

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

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

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

Moses was instantly alert to the risks. These two tribes were putting their own interests above those of the nation as a whole. They would be seen as abandoning their people at the very time they were needed most. There was a war -- in fact a series of wars -- to be fought if the Israelites were to inherit the Promised Land. As Moses put it to the tribes: "Should your fellow Israelites go to war while you sit here? Why

do you discourage the Israelites from crossing over into the land the Lord has given them?" (32:6-7). The proposal was potentially disastrous.

Moses reminded the men of Reuben and Gad what had happened in the incident of the spies. The spies demoralised the people, ten of them saying that they could not conquer the land. The inhabitants were too strong. The cities were impregnable. The result of that one moment was to condemn an entire generation to die in the wilderness and to delay the eventual conquest by forty years. "And here you are, a brood of sinners, standing in the place of your fathers and making the Lord even more angry with Israel. If you turn away from following Him, He will again leave all this people in the wilderness, and you will be the cause of their destruction." (Num. 32:14-15) Moses was blunt, honest and confrontational.

What then follows is a model illustration of positive negotiation and conflict resolution. The Reubenites and Gadites recognise the claims of the people as a whole and the justice of Moses' concerns. They propose a compromise: Let us make provisions for our cattle and our families, they say, and the men will then accompany the other tribes across the Jordan. They will fight alongside them. They will even go ahead of them. They will not return to their cattle and families until all the battles have been fought, the land has been conquered, and the other tribes have received their inheritance. Essentially they invoke what would later become a principle of Jewish law: *zeh neheneh vezeh lo chaser*, meaning, an act is permissible if "one side gains and the other side does not lose." (Bava Kamma 20b) We will gain, say the two tribes, by having land which is good for our cattle, but the nation as a whole will not lose because we will still be a part of the people, a presence in the army, we will even be on the front line, and we will stay there until the war has been won.

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

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the interests of the other tribes and of the nation as a whole have been secured. It is a masterclass in negotiation.

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

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

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

The negotiation between Moses and the two tribes in our parsha follows closely the principles arrived at by the Harvard Negotiation Project, set out by Roger Fisher and William Ury in their classic text, *Getting to Yes*. 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 expressed halachically as *zeh neheneh vezeh neheneh*, "Both sides benefit." This comes about because the two sides usually have different objectives, neither of which excludes the other.

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

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

Fourth, there was an agreement on objective criteria. The Reubenites and Gadites would not return to the east bank of the Jordan until all the other tribes were safely settled in their territories. And so it happened, as narrated in the book of Joshua: "Then Joshua summoned the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manashe and said to them, 'You have done all that Moses the servant of the Lord commanded, and you have obeyed me in everything I commanded. For a long time now -- to this very day -- you have not deserted your fellow Israelites but have carried out the mission the Lord your God gave you. Now that the Lord your God has given them rest as He promised, return to your homes in the land that Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side of the Jordan.'" (Joshua 22:1-4)

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

Note that Moses succeeds not because he is weak, not because he is willing to compromise on the integrity of the nation as a whole, not because he uses honeyed words and diplomatic evasions, but because

he is honest, principled, and focused on the common good. We all face conflicts in our lives. This is how to resolve them. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* © 2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Moses recorded the places of origin toward the places of destination... and these are the places of destination toward the places of origin" [Numbers 33:2]. Undoubtedly, the Exodus stands as the central event of our nation's collective consciousness, an event that we invoke daily in the Shema, on the Sabbath, on festivals, and after every meal. Still, when we consider the detail that our portion of Masei devotes to recording all 42 stops of the 40 year desert sojourn, we're a little taken aback. One chapter devotes 45 verses to listing all 42 locations, and since each location was not only a place where the Israelites camped, but also a place from which they journeyed, each place name is mentioned twice. Why such detail? Different commentators take different approaches.

The Sforno maintains that the plethora of locations is a way of highlighting the merit of the Jewish people, who, "in the loving kindness of their youth, followed God into the desert, a land not sown" (Jeremiah 2:2). And the Sefat Emet suggests that the names of the encampments are included to demonstrate that wherever the Jewish people travelled through our long history, we have been able to create Tikkun Olam – making a profound impact on our environment.

This week, I would like to concentrate on the commentary of Nahmanides. Apparently, he is troubled not only by the delineation of each stage of the journey, but also by the additional declaration that "...Moses wrote their goings forth, according to their stations, by the commandment of God..." (Numbers 33:1-2). These words suggest that the actual recording of these journeys has importance. In approaching the issue, Nahmanides first quotes Rashi who says that Moses "set his mind to write down the travels. By doing this, he intended to inform future generations of the loving kindness of God...who protected His nation despite their manifold travels". Nachmanides, then quotes Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed, 3: 50) who understands the detail as a means of corroborating the historical truth of the narrative. He adds that later generations might think they sojourned in a "desert that was near cultivated land, oases which were comfortable for human habitation, places in which it was possible to till and reap or to feed on plants, areas with many wells...", hence the enumeration of all these way-stations is to emphasize the extent of the miracle

of Israelite subsistence. After quoting these views, Nahmanides concludes with his own most intriguing comment: "The recording of the journeys was a Divine commandment, either for reasons mentioned above, or for a purpose the secret of which has not been revealed to us...". Nahmanides seems to be prompting us to probe further.

I would submit that the secret he refers to may indeed be the secret of Jewish survival. After all, the concept of "ma'aseh avot siman l'banim" – that the actions of the fathers are a sign of what will happen to the children – was well known to the sages, and one of the guiding principles of Nahmanides's Biblical commentary. Perhaps, the hidden message of this text is an outline of the future course of Jewish history. From the time of the destruction of the Temple, until our present return to the Land of Israel – the "goings forth" of the Jewish people certainly comprise at least 42 stages: Judea, Babylon, Persia, Rome, Europe, North Africa and the New World. As Tevye the Milkman explains in Fiddler on the Roof when he is banished from Anatevka, "Now you know why Jewish adults wear hats; we must always be ready to set out on a journey!" Moreover, each Diaspora was important in its own right, and made its own unique contribution to the text (Oral Law) and texture (customs) of the sacred kaleidoscope which is the Jewish historical experience. Are not the Holocaust memorial books, where survivors try to preserve what little can be kept of lost worlds, examples of our sense that God commanded us to write things down – to remember? Perhaps the Jews didn't invent history, but they understood that the places of Jewish wanderings, the content of the Jewish lifestyle, and the miracle of Jewish survival are more important than those hieroglyphics which exalt and praise rulers and their battles. The "secret" Nahmanides refers to may not only be a prophetic vision of our history, but a crucial lesson as to what gave us the strength, the courage and the faith to keep on going, to keep on moving, to withstand the long haul of exile.

If we look at the verse where Moses writes down the journey according to the command of God, we read that Moses recorded "their starting points toward their destinations at God's command and those were their destinations toward their starting points". What does this mean? Why does the same verse conclude "destinations toward starting points?" Fundamental to our history as a nation is that we are constantly traveling – on the road to the Promised Land, on the journey towards redemption. That direction was given to us at the dawn of our history: in Hebron, with the Cave of the Couples, beginning with Abraham and Sarah, and their gracious hospitality to everyone, their righteous compassion and just morality; and in Jerusalem, the city of peace. Even as we move down the road of time, we must always recall the place

of our origin.

When S.Y. Agnon received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he was asked about his birthplace. To the interviewer's surprise, he answered that he was born in Jerusalem. The interviewer pointed out that everyone knew he had been born in Buczacz, a town in Galicia. Agnon corrected him: "I was born in Jerusalem more than 3,000 years ago. That was my beginning, my origin. Buczacz in Galicia is only one of the stopping-off points".

Only two princes of tribes who served as scouts reached the Promised Land: Caleb and Joshua; Caleb because he visited the graves of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs in Hebron, and Joshua because the name of God, the author of the revelation was added to his name. Only these two set out for the Promised Land with their place of origin at the forefront of their consciousness. Only those with a proud past can look forward to a glorious future.

As long as we wander with our place of origin firmly in mind, we will assuredly reach our goal. We may leave our place of origin for our destination, but our places of origin in Israel will remain our ultimate destiny. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he combination of these two sections of the Torah constitutes the question, raised by all commentators over the ages, as to whether there is a connection between these two Parshiot, or is it just a matter of calendar convenience that unites them is one Torah reading on this coming Sabbath.

I have always believed that there are no random occurrences or events as they appear in the text in the Torah and in other holy writings. The Torah is not a random work, and these sections of the book are also not randomly put together. There must be a connecting bond, a common denominator that unites these two apparently disparate and different sections of the Torah.

I feel that it is in the relationship between the Jewish people and the land of Israel that is the connection that links Matot and Maasei. In this reading of Matot, we are told of the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to settle themselves and their families, their flocks, their wealth, and talents outside the strict borders of the land of Israel. They point out to Moshe all the advantages that they would enjoy if he allowed them to take their share in the land of Israel east of the Jordan River.

Moshe resists their plan, and sharply criticizes them for advancing it publicly. However, he is powerless to change their minds and alter their demands. He reaches an accommodation with them, i.e. that they will participate in the conquest of the land of Israel itself and not forsake their brothers in the

struggle to obtain the land of Israel for the tribes of Israel. However, it is obvious that even this result, to settle east of the Jordan River, is a disappointment.

Advancing in history, we see that centuries later the tribes of Reuven and Gad were the earliest ones who were forced into exile, losing their land and independence.

In the second section of this week's Torah reading, we have the entire list of all the way stations that the Jewish people experienced during their sojourn in the desert of Sinai. Rashi is quick to point out that every one of these places had memories for the Jewish people, and were not just simply names of places, but, rather, descriptions of past events. Each place was a challenge and a test. We find in Judaism and Jewish thought that maintaining Jewish values is not always convenient. It demands sacrifice and memory of historical importance. In our time, many Jews, if not most of them, have again chosen to live outside the confines of the land of Israel. I do not mean to criticize any of them for this choice, but I merely make the observation that for almost all these Jews, it is a matter of convenience. It is the same type of convenience that led the tribes of Reuven and Gad to prefer the pasture lands of Transjordan over the land of Israel itself. It certainly was more convenient for them to do so, but the hard truth about Judaism is that it is never convenient -- it is demanding, insistent and unwavering.

Remembering fondly all the way stations that we have experienced over our long exile in this world may create within us a feeling of nostalgia, but that is only because we do not directly face the lessons of exile, and what was endured throughout the centuries. It is certainly not for me to criticize Jews who choose to live outside of the land of Israel. It is their choice, and many, if not most, have good reasons to do so. But none of this changes the historical fact that only in the land of Israel do the Jewish people have a future, and only there will they be able to truly fulfill the mission set forth for them at Mount Sinai. ©2021 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**P**arashat Mattot opens up by presenting the importance of fulfilling vows. As the Torah states, "He shall not break [yachel] his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth" (Numbers 30:3).

Jewish law posits that while the person who has taken the vow cannot nullify it, others, comprising a lay court, can cancel the vow for him. This is commonly done during the period of the High Holidays in a ceremony called hatarat nedarim.

What is fascinating is that an example offered by the Talmud concerning nullification is a vow made by God. This occurs when God decides to destroy the Jewish People after they build the golden calf. Moses intercedes. The verb used for that intercession is va'yechal, the very term used in our text. As Rava in the Talmud said: "Moses stood before God until he cancelled His vows" (Berachot 32a).

In that cancellation, Moses tells God, "Let not Your anger blaze forth against Your people whom You delivered from Egypt" (Exodus 32:11). We can imagine Moses saying to God, Perhaps You acted precipitously without taking into consideration that the Israelites just came out of Egypt after serving hundreds of years of bondage. It's understandable that they made a golden calf, as calves were commonly worshipped in Egypt.

Furthermore, Moses asks God whether He took into account that with the annihilation of Israel, the covenantal promise made to the patriarchs and matriarchs would never be fulfilled (32:13).

God hears Moses's arguments, and in the end God's vows are upended. As the Torah states, "And the Lord regretted of the evil which He said He would do to His people" (32:14).

And so, the vows of our portion can be extended to the divine sphere. Like human vows, they can be negated.

Is it a coincidence that the portion of Mattot is always read on the days between the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av, when we remember the destruction of the Temple? Does the reading about vows include our prayer to God: "If You have made a decree against the Jewish People, rethink Your words, and allow us, like Moses of old, to nullify Your vows." ©2021 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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"W**hen a man makes a vow to Hashem... he should not pass over his words; like all that comes out of his mouth shall he do." (Bamidbar 30:2) The last few parshiyos have discussed the power that we have in our mouths. Whether blessing others, holding back from disparaging them, or declaring festivals, we have been granted a powerful tool for good in the speech Hashem gives us.

This week we discuss another power we have, that of forbidding things to ourselves which are otherwise permitted. A person may, for example, vow that he will not eat chocolate. He is then forbidden to do so, unless he approaches a chacham and an opportunity found to explain that he didn't fully realize the ramifications of such a vow and that he would not have made it if so. One might also make a promise not

to eat or do something that is already forbidden, as a means of steeling himself against his Yetzer Hara.

It is therefore strange that the Torah tells us that whatever he said, "he should do." In most cases, he is NOT doing. Whether desisting from eating or taking pleasure in whatever it is, it seems that he is not "doing" something, but rather that the only "doing" would be if he transgressed that vow. (Of course, he can DO things to help him avoid the prohibition.)

Just as the word "yachel" can mean not to pass over and ignore his words, and also not to profane his words, meaning that what he says is holy and has power, the word "yaaseh" can be translated in multiple ways. It can mean that what he says, he shall do, but also that what he says, he shall "become."

When Yaakov Avinu had the famous dream of the ladder to Heaven, he awoke and made a vow. He said, "If Hashem provides me with my needs and returns me safely to my father's house, then He will be my G-d." The commentaries ask what this means. If Hashem did not give him all those things, would He NOT be Yaakov's G-d?

One answer is that Yaakov was agreeing to live on a higher level. The name Hashem is one of mercy, while Elokim (G-d) is one of justice. Yaakov was vowing to become a person who lived an elevated life, one that could pass the scrutiny of even the name Elokim.

So, too, the person who makes the vow is not merely deciding not to eat a certain food. Rather, he has an endgame in mind; he is trying to become a different, and better, person. The vow is a symbol of this change. Therefore, the Torah says, "Do not make your words profane," by only focusing on the act. Rather, "as you have said, so shall you 'become.'" Utilize the vow as you initially intended it, as a means of coming "LaShem," closer to Hashem, and being a better person.

Depriving one's self of pleasures (think fast days) is not about suffering, but about finding meaning and purpose in all that we do and partake of. It is about using this world; both the things that go into our mouths and the words that come out of our mouths, to become ever-more lofty human beings and connecting to our Father in Heaven.

*A young Jewish man had a dire illness which required frequent blood transfusions. At the hospital one day, the boy's younger brother expressed a desire to donate some life-saving blood. His father said no, because the hospital rule was that one needed to be sixteen in order to donate blood.*

*"I'll be sixteen next week! Who will know? What's the difference?" the boy protested. But his father was adamant. "So, you will say that you are sixteen when you are not? That's not truthful. You should always speak "emes." And that was that.*

*A few days later, the younger boy was in a car accident and lost a lot of blood. Hearing about the*

prevented transfusion, the doctors later said that had he given blood the previous week, he would not have survived. His life was saved by his passing on the blood donation, in favor of truth. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

### 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 (*mochel*) 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

## A Message of Teshuva

After several other halachic statements (laws) from Moshe about doing battle, the Torah tells us, "And Elazar the Kohen said to the soldiers that came to the war, this is the law of the Torah that Hashem

commanded Moshe." What Elazar taught the soldiers is not yet relevant to our discussion, for several questions immediately arise from this sentence alone: (1) Why is Elazar teaching a law to the soldiers instead of Moshe?, (2) Is the message that Elazar teaches a lesson which is particularly relevant from a Kohen?, (3) And why is Elazar teaching a law only to the soldiers when the law that he is teaching will apply to all of B'nei Yisrael?

The Talmud says that a student is not permitted to teach a law in the presence of his teacher. Since most laws were passed down from teacher to student, the more authentic teaching is the original statement and not the possible misstatement by the student. All the more would it be considered an insult to Moshe, who had taught the Torah to everyone. It cannot be possible that Elazar would then teach a law in front of Moshe without a reason. One must understand the events which led to his decision. Earlier in the parasha, Moshe was commanded by Hashem, "you will surely avenge B'nei Yisrael from the hands of the Midianites and afterwards you will be gathered to your people (you will die)." Elazar understood this to mean that Moshe would die that day as soon as the soldiers would return. This presented Elazar with a problem. He understood from Moshe that "there is no rule on the day of death." Elazar was afraid that Moshe would fail to remind the soldiers about a particularly timely law because his "Torah" would have left him on that day of his death. Elazar had seen that Moshe had already placed his hands on Yehoshua to pass on the leadership to him. This meant that Moshe would no longer be teaching the laws. Yet, when Elazar taught the halacha, he was careful to add the words "that Hashem commanded Moshe." In that way he taught the law in the name of his teacher.

The second and third questions that our pasuk prompted can be answered together. What did Elazar teach the soldiers and why was it necessary to teach them and not the entire B'nei Yisrael? The laws that were taught were the laws of kashering (making kosher) a pot or other cooking utensil. The soldiers in battle were given certain leniencies that would never be granted them under normal circumstances. When the B'nei Yisrael fought against Midian, they were allowed to use the pots and pans of the enemy even if they had been used to cook pigs. The Rambam wrote that they were even permitted to eat forbidden foods with Hashem's permission while in battle as food is difficult to find in a war. When the soldiers returned from battle and brought with them these pots and pans, Elazar was afraid that they might think that once these pots were permitted, they were permitted even without kashering them. These soldiers also were not familiar with the kashering process, since this was not relevant to them normally. But why not teach all of B'nei Yisrael at the same time? One must remember that the number of

soldiers was kept at a minimum. There had been only twelve thousand soldiers in the battle out of six hundred thousand who were eligible to serve. These soldiers needed this information now, and the rest of B'nei Yisrael could be taught at a later time.

There is one other nuance that is relevant to our questions. It was important for Elazar to teach the soldiers this law at this time because there would be other situations that would demand the same type of immediate action. After the B'nei Yisrael entered Cana'an and began their conquest of the land, Yehoshua would be faced with a similar problem. When the soldiers went into battle, those same leniencies that were granted the soldiers in the desert were granted the soldiers within Cana'an itself. Pinchas was grateful to his father Elazar for demonstrating that either he or Yehoshua would need to remind the soldiers of these laws during the conquest of Cana'an. In that way, Elazar also demonstrated that these laws were particularly necessary and pertinent to those who were soldiers and not to the entire B'nei Yisrael.

There is one more point that should get our attention. Was this particular halacha one during which Moshe should have remained silent? The law of kashering pots and cooking utensils, follows a basic principle in law, "k'bolo kach polto, as it swallows so it spits out." The same way in which a pot is used is the same way in which it is kashered. If a pot or pan normally cooks food by means of fire directly onto the food without boiling it (frying, e.g.), then the way in which we kasher the pot is by applying fire directly to it (blow torch). A pan which is normally used for boiling is kashered by putting it in boiling water filling the pot with water and boiling it. Than a large rock which has been heated is placed in it, making the water overflow so that there is boiling water on the inside and the outside at the same time.

This same concept of "k'bolo kach polto" can also apply to sins. We are told that the only way that a person has a complete "teshuva, return to righteousness" is to face a similar temptation but to get control of that temptation and not give in to it. What was Moshe's sin? He became angry with the B'nei Yisrael when they complained for water after Miriam's death and the disappearance of her well. He called them hamorim, the rebellious ones. Because Moshe demonstrated his anger and cast aspersions on the people, Moshe was forbidden to lead them into the Promised Land. With Elazar, we see a situation which could have led Moshe to become even angrier. His student taught a law while he was present. He could have seen Elazar as a rebel, still he remained quiet. This was perhaps his final test and the final opportunity for him to demonstrate "teshuva gemura, a complete return to the proper path of Hashem." Hashem had presented Moshe with a similar situation, and he was

able to distance himself from passing judgment this time.

As we go into the months of Av and Elul, may we look into ourselves to discover the things which we need to correct in our own lives. Let us not focus on what our neighbor must correct, but what we can do to improve our own personal behavior. Let us not fail to take this opportunity to do the teshuva that we personally need. ©2021 Rabbi D. Levin

### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**P**arashat Matot begins with the laws of Nedarim / vows to prohibit items or actions that otherwise are permitted by the Torah -- for example, a vow not to eat a specific permitted food or not to interact with a specific person. R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: The Mitzvot in general, especially those which are obligations toward Hashem alone (as opposed to inter-personal obligations) are intended to achieve specific results: to draw a person closer to Hashem, and to sanctify one's deeds, thoughts, and beliefs. The Torah's goal is to accomplish these aims within the framework of everyday life; therefore, the Torah is not too heavy-handed in its demands.

R' Kook continues: The Torah aims to address the spiritual needs of every individual, but, when all is said and done, it is directed toward the nation as a whole, and it therefore speaks generally. Even so, G-d forbid that any person take upon himself to breach the Torah's boundaries, even if he thinks that his personal spirituality will benefit thereby. The Torah's demands do not change because of the feelings of an individual or even a group. In areas where the Torah's demands are well-established, no individual or group may say that his or her spiritual needs require a different law.

Having said that, R' Kook writes, the Torah does provide a mechanism for addressing a person's personal spiritual needs, and that is through Nedarim. If a person feels that he will benefit spiritually from behaving in a more holy way or distancing himself from pleasures more than the Torah requires, the Torah gives him a process for doing so -- i.e., by taking a vow to refrain from some object, act, or behavior. (Ain Ayah: Shabbat 1:37)

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"Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, 'Take vengeance for Bnei Yisrael against the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered unto your people.' Moshe spoke to the people, saying, 'Arm men from among yourselves for the legion that they may act against Midian to inflict Hashem's vengeance against Midian.'" (31:2-3) Rashi z"l writes: The expression Moshe used, "Hashem's vengeance," is equivalent to the expression Hashem employed, "Vengeance for

Bnei Yisrael," because, if one attacks Yisrael, it is as though he has attacked the Holy One, blessed is He. [Until here from Rashi]

It emerges, observes R' Yosef Tendler z"l (1932-2012; Menahel of Mechinat Ner Israel in Baltimore, Maryland), that vengeance for Hashem and vengeance for Bnei Yisrael are one and the same.

R' Tendler continues in the name of R' Avraham Yaakov Pam z"l (1913-2001; Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath in Brooklyn, N.Y.): We recite in the Al Ha'nissim prayer on Chanukah, "You, in Your great mercy, fought their fight." Why was the war against the Greeks the Jewish People's fight? After all, the Greeks did not seek to destroy the Jewish People, only the Jewish religion! It should have been Hashem's fight! R' Pam explains: The Jewish People of that time understood that a life without Torah is not worth living; therefore, the Greeks' attack on the Torah was an attack on the Jewish People. It was our fight.

R' Tendler adds: We read in Tehilim (1:2), "But his desire is in the Torah of Hashem, and in His Torah he meditates day and night." The Gemara (Kiddushin 32b) notes that the phrase, "His Torah" -- referring to Hashem's Torah -- also can be read, "his Torah" -- man's Torah. Says the Gemara: "First it is 'the Torah of Hashem,' then it becomes 'his Torah' -- the Torah of the person who studies it. When we study Torah properly, we will come to feel that an attack on the Torah is an attack on our Torah and, therefore, an attack on us. (Od Yosef Chai)

"These are the journeys of Bnei Yisrael..." (33:1) On the verse (Vayikra 6:6), "An eternal flame shall burn on the altar, it shall not be extinguished," the Talmud Yerushalmi comments: "Even during the travels." What does this teach us?

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (the "Reisha Rav"; killed in the Holocaust in 1941) writes: There is an awesome ethical lesson here. When a person is at home, he is less likely to sin. Even if the Yetzer Ha'ra tempts him, he will overcome the Yetzer Ha'ra because he knows that whatever he does will come to the attention of his friends and neighbors. Not so when a person is traveling. When he is away, he can act with impunity and it will not become known at home. This fact is alluded to in the verse (Bereishit 4:7), "Sin lurks at the door." When one leaves the door of his house, he is more likely to sin.

However, "Fortunate is one who fears Hashem, who goes in his ways" (Tehilim 128:1). Even when he goes on his way, he fears Hashem. [Note that most commentaries translate: "His ways," referring to G-d.]

This, writes R' Lewin, is the Yerushalmi's message: The eternal flame of love of G-d should burn on the altar in a person's heart even when he travels. As Tehilim (119:1) says, "Fortunate are those who are perfect on the road, who go with G-d's Torah."

(Ha'drash V'Ha'iyun II p.91)

"Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journeys at the bidding of Hashem..." (33:2) R' Avraham Dov Ber z"l (1760-1840; Chassidic Rebbe and rabbi of Ovruch, Ukraine; later in Tzefat) writes: The Torah intends that we learn a practical lesson from the description of Bnei Yisrael's travels. He explains:

The primary purpose of being in Eretz Yisrael is to attain Yir'at Ha'romemut / awe of the Creator, the King of Kings, the Holy One blessed is He. Since that is where the primary revelation of His Shechinah takes place, that is where a person can easily accept the yoke of His dominion, on the one hand, and attain humility, on the other hand.

The purpose of Bnei Yisrael's travels through the desolate wilderness, a place of snakes, serpents and scorpions (Devarim 8:15), was so that they could appreciate that there is another type of Yir'ah, i.e., fear of physical things. They needed to know -- as do we, hence we read of their travels -- that such Yir'ah exists, even though it is not the ideal form of Yir'ah. Yir'at Ha'romemut / awe of G-d is the ideal, while Yir'ah / simple fear can be a stepping-stone to that higher level. Ultimately, though, one should fear nothing but Hashem. (Bat Ayin)

This week, the month of Tammuz ends, and the month of Av begins. R' Chaim Kanievski shlita (Bnei Brak, Israel) writes: "Tammuz" is the name of an idol (see Yechezkel 8:14). Our Sages gave the month this name because, on the seventeenth of the month, an idol was placed in the Heichal / sanctuary of the Bet Hamikdash. [This is one of the five reasons we fast on the 17th of Tammuz (see Ta'anit 26b).]

The word "Av" -- literally, "father" -- connotes consolation, as in Eichah (5:3), "We have become orphans, with no 'Av'." This alludes to the fact that it is parents who console their children, as we read (Yeshayah 66:13), "Like a man whose mother consoles him." (Si'ach Ha'nechamah) © 2021 S. Katz & torah.org

