

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

The book of Bamidbar comes to a close that is very strange indeed. Earlier in the parsha of Pinchas we read of how the five daughters of Tzelophehad came to Moses with a claim based on justice and human rights. (The word "rights" is, of course, an anachronism here. The concept was not born until the seventeenth century. Nonetheless it is not absurd to suggest that this is what is implied in the daughters' claim, "Why should our father's name be disadvantaged?")

Their father had died without sons. Inheritance - in this case, of a share in the land -- passes through the male line, but here there was no male line. Surely their father was entitled to his share, and they were his only heirs. By rights that share should come to them:

"Why should our father's name be disadvantaged in his family merely because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father's brothers." (Num. 27:4)

Moses had received no instruction about such an eventuality, so he asked God directly. God found in favour of the women.

"The daughters of Tzelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them."

He gave Moses further instructions about the disposition of inheritance, and the narrative then passes on to other matters.

Only now, right at the end of the book, does the Torah report on an event that arose directly from that case. Leaders of Tzelophehad's tribe, Menasheh, son of Joseph, came and made the following complaint. If the land were to pass to Tzelophehad's daughters and they married men from another tribe, the land would eventually pass to their husbands, and thus to their husband's tribes. Thus land that had initially been granted to the tribe of Menasheh might be lost to it in perpetuity.

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Again, Moses took the case to God, who offered a simple solution. The daughters of Tzelophehad were entitled to the land, but so too was the tribe. Therefore, if they wish to take possession of the land, they must marry men from within their own tribe. That way both claims could be honoured. The daughters did not lose their right to the land but they did lose some freedom in choosing a marriage partner.

The two passages are intimately related. They use the same terminology. Both Tzelophehad's daughters and the leaders of the clan "draw near". They use the same verb to describe their potential loss: yigara, "disadvantaged, diminished". God replies in both cases with the same locution, "kein... dovrot/dovrim," rightly do they speak.[2] Why then are the two episodes separated in the text? Why does the book of Numbers end on this seemingly anticlimactic note? And does it have any relevance today?

(These two passages may well be the source of the story of the rabbi who hears both sides of a marital dispute, and says to both husband and wife, "You are right." The rabbi's disciple asks, "How can they both be right?" to which the rabbi replies, "You too are right.")

Bamidbar is a book about individuals. It begins with a census, whose purpose is less to tell us the actual number of Israelites than to "lift" their "heads", the unusual locution the Torah uses to convey the idea that when God orders a census it is to tell the people that they each count. The book also focuses on the psychology of individuals. We read of Moses' despair, of Aaron and Miriam's criticism of him, of the spies who lacked the courage to come back with a positive report, and of the malcontents, led by Korach, who challenged Moses' leadership. We read of Joshua and Caleb, Eldad and Medad, Dathan and Aviram, Zimri and Pinchas, Balak and Bilam and others. This emphasis on individuals reaches a climax in Moses' prayer to "God of the spirits of all flesh" to appoint a successor (Bamidbar 27:16) -- understood by the Sages and Rashi to mean, appoint a leader who will deal with each individual as an individual, who will relate to people in their uniqueness and singularity.

That is the context of the claim of Tzelophehad's daughters. They were claiming their rights as individuals. Justly so. As many of the commentators pointed out, the behaviour of the women throughout the wilderness years was exemplary while that of the men was the opposite. The men, not the women, gave gold for the Golden Calf.

The spies were men: a famous comment by the Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550-1619, on Num. 13:2) suggests that had Moses sent women instead, they would have come back with a positive report. Recognising the justice of their cause, God affirmed their rights as individuals.

But society is not built on individuals alone. As the book of Judges points out, individualism is another name for chaos: "In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Hence the insistence, throughout Bamidbar, on the central role of the tribes as the organising principle of Jewish life. The Israelites were numbered tribe by tribe. The Torah sets out their precise encampment around the Mishkan and the order in which they were to journey. In Naso, at inordinate length, the Torah repeats the gifts of each tribe at the inauguration of the Mishkan, despite the fact that they each gave exactly the same. The tribes were not accidental to the structure of Israel as a society. Like the United States of America, whose basic political structure is that of a federation of (originally thirteen, now fifty) states, so Israel was (until the appointment of a king) a federation of tribes.

The existence of something like tribes is fundamental to a free society. The modern state of Israel is built on a vast panoply of ethnicities -- Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Jews from Eastern, Central and Western Europe, Spain and Portugal, Arab lands, Russia and Ethiopia, America, South Africa, Australia and other places, some Hassidic, some Yeshiva-ish, others "Modern", others "Traditional", yet others secular and cultural.

We each have a series of identities, based partly on family background, partly on occupation, partly on locality and community. These "mediating structures", larger than the individual but smaller than the state, are where we develop our complex, vivid, face-to-face interactions and identities. They are the domain of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, and they make up what is collectively known as civil society. A strong civil society is essential to freedom. (This is the argument made most powerfully by Edmond Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville.)

That is why, alongside individual rights, a society must make space for group identities. The classic instance of the opposite came in the wake of the French revolution. In the course of the debate in the French Revolutionary Assembly in 1789, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre made his famous declaration, "To the Jews as individuals, everything. To the Jews as a nation, nothing." If they insisted on defining themselves as a nation, that is, as a distinct subgroup within the republic, said the Count, "we shall be compelled to expel them."

Initially, this sounded reasonable. Jews were being offered civil rights in the new secular nation state. However, it was anything but. It meant that Jews would have to give up their identity as Jews in the public

domain. Nothing -- not religious or ethnic identity -- should stand between the individual and the state. It was no accident that a century later, France became one of the epicentres of European antisemitism, beginning with douard Drumont's vicious *La France Juive*, 1886, and culminating in the Dreyfus trial. Hearing the Parisian crowd shout "Mort aux Juifs", Theodor Herzl realised that Jews had still not been accepted as citizens of Europe, despite all the protestations to the contrary. Jews found themselves regarded as a tribe in a Europe that claimed to have abolished tribes. European emancipation recognised individual rights but not collective ones.

The primatologist Frans de Waal, whose work among the chimpanzees we mentioned in this year's *Covenant & Conversation* on Korach, makes the point powerfully. Almost the whole of modern Western culture, he says, was built on the idea of autonomous, choosing individuals. But that is not who we are. We are people with strong attachments to family, friends, neighbours, allies, co-religionists and people of the same ethnicity. He continues:

"A morality exclusively concerned with individual rights tends to ignore the ties, needs and interdependencies that have marked our existence from the very beginning. It is a cold morality that puts space between people, assigning each person to his or her own little corner of the universe. How this caricature of a society arose in the minds of eminent thinkers is a mystery." (Frans de Waal, *Good Natured*, Harvard University Press, 1996, pg 167.)

That is precisely the point the Torah is making when it divides the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad into two. The first part, in parshat Pinchas, is about individual rights, the rights of Tzelophehad's daughters to a share in the land. The second, at the end of the book, is about group rights, in this case the right of the tribe of Menasheh to its territory. The Torah affirms both, because both are necessary to a free society.

Many of the most seemingly intractable issues in contemporary Jewish life have appeared because Jews, especially in the West, are used to a culture in which individual rights are held to override all others. We should be free to live as we choose, worship as we choose, and identify as we choose. But a culture based solely on individual rights will undermine families, communities, traditions, loyalties, and shared codes of reverence and restraint.

Despite its enormous emphasis on the value of the individual, Judaism also insists on the value of those institutions that preserve and protect our identities as members of groups that make them up. We have rights as individuals but identities only as members of tribes. Honouring both is delicate, difficult and necessary. *Bamidbar* ends by showing us how. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's double portion records how the Jews finally cross the Jordan River on their way to conquer the Promised Land. The tribes of Gad and Reuven and half the tribe of Menashe possess a great multitude of cattle, and "paradise" for cattle is good grazing land, which happens to be what these two and a half tribes find in their present location of Trans-Jordan. They then petition Moses with a special request. "If you would grant us a favor, let this land be given to us as our permanent property, and do not bring us across the Jordan." (Numbers 32:5)

Moses' response is sharp. "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here? Why are you trying to discourage the Israelites from crossing over to the land that God has given them? This is the same thing your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land" (Numbers 32:6-8). Moses' reference is an especially damning one: just as the scouts decided to remain in the desert because they lacked the courage and will to fight for the Promised Land, you are acting similar to them by your desire to stay where you are, saving yourselves from the harrowing experience of war. And Moses makes this comparison even though Trans-Jordan is considered to be part of the holy land (Mishnah Kelim 1,10).

What moved these two and a half tribes to remain in Trans-Jordan? According to Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm, they petitioned not to have to cross the Jordan because of their cattle, which expresses a certain degree of materialistic greed on their part; it doesn't take a great flight of the imagination to see the correspondence between cattle and grazing lands in those days to economic opportunities in the work place today.

Why do Jews continue to live outside of Israel, further away than the other side of the Jordan – on the other side of the Atlantic? Because they've found good grazing lands for their cattle and it's a shame to give that up, especially since our present-day descendants of Gad and Menashe rarely question a contemporary Rabbinic authority about their choice. If they did, he would more than likely repeat Moses' message "Why should your brothers go out and fight while you stay here?" (Numbers 32:61).

After all, world Jewry has certainly benefited from the State of Israel, ever since its inception and to this very day. After the Holocaust, which resulted in the tragic loss of 1/3 of our people and 4/5 of our religious, intellectual and cultural leadership, it seemed as if Judaism had finally faded from the world stage of viable "peoples", nations and religions. The renowned historian Alfred Toynbee called the Jews a "fossil" in the history he published in 1946, the Chief Rabbi of Rome

converted to Christianity and immediately following the Holocaust, conversion was rampant on every campus in America.

Not only did world Jewry experience a miraculous renaissance after the declaration of Israeli statehood – and then again with the liberation of Jerusalem after the Six Day War in 1967 – but Israel is now the greatest provider of religious and educational leadership for Jewish communities throughout the world as well as the most effective fount of inspiration for searching and struggling assimilated Jews whose lives become significantly transformed through programs like Birthright Israel. All of the successful diaspora Jewish communities today owe their development in no small measure to the Jewish State.

Rabbi Yitzchak Arama gives a slightly different interpretation. The author of the Akedat Yitzchak describes the two and a half tribes as practical materialists who nevertheless are planning to eventually join their siblings in Israel's heartland – but only eventually, not right now. At present, the personal needs of the family and the tribe must come first – until the leader of the family can amass sufficient material goods to make the big move to the middle east a less risky venture. Their personal needs – and not historic Israel's national needs – must come first. Therefore, Moses took them to task.

The Ohr Hachayim approaches the situation in its simplest, most "religious" terms: suggesting that the two and a half tribes built their argument around Divine intervention: "The land which God conquered on behalf of the congregation of Israel is a land for cattle, and your servants have cattle." (32:41). In other words, this is the land that God conquered for us and therefore this is the land we wish to remain in. If God wants us somewhere else, let Him take us there, let Him conquer that land too. Until then, this is where we're going to stay and this is where our cattle will stay. It is good for our cattle and therefore it is good for us.

In many ways, the Ohr Hachayim's reading sees the two and a half tribes as being the counterparts of the devotees of Natura Karta. They are waiting for God Himself to bring them to Israel – and if not God, then at least His Messiah! When God is good and ready to redeem Israel completely, He'll do it in His own time. Everything depends on God, and we are more than happy to wait it out in our pleasant grazing land until then....

The truth is that Gad, Reuven and half of Menashe had forgotten their history. They cannot rest on their grazing laurels while the rest of the nation fights their wars for them. When the Israelites reached the Reed Sea chased by the Egyptian hordes they asked Moses to pray to God. "Why are you crying out to me?" God says to Moses. 'Speak to the Israelites and let them start moving.'" (Exodus 14:15). The sea does not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav and Caleb ben Yefuna

jump in.

Similarly, when Moses tells the two and a half tribes that they have to bear arms and fight, he's really pointing out that God's promise to Israel is that everyone has to be partners – God with the nation, and the nation with one another, sharing in a mutual responsibility and privilege. At the end of the day, if our fledgling State proves to be even more vulnerable than we think by dint of less manpower in war and a smaller population than is required, Jews will have only themselves to blame for not rising to the challenge offered by the greatest Jewish adventure in 2000 years. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The narrative of the experiences of the people of Israel in the desert of Sinai concludes with the parshiyot of this week. All of the occurrences, successes and failures that marked this forty year trek in a wasteland wilderness are alluded to in the count of Israel in last week's parsha - and in the listing of all of the way stations of that excursion.

The Torah seems to be determined to remind all later generations of Jews of the experiences in the desert. Moshe, in his final oration in the book of Dvarim, will once again review the events of the desert for a new generation of Jews distanced in time and circumstance from Egyptian bondage. The Torah is aware of human forgetfulness.

It will take only one generation to forget Egypt and even Mount Sinai. History is boring and quite irrelevant to new generations. Yet forgetting the Jewish past is the ultimate betrayal of Judaism and Jewish hopes. All of us, as we become older, begin to feel a psychological and spiritual need growing within us to be remembered.

The Baal Shem Tov is reputed to have said: "Forgetting is the true exile." Of course it is obvious that ignorance is the true partner of forgetfulness. In fact, if one never knew anything then one cannot be accused of having forgotten it. The Torah emphasizes the repetition of all the facts and experiences of Jewish life in the desert of Sinai so that this knowledge will enable and strengthen the powers of national remembrance.

Much of the Jewish world today suffers from a severe case of, hopefully temporary but nevertheless intense, amnesia. In spite of all of the efforts of the survivors, the museums, the academic courses and books relating to the Holocaust, this event is rapidly disappearing from world and even Jewish memory.

Religious Jewry has found no way, as of yet, to ritually remember the Holocaust. Without ritual and holiness, it tragically will continue to fade from the memory of the coming generation. In distributing films and audio lectures about the Holocaust and the founding of the State of Israel to Jewish schools worldwide I am

already encountering apathy if not sometimes even outright opposition to the insertion of the subject into the curriculum of schools.

One principal asked me: "Will it help my students to be admitted to Harvard or Yale?" And on the other end of the spectrum of Jewish education another principal told me: "Will it increase their ability to study Talmud properly?" I responded that the Torah listed all of the desert way stations even though knowing them would also not guarantee Talmudic proficiency or admission to Harvard or Yale.

It is not only the amnesia regarding even our very recent past that afflicts us. It is our inability to grasp that the knowledge of this immediate past is vitally essential to our present and to our future. Without knowledge of the events of the past, dating back all of the way to the events of the desert of Sinai, we are creating for our descendants a new desert, a wasteland of ignorance, falsehoods and disillusion. It is not too late to correct this. If our schools won't do so, let our homes and families attempt to do so.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Only Aaron's specific date of death is recorded in the Torah: "And Aaron died...in the fifth month [Av], on the first day of the month" (Numbers 33:38).

We remember the deceased on the *yahrzeit*, the anniversary, of their death rather than on their birthdate. After all, a person's future accomplishments are unknown at birth. Upon death, they can be recalled.

Ecclesiastes says, "More good [tov] is the day of death than the day of birth" (Ecclesiastes 7:1). The text does not say the day of death is happier than the day of birth – indeed, it is not. Rather, it is "more good." Note that in the Genesis creation story, goodness [ki tov] is not mentioned after Adam is created, as the term can only be used after one has lived a meaningful life.

It is said that the key symbol in the listing dates of birth and death on a tombstone is the dash in between. That dash denotes all one has done in a lifetime.

The challenge of death is to keep the goodness, the legacy, the dash of the deceased alive. This idea is reflected in the Mourner's Kaddish. Its most important term is the word *Shemeh*, found in each of its sections, which literally means "His name," referring to the *shem Hashem* (name of the Lord), two words that encapsulate the mission of Judaism.

When Abraham and Sarah arrive in Israel, they build an altar and "va'yikra b'shem Hashem" (called out in the name of the Lord; Genesis 12:8). Their calling is far more, however, than the utterance of God's name,

also encompassing the larger mission of Judaism – to bring ethical monotheism into the world.

When reciting the Mourner's Kaddish, the bereaved offers gratitude to the deceased for living a life of Shmeh. And so, the term Shmeh is found throughout the Kaddish, beginning with Yitgadal v'yitkadash Shmeh rabba. Even if the deceased would not have couched his or her contribution in godly terms, thanksgiving is offered more broadly for the good the deceased did – leaving the world a better place.

Most importantly, the Kaddish is in the future tense. Yitgadal is the future reflexive of gadol (magnified); v'yitkadash is the future reflexive of kadosh (sanctified). While death is death, the influence of the deceased lives on.

More broadly, the Kaddish may be an educational tool, teaching the bereaved to move from loving through “contact” to loving through “presence.” Contact is associated with life relationships. It occurs when individuals are physically near or talking or emailing one another. After death, relationships with the deceased are metaphysical. In this state, one can constantly feel what can be called the “presence” of the deceased.

In certain ways, “presence” is more powerful than “contact,” as it is not limited to any particular place; one can potentially feel the “presence” of the deceased anywhere, and for that matter, at any time.

The *yahrzeit* of Aaron the high priest is singled out, as he is the paragon of “loving peace and pursuing peace,” extraordinary virtues, especially when considering that he played a major role in leading the Israelites during the troublesome, quarrelsome forty years of the first generation's journey through the desert (Ethics of the Sages 1:12).

Not coincidentally, his *yahrzeit* is on Rosh Chodesh Av, which always falls around the time we read about his death in Parashat Masei. The first of Av ushers in the Nine Days leading to Tisha b'Av, commemorating the destruction of the Temples. The second was destroyed because of *sinat chinam* (baseless hatred). Aaron's *yahrzeit* reminds us that the Temple will be rebuilt when, as Rabbi Kook noted, *ahavat chinam* (unconditional love) replaces *sinat chinam*.

Aaron's “Shmeh” continues forever. Hopefully, we too will feel the “Shmeh” presence of those closest to us who have passed on – tapping us on the shoulder, showing us the way. ©2023 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

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Annulment of Vows

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

If a person has taken a vow (*neder*) but later regrets having done so, he may approach a rabbi to have it

annulled. The Hebrew word for annulment is *hatarah*. Some *Rishonim* explain that this is related to the word *le-hatir*, to untie. Undoing a vow is like untying a knot. Others explain that it is related to *heter* (permissible) as opposed to *issur* (forbidden). According to them, *Hatarat Nedarim* means permitting the behavior that had been forbidden by the vow.

There is a disagreement among the *Tannaim* as to the source for *Hatarat Nedarim*. Some say the source is the verse (*Bamidbar* 30:3), “He shall not break his pledge” (*Lo yachel devaro*). They expound: The one who undertook the vow cannot forgive (*mocheil*) it, but someone else can forgive it for him. The other opinion is that *Hatarat Nedarim* has no basis in the written Torah at all. Rather, Moshe taught the people orally that when the verse says, “He shall not break his pledge,” it means one should not flippantly disregard his vow. Instead, if he truly regrets it and wishes to undo it, a rabbi can do it for him. The idea that there is no clear biblical source for *Hatarat Nedarim* is expressed in the Mishnah with the phrase “it is floating in the air” (*Chagigah* 1:8).

When a rabbi annuls a vow, the annulment takes effect retroactively. It is as if the person never made the vow at all. In contrast, when a husband cancels his wife's vow (*Hafarat Nedarim*), it takes effect only from the time he becomes aware of the vow and cancels it.

How is a vow annulment actually done? The person who made the vow stands in front of one rabbi or three laymen. He explains that he regrets having made the vow, and would not have made it if he had realized all the consequences. They then say to him, “The vow is annulled,” “The vow is forgiven,” or anything similar. Some require that the phrase be recited three times, but this is just to make it feel more serious. According to the letter of the law, though, saying it once is sufficient. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The End of the Story

The story of the B'not Tzelophchad spans three parshiot in the Torah. The backstory is that the daughters of Tzelophchad were the only children of their father who died in the wilderness for a “sin.” Though the sin is not specified, it appears from many of the commentators that his sin was gathering wood on Shabbat after being warned that he would face the death penalty. The Torah mentioned their names in Parashat Pinchas in the census immediately after the plague which consumed twenty-four thousand of those who had sinned with the Moabite women. Hashem told Moshe to count the leaders of each family by name, and those that were named would also be the ones to receive a portion of ancestral land given to each tribe. The names consisted of the heads of families who left Egypt, the “ancestral” families. Tzelophchad's name was stated along with his story and that he had only daughters (Machla, Noa, Hogla, Milka, and Tirza, who were also

named) to inherit him.

The Torah states about the names mentioned in the census, "To these shall the land be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names." After the census, the daughters of Tzelophchad came to Moshe saying, "Our father died in the wilderness, but he was not among the assembly that was gathering against Hashem in the assembly of Korach, rather he died of his sin; and he had no sons." They requested his portion of the land so that his name would be remembered. Hashem agreed with their request and stated to the people, "If a man will die and he has no son, you shall cause his inheritance to pass over to his daughter." There is a further statement of inheritance should there be no children.

It is important to note that the Torah states the full lineage of Tzelophchad, something which is not done for Korach. Tzelophchad was the son of Hefer, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Menashe. This plays an important part in the middle of our story. In Parashat Matot, the first of our double parshiot read this week, the tribes of Reuvein and Gad decided that they wanted to remain in the land across the Jordan (in what today is Jordan and Syria) because it was good grazing land for their many animals. Again, the negotiations with Moshe which allowed this are not relevant to our story except for one detail: Moshe allowed these tribes to settle across the Jordan River, but he also placed half the tribe of Menashe with them.

All of this brings us to the end of this week's double parasha. The Torah states, "The heads of the fathers of the family of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Menashe, of the families of Yosef, approached and spoke before Moshe and the princes, the heads of the fathers of the Children of Israel. They said, Hashem has commanded my master to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the Children of Israel, and my master has been commanded by Hashem to give the inheritance of Tzelophchad, our brother, to his daughters. If they become wives of one of the sons of the tribes of the Children of Israel, then their inheritance will be subtracted from the inheritance of our fathers and be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they will marry, and it will be subtracted from our lot of our inheritance." They were also concerned that this would cause the land to be forfeited in the Jubilee year, making the loss permanent. Hashem then made a general decree: "Let them be wives to whomever is good in their eyes, but only to the family of their father's tribe shall they become wives. An inheritance of the Children of Israel shall not be redirected from tribe to tribe; rather the Children of Israel shall cleave every man to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers." Hashem also extended this to any woman who was not yet married and would inherit ancestral land from her father.

The Ramban points out that our Rabbis in Gemara Baba Batra only applied this law to that

generation. Part of the argument against applying this law of marrying within the tribe, for women who inherited because there were no sons, is that the same scenario could occur if the daughters married outside of the tribe and then the sons died unmarried. The daughters would then already be married outside the tribe, and the same problem would arise. Still, the pasuk is clear that the land should not go from tribe to tribe. One solution that is offered is that, should a daughter of one tribe inherit from her father of another tribe, her husband and children would not inherit that land from her, but the land would pass to the nearest relative in her father's tribe.

There is an implication that there would have been an alternative solution, namely to sell the land to one from the tribe and then to be free to marry into any tribe. The problem with this alternative for the daughters of Tzelophchad is that it did not leave the land in the name of their father who passed away. The request that the daughters of Tzelophchad made included the phrase, "Why should the name of our father be omitted from among his family because he had no son?" Selling the land would have negated that request, and therefore it was discarded.

We saw earlier that Moshe designated half of the tribe of Menashe to live on the other side of the Jordan River. Tzelophchad was the son of Hefer, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin tells us that the sons of Machir took land on the other side of the Jordan, whereas the sons of Gilead took their land in Israel. It should be noted that there is a difference of opinion among the Rabbis whether the daughters of Tzelophchad had land on both sides of the Jordan. HaRav Sorotzkin asks why the sons of Machir did not take part in this request concerning ancestral land. It appears that those who dwelled on the other side of the Jordan were not particular about ancestral land as they should have taken their portion within the boundaries of Israel instead.

One must wonder why this request by some of the sons of Menashe takes place at the end of Bamidbar. The story of the daughters of Tzelophchad occurred in Pinchas. The request by the children of Reuvein and Gad to remain on the other side of the Jordan occurred in Matot. Now, in the last parasha in Bamidbar, Masei, and in the concluding paragraph of this parasha, we are suddenly drawn back into this issue of inheritance. Perhaps the discussion is placed here as a counter-balance to the entire Sefer Bamidbar. Throughout this Sefer, we have seen several rebellions against Moshe and Hashem, we have heard negative remarks about the Land and its inhabitability, and we have seen two tribes reject the Land completely so they could remain across the Jordan. Finally, at the end of the Sefer, we see a tribe so in love with the land, that they fight to retain every portion due their tribe. There are those throughout our exile who have experienced only hardships here, but others recognize the holiness of the Land. May we all

grow to love this Land, our Home, and may we rejoice in its holiness. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd Moshe got angry at the officers of the army, those who headed the thousands and those who headed the hundreds." (Bamidbar 31:14)

Upon dealing the Midianites a decisive defeat, the Jewish army captured the spoils of war. They brought the booty back and presented it before Moshe and the leaders of the Jewish People. When they did so, Moshe could not believe his eyes. They had brought back the Midianite women as captives! Moshe was incensed.

These were the very women who were the cause of the Jews sinning, which led to the deaths of thousands of people. And these soldiers had the temerity and shortsightedness to bring these women back as captives?!

The question we ask today is why the Torah specifies that Moshe got angry. If the Jews needed to be rebuked, Moshe should have done it calmly. He should have explained their mistake in a soft tone. Why did he get angry?

The answer is that here, when Moshe was speaking to the leaders of the hundreds and the thousands, they should have known better. This was not a mistake they should have made.

If there was something the Jews didn't know, Moshe could have taught it to them softly. However, here, something much more insidious was afoot. For nearly forty years in the desert, the Jews dwelled in isolation from the outside world. Their perspective was formed by Hashem's will and Moshe's teaching.

How, then, could they make this error? It's because of their exposure to the Midianites and the other nations they encountered. So long as they were isolated, they were able to maintain their beliefs. Once they began to mingle with these people who were not guided by Hashem, they were affected and influenced. However, they didn't see it. To them, this way of thinking was correct, and they didn't see a reason to kill the "innocent" women who were taken captive.

What angered Moshe is that they allowed themselves to be lulled into a false sense of appropriateness. The fact that they didn't see for themselves, immediately, the problem, meant they had become desensitized to holiness and purity. Moshe needed to express shock to make them realize just how egregious this was. Allowing their principles to be compromised was something which should have caused each of them to protest. Had they been on the proper level, they, too, would have been outraged by such a suggestion, even if it came from a higher-ranking officer. They would have known it was wrong and spoken up. Therefore, Moshe acted as they should have, to highlight the behavior they should have known to use themselves,

and to give them direction to never be fooled again.

An artist went up to the mountains to paint in solitude. He spent weeks there, perfecting his masterpiece. When he was done, he stepped back to admire his handiwork.

He began to examine it from every angle. He looked from one side, then from up on a rock. Then he placed the painting on a rock ledge and stepped back to see it in the morning sun. He took one step back, then another, admiring his masterpiece.

Suddenly, as if from nowhere, an arrow flew past his head and sliced through his canvas. Weeks of work, ruined! He snapped out of his reverie and spun around, looking for the perpetrator of the crime. A man came down from the mountains holding a bow. "How could you do that?!" shouted the artist. "You've ruined my greatest work!"

The man pointed and said, "Look! You were at the edge of a cliff. You were so engrossed with the colors and paint that you nearly lost your life. I tried calling to you but you didn't hear me. I had no choice but to destroy that which distracted you, in order to save you." © 2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Meor Einayim

"**I**f a man takes a vow to Hashem...to prohibit something to himself, he shall not desecrate his word. He shall do according to all that comes from his mouth." The world and everything in it came into existence through the word of Hashem. Moreover, the existence of anything, without exception, is predicated on that word's constant sustaining of it. At the core of everything must reside a spiritual core that bears G-d's word as hidden sparks.

In our broken world, these sparks also exist in a broken state. They come to us garbed in kelipos/shells of physicality that mask their presence. But it is crucial to realize that these sparks are behind our interactions with the material world.

When we are pleased by the taste of food, we must realize that the real source of the pleasure is these sparks/nitzotzos of kedushah. When the body digests food, it processes what it can use, and expels the unusable. This mirrors exactly what is happening on a spiritual plane: we make use of the nitzotzos, and reject the kelipos.

If we focus properly on what we are doing, and fully believe that it is the nitzotzos that sustain us, rather than the tissue in which they are garbed, we effectively return the nitzotzos to their holy place of origin. This provides us with a simple statement of the purpose of life: the gathering of nitzotzos and returning them to where they belong.

Food is simply an example. Nitzotzos are hiding everywhere. They are encountered in all the pleasures of this world, and in all of a person's interactions with his

surroundings, including the practice of making a living. Furthermore, the nitzotzos that he comes upon are determined by his shoshon neshamah. No one else can substitute for him; it is part of his individual life's mission to elevate those nitzotzos. Divine Providence will guide him through the vicissitudes of life to run into the nitzotzos that he is charged to elevate.

Navigating the material world is no less an avodah than the performance of identifiable mitzvos. A Jew must believe that everything he does -- without any exception -- is part of avodas Hashem. How he acts is always governed by Torah.

Further, we recognize that not everyone acts with this kind of intention of elevating the ordinary to its Heavenly source. Not everyone keeps this in mind when he davens or learns. Yet we recognize that davening and learning without this perfect intention is still significant! It is still davening and learning! Similarly, when a person engages the world without this focus on the bits of ruchniyus around him, it is still a form of avodah. Minimally, he makes berachos before and after he eats, thus using the food to coronate the King. This is also a form of elevating the food. (It should be seen as an entry point to this avodah. A person must not be complacent with it, but always seek to climb to higher levels.)

We now have a different perspective on our pasuk. "If a man takes a vow...to prohibit something to himself (lit., to his nefesh)," i.e. if he prohibits himself from using something of this world, whose inner spiritual core is related to his individual nefesh, he denies himself the opportunity of elevating it. "He shall not desecrate his word." He must see to it that he has lost the opportunity only temporarily. He must not allow His Word -- the nitzotz emanating from the dvar Hashem -- to remain desecrated by being trapped in kelipos. Rather, "he shall do according to all that comes from his mouth:" he shall ensure that the nitzotzos of kedushah that came from Hashem's dibbur are properly attended to and elevated. (Based on Meor Einayim by R. Menachem Nochum zt"l of Chernobyl.) © 2023 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Although Sefer Devarim is the final "book" of the Torah, in a sense, Sefer Bamidbar is. That is because, while Devarim includes many new laws and accounts, it also repeats some, and is thus characterized by Chazal as "Mishneh Torah" -- the "repetition" or "second" Torah.

Which gives Matos and Mas'ei, Bamidbar's final parshios, the status, on some level, of the "end" of what began in Beraishis.

The thought is intriguing, since those parshios reflect elements we find at the Torah's start. The first sin in history (after Adam and Chava brought sin into the realm of possibility) was murder -- that of Hevel -- and Kayin's subsequent peripatetic life. And at the end of

Sefer Bamidbar, we have the law of orei miklat, the cities to which an accidental murderer (which, in a way, Kayin was, as he had never before witnessed death) flees. And the detailed masa'os, wandering-stops of the Jews in the desert, are reminiscent of Kayin's na vanad, "wandering to and fro."

Also prominent at the end of Sefer Bamidbar is the subject of speech: Like vows and the tenai -- "condition" -- made with Bnai Gad and Bnei Reuvain (with its halachic ramifications for verbal agreements). Even Bil'am's death by sword reflects the idea of the power of speech (see Rashi Bamidbar 31:8).

Speech is what, in parshas Beraishis, is identified as the essential human attribute: the Targum of nefesh chayah, "a living soul," famously is ruach memalela, "a speaking soul."

And, thus, it is the defining power of the nation Hashem chose to be an example to mankind. Forces of evil come with swords, guns and bombs. We come with tefillah and talmud Torah.

A particularly worthy thought during this period of the Jewish year, when we focus on the destruction of the Batei Mikdash and hope for the speedy arrival of the third and final one. © 2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Upon their return from the battle against Midian, Moshe angrily reprimanded the officers for not following his orders. Subsequently, when it was necessary to make the utensils taken in the booty kosher, Elazar the Kohen said: "This is the decree (for making utensils kosher)" Numbers 31:21).

Why did Elazar teach this law and not Moshe?

The Talmud answers that Moshe had forgotten the law due his anger. "If a person becomes enraged, if he is wise, he loses his wisdom, and if he is a prophet, he loses his prophecy" (Pesachim 66b).

Writes Rabbi Yehudah Leib Chasman, "The suspension of Moshe's prophetic powers and intellect was not a punishment. Far from it. Moshe's wrath was directed at those who failed to protect the Israelites from improper actions, and it was thus in the interest of Israel and for the greater glory of God. Nevertheless, Moshe suffered suspension of his enormous powers because of the toxic effects of rage are a natural phenomenon. A person who put his hand into a fire is not 'punished' by being burned. It is a natural consequence. Similarly, the loss of one's powers due to rage is a natural consequence rather than a punishment."

It is vital that one works to break the character trait of anger. *Dvar Torah from Twerski on Chumash by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.* © 2018 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

