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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **MATOS MASEI** - 5767

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Parsha Page

by **Fred Toczek** - A Service of Anshe Emes

Matos

D. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

The Importance of Speech. Although this Parsha specifically addresses vows, the Torah commentaries have broadened this concept to apply to everything that one says. Torah places great emphasis on words. Verbal blessings are considered important, and the Talmud states that not only is there great value to a Tzaddik's blessing, but also to an ordinary person's blessing. One should not utter curses, and be careful not to say ominous words about oneself. Verbal communication is a prominent difference between man and lower forms of life. This special gift to mankind should not be treated lightly. Many volumes have been written about *shmiras halashon* (guarding one's tongue). In our daily prayers, we say "My G-d, prevent my tongue from speaking evil and my lips from uttering deceit. As with all other prayers for Divine assistance, we must first exert our own efforts (in this case, to guard our tongues).

E. Reflections on the Sedra (Rabbi Zalman Posner)

Caring for others. When several tribes approached Moshe for permission to stay in trans-Jordan, he retorted, "Your brothers go into battle and you will sit here?" Here a familiar integral theme of Torah recurs. Anyone living in comfort and security finds it difficult to realize the situation of those in want and peril. We may read of famines in Africa and sympathetically nod, but undismayed we turn to the next item in the newspaper and with little appreciable loss of appetite sit down for dinner. Only a person of responsibility to mankind and with rare compassion will be moved enough to share the troubles of the unfortunate. With Israel especially, one Jew's peril is every Jew's concern. No Jew anywhere in the world can hide from problems plaguing other Jews.

Massei

D. Living Each Week (Rabbi Abraham Twerski)

1. Spirituality: A Gradual Process. In describing the journeys of the Israelites during their forty years in the desert, the Torah not only enumerates the various resting places, but at each point states, "They traveled from A and camped at B. They traveled from B and camped at C, etc." Since the Torah doesn't even have a single superfluous letter, why doesn't it simply state, "They camped at A, B, C, etc."? The Torah commentaries state that the forty years in the desert were a period of spiritual growth and development necessary to prepare the Jews for

entrance into the holy land of Israel. The people that were capable of the lack of faith and trust in G-d manifested by the Golden Calf and the episode of the spies required a lengthy course in spiritual development, which they received under the tutelage of Moshe. Each encampment symbolizes another step in this process of spiritual development. While achieving spirituality is essential, it must proceed gradually. Only after the Jews had solidified their spiritual growth at a particular encampment were they able to travel to the next point, and if they regressed in their spiritual development, they had to go back and recoup the spirituality they had lost before they were able to progress further.

2. Maintaining a positive attitude. "They traveled from Marah and came to Elim, and in Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palms, and they camped there." Inasmuch as the Torah does not describe any of the other camping sites, why does the Torah find it important to describe the features of Elim? In his commentary on the Parsha of Beshalach (supra), the Baal Shem Tov noted that the Israelites were unable to drink the water in Marah because they, the Israelites, were bitter. It is a common that when a person is in a state of depression and has an attitude of bitterness, everything appears to be bitter, regardless of how sweet it may be in reality. We must realize that our perception can be grossly distorted by our mood. The Torah teaches us this in the episode of Hagar and Ishmael, in which Hagar abandoned Ishmael in the desert, stating that she could not bear to see him die of thirst. "G-d opened her eyes and she saw a well of water." The Torah is telling us that the well was there the whole time, but in her state of depression she didn't see it. In Elim there were springs of water and seventy palms. Of what value is seventy palms to a population of several million? Having rid themselves of their dejection at Marah, coming upon a small oasis was a pleasant event. When they "traveled from Marah," (i.e., when they separated themselves from their bitterness), then camping at Elim was a great event. Some of life's events may cause us to become dejected. We must try to overcome this mood, and develop a positive attitude, because in a state of dejection, we may perceive reality in a negative light, whereas in a state of *simchah* (joy), we can recognize everything we have as a precious gift.

E. Chassidic Dimension/In the Garden of the Torah (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, z"l)

The "encampments" of the Jews. While the Torah refers to the "journeys" of the Jews, it is actually referring to where they encamped (in fact, the Jews spend the majority of the forty years in encampments, not in travel). Why? The ultimate purpose of travels and encampments was to reach Israel -- the encampments are referred to as "journeys" since they served no purpose in and of themselves. The Bal Shem Tov noted that the "encampments" refer to the various stages of spiritual growth to be experienced during life's journey. Each step of the journey represents in and of itself a phase of holiness and possesses an importance of its own. However, in order for one to attain the next spiritual level, he must be "on the move" -- if he stagnates or merely moves to a comparable level, he is considered stationary. "On the move" means that he has totally departed from his previous level. Thus, the verse emphasizes "journey" to remind us that we must always be on the "upward move," constantly striving to reach an infinitely higher spiritual level than our current level. The forty-two "journeys" of the Jews allowed them to reach the proper spiritual level to enter Israel.

F. Majesty of Man (Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz)

Remembering the painful moments of our journeys. Rashi quotes a Midrash that explains, via parable, why Hashem chose to recount the Israelite's travels: A king once took his ill son abroad to find a cure; during their journey home (after the boy had been cured), he recounted the stops along the way -- "here you had a fever . . .", etc. Similarly, Hashem recounted all of the places where the Jews had angered Him on the way to Israel. However, unlike the king who recounted the stops to evoke feelings

of relief and thankfulness, Hashem's actions are harder to fathom for they don't seem to conjure feelings of relief and thankfulness. But, Hashem has infinite love for the Jewish people; even when we sin and act with ingratitude towards Him, He doesn't view it in that light -- in His eyes, these are merely temporary illnesses. Hashem's love and compassion for the Jewish people is particularly uplifting during the Three Weeks preceding the 9th of Av, reminding us that our teshuvah (repentance) doesn't fall on "deaf ears".

H. Parsha Parables (Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky)

Kinder, gentler killers. In this Parsha, we learn about the Orei Miklot (Cities of Refuge). In addition to killers, the Levites lived in these cities; there the Levites played an integral role in the killers' rehabilitation. The sentence imposed on the killers was also unique, since it was defined by circumstance (i.e., it lasted until the Kohein Gadol's death), not time. Thus, the Midrash says, the Kohein Gadol's family were worried that the convicts would pray for the Kohein Gadol's early death; thus, in order to dissuade them, the Kohein Gadol's mother would distribute food and clothing to the convicts. It is hard to understand. Didn't the convicts have loved ones waiting for him/her with food and clothing? Was the Kohein Gadol's mother's food worth exile in the City of Refuge? Rabbi Aryeh Levine took it upon himself to visit Jewish inmates. Becoming like a father to these prisoners, he brought them food, clothes and love. For years, despite terrible weather conditions, he never missed a lengthy Shabbos visit. Once, in the midst of a Shabbos service, he was called out of the prison by a very excited messenger. Reb Aryeh's daughter had become paralyzed, and the doctors were helpless. He was needed for support at home -- immediately. After Shabbos, a messenger was sent by the concerned inmates to inquire what tragedy had interrupted the Rabbi's weekly visit. The next Shabbos, despite the enduring tragedy at home, Reb Aryeh went to the prison as usual. Normally, during the Torah reading, prisoners pledged a few coins to charity. That week the donations were far different. "I will give up a week of my life for the sake of Reb Aryeh's daughter," the first convict pledged. Another prisoner pledged a month of his life. Each one called to the Torah upped the previous pledge until the last prisoner cried out, "what is our life compared to Reb Aryeh's anguish? I will give all my remaining days for the sake of the Rabbi's daughter." At this remarkable display of love and affection, Reb Aryeh broke down and wept. Miraculous as it may sound, that Saturday night Reb Aryeh's daughter began to move; within days she had fully recovered. The Orei Miklot were not jails or detention camps. They were an environment in which reckless people became aware of the serious ramifications of their careless actions. Constantly under the influence of the Levites, the prisoners would observe them pray, learn and teach, and see the epitome of awareness and care for fellow human beings. The mission of the Kohein Gadol's mother was not merely to distribute food; its true purpose was to develop a bond with those people whose carelessness spurred death. They saw the love a mother had for her son, and how a total stranger would make certain that their needs were met. The Torah cannot punish without teaching and rehabilitating. As it infuses a love for life and spirituality into former careless killers, its goal is to mold a new person whose attitude will cause him to be kinder, gentler and more careful.

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Parshat Masei "The Land that shall Fall to You"

Rosh Hayeshiva Rav Mordechai Greenberg shlita

The book of Bamidbar concludes the period of exile in the desert. At the end of the forty years, Am Yisrael stands at the entrance to Eretz Yisrael,

conquers the east-bank of the Jordan River, delineates the borders of Israel and prepares for war.

This is a commandment for generations, as the Ramban writes: "'You shall possess the land and settle in it' - that we shall not leave it in the hands of a nation other than us or allow it to become barren." (Bamidbar 33:53) Despising the precious land brought about the long exile. However, many people still ask: Why did Hashem "lock us" us in this particular tract of land?

The Ramban writes at length on this subject in Parshat Acharei-Mot. Rav Kook encapsulates the idea succinctly in his opening to Orot: "Eretz Yisrael is not something external, an external possession of the nation, merely as a means to the goal of collective joining and of maintaining its material or even spiritual existence. Eretz Yisrael is connected by a bond of life to the nation."

Every means has a substitute. When Eretz Yisrael is seen as a means towards the security of Am Yisrael, as a national or even cultural center, it is possible in times of distress to find a substitute. However, Eretz Yisrael is a land of life: "I shall walk before Hashem in the lands of the living." (Tehillim 116:9) Chazal teach that this is Eretz Yisrael. The Torah writes several times: "That you may live, and you will come and possess the land." (Devarim 4:1) Since Am Yisrael is characterized by: "You who cling to Hashem, your G-d - you are all alive today," (Devarim 4:4) it is impossible to maintain this kind of life and attachment anywhere but in the land of life. Just as a person does not seek explanations for life itself, there also should be no need to look for reasons to live in Eretz Yisrael, because that is where life really is. Am Yisrael can only find a full life in this place. Chazal teach that the pasuk: "The dove could not find a resting place for the sole of its foot" (Bereishit 8:9), alludes to Knesset Yisrael, which is compared to a dove. For this it says: "Among those nations you will not be tranquil, there will be no rest for the sole of your foot." (Devarim 28:65)

On the other hand, gentiles cannot find peace in Eretz Yisrael. The Ramban writes about Eretz Yisrael: "They are unworthy of you, and you are not appropriate for them."

Eretz Yisrael is not just a place that people live in. It is the "Sanctuary of Hashem," as the Ramban writes. The Torah writes about it: "Cain left the presence of Hashem" (Bereishit 4:16), "Yonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Hashem." (Yonah 1:3) Therefore, the Ramban writes: "It is impossible to comment any more on the subject of the Land, but if you are worthy of understanding the first [mention in the Torah of] "land," you will understand a great and hidden secret, and you will understand what our rabbis meant that the Temple above corresponds to the temple below." His intention is that the pasuk: "In the beginning of G-d's creating the Heavens and the land" (Bereishit 1:1) should be interpreted that Hashem first created the upper and only then did he create the parallel land below.

This is what the Torah means when it states in the Parsha: "This is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance." (Bamidbar 34:2) Chazal ask: "Can the land fall?"

The Sfat Emet explains Chazal's answer, that so long as the Canaanites were in Eretz Yisrael, the necessary vessels to contain the land above were not yet formed. However, when Am Yisrael enter the land, the land above drops and connects with the land below, thus creating compatibility between Heaven and earth.

The war over Eretz Yisrael is not about territories and other national rights. This is a global war over Hashem's Throne in the world. "For the Hand is on the Throne (kes) of G-d" (Shemot 17:16) - Hashem's name is incomplete and His Throne is incomplete. Therefore, the war in the end will focus on Yerushalayim because: "At that time people will call Yerushalayim 'the Throne (kisei) of Hashem'" (Yirmiyahu 3:17) and the nations wish to prevent this. Otherwise, it is impossible to understand this great interest of all the nations in such a small place.

However, we are sure of: "Not one of Your words is turned back to its origin unfulfilled" (Haftarah blessings), and, "May our eyes behold your return to Zion in compassion." (Shemoneh Esrei prayer)

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PARSHAS MATTOS/MASSEI He shall not desecrate his word. (30:3) A Jew's word is sacred, so that to renege his word is to violate it. Chazal assert that while a Jew may not break his own word, a Torah scholar or a bais din of three competent Jews may permit him to "take back" his word. This teaches us the awesome power of talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars. While we are well aware that bais din has the power of hefker bais din hefker, being able to nullify and renounce ownership of a person's property, it would seem that this is applicable only concerning monetary possessions, while Biblical prohibitions, such as those created through a Jew's sacred word, are different. These prohibitions apparently remain beyond the scope of the Torah scholar. We see from this pasuk that this is not the case. Everything within Jewish life falls under the domain of the talmid chacham.

The Kli Yakar explains why a talmid chacham or a bais din of three common Jews have the power to nullify a vow, just as a husband may annul his wife's vow and a father may nullify his daughter's vow. He says that prior to marriage, a young woman is under the r'shus, authority, of her father. Once she marries, she is in the r'shus of her husband. She may not do anything without her father's or husband's permission. Thus, when she makes a vow, it is as if she were saying, "I am making this vow providing that my father or my husband agree with its ramifications. If they do not grant permission for this vow, I take it back." Likewise, every Jew places his trust in the chachamim of each generation. He is under their authority and guidance. What they declare is accepted. Therefore, when a Jew makes a vow, he is basically saying, "I will or will not do this based upon the approval of the chachamim." They have the right to nullify the vow, because its sacredness is dependent upon them.

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, derives from here that the Torah wants the Jew to remain attached to chachamim throughout his life. This is the meaning of emunas chachamim, trust and faith in the Torah scholar, so that if they do not agree with what he has in mind to do, he will not do it. One should not do anything without their approval.

Indeed, emunas chachamim is one of the forty-eight ways to acquire Torah. We believe that a Jew should not rely on his own subjective decision. The Torah decides if, when and how one should take action. The Torah input is rendered by the Torah scholar who interprets the law and determines how to integrate its word in every given situation.

In Pirkei Avos, our Chazal have taught us that we acquire Torah through forty-eight qualifications. Among them is emunas chachamim. As Hashem's representatives, the trust we place in our sages reflects the trust we place in Hashem. It goes without saying that the Torah scholar's behavior must be worthy of reverence. Indeed, the trust we place in our Torah leadership consists of two aspects: trust in his personal character; and trust in his wisdom. How does this trust work?

The very first teacher of Klal Yisrael was Moshe Rabbeinu. When the time came to share his Torah with the seventy elders Hashem said, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Yisrael and I will draw from the spirit which is upon you, and I will put it upon them." (Bamidbar 11:16) The Midrash adds, "To what was Moshe then compared? To a burning candle set in a menorah from which many lights are kindled, yet its own light is

not diminished. In this same manner, the wisdom of Moshe does not diminish."

This is the way in which Torah is transmitted from rebbe to talmid, teacher to student. It is not the transmission of cold, scientific knowledge. It is the lighting of one candle from another, until the new candle can shed a ray of Divine light into the darkness of human existence. A flame is not shared because the light is often not bright enough or strong enough to spread around. When each light connects with another wick, however, and serves as its power source for creating its own light, the entire room is illuminated.

In order to achieve this phenomenon, to study with a rebbe who has grown wise in Torah and to have his knowledge begin to glow within you, one must have faith in him--in his wisdom and in his sincerity and integrity-- and believe in what he represents. One must believe that he carries the flame of Torah that has been passed through the generations from Moshe, the quintessential teacher of our People. Without this implicit faith and trust, one closes the door on the channels of meaningful learning. He closes the door on Har Sinai!

The principle of emunas chachamim is one that is a requisite in understanding, appreciating, accepting and transmitting Torah. It is a principle that has eluded all those who have eschewed Torah study and mitzvah observance. When we study from our rebbeim, we absorb more than mere facts, laws, interpretations and elucidations. We delve into the depths of the Torah to perceive its profundities, to understand its message and the mission it wants us to accomplish. How do we achieve this? When we learn, we connect with the rebbe, who has connected with his rebbe, to the point that we link our spirit with that of Chazal and beyond, back to Moshe Rabbeinu. We become part of them as if we ourselves are hearing the words expressed at Har Sinai. This is the meaning of Chazal in the Talmud Yevamos 97a, "Wherever an oral teaching is quoted in the name of the sage (who established it), his lips move in the grave." In the union of spirit and spirit, the student with the rebbe, the thoughts of the departed sage link and live, continuing to speak through the student.

Emunas Chachamim is "money in the bank," or, at least, that is the level of security one should feel when trusting our rebbeim. Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, cited by Rabbi Paysach Krohn in "The Maggid Speaks," would often relate the following incident to emphasize the essence of emunas chachamim. A prominent, philanthropic woman named Chavala would make the effort to bring challo to the Shaagas Arye every Erev Shabbos. As a result, he blessed her that one day she would attain great wealth and have the privilege of building two synagogues: one in Minsk, her place of residence; and one in Eretz Yisrael.

With time, the first blessing was realized, as she amassed great wealth and built what became known as Chavale's Shul in Minsk. She aged and decided that she had better immigrate to Eretz Yisrael, so that she could observe the second part of her blessing fulfilled. Prior to leaving Europe, she decided to bid goodbye to all of those rabbis with whom she had become acquainted throughout the years. When she came to say goodbye to Horav Chaim, zl, m'Volozhin, he asked why she was leaving. She explained that she was going to Eretz Yisrael to build a shul as part of a blessing from the Shaagas Arye. Rav Chaim heard this and asked incredulously, "If you have the assurance of the Shaagas Arye, a tzadik of great renown, what is your rush?" He manifested true belief.

Bnei Reuven and Bnei Gad had abundant livestock. Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven came and said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants." (32:1,2,5)

The commentators are vexed by a number of ambiguities in the request presented by Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven. What prompted them to forego their portion in Eretz Yisrael and trade it for a place in Ever HaYarden? Did they not see what had occurred concerning the meraglim, spies? If they had been in doubt about taking a position vis-?-vis not going to Eretz Yisrael, that debacle should have changed their mind. The Sefas Emes cites his

grandfather, the Chidushei HaRim, zl, who heard a profound interpretation of this incident from Horav Simcha Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa. "U'mikneh rav," which is translated as abundant livestock, may be interpreted as a great kinyan, acquisition, referring to the relationship they had with their rav, Moshe Rabbeinu. In other words, due to the unique relationship Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven had with their rebbe, Moshe, they refused to leave the land in which their rebbe would be buried. They were willing to forego their portion in Eretz Yisrael. It was not their lack of reverence for the Holy Land that catalyzed their request. Rather, their reverence and love for their quintessential rebbe motivated them to remain in Trans Jordan.

Horav P. Friedman, Shlita, questions why Moshe was buried in Bnei Gad's portion of the land. After all, the request to remain on the other side of the Jordan was made by both tribes - equally. Should they not have both "shared" in this distinction? He cites the Talmud Sotah 13b where it is stated that Moshe actually died in Reuven's portion and was "carried" four mil into Gad's portion to be buried there. This is indicated by the pesukim in the Torah which place Moshe's death on Har Nevo, which was in Reuven's portion and his burial in Gad's portion. How did he get there? Hashem took him. We wonder why He did it this way. The burial could have been facilitated in such a manner that Moshe would have died and been buried in the same place.

Rav Friedman explains that specifically because both tribes had a "mikneh" rav, acquisition in the rav, it was only right that both should possess an equal share in his passing from this world.

With this in mind, we wonder why Moshe took these two tribes to task. Their reason for remaining was praiseworthy. Indeed, they should have been commended for their reluctance to leave their rebbe. Horav Elyah Schlessinger, Shlita, cites the Midrash which criticizes these two tribes for making what should have been the ikar, primary, into the tafeil, subordinate, focus. They seemed to have prioritized their material possessions over their children, which is clearly a case of misplaced priorities. There is, however, more to it. Horav Shmuel Rozovsky, zl, derives an important lesson from Chazal's vernacular. Chazal state, "They made their ikar into tafeil, and their tafeil into ikar." This would imply that they did two things wrong. The criticism was that: they made their principle into something secondary; and they converted their subordinate into their primary. We are taught here that just as it is wrong not to give precedence to the primary, it is equally wrong to prioritize the secondary. When we grant significance to something that should have secondary status, we ultimately denigrate that which should have primary significance.

Moshe was afraid that they were making living in Ever haYarden--near his gravesite-- into an ikar, thereby elevating this experience to mitzvah status. Yes, they would give greater credence to Moshe's grave than to Moshe's Torah. When one elevates that which should remain subordinate, he will eventually devalue and replace that which is, and should continue to be, his prime focus in life. How often do we see tzedakah, charity, taking the place of Torah study? This applies to a host of other wonderful deeds where we displace mitzvah enhancements for the actual mitzvah. Moshe understood their error and its ramifications for the future.

Parashas Masei For he must dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol. (35:28)

One who had inadvertently killed a fellow Jew was required to flee to one of the Arei Miklat, Cities of Refuge, to seek protection from the anger and vengeance of the go'el ha'dam, avenger of the blood, a relative who had the right to kill the murderer to avenge the blood of a loved one. While it served as a refuge for the murderer, the exile was also a punishment which mandated him to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the Kohen Gadol. In explaining this halachah, Rashi quotes the Talmud Makkos 11a, which teaches us that it was the Kohen Gadol's responsibility to pray for Klal Yisrael, so that such tragedies will not occur. Since this murder did take place, albeit unpremeditated, the Kohen Gadol is held responsible to a certain extent.

Because Hashem determines the lifespan of the Kohen Gadol, there were significant variations in the length of the sentence. One person might have been released after a short stay, while another may have had a lengthy residence in the city of refuge. In noting the disparity among sentences, the Sforno explains that many different factors play a role in an unintentional killing. Bais Din is not privy to these factors and were, thus, at a loss to determine the correct and exact punishment that should be given to the defendant. Clearly, some unintentional circumstances border on the accidental, while others are almost certainly negligence. Therefore, the length of exile of each killer is left to an act of G-d, the death of the Kohen Gadol, which is Hashem's way of indicating the veracity of the defendant's lack of premeditation.

We can imagine that the killers who resided in the Arei Miklat understood that their freedom was contingent upon the Kohen Gadol's lifespan. This might lead them to hope and even pray that he pass on to his eternal rest at the soonest possible time. Chazal teach us that to circumvent this problem, the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim would supply food and drink in abundance, so that the killer would be content in his new home and not pray for the Kohen Gadol's premature demise.

This observation regarding the maintenance of the needs of the murderers provides us with a powerful lesson concerning the power and efficacy of prayer. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, in his anthology of Torah thoughts authored by Rabbi Sholom Smith, cites the Alter, zl, m'Kelm, who notes the distinction between the one who is praying and the one about whom he is praying. The Kohen Gadol was usually the individual who had achieved an elevated, if not the most exalted, spiritual plateau in Klal Yisrael. He carried the problems and needs of the entire nation on his shoulders and in his heart. He would enter the Kodoshim, Holy of Holies, on Yom Kippur in order to entreat Hashem on behalf of the Jewish People. As the individual empowered to ask for their forgiveness, he was certainly a special and holy individual. Let us turn to look at the other end of the spectrum: the unintentional murderer. He could have been a fine, upstanding member of the community, but let's face it: What kind of person would pray for the premature death of the Kohen Gadol? Is that not selfishness at its nadir? Why pray for a tzaddik, righteous person, to die just so that one can leave the Arei Miklat early? Indeed, why would Hashem listen and respond to such a person's selfish prayer?

The Alter explains that the exiles were in a unique position for understanding that their release was dependent upon one - and only one-source: Hashem. While we all know this, the exiles felt it! Therefore, their prayers emanated from the deepest recesses of their hearts, with a sincerity, integrity and resolute conviction that only Hashem could help them. Such prayers have a power unlike any other. They can pierce the Heavens and achieve unusual and unprecedented efficacy. Yes, the mothers of the Kohanim Gedolim had much to fear from the exiles' prayers. They prayed like there was no other recourse. Such a prayer is not contingent upon the individual who is praying or for what he is praying for. It is the prayer itself that counts.

Selfish tefillos, prayers, may not be the most appropriate way to communicate with Hashem, but their effectiveness is not to be ignored. The essence is sincerity in prayer and belief in what one is doing. All too often, we also pray to Hashem. This means that we resort to all means of hishtadlus, endeavoring, and "just in case" our hishtadlus does not work, we pray to Hashem. Regrettably, this indicates exactly where on the "totem pole" we place prayer. The exile knows that there is no other recourse but Hashem. This is why his prayer is so powerful. It is sincere.

Does one have to be a righteous and pious person to pray effectively? No. Certainly, the "members" of the city of refuge community were not. They were there because it was their escape. Rav Pam cites the Talmud in Shabbos 67a, which offers the following insight. If a person has a tree that sheds its fruit prematurely before they ripen, he will sustain a major financial loss. What should he do to prevent this loss? Chazal suggest that he dye the tree with red paint to call attention to it. This way, when

passersby see the tree, they will recognize the owner's plight and pray that Hashem have mercy on him and that his tree will retain its fruit a bit longer.

This was a normal occurrence that was expected of ordinary people. They were to feel the pain of the owner, who was probably a total stranger to them, and pray for him. We are not talking about a tzaddik. We are not talking about a child that is chas v'shalom ill. We are talking about a tree! Yet, Jews have sensitive feelings within their psyche, such that when they see a red-dyed tree, they will pray for its owner - even if they have no clue who he is! Moreover, such behavior was expected of the average Jew! It was not the exclusive domain of the righteous. It was an "everyone" thing!

In his inimitable manner, Rav Pam addresses the present and the way people act in regard to the needs of others. We walk by a bulletin board in shul, and we see the name of a person for whom we should recite Tehillim. We see an ad in the paper to say Tehillim. We hear of a Jew who is ill and in need of Heavenly intervention. These are all common everyday scenarios. How do we respond to these circumstances? If it is someone we know personally or with whose relatives we are acquainted, we will daven, pray, for them. If the name means absolutely nothing to us, however, chances are that we will ignore the request for prayers. Why? Where is our sensitivity? Where is our empathy? Where is our caring?

Likewise, when one sees the flashing lights or hears the siren of a hatzolah vehicle racing to an emergency, does it immediately evoke within us a sense of achrayus, responsibility, to pray? These devoted volunteers take off time and energy to help other Jews. Are we at least prepared to pray for the individual in need, or is that beyond our scope of responsibility? After all, we do not really know the person. As we learned from the Talmud, praying for the person is not considered an extraordinary act. It is the appropriate response!

Horav Yitzchak Izik Sher, zl, was visiting America, and he was asked to deliver one of his famous shmuessen, ethical discourses, to a group of elderly rabbis. Shortly before Rosh Hashanah, Rav Aizik rose to the lectern, posing the following question to them: "My friends, the Yom haDin, Day of Judgement, is quickly approaching. Do you have reason to be concerned? After all, you are all deeply observant. You observe Shabbos, kashrus, you are honest, you do not speak lashon hora, slanderous speech. You give tzedakah. What are you worried about? You lead lives of virtue."

After a lengthy discourse, Rav Aizik came to his point: "Gentlemen, you are all fine Jews, and you do not sin. Yet, you are able to pick up the New York Times in the morning and read that a man was killed, yet you continue to drink your coffee. How can you drink your coffee when you have read that a woman has become a widow and that children have lost their father? You should faint in anguish, but you do not. Why? Because you do not care how that death affects other people. Therefore, fear the Yom haDin, because the Ribbono Shel Olam is more stringent with tzaddikim, the righteous, than He is with common people. On Yom HaDin, you must all be careful, because this grievance applies to everyone!" Powerful words. What should we say?

The Rosh Yeshivah notes that we always read Parashas Masei on the Shabbos before Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Chodesh Av marks the beginning of the tragic nine days which conclude with Tisha B'Av. It is a time when all Jews should be especially sensitive to the needs of all of their brothers and sisters, to pray for them that Hashem alleviate their pain and troubles. With this merit of brotherly sensitivity, Hashem will finally transform Tisha B'Av, with the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, into a festival of joy.

Izchar nishmas R' Yissachar Dov ben HaRav Yisroel a"h Hertzberg niftar 7 Av 5745 t.n.tz.v.h.

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Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Sir Jonathan Sacks

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

[From 2 years ago - currently 5765]

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Mattot

The Israelites are almost within sight of the promised land. They have waged a victorious campaign against the Midianites. We feel the tempo quicken. No longer are the Israelites in the desert. They are moving inexorably toward the Jordan, to the west of which lies their destination: the land 'flowing with milk and honey'.

The members of the tribes of Reuben and Gad, though, begin to have different thoughts. Seeing that the land through which they are travelling is ideal for raising cattle, they decide that they would like to stay there, to the east of the Jordan. Moses is angry at the suggestion:

Moses said to the Gadites and Reubenites, "Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the Lord has given them? The tribes meet his objection with a compromise formula:

Then they came up to him and said, "We would like to build pens here for our livestock and cities for our women and children. But we are ready to arm ourselves and go ahead of the Israelites until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our women and children will live in fortified cities, for protection from the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until every Israelite has received his inheritance. We will not receive any inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan, because our inheritance has come to us on the east side of the Jordan." We are willing, they tell Moses, to join the rest of the Israelites in the battles that lie ahead. Indeed we are willing to go on ahead, to be the advance guard, to be in the forefront of the battle. It is not that we are afraid of battle. Nor are we trying to evade our responsibilities toward our people as a whole. It is simply that we wish to raise cattle, and this land to the east of the Jordan is ideal. Warning them of the seriousness of their undertaking, Moses agrees. If they keep their word, they may settle east of the Jordan.

That is the story on the surface. But as so often in the Torah, there are subtexts as well as texts. One in particular was noticed by the sages, with their sensitivity to nuance and detail. Listen carefully to what the Reubenites and Gadites said:

Then they came up to him and said, "We would like to build pens here for our livestock and cities for our women and children." Moses replies:

"Build cities for your children, and pens for your flocks, but do what you have promised." The ordering of the nouns is crucial. The men of Reuben and Gad put property before people: they speak of their flocks first, their women and children second. Moses reverses the order, putting special emphasis on the children. As Rashi notes:

They paid more regard to their property than to their sons and daughters, because they mentioned their cattle before the children. Moses said to them: 'Not so. Make the main thing primary and the subordinate thing secondary. First build cities for your children, and only then, folds for your flocks.' The midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 22: 9) makes the same point through a dazzling interpretation of the line in Ecclesiastes:

The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left. (Ecclesiastes 10:2) The midrash identifies 'right' with Torah and life: "He" refers the fire of a religion to them from his right hand (Deut. 33:2). "Left" refers to worldly goods:

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour. (Proverbs 3: 16) The men of Reuben and Gad put 'riches and honour' before faith and posterity. Moses hints to them that their priorities are wrong. The midrash continues:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: "Seeing that you have shown greater love for your cattle than for human souls, by your life, there will be no blessing in it." One of the most consistent patterns of Jewish history is

the way communities through the ages put children and their education first. Already in the first century Josephus was able to write: "The result of our thorough education in our laws, from the very dawn of intelligence, is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls." In twelfth century France a Christian scholar noted: "A Jew, however poor, if he has ten sons, will put them all to letters, not for gain as the Christians do, but for the understanding of G-d's law - and not only his sons but his daughters too."

In 1432, at the height of Christian persecution of Jews in Spain, a synod was convened at Valladolid to institute a system of taxation to fund Jewish education for all. In 1648, at the end of the Thirty Years' War, the first thing Jewish communities in Europe did to re-establish Jewish life was to re-organise the educational system. In their classic study of the shtetl, the small townships of Eastern Europe, Zborowski and Herzog write this about the typical Jewish family:

The most important item in the family budget is the tuition fee that must be paid each term to the teacher of the younger boys' school. Parents will bend in the sky to educate their son. The mother, who has charge of household accounts, will cut the family food costs to the limit if necessary, in order to pay for her sons schooling. If the worst comes to the worst, she will pawn her cherished pearls in order to pay for the school term. The boy must study, the boy must become a good Jew - for her the two are synonymous. In 1849, when Samson Raphael Hirsch became rabbi in Frankfurt, he insisted that the community create a school before building a synagogue. After the Holocaust, the few surviving yeshivah heads and Hassidic leaders concentrated on encouraging their followers to have children and build schools.

It is hard to think of any other religion or civilization that is as child-centred as Judaism, nor any that has predicated its very existence on putting their education first. There have been Jewish communities in the past that were affluent and built magnificent synagogues - Alexandria in the first centuries of the Common Era is an example. Yet because they did not put children first, they contributed little to the Jewish story. They flourished briefly, then disappeared.

Moses' implied rebuke to the tribes of Reuben and Gad is not a minor detail but a fundamental statement about Jewish priorities. Property is secondary, children primary.

Civilizations that value the young, stay young. Those that invest in the future, have a future. It is not what we own that gives us a share in eternity, but those to whom we give birth and the effort we make to ensure that they carry our belief and way of life into the next generation.

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Massei

The book of Bamidbar/Numbers draws to a close with an account of the cities of refuge - the places set apart as shelter for those found guilty of manslaughter, that is to say, those who caused a human death, but accidentally or inadvertently, without murderous intent. The cities were havens, shelters, places of safety designed to protect manslaughterers from "blood vengeance" by a member of the family of the victim.

One detail in the legislation about the cities of refuge is particularly fascinating. Maimonides, following the Talmud, rules thus:

One who has been exiled does not leave the city of refuge at all, even to perform a mitzvah, or to give evidence in a monetary or capital case, or to save someone by his testimony, or to rescue someone from a non-Jew or a

river or a fire or a collapsed building. Even if all Israel needs his help, like Joab ben Zeruyah [King David's chief of staff], he never leaves the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest, and if he leaves, he makes himself vulnerable to death. (Rotzeach 7:8) There is a principle here that sheds much light on Judaism's system of values. Outside the city of refuge, the person found guilty of manslaughter could be killed by the blood avenger: "But if the accused ever goes outside the limits of the city of refuge to which he has fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the city, the avenger of blood may kill the accused without being guilty of murder." (Num. 35: 26-27)

Only within the city of refuge was the manslaughterer safe. To leave the city of refuge was to put his life at risk. No one in Judaism is commanded to put his life at risk to save the life of another - even to save the entire Jewish people ("even if all Israel needs his help"). Despite the fact that Judaism is an intensely communal faith, nonetheless in Jewish law the individual takes priority over the community.

Here is another example, codified by Maimonides:

If idol-worshippers say to a group of women, 'Give us one of your women for immoral purposes, or we will violate you all', they must all allow themselves to be violated rather than hand over one Jewish soul. Similarly, if idol-worshippers say, 'Give us one of you and we shall kill him, or else we will kill you all', they must all allow themselves to be killed rather than hand over one Jewish soul. (Yesodei haTorah 5: 5) On the face of it, the law is illogical. The refusal to collaborate with tyranny by handing over a victim, will not save the victim. She will be violated, or he killed, whatever the group chooses to do. Why then must they all allow themselves to be mistreated? The key difference is between active and passive, between what a person does and what is done to him. An entire group must passively allow itself to be assaulted rather than actively sacrifice a single one of their number. Again, the rights of the individual take priority over the welfare of the group.

A third example is exemption from military service (in the case of a milchemet reshut, a non-obligatory war; the exemptions do not apply in the case of a war of self-defence):

The officers shall say to the people: "Has anyone built a new house and not dedicated it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may dedicate it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her . . ." (Deut. 20: 5-7) Wars are fought for the sake of the nation as a whole. The exempt categories refer to individuals who have not yet had the chance to enjoy something important to them. Again we see that the private good overrides the public good.

At stake in these and many other examples is the supreme importance, in Judaism, of the individual. This is how a famous Mishnah puts it:

Man was created alone to teach you that whoever destroys a single soul is as if he destroyed an entire world, and whoever saves a single life is as if he had saved a complete world. Also [he was created alone] for the sake of peace among human beings, so that one could not say to the other, 'My father was greater than yours' . . . And also to proclaim the greatness of the Holy One, blessed be He, for if a person makes many coins from one mould, they are all the same, but the supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, made every person in the stamp of the first man, yet not one of them is identical to another. Therefore every single person is obliged to say: the world was created from my sake. (M. Sanhedrin 4) In these words, we feel the full revolutionary significance of the first chapter of Genesis, with its momentous declaration that the human being is in the image and likeness of G-d - the single most radical consequence of monotheism. The concept of G-d, singular and alone, gives rise to the concept of the human person, singular and alone. This is the birth of the individual in Western civilization.

It goes without saying that this was unknown in the pagan world. More worthy of attention is the difference between biblical ethics and those of ancient Greece. In Greece the highest value was the polis, the group. Ethics was a code of devotion to the city (Athens, Sparta). The supreme glory was heroism in the field of battle, or the willingness to die for the city's sake: dulce et decorum est pro patria mori ('It is pleasant and proper to die for one's country'). The group takes precedence over the individual. That is the fundamental difference between Greek and Jewish ethics.

One thinker who reflected deeply on this was the late Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel (1882-1945), Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and later of Tel Aviv. In his Ha-tzedek ha-soziali v'ha-tzedek ha-mishpati shelanu (translated as Ethics and Legality in Jewish law), he pointed out two consequences of the Jewish emphasis on the individual. On the one hand, it was vital to Jewish survival in exile. Jews were always a minority, and the minority usually conforms to the majority. Had this been the case among Jews, there would be no Judaism today. Jews, however, have had a long history of valuing the individual over the group. Jews did not bend to the majority. The one did not give way to the many.

But the very attribute that was a source of strength in exile could also be a source of weakness at times of Jewish national sovereignty:

In order to enforce order, there must be some denial of the individual's rights in society, or sacrifice of the private to the public good. No government or political order in the world can always benefit every individual. Every form of government must strive for the public good, and if the individual must occasionally suffer, there is no great harm done. But the Jewish national character cannot bear this, for Jewish ethics preaches the absolute freedom of the individual, which cannot be abrogated on behalf of society. This gives rise to the fractious nature of Jews as a group:

Everyone considers himself qualified to judge the judges, and sets up his own altar, not accepting any authority. If Jews are more prone to these faults than the rest of mankind, it is also the result of this outlook - that society exists for the sake of the individual. Thus every individual allows himself to separate from society, until there are an endless number of parties and splinter groups. This in turn generates much baseless hatred.

Can a civilization that grants supreme significance to the individual, flourish as a collective entity, a self-governing nation? That is the great question of Jewish history, then and now.

'You'

by the Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks

The single most revolutionary word in the siddur is the one we are most inclined to take for granted: the word

Atah, 'You'. It is the second word of every blessing. It is the first word of the central section of almost every Amidah. On weekdays we say

Atah chonen le-adam da'at,

'You grace humanity with knowledge'. On Friday evenings we say

Atah kidashta, 'You sanctified', on Shabbat afternoon,

Atah echad, 'You are one', on Shabbat Rosh Chodesh

Atah yatzarta,

'You formed', and on festivals,

Atah bechartanu, 'You chose us'. This word distinguishes Judaism (and its

daughter monotheisms, Christianity and Islam) from almost every other culture in history. The ancients believed in blind, capricious forces: the storm, the thunder, the sea, the rain, all indifferent or hostile to humankind. During the Enlightenment, deists came to believe in the G-d of

creation, but not the G-d of revelation or redemption. G-d, they believed, created the universe in what we now call the Big Bang, and then retired from the scene.

Today neo-Darwinian thinkers prefer to talk about random genetic mutation, natural selection, the blind watchmaker and the selfish gene.

What all these views have in common is that they do not believe in a personal G-d, one to whom we can talk, one who knows we exist, one who cares. The fact that we are self-conscious, that we have thoughts and feelings, that we are capable of loneliness and thus of reaching out to another human being in love, are for them a mere accident, an epiphenomenon, chance. Atheist or deist, they believe that at the heart of reality is an It, not a You. The universe is blind to our existence, indifferent to our fate, deaf to our prayers. We may speak from the depths of our soul, but no one is listening. We believe otherwise. We are not here by accident. We were brought into being by one who created us in love, gives us strength when we tire, courage when we are afraid, hope when we despair, and forgiveness when we repent. We believe in the G-d who listens. That, and that alone, empowers us to use the word Atah, You. In that one word lies the redemption of human life from meaninglessness. For if we truly believe in a G-d to whom we can say 'You', then we do not believe that this material world is all there is, that our prayers are mere soliloquies directed to ourselves.

The late Carl Sagan dedicated much of his life to SETI, the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence, in the apparent belief that if we discovered life on a distant planet it would mean that we are not alone in the universe. We don't need to wait until we can travel to the stars to know we are not alone. One prayer will do instead. Not even a prayer: a word.

Atah

. You. In that one word lies the faith that gives meaning to our lives in the knowledge that we are not alone.

Rabbi Aron Tendler <ravaron@torah.org> to parsha-summary show details Jul 9 (3 days ago)

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading: Parshas Mattos - Masei
Note: The Shabbos Torah Reading is divided into 7 sections. Each section is called an Aliya [literally: Go up] since for each Aliya, one person "goes up" to make a bracha [blessing] on the Torah Reading.

The year is 2448 and the 40 years in the desert are drawing to a close. Miriam and Aharon have passed on, and Yehoshua has been appointed as the successor. In these last two portions of Sefer Bamidbar, Mattot -

Massey, Hashem begins to wrap things up. Pay attention to the laws selected to end the 4th Sefer.

1st Aliya: The laws of personal vows are detailed and Moshe is instructed to "take revenge" against Midian. In the battle, both Balak and Bilaam are killed.

2nd Aliya: In the aftermath of the war, Moshe instructs the soldiers regarding the applicable laws of Tumah - impurity, and deals with the division of the booty between the soldiers, community, and the Mishkan.

Note verses 22 and 23 which teach us the laws of how to make kosher our vessels, and the Torah requirement for metal vessels made by a non-Jew or purchased from a non-Jew to be immersed in a mikvah before being used. (the Rabbis extended this law to included glassware)

In appreciation for the fact that not a single soldier was lost in battle, the Generals and Captains donate their personal percentage of the captured gold to the Mishkan. The total weight of the donated gold weighed 837.5 lbs.!(Areyeh Kaplan)

3rd & 4th Aliyot: Moshe is approached by the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and 1/2 of Menashe to acquire the Trans-Jordan territories captured from Sichon and Og. Moshe first treats their petition with suspicion; however, an agreement is reached between the 2 1/2 tribes and Moshe: Trans-Jordan in exchange for manning the front lines in the campaign to take Eretz Yisroel.

5th Aliya: Moshe instructs the Bnai Yisroel to clear out the Land from all negative influences, and sets the Biblical boundaries of the Land.

6th Aliya: New leaders are appointed to oversee the division of the Land, and the 48 Levitical cities, including the 6 Cities of Refuge, are mandated.

7th Aliya: The laws regarding the inadvertent murderer are detailed, and the prohibition against marrying outside one's tribe is established. This prohibition was only for the generation that occupied the Land. -----

Haftorah Maatos - Maasei

Jeremiah 2:4 - 2:28, 3:4

2nd of the Tlas Diparanusa - Haftoras of Ill Tidings

This week's Haftorah is the second Haftorah forewarning the impending destruction of Yerushalayim. In the 2nd chapter of Yirmiyahu, the Navi detailed the extent of the nations infidelity that ad led up to the Churban - destruction. The leaders, the Kohanim, and the common man had all betrayed G- d's love. Whereas last week the Prophet left us with a vision of G-d's love for His children, this week his words relentlessly assault our consciousness.

"As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a piece of wood: "you are my father," and to a stone: "You gave birth to me. ...But in the time of their trouble they will say: Arise and save us. Where are your g-ds that you made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble..." (Yirmi. 2:26)

----- Parsha-Summary,

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\ SHABBAT SHALOM: PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI (Numbers 30:1 - 36:13) 28 Tammuz, 5767 - 14 July, 2007

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

A memorial tribute to the soldiers and civilians who sacrificed their lives in the Second Lebanon War, just one year ago.

Efrat, Israel - 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, 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 G-d 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 one-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 conversion was rampant in every campus in America immediately following the Holocaust. 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 Days 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 tribes of Gad and Reuven as practical materialists who never the less 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. Hereto 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 G-d 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 G-d conquered for us and therefore this is the land we wish to remain in. If G-d 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 one half tribes as being the counterparts of the devotees of Neturei Karta. They are waiting for G-d Himself to bring them to Israel - and if not G-d, then at least His Messiah! When G-d is good and ready to redeem Israel completely, He'll do it in His own time. Everything depends on G-d, and we are more than happy to wait it out in our pleasant grazing land until then...

The truth is that Gad and Reuven 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 G-d. "Why are you crying out to me?" G-d 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 Gad and Reuven that they have to bear arms and fight, he's really pointing out that G-d's promise to Israel is that everyone has to be partners: G-d with the nation, and the nation with each other, 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 man-power 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. Shabbat Shalom Visit the Ohr Torah Stone Website

Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com> hide details Jul 11 (1 day ago) reply-to Rav-Kook-List-owner@googlegroups.com to **Rav Kook List** <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com> date Jul 11, 2007 7:59 AM subject [Rav Kook List] Matot-Massei: Unchecked Violence mailed-by googlegroups.com Massei: Unchecked Violence

Regarding a society that accepts ransom money to allow murderers evade punishment, the Torah warns,

"Do not defile the land in which you live and in which I live." [Num. 35:34]

What does allowing murderers go unpunished 'defile the land'? Why does the Torah emphasize that this is the land where both you and G-d dwell?

The Sages taught [Shabbat 33a]:

"For the crime of bloodshed, the Temple is destroyed and the Shechinah (God's Presence) departs from Israel, as it says "Do not defile the land in which you live and in which I live." If you do defile it, you will not dwell in it, nor will I dwell in it."

Why is the appropriate punishment for such corruption the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash, the loss of the Shechinah, and exile?

The Impact of Murder

Clearly, a nation that suffers from rampant violence and unchecked bloodshed is not fulfilling its basic obligation to provide security for its citizens. But from an ethical-spiritual perspective, murder reflects a far more tragic phenomenon.

The Torah describes the divine aspect of the human soul with the term tzelem Elokim. What is this 'image of God'? The Torah is teaching that the Divine attributes of goodness, of seeking to help others, of giving life and nurturing life, are inherent to the human soul. Thus one who sheds blood has corrupted his soul to such an extent that he has completely reversed his

innate tzelem Elokim. Instead of promoting life, such an individual causes its loss and destruction.

Destruction of the Temple

The Beit HaMikdash was not meant solely for the benefit of the Jewish people. When King Solomon built the Temple, he announced that it was "also for the stranger who is not from Your people Israel, but will come from a far country for the sake of Your Name" [I Kings 8:41]. The Temple is to be a "house of prayer for all peoples" [Isaiah 56:7], a focal point spreading enlightenment and ethical teachings throughout the world.

However, to influence and better humanity requires that the ethical state of the Jewish people be healthy and strong. When Israel has fallen to the lowest levels of cruelty and violence, what kind of ethical instruction can the Beit HaMikdash provide to the world? How can the Temple service inspire other nations when they see that its values have not even succeeded in reaching the Jewish people, correcting social injustice and eradicating bloodshed? Unable to serve its universal purpose, the Temple was destroyed.

Loss of Divine Presence

This explains the connection between a corrupt society and the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. What about the second consequence - the departure of the Shechinah?

We must first understand the significance of this Divine Presence. The national soul of the Jewish people contains aspirations far greater than normal social ethics. Our objective is not just to create a smooth-running social order that provides safety and security for its members. What point is there in creating a selfish, materialistic society, even if its citizens are protected from violence and instability?

This is where the Shechinah comes in. The Jewish people has an inner holiness that elevates the value of life itself. Through the Divine Presence, the nation's soul aspires to the highest and loftiest good possible. It strives to live according to the most elevated, Godly values.

But spiritual goals are like building blocks, attained step by step. The nation must first acquire a basic moral level, those common mores appreciated by all peoples. Only then is it possible to aspire to special levels of holiness. If the Beit HaMikdash is no longer standing due to a corrupt and immoral society, how can the soul of the nation attempt to elevate itself to its unique goals? In such a situation, the Shechinah departs from Israel.

Exile from the Land

The third punishment for national corruption is exile. The dwelling of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael is tightly bound to its positive influence as a nation. Certainly much holiness and enlightenment can be gained from righteous individuals. But the impact of a holy nation, expressing holiness in all aspects of its national life, is of a far greater magnitude.

When the Jewish people ceases to have a positive influence on other nations, as indicated by the destruction of the Temple and the departure of the Shechinah, then their continued settlement in the land of Israel is also called into question: "If you defile the land, you will not dwell in it and I will not dwell in it."

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