosh Chodesh Av, though we generally do not follow this practice and do recite Birchas Hachodsh Menachem Av.

Business, purchases, building, and repairs. From Rosh Chodesh Av, business should be reduced, especially simchah purchases, such as silver vessels, wedding items, or celebratory objects that can be bought later at the same price. Ordinary business is more lenient where delay would cause loss, affect livelihood, or miss an opportunity. R' Eider records that nowadays, if reducing business would affect livelihood, the minhag permits active business.

One may not build during the Nine Days for simchah, beauty, or pleasure, including decorative construction, a vacation home, painting, wallpapering, or home decorating. Building for a mitzvah and necessary repairs are permitted. A non-Jewish contractor hired before Rosh Chodesh Av may continue where stopping would cause loss; if the work is visible and delay is possible, it should be delayed. Repairs to prevent damage, such as a leaking roof, are permitted. Planting for pleasure during the Nine Days is prohibited. Ask your Rav.

Meat and wine. Ashkenazim avoid meat, chicken and wine from

Rosh Chodesh Av until after Tisha B'Av. Parve food cooked in a clean meat vessel is permitted. Meat and wine are permitted on Shabbos (even in a seudah shlishis that extends after dark and even in the Nine Days). A sick or weak person, and pregnant or nursing women when needed, may eat meat; chicken is preferable if sufficient. R' Eider adds that where possible, even those relying on a health leniency should avoid meat from the seventh of Av. Rabbi Jachter says that a kosher restaurant owner may have room to serve meat in the Nine Days if otherwise Jewish customers may eat non-kosher meat.

For Havdalah, some allow the adult to drink the wine; others prefer giving it to a child; if no suitable child is available, the adult may drink it; and some use beer or other *chamar medinah*.

Seudas mitzvah and siyum. Meat and wine are permitted at a genuine seudas mitzvah, such as a bris, pidyon haben, or siyum. Before *shavua shechal bo*, all participants may eat meat; during *shavua shechal bo*, the number should be limited. R' Eider defines a siyum as completion of a masechta of Gemara, a seder of Mishnah, or a book of Tanach learned in depth with Rishonim. In a camp or yeshiva, those who normally eat together with the person making the siyum may participate.

One should not arrange a siyum merely to permit meat. The Mishna Brurah says not to delay or accelerate learning to schedule a Nine Days siyum. Some poskim, including Kaf HaChaim and Piskei Teshuvos, are more lenient where the goal is increasing Torah learning rather than eating meat.

Laundering and clothing. Laundering is prohibited during the Nine Days even for clothing worn afterward. This includes dry cleaning and giving clothing to a non-Jewish cleaner. Clothing given to a non-Jew before Rosh Chodesh Av may be washed. The prohibition includes garments, linen, handkerchiefs, tablecloths, and towels. Children's diapers and clothing may be washed as needed, privately and only as necessary. Washing for mitzvah need, such as white garments for *shivah nekiyim*, is permitted. Washing undergarments that are very sweaty or dirty and needed is permitted according to Peninei Halacha and Shoneh Halachos.

One may not wear freshly laundered clothing during the Nine Days; clothing should be prepared beforehand by wearing it briefly. This applies to outer garments. R' Eider permits changing undergarments, socks, and pajamas that are sweaty. Shirts are harder and should ideally be pre-worn; laundering adult shirts is not generally permitted absent real need.

Shabbos clothing, bris clothing, and new clothing. Fresh bed linen is prohibited. Tablecloths and towels should not be changed except for Shabbos or if soiled. Regarding Shabbos clothing, the Rema records a custom not to wear full Shabbos clothing on Shabbos Chazon, while the Gra held that kavod Shabbos should not be diminished. R' Eider and Piskei Teshuvos record that nowadays most wear Shabbos clothing even on Shabbos Chazon; freshly laundered Shabbos clothing is permitted, but new garments remain prohibited. For a bris, the father, mother, mohel, sandak, and woman carrying the baby may wear Shabbos clothing, but not the kvatter.

During the Nine Days, one may not buy, make, knit, weave, or sew new garments or shoes, even for later use, except in great necessity. Repairing torn garments or shoes is permitted; polishing shoes to restore color is permitted, while shining merely for shine is questionable. R' Eider.

Bathing, showering, swimming, and Mikve. From Rosh Chodesh Av, one may not bathe for pleasure, even in cold water. Washing face, hands, and feet in cold water is permitted. Washing for medical need, sweat, dirt, odor, discomfort, or mitzvah need is not pleasure bathing. Hot or warm water, soap, and shampoo are more severe, but may be used when needed for cleanliness. *Sources:* Mishna Brurah; R' Eider. Peninei Halacha adds that today many shower for basic cleanliness, not pleasure. An *istinis*, or one who suffers from not washing, may shower preferably with lukewarm water for cleanliness, using soap or shampoo as needed. Rabbi Neustadt likewise permits washing to remove dirt or perspiration.

Recreational swimming during the Nine Days is prohibited, since the bathing restriction generally applies to swimming. Many contemporary poskim permit, for example in a camp, swimming for health, cooling down from extreme heat, or necessary instructional needs provided it is not recreational.

Bathing for mitzvah need, including tevilah preparation, is permitted. A man who goes to the Mikve every Erev Shabbos may do so on Erev Shabbos Chazon, but others should not begin then.

For a non-*istinis* on Erev Shabbos, there are differing views whether one may take a full-body shower or only wash the face, hands, and feet. See R' Eider

No ordinary shavua shechal bo. When Tisha B'Av falls on Sunday, or falls on Shabbos and is postponed to Sunday, many poskim hold that the preceding week is not considered *shavua shechal bo*. The special stringencies of that week therefore do not apply in the same way, though the broader Nine Days restrictions still apply.

Kiddush Levanah. The custom is to postpone Kiddush Levanah until after Tisha B'Av because it should be recited in joy. If waiting may cause one to miss the proper time, Kiddush Levanah may be recited earlier. Ask your Rav.

For more information and sources, see:

1. Shulchan Aruch Siman #551
 - a. & Mishna Brurah - <https://tinyurl.com/SefariaMishnaBrurah551>
 - b. & Aruch Hashulchan - tinyurl.com/SefariaAruchHashulchan551
2. Halachapedia - [halachapedia.com/index.php?title=Three_Weeks & title=Nine_days](https://halachapedia.com/index.php?title=Three_Weeks&title=Nine_days)
3. R' Doniel Neustadt
 - a. Three Weeks - tinyurl.com/3-weeks-r-neustadt
 - b. Music & 3 Weeks - tinyurl.com/Music-3-Weeks-9-Days
 - c. Nine Days - tinyurl.com/9-days-r-neustadt/ & -2/
4. R' Yirmiyohu Kaganoff
 - a. Laws of 3 Weeks - rabbikaganoff.com/the-three-weeks/
 - b. Shaving and Haircuts - www.yeshiva.co/midrash/6589
5. R' Shimon Eider a Summary of Halachos of the Three Weeks – www.feldheim.com/summary-of-halachos-of-the-three-weeks
6. R' Eliezer Melamed & Peninei Halacha
 - a. Customs of the Three Weeks - www.yeshiva.co/midrash/7966
 - b. Shaving During 3 Weeks - www.yeshiva.co/midrash/48338
 - c. Peninei Halacha - ph.yhb.org.il/en/category/zemanim/05-08/
7. Ohr Somayach Laws of the Three Weeks various articles listed at <https://articles.ohr.edu/categories/law-and-ritual>
8. Rav Moshe Feinstein – Shu"t Igros Moshe O.C. 1:168, 3:80, 4:112:2 & 4:21:4, Y.D. 2:137, C.M. 1:93 <https://tinyurl.com/IgrosMoshe-ThreeWeeks>

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Adapted from the **Imrei Or** by **Rav Elya Ber Wachtfogel** Rosh Yeshivas Zichron Moshe of South Fallsburg – **Masei Bein HaMetzarim, Torah Protects from Punishment for Sin When Lesser Things Replace What Matters, Churban Becomes Necessary**

The Gemara in Nedarim 81a asks: *אמר רב יהודה אמר רב מאי דכתיב מי* *האיש החכם ויבן את זאת וגו' על מה אבדה הארץ*, Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: what is the meaning of the pasuk, "Who is the wise man who can understand this, why was the land lost?" This question was put to the Chachamim, the Nevi'im, and the malachim, and none of them could answer it, until Hakadosh Baruch Hu Himself explained: *ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורתי*, because they abandoned My Torah. Rav Yehudah adds, in the name of Rav, that this means *שאינ' עבודה זרה, גילוי עריות, ושפיכות דמים*, they did not recite Birchas HaTorah first. The Ran, citing Rabbeinu Yonah (c. 1200–1263), explains that this was not a mere technical lapse. Rather, *שלא היתה התורה חשובה בעיניהם*, Torah was not important enough in their eyes to warrant a berachah. They learned Torah, but not lishmah. Because Torah was not precious to them, they grew lax even in blessing it.

The Rishonim, and the Chasid Yaavetz (Rav Yosef ben Chaim Yaavetz, c. 1438–1539), raise an obvious difficulty. This pasuk speaks of the first Beis Hamikdash, yet the Gemara in Yoma 9b attributes that churban to three cardinal sins, *עבודה זרה, גילוי עריות, ושפיכות דמים*, idolatry, forbidden relations, and bloodshed. Why, then, does Hashem answer that the churban came from abandoning Torah? And however great limud haTorah may be, how could a deficiency in learning be punished more severely than those three aveiros themselves?

The Chasid Yaavetz answers that the three severe aveiros were indeed the underlying cause. But Torah had been protecting the people from punishment for those very sins. By the time of the churban, they were no longer as deeply mired in those aveiros as before, yet the earlier sins had already set the decree of punishment in motion. The real question, then, is why the land was not destroyed earlier, when the sins were worse, and was destroyed later, when they had lessened. The answer is that the zechus of Torah had shielded them, until that protection was withdrawn.

He offers a mashal. A king had a musician whose playing gave him unique pleasure. The musician deserved death for a crime he had committed, but the king delayed the sentence because he took such delight in the music. Later, the musician lost the use of his fingers, or vowed never to play again, and only then did the king carry out the punishment for the original crime. So too, as long as Bnei Yisrael were engaged in Torah, they gave Hashem delight, as it says, *יִעַרְבַּ יְעָרִי שִׁירִי*, may my speech be sweet to Him. But once they abandoned Torah, the earlier sins came due. The immediate cause of the churban, then, was *עזיבת התורה*, the abandonment of Torah. This sharpens Rabbeinu Yonah's point. They were punished because Torah lacked importance in their eyes. Just as a tune loses its sweetness once played carelessly, Torah learned without real appreciation no longer carried the sweetness of *יִעַרְבַּ עָלַי שִׁירִי*, and so could no longer protect them.

The Chasid Yaavetz applies this to the expulsion from Spain, among whose exiles he himself was numbered. Spain had many yeshivos and talmidim, yet many learned for six or seven years only to sharpen their minds, and then turned to *הקצות דיצינויות*, outside

disciplines. Others abandoned learning for worldly pursuits. Others turned Torah into a profession, chasing pilpul to display brilliance, capable, as the expression goes, of *מטדד את השרץ*, "purifying the sheretz", without ever reaching Torah's purpose: not practical halachah, not chassidus, not even the daily halachos of tzitzis, tefillin, and issur v'heter. A small number learned properly, to know what Bnei Yisrael ought to do, but even among them, many fell short of true lishmah. So the few who did learn properly could not protect the generation.

A similar idea appears in the Rambam (1138–1204), in his Peirush HaMishnayos at the end of Berachos. On the pasuk *עת לעשות לה' הפרו*, he explains that when the time comes for Hashem to act in judgment, causes arise that lead people to set Torah aside, so that punishment can justly follow. Torah protects from punishment, but once it is weakened, that protection lifts.

Rav Itzel Peterburger (Rav Yitzchak Blazer, 1837–1907) reads the Gemara in Nedarim in the same direction as the Chasid Yaavetz, but with a different emphasis. The primary punishment of the churban was indeed for the three severe aveiros, but the real question is why Torah did not protect the people from sinning in the first place.

Chazal say, *בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תכלין*, I created the yetzer hara, and I created Torah as its antidote. If they were learning Torah constantly, how did they fall into avodah zarah, gilui arayos, and shefichas damim? Hashem's answer is that they did not properly value Torah. Since it was not truly important to them, it failed to protect them from sin.

Still, this needs sharpening. Chazal say, in the Pesichta to Eichah Rabbah: *ויתר הקב"ה על עבודה זרה ועל גילוי עריות ועל שפיכות דמים ולא ויתר ויתר*, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, so to speak, overlooked idolatry, forbidden relations, and bloodshed, but did not overlook contempt for Torah. This sounds as though the true cause of the churban was not the three aveiros at all, but *מאסה של תורה*, the rejection of Torah. How does this square with Yoma, which attributes the churban to the three severe sins?

The answer emerges from the haftarah of Masei: *כי שנים רעות עשה עמי*, *אורי עזבו מקור מים חיים לחצוב להם בארות בארות נשברים אשר לא יכילו המים*, My people has committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the source of living waters, to dig for themselves broken cisterns that cannot hold water. What are these two evils? On the surface, it seems like one failure: they left Torah for other things. Yet Chazal derive from this pasuk that Bnei Yisrael *חטאו בכפלים*, sinned doubly; *לקו בכפלים*, were punished doubly; and are *עתידים להתנחם בכפלים*, destined to be consoled doubly. What does a "double sin" mean? A sin can be greater or smaller, but what makes it double? And if the punishment was doubled, where is the middas hadin?

Chazal say elsewhere, on *היו צריה לראש איביה שלו*, "her oppressors became the head, her enemies were at ease", one might have thought this happened *על מנן*, for no reason, so the pasuk continues, *כי ה' חוגה*, because Hashem afflicted her for her many sins. What was the hava amina that such suffering could have been for nothing? A further Chazal, in Gittin 7a, discusses the pasuk *זאת לא זאת השפלה*, "this, not this; lower the high and raise the low." The malachim ask Hashem: *זאת להם לישראל שהקדימו לפניך בסיני נעשה*, is this what becomes of Yisrael, who at Sinai placed naaseh before nishma? Hashem answers: *לא זאת להם לישראל שהשפילו את הגבוה*, not this for Yisrael, for they lowered the high, raised the low, and set up an idol in the Heichal.

This is puzzling. If they placed an idol in the Heichal, that alone is a grave enough sin, why add that they lowered the high and raised the low? And why bring naaseh v'nishma into it at all?

The answer is that the malachim's question and the Nevi'im's question were really one and the same question. Klal Yisrael certainly sinned gravely, but ordinarily there is a structure to sin and punishment: Beis Din punishes the guilty individuals, and it seems that only a minority of Klal Yisrael had committed the gravest sins. The real question was why there had to be a total churban.

The answer is that punishment depends on the root of the sin. Sometimes a person sins from taavah, or because the yetzer hara simply overpowers him. That is a terrible failing, but it can be repaired through punishment and teshuvah. But sometimes people sin because they have lost all sense of what truly matters, their values themselves have inverted. That is not a crack in the building; it is rot in the structure itself. A cracked building can be repaired. A rotten one must be torn down and rebuilt.

That was the generation of the churban. Their aveiros grew out of having lost their appreciation for Torah. Once Torah was lowered, something else was raised in its place, and from that came the three severe aveiros. Their entire value system had been overturned. This is what *שלא ברכו בתורה תחילה* really means: Torah was no longer important to them, and their sins grew from that root. The churban came, as Yoma says, from the three aveiros, but only because those aveiros themselves sprang from *מאסה של תורה*, as the Gemara Nedarim and Eichah Rabbah teach.

This also explains the exchange with the malachim. They argued that Yisrael possessed the quality of *זאת*, the singular status of Torah, because they had said naaseh v'nishma. Hashem answered that it had become *לא זאת*: they lowered the high and raised the low. Torah, which is truly elevated, was lowered, and empty things were raised up in its place, and from that came the placing of an idol in the Heichal itself, a horrifying inversion in which the kedushah of the Kodesh HaKodashim was displaced by a lowly, tamei image. This is also why Chazal say *אין זאת אלא תורה*, that *זאת* refers only to Torah, as in *וזאת התורה*, "and this is the Torah." The word *זאת* appears elsewhere too, but Rashi in Sotah explains that it is a term of exclusivity, *זאת ולא אחרת*, this and no other. That is the nature of Torah: it demands a level of importance that nothing else can substitute for.

Rav Reuven Grozovsky (1886–1958) writes, in his introduction to Birchas Shmuel volume 2, that Rav Baruch Ber Leibowitz (1862–1939) would say: *התורה אוהבת רק את מי שאינו אוהב דברים אחרים רק אותה*, Torah loves only one who loves nothing else but her. Only to such a person does Torah give herself, and allow herself to be acquired. This is *חטאו בכפלים*. The sin had two sides: they lost Torah's importance, and they installed other things as important in its place. This is *עזבו מקור מים חיים*, *שנים רעות עשה עמי*, they abandoned the source of living waters, and *חצבו בארות נשברים*, they dug broken cisterns instead. They were therefore punished middah keneged middah, in two corresponding ways: Yisrael was lowered and destroyed, and the nations rose over them, fulfilling the tochachah, *הגר אשר בקרבך יעלה עליך מעלה מעלה ואתה תרד מטה מטה*, the stranger in your midst will rise higher and higher, and you will sink lower and lower. In the future, they will be consoled *בכפלים*, when the order reverses: Yisrael will be raised and the nations lowered, as it says,

והיית רק למעלה ולא תהיה למטה, you will be only above, and never below.

This also explains *היו צריה לראש, יכול על מגן*. The pain was not only that Yisrael fell, but that their enemies rose and prospered. One might think this anguish was self-inflicted, that Yisrael brought it on themselves by dwelling on their enemies' success. Chazal answer, *כי הוה חגה על רוב פשעה*, this anguish, too, was part of the punishment. Because they had inverted their values, lowering the high and raising the low, the punishment mirrored the sin: they themselves were lowered while their enemies were raised.

The same idea may illuminate the expulsion from Spain. The Chasid Yaavetz writes that many in Spain learned for years and then left Torah for outside disciplines or worldly pursuits, revealing that even their earlier learning had lacked genuine appreciation for Torah. They valued other things more, and so Spanish Jewry, too, required churban and rebuilding.

A Sephardi once asked why the Germans, *ymach shemam*, brought such devastating churban to Ashkenazic lands, while Sephardic communities such as Egypt and Morocco were not destroyed to the same degree. The answer may lie in a derashah of the Maggid of Kelm (Rav Moshe Yitzchak Darshan), recorded in the introduction to *Tochachas Chaim*. In 1871, well before Hitler, *ymach shemo*, as *haskalah* was spreading, one of the German maskilim [Abraham Geiger] published a so-called "Shulchan Aruch" instructing readers in reform practice. The Maggid of Kelm said that because of this, a day would come when the Germans, too, would write a Shulchan Aruch, and there, *rachmana litzlan*, it would say, *the best of the Jews, kill*. The point is the same one: *haskalah* exchanged Torah's values for *חכמות היצרניות* and foreign culture. These were not sins of appetite; they were a reversal of what mattered. And so an entire world of European Torah had to be destroyed, and Klal Yisrael forced to begin again. The Steipler wrote that the pattern of Nazi destruction followed the spread of *haskalah*, first Germany, then Poland, and eventually Hungary. Rav Leib Malin similarly explained the pasuk *מקום המשפט שמה הרשע*, "in the place of justice, there was wickedness," that the churban emanated from Germany because that was *haskalah's* primary seat. This may account for why the destruction fell especially on Ashkenazic lands: among Sephardim, even where sins were many, *haskalah* had not taken root in the same way, and their underlying respect for *kedushah* remained intact. Even today, one often finds among non-observant Sephardim a genuine respect for matters of *kedushah*.

Today, the yetzer hara of *haskalah* has largely receded from the yeshivos, but other yetzarim, especially *taavos*, still weaken limud Torah and diminish its importance in our eyes. In Bein HaMetzarim, we must repair the very sin for which the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed. A person should value his seder as something worth paying for, not something to set aside for a small convenience or a little money. The end of the zman should be learned with the same seriousness as its beginning, and even *bein hazmanim* should include Torah, if only lighter material.

May it be that in the *zechus* of strengthening our appreciation for Torah, the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt speedily in our days.

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Words and the Thought Behind Them

Parshas Matos deals with vows and pledges that a person undertakes, and the obligation to keep them. Keeping one's pledges is undoubtedly a sacred obligation, but the Torah gives us an "escape" clause. One can ask a court, or a learned expert to "annul" one's vows. Similarly, the father of a minor girl, or a husband, can annul her vows. While one can understand the concept of annulment as being necessary because of the severity of vows, its dynamics still need to be understood.

Although this seems to be one of many mitzvot, this parsha was specially chosen to delineate two important points that are seemingly unrelated to the particular properties of this mitzvah: 1) the unique nature of Moshe's prophecy, 2) the unique role of the leaders of Israel. What is it about this mitzvah in particular that makes it the appropriate forum to convey these two points?

Speech is the unique faculty that defines humans, as they are categorized "medabrim". The act of speech is very different than other activities of a human. All other activities are "caused" by thought, much the way that pushing a rock causes it to roll. Speech, however, is the very embodiment of a person's cognition. While an act done unwittingly is pardonable, a word uttered by accident is simply not even considered to be speech (see Nedarim 28a).

The ability to annul vows is a result of this understanding. In the process of the annulment of a vow, the person presents that he did not really understand the ramifications of his words. In effect this means that those words were not the result of an understanding, but in effect a "blurring out" of words. Similarly, the husband or father assumes the role of the "da'as" of the spouse or child, and if he disagrees with the vow, it means that the words are lacking proper "da'as".

This is the reason that this parsha is chosen to delineate the distinction between Moshe's prophecy and that of other prophets. Prophecy is the "word" of Hashem, but its quality is only as good as the understanding of the prophet. All prophets - barring Moshe - do not have a crystal-clear understanding of the message; their words of prophecy are therefore prefaced only with "koh", indicating that it's an approximation. Only Moshe, whose understanding was crystal clear, could say words that were precise - "zeh hadavar".

This also is the appropriate mitzvah to express the unique role of the leaders of Israel. The Jewish nation is like a person, with each of the individuals having a unique role, similar to the organs of a body. The leaders are the mind - and therefore an expert dayan can nullify a vow.

This concept sets a high bar for mitzvot that are performed by articulation. If we do a mitzvah with our hands, as long as we have some cognizance of what we are doing then we have essentially fulfilled our mitzvah. But mitzvot of articulation - tefilla being foremost among them - are a different story. Words said half-thoughtfully, or off-handedly, are lacking the very point of davening. Similarly, helping someone physically is a chessed, no matter how little thought is invested. But kind words need to express true thought and empathy.

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The Danger of Suspicion 🕒 (Matot-Masei)

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Zt"l

This year's series of essays were originally written and recorded by Rabbi Sacks zt"l in 5773 (2012–2013).

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

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

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

How did this translate itself into Jewish law and life? The Mishnah in Shekalim speaks of the three periods in the year when appropriations were made from the collective donations stored in the Temple treasury. The Mishnah states that "The person who made the appropriation did not enter the chamber wearing a bordered cloak or shoes or tefillin or an amulet, so that if he subsequently became poor, people would not say that he became poor because he committed an offence in the chamber, and so that if he became rich people would not say that he did so by misappropriating contributions in the chamber - for we must be free of blame in the eyes of people just as we must be free of blame before God, as it is said, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel.'"

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

Not only must there be no wrongdoing when coins are taken from the Temple treasury; there must be no suspicion of wrongdoing. Hence the person who gathered the money should not wear any item of clothing in which coins could be hidden. He was to be searched before and afterwards, and even engaged in conversation so that he would not be tempted to secrete some of the money in his mouth. Two rabbinic teachings from the Second Temple period speak of families famous for their role in Temple life and the lengths they went to place themselves beyond suspicion. The Garmu family were expert in preparing the showbread. It was said of them that "their memory was held in high esteem because fine bread was never found

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

The general principle is stated in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

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

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

A closely related halachic principle is the idea known as *marit ha-ayin*, "appearances". Thus for example, before milk substitutes became common, it was forbidden to drink milk-like liquids (made, for example, from almonds) together with meat on the grounds that people might think it was milk itself. Similarly it is forbidden on Shabbat to hang out garments that had become wet (for example, by falling into water) to dry, in case people think that one has washed them on Shabbat. In general one is not allowed to perform actions which, permitted in themselves, lend themselves to misinterpretation. The connection or contrast between these two principles is a matter of some debate in rabbinic literature. There are those who see *chashad* and *marit ha-ayin* as very similar, perhaps even two names for the same thing. Others however see them as different, even opposites. *Chashad* represents the possibility that people might think you have done something forbidden and thus think badly of you. *Marit ha-ayin* concerns cases where people, knowing that you are not the sort of person to do something forbidden, draw the mistaken conclusion that because you are doing X, Y is permitted, because X is easily mistaken for Y. Thus, to take one of the cases mentioned above, people seeing you hanging out clothes to dry on Shabbat might conclude that doing laundry is permitted, which it is not. This concern for appearances is, on the face of it, strange. Surely what matters is what God thinks of us, not what people think of us.

The Talmud tells us of a moving encounter between the dying Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and his disciples:

They said to him: Master, bless us. He said to them: May it be God's will that the fear of heaven should be as important to you as the fear of [the opinions of] human beings.

They said: Is that all?

He said: Would that you were able to attain this [level of spirituality]. You can see [how difficult it is] because when someone wants to commit a sin, he says, I hope no one will see me [thus placing his fear of human beings above the fear of God who sees all].

What is more, it is forbidden to suspect people of wrongdoing. The rabbis said, "One who suspects the innocent is [punished by being] bodily afflicted" and "One should always judge a person in the scale of merits." Why then, if the onus is on the observer not to judge harshly, should we - the observed - be charged with the duty of acting above suspicion?

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

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

Rashi's commentary on Deut. 1:12 Even Moses, who devoted his life with total selflessness to the people of Israel, was not able to avoid their suspicion. R. Moses Sofer goes so far as to say that he was troubled throughout his lifetime by the challenge of the command, 'You shall be innocent in the eyes of God and Israel,' adding that it was far easier to fulfil the first half of the command than the second (in the eyes of Israel). Indeed he wondered if it was possible for anyone to fulfil it in its entirety. Perhaps, he said, this is what Ecclesiastes meant when he said, "There is not a righteous man on earth who only does what is right and never sins" (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Yet there is a profound idea embedded in the concept of *veheyitem neki'im*, 'You shall be innocent.' The Talmudic sage Rava was scathing of those who stood in the presence of a Torah scroll but not in the presence of a Torah sage. To be a Jew is to be summoned to become a living Sefer Torah. People learn how to behave not only from the books they study but also - perhaps more so - from the people they meet. Jewish educators speak of 'text-people' as well as 'text-books,' meaning that we need living role models as well as formal instruction. For that reason, Rabbi Akiva used to follow Rabbi Yehoshua to see how he conducted himself in private, saying 'This too is part of Torah, and I need to learn.' The twin principles of *chashad* and *marit ha-ayin* mean that we should act in such a way as to be held as a role-model (by being above suspicion - the rule of *chashad*) and that, just as a book of instructions should be unambiguous, so should our conduct (by not laying itself open to misinterpretation - the idea of *marit ha-ayin*). People should be able to observe the way we behave and learn from us how a Jew should live.

The fact that these rules apply to every Jew, not just to great Sages, is eloquent testimony to the spiritual egalitarianism of the halachah. Each of us is bidden to become a role-model. The fact, too, that these rules exist despite the fact that we are commanded not to suspect others of wrongdoing, tells us something else about Judaism, namely that it is a system of duties, not just of rights. We are not allowed to say, when we have acted in a way conducive to suspicion, 'I have

done nothing wrong; to the contrary, the other person, by harbouring doubts about me, is in the wrong.' To be sure, he is. But that does not relieve us of the responsibility to conduct our lives in a way that is above suspicion. Each of us must play our part in constructing a society of mutual respect.

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

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

That is why we said, 'Let us get ready and build an altar - but not for burnt offerings or sacrifices. On the contrary, it is to be a witness between us and you and the generations that follow, that we will worship the Lord at the Sanctuary with our burnt offerings, sacrifices and fellowship offerings. Then in the future your descendants will not be able to say to ours, "You have no share in the Lord." And we said, "If they ever say this to us or to our descendants, we will answer: Look at the replica of the Lord's altar which our fathers built, not for burnt offerings and sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.'

Civil war was averted, but only just.

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

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

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Mattot: A Misunderstanding or a Leadership Triumph?
By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

In his work, *Iyyunim BeParashot HaShavua* (series 1, 2002), Rabbi Elhanan Samet presents a meaningful analysis of a debate between Rabbi Yitzhak Arama (Spain, 1420-1494) and Rabbi Yitzhak Abarbanel (Spain, Italy 1437-1508). The following essay is based on Rabbi Samet's study.

The request of the tribes of Reuben and Gad in Numbers chapter 32 appears straightforward. Having seen the fertile grazing lands east of the Jordan, they ask Moshe for permission to settle there rather than receive territory west of the river. Moshe responds with surprising severity. He accuses them of abandoning their brethren and compares them to the spies whose discouraging report had doomed an entire generation to die in the wilderness.

Why does Moshe react so strongly? Were the tribes guilty of selfishness, or did Moshe misread a generation that was fundamentally different from the one that had left Egypt? The medieval commentators offer two sharply different perspectives, and each illuminates an important dimension of leadership and communal responsibility.

The first perspective, advanced by Abarbanel and associated with Ramban, sees Moshe's rebuke as based upon a misunderstanding. The tribes never intended to avoid military service. Their request focused on where their families and livestock would reside, not on whether they would participate in the conquest of Canaan. The key phrase appears at the end of their initial request: "Do not bring us across the Jordan." According to this reading, they refer to their inheritance and permanent residence, not to their personal participation in the campaign.

From this perspective, the episode reveals a growing gap between Moshe and the generation preparing to enter the Land of Israel. Unlike the generation of the spies, these Israelites have already demonstrated courage in battle against Sihon and Og. They are not fearful of conquest. They are eager and prepared to fight. Just as Abarbanel sees tensions between Moshe and the younger generation in the episodes of Mei Merivah (Numbers 20) and Baal Peor (Numbers 25), so too here he detects a leader whose assumptions are shaped by the failures of an earlier generation.

The second perspective, developed by Rabbi Yitzhak Arama in his *Akedat Yitzhak*, views Moshe's response very differently. Moshe correctly perceived a grave danger lurking beneath the tribes' request. Even if Reuben and Gad did not intend to evade military service, their proposal threatened to create the same practical result as the sin of the spies. Once a large and fertile territory had already been conquered, why continue crossing the Jordan?

Moshe therefore confronts not a crisis of faith but a crisis of national destiny. Unlike the spies, Reuben and Gad do not doubt God's promises or fear the Canaanites. Nevertheless, their request could weaken the nation's resolve to complete its mission. The danger lies not in their motives but in the consequences their proposal might produce.

Several details in the text support Rabbi Arama's reading. After Moshe's rebuke, the Torah records a break in the narrative and then states, "They approached him and said..." Why did they need to approach him again? The Akedah suggests that the closed parashah break indicates a pause during which the tribal leaders consulted among themselves and reformulated their proposal. They did not

merely clarify a misunderstanding; they strengthened their commitment.

Indeed, their revised proposal goes well beyond what would have been necessary to correct Moshe's impression. They promise not only to fight alongside their brethren but to march "before" them. They pledge to remain engaged until all the tribes are securely settled in their inheritances. This expanded commitment later finds fulfillment when the eastern tribes participate in the conquest under Joshua before returning home.

Yet even if Rabbi Arama is correct, the story ultimately highlights the greatness of the new generation. Moshe identifies a potentially dangerous challenge, but the tribes respond not with resentment or defiance. Instead, they rise to the occasion. They place themselves at the forefront of the national effort and transform a questionable request into an extraordinary demonstration of solidarity.

The debate between Abarbanel and the Akedah therefore centers on a larger question: Is the Torah criticizing Moshe or praising him? Abarbanel emphasizes Moshe's inability fully to appreciate the character of the generation about to inherit the land. Rabbi Arama emphasizes Moshe's courage in confronting a threat before it matured into disaster. For Abarbanel, the episode exposes the limitations of an aging leader; for the Akedah, it demonstrates the enduring necessity of vigilant leadership.

Perhaps the enduring lesson is that both insights contain truth. The generation entering the land was indeed different from the generation that left Egypt. It possessed confidence, initiative, and a willingness to fight for the nation's future. At the same time, Moshe's leadership ensured that this strength would be directed toward collective responsibility rather than tribal self-interest. History did not have to repeat itself. Through courageous leadership and a willing response from the people, a moment that could have echoed the tragedy of the spies instead became a model of national unity and shared destiny.

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

So which cliché is more 'correct'?

THE BORDERS IN PARSHAT MAS'EI

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

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

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

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

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

THE EASTERN FRONTIER

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

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

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

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

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

THE LAND PROMISED TO AVRAHAM AVINU

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2) At BRIT MILA: / 'ERETZ CANAAN'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO BORDERS / TWO TYPES OF KEDUSHA

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

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

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

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

BRIT BEIN HA-BTARIM

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

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

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

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

BRIT MILA (Breishit chapter 17)

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

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

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

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

(A) The NATIONAL aspect

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

[See Rambam, Hilchot Trumot, first chapter!]

(B) The PERSONAL aspect -

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

The following table summarizes our analysis thus far:

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

YERUSHA & ACHUZA

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

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

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

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

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

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

AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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

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

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

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

THE 'KERNEL'

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

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

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

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

EXPANDING KEDUSHA

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

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

THE RAMBAM'S DEFINITION OF ERETZ YISRAEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'LAND FOR PROGRESS'

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

=====
FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. MITZVAT KIBBUSH ERETZ CANAAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PARSHAT MATOT [Parshanut]

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

LOTS OF QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

EXCLUSIVITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PSHAT vs. DRASH

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

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

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

RASHBAM

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

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

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

and this was my [Rashbam's] answer:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAMBAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IBN EZRA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHIZKUNI

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

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

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

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

SEFORNO

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

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

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

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

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

NEXT TIME

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

PARASHAT MATOT: SECRET STRUGGLE

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

SETTING THE SCENE:

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

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

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

ANTICIPATING RESISTANCE:

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEGOTIATING POSTURE:

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

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

"THE LAND HASHEM HAS CONQUERED":

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

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

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

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

MOSHE RESPONDS (NOT):

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

Why doesn't Moshe respond?

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

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

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

MOSHE RESPONDS (REALLY):

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

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

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

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

LET ME TELL YOU A LITTLE SECRET:

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

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

making this a private conversation and then sweetening their offer.

THE NEW DEAL:

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

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

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

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

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

SUB-SURFACE STRUGGLE:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“holding,” not an inheritance.

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

TRIPLE PLAY:

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

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

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

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

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

Bnei Gad and Bnei Re’uvein do indeed describe the land they desire as a land “conquered by Hashem,” giving credit to Him for the victory. But this attribution is merely strategic, a way of making their request appear part of Hashem’s plan and therefore unrefusable. When they volunteer to lead the charge into Eretz Canaan, they promise to remain with the other shevatim “until **WE** have brought them to their place,” i.e., until WE have conquered everything and provided each person with his portion in the Land. And, significantly, their promise is to venture forth “before Bnei Yisrael.” Moshe powerfully reminds them that the victories to come, those in Eretz Yisrael, may be attributed to no one but Hashem: they are to venture forth “before Hashem” — this phrase appears *seven* times in total in our section — not “before Bnei Yisrael”; the Land will be conquered not by the brave vanguard, but “will be conquered before Hashem.” The conquest takes place almost passively, so to speak; the Land simply “is conquered,” without a human actor. The vanguard is needed not to wield its swords with might and valor, but only to demonstrate its faith in Hashem’s promise to help the people inherit the Land. “Lo be-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'uvan (and, later on, a few Menashe-ite families. Two interesting side points, beyond the scope of this shiur, relate to the role of this tribe to the end of Bamidbar. First of all, why did they jump on the Gad-Re'uvan "bandwagon" in the middle of the

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

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

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

III. LEKHTEIKH AHARAI BAMIDBAR - ?

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

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

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

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

A: Chapters 1-10:

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

1-4: Census

1-2: General Census

3-4: Levite Census

5-6: Assorted Laws relating to Sanctity of the Camp

7: Dedication of the Mishkan

8-10: Preparation for leaving Sinai

8: Sanctification of the Levi'im

9 (1-14): Celebration of Pesach, Institution of Pesach Sheni

9 (15-23): Description of the 'Anan

10 (1-10): The Trumpets of Assembly

10 (11-28): Beginnings of Travel

10 (29-34): Invitation to Hovav

10 (35-36): Misplaced Parashah (see Rav Soloveitchik's shiur)

B. Chapters 11-25: "The Troubles"

11-12: Challenges of Leadership

11:1-3: Mit'onenim ("complainers")

11:4-35: Mit'avim ("lusts")

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

13-14: Scouts ("Spies")

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

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

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

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

C: Chapters 26-36:

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

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

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

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

IV. METHODOLOGY NOTE: CHIASMUS AND BOOKENDS

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

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

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

One more bit of methodology before proceeding:

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

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

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

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

V. REVERSING THE DIRECTION OF LEGAL TRANSMISSION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Enter the daughters of Tz'lofchad:

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI. REDEMPTION DEMANDS UNITY

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

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

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

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

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

Note also the famous statement in the Yerushalmi:

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

VII. THE "SINS OF THE DESERT"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

IX. MENASHEH'S CHIEFTAINS REVISITED

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

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

X. POSTSCRIPT

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

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