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From Rabbi Yissocher Frand ryfrand@torah.org reply-to ryfrand@torah.org, genesis@torah.org to ravfrand@torah.org date Thu, Jul 21, 2011 at 3:43 PM
subject Rabbi Frand on Parshas Matos

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Money and the Kids

And they said, "We will build sheep pens for our livestock here and cities for our children." (32:16)

The Jewish people reached the plains of Moav, the jumping-off point for the invasion of Canaan, which was imminent. But the tribes of Gad and Reuven, rich in livestock, preferred the lush pasturelands of the Trans-Jordan to shares in Eretz Yisrael proper. They asked Moshe for permission to take their share in the Trans-Jordan.

Moshe berated them for letting the others fight to conquer Canaan while they settled down in their ranches. Furthermore, their reluctance to cross would have a demoralizing effect on the others, just as the report of the Meraglim had demoralized the people thirty-eight years earlier.

"This is what we want to do," they said to Moshe. "We want to build sheep pens for our livestock here and towns for our children. Then we will go quickly at the head of the army and fight until the land is conquered and apportioned. Only then will we return to our homes."

"All right," said Moshe (32:24), "build towns for your children and pens for your sheep. And make sure you keep your word."

Notice that Moshe reversed the order of their priorities. They wanted to "build sheep pens for our livestock here and towns for our children."

First let us take care of the livestock. Let us make sure we have pens in which to keep them so they don't wander off into the hills and get lost or stolen.

Cows and sheep are valuable assets, and we have to take good care of them. Then they spoke about building "towns for our children." Then we will provide our children with a place to live while we are at war.

Oh no, Moshe replied. You have it backwards. First of all, "build towns for your children." Make sure you have attend ed to the needs of your children. Afterwards, you can also build "pens for your sheep." First you take care of your children, then you worry about your cattle.

The Midrash sums up the exchange with the verse (Koheles 10:2), "The heart of the wise man is on his right, and the heart of the fool is on his left." Moshe's heart was on the right. He had his priorities right. Their hearts were on the left. They gave precedence to secondary considerations. They were more worried about their money than their children.

When we look at this incident, we say to ourselves, "How foolish can people be? How warped can their values be? How can anyone put the welfare of his cattle before the welfare of his children?"

Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident, something bizarre that happened thousands of years ago. It is an everyday phenomenon. People become focused on their livelihood, on developing a business, on advancing professionally, on building a practice, and their kids get lost in the shuffle. They don't realize that they are making the exact same mistake as the tribes of Gad and Reuven. But it is true. It happens all too often.

Rashi writes (32:24) that the tribes of Gad and Reuven did not return home to the Trans-Jordan until after the seven years of conquest and the seven years of apportionment. They remained in Eretz Yisrael for a full fourteen years. Those little children they left behind -- let's assume they were 3 or 4 years old -- how old were they when their fathers returned home? Teenagers! Practically adults. The Midrash tells us that their fathers were shocked to find that their sons had long hair, that they were indistinguishable from their pagan neighbors.

This is what happens when parents give priority to their wealth over their children.

The Ksav Sofer raises a question with the latter part of Moshe's words. After helping the tribes of Gad and Reuven get their priorities straight, he told them, "Make sure you keep your word." Why was this necessary?

The answer, says the Ksav Sofer, is that Moshe knew with whom he was dealing. People who could even think of protecting their money before they protect their children cannot be trusted. They are so intent on their wealth that they can do anything. Therefore, Moshe had to exhort them to keep their word.

Rav Tzaddok Hakohein explains that the desire for money is greater than any other material drive, since it is the only one that is insatiable. There is a limit to how much a person can eat, to how many times he can commit adultery, but there is no limit to how much money he can accumulate. The quest for wealth can become more obsessive than any other quest. All too often, the children are the price of the wealth.

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date Wed, Jul 20, 2011 at 9:49 PM subject Rabbi Dr. Abraham J.
Twerski - The Importance of Derech Eretz

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski
The Importance of Derech Eretz

In parsha Matos, the Torah tells us that prior to entering Canaan, the tribes of Gad and Reuvein came to Moshe with a request to give them their

share of the land east of the Jordan River in the lands Bnai Yisroel had conquered, and that they were willing to forego their portion in Canaan. Moshe became furious with them, citing the refusal of the earlier generation to conquer Canaan, which resulted in their wandering in the desert for forty years.

Moshe became furious with them. "Ha'acheichem yavo'uh lamilchama v'atem teishvu poh - Your brethren will go to war and you will stay here?" (Bamidbar 32:6.) Your fathers reject the land Hashem promised us, and, "V'hinei kamtem tachas avoseichem tarbus anashim chatoim lispos od al charon af Hashem el Yisroel - Now you have arisen in the place of your fathers, a society of sinful people, to add more to the burning wrath of Hashem against Israel" (Bamidbar 32:14.)

The tribes of Gad and Reuvein explained that they would never think of shirking their responsibility in the conquest of Canaan. To the contrary, they were willing to go head as a vanguard, and after Canaan was successfully conquered, they would then return to settle in Eiver haYarden. Moshe agreed to this.

But why was Moshe so quick in condemning them, telling them that they are as bad as their fathers? Why didn't he give them a chance to explain themselves?

When Moshe related the incident of the spies that had occurred forty years earlier, he expressed his guilt in the episode, saying that when they requested scouting the land, "The idea was good in my eyes." But why should he have felt guilty? The answer is in Rashi's comment on Moshe's statement, "All of you approached me," to which Moshe said, "You came as an undisciplined mob, the young pushing aside the old, and elders pushing aside the leaders." Moshe's confession of guilt was, "I should have known that with the gross disrespect you exhibited, the venture you suggested would not come to any good result."

During the forty years in the desert, Moshe taught Bnai Yisroel Torah, teaching them proper middos, and he had hoped that they had refined their character traits. But look carefully at the words in the Torah, "Vayavo'uh bnai Gad u'bnai Reuvein - The tribe of Gad and the tribe of Reuvein came to Moshe" (Bamidbar 32:2.) Reuvein was the oldest of Yaakov's sons, and Gad was much younger. When they came to Moshe, the tribe of Gad had pushed the tribe of Reuvein aside! Moshe was horrified by this. "After forty years of my teaching you middos, you obviously have learned nothing! The younger are still pushing themselves ahead of the older. You haven't changed a bit! You are following in the chutzpadik footsteps of your fathers!" No wonder that Moshe was enraged. Because they manifested such poor middos, Moshe assumed that they would shirk their responsibility to the nation.

Proper middos are the foundation of Torah. Rebbe Chiam Vital, the prime disciple of the Ari z"l said that a person must be even more cautious and stringent in practicing fine middos than in the observance of both the positive and restrictive mitzvos (Shaar Hakedushah 2:2).

The mussar teachers bewailed the behavior of students who pushed aside others in order to sit next to the speaker. It is hypocritical and a violation of mussar to be inconsiderate of others in the effort to hear a lecture on mussar!

The episode of the tribes of Gad and Reuvein is an important lesson in derech eretz.

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[from 4 years ago]

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

We All Had to Contribute; We All have to Reflect

It was at this time last summer that we, who were physically far from the rockets attacking us from the north and from the courageous chayalim sent in by foot, were oft reminded of our obligations as prescribed by parshas Matos. In this parsha we are introduced to the phrase "elef lemateh", which directed the advice of numerous gedolei hador and was subsequently programmed by several national organizations. "Elef lamateh", a thousand per tribe, refers to Moshe's call to 12,000 soldiers who would carry out the battle with Midyan. However, Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 22,2) explain that the seeming repetition of this phrase refers to establishing a force of 36,000 Jews: 12,000 soldiers would bear arms to fight Midyan, 1,000 from each shevet; 12,000 Jews formed the support force caring for the food and equipment of the fighters; another 12,000 Jews culled from each shevet stayed with their families at home to daven on behalf of those who were thrust into mortal danger.

Later in history according to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi (Berachos 10a) Dovid Hamelech accords no less than the conquest of Yerushalayim to the Jews who supported the troops with their Torah study. "Omdos hoyu ragleinu besharayich yerushalyim" (Tehillim 122), explains Rabbi Yehoshua, means that the feet of the conquerors stood firmly on the holy soil of Yerushalayim due to support of those who were studying Torah in her gateways.

The responsibilities of various parts of our people are further impressed upon the return from the battle with Midyan. Here the parsha proceeds to painstakingly describe the apportionment of the spoils of the war (3:26-49). First the spoil was split, half going to those who were in battle and half going to the balance of the Jewish people. To my mind this apportionment awarded those who risked their lives on behalf of the people even as it reminded all, that our success is dependant on the merit of national study and prayer. The soldiers proceeded to tithe their spoil at a rate of 1 of 500 whereas the rest tithed at a rate of 1 out of 50. This too awards the soldier as if to say that all of their gains are already elevated by the mesirus nefesh with which they responded to Hashem's call.

Interestingly the tithing of the soldiers is counted specifically, noting that they as a group received 337,500 sheep of which they gave 657 to Elazar; 36,000 cattle of which they gave 72; 30,500 donkeys of which 61 were given etc. Whereas the large numbers taken in by the non-fighters is listed, the numbers of their gifts to Elazar is omitted. The Torah simply states that they too received as a group 337,500 sheep, 36,000 cattle and 30,500 donkeys leaving us to do the rest of the math by ourselves. Perhaps every sheep, cow and donkey that came from the soldiers and was actually brought back to the camp by themselves and their mesirus nefesh deserves to be listed separately. This means that their tithing told of personal sacrifice and handing those animals over to Elazar told the story of Jewish courage and trust in Hashem's protection. With respect to the second group of animals, tithed at relatively high rate, it is the tithing per se that gave expression to our deep belief that our zehcuyos powerfully protect and advance the course of our people.

Further developing this theme, Rav Elyashiv shlit"a (Divrei Agadah p.321) reminds us that the battle for midyan and the subsequent conscription was declared explicitly by Hashem. If for that alone we should be assured victory and add to that the leadership of Pinchas, the call of the chazotzros and the presence of the aron and the tzitz! With all of that Moshe still appointed a one for one davening buddy! All of this for the dor deah of the midbar! One can only imagine that in our time, writes Rav Elyahsiv, we should have 10 people davening for every soldier as we know Torah magna unatzla (Sotah 21a,) Torah saves and protects.

Now that the review of last summer's military efforts are being discussed, the elef lamateh that stayed behind needs to take stock and responsibility as well. Perhaps we can add this to the incumbent sobering and honest introspection of this time of year.

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from genesis@torah.org reply-to genesis@torah.org to
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Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

The Prohibitions of The Three Weeks The three-week period between the fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tishah b'Av, known as Bein ha-Metzarim, was established by the Rabbis as a period of mourning over the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash. There are certain activities, normally permitted, which are prohibited during this period. The Talmud[1] tells us that only one who has properly mourned the Temple's destruction will merit to see its rebuilding. It is important, therefore, to become more knowledgeable about the exact nature of those prohibited activities. Let us review:

There are four forbidden activities, for men and women, that are specific to the Three-Weeks period: 1. Taking a haircut or a shave; 2. Getting married or participating in a wedding; 3. Listening to music and dancing; 4. Reciting shehecheyanu.

Important Note: The Three Weeks period includes another period of mourning, called the Nine Days. The halachos of those days—from Rosh Chodesh Av through midday of the tenth of Av—are more restrictive in several areas. Here we are discussing the laws of the Three Weeks only, not the special, more stringent, halachos of the Nine Days.

Cutting Hair—When is it permitted? When is it prohibited?

It is permitted to trim a mustache that interferes with eating[2]. It is permitted to pluck one's eyebrows or eyelashes[3]. Married women may cut hair that is protruding from their head covering[4]. It is permitted to comb one's hair even though some hair will get torn out while combing[5]. Nail cutting is permitted[6]. It is permitted to shave if one's employer insists upon it[7]. But if one's job is not at stake, though he may be ridiculed, it is forbidden to shave[8]. A mourner who completed his mourning period during the Three Weeks, may take a haircut and a shave[9]. The prohibition of hair-cutting applies even to small children[10]. Thus if an upsheren falls during the Three Weeks, it should either be moved up or postponed[11]. If absolutely necessary, some poskim permit taking a haircut or a shave on the evening and night of the Seventeenth of Tammuz[12]. There are poskim who support the custom of those who shave on erev Shabbos[13], but this is not the custom today in most communities[14]. On the day of a baby's bris[15], the father, the sandek and the mohel may take a haircut or a shave[16]. But it is forbidden to take a haircut or shave in honor of a bar mitzvah[17].

Weddings—When are they permitted? When are they prohibited?

A wedding may be held on the evening before the Seventeenth of Tammuz if the chupah will take place before sunset[18]. If no other date

is feasible, some poskim allow the chupah to take place even after sunset[19] while others are more stringent[20]. Engagements are permitted and may even be celebrated with a party or a meal[21].

Music—When is it permitted? When is it prohibited?

Listening to music is prohibited, whether it is live, broadcast on the radio, or taped[22]. Programs or other occasions where the musical accompaniment is incidental to the main event may be attended or viewed[23]. Children who are old enough to understand about the destruction of the Beis ha-Mikdash may not listen to music[24]. Several poskim, however, permit a child to practice his musical instrument[25].

Singing in praise of Hashem at a seudas mitzvah, without musical accompaniment, is permitted[26]. A professional musician, or one who is learning to play professionally, may play music during the Three Weeks[27].

Shehecheyanu[28]—When is it permitted? When is it prohibited?

On Shabbos, it is permitted to recite shehecheyanu[29]. On Rosh Chodesh Av, it is permitted to recite shehecheyanu[30] over new fruit[31]. A new fruit that will not be available after the Three Weeks may be eaten and a shehecheyanu recited[32]. A shehecheyanu is recited at a pidyon ha-ben[33] and upon seeing one's newborn daughter[34]. A shehecheyanu may be recited if by mistake the Borei pri ha-eitz was already said over a new fruit[35]. The blessing of ha-Tov v'ha-Meitiv may be recited during the Three Weeks[36]. Since it is prohibited to recite shehecheyanu, it is also prohibited to buy any item that normally requires shehecheyanu to be recited. It is forbidden, therefore, to buy a new car for personal use during the Three Weeks. It is permitted, however, to buy a car for business use [and recite the shehecheyanu after the Three Weeks] or for the benefit of the family [since in that case ha-Tov v'ha-Meitiv is recited instead of shehecheyanu[37]]. New clothes that normally require a shehecheyanu should not be bought during this time. Thus, shoes, shirts, trousers and all undergarments may be purchased and worn without restriction until Rosh Chodesh Av, since shehecheyanu is generally not recited over them. One who never recites shehecheyanu on clothes, even on expensive ones[38], could also purchase and wear expensive clothes during this time. Those who do recite shehecheyanu when putting on new clothes may still buy and alter them until Rosh Chodesh Av, but they may not be worn until after the Nine Days are over[39].

NOTES 1. Ta'anis 31b, quoted in Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 554:25. 2. O.C. 551:13. 3. Halichos Shelomo 3:14, Devar Halachah 9; Bein Pesach l'Shavuos, pg. 241, quoting Rav S. Vosner. 4. Mishnah Berurah 551:79. When necessary, women may shave their legs; Rav M. Feinstein (Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 128, note 9). See also Igros Moshe, Y.D. 2:137 where he allows women to take haircuts when necessary during the Three Weeks. When necessary, a girl of marriageable age may take a haircut; Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 3:14, Devar Halachah 10). 5. Mishnah Berurah 551:20. 6. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 122:5. 7. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:102; She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 122:5. 8. Igros Moshe, C.M. 1:93; Halichos Shelomo 3:14-7. 9. Mishnah Berurah 551:87. 10. Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 551:91. Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:31, however, seems to hold that only children above the age of chinuch are prohibited to take a haircut. See also Igros Moshe, Y.D. 1:224 who agrees with this opinion. 11. Chanoch le-Na'ar 22:1. 12. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:112-2; She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 122:1. Others do not agree with this leniency; see Halichos Shelomo 3:13, Orchos Halchah 1, and Shevet ha-Levi 8:168-8; 10:81-2. 13. Kaf ha-Chayim 551:66. See also Beir Halachah 551:3, quoting Rav Akiva Eiger. 14. Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasa 42:52. 15. Or the evening before; Mishnah Berurah 493:13. If the bris is on Shabbos, it is permitted to take a haircut on Friday, ibid. If the bris is on Sunday, most poskim do not permit taking a haircut on Friday; see Kaf ha-Chayim 493:36. 16. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 122:15; Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 551:4, quoting Chasam Sofer; Kaf ha-Chayim 551:10; Pischei Teshuvah 551:1; She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 122:16. See, however, Be'er Heitev 551:3, who is stringent. 17. Rav M. Feinstein, quoted in Moadei Yeshurun, pg. 128. 18. Rav Y.Y. Kanievsky and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv, quoted in Nechamas Yisrael, pg. 32. 19. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:168. 20. See Halichos Shelomo 3:13, Orchos Halachah 1, Tzitz Eliezer 10:26 and Shevet ha-Levi 8:168-8; 10:81-2. 21. Mishnah Berurah 551:19 and Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 26. 22. Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:166; 3:87; 4:21-4;

Minchas Yitzchak 1:111-4; Halichos Shelomo 3:14, Devar Halachah 4; Yechaveh Da'as 3:30. 23. Rav M. Feinstein (quoted in Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 128). 24. Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:21-4. 25. See She'arim Metzuyanim b'Halachah 122:2 and Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 128. 26. Rav M. Feinstein (Ohalei Yeshurun, pg. 128); Halichos Shelomo 3:14-3; Yechaveh Da'as 6:34. 27. Beur Halachah 551:2; Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:87. 28. Not all poskim prohibit reciting shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks and some conduct themselves according to that view; see Aruch ha-Shulchan 551:38. Our Discussion here is based on the view of the Mishnah Berurah, who does not permit reciting shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks, and this has become the prevalent custom. 29. Mishnah Berurah 551:98. Bein Pesach l'Shavuos, pg. 293, quotes Teshuvos Riva that this is permitted only on Shabbos itself, but new clothing may not be worn for the Minchah service on erev Shabbos. 30. Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 551:99. 31. Halichos Beisah, pg. 371, since clothing may not be bought during the Nine Days. 32. Rama, O.C. 551:17. 33. O.C. 551:17. 34. Nitei Gavriel, pg. 35. 35. Birkei Yosef 551:12. 36. Sha'arei Teshuvah 551:10, quoting Siddur Ya'avetz. 37. Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:80. 38. See Teshuvos Maharshag, Y.D. 1:95. 39. Mishnah Berurah 551:45; Kaf ha-Chayim 551:88; Halichos Shelomo 3:14-1. Weekly-Halacha, Weekly Halacha, Copyright © 2011 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com

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Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein
 Parshat Matot 5771

Friday, July 22, 2011

I recently finished reading a fascinating book about World War II – that terrible conflict that destroyed at least fifty million lives – and it casts a different light on the known facts regarding that struggle. Its basic thesis is that the two greatest ideologues in that war – Hitler and Stalin – eventually lost the war because of their rigid ideologies which overwhelmed pragmatism and common sense. I do not mention any sense of morality or human feeling in this analysis, for neither of them had any such sense or feeling. By the end of the twentieth century, Germany was pacified, shrunken in size and ambition but still prosperous, united and successful. It was not to be the thousand year Reich that demanded lebensraum and killed millions on the basis of hateful racial superiority theories. Stalin's Soviet Union emerged as the apparent victor from the war putting a third of Europe under its rule and Communist system. But it was a pyrrhic and illusionary victory. By the end of the century, the Soviet Union had disappeared and Russia reverted to a much more contracted and constricted state. Communism had lost all intellectual and practical allure and Stalin himself went from being the great hero of the Soviet Union to being one of the greatest butchers of humans in the history of civilization. Both villains were driven by their ideologies and the belief that their will and terror tactics would make the world conform to their plans and ideals.

As I mentioned above, since neither man had any sense of morality and scruples, it is not so shocking that between them they were responsible for almost fifty million people being killed in Europe and the Mediterranean areas of the world in a little more than five years. Hitler's ideology was pure and simple. He believed in the supremacy of

the Aryan race and the destruction of others whom he saw as being sub-human, especially the Jews. His two cardinal mistakes in the war stemmed from his ideology. He invaded Russia because he needed its territory for lebensraum and he wished to destroy its Jews and enslave its Slavic population. He embarked Germany upon a two-front war that it could not possibly, in the long run, win. He pursued the extermination of the Jews unhesitatingly even when this policy was at the expense of his successful prosecution of the war itself. The Soviet Union had to collapse like a house of cards because he willed it to be that way. He changed his mind dozens of times on critical personnel and military issues and even contradicted his own previous orders, but his loyalty to his ideology never wavered. Until his suicide, he was still convinced that he was right and that the war was lost because the German people (who had sacrificed so much for his rantings and ideas) were not worthy of his leadership. His second cardinal error was in declaring war on the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He was under no obligation to do so but his ideology that a country dominated in his words "by blacks and Jews" had no right to exist and promulgate "mongrel races." He believed the future would be an Aryan world order. Millions would yet perish until the war finally ended but those two errors of Hitler, driven by his rigid ideology, sealed the doom of Germany and Naziism. Stalin was also an ideologue - and an amoral and wicked one at that. Communism was the wave of the future and Marx and Lenin had guaranteed its success and world triumph. The state was everything, the proletariat was the dictator, but the individual counted for nothing.

There was no army in the Second World War, even that of Japan, who was as wasteful of the lives of its own soldiers as the Soviet Union. Stalin was aware of the opposition to Communism in the Soviet Union. He was cognizant of the discontent in the population caused by the fact that the promised workers' paradise had not yet arrived, even after coercion and terrorization of the population into forced Communist correctness. Again, Stalin's ideology overrode common sense and practical planning. So all of the alleged territorial and economic gains occasioned by being a victor in World War II were frittered away on the altar of ideology. In our current contest with the Palestinians we should also be careful of ideologies, both pacifist and aggressive, which may not stand up to the test of practicality and reality. Ideology per se is usually a loser in human conflicts. Shabat shalom. **Berel Wein**

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Weekly Parsha

MATOT

Friday, July 22, 2011

This week's parsha concentrates upon the great commitment of the spoken word. In English Common Law and in most legal systems in the world, agreements that are not committed to writing and then signed by the parties are of little enforceable value. Though the parsha concentrates on the legalism of vows and oaths in Jewish law and life, the general message that it conveys is a clear one – the spoken word binds a person to what is said and declared. This is part of the general pattern of the Torah to rigidly enforce the value of truth and to warn humans of the dangers of duplicity and falsehood in personal relationships. The ultimate punishment of a con man is that he eventually cons himself. Today's financial markets are strewn with the wreckage of such falsehoods and cons. Ironically, most of them originate without criminal intent involved. But once involved with falsehoods, the trap closes on individuals and it becomes well nigh impossible to extract one's self from the clutches of this self-made web of falsehood. My word is my bond was the slogan of honest people in all commercial

enterprises. There are many fields of economic endeavor where this motto yet has legal effect and the spoken word is itself a binding commitment to buy or sell or to establish a price for an item. Jewish rabbinic responsa over the ages is replete with instances of enforceable oral commitments. It is not for naught that the rabbis warned us that wise men should be careful as to what they say. Saying is signing – it is committing and it is binding. There are two tractates of the Mishna and Talmud – both of considerable size and complexity – that deal with this issue of the legal and spiritual ramifications of the spoken word. Nedarim – the tractate that deals with vows (there is no perfect translation of this Hebrew term in English) – appears in seder Nashim – the order of the Mishna and the Talmud that deals with marriage, divorce and domestic relations. This placement comes to emphasize to us the necessary commitment and honesty that is the basis of the relationship of marriage and family. The vows and commitments that a husband and wife make to each other are deemed sacrosanct in Jewish life and law. Only by realizing the seriousness of vows can one train one's self in honest speech and true emotional commitment in family life. The tractate of Shvuot – dealing with oaths that are taken (again there is no exact nuanced translation of this Hebrew word in English) – is found in the order of Nezikin (torts, courts and commercial issues) in the Mishna and Talmud. Honesty and probity in the world of finance and commerce is dependent upon keeping one's word. Breaking one's word damages everyone involved. Many a person has been ruined by the inability to withstand the temptation of breaking one's word for a seemingly short-term financial gain. Since this temptation is omnipresent and very persuasive, the Torah goes to great lengths to emphasize the importance of keeping one's word under all circumstances. It reconfirms to us the maxim that "Life and death themselves are dependent upon the spoken word." Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein U.S. Office 386 Route 59 Monsey, NY 10952 845-368-1425 | 800-499-WEIN (9346) Fax: 845-368-1528 Questions? info@jewishdestiny.com Israel Office P.O. Box 23671 Jerusalem, Israel 91236 052-833-9560 Fax: 02-586-8536 Questions? scubac@netvision.net.il SSL Certificates RabbiWein.com © 2011 The Destiny Foundation

from Yeshivat Har Etzion office@etzion.org.il **Yeshivat Har Etzion**
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PARASHAT MATOT Sicha of HARAV MOSHEH LICHTENSTEIN

Yirmiyahu and Moshe – Two Models of Prophecy Translated by David Strauss

This week's haftara (Yirmiyahu 1) opens the series of haftarot that are read during the Three Weeks, known as telata de-pur'anuta - "the three haftarot of catastrophe." This haftara serves also, according to the Sefardi rite, as the haftara for Parashat Shemot. There it serves the purpose of comparison and contrast between the selection of Moshe and the consecration of Yirmiyahu. Here, too, we shall examine this angle.

When we compare the two consecration stories, we see that Moshe strongly opposes the appointment forced upon him, whereas Yirmiyahu does not oppose it, but merely asks for support and strengthening. His argument that he is young and lacks maturity is a pertinent argument, and from the moment that he is promised God's support and assistance, he calms down and accepts the mission without further discussion. Moshe, on the other hand, does not put forward any relevant arguments based on his inappropriateness for the job.[1] All that he presents are general arguments that could have been put forward by anybody upon whom such a mission would have been cast. The argument, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Shemot 3:11), testifies to Moshe's humility, but it does not constitute an explanation why he in particular is unsuited for the role. And this is certainly true about the question, "Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to

you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say to them?" (ibid. v. 13). We are not dealing here with a flaw in Moshe's personality or abilities, but rather with a lack of desire on his part to accept the mission. Unlike Yirmiyahu, who accepts the supportive words of God and abandons his arguments, Moshe is not set at ease even after he is promised by God, "Certainly, I will be with you" (ibid. v. 12), and he continues to argue with God.

PROPHET OF REDEMPTION AND PROPHET OF DESTRUCTION

The conclusion that emerges from all this is that Yirmiyahu is not afraid to accept upon himself his prophetic mission and that he merely voices a pertinent comment regarding his inappropriateness for the job; therefore God's promise to help him suffices. Moshe, on the other hand, does whatever he can do not to accept the mission and he only goes to Egypt after a long argument during the course of which God becomes angry with him. Were we to ask ourselves, from whom would we expect greater opposition - from Moshe, the prophet of redemption, or from Yirmiyahu, the prophet of destruction - we would say just the opposite. Moshe is sent to the people with the festive tidings of their redemption and the end of their servitude, whereas Yirmiyahu comes with harsh prophecies of rebuke and destruction. It is certainly far more pleasant to prophesy about the evil that will befall Pharaoh and Egypt, than to make similar prophecies about Israel.

While it is true that Moshe will also be sent as a prophet to Pharaoh who will refuse to heed his message and that the confrontation with Pharaoh will be unpleasant, Moshe's primary mission was still to Israel and it differs in its essentials from that of Yirmiyahu. And, indeed, even retrospectively, we see that Yirmiyahu suffered more than Moshe. He lived in harsh and constant tension with the members of his generation, he was persecuted by his neighbors and acquaintances, and he was cast into a pit. Moshe, despite his disappointment with the people and the tensions that accompanied the relationship between them throughout their joint years in the wilderness, was very far from the situations that characterized Yirmiyahu. Why, then, did Moshe oppose his prophetic mission so much more strongly than did Yirmiyahu?

LEADER OR MOUTHPIECE

In order to answer this question, we must examine the nature of the missions assigned to each of them. We find in Scripture various models of prophecy, and these account for the difference between Moshe and Yirmiyahu. One model of prophecy is the prophet sent to lead the people and serve them as a guide. Fundamentally, we are dealing with human leadership. The prophet is chosen because of his unique spiritual-prophetic powers and because of his spiritual greatness, but he leads the people according to his own judgment, while exploiting his capability of communicating with God and in light of his spiritual perspective. In other words, we are dealing with a "prophet-leader," that is to say, a leader who is also a prophet. Of course, the tensions and doubts that accompany any leader who is forced to make difficult decisions and outline policy in complicated situations, are also the lot of the leader who is a prophet, for the prophet leads his people as a human being.

In contrast, there is another type of prophet, who does not approach the people with the spiritual powers that had developed within him to the point that he achieved prophecy, but rather he simply serves as a convenient mouthpiece for God to pass His word on to the people. The prophet is a human loudspeaker that God uses to pass on messages relating to the needs of the people. If a prophet of independent stature is available, he will be chosen to bring the word of God to the people, but if no such possibility presents itself, it is not impossible that a person who does not meet the ordinary criteria for prophecy will be chosen, because the circumstances dictate transmission of the message. It is precisely on this point that there is a significant difference between Moshe and Yirmiyahu. Moshe was appointed as a prophet sent to lead the people. God revealed Himself to Moshe through prophecy, and chose him because of his spiritual qualifications, but the office was one of political leadership. For reasons that we can not go into here, Moshe was afraid and tried to refuse, but it is important to emphasize that it was the position of prophet-leader that he tried to refuse. Yirmiyahu, on the other hand, was not appointed to serve as leader, but rather he was meant to serve as God's mouthpiece, and therefore he does not refuse, but rather he accepts God's support and agrees to prophesy.

YOUNG AND CONSECRATED

This point expresses itself in various ways. First of all, it is expressed in Yirmiyahu's selection despite his young age. If the prophet is God's mouthpiece, there is no reason not to choose a young man, for he prophesies not on the basis of his spiritual accomplishments, but because he serves as a conduit for passing on messages. Needless to say, had Yirmiyahu been chosen to serve as a leader like Moshe, it would have been inconceivable to send him as a young man, with no experience or standing, despite his consecration. It was only because the job description was that of a prophet who is not a leader that it was possible to appoint such a young man. Second, Yirmiyahu's consecration is formulated in terms of bodily sanctity; this is connected to the fact that he serves as God's instrument. This is similar to the

sanctity of a priest, who is a “vessel of the sanctuary” and he serves God with his body. In this context, let us cite the words of Radak: “I have sanctified you” – in the sense of sanctity. “And I have known you” – in the sense of greatness. According to the first explanation, one might ask: Surely all the prophets and righteous people, and similarly the wicked people, God knew and recognized them before they were formed. This teaches that [Yirmiyahu’s] father and mother were careful regarding sanctity and purity during the pregnancy so that the prophet should be consecrated. And the great Sage, Rabbi Moshe bar Maimon wrote that this applies to every prophet – he requires natural preparation from the time of his formation that he be prepared for prophecy with training. According to him, one can ask: Why was this not stated to any other prophet, but [only] to Yirmiyahu? We can say that because God, may He be blessed, knew that Yirmiyahu would refuse God’s mission, He told him that He had been prepared for prophecy from the womb, in order to strengthen his heart to follow God’s mission. Should you ask: Surely Moshe Rabbeinu also refused God’s mission, but He did not tell him these things? [The answer is that] He gave him a great sign to strengthen his heart, namely, the sign of the burning bush and the other signs that He gave him to perform before Pharaoh.

According to the Radak’s first explanation, when God says, “Before you came out of the womb I sanctified you,” we are dealing with the concept of sanctity, in its plain sense, whereas the Rambam understood this as preparation for prophetic capability. According to both explanations, the Radak is bothered by the fact that this was not stated with respect to other prophets. According to the Radak’s first explanation, only Yirmiyahu was sanctified with bodily sanctity from the womb, this owing to his parents’ conduct during the period of pregnancy (apparently, following the precedent of Shimshon). It seems that the emphasis on the prophet’s bodily sanctity stems from the fact that he serves as God’s mouthpiece. Since Yirmiyahu does this from an early age, his sanctity is from the womb. A prophet-leader, on the other hand, leads on the basis of the human greatness within him, and therefore his definition is different. A comment is also in order regarding the Radak’s second answer (based on the Rambam’s understanding). He assumes that the matter of sanctity was not unique to Yirmiyahu, but it was told to him in order to strengthen him since he did not want to prophesy. A question, therefore, arises regarding Moshe, for he too refused to prophesy, but he did not receive this kind of strengthening. The Radak answers that Moshe received other types of strengthening, for “He gave him a great sign to strengthen his heart, namely, the sign of the burning bush and the other signs that He gave him to perform before Pharaoh.” This answer fits in very well with what we have said. Yirmiyahu who was a prophet-mouthpiece was strengthened with respect to his sanctity, whereas Moshe, who hesitated to accept the office of prophet-leader, was given tools that would strengthen his political skills, this being preferable for his needs.

PROPHET TO THE NATIONS Third, the expression, “I have ordained you a prophet to the nations” (v. 5) seems to be connected to this distinction as well. The expression is difficult, for Yirmiyahu’s primary mission was not to the nations, but to Israel. The commentators offered various explanations to resolve this difficulty. However we explain these words, whether directed at Israel as a nation, or to all the nations including Israel, it is only in the framework of prophet as God’s mouthpiece that Yirmiyahu could have been assigned the mission of turning to the nation and prophesying about it. Even if the reference is to Israel, the prophecy follows from the fact that they are a nation about which the prophet can prophesy, and this he does by delivering the word of God from the outside. Were he a prophet-leader leading the people, using the expression “prophet for the nations” when he guides and leads the people of Israel would be off the mark, for he would be leading them as part of them. A prophet-leader cannot look upon the nation of Israel from a prophetic perspective outside of them.

HAND AND MOUTH In light of this, we can well understand the end of the dialogue: “Then the Lord put out His hand, and touched my mouth, And the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put My words in your mouth” (v. 9). Defining the consecration as placing the word of God in his mouth follows the definition of the prophet as a mouthpiece. This is also the reason that He touches his mouth, in contrast to Moshe who receives signs in his hand and in his staff. The objective of the signs for Moshe is not the strengthening of his prophetic powers, but rather his leadership, and the symbols for that are not the mouth, but rather the staff and the hands which represent practical and political activity.

GOD’S MOUTHPIECE – A PRIVATE PERSON In conclusion, it should be noted that in the continuation of the book, there is a sharp tension between Yirmiyahu the person who experiences the destruction and Israel’s suffering, on the one hand, and the prophet of destruction who foretells the catastrophe that will befall them. Frequently, the book describes points of friction and near crises regarding this duality. This does not stand in contradiction to our

claim that Yirmiyahu is God’s mouthpiece, but rather it strengthens it. In the end, Yirmiyahu is also a private individual with personal experiences, but the duality and the tension stem from the fact that in his other half he is God’s mouthpiece. Owing to the sharp differences of perspective between the human being and the divine mouthpiece, the sharp tension is created. Were he a prophet-leader, he would be able to faithfully represent the human angle even before God and mitigate the tension between his prophetic role and his personal identity. But since Yirmiyahu’s prophetic role is merely to express the Divine perspective, the tension is exceedingly severe.

THE ORDER OF THE PROPHECIES AND THEIR MEANING

Let us now briefly deal with another point, namely, the reciprocal relationship between the various parts of the haftara. It is easy to see that the haftara is composed of four prophecies: 1) the prophecy of consecration; 2) the prophecy concerning the rod of the almond tree; 3) the prophecy concerning the boiling pot; 4) the prophecy concerning Israel’s going after God in the wilderness. The prophecy of consecration is not a prophecy that was related to Israel, but only to Yirmiyahu, and it deals with the nature of his prophecy. The second prophecy, regarding the rod of the almond tree, also deals with the nature of his prophecy (as “a prophecy about prophecy”) and with Yirmiyahu’s prophetic skills (“You have seen well” [v. 13]). It is not meant to serve as Yirmiyahu’s inaugural words to the people, but as sort of a “prophetic exercise” between him and God. In light of this, we must examine the third prophecy concerning the boiling pot, and this in light of two considerations. First, unlike the prophecy of consolation at the end of the haftara, when Yirmiyahu is told, “Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem” (2:2), here it does not say that Yirmiyahu must go out and speak to the people. It should be emphasized that in many places in the book, the prophet is told to go to the people and prophesy to them, and thus this is not an expression unique to this prophecy of consolation. We see then that the prophecy of “Go out and cry in the ears of Jerusalem” was told to the people, whereas the prophecy of the boiling pot was not conveyed to the people, but rather it was a private message directed at Yirmiyahu alone. This fits in well with the words, “And the word of the Lord came to me a second time” (v. 13), which emphasizes the connection between the prophecy of the rod of the almond tree and the prophecy of the boiling pot, for the word “second” creates a relationship between the two prophecies. What is the meaning of the boiling pot to Yirmiyahu as a private individual, rather than as a prophecy to the people? It seems that the prophecy comes to warn Yirmiyahu that his primary mission will be to serve as prophet of doom. He must know and prepare himself for the fact that he will spend most of his time dealing with ruin and destruction. His visions will be visions of boiling anger (“boiling pot”) and his predictions will be about foreign kings coming to destroy Jerusalem. Before he sets out on his mission, he is forewarned by God and prepared for what the future will bring him.

OPENING WITH CONSOLATION If this is true, it leads us to another important conclusion, namely, that the first prophecy that Yirmiyahu delivers to the people is the prophecy of “I remember in your favor, the devotion of your youth, etc.” (2:2-3). Chazal[2] indeed note that this is the beginning of Yirmiyahu’s prophecy: “Go out and cry in the ears of Jerusalem” – this is the beginning of the book. And why is it written here? Because there is no order in the Torah.[3]

This notion has great importance because, according to this, Yirmiyahu’s first words to the people are not rebuke and warning of destruction, but consolation. In order that he should be able to reproach them with harsh words and decree destruction and exile, he must first present a prophecy that embraces long-term optimism – surely the “devotion of youth” under discussion took place hundreds of years earlier, but it is still valid. He must also open his prophetic career by showing the people God’s compassion for and connection to them. Otherwise, the rebuke would bring the people to despair and to the feeling that God wishes their destruction. Only in the wake of such an opening can the prophet come with words of rebuke. In next week’s haftara, Yirmiyahu will rebuke Israel for straying from God. It is therefore of exceeding importance that this week he opens with Israel’s youthful devotion and bridal love.

[1] The argument of “heaviness of mouth” and “heaviness of tongue” appear only at the end of the story of the burning bush, after he exhausts all his other arguments.

[2] Mekhilta on the Song of the Sea, on the verse, “The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake” (Shemot 15:9).

[3] In light of our explanation, there is no need to invoke the idea that there is no order in the organization of the biblical books, for we can say that the previous prophecies are not the beginning of the book for the people.

From: Kaganoff Sent: Monday, July 18, 2011 5:00 PM To: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com Subject: shaving and haircuts during the 3 weeks

**Shaving and Haircuts during the Three Weeks
by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: My company sent me out of town to meet a new client, and I forgot to have my hair cut before Shiva Asar B'Tamuz. May I have the bushier parts trimmed? Does it make a difference if I use a non-Jewish barber? May I shave?

Question #2: My son wrote me that in his yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel, the Sefardic bochurim shave during the Three Weeks. Is this permitted? Question #3: Thank G-d, we will be celebrating the Bris of a Grandson during the Three Weeks, and I do not want to look disheveled for the Bris photos. May I shave in honor of the occasion?

Question #4: My wife says that her hair is sticking out beyond her tichel and she would like to trim it. May she?

The three-week period between Shiva Asar B'Tamuz and Tisha B'Av is observed by klal Yisroel as a time of mourning. These three weeks heralded the beginning of the tragedies that took place prior to the destruction of both Batei Hamikdash. Prior to the destruction of the First Beis Hamikdash, the daily korban tamid ceased on Shiva Asar B'Tamuz and did not resume until the Jews began constructing the Second Beis Hamikdash seventy years later (see Rambam, Hilchos Taanis 5:2). Before the destruction of the Second Beis Hamikdash, the walls of the city of Yerushalayim were breached on Shiva Asar B'Tamuz, leading to the complete devastation that followed (Gemara Taanis 28b).

To commemorate these tragic events, the minhag is to observe some mourning practices (aveilus) from the 17th day of Tamuz until Tisha B'Av (Rama, Darchei Moshe 551:5 and Hagahos 551:2; Ben Ish Chai, Parshas Devorim #4; Knesses Hagedolah; Sdei Chemed Vol. 5, pg. 279 #14). (According to most customs, some aveilus extends into the Tenth of Av.) This three-week season is referred to by the Midrash Rabbah (Eicha 1:3) as the period of Bein Hametzarim. (It is noteworthy that neither the Mishna nor the Gemara make any mention of beginning the mourning period any earlier than Rosh Chodesh.)

WHAT ARE THE LAWS ABOUT HAVING HAIRCUTS AND SHAVING DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

The Mishnah (Taanis 26b) rules that it is prohibited to cut one's hair from the Motza'ei Shabbos preceding Tisha B'Av until Tisha B'Av. (As a general rule, the halachos of shaving and cutting one's hair are usually the same.) These days are referred to as shavua shechal bo Tisha B'Av, the week in which Tisha B'Av falls. Thus, when Tisha B'Av falls on Sunday, one may cut one's hair the entire period of the Three Weeks except for Tisha B'Av itself! However, the Rama notes that the custom among Ashkenazim is that we do not cut our hair during the entire Three Weeks (Darchei Moshe 551:5 and Hagahos 551:4).

There are different customs among Sefardim as to whether they get their hair cut during the Three Weeks. The Shulchan Aruch (551:3) only prohibits that which is recorded in the Gemara, cutting hair from Motza'ei Shabbos until Tisha B'Av, and this is the prevalent practice among Sefardim today in Eretz Yisroel (Shu't Yechaveh Daas 4:36). Others shave and get hair cuts until Rosh Chodesh, but stop after that point.

However, other Sefardic communities follow the Ashkenazic practice not to shave or get haircuts the entire period of Bein Hametzarim (Ben Ish Chai, Parshas Devorim #12). (Incidentally, the Shulchan Aruch [551:4] also permits having one's hair cut immediately after Tisha B'Av is over, and does not require waiting until the next day.)

SEFARDIM LIVING IN AN ASHKENAZI COMMUNITY

May a Sefardi living in an Ashkenazi community be lenient despite the prevalent custom?

This issue is discussed by contemporary authorities, involving the general halachic rule that a community should follow one established practice. This principle is referred to by the Gemara as "lo sigdodu," do not give the appearance that different Torah communities received different versions of the Torah, G-d forbid (Yevamos 14a, as explained by Rashi). This law prohibits a Jewish community from following two conflicting customs. Thus, it seems that an Ashkenazi living in a Sefardi community or vice versa must observe the prevailing custom.

However, contemporary poskim rule that Ashkenazim living in Sefardi communities may observe Ashkenazic custom and Sefardim living in Ashkenazi communities may continue to follow Sefardic practice. Therefore, Sefardic bochurim studying in an Ashkenazic yeshiva are permitted to shave until Rosh Chodesh or during the entire Three Weeks, depending on their minhag. Even though most of the students in the yeshiva follow the Ashkenazic practice of not shaving during the entire Three Weeks, it does not violate minhag hamakom for the Sefardic bochurim to shave (Shu't Yechaveh Daas 4:36).

WHY DOES THIS NOT VIOLATE LO SIGODEDU?

Even though there is a general rule that a community should follow one halachic practice, this is true when the community has one rav or follows the guidance of one beis din. However, when there are two different batei din in a community, each beis din is free to rule as it sees fit and does not need to change its decision to avoid lo sigodadu. Thus, the prohibition of lo sigodadu applies only when there are two different practices in one beis din.

Similarly, when it is well-known that there are different communities, each may observe its own well-established practice. Therefore, Ashkenazim and Sefardim following different minhagim is not a violation of lo sigodadu. As a result, Sefardic bachurim may shave during the Three Weeks even if they study in an Ashkenazi Yeshiva, since it is understood that they are following a different psak.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

There are several exceptions when Ashkenazim are permitted to shave or take a haircut during the Three Weeks. For example, it is permitted to trim one's mustache if it interferes with eating (Ran; Shulchan Aruch 551:13). Some poskim rule that a person who usually shaves every day is permitted to shave during the Three Weeks in honor of Shabbos (Shu't Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #348 s.v. Ve-yi golach). Others permit someone to shave whose beard stubble makes him very uncomfortable (see Shearim Hametzuyanim B'Halacha 122:5). However, since these last two psakim are not usually accepted, one should not rely on them without receiving a psak from a rav.

Someone who is in aveilos is not permitted to shave or have his hair cut until the end of the Sheloshim (30 days), and someone in aveilos for a parent, for several months. If the aveilos ended during the Three Weeks, he is permitted to have his hair cut since he could not cut it before Shiva Asar Bi'Tamuz (Be'er Heiteiv 551:18). Most poskim permit this even during the Nine Days assuming his aveilos ended then (Bach; Taz; Mishnah Berurah 551:87; cf. however, Eliyah Rabbah).

SHAVING BECAUSE OF FINANCIAL LOSS

Rav Moshe Feinstein paskens that one may shave during the Three Weeks if one may lose one's job or customers because one does not shave. However, if the only concern is that people will make fun of him, one is not permitted to shave. Rav Moshe Feinstein contends that since the prohibition not to shave the entire Three Weeks began as a minhag, the custom was only originally established when one will not suffer financially as a result. However, if he will only suffer embarrassment or harassment but no loss of income, he is required to remain unshaven (Shu't Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 1:93; Orach Chayim 4:102). Thus, someone who makes a business trip may shave since making a bad impression on the potential customer could cost him business. Certainly, one is not required to jeopardize his employment by avoiding shaving during the Three Weeks.

SHAVING FOR A SIMCHA

If a bris falls out during the Three Weeks, the father of the baby, the mohel, and the sandek who holds the baby during the bris are permitted to shave or take a haircut in honor of the festive occasion (Shu't Chasam Sofer, Orach Chayim #158). According to some poskim, the kvatter, who brings the baby to the bris, and the sandek meumad (also called amida lebrochos), who holds the baby while he is being named, are also permitted to shave or take a haircut (Shearim Metzuyanim B'Halacha, Kuntrus Acharon 120:8, based on Eliyah Rabbah 551:27 and Beis Meiv 551). Thus the grandfather who asked whether he may shave or cut his hair in honor of his grandson's bris during the Three Weeks may do so if he receives the honor of being sandek. If he receives a different honor, he should ask a shaylah as to whether he may shave in honor of the occasion.

The poskim dispute whether the baalei simcha are permitted to shave even if the bris falls during the Nine Days or only if it falls before Rosh Chodesh. (The Chasam Sofer, Shu't Noda B'Yehudah 1:28, Shaarei Tshuva, and Sdei Chemed 5:278:3 permit, whereas the Be'er Heiteiv 551:3 prohibits.)

CHOSON

Question: May someone who got married before the 17th of Tamuz shave during his Sheva Brachos week? May someone attending a Sheva Brachos shave in honor of the occasion?

The week after a couple gets married is considered a Yom Tov for them and they should wear Yom Tov clothes and eat Yom Tov-type meals. Similarly, they are not permitted to go to work. Part of the celebration is that they should look like two celebrants. Thus, it would seem that the choson may shave during his Sheva Brachos week.

However, for the participant in the Sheva Brachos it is not a Yom Tov, so he would not be permitted to shave for the occasion.

Some poskim hold that a bar mitzvah bochur who needs a haircut may get one during the Three Weeks, as long as it is not during the week of Tisha B'Av. Others contend that it is better if he gets the haircut the day before he turns bar mitzvah

and rely on the opinion that a minor may get a haircut during the Three Weeks, as I will discuss (Shearim Metzuyanim B'Halacha, Kuntrus Acharon 120:8).

UPSHEREN

Although some poskim permit scheduling an upsheren (chalahah) during the Three Weeks if the child was born during the Three Weeks, the prevalent practice is to postpone the upsheren until after Tisha B'Av (Piskei Tshuvos 551:44; Chanoch Lanaar, Chapter 21, fn. 1).

Adults may not give children haircuts during the week of Tisha B'Av (Shulchan Aruch 551:14). There is a dispute whether a minor may get a haircut during the Three Weeks, some poskim contending that children were not included in the custom not to cut hair (Mishnah Berurah 551:82, quoting Chayei Odom), whereas others rule that one may not cut a child's hair just as one may not cut an adult's (Eliyah Rabbah 551:28).

There are different opinions among poskim whether a woman may have her hair cut during the Three Weeks. The Mishnah Berurah rules that a woman may not have her hair cut during the week of Tisha B'Av, but he suggests that she may be permitted to trim the hair on her temples that stick out from the tichel (Mishnah Berurah 551:79). Many poskim rule that a woman may tweeze her eyebrows and perform similar cosmetic activities (see Shu't Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 2:137; Halichos Beisah, Chapter 25, footnote 70; Piskei Teshuvos 551:43).

MAY I CLIP MY FINGERNAILS DURING THE THREE WEEKS?

It is permitted to clip one's fingernails during the Three Weeks and the Nine Days according to all opinions. It is a dispute whether one can clip nails during the week of Tisha B'Av (Magen Avraham, 551:11 permits, whereas Taz 551:13 and Eliyah Rabbah 551:7 prohibit).

FOCUS OF THE THREE WEEKS

The most important aspect of the Three Weeks is to focus on the tremendous loss we suffer because of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. The minhag among some Sefardic kehillos in Yerushalayim is to sit on the floor each day of the Three Weeks just after midday and to recite part of tikkun chatzos that mourns the loss of the Beis Hamikdash. To further convey this mood, Yesod V'Shoresh HaAvodah prohibits any laughing and small talk during these weeks just as a mourner does not engage in laughter or small talk (Shaar 9, Ch. 11-12).

Although we may not be holding at such a madreigah, we certainly should contemplate the tremendous loss in our spiritual lives without the Beis Hamikdash. Let us pray intently for the restoration of the Beis Hamikdash and the return of the Divine Presence to Yerushalayim, speedily in our days!

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Mattos

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PARSHAS MATOS

Her husband had nullified them and Hashem will forgive her. (30:13) The husband has the power to nullify his wife's vows. So why does Hashem have to "forgive" her? She did no wrong. The Talmud Nazir 23a asks this question and explains that the woman was unaware that her husband had nullified her vow. Therefore, she needs atonement. She thought she was transgressing, when, in fact, she was not. Chazal note that when Rabbi Akiva would reach this pasuk he would begin to weep: "If someone who intended to eat pork and instead lamb's meat came into his hand - he needs atonement and forgiveness. Then someone who intended that pork come into his hand and pork did, in fact, come into his hand, how much more so is he in need of atonement and forgiveness." In short, Rabbi Akiva compares the woman who attempted to violate her vow, not realizing that it had been revoked, to someone who thought he was eating pork and discovered that it was lamb. Both intended to commit a transgression - but they did not. Nevertheless, they require atonement. Certainly, the individual who attempts to sin and is successful in carrying out his malevolent intention requires Divine forgiveness!

Horav Yerachmiel Krohm, Shlita, relates that the Chafetz Chaim, zl, was once subpoenaed to testify in civil court as a character witness for one of his students. This occurred during World War I, and the student was suspected of spying for the German government. The charges were trumped up, but that was the way of life in Eastern Europe one century ago. The sage prayed fervently that his student be spared. The entire yeshivah body fasted and prayed on the designated day of the court case. The Chafetz Chaim was called before the magistrate and asked to offer testimony concerning the character of the suspected spy.

The Chafetz Chaim spoke the truth. This was a young man who spent his entire day engrossed in Torah study. Nothing else mattered - certainly spying for the

enemy! Then came the prosecution who contended that they had no proof concerning the veracity of the Chafetz Chaim's testimony. How was the court to ascertain that what the Chafetz Chaim had related was, in fact, true?

One of the student's defense lawyers asked to be heard. "I would like to relate an incident to the magistrate that occurred concerning the Chafetz Chaim, and then I will allow his honor to be the judge of this sage's rectitude. One day, the Rav was in the railroad station in Warsaw, when a thief came over and stole his briefcase. Do you know how the Chafetz Chaim reacted? He declared loudly, 'I forgive you for what you did. You may have the briefcase as a gift!'"

When the magistrate heard this, he looked the defense attorney in the eye and asked, "Do you believe that story?"

The attorney looked right back at the magistrate and retorted, "Judge, what difference does it make whether I believe it or not. Let us see if they say such stories about his honor!"

A powerful response - and quite true. Where there is the proverbial smoke, there is fire. Such stories are said only about the few and the great, in whose class the Chafetz Chaim was the superstar. As an addendum to the incident, Rav Krohm relates that the Chafetz Chaim was queried about why he had raised his voice in his declaration of forgiveness. He could have done the same thing quietly. The sage replied, "My intention was to spare him not only from the sin of gezeilah, theft, but also of 'intending to eat pork and eating lamb'. This way, his intention was not to steal at all."

How often do we allow ourselves to be entrapped in possibly doing something inappropriate, which fortunately turns out to be in our favor? Do we ever think about the atonement we require?

Calculate the total of the captured spoils... Divide the spoils in half... You shall raise up a tribute to Hashem from the men of the war. (31:26,27,28)

Once the nation triumphed in their battle of vengeance against Midyan, they were enjoined with an added mitzvah: the division of the spoils. The greatest share went to the soldiers who actually risked their lives in battle, with the remainder going to the nation, the Mishkan treasury and the Leviim. Half of the spoils went to the warriors, with the other half going to the nation. Both the warriors and the nation were taxed by the treasury with a percentage of the warriors' booty given to Elazar the Kohen and a percentage of the nation's portion given to the Leviim. This was known as mechess, tax, on the spoils. Bahag considers the separation of mechess one of the 613 mitzvos of the Torah, while the Rambam opines that it only applied to that time. According to Ramban, the Bahag's application of this mitzvah remains in force throughout time: Whenever the Jewish nation wages war, a portion of the spoils must be given to the sanctuary.

Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, discusses the practical application of this mitzvah in contemporary times. First, does the concept of war apply today? Second, we no longer have within our midst the Bais Hamikdash with its accompanying Kohanim and Leviim who would receive the mechess. What does mechess mean today, and does it apply? Rav Nebentzhal concludes that while the actual mitzvah may not have practical application as a result of the above factors, its "spirit," the underlying lessons that may be derived from it, are instruction whose relevance is certainly germane in today's Torah-oriented society.

The Torah goes to great length to emphasize the mechess in order to teach us a number of lessons. In Mesches Derech Eretz Zuta 4, Chazal teach that if one came into money without exerting any toil, the way to ensure its remaining in his possession is to include Hashem as his "partner" in the venture. Hashem will make sure that the money will grow and multiply. The reasons for this are simple: One who performs a mitzvah with his money demonstrates that he is an astute investor and should be granted more opportunities for "investment." Furthermore, when one begins with a mitzvah, it has an effect on his other possessions. This is an individual to whom money is considered a gift from G-d, so it should be acknowledged and appropriated for mitzvos.

A second reason that one should apportion part of the spoils for the Sanctuary may be derived from Yaakov Avinu's statement to Hashem, Katonti mikol ha'chasadim, "I was diminished by all of the kindnesses" (Bereishis 32:11). Chazal interpret Yaakov's statement as a concession that, as beneficiary of Hashem's kindness to him, his reservoir of merits had become depleted. The Patriarch recognized that when one overcomes a serious challenge, triumphs over a powerful adversary, he is calling upon "weaponry" that is "warehoused" in his behalf. We think that these merits are not used. They are. Each time Hashem spares us from challenge, He calls up more of our stored zechusim, merits. We cannot expect to withdraw from the bank constantly without making a deposit. If we do not put in, we will soon have nothing to withdraw.

Rav Nebentzhal offers a third reason for distributing part of the spoils to the Sanctuary. War demands that one elevates himself spiritually. War has a definitive effect on a person's psyche. For some, this effect is of a positive nature,

engendering a leap of faith and strengthening his ties with the Almighty. For others, regrettably, war can have a negative, almost numbing, effect. This occurs due to a number of reasons. First, an individual who, at best, is a weak person will find himself tremendously challenged on the battlefield. Such a person functions optimally when he has the support of a community, order in his life, no temptations, no challenges. The battlefield weakens his defenses. He finds it difficult to deal with the pressures. Second, when one emerges triumphant from battle he always has the fear that the success will go to his head. It was his power, his strength, his strategy - all "his," allowing no room for the true Source of success: Hashem

One who returns from a challenging situation, succeeding at a time when others have failed, knowing full-well that his success is from Hashem, must make an offering from the spoils. The gift has a twofold purpose: gratitude and atonement. He must be grateful for his survival and successful return. He must realize that he has paid a price for his return. The merits which had accrued in his Heavenly account were used, and his account is now diminished. An atonement is necessary as recognition of this reality. One acknowledges that it was Hashem Who saved him, and that his survival came with a price. Nothing should remain unacknowledged.

They approached him and said, "Pens for the flock we shall build here for our livestock and cities for our small children... Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flock. (32:16,24)

We find a strong difference of opinion regarding the choice of priorities as manifest by Bnei Gad u'Bnei Reuven and Moshe Rabbeinu's response to them. They asked for pens for their sheep and cities for their children. Moshe replied by underscoring the requirement to fulfill one's obligation to his children first and only then address the needs of the animals. Clearly anyone with a modicum of intelligence understands the importance of applying oneself to his own priorities. The problem is that not all of us are capable of sifting through the "various" priorities which present themselves. Let us focus on determining the priorities which some of us face.

Reb Zalman was a very observant Jew, quite wealthy, who gave charity with ease, helping many Jews in need. In order to provide a proper Torah education for his young children, he hired Reb Shlomo, a Lubavitcher chasid, who believed strongly in the need for every Jew to be moser nefesh, dedicate himself to the point of self sacrifice, to his religious observance. "Anything less than mesiras nefesh is useless," he would declare.

One time, Reb Shlomo, the tutor, approached Reb Zalman and quipped, "You want me to teach your children Torah, yet you refuse to show them your own commitment to Torah study. The 'do as I say - not do as I do' dictum seems to have generated increased popularity concerning Torah study. If a father wants to send his children the message that Torah study is important, then he must also study, or else the finest tutors will be of no avail."

Reb Zalman did not disagree in principle. He felt, however, that his business affairs were so imposing that they allowed him little time for Torah study. Furthermore, if he neglected to apply himself fully to commerce, he would not have enough income for charity.

Reb Shlomo continued, "You seem to find time to sleep and eat. Indeed, you find sufficient time to do business. It is just for the Torah that your schedule does not permit any allowance. Are you sending the message to your children that Torah study is the least of your responsibilities?"

"You are a wonderful and charitable person, but do not think for one moment that charity replaces Torah study. There is no indemnity for a lack of Torah study. Flour and water are both necessary for making bread. One cannot compensate for a lack of water by adding more flour."

Generous people have no issue with sharing their wealth with those who are less fortunate. They derive great satisfaction from giving to others. Yet, they might act miserly when it comes to their own time. They will share their wealth with others, but they are not prepared to share their time with the Torah. They are too busy to learn, or learning deprives them of earning more money which they can earmark for charity. However, taking time off for Torah study will not decrease one's earnings.

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains that false piety is characterized by exaggerating the significance of trivia and minimizing the importance of principles. We do it all of the time by attributing importance to relatively minor things, while simultaneously ignoring that which should be treated with respect.

We live in a society that seems to venerate the inconsequential, while manifesting indifference to that which is really important. This confusion of priorities is especially glaring in light of picking and choosing those mitzvos that appeal to our comfort zone. We are meticulous concerning that which enters our mouth, but we have no problem denigrating its purveyor if it does not suit our fancy. Machlokes, controversy and discord, has almost become a way of life, regrettably occurring and

being accepted within the halls of those who are supposed to set the standard for others to follow. Tznius, modesty, is not only about the length of one's clothes. It is about calling attention to oneself. Dressing like a monk, but screaming to the world, "Look at my house; look at my car, etc..." is not tznius. The list goes on. We seem to be plagued with the disease of placing emphasis on the superficial, while failing to observe the most basic tenets of our faith: like V'havta l'reiacha kamocho, "Love your fellow as yourself."

A similar idea applies to attitude. The Tzemach Tzedek, zl, of Lubavitch said, "It is not a sin to say, 'I want.' However, to say, 'I need,' indicates a lack of faith." Many of us have desires. Some of these desires are appropriate, while others are definitely not in our best interest. Regrettably, we continue to "want," either because we are governed by limitations which promote desire, or because our level of intelligence has not yet reached that point at which we understand that some things are not good for our health - both physical and spiritual.

To make the statement, "I need," expresses one's lack. Since we should believe that Hashem provides us with everything that we need, making a statement, "I need," is an assertion that Hashem has failed to provide. This indicates a shortcoming in one's faith, since we believe that Hashem provides what He "feels" is necessary. If we do not have it - we do not need it - end of subject.

The acquisition of money/wealth is a goal that seems to consume many of us. In the Chassidic writings, it is noted that when Hashem cursed the nachash, serpent, He said, "You shall eat dust all the days of your life" (Bereishis 3:14). This does not appear to be much of a punishment, since the serpent was destined to have an endless supply of food. The Chassidic Masters explain that other living creatures must pray to Hashem for their food. The serpent, however, is so abominable that Hashem wants no part of him: "Here is your food. Take it and leave Me alone. I do not want to hear from you - ever!"

Many of us think that we could use a greater portion of wealth - not necessarily riches - but just to be "comfortable." We turn to the Almighty in prayer and ask for more than He originally gave us. It just is not enough for our needs. Imagine if He were to answer our prayers, it might be something like this: "You really do not need more than you already have, but since you are adamant and question My judgment, I will give you more, but do not pray to Me for any more money. I do not want to hear from you."

On the other hand, one may want and he should pray for that which he wants. If, at first, he does not receive a positive answer to his "wants," he should realize that Hashem is telling him that greater wealth is not one of his "needs." He is doing well as it is.

And the land shall be conquered before Hashem, and then shall you return. Then you shall be vindicated from Hashem and from Yisrael. (32:22)

Moshe Rabbeinu rebuked the tribes of Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven concerning their distorted priorities. Money definitely plays an important role in one's life, but certainly not at the expense of his children. Nonetheless, even after Moshe's reproach, followed by their positive acceptance and ensuing fulfillment of their tribal obligations to the collective nation, Chazal still found something wanting in their behavior. In the Midrash Rabbah, Chazal state that Hashem had created and bequeathed to the world three unique, exceptional gifts. They are: wisdom; strength; and wealth. One who is privileged to have been the beneficiary of wisdom essentially has everything. One who has been granted strength has received it all. One who is wealthy is privileged to have it all. Chazal continue with a stipulation: these gifts must come from Heaven and through Torah. If, however, it is man made strength, wisdom or wealth, it is of little value. Clearly Chazal's words are confusing. Is there anything that does not come by way of Heaven? Does man have his own power? Chazal explain that there is an endurance issue concerning anything that one does not receive from Heaven. The examples that are cited include: Haman and Korach who accumulated incredible wealth, only to lose it all. It was not granted to them by Hashem. So, how did they acquire it? They grabbed it! Likewise, Bnei Gad and Bnei Reuven were very wealthy, but their wealth was so dear to them that they lived outside of Eretz Yisrael. Therefore, they were the first ones to be exiled.

What does they "grabbed it" mean? How does one determine what is a gift from Heaven and what is not? Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, compares this to a young boy who is standing in line with his father at the bank. The child is amazed with the teller's "ability" to dole out money in all amounts to the people waiting in line. "Wow! That person must be amazingly wealthy," remarked the boy. "He is giving out so much money." The father replied, "No, he is nothing more than a worker who is giving out the bank's money to its depositors. If that man were to pocket one cent, he would be in serious trouble"

Some people have been blessed with wealth; others are individuals who are exceptionally wise or extremely strong. These are gifts from Hashem for a purpose:

to share with others. Man is like a treasurer who is entrusted with the large sums of money. The money does not belong to him. He is only its guardian until the rightful owner comes calling for it. Those individuals who refuse to share-- who hoard the money, the wisdom, the strength for their own personal use-- are thieves. Eventually they will be called to task for this.

Rav Sholom continues with his inimitable story. This story has found its place into these pages a number of years ago, but it is such an important story with a powerful lesson, that I feel it is well worth repeating. By way of introduction, there are individuals who think that the money that is in their possession is theirs to keep. They are mistaken. It is not going with them. Others share, acting charitably when the need arises. Then there is that unique person who is willing to sacrifice his time and energy to help those in need. How many of us are prepared to suffer bizyanos, humiliation, just to help someone in need? Not many. The following episode paints a poignant picture of an exceptionally special baal tzedakah and the reward he earned.

The German and Polish governments decided to build a highway between their respective countries. Some of the small towns along its path were affected by the construction. Whole communities were uprooted to make way for progress. The small Jewish cemetery of Klabutzk was in the way and had to be moved to a new place. The Jewish population, although small, made a concerted plea to the government not to demolish the cemetery. Their pleas fell on deaf ears.

The next day, the community went down to the cemetery to dig up the graves and reinter the remains. As they were engaged in their gruesome work, they came upon a startling discovery. In one grave, the coffin, although it had been in the ground for years, appeared brand new. When they opened the coffin, they discovered the deceased in perfect condition, as if he had been buried that day! Most astounding of all, the deceased was clothed - not in the traditional tachrichim, shrouds, - but in the clerical garb of a Catholic priest!

The members of the Chevra Kaddisha, Jewish Burial Society, immediately dispatched someone to summon the city's rav. Perhaps he could make sense out of this anomaly. The rav had no clue, but he conjectured that, based upon the condition of the body this was no ordinary Jew. He instructed the community to arrange for a large funeral respectful of this man's distinguished position. The rav went home to pray that somehow Heaven would privilege him with an explanation for this strange discovery.

After a few days of fervent prayer, the deceased appeared in a dream to the rav and related to him an intriguing story. "I lived one hundred years ago," the neshamah, soul, began. "I was a simple, unschooled Jew, who yearned to do something with my life. I could not learn, but I could perform acts of chesed, kindness. This was especially true concerning my devotion to the mitzvah of hachnosas kallah, providing for the financial needs of brides who were lacking the necessary dowry. I would trudge from door to door raising money for orphans in need. It was my greatest privilege.

"There was one young woman who had been orphaned at a young age who had no one to look after her. She worked at various jobs, earning barely enough money to subsist. She was now thirty years old and wanted very much to get married, but, without money and no family to fall back on, her prospects were not good at all. As the years had gone by, she had become more and more depressed. One day, a young man, also in his early thirties, moved to town. Work was limited, especially for someone new to the community. The young man took the position of water carrier and attempted to earn a living.

"I felt that this was a perfect shidduch, matrimonial match. I went forthwith to the fellow and extolled the virtues of the girl. His response was simply that he was not looking for a depressed girl as a wife. After explaining to him that her depression was a temporary situation due to her unmarried state, he was willing to entertain the shidduch. There was one stipulation: he had to receive a decent dowry. I offered 50 gold coins, to which he laughed; I must start a business without any familial support. Fifty gold coins will not get me very far. I demand 300 gold coins, or else there is nothing to discuss."

"This was an outrageous sum for me to raise, but I accepted it. One week later, I had already raised 150 gold coins, but I had exhausted every charitable source at my disposal. There was only one other person to visit, a wealthy miser, who was known for his stinginess. He had never once given me money for anyone. Why should he suddenly change his ways? Nonetheless, I had to make the attempt. If he threw me out, at least I would have given it my best shot.

"I went to his house, and he ridiculed me. 'Yankel, why have you come to me? Do you want me to invest in a business deal?' he taunted. I explained the situation and pleaded my case. I was beyond emotion, yet the tears flowed freely down my face.

"The miser owned a clothing factory in which he produced suits for individuals from all walks of life. 'You know Yankel,' he began with a smirk, 'I might have an

idea. You see this clerical robe. It was made for the priest, who unfortunately became ill and does not need it. I will give you the 150 gold coins if you will don the robe and collar and walk through the streets of the city all day.' What could I do? To refuse meant relegating the young orphan to a life of spinsterhood. I accepted.

"The next day, I walked up and down the city dressed like a priest. The entire community came out to 'greet' me. The taunts were terrible; the humiliation was awful, but it was well worth it. At the end of the day, I picked up the money. When I bid the miser good-bye, I asked for one additional favor, 'Can I keep the robe?' He replied that it would be his 'pleasure' to give me the robe. I kept the robe until shortly before the end of my life, when I called the Chevra Kaddisha and asked them to bury me in the clerical robes. It was my feeling that the humiliation I sustained in order to marry off the orphaned girl would open doors in Heaven for me. And so it did. Wherever I went, the ministering angels saw the robe and opened the path for me to pass through. I suffered greatly that fateful day, but the humiliation I experienced in the performance of a mitzvah was my ticket to Gan Eden."

Va'ani Tefillah Melech Keil Chai Ha'Olamim. King, G-d, Life-giver of the worlds/Who lives forever.

Yishtabach is the conclusion of Pesukei D'Zimra. The prayer culminates with the words Chai ha'olamim. We have until now been praising Hashem's might, wisdom, kindness, etc. He has been extolled as the Creator of everything that exists and breathes, but He is more. Hashem is the life source of all living things. Without Hashem's will, everything ceases to exist. Thus, He is much more than the Creator who once created the world. Hashem keeps on creating the world every second that the world exists. He is life's origin - He is the essence of life. In fact, He is the one thing that has intrinsic existence. Every creature relies on Him for existence. He is existence. In other words, Hashem is the only true living being. Thus, we understand the second translation: Who lives forever. Since Hashem is the only One who possesses intrinsic life, He truly lives forever. The rest of "us" depend on His will to continue living. This gives us a whole new meaning to the tefillah of Yishtabach.

l'zehar nishmas Dov ben HaRav Yisroel a"h Hertzberg niftar 7 Av 5745 t.n.tz.v.h. Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/peninim_shemayisrael.com

From: israel zwick <izwick@gmail.com> Date: Thu, Jul 21, 2011 at 4:24 PM
Subject: Rabbi Moshe Hubner

By Rabbi Moshe Hubner

May the learning and mitzvos that result from this article be a zechus for a refuah sheleima for Rafael ben Sarah; and for the neshamah of Moshe Manes ben Yaakov Yitzchok (2 Av).

At the beginning of Perek 31, Hashem tells Moshe "nikom" -- "take revenge for the Jews against the Midyanites, and then you shall pass away."

The "revenge" was for the fact that the Midyanites had sent their women to entice the men of Klal Yisrael to sin, after which Hashem had punished the Jews with a plague. Since the Midyanites were the cause of their sins, they were to be punished as well.

The Ohr Hachayim Hakadosh asks why nikom is written in a singular tense, which implied that Moshe was to battle the Midyanites on his own, when we know that Moshe actually sent in an army. Why did Hashem not tell Moshe "nikmu," in plural form, to indicate that Moshe and men of his choosing should take revenge against Midyan?

The mefarshim also question why Hashem is speaking to Moshe about his forthcoming petirah at this point. This seems to imply that Moshe's passing is a direct result of the actions of the Midyanites, and that he was personally responsible for their success in causing Bnei Yisrael to transgress Hashem's command. In fact, the midrash here states, "he should be happy that his enemy falls before him," which also reinforces the idea that Moshe had a personal stake in the battle and that after he exacts revenge he will be in a "better position" to be greeted in Olam Ha'emes.

To answer, we must digress to a detail concerning the story of Zimri. Zimri had a relationship with one of the Midyanite women before Pinchas killed him. The Gemara tells us that Zimri appeared before Moshe and asked if he was allowed to be with her, and then added that if the woman he was asking about was not permitted to him, then he wanted to know how Moshe was allowed to be with his own wife, who was not born from Jewish parents. (In Parashas Shemos, we are told that Moshe's wife, Tziporah, was the daughter of the kohen of Midyan.)

Essentially, Zimri and his followers claimed that they were no different than Moshe and should be allowed to partake of the same type of relationship as he did.

Although Moshe's situation was very different for multiple reasons – particularly because he married his wife before the receiving of the Torah – he was in some way a contributor to the sin of Bnei Yisrael, based on their own reasoning. Because he was responsible, even in an infinitesimal amount, he needed to seek revenge on a personal level.

With this introduction, we can understand the words of the Rokeach, who states in Parashas Pinchas (25:17) that Hashem told Moshe that he should harass the people of Midyan, because it was through him and his wife that thousands of Jews ultimately perished.

We can add that the Torah does not tell us the specific location of kever Moshe but rather that he is buried near Pe'or, where the sins of Bnei Yisrael took place, in order to counteract the negative energy of the place - a negative energy that Moshe on some level caused.

There is a valuable lesson in this. We understand that the nation of Midyan was to be punished because they were directly involved in the sin, but from Hashem's words to Moshe we see that even indirect cause is punishable. We must always behave as if others might emulate our every move – the need to be above a bad name is not just about fame and popularity; it is about creating an environment where no one could ever say, "look, he is no better than me..."

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