

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Masei always occurs at the heart of the Three Weeks. This is the time when we engage in an act of collective recall of our two greatest defeats as a nation. The symbol of the nation was the Temple in Jerusalem. So the symbol of the nation's defeat was the destruction of the Temple. It happened twice, once in the sixth century BCE, the second time in the first century of the common era. In both cases it happened because of poor leadership.

The first defeat was set in motion some three centuries before it happened by a disastrous decision on the part of king Solomon's son Rehoboam. The people were restless during the latter part of Solomon's reign. They felt he has placed too heavy a burden on the people, particularly during the building of the Temple. When he died they came to his son and successor and asked him to lighten the load. His father's counsellors told him to accede to their request. They gave him one of the finest pieces of advice ever given to a leader. If you serve the people they will serve you (1 Kings 12:7). Rehoboam did not listen. The kingdom split. Defeat of both halves -- the northern and southern kingdoms -- was inevitable and only a matter of time. As Abraham Lincoln said: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The second defeat in the days of the Romans was the result of a complete collapse of leadership during the late Second Temple period. The Hasmonean kings, having defeated Hellenism, then succumbed to it. The priesthood became politicised and corrupt. Maimonides wrote, in his Letter to the Sages of Marseilles, (tr. Isidore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, 463ff) that the Second Temple fell because Jews had not learned military strategy and the laws of conquest. The Talmud says it fell because of gratuitous hatred. Josephus tells us it fell because of conflicts within the forces defending Jerusalem. All three explanations are true and part of the same phenomenon. When there is no effective leadership, divisions open up within the group. There is internal conflict, energy is wasted, and no coherent strategy emerges. Again defeat becomes inevitable.

In Judaism, leadership is not a luxury but a necessity. Ours is a small and intensely vulnerable people. Inspired, we rise to greatness. Uninspired, we

fall.

But there is, oddly enough, a deeply positive message about the three weeks. For the fact is that the Jewish people survived those defeats. They did not merely survive. They recovered and grew stronger. They became in the most positive sense a nation of survivors. Who gave them that strength and courage?

The answer is: three leaders whose names are indelibly associated with the three weeks: Moses, whose message to the generations at the beginning of Devarim is always read on the Shabbat before Tisha be'Av, Isaiah whose vision gives that day its name as Shabbat Chazon, and Jeremiah, the prophet who foresaw the destruction and whose words form the haftarat for two of the Three Weeks.

What made these men great leaders? They were all critical of their contemporaries -- but then, so are most people. It takes no skill whatsoever to be a critic. All three predicted doom. But Jeremiah himself pointed out that predicting doom is a no-risk option. If bad things happen, you are proved right. If they don't -- well, clearly G-d decided to have compassion. (See Jeremiah 28; Maimonides, Hilkhos Yesodei ha-Torah 10:4.)

So what made Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah different? What made them great leaders? Specifically, what made them leaders in hard times, and thus leaders for all time? Three things set them apart.

The first is that they were all prophets of hope. Even in their darkest moments they were able to see through the clouds of disaster to the clear sky beyond. They were not optimists. There is a difference between optimism and hope. Optimism is the belief that things will get better. Hope is the belief that if we work hard enough together we can make things better. It needs no courage to be an optimist, but it needs courage, wisdom, a deep understanding of history and possibility, and the ability to communicate, to be a prophet of hope. That is what Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah all were. Here is Moses: "When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your G-d disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your G-d and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your G-d will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he

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scattered you. Even if you have been banished to the most distant land under the heavens, from there the Lord your G-d will gather you and bring you back." (Deut. 30:1-4)

Here is Isaiah: "I will restore your leaders as in days of old, your rulers as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." (Isaiah 1:26)

And this is Jeremiah: "This is what the Lord says: 'Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded,' says the Lord. 'They will return from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your descendants,' says the Lord. 'Your children will return to their land.'" (Jer. 31:15-16)

The point about all three of these prophecies is that they were delivered knowing that bad things were about to happen to the Jewish people. They are not easy hope; they express hope rescued from the valley of despair.

The second characteristic that made Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah different was that they delivered their criticism in love. Isaiah said in the name of G-d perhaps the loveliest words ever spoken to the Jewish people: "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed" (Isaiah 54:10). Jeremiah, in the midst of his critique of the nation, said in the name of G-d, "I remember the kindness of your youth, how as a bride you loved Me and followed Me through the wilderness, through a land not sown" (Jer. 2:2).

Moses' love for the people was evident in every prayer he said on their behalf, especially after they had made the golden calf. On that occasion he said to G-d: "Now, please forgive their sin -- but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written" (Ex. 32:). He was prepared to give his life for his people. It is easy to be a critic, but the only effective critics are those who truly love -- and show they love -- those whom they criticize.

Third, Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah were the three prophets who, more than any others, spoke about the role of Jews and Israel in the context of humanity as a whole. Moses said, Keep the commands "for they are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations" (Deut. 4:6).

Isaiah said in G-d's name: "You are my witnesses... that I am G-d." (Isaiah 43:12), and "I created you and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations, opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (42:6-7).

Jeremiah was the leader who defined for all time the role of Jews in the Diaspora: "Seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its prosperity you shall prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7) -- the first statement in history of what it is to be a creative minority.

Why did this universal perspective matter? Because those who care only for their own people are chauvinists. They create false expectations, narrow and self-regarding emotions, and bravado rather than real courage.

Moses had to show (as he did when he rescued Jethro's daughters from the local shepherds, Ex. 2:17) that he cared for non-Israelites as well as Israelites. Jeremiah was told by G-d to become a "prophet to the nations," not just to Israel (Jer. 1:5). Isaiah in one of the most remarkable prophecies of all time showed as much concern for Egypt and Assyria, Israel's enemies, as for Israel itself (Is. 19:19-25).

Great leaders are great not just because they care for their own people -- everyone except a self-hater does that -- but because they care for humanity. That is what gives their devotion to their own people its dignity and moral strength.

To be an agent of hope, to love the people you lead, and to widen their horizons to embrace humanity as a whole -- that is the kind of leadership that gives people the ability to recover from crisis and move on. It is what made Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah three of the greatest leaders of all time. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Aaron the High Priest went up to Mount Hor at the word of the Lord and died there..." (Numbers 33:38) In this week's

Biblical portion, we read - for the second time - of the death of Aaron atop Mt. Hor, as a kind of accompaniment to the closing travelogue of the various encampments of the Israelites during their desert sojourn. When we are initially told of his demise in the portion of Hukat, we read, "The entire household of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days" (Num. 20:29). Likewise, when the Bible informs us of the death of Moses who was our greatest prophet and the great liberator and law-giver of Israel (apparently greater than Aaron), we read, "and the children of Israel wept for Moses for thirty days" (Deut. 34:8).

The classical commentator Rashi notes a glaring absence at Moses' funeral: "(only) the males

(mourned for Moses), whereas for Aaron, the entire House of Israel mourned, men and women; that was because Aaron was a seeker after peace and effectuated peace between neighbors and between husbands and wives." A comparison of these two leaders, may well highlight two crucial aspects of rabbinic leadership today.

In the last Biblical portion of the Book of Deuteronomy, the opening verse refers to Moses as "a man of G-d", Ish Ha'E-lohim (Deut. 33:1) and in the very last chapter Moses is referred to as a "servant of the Lord," eved Hashem (ibid 34:5). Indeed we have seen how Moses constantly sought G-d's "fellowship" (as it were), how Moses was the most unique of prophets, to whom G-d spoke "mouth to mouth" (Num. 12:8), and that his "heaviness of speech" may well refer to the kind of conversation which interested him - matters of theology, jurisprudence and philosophy - rather than to a physiological problem of stuttering or stammering.

Moses spends much time atop Mount Sinai, perhaps even in the supernal realm of G-d's presence, and he takes his "tent of meeting" with G-d "outside the Camp, far away from the camp of human social intercourse (Ex. 33:7). Aaron, on the other hand, is a man of the people, wearing an apron ephod with two shoulder straps sporting two shoham stones, each engraved with the names of six of the twelve tribes, the people of Israel. Likewise, on the High Priests' breast-plate of judgment were precious stones, each inscribed with the name of a different tribe, so that Aaron bore the names of the sons of Israel on his heart (Ex. 28:29).

Moses was first and foremost a devoted man-of-G-d, who saw his task as faithfully communicating the vision of a G-d of "compassionate righteousness and moral justice" to Israel and the world. Hence he slays the Egyptian task-master to protect the Hebrew slave, chastises the Hebrew who struck his brother Hebrew, and rescues the Midianite shepherd daughters of Yitro from their Midianite shepherd oppressors. Hence he liberates the Hebrews from Egyptian subjugation. Hence he revealed G-d's Decalogue at Sinai, the most pithy expression of ethical probity in human history, based upon humanity's having been created to be free in the Divine image.

Similarly, our rabbis must, first and foremost, be supremely honest individuals, above suspicion and without avarice. They must be fearless in the face of graft and corruption, establishing moral probity as the greatest Israeli product. They must be deeply learned, committed to solving problems of Jewish law such as women bound to recalcitrant husbands, issues whose lack of solution not only causes tragic individual sufferings, but also brings disrepute upon our Holy Torah and the G-d who gave it.

Aaron the High Priest was a man of the people,

"one who loved peace and pursued peace, loved all human beings and brought them close to Torah" (Avot 1: 12). He took responsibility for every single Jew, carrying the tribal names of all upon his shoulders and within his heart. He was responsible for the Temple ritual, the synagogue liturgy, Sabbath and Festivals, rites of passage and life style events. He had to minister to all non-judgmentally and lovingly.

So our rabbis must recognize that Israel is the homeland of every Jew - not only the Orthodox Jews - and that we must make the House of Israel open and welcoming to all. They must love the convert from the moment they ask about conversion. We've had such Rabbis in the past and we must make sure there are more in the future. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There is a trend amongst all biblical commentators in the Jewish world to view the biblical description of past events that occurred to our ancestors from the time of Abraham through the beginning of Second Temple times as being not only a description of past events but to also subtly indicate the course of all events that would befall the Jewish people.

This type of idea perhaps helps us to understand why the Torah goes into such detail in the naming all of the way stops of the Jewish people during their forty-year sojourn in the Sinai Desert. The Torah indicates to us that the Jewish people were and are a wandering and traveling group.

Even though the commentators point out to us that the Lord favored Israel by allowing it to remain in place at one oasis for thirty-eight years and that all of the many other way station stops listed in this week's Torah reading took place only over a relatively short period of time, of approximately two years, the list of stops and starts is impressive if not even astounding.

Since most of these locations are unknown to us today and have limited meaning to later generations, the broader message encompassed in this travelogue is to be considered and studied. All of the commentators to the Bible have advanced insights and explanations to enlighten us as to the reasons for this detailed accounting of the travels of Israel in the desert of Sinai.

Rashi sees it as a type of recollected history of the events, failings and triumphs of the Jewish people on the road from Egyptian slavery to the settling of the Land of Israel. The Torah, in its usual cryptic style, only records the names of the places and we are to fill in the missing event that should be part of our memory bank. But that requires a certain amount of knowledge, sophistication and national memory. These items are always in short supply in every generation.

If one views Jewish history as a whole, then

one realizes that this pattern of movement, stops and starts, continuing travel and social instability recorded for us in this week's Torah reading, is really an ongoing pattern in all of Jewish history. The Jewish people, again as a whole or in its many subdivisions, have literally seen the entire world in their wanderings.

Already in First Temple times the prophet describes Jewish mercantile activity in faraway places of the ancient world. In the long exile and in the far-flung diaspora of the Jews, there is no place on our globe that has not seen Jewish settlement or activity.

Many commentators saw this phenomenon as a positive thing -- the spreading the ideas of monotheism and of Torah values to a pagan and uncaring world. Others have seen it as the source of the angst and punishment of Israel for its betrayal of those very same values and beliefs. Perhaps both approaches are correct and have meaning for us.

Nevertheless, we now live in a shrinking Jewish world. Entire ancient Jewish communities no longer exist and the Jewish people are concentrated in a relatively small number of national enclaves, basically in the Western world and the Land of Israel. One would hope that both our travels and travails will soon come to an end. ©2014 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The portion of Masei includes the sentence that speaks to the commandment of living in Israel. The key phrase is "and you shall take possession of the land and dwell therein." (Numbers 33:53)

Rashi is of the opinion that this sentence does not constitute a command to live in Israel. It is rather good advice. Take possession of the land from its inhabitants, otherwise you will not be able to safely live there.

Ramban (Nahmanides) disagrees. In his addendum to Rambam's (Maimonides) Book of Commandments, Ramban notes that Rambam failed to mention living in Israel as a distinct mitzvah. Ramban writes: "We have been commanded in the Torah to take possession of the land which G-d gave to the patriarchs and not leave it in the hands of others or allow it to remain desolate, as it says 'and you shall take possession of the land and dwell therein.'" (Addendum, Mitzvat Aseh 4)

Some commentators argue that implicit in Rambam is the commandment to live in Israel. So basic is the mitzvah, writes the late former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, that it need not be mentioned, as it is the basis for all of Torah.

But whether or not one maintains that Rambam

believes it is a mitzvah to live in Israel, doesn't this commandment, as certainly understood by Ramban, fly in the face of our mission to be an or la'goyim? How can we be a light to the nations of the world if we don't live amongst Gentiles and are ensconced in our own homeland?

One could argue however, that the mandate to live in the chosen land of Israel is crucial to the chosen people idea. Being the chosen people doesn't mean that our souls are superior. Rather it suggests that our mission to spread a system of ethical monotheism, of G-d ethics to the world, is of a higher purpose. And that can only be accomplished in the land of Israel.

From this perspective, the significance of the modern state of Israel is not only as the place of guaranteed political refuge for Jews; or as the place where more mitzvot can be performed or where our continuum as a Jewish nation is assured. Rather it is the only place where we have the potential to carry out the chosen people mandate.

In exile, we can develop communities that can be a "light" to others. But the destiny of the Jewish people lies in the State of Israel. Israel is the only place where we as a nation can become an or la'goyim. In the Diaspora, we are not in control of our destiny; we cannot create the society envisioned by the Torah. Only in a Jewish state do we have the political sovereignty and judicial autonomy to potentially establish the society from which other nations can learn the basic ethical ideals of Torah.

As we near Tisha B'av, the fast commemorating our exile from the land, this position reminds us of our obligation to think about Israel, to visit Israel, and, most important, to constantly yearn to join the millions who have already returned home. Only there do we have the potential to be the true am ha-nivhar (chosen people). ©2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"Whenever smites a soul, through witnesses shall the killer be killed, and one witness shall not answer about a soul to be killed" (Bamidbar 35:30). Although the information gleaned from a straightforward reading of this verse would be that (a) witnesses are necessary for a murderer to be executed and (b) one witness is not enough to carry out an execution (and this is certainly true), the Talmud (Sanhedrin 33b-34a, see also Sifre and Yerushalmi) understands the second half of the verse to be discussing court proceedings that occur after the witnesses have already given their testimony, not the testimony itself.

Usually, after a witness has testified and the judges have started deliberating the merits of the case, students sitting before the judges can state their opinion about which decision should be reached. However, if the case involves capital punishment, since the Torah tells us to try to save the accused from being executed (35:25), only an argument for acquittal is accepted. What if the witness himself wants to present an argument about the case? Obviously, for the same reason a student is not allowed to argue for conviction, a witness can't either. As far as whether a witness can argue for acquittal (as a student can), two opinions are expressed in the Talmud. Rabbi Yosi bar Yehudah says that a witness can argue in favor of the defendant, as the verse only says that "a witness can't answer in a capital case to convict" (implying that he can argue for acquittal), while the Rabbanan say that a witness cannot make a case for either acquittal or conviction. Even though the verse adds the word "to be killed" (i.e. to be convicted of murder and executed), they understand this word as applying only to the students. [According to this, the verse would be read in two ways, both being true, with each excluding one of the words of the verse; "a witness shall not answer about a soul (a case of capital punishment)," with the word "to convict" being left off, and "one (of the students) shall not answer about a soul to convict," with the word "witness" being left off.]

There are several reasons why this part of the verse is understood to be referring to what a witness says after he testifies rather than to the testimony itself. For one thing, the Torah tells us elsewhere that one witness is not enough, so this verse can't be teaching us the same thing. This reason is put forth by the S'MaG (Negative Commandment #264) and Yad Ramah, both of whom quote D'varim 19:15. [As far as why D'varim 17:6 isn't quoted, Rambam (Negative Commandment #291) says this also refers to a witness not being allowed to make an argument to convict. However, according to the Rabbanan witnesses are also prohibited from making an argument to acquit, and this verse only mentions conviction. We would also need to address why preventing a witness from making an argument is taught twice (once in Bamidbar and once in D'varim) if needing more than one witness cannot be, as well as the fact that many laws are repeated in D'varim.] It should be noted that the Chizkuni and the Netziv give reasons why the Torah mentions needing more than one witness even if we already know it from another verse.

Another reason given (see Netziv's commentary on Sanhedrin as well as his commentary on Bamidbar) is that the term usually used to signify the testimony of a witness is "ya'kum," to establish the facts of the case, whereas here the term used here is "ya'aneh," to respond to what has already been [attempted to be] established. [Nevertheless, the

Targumim translate the word as "testify," not "answer."] A third reason may be the verse's implication that two or more witnesses are needed only when it is a capital case, an implication that applies only if the verse means needing more than one witness, not if it means being prohibited from making a case for acquittal or conviction after giving testimony. [It should be noted that many, if not most, including the Rambam, say that witnesses can make an argument in civil cases, making this a valid implication, as it is only in capital cases that a witness can't present an argument, whereas in other cases he can.]

That a witness cannot argue for or against a conviction in a capital case is listed as one of the 613 Biblical commandments. I have already referenced the S'MaG and the Rambam; the Chinuch lists it as Mitzvah #411. All three mention that this prohibition only applies to capital cases; in a monetary case, after giving his testimony a witness can make a case as to why the money should or shouldn't transfer hands. The basis for this difference is stated quite clearly; the verse is only discussing capital cases, so can't be automatically extended to other cases. However, the way things are explained in the Talmud raises several issues, including making such a distinction.

After telling us that Rabbi Yosi bar Yehudah only prohibits the witness from arguing for conviction because that's all the verse mentions, the Talmud asks why the Rabbanan prohibit the witness from arguing for acquittal too. Reish Lakish says it is because doing so "gives the appearance of biased testimony." The commentators explain that after testifying that a capital offense was committed, the witness may become nervous that his testimony will be proven false via "eidim zom'mim," witnesses that undermine his ability to be able to testify about this case (because he was elsewhere at the time), which can have severe consequences (in this case, being put to death instead of the defendant). In order to prevent a conviction based on his testimony -- which can lead to suffering the consequences instead of the defendant -- the witness may therefore try to argue against a conviction. [Although from the Talmud's wording it seems that it is the original testimony that "appears biased," it could also be the argument that can appear specious, since it is only being made to prevent his previous testimony from leading to a conviction.] In order to avoid this "perceived bias," we don't let a witness argue for or against a conviction. Based on this, the Meiri (and others) ask why this concern only applies to capital cases, not to monetary cases as well, where biases can also be present.

Another issue that is raised (see Gilyon Maharsha on Sanhedrin 34a, see also Shiray Korban on Sanhedrin 4:6) is based on how the Rambam describes this law in Mishneh Torah (Hilchos Eidus 5:8). Although in Sefer HaMitzvos he mentions the

reason given by Reish Lakish as to why a witness cannot make an argument against acquittal, in Mishneh Torah he says it is based on the verse itself, without mentioning Reish Lakish's rationale, seemingly ignoring the Talmud. [Others ask how the concepts of "conviction" and "acquittal" apply to monetary cases, since ruling for one party means ruling against the other. However, if the issue is only an "appearance of bias" based on the witnesses' earlier testimony, as far as the witness is concerned it is only arguing for or against his own testimony that is relevant, not whether there is another party equally affected by the court case.]

The consequences of the witnesses' testimony are certainly more severe in capital cases than in monetary cases, so (as Meiri admits) we can certainly understand why there is less of an issue of "perceived bias" by the latter. Whether the issue is a possible fear of "eidim zom'mim," or (as some suggest) of the defendant's relatives taking revenge, or not wanting to be the cause of someone else's death, a witness not being allowed to argue for acquittal in capital cases based on this "perceived bias" does not automatically apply to other, less severe, cases. Nevertheless, no matter how strong the concern about "perceived bias" is in capital cases, it cannot negate the Biblical mandate to try to save the defendant from execution. Therefore, Reish Lakish's concern cannot override the implication of the verse, it must work within it.

There are two ways to understand the verse (within a "post-testimony" context). It could be saying (as Rabbi Yosi bar Yehudah has it) that a witness cannot make a case to convict in a capital case, or it could be saying (as the Rabbanan have it) that in a capital case, a witness cannot make any argument. Since the prohibition against arguing for conviction extends beyond witnesses (to students, and even to judges who had previously argued in favor of acquittal), there would seem to be no need to state such a prohibition specifically for witnesses. The upshot of the verse, then, is that witnesses are only prohibited from arguing for conviction, but they are allowed to argue for acquittal. This should also be obvious, though, since the Torah wants the accused to be acquitted. Why would the Torah need to teach us that a witness is allowed to argue for acquittal? It would seem, then, that Reish Lakish's "perceived bias" is needed by Rabbi Yosi bar Yehudah too, but instead of being the reason why the verse must mean that a witness cannot argue for acquittal (as the Rabbanan have it), it is the reason why we might have thought that a witness cannot argue for acquittal. (The Talmud continues by asking why, according to the Rabbanan, we wouldn't know it was a capital case without the word "to convict," with the answer being that the extra word teaches us that students are prohibited from arguing for conviction.)

As it turns out, then, both the Rabbanan and

Rabbi Yosi bar Yehudah base their opinions on how they understand the verse, with "perceived bias" being either the reason why the verse prohibits a witness from arguing for acquittal (the Rabbanan's perspective) or the reason why the verse must tell us that a witness can argue for acquittal. There is therefore no contradiction between the Rambam saying that the source of the prohibition against a witness arguing for acquittal is the verse and the Talmud attributing it to a "perceived bias," as the latter is only explaining the former.

When including the prohibition in the list of Biblical commandments, where its very inclusion means it is based on a verse, there's no reason to leave out Reish Lakish's reason, since it was the reason the verse was understood this way. In Mishneh Torah, on the other hand, where laws that are both Biblical and Rabbinical in origin are listed, the Rambam wanted to make it clear that the source of the prohibition is the verse, so omitted Reish Lakish's reason for understanding the verse that way. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

In the list of travels through the desert, the Torah states: "And they traveled from Kivrot Hata'avah" (Number 33:17).

As mentioned above, the names of the places hint at a deeper meaning, a lesson learned there. What do we learn from the name Kivrot Hata'avah?

Rabbi Yitzchok of Vorki tells us that the Torah is hinting to us here to keep a distance from desires. The words Kivrot Hata'avah mean "burial place of desires." A person needs to be on guard that his desires do not cause him an early burial. How can one overcome his desires? Says Rabbi Yitzchok, "by focusing on the words 'they traveled' in the desert and remembering that we, too, are only traveling temporarily in this world on our path to the next world. Therefore, we should not give in to immediate temporal desires which can destroy our lives in this world and impact our life in the world to come.

The goal: be in control of your desires and do not allow your desires to control you! *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Kinder & Gentler Killers

This week we read about the cities of refuge. A man who kills someone accidentally is exiled to an Ir Miklat, a city of refuge. In addition to killers, a very distinguished group of people, the Levites, lived in those cities. Their job was something similar to today's Rabbis. They traveled throughout Israel, teaching and preaching. The Levites would return to their homes and

neighbors, people who killed through carelessness, who were convianslaughter of sorts. They played an integral role in the killer's rehabilitation.

The sentence imposed on the killers was also very unique. It was not defined by time, but rather by circumstance. The killers would go free only when the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would die. The Talmud in Makos tells us that the Kohen Gadol's family members were quite worried. They were not concerned that there would be an assassination plot against the Kohen Gadol's life. They were worried that the convicts would pray that the Kohen Gadol would die before his due time, thus releasing them early. In order to dissuade them, the mother of the Kohen Gadol would distribute food and clothing to the inmates to deter them from praying that her son die.

It is hard to understand. Are there no loved ones waiting for these outcasts with food and clothing to be offered upon release? Were the Kohen Gadol's mom's cookies worth exile in the city of refuge? How did these gifts work as bribes?

Reb Aryeh Levine took it upon himself to visit Jewish inmates, mostly members of the Irgun, held under British rule prior to Israel's statehood. He became like a father to those prisoners, bringing them food, clothes and love. For years, despite sweltering heat and frigid rains, he never missed a Shabbos visit, save one.

Once, in the midst of a Shabbos service, a very excited messenger called him out of the prison. Reb Aryeh's daughter had become paralyzed and the doctors were helpless. He was needed for support at home, immediately. After the Shabbos, an Arab messenger was sent by the concerned inmates to inquire what tragedy interrupted the weekly visit.

The next Shabbos, despite the enduring tragedy at home, the Rabbi went to the prison as usual. Normally during the Torah reading, prisoners would pledge a few coins to charity. This week the donations were far different. "I will give up a week of my life for the sake of Reb Aryeh's daughter," the first convict pledged. Another prisoner announced that he would give a month from his. Each one called to the Torah upped the previous pledge until the last prisoner cried out, "what is our life compared to Reb Aryeh's anguish? I will give all my remaining days for the sake of the Rabbi's daughter."

At this unbelievable display of love and affection, Reb Aryeh broke down and wept. Miraculous as it may sound, that Saturday night Reb Aryeh's daughter began to move and within days was fully recovered.

The cities of refuge were not jails, nor were they mere detention camps. They were environments in which reckless people became aware that careless actions have serious ramifications. They were constantly under the influence of their neighbors, the

Levites. They would observe them pray, learn, and teach others. They would see the epitome of awareness and care for fellow beings.

The mission of the Kohen Gadol's mother was not just to distribute food. It was to develop a bond with those people whose carelessness spurred a death. They saw the love a parent had for her son as she subconsciously plead with the inmates to spare her child. They saw how a total stranger, despite her great esteem, would make sure that their needs in the city of refuge were cared for. They may have even thought of the loved one they killed and his family.

After developing an awareness of life, they would never be able to pray for the death of anyone, even if it meant their own freedom. In fact, they, like Reb Aryeh's prisoners, may have offered their years for the merit of the Kohen Gadol.

The Torah can not punish without teaching and rehabilitating. It infuses a love for life and spirituality into former careless killers. Its goal is to mold a new person whose attitudes will cause him to be kinder, gentler, and a lot more careful. *The story was adapted from A Tzadik in Our Time, by Simcha Raz, © 1976 Feldheim Publishers. © 2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne*

"**A**ll of her pursuers caught her between the boundaries (bein hametzrim)" [Eichah 1:3]. The Maggid of Kuznitz said: "Her pursuers' can be read as two words -- "Rodef yud-heh," which means to pursue G-d -- He wrote that one who searches for the holy Shechina, the Presence of G-d, will find it during the Three Weeks (between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av). These are great times, since the prophets promised that all the fast days would be transformed to holidays. And even Aharon the High Priest said, referring to the seventeenth of Tammuz, "Tomorrow is a holiday for G-d" [Shemot 32:5].

The Haftarah that we read at the start of the Three Weeks (Bein Hametzrim), describes how Yirmiyahu saw a vision of a staff of wood from an almond tree. Rashi writes from the Midrash, "the time from when an almond starts to bud until it is ripe is twenty-one days, the same as the time between the seventeenth of Tammuz and the ninth of Av."

There are 21 types of holy days when special sacrifices are brought in the year, as described in the Torah portion of Pinchas (Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, Pesach, seven days of the holiday of Matzot, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and eight days of Succot and Shemini Atzeret). The 21 days of the Three Weeks are the foundation of the sanctity of the holidays. When in the future they will be revealed as additional

holidays, the total will be forty-two. This is the number of stops that we encounter in this week's Torah portion. "These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael" [Bamidbar 33:1]. Starting with the Exodus from Egypt and up to the Jordan River at Jericho, there were forty-two stops. The GRA wrote that these forty-two journeys encompass within them the stages of the future redemption. What is the secret of this number?

When Moshe said that the people would ask him, "What is His name?" [Shemot 3:13], the Holy One, Blessed be He, replies, "I will be what I will be... 'I will be' sent me to you" [3:14]. The Meshech Chochma notes, "The numerical value of 'e'heyeh' is twenty-one. 'I will be what I will be' is twice that, or forty-two. This refers to the long version of the Holy Name, which has forty-two letters. And whoever knows this name is feared by the creations (Kedushin 71)."

The same concept can be seen with respect to Tefillin. The name of G-d appears twenty-one times in the four sections of the Tefillin. Adding the two Tefillin on the hand and on the head together, we again reach the total of forty-two. This is what is referred to in the Talmud: "And all the nations of the earth will see that you are called by G-d's name, and they will fear you" [Devarim 28:10]... This is the Tefillin worn on the head" [Berachot 6a].

The Tefillin on the head shows that there is open Divine guidance, and that on the hand, which is normally covered, shows that there is hidden guidance. G-d told Moshe that sometimes the guidance will be exposed to all, as in the verse, "I will be what I will be" and at other times it will be hidden, as in the phrase "I will be' sent me to you."

The Talmud tells us about a religious debate between a Tzeduki and Rabbi Yehoshua (Chagiga). The Tzeduki turned his head away, hinting that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not look at us, while Rabbi Yehoshua raised his hand, as a sign that "his hand is still stretched out over us." While we might not be seeing revealed guidance as in the Tefillin on the head, the hidden guidance of the Tefillin on the hand

continues to exist.

And that is what the Holy One, Blessed be He, promised Shlomo at the dedication of the Temple. "And my eyes and my heart will be on you for all the days" [Melachim I 9:3]. The eyes and the heart signify the Tefillin on the head and on the hand, implying revealed guidance. But this is only during the day and not at night, during the exile. Then, the guidance will be hidden.

Two Talmud scholars lived in the Shaarei Chessed neighborhood of Jerusalem, Rabbi David Baharan and Rabbi Betzalel Goldstein. One time Rabbi David told his friend that he had studied the words of the GRA, and he felt that he understood the secret of the forty-two journeys of Bnei Yisrael. In reply to the insistent requests by his friend, Rabbi David explained that before the coming of the Mashiach three significant events will take place, and they will be followed by the arrival of the Mashiach: 5707-5708 (1948) -- the War of Independence; 5717-1718 (1957) -- the Sinai War; and 5727-5728 (1967) -- the war for Jerusalem. ©2013 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet. Translated by Moshe Goldberg

RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG

Respecting Human Life

"**T**hen Moshe designated three cities" (Devarim, 4:41) The Talmud teaches that the three cities of refuge on the east bank of the Jordan River only became functional after the three on the west bank were established. Although Moshe knew that the latter three would only be established fourteen years after his passing, he insisted on establishing the three on the east bank. The Talmud uses this as an example of Moshe's alacrity in the performance of mitzvos. (Makkos, 10a)

Generally, alacrity in the performance of a mitzva leads to the mitzva being accomplished sooner. However, in Moshe's case, since the cities offered no refuge until after they all were completed, what was there to be gained by his promptness?

The cities of refuge served a dual purpose. One function was as a safe haven for the perpetrator of an accidental murder, while the second was to create a higher degree of awareness amongst Bnei Yisroel concerning the sanctity of human life. The mere presence of the city sent a message to everyone to be more cautious with their actions. Although the first function did not take effect until after the conquest of Eretz Yisroel, Moshe was able to immediately set the second function into motion.

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