

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moses recognises the fact that they have met his objections. He restates their position to make sure he and they have understood the proposal and they are ready to stand by it. He extracts from them agreement to a *tenai kaful*, a double condition, both positive and negative: If we do this, these will be the consequences, but if we fail to do this, those will be the consequences. He leaves them no escape from their commitment. The two tribes agree. Conflict has been averted. The Reubenites and Gadites achieve what they want but the interests of the other tribes and of the nation as a whole have been secured. It was a model negotiation.

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

¹ Baba Kama 20b.

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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Joshua 22 describes how, returning to their families and settling their land, the Reubenites and Gadites built “an altar to the Lord” on the east side of the Jordan. Seeing this as an act of secession, the rest of the Israelites prepared to do battle against them. Joshua, in a striking act of diplomacy, sent Pinhas, the former zealot, now man of peace, to negotiate. He warned them of the terrible consequences of what they had done by, in effect, creating a religious centre outside the land of Israel. It would split the nation in two.

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

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

1. Separate the people from the problem. There are all sorts of personal tensions in any negotiation. It is essential that these be cleared away first so that the problem can be addressed objectively.
2. Focus on interests, not positions. It is easy for any conflict to turn into a zero-sum game: if I win, you lose. If you win, I lose. That is what happens when you focus on positions and the question becomes, “Who wins?” By focusing not on positions but on interests, the question becomes, “Is there a way of achieving what each of us wants?”
3. Invent options for mutual gain. This is the idea

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

expressed halakhically as zeh neheneh ve-zeh neheneh, “Both sides benefit.” This comes about because the two sides usually have different objectives, neither of which excludes the other.

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

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

Second, he focused on interests not positions. The two tribes had an interest in the fate of the nation as a whole. If they put their personal interests first, G-d would become angry and the entire people would be punished, the Reubenites and Gadites among them. It is striking how different this negotiation was from that of Korach and his followers. There, the whole argument was about positions, not interests – about who was entitled to be a leader. The result was collective tragedy.

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

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

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

This was, in short, a model negotiation, a sign of hope after the many destructive conflicts in the book of Bamidbar, as well as a standing alternative to the

many later conflicts in Jewish history that had such appalling outcomes.

Note that Moses succeeds, not because he is weak, not because he is willing to compromise on the integrity of the nation as a whole, not because he uses honeyed words and diplomatic evasions, but because he is honest, principled, and focused on the common good. We all face conflicts in our lives. This is how to resolve them. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When an individual makes a promise before the Lord or makes an oath prohibiting something upon himself, he dare not profane his word." (Numbers 30:2-17)

For me, the saddest Book of the Bible is the Book of Numbers according to the Greek, Latin and English translations and the Book of the Desert according to most renderings of the Hebrew Bamidbar. It begins with a sublime description of the twelve tribes, united by the great liberator-leader Moses, stationed and bannered surrounding the Sanctuary of the Divine Presence, poised to enter the Promised Land of Israel, and it concludes in disgruntled disillusionment, a catalog of reversions, rebellions and recalcitrance, with Moses discredited and disregarded by the people, forbidden to enter his beloved Israel by G-d, and virtually the entire desert generation doomed to die in the wilderness of their wanderings.

These last two portions of Matot-Masei, seem to at least provide a ray of hope for continuity, and they serve as the segue into the Book of Joshua and the eventual conquest of the land of Israel. This bridge actually begins at the end of the portion of Pinchas, with a second, truncated census, (which suggests a new, if sobered, beginning), then the daughters of Tzlofhad who valiantly struggle for inheritance rights to land in Israel, Moses bittersweet glimpse of Israel from atop Mount Nebo, the appointment of Joshua, the sacrifices for the Festivals, the settling of scores with Midian, the two and one-half tribes who wish to settle Trans-Jordan, a record of the desert way-stations, the procedure for the parceling out of the land, the areas set aside for Cities of Refuge and a final tribute to the faith and persistence of the daughters of Tzlofhad. All of these accounts provide closure to the desert generation and pave the way for the generation of conquest and inheritance - except for what appears to be a disjunctive legal intrusion right at the beginning of Matot.

Our Torah reading begins: When an individual makes a promise before the Lord or makes an oath prohibiting something upon himself, he dare not profane his word. (Num. 30:2-17). The Biblical text goes on to delineate the various kinds of oaths an

individual can make, including vows to G-d, as well as oaths which may impinge on relationships with one's spouse or parents. In fact, it is this segment of sixteen verses which serves as the basis for no less than two Talmudic Tractates (Shavuot and Nedarim) and provides the theme for the haunting Kol Nidre prayer which opens our Yom Kippur liturgical service. Why attribute such overriding importance to the laws of oaths and promises, and why place it here at the end of the Book of Numbers?

I believe that the Torah is here stressing the power of the word - the word which can create reality and the word which can destroy reality, the word which can establish a relationship and the word which can besmirch a relationship. After all, we are the people of the word, the Ten Words (Dibburim, Dibrot), which continue to influence the standards of world morality to this very day. Moses' inability to properly utilize the word - to speak to the rock rather than strike the rock (and the rock is probably symbolic of the Israelite nation, hard-necked and stubborn as a rock) is what causes him to be banned from entering the Promised Land.

Indeed, from the very outset of his ministry, Moses seeks to deflect the Divine Call and to cast G-d's call for leadership upon another because he feels that he is inadequate. He is a kvad peh - heavy of speech - a man of thought rather of words, a prophet who seeks spiritual contact with the Divine rather than verbal relationships with people. He has neither the patience nor the wherewithal to verbally persuade the people to reject the report of the Scouts and to conquer the land of Israel; he cannot even verbally defend himself against the hateful recriminations of Korach, Datan and Aviram! All he can do is to fall on his face in prostration before G-d. At the end of the day, the negative, inciting words of the ten scouts influence the nation and doom the generation to die in the desert. Korach's unchallenged rebellion paved the way for Zimri's flagrant defiance of Moses and his Torah morality. Just consider how Winston Churchill's and Franklin Roosevelt's Fireside Chats rhetoric uplifted a nation to transcend itself, and how Hitler's incitements and Islamic Fundamentalist preachers have destroyed untold innocent lives.

From this perspective, the laws of oaths and promises, the legal ramifications of the power of the word, encapsulate the promise of the people of the word as well as the tragedy of the Book of Numbers. It is hardly accidental that the Hebrew and Aramaic word for leader is dabbar; for a great leader guides and directs by means of speech. I would even submit that the root word of Bamidbar is dbr, the leader-shepherd, who grazes his sheep in the oases found in the desert (he must walk his flock around arid land or else the sheep would destroy all the vegetation), and guides his flock largely by words and sounds which come forth

from his mouth. In the words of the Yiddish folk-saying:
 A patsch dergent, a vort bashten.
 A slap goes away, a word lasts forever. ©2014
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The subject matter that begins this week's parsha concerns itself with vows and commitments that one undertakes to perform or to abstain from. There is an entire tractate in the Talmud – Nedarim – that discusses this subject almost exclusively. In Jewish life, even an oral commitment in many cases can be considered to be binding. The Torah expressly teaches us that one should live up to and perform "everything that emanates from one's mouth."

As such, it is completely understandable why this matter of vows and commitments should merit the attention that it does receive in the Talmud and in Jewish law generally. Man is elevated from the animal kingdom by the gift and ability to speak and communicate to others, even to later generations.

Words, whether spoken or written, are almost sacred in the view of Jewish tradition and society. The great sage and saint of Eastern European Jewry of the last century, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Hakohen Kagan – Chafetz Chaim - devoted much of his scholarly career to explaining and teaching the Torah laws regarding speech. We are taught that "life and death itself are dependent upon the utterances of our tongue."

In a society such as ours, where instant communication is the expected norm and silence is treated as a social and political aberration and not as a virtue of wisdom or patience, the sanctity of speech and its binding effect has unfortunately lost resonance amongst us. Nevertheless, it certainly would behoove us to study this parsha's message regarding our spoken words and the commitments that they carry with them.

The question arises and is discussed by many biblical commentators as to why this particular subject was initially taught by Moshe to the leaders of the tribes of Israel - and certainly why the Torah makes mention of this in the opening verse of the parsha itself. The question also subtly raises the issue of why the Torah allows, if not even demands, the continuation of the Jewish people as being divided into separate tribes and not treated as being one whole unit.

We see throughout the Bible that this division into tribes occasioned much social disunity and sometimes even civil war. I think that one insight into these matters is that people find it difficult to operate within a large and general group, with one perspective. Our nature is to remain familial and tribal.

Part of that nature unfortunately breeds a disdain for others not like us. This disdain is usually reflected in our speech and comments about others

and also in the fact that somehow we feel that we are not really bound by our verbal and written commitments made to those 'others.'

My commitments to my family and my tribe are certainly sacred in my eyes and I will do all in my power to fulfill them. But my commitments to your family or your tribe have a certain unjustified mental flexibility attached to them that would allow me somehow to avoid my responsibilities.

Moshe expresses this lesson regarding the individual commitments of Jews to the heads of all of the different tribes to teach them that they are all equally bound to all commitments made, no matter to what tribe, family or individual. The nature of humans is to be tribal and the Torah allows for it. However, the Torah does not allow for slippery speech and broken vows and shattered commitments, simply because they were made to those of another tribe. ©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

In this week's portion, Moshe (Moses) gives to the tribe of Reuven, the tribe of Gad and half of the tribe of Menasseh the entire Kingdom of Og, ruler of Bashan (Numbers 32:33). Interestingly, just before Moshe and the Israelites conquered the land of Bashan, the Torah records that G-d tells Moshe "fear him [Og] not" (Numbers 21:34).

Why should Moshe have been fearful of Og? Rashi writes that "Moshe was afraid of doing battle lest he [Og] be protected by the merit of (his services to) Avraham (Abraham), as it is written 'and there came one that had escaped and told Avraham (of the capture of Lot-Avraham's nephew) (Genesis 14:13). The one that came was none other than Og." Rashi's comment is best understood with the backdrop of the Maimonidean understanding of reward and punishment.

Maimonides, echoing the Talmud, notes that three books are open on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Those who are clearly meritorious are immediately inscribed for a good year on Rosh Hashanah. And those clearly sinful, are inscribed immediately for a bad year on Rosh Hashanah. The benonim-those in the middle, have their sentence suspended until Yom Kippur, when their destiny is sealed. (Rambam, Hil. Teshuvah 3:3)

For Maimonides, it appears that reward and punishment is a simple matter of weighing one's good deeds against one's bad deeds. A person's fate depends upon what he or she has done more-good or bad.

But, Maimonides adds, that one bad deed because of its particular circumstances, could outweigh all the good one has done. The reverse is also true. One good deed could outweigh all of the evil ones. (Rambam, Hil. Teshuvah 3:2)

In other words, for Maimonides, only G-d can be the accountant for our deeds. The evaluation is not a mere weighing of numbers, it is a qualitative one-and only G-d can know which deed will make the whole difference.

This may be the intent of Rashi. True, King Og was the wicked of the wicked. But Moshe was concerned that he may have performed one good deed, like alerting Avraham that his nephew was taken hostage-and that good deed could carry him forever.

It sometimes occurs when traveling, that former students approach me and say-"you know, there is something you said, something you did in class that made a great difference in my life." My heart then drops as I offer a little prayer that the one word or action that is remembered, made a positive difference and not a negative one.

Rashi's comments teaches that we all should take heed to every action, every deed-as it could make the whole difference and change an entire world. ©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

"And they attacked Midyan... and they killed Bilam the son of B'or" (Bamidbar 31:7-8). Being that after his failed attempt to curse Israel Bilam had returned home (24:25) to Aram (23:7), we wouldn't have expected him to be in Midyan when G-d commanded Moshe to take revenge against them. The most widely quoted explanation for Bilam being back in the region is that he returned to collect the money owed to him because his advice to seduce the men of Israel had worked. Bilam had told Balak that G-d hates promiscuity, and that by getting Israel to sin He would punish them. After hearing that 24,000 had died from the plague that resulted from the sin of P'or, Bilam wanted his money, so came back to collect it. [This explanation is given in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 106) and in numerous Midrashim; among the commentators who reference it is Rashi, Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni.] Although this explains why Bilam was there, it doesn't explain why Bilam went to collect his money from Midyan if the conversation about causing Israel to sin was only with Balak. The "elders of Midyan" had left after Bilam's initial refusal to go with them to curse Israel (see Rashi on 22:7); why would Midyan owe him any money?

Mizrachi (31:8) fleshes this question out, and gives two answers. First he suggests that since it was

Midyan who told Balak to hire Bilam, they were the ones Bilam contacted about collecting his debt from Moav. His second suggestion is that Bilam wasn't trying to collect any money from Midyan, but was passing through Midyan on his way from Aram to Moav when Israel attacked. [Mizrachi admits that the wording of the Aggadah implies that Bilam's destination was Midyan, not Moav, but says this shouldn't preclude the possibility that his real destination was Moav. However, if Midyan is southeast of Israel (which is where Yisro's Midyan seems to have been), the route from Aram, which is northeast of Israel, to Moav, which is on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, would not be through Midyan.]

Gur Aryeh assumes that Bilam was hired by both Moav and Midyan (although he doesn't explain the basis for such a assumption), and says that since Moav only hired Bilam because they were afraid of Israel while Midyan hired him because of their hatred towards Israel (see Rashi on 31:2), Bilam figured that Midyan would be much more willing to pay what they owed him than Moav was. Although it could be said that Bilam intended on collecting his debt from both countries, and just went to Midyan first (where he was killed before he got a chance to try to collect from Moav), or that he had already collected his debt from Moav and was now trying to collect from Midyan, the Maharal makes it seem as if Bilam was only trying to collect the money that Midyan owed him.

Nachalas Yaakov says that even though Midyan didn't hire Bilam to curse Israel (because they knew it was futile), Balak consulted with them (again) before following Bilam's advice about how to weaken Israel. (This is evident from the fact that the daughters of Midyan joined the daughters of Moav in their quest to get Israel to sin; see Maharsha on Sanhedrin for a similar idea.) Therefore, both Moav and Midyan were responsible for paying Bilam when his plan succeeded. As far as why Midyan would owe money to Bilam if they didn't hire him for anything and weren't involved in the conversation with Bilam about getting Israel to sin, Nachalas Yaakov points out that there isn't any mention of Balak promising Bilam any money for his advice either; just as Balak owed him money when the advice worked, Moav owed him money as well. (I would question why either owed him money, but apparently Nachalas Yaakov assumes that being paid for advice that works is a given, even if it wasn't spelled out ahead of time.) Yalkut Shimoni (785) says that Bilam only gave Balak the advice on condition that he would get paid if it worked. Although this Midrash doesn't explain why Bilam went to Midyan instead of directly to Balak, once Balak got Midyan involved in the plan (as Nachalas Yaakov suggests), he likely got them to agree to help pay for it as well.

Once we have a reasonable explanation as to why Bilam would try to collect from Midyan, there's no

need to explain why he went there before going to Moav. After all, he had to go to one of them first! Besides, he might have actually gone to Moav first, and was killed when he went to Midyan afterwards. Nevertheless, Nachalas Yaakov adds that he might have gone to Midyan rather than Moav because there was an additional reason to go to there -- to help them defend against the avenging Israelites. However, even if Bilam was able to find out that his advice had worked while he was in faraway Aram (there was a time lag between the sin of P'or and the commandment to attack Midyan, enough to take a census of the entire nation as well as teach them some new laws), how did he know that Midyan was going to be attacked before he left?

The Midrash quoted by Yalkut Shimoni starts by explaining why G-d told Moshe to attack Moav now; "while Bilam is there, go upon them." Besides making it clear that the attack on Midyan didn't start until after Bilam had already traveled there, this Midrash is explaining why it was commanded again now, even though it had already been commanded right after the incident (25:16-18); by attacking now, they could kill Bilam at the same time. Putting all these things together, we can try to reconstruct what may have happened in a way that addresses the issues that have been raised.

Balak was originally an officer in Midyan (see Rashi on 22:4; see also B'er Ba'Sadeh's commentary, where he suggests that Balak went back home to Midyan the same time that Bilam went home to Aram, as he was no longer the king of Moav), and had a working relationship with the Midyanim. (Although B'er Ba'Sadeh incorporates the fact that there are Midrashim that say that Tzur, one of the Midyanite kings who was killed, and whose daughter tempted Zimri, was Balak, Rashi does not bring this Midrash -- even though there are several places where it would have been appropriate to do so. I am therefore avoiding including it in this scenario.) Before agreeing to follow Bilam's advice, and committing to paying Bilam if it worked, Balak consulted with his "landsmen," and when they agreed to follow Bilam's plan, they also committed to paying Bilam's fee if it worked.

Bilam knew this before he left (not necessarily that Midyan was on board, but that Balak was going to consult with them and would only follow his advice if they agreed to join him), so when he heard that it worked, he knew that Midyan owed him money. It's a long trip from Aram to Midyan, so he wasn't necessarily going to make a special trip just to collect his debt, figuring that when he had another reason to be in the area, he would get it then. However, if Midyan was about to be attacked by Israel, he figured he better try collecting his money now, as if he didn't collect it before Midyan was obliterated, he would never be able to. (Even if he didn't know they would be obliterated,

Midyan being attacked and suffering as a result of following Bilam's advice would nullify their obligation to pay him anything, as following it would end up being a negative, not a positive.)

G-d wanted to punish Midyan (and prevent them from ever trying to cause Israel to sin again), but also wanted to punish Bilam. Therefore, He made it known to Bilam (who received divine messages) that He had commanded Israel to take revenge against Midyan (or was about to), knowing that this would motivate Bilam to try to collect his debt before it was too late. (As per Rashi, based on the Sifre, he also tried to talk Israel out of attacking, possibly because he didn't want to lose any future business from Midyan or from others who would see what following his advice could lead to.) Bilam took the bait, and headed straight for Midyan to collect his money before they would no longer (be around to) pay it. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

"**T**here was much livestock belonging to Bnei (the children of) Reuven and Bnei Gad -- very much... Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven came and said to Moshe..." (32:1) These two tribes asked Moshe if they could remain in the rich pasture lands on the east side of the Jordan River rather than cross the Jordan to dwell in Israel proper. The Kli Yakar (cited in Talelei Orot) notes that in describing this request, Bnei Gad are mentioned first, as if they were the leaders of the delegation. Reuven was Yaakov's first born son and his tribe was one of the more prominent; they should have led the delegation. Why did Bnei Gad take the lead?

Kli Yakar says that the answer can be found in the first verse we cited. Both tribes had abundant livestock, but Bnei Gad had "very much" -- the last two words refer back only to them and not to both tribes. However, the reason they took the lead was not because they had more of a need for pasture land as a result of a greater number of sheep. Rather, their superior wealth engendered a perception of superior importance: Reuven was the first born? Doesn't matter, we are richer and hence we should speak first. Kli Yakar explains that this is an unfortunate but common tendency. People, especially the wealthy, often believe that wealth automatically confers great status and is more meaningful than other standards. The Torah is warning us against this mentality, which is a risk in our time, just as it was back then. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Before the war on the Midianites, Moshe spoke to the people saying: "Detach from you men for the army, and they shall be against Midian to take the

Almighty's vengeance against Midian." (Numbers 31:3)

The commentary Sifri tells us that even though Moshe heard that he would die after this battle, he nevertheless acted with joy and did not procrastinate. What lessons can we learn from this?

Two important traits in doing the will of the Almighty (or any task in life) -- even though we find it difficult -- are to do it with joy and to do it without delay.

The more difficult it is to do, the greater the reward. As it says in Pirke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers (5:23), "According to the effort is the reward." The most precious thing a person has is life itself. Knowing that fulfilling the will of the Almighty will cost one's life is the greatest difficulty possible. Exactly because of this Moshe experienced joy in fulfilling this act and he did it with great speed.

The more difficult it is to do, the greater joy you can experience. Just focus on the joy of accomplishing something meaningful and on your overcoming your inclination to procrastinate! *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2014 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

TorahWeb

A thousand for a tribe, a thousand for a tribe, for all the tribes of Yisrael shall you send to the army. (Bamidbar 31:4). Some say that three thousand served from each tribe. One thousand fought at the front. One thousand guarded the gear behind the battle lines (See Rashi Breishis 14:24). One thousand engaged in tefilla (Bamidbar Rabba 22:3).

Forty years ago, at the frightening beginning of the Yom Kippur War, R. Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l cited this Medrash in his exhortation to his talmidim (Erev Sukkos 5734, Sichos Mussar, 2010 ed., p. 456,7). This week, with rockets landing throughout Eretz Yisrael, R. Chaim's message is timely and critical, particularly for American Jews.

At present, many heroic soldiers are risking their lives to defend Israel's citizens. Our obligation to pray for them is boundless. Those who gave their lives on behalf of Am Yisarel, or were killed only because of their being Jewish -- no creature can reach their place of reward in the next world (Bava Basra 10b). The Talmud refers to R. Akiva, and the brothers who gave their lives to save the Jews of Lod. Today we refer to the kedoshim of Tzahal, the three talmidim murdered last month, and this week's victim of a rocket fired from Gaza. Today, all of Israel's citizens, behind the battle lines, are in danger.

In recent weeks, we have seen the hand of Hashem in sparing us from casualties despite thousands of potentially fatal rockets. This demands thanking Hashem for His protection, and beseeching Him for safety and ultimately for peace. Our embattled Israeli brothers and sisters are doing their part.

American Jews, far from the murderous enemies, must share the pain of the Israelis, and intensify their tefillos for peace and serenity in the holy land.

R. Chaim cites the expression (Yeshaya 54:9) the waters of Noach, which refer to the mabul. The Zohar (parshas Noach) holds Noach partially responsible for the deluge, since he did not pray that the generation be saved. We dare not repeat this mistake. Our tefillos, especially communal ones, are our indispensable contribution to the war effort.

When you draw near to the war, the Kohen says to the people: Shema Yisrael, today you are coming near to the battle against your enemies (Devarim 20:2,3). Even if there is no merit in you except for Krias Shma, you are worthy that Hashem should save you (Rashi). We must say Shema, with intensity, and on time, to merit Hashem's salvation. Extra chizuk is needed during a crisis in a time of laxity, such as summer vacation.

The pesukim continue (20:3,4): Do not be afraid of them for Hashem fights for you against your enemies to save you. R. Chaim states that only the realization that Hashem alone can save us can prevent fear. Ashur (the USA) will not save us, we will not ride (rely) on horses (planes) and we will not call our handiwork (the army) "our god" (Hoshea 14:4). We must pray with all our might for the safety of our soldiers, but we must realize that only Hashem can save us.

As the war dragged on then, as now, R. Chaim's words (p. 460-61) continue to inspire. We dare not become accustomed to the dangerous situation and be lulled into a state of complacency. Moreover, the thousand who prayed did so near the front, so that their tefillos be more intense and effective. In America we must try to feel part of the dangerous matzav. If we daven for those in danger, Hashem will have mercy and help them and us.

From afar it is difficult to feel their pain. Moshe went out to his brothers and saw their burden (Shemos 2:11). He focused his eyes and his heart to be distressed over them. Only then could he feel their pain, and, by joining in their plight, pray intensely and effectively.

One who pains himself together with the community merits seeing their consolation. But one who separates himself from the community will not see their consolation (Ta'anis 11a). One who separates himself and does not pray together with the community is included in this category (Pri Megadim Orach Chaim 574:6).

Indeed, concludes R. Chaim (p. 463,4), our suffering is a means to the end, that we should daven to Hashem Who desires our tefillos. Why did Hashem create the crisis at Yam Suf? Because he desired to hear their voices in prayer, as it says (Shir Hashirim 2:14) My dove [trapped at the sea as if] in the clefts of a

rock, let Me hear your voice [in prayer]. (Sehmos Raba 21:5).

Each day, near the end of 'Hodu', we say, Open your mouth wide -- with intense tefilla -- and I will fill it [Tehillim 81:1]. Once the purpose of your suffering, from Mitzrayim until today, is achieved by your tefillos, Hashem will answer them.

The previous pesukim in Hodu express our sentiments in this time of crisis. Hashem save, may the King answer us on the day we call. Save Your nation. Hashem is our help and our shield. Grant us our salvation. Redeem us for the sake of your kindness. And, as R. Chaim taught, may your kindness be upon us, as we prayed to You, thus achieving the purpose of the crisis.

Klal Yisrael's response to the abduction which precipitated the present crisis was breathtaking. We witnessed unity among previously fragmented groups. We saw faith and prayer across an incredibly wide spectrum. We felt the everlasting truth of the subsequent pasuk in Hodu: Fortunate -- and praiseworthy [See Metzudos and Rashi, Tehilim 1:1] -- is the nation that Hashem is their G-d.

As Klal Yisrael suffers in Eretz Yisrael, Jews worldwide must join in the suffering and pray to Hashem for salvation. Our tefillos must include faith and trust in Hashem, even when He does not accede to our prayers. May we merit the conclusion of Hodu "My heart will rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to Hashem for He has saved me". ©2014 Rabbi M. Willig and The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our parashah opens: "Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisrael, saying, 'Zeh ha'davar / This is the word that Hashem has commanded'." Rashi observes that many prophets (including Moshe) introduced their messages with the phrase "Ko amar Hashem / So said Hashem," but only Moshe introduced

some of his messages with "Zeh ha'davar / This is the word."

R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (rosh yeshiva of Torah Voda'ath in Brooklyn, N.Y.; died 1986) elaborates: Our Sages teach that all of the prophets saw their prophecies with an "unclear vision," while Moshe saw with a "clear vision." In other words, all prophets (besides Moshe) had to interpret the visions they saw, a process that could be affected by the prophets' own personalities and predilections. Moshe's prophecy was different; he understood exactly what G-d meant and transmitted it literally and perfectly. He could say, "This is the word that Hashem commanded."

Why is this message alluded to in our parashah? R' Kaminetsky explains: The first section of Parashat Matot presents the laws of vows and oaths. These laws demonstrate man's special status in that, through a vow or oath, a person can, in effect, create new mitzvah obligations. For example, if a person says, "I swear that I will eat this loaf of bread," it becomes a mitzvah for him to eat that loaf of bread. If a person says, "Apples are forbidden to me like a sacrifice," it becomes a mitzvah for him to refrain from having any benefit from apples. This ability of man to enact new laws for himself might lead one to question the Divine origin of the Torah. Accordingly, the Torah chooses this context to inform us that Moshe's prophecy--indeed, the transmission of the entire Torah--was a literal transmission of Hashem's words. (Emet L'Yaakov)

"He shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do." (30:3)

R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin z"l (1817-1898; rabbi of Brisk, Poland; later in Yerushalayim) was once present at a hesped / eulogy for one of his students. Following the hesped, a "Kail Malai" was recited, and the assembled crowd dispersed.

R' Diskin then approached the gabbai and handed him a coin. He said, "I am giving this coin to charity in memory of the deceased on behalf of everyone who was present today." He explained: When the gabbai recites a Kail Malai, he often says the phrase, "in the merit that the entire congregation promises to give charity on behalf of the elevation of the soul (of the departed)." I, said R' Diskin, am afraid that people will forget to fulfill this vow that was made on their behalf, so I am acting as their representative. (Quoted in Ve'karata La'Shabbat Oneg) ©2014 S. Katz & torah.org

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