

Home Weekly Parsha MATOT – MAASEI
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The fourth book of the Torah – Bamidbar – concludes in this week's public Torah reading. The new generation of Jews, no longer the slave generation that left Egypt hastily and constantly longed to return there when faced with problems and difficulties, stands poised to enter the Land of Israel and fulfill God's covenant with Avraham. However here again, narrow personal interests becloud the general picture and weaken the necessary national resolve.

It is no longer the so-called fleshpots of Egypt that beckon and entice. It is rather the pasture lands east of the Jordan River that force the cattle raising tribes of Reuven and Gad to plead with Moshe that they not be compelled to cross the Jordan and enter the Land of Israel.

Moshe's initial reaction to their request is one of shock and bitter disappointment. He reminds them that their parents' generation was destroyed in the desert for disparaging the Land of Israel and refusing to struggle on its behalf. And he warns them that they have apparently learned little from that bitter event in Jewish history.

Here they stand making the same error in judgment and vision that the previous generation did. Moshe's greatest frustration is that the Jewish people can't see past their cattle, their personal gain, an imagined short term benefit and their refusal to acknowledge the grandeur of the Lord's long term vision for themselves and their land. It is this blindness of spirit and unwillingness to appreciate the uniqueness of Israel, the people and the land that Moshe bemoans.

But all of this temporary gain comes with cost and a price. Separated from their brethren west of the Jordan, the tribes of Gad and Reuven have a difficult time defending themselves and are the first tribes to be exiled. They produce no major leaders or heroes for the Jewish people and their dreams of prosperity and material success are only fleetingly realized.

Criticized bitterly and eternally by the prophetess Devorah for standing aside in an hour of national Jewish peril, they become the model of individual Jewish indifference to the general cause of Jewish survival and success. In our current world they unfortunately have many heirs and disciples. Mordecai warned Esther not to stand away and be passive in the face of Haman and his decrees. He warned her that when the Jews would somehow escape from the troubles she and her family would be doomed to extinction in the Jewish story if she allowed her narrow self-interest to rule over her national duty for the preservation of Israel.

Today, also, narrow self-interests govern many Jews – even leaders who seemingly should know better – in their attitudes, policies and behavior regarding the existential problems that face the Jewish people and the Jewish state. The Talmud teaches us that Jerusalem always needs

advocates for its cause. That certainly is the case in the generation and times in which we find ourselves currently. Jewish apathy and alienation are our enemies. The allure of current political correctness in policy and mindset is misleading and dangerous. We too stand on the cusp of great adventures and opportunities. We should avoid the Reuven/Gad syndrome.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Natural or Supernatural?

Matot, Masei

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The book of Bamidbar draws to a close with an account of the cities of refuge, the six cities – three on each side of the Jordan – set apart as places to which people found innocent of murder, but guilty of manslaughter, were temporarily exiled.

In early societies, especially non-urban ones that lacked an extensive police force, there was a concern that people would take the law into their own hands, in particular when a member of their family or tribe had been killed. Thus would begin a cycle of vengeance and retaliation that had no natural end, one revenge-killing leading to another and another, until the community had been decimated. This is a phenomenon familiar to us from literature, from the Montagues and Capulets of Romeo and Juliet, to the Sharks and Jets of West Side Story, to the Corleones and Tattaglias of The Godfather.

The only viable solution is the effective and impartial rule of law. There is, though, one persisting danger. If Reuben killed Shimon and is deemed innocent of murder by the court – it was an accident, there was no malice aforethought, the victim and perpetrator were not enemies – then there is still the danger that the family of the victim may feel that justice has not been done. Their close relative lies dead and no one has been punished.

It was to prevent such situations of “blood vengeance” that the cities of refuge were established. Those who had committed manslaughter were sent there, and so long as they were within the city limits, they were protected by law. There they had to stay until – according to our parsha – “the death of the High Priest” (Num. 35:25).

The obvious question is, what does the death of the High Priest have to do with it? There seems no connection whatsoever between manslaughter, blood vengeance, and the High Priest, let alone his death.

Let us look at two quite different interpretations. They are interesting in their own right, but more generally they show us the range of thought that exists within Judaism. The first is given by the Babylonian Talmud:

A venerable old scholar said, 'I heard an explanation at one of the sessional lectures of Rava, that the High Priest should have prayed to God for mercy for his generation, which he failed to do.

Makkot 11a

According to this, the High Priest had a share, however small, in the guilt for the fact that someone died, albeit by accident. Murder is not something that could have been averted by the High Priest's prayer. The murderer was guilty of the crime, having chosen to do what he did, and no one else can be blamed. But manslaughter, precisely because it happens without anyone intending that it should, is the kind of event that might have been averted by the prayers of the High Priest. Therefore it is not fully atoned for until the High Priest dies. Only then can the manslaughterer go free.

Maimonides offers a completely different explanation in *The Guide for the Perplexed*:

A person who killed another person unknowingly must go into exile because the anger of "the avenger of the blood" cools down while the cause of the mischief is out of sight. The chance of returning from the exile depends on the death of the High Priest, the most honoured of men, and the friend of all Israel. By his death the relative of the slain person becomes reconciled (ibid. ver. 25); for it is a natural phenomenon that we find consolation in our misfortune when the same misfortune or a greater one has befallen another person. Amongst us no death causes more grief than that of the High Priest.

The Guide for the Perplexed III:40

According to Maimonides, the death of the High Priest has nothing to do with guilt or atonement, but simply with the fact that it causes a collective grief so great that it causes people forget their own misfortunes in the face of a larger national loss. That is when people let go of their individual sense of injustice and desire for revenge. It then becomes safe for the person found guilty of manslaughter to return home.

What is at stake between these two profoundly different interpretations of the law? The first has to do with whether exile to a city of refuge is a kind of punishment or not. According to the Babylonian Talmud it seems as if it was. There may have been no intent. No one was legally to blame. But a tragedy has happened at the hands of X, the person guilty of manslaughter, and even the High Priest shared, if only negatively and passively, in the guilt. Only when both have undergone some suffering, one by way of exile, the other by way of (natural, not judicial) death, has the moral balance been restored. The family of the victim feel that some sort of justice has been done.

Maimonides however does not understand the law of the cities of refuge in terms of guilt or punishment whatsoever. The only relevant consideration is safety. The person guilty of manslaughter goes into exile, not because it is a form of expiation, but simply because it is safer for him to be a

long way from those who might be seeking vengeance. He stays there until the death of the High Priest because only after national tragedy can you assume that people have given up thoughts of taking revenge for their own dead family member. This is a fundamental difference in the way we conceptualise the cities of refuge.

However, there is a more fundamental difference between them. The Babylonian Talmud assumes a certain level of supernatural reality. It takes it as self-understood that had the High Priest prayed hard and devotedly enough, there would have been no accidental deaths. Maimonides' explanation is non-supernatural. It belongs broadly to what we would call social psychology. People are more able to come to terms with the past when they are not reminded daily of it by seeing the person who, perhaps, was driving the car that killed their son as he was crossing the road on a dark night, in heavy rainfall, on a sharp bend in the road.

There are deaths – like those of Princess Diana and of the Queen Mother in Britain – that evoke widespread and deep national grief. There are times – after 9/11, for example, or the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December 2004 – when our personal grievances seem simply too small to worry about. This, as Maimonides says, is "a natural phenomenon."

This fundamental difference between a natural and supernatural understanding of Judaism runs through many eras of Jewish history: Sages as against Priests, philosophers as against mystics, Rabbi Ishmael as against Rabbi Akiva, Maimonides in contradistinction to Judah Halevi, and so on to today.

It is important to realise that not every approach to religious faith in Judaism presupposes supernatural events – events, that is to say, that cannot be explained within the parameters of science, broadly conceived. God is beyond the universe, but His actions within the universe may nonetheless be in accordance with natural law and causation.[1]

On this view, prayer changes the world because it changes us. Torah has the power to transform society, not by way of miracles, but by effects that are fully explicable in terms of political theory and social science. This is not the only approach to Judaism, but it is Maimonides', and it remains one of the two great ways of understanding our faith.

[1] For a further study of the contrasting approaches to events as either natural or supernatural, please refer to the essay Rabbi Sacks wrote on parshat Beshallah, re-shared earlier this year: <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/beshallah/the-power-of-ruach/>

Laws of the Three Weeks

Revivim – Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

These days are days of mourning over the destruction of the Temple * One should refrain from listening to joyous songs from the beginning of the Three Weeks * An

aerobics class that is primarily for exercise can be held until the end of the month of Tammuz * It is permissible to hold an evening of singing focused on devotion to God and longing for redemption during the Three Weeks * During the Nine Days, it is not possible to hold a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah celebration as is customary throughout the year * From the beginning of the month of Av, one should not swim for recreational purposes * During the Nine Days, business activities are reduced, so one should not purchase items that bring joy * Many communities have the custom to be strict and not get haircuts during the entire Three Weeks

Q: Is it permissible to listen to music during the Three Weeks?

Answer: These days are days of mourning over the destruction of the Temple, and although our Sages did not establish special ordinances to express sorrow and mourning during this time, Jews have adopted some mourning customs during the Three Weeks, including refraining from holding dances and festivities (Magen Avraham 551:10).

As a result, the poskim (Jewish law arbiters) of the previous generation debated whether it is permissible to listen to musical instruments through home electrical devices during the Three Weeks. As the years pass and listening to music through electrical devices becomes more common, the festive nature of this activity diminishes. In practice, songs can be divided into three categories:

1. The first is joyous songs, such as wedding songs, which should be avoided from the beginning of the Three Weeks.
2. The second category includes songs that are neither particularly joyous nor sad, including most contemporary songs and most classical compositions, which should be avoided from the beginning of the month of Av.
3. The third category consists of sad songs, such as mourning songs for a deceased person or songs about the destruction of the Temple, which are permitted to be listened to even during the Nine Days.

Lowering the Volume of Music

When music is played loudly, even if it is neutral in nature, the volume gives the song a festive quality, making it like a joyous song. Therefore, even songs that are permitted to be heard during the Three Weeks should not be listened to at high volume. Similarly, one should not attend a concert of sad music (such as a requiem) during the Three Weeks, because even though it is mournful music, a concert in general is a festive and joyous event (Peninei Halakha: Z'manim 8:4).

Dance Classes and Aerobics Classes

Dance classes, concerts, and joyous singing events should not be held or attended during the Three Weeks.

An aerobics class accompanied by music, which is primarily for exercise purposes, can be held until the end of the month of Tammuz, and efforts should be made to use music that is not known to be joyous.

Educational-Cultural Events

At an educational-cultural event, it is permissible to play music that is appropriate to its nature. Even during the Nine Days, it is permissible to play sad songs that express sorrow over the destruction of the Temple and songs of longing for the building up of Torah, the nation, and the land (see Peninei Halakha: Zmanim 8:4).

It is also permissible to hold an evening of singing focused on devotion to God and longing for redemption during the Three Weeks, as these are not joyous songs. During the Nine Days, it is permissible to hold a talk and incorporate singing and music of songs about the sorrow of the destruction and longing for redemption.

Music and Singing at Mitzvah Meals

It is permissible to sing joyous songs at mitzvah meals during the Three Weeks, such as at a brit milah (circumcision), pidyon haben (redemption of the firstborn), and sheva brachot (seven blessings after a wedding). Until the end of the month of Tammuz, it is also permissible to play music as is customary throughout the year.

Once the month of Av begins, joyous songs should not be played through electronic devices, and only songs related to the joy of the mitzvah may be sung vocally. It is also permissible to dance in a circle, as many customarily do at a brit milah celebration.

Music during Havdalah and Melave Malka

Families that are accustomed to playing sacred songs on Saturday night may continue to do so until the beginning of the month of Av, because the atmosphere of Shabbat, which does not include mourning customs, still lingers in the hours designated for the melave malka meal. Additionally, these are sacred songs.

Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah

Until the beginning of the month of Av, it is permissible to celebrate a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah on the day of entering into mitzvot. It is also permissible to hire musicians, provided that this is their custom throughout the year. When it is difficult to hold the party on the same day and they want to hold it on one of the nearby days, it is appropriate for the bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah celebrant to complete an important book of study at the beginning of the event, thus allowing them to hold the celebration with music or musicians as is customary throughout the year. If they cannot make a siyum (completion of study), they can rely on a siyum made by one of the relatives. When there is no such possibility, they can, as a last resort, rely on the bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah speech, which is an important Torah discourse, clarifying that the essence of the party is to celebrate entering into mitzvot.

However, during the Nine Days, it is not possible to celebrate a bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah as is customary throughout the year, since it is usual to invite many participants and play music, which is prohibited during the Nine Days. Therefore, it is appropriate to postpone the large party until after Tisha B'Av, and on the day of

reaching mitzvot age, a home meal can be arranged with meat and wine and a limited number of guests (Peninei Halakha: Z'manim 8:3).

Trips and Vacations in Hotels

It is permissible to hike and bathe in the sea or in a pool until the beginning of the month of Av, because only from the beginning of Av did our Sages instruct to reduce joy, but before then there is no prohibition on doing things that bring pleasure and enjoyment, and only events of excessive joy should be avoided. Therefore, it is permitted to hike, bathe, and vacation in a hotel until the end of the month of Tammuz.

Once Av begins, joy is reduced, so one should avoid trips and recreational activities that are primarily for pleasure and joy.

However, a trip or vacation that is primarily for educational or health purposes is permitted during the Nine Days.

Swimming During the Nine Days

From the beginning of the month of Av, one should not swim for recreational purposes. However, if swimming is for health purposes, for example, people who regularly swim for half an hour every day in a pool, it is permitted until Shabbat Chazon, and after Shabbat Chazon it is appropriate to be stricter. Those who need to swim for medical reasons may swim until the eve of Tisha B'Av (see Peninei Halakha: Z'manim 8:5).

'Shehecheyanu' During the Three Weeks

It is customary to refrain from reciting the Shehecheyanu blessing during the Three Weeks, for how can we bless "Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this time" during a time of calamity? Although some are strict about this even on Shabbatot during the Three Weeks, in practice, one may recite Shehecheyanu on Shabbat.

If one has the opportunity to perform a mitzvah that requires the Shehecheyanu blessing, such as a brit milah, they should recite Shehecheyanu (Shulchan Aruch 551:17). Similarly, one who sees a dear friend after not seeing them for thirty days and is happy to see them, should recite Shehecheyanu, for if they do not recite it, they will miss the opportunity for the blessing.

Shopping During the Three Weeks

Since we do not recite Shehecheyanu during the Three Weeks, one should not make purchases that require the Shehecheyanu blessing, such as a new garment or utensil that requires this blessing. However, items that do not require Shehecheyanu because they are not so important, such as socks and undershirts, may be purchased until the end of the month of Tammuz. Similarly, a couple may purchase furniture, because since they are partners in it, the blessing is "Hatov VeHameitiv" (Who is good and does good) and not Shehecheyanu. However, an individual should refrain from buying furniture, as its blessing is Shehecheyanu (ibid. 8:6).

During the Nine Days, business activities are reduced, so one should not purchase joyous items even when they do

not require Shehecheyanu, such as socks and undershirts, as well as furniture for family use that requires the "Hatov VeHameitiv" blessing. Online purchases are also included in this prohibition (ibid. 8:15).

Weddings

Most Jewish communities have the custom not to perform weddings during the Three Weeks. This is the custom of all Ashkenazi communities and most Sephardic communities, including those from Turkey, Morocco, Babylon, and Yemen.

There are some Sephardic communities that only refrain from weddings during the Nine Days, as written in the Shulchan Aruch (551:2, Yabi'a Omer 6:43).

Grooms from communities that allow weddings until the end of the month of Tammuz may invite a regular band to their wedding, as there is no joy for a bride and groom without musical instruments. Even those who follow the custom not to get married during these days may participate and dance at their celebration, as it is a mitzvah celebration.

Engagements

Large engagement parties should not be held during the Three Weeks. Even those who are lenient about holding weddings are not lenient about holding an engagement party in a hall. However, it is permissible to hold a home engagement party until the end of the month of Tammuz with songs and dancing as is customary, because it is a mitzvah celebration of the couple's agreement to marry.

During the Nine Days, when joy should be reduced, it is forbidden even to hold a modest home engagement party. However, it is permissible for the parents of the bride and groom to meet and set the terms of the wedding. Even though there is joy in this meeting and light refreshments are served, since it will make the relationship between the couple a finalized fact, and it brings them closer to the mitzvah of marriage, it is permitted to hold it. Similarly, it is permissible and even a mitzvah for single people to meet during the Nine Days for the purpose of marriage (ibid. 8:9).

Haircuts during the Three Weeks and Nine Days

Our Sages ordained not to get haircuts or launder clothes during the week in which Tisha B'Av falls (Ta'anit 26b). Some Sephardic Jews follow the custom of not getting haircuts from the beginning of the week in which Tisha B'Av falls, but they do get haircuts before then (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 551:3).

However, many communities have adopted the stricter custom of not getting haircuts during the entire Three Weeks. This is the custom of all Ashkenazi Jews, as well as some Sephardic Jews, including those from Morocco and Djerba, and those who follow the customs of the Ari (Rema 551:4; Kaf HaChaim 80; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch Toledano 387:8, Brit Kehuna 2:12). The custom of Jews from Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya is not to get haircuts from the beginning of the month of Av.

Haircuts for a Mitzvah Celebration

For a brit milah, when necessary, it is permissible for the father of the baby, the sandak, and the mohel (circumciser) to get haircuts until the week in which Tisha B'Av falls. It is appropriate for a bar mitzvah celebrant not to get a haircut during these days, as he can get a haircut before the 17th of Tammuz. However, the father of a bar mitzvah celebrant who usually shaves every day can shave for his son's bar mitzvah meal until the week in which Tisha B'Av falls.

Shaving During the Three Weeks

According to those who observe the custom of not getting haircuts during the Three Weeks, some poskim are of the opinion that one should also be strict about not shaving. Many who are meticulous in observance follow this practice. On the other hand, some believe that there is no prohibition against shaving until the end of the month of Tammuz, because shaving does not involve any festivity but only removes unkemptness. It is appropriate for each person to follow their father's custom. For someone without an established custom, it seems that until the beginning of the month of Av, it is good to shave every Friday for Shabbat, and if they want to shave every day – they are permitted to do so.

However, from the beginning of the month of Av, and even for Shabbat Chazon, according to the custom of Ashkenazi Jews and some Sephardic Jews, it is appropriate not to shave. And in the week in which Tisha B'Av falls, according to all opinions, it is forbidden to shave (Peninei Halakha: Z'manim 8:9). This article appears in the 'Besheva' newspaper and was translated

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Parshat Matot-Masei: The Unique Prophecy of Moses Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

“This is the thing [or word] which God has commanded.” (Numbers 30:2)

How was Moses different from the many other prophets recorded in the biblical tradition? Was there a distinction only in degree, or was there a much more fundamental difference, a difference in “kind” between Moses and those who came after him?

The opening verse in the portion of Matot may well provide us with an insight concerning this issue. We read, “And Moses spoke unto the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel saying: ‘This is the thing [or “word,” zeh hadavar] which God has commanded: when a man vows a vow unto God...’” (Numbers 30:2–3).

In his commentary, Rashi cites a midrash (Sifrei) which makes the following distinction between Moses and the other prophets: whereas the other prophets consistently introduced their prophecy with the word, “Thus said God,” (koh amar Hashem), the expression “zeh hadavar asher

tziva Hashem” (this is the thing which God has commanded) is unique only to Moses (although koh also appears in Mosaic prophecies), and so zeh represents Moses' additional and superior prophetic status.

Rashi is apparently lifting Moses above the other prophets; he does not seem, however, to flesh out the substance of this superiority. One of the most important supercommentaries – or commentaries on the primary commentary Rashi – Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi, the Re'em (1448–1526, chief rabbi of Constantinople), suggests that the phrase “koh amar Hashem” (thus said God) expresses the intention or the essence of the vision, although not necessarily the vision itself; after all, the other prophets only see “through a glass darkly” (aspaklarya she'eina me'ira). Moses' prophecy, however, is through “a glass brightly” (aspaklarya me'ira), and therefore he had the power to express precisely what was given to his eye or communicated to his mind, word for word: “zeh,” this is (precisely) the thing, or word.

In Emek HaNetziv, the classic commentary on the Sifrei written by Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the author questions any interpretation which could possibly suggest that the vision of the other prophets could be anything less than an exact transmission. Moreover, the Netziv proves that the use of the word koh elsewhere in the Torah is taken by the Talmudic sages to indicate something absolute and exact: for example, when the priests are commanded to bless the Israelites, we read the following words, “And God spoke unto Moses telling him to speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying: ‘This [koh] is how you must bless the children of Israel’” (Numbers 6:23). And our sages insist that the blessing is to be recited exactly as presented in the text, twenty-two words, no more and no less, in other words, “This is how you must bless...”

The Netziv therefore explains that what makes the prophecy of Moses unique, and what is the true significance of “this” rather than “thus,” is the fact that Moses communicated the divine word immediately upon his having received it, whereas the other prophets could only process their message after a delay of a period of time; after all, the prophetic state had a paralyzing and debilitating affect on the other prophets, weakening their physical condition, while Moses received the Godly message naturally, without the requirement of time-in-between for recuperation. It was that in-between time which caused the delivery of the message by the other prophets to be less exact.

Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, the late erudite rabbi of London, called my attention to another commentary of Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (CHidushei HaGryz) which can truly illuminate our distinction between koh and zeh. When the young shepherd Moses is confronted by a burning bush which is not consumed, the Almighty attempts to convince him to accept the responsibility of Jewish leadership. Moses is hard to convince: “Who am I that I should bring

forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exodus 3:11). But God counters Moses' resistance: "Certainly I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12).

The Gryn points out that the real significance of this dialogue is more profound than Moses merely seeking assurance and God guaranteeing "back-up." Moses is questioning the efficacy of human involvement altogether in what he thinks ought to be a divine mission. After all, did not the Almighty promise the patriarchs that He, God Himself, would act as the redeemer (Midrash Rabba 15)? The interpretation must be that the divine response "I will be with you" is God's explanation that indeed He will act as the redeemer, but that God acts through human instruments. God requires, as it were, human beings to be His full partners; the ground rules with which the world is governed require divine objectives to be realized through human agency. Hence, God must insist that He and Moses go to Pharaoh and redeem Israel together; God is choosing Moses to redeem the Israelites alongside of Him!

I would suggest that herein lies the truest distinction between Moses and the other prophets, as well as the significance of the differences in phraseology in the Hebrew text. The other prophets succeeded in receiving and transmitting a divine will; Moses succeeded in living a life and doing deeds which were the human extension of the divine plan, "this is the thing which God commands." Davar is more than a "word"; it is a thing, an objective and substantive reality. The other prophets conveyed words in accordance with the divine message; Moses, however, changed reality in accordance with the divine plan, in accordance with his actions. The other prophets spoke words which were a transmission of the divine; Moses lived a life which was an extension of the divine. And the Hebrew word zeh can also refer to a human being (ha'ish hazeh, this man), and not only to a word, koh tomar (thus shall you say).

Perhaps this is why the Sifrei chooses to point out this distinction between Moses and the other prophets in the context of the opening verse of our biblical portion Matot, in the context of the laws of oaths and promises. Human beings have the power to alter reality by the oaths and words which they utter, as well as to effectuate forgiveness and absolution by words which they express (Numbers 30:3). The realm of oaths and promises unmistakably points out the almost God-like powers of human beings, the ability of humans to serve in an almost divine capacity as God's helpers, as God's partners. It is indeed the most exalted goal of every person to become a vehicle for the expression of the divine will. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch so interprets the biblical words zeh Eli ve'anvehu sung by the Israelites after the splitting of the Red Sea: "This is my God, and I shall be His sanctuary" (Exodus 15:2). Most translators render the verse, "This is my God and I shall glorify Him" from the Hebrew na'eh, to beautify, but Rabbi Hirsch derives the meaning from

naveh, which means "home" or "sanctuary." The human being, his very body acting upon the messenger of his brain, his heart, and his soul – must become the vehicle, the expression, for God's will in its every word and action. Moses' physical being, Moses' every act and word, was indeed a sanctuary, an extension of the divine. Moses is therefore the greatest of all prophets and the highest human achievement in world history.

Shabbat Shalom

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Rabbi YY Jacobson

The First Marriage Therapist in History

The Only Yartzeit Mentioned in the Torah is Aaron's. Why?

Why Aaron?

The Torah never mentions the yartzeit—the day of the passing—of any of its protagonists. We do not know the day when Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Sarah, or Rachel passed away. Even Moses' day of passing is omitted in the Torah.[1]

There is one single exception: Aaron, the older brother of Moses and the High Priest of Israel. His death is recorded in the weekly portion with a date:

מסעי לג, לה: ויעל אהרן הפהן אל-הור ההר על-פי ה' וימת שם בשנת הארבעים לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים בחודש החמישי באחד לחודש:

Numbers 33:38: Aaron the priest ascended Mount Hor, at the behest of G-d, and died there, in the fortieth year after the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month.

Why Aaron? Even with his own siblings, Miriam and Moses, we don't see in the Torah the date of their passing. Why was his passing day enshrined in the biblical text?

What is more, the date of his death is not mentioned in the actual story of his passing (back in Chukas, Numbers ch. 20), where it would seem to belong, but rather in the portion of Massei (Numbers ch. 33), while discussing the forty-two journeys that the Israelites traveled in the desert—en route from Egypt to the Promised Land.

It is in this context, apparently not relevant to the discussion, that the Torah takes a detour:[2] "They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. Aaron the High Priest ascended Mount Hor at G-d's behest and died there..."

The Peacemaker

The Lubavitcher Rebbe once offered a moving insight, demonstrating the timeless relevance of the Torah.[3]

Aaron, we know, was the ultimate peace lover and peacemaker among the Jewish people. As Hillel says in the Ethics of the Fathers:[4] "Be of the disciples of Aaron—a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah." Aaron dedicated

his life to bringing peace between rivals and quarreling spouses.[5]

When the Torah describes his death, it states:[6] The whole congregation saw that Aaron had expired, and the entire house of Israel wept for Aaron for thirty days.

Why the "entire house of Israel"? When Moses passes away, the Torah states[7] that the "sons of Israel wept for Moses"; but here it was the "entire house." Why the distinction? Rashi explains: "Both the men and the women, for Aaron had pursued peace; he promoted love between disputing parties and between husbands and wives."

The Talmud relates[8] that 80,000 young men who were all given the name "Aaron" came to eulogize Aaron after his passing. They were the children born from parents who wanted to get divorced, and Aaron saved their marriages. They named their babies Aaron, in tribute to the person who saved their marriage and allowed these children to be born.

This means that over forty years in the wilderness, Aaron restored peace and trust among 80,000 Jewish couples. He must have been one busy marriage therapist!

In addition to serving as High Priest, doing the service in the Sanctuary, and being a prophet and teacher himself, he was busy with teaching Jewish couples how to heal and trust. Following decades of trauma in Egyptian exile, this must have been a grueling task, but his love and empathy managed to save marriages.

His efforts were rewarded in kind, with the appearance of Clouds of Glory that served as a unifying force, molding the entire Israelite encampment into a cohesive unit.

The Remedy

Now, we can understand, on a homiletical level, why the yartzeit of Aaron is specified in the Torah -- on the first day of the fifth month of the year, which is the Hebrew month of Av.

1500 years after the death of Aaron, the first of Av would usher in a period known in Jewish law as the "Nine Days," referring to the first nine days of the Hebrew month of Av, a time dedicated to mourning the destruction of the first and second Holy Temples in Jerusalem, which were both burned down on the 9th day of AV (the first by Babylon in 586 BCE, the second by Rome in 70 CE).

The Talmud states:[9] "The second Temple, why was it destroyed? Because the Jews harbored baseless hatred towards each other." This was also true on a political level: The Romans exploited the in-fighting between the Jewish people to defeat Judea.

During the first Temple era, too, it was the ongoing conflicts between the two kingdoms of Israel that weakened the nation, and the violence among Jews which spelled disaster, as the prophets explicitly warn.

"G-d provides the remedy before the disease," says the Talmud.[10] Before any challenge in life, G-d provides the energy to deal with it. The yartzeit of a person, the day when their life journey is completed, is a day in which their

energy and light is manifest in a uniquely potent way in the world.[11] So on the first day of Av, when we usher in the Nine Days of grief over our discord and hatred, the Torah tells us we have the yartzeit of Aaron the great peacemaker and unifier—a day in which can connect with Aaron's energy and legacy of love and unity, to repair and heal the rifts and mistrust that caused our exile, and usher in a new era of redemptive consciousness.

That is why the Torah places the day of the yartzeit in the portion of Maasei, which according to Jewish tradition is always read on or right before the very day of his yartzeit—the first day (Rosh Chodesh) of the month Av. It is during this time of the year that the Torah wants to empower us with the energy of Aaron to restore cohesion, trust, and love among our people.

On every first day of Av, as one can smell the flames of destruction, Aaron casts upon us his power of love, reminding us that we are capable of transcending our fears and our egos, and creating a revolution of love among our eternal but fragmented people. If baseless hatred was the cause of our destruction, baseless love will create our redemption.

A Healthy Heart

A story:[12]

Moshe Tzur, an Israeli Air Force veteran, who has a skill for activism and leadership, returned to Judaism later in his life, and at a visit to the US in the 1970s he visited the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Rebbe asked him what he was doing to help the Jewish people and the community. Moshe was not that excited about getting involved.

The Rebbe asked him, "Why is the heart of the human being on the left side? Everything important in Judaism is on the right side. We put on tefillin with the right hand, we put the mezuzah on the right side of the door, we shake hands with the right hand, we hold the Torah scroll on our right side, Joseph wanted the blessing of the right arm of his father for his oldest son; in the Temple they always walked to the right, so why is the heart—the organ responsible giving us vitality—on the left?"

The Rebbe shared his vintage answer:

"Your heart is indeed on your right side! Because what is the true function of a heart? To feel and experience the heart of the person standing in front of you; and for the person in front of you, your heart is on the right side. When your heart is linked with others, then indeed your heart is on the "right" side.

Moshe continued to relate his story:

"This message really spoke to me, and I adopted it as the center of my philosophy of life. Since then, my mission in life has been to reach the heart of every Jew that I meet. I returned to Israel, and I established two important yeshivot. One yeshiva is called Aish HaTalmud; it is a yeshiva high school with almost two hundred boys enrolled. The other is called Torat Moshe, with about ninety-five boys. I have

also established four kollelim, study groups for married men, with almost a hundred-twenty enrolled. "

"In addition, I founded an organization to support poor families for Rosh Hashanah and Passover. These are people who don't have much income, and we help them with food and money. All this because of the words of the Rebbe – that the key is to help others – which changed my perspective on life and shaped my life's mission."

As Israel fights for its existence, we need this love and unity more than ever. We may not all agree on everything, but we must be here for each other like never before.

[1] The Talmud and the Midrash deduce from the verses which dates they passed on, but it is not explicit in the Torah. [2] Numbers 33:37-38

[3] Sichas 29 Tamuz, 5735 (1975). Sichas Motzei Shabbos Matos-Maasei 5739 (1979). Cf. Likkutei Sichos vol. 18 Matos-Maasei pp. 411- 12. A similar idea I saw in Sefas Emes Maasei 5659. [4] 1:12 [5] Avos chapter 1. Avod D'Rabi Nosson ch. 12 [6] Numbers 20:29. See also Rashi Rashi Devarim 34:8. [7] Deuteronomy 34:8 [8] Tractate Kallah ch. 3 [9] Yuma 9b [10] Megilah 13b [11] See Tanya Igeres Hakodesh ch 27-28 [12]

https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/3779581/jewish/Its-Their-Right.htm]

Perceptions

By Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Parshas Matos

Kosher Extraction

THE LAWS OF kashering are many and confusing, and learned from this week's parsha. Thanks to Midian, we're still in exile. Bilaam sent them in, and their impact went far beyond Shittim, causing the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe to choose the land east of the Jordan river. And unfortunately and clearly unbeknownst to them at the time, it cost them and every Jew since then, the final stage of redemption.

Because, by choosing not to settle in Eretz Yisroel, they reduced the magical number of 600,000 necessary to annihilate the Sitra Achra and begin the Messianic Era. Had that many men between the ages of twenty and sixty settled on the west side of the Jordan, evil would have been destroyed forever, and Yemos HaMoshiach would have begun at that time.

Revenge against Midian in this week's parsha therefore was more historic than it might seem. And unlike with respect to the annihilation of Amalek, we were allowed to take spoils of war, which we did. Among the many things taken were cooking implements, and that created the need to talk kashrus, specifically the kashering of treif pots, pans, dishes, etc.

Obviously, everything had to be thoroughly washed and cleaned. That took care of all the mamashos, the traces of food that stuck to the vessels. For the average person, that

would have seemed like enough. What else could there be to worry about?

Bliyos. Absorptions. Molecules of food that can, under the right conditions, become absorbed into the walls of a pot, a roasting spit, or a knife, etc. And even though such vessels may seem impervious to everything, especially today given the materials and methods used to make them, halachically, nothing is. With enough heat, bliyos of what is being cooked will split away from the main food and become absorbed in the walls of the cooking instrument.

That's how a pot, etc., can become milchig (dairy) or fleishig (meat) and remain that way even after the food has been removed and the pot has been cleaned. It's the bliyos that were absorbed that do that, and they will remain in the walls of the pot until one of two things happen. Either the pot remains unused for 24 hours, or something is done, like kashering, to draw out the bliyos and make the pot pareve again.

Why 24 hours? Because Tradition teaches that bliyos can only remain detached from their source for 24 hours before they lose their taste, and kashrus is a large part about taste. This works in two ways, because bliyos are something the rest of the world would not consider to be something to worry about in terms of kashrus. On the other hand, they would call something food even though it has lost all taste. Kashrus does not.

This means, technically-speaking, that any pot that sits a full 24 hours without being used and clean of all food automatically becomes pareve once again and, indeed, that is the Torah law. The rabbis however have declared that such a pot remains milchig or fleishig forever until properly kashered. People make mistakes, especially with kashrus, so many halachic fences have been put in place to keep people a safe distance from breaking Torah law.

However because many laws of kashrus are rabbinic in origin, it leaves room for leniencies in emergency situations. No one can pick and choose which rabbinic laws to keep or ignore, but a competent halachic authority can decide in what situations they may or may not apply. This is usually based upon precedents from earlier generations.

The other way to kasher something is prescribed in this week's parsha. Since heat is usually the main culprit in causing bliyos to enter vessels, heat has to be used to rectify the situation as well. How much heat is used to kasher will depend upon how it was used to make something treif in the first place, or to make it milchig or fleishig. The stronger the heat, the deeper the bliyos enter the vessel and likewise, leave it.

That is part of the technical laws of Kashrus. There is mussar in this as well because, like bliyos of food, we get absorbed into the "walls" of exile as well. Depending upon the heat (passion) that was used to cause this, that is how deep a Jew can be absorbed into exile, and that is how much heat (anti-Semitism) will be needed to extract the bliyos.

When Moshe Rabbeinu went down to Egypt, he did not convince everyone of his mission right away. Only a few people joined him, the rest holding out until they too became convinced of his Godly mission. After a few more plagues, some more joined the group, and then a few more. But even still, after all of that and eight plagues, four-fifths of the Jewish people in Egypt at that time were still not onboard, and died in the Plague of Darkness instead of going out. That was twelve million Jews altogether who had become absorbed into the Egyptian lifestyle and refused to be extracted! “Rava says: It will be likewise in the Messianic Era” (Sanhedrin 111a.). No wonder Heaven is turning up the heat, and the Diaspora is becoming less and less hospitable.

Shlomo Werdiger <news@agudah.org>

Dear Friends,

There is a well-known vort from the Chidushei Harim. On the pasuk of V’hotzeisi eschem mitachas sivlos Mitzrayim, I will take you out from under the burdens of Mitzrayim (Shemos 6:6), he explains that the first step to getting out of galus is the realization that we can no longer be sovel it, that it has become intolerable.

Hashem says that He will take away our savlanus, our tolerance, for Mitzrayim and we will realize that we are not in the right place.

Spending time in Washington DC last week was, for me, the perfect way to get into the mindset of the Three Weeks, a chance to contemplate the fact that even as we continue to prosper and grow in this medina shel chesed, we are still very much in Galus.

Prime Minister Netanyahu had come to deliver a speech - an impassioned plea! - to the United States congress, asking them to stand behind him and his people at a particularly difficult hour for their country.

It was a well-received speech, one which received thunderous and sustained applause from the gallery, and from so many of our friends in Congress. Personally, I got lots of feedback because of the visibly warm reception he gave me and my wife, which, to be honest, has less to do with personal prestige and more to do with his need to connect with people of emunah, to know that our tzibbur is davening along with him. We had a robust minyan for mincha, and there was food with a trusted hechsher served at the private reception after the speech: on the surface it appeared to be a successful trip to DC.

But all that is just external, one small part of the story at most.

There was another dimension to the speech, one that was not captured by the cameras and this was the undercurrent of antipathy that pervaded certain sections of the floor of the house as the Prime Minister spoke

The level of animus was disconcerting and the source of it was even more alarming: our “friends”, those who have graced our dinners and smilingly greeted our askanim over the years, the ones who have pledged their love for our people at every opportunity, who saw it as politically convenient to stand publicly with us, have switched sides. It was worrisome – but also, in a strange way, empowering, because it was a stark reminder that we are in the Ribbono shel Olam’s hands and only in His hands, with no other friends or allies to count on.

I left the nation’s capital thinking about how in these Three Weeks, each one of us has to work harder not only to daven for Acheinu kol beis Yisrael, but to make it clear where we belong, and Who we take orders from.

Ein lanu al mi l’hishaen - we have nowhere else to turn.

If, as the Chidushei Harim said, the first step is to cry out, “We can’t take it anymore,” then we are a lot closer today than we were last year at this time.

May the Ribbono shel Olam see our sincerity, our loyalty, and our hope and draw us closer than ever.

Shloime

Tearing Keriah for the Beis Hamikdash By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Introduction:

This is obviously an appropriate week to discuss the halachos regarding the agony we are to feel when seeing the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash. I want to note that, for various well-meaning but incorrect reasons, people are very lenient about these laws. However, it is clear from the Gemara and the halachic authorities that we are to feel tremendous anguish when seeing the destruction of our Beis Hamikdash area and to express this agony by tearing keriah on a garment that we are wearing at the time. Thus, various approaches, such as visiting the Kosel on erev Shabbos or “selling your clothes” to someone else, are probably all invalid (Shu”t Teshuvos Vehanhagos 1:334; Orchos Rabbeinu #2 page 149; Makom Hamikdash page 7) and certainly do not reflect the proper hashkafah.

The Gemara (Mo’eid Katan 26a) states: Someone who rends his clothes because of the passing of his father, mother, his rebbe who taught him Torah, the king of Klal Yisrael, the head of the beis din or upon hearing other bad tidings -- including hearing someone curse Hashem or he observed a sefer Torah being burned or he saw the destroyed cities of Yehudah, the Beis Hamikdash, or Yerushalayim -- may not reweave the garment afterward to mend it (see Hagahos Maimaniyos, Hilchos Aveil 9:3). Improperly stitching or pinning the garment closed afterward is permitted (Rambam, Hilchos Aveil 9:3). A woman should pin her torn garment closed (Mo’eid Katan 22b; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 340:15).

From this Gemara, the Rishonim and poskim derive the obligation to tear one’s garments upon seeing the destroyed

cities of Yehudah, Yerushalayim or the Beis Hamikdash (Rambam, Hilchos Ta'anis 5:16; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 561). As is evident from the Gemara and the Rambam, the point of tearing one's garments over the calamity of the destruction is to express one's sorrow over these tragic events.

The laws of keriah apply equally to men and women, the only distinction being that a woman should tear in a tzeniyus way (Mo'eid Katan 22b; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 340:11; Shach 340:22). Most authorities rule that a child under bar or bas mitzvah does not tear keriah upon observing the site of the Beis Hamikdash.

Keriah must be performed while standing (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 340:1). The rending should be on the front of the garment and from the top, near the collar, downward. The torn area should be a tefach (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 340:3), about three inches long.

How many garments does one tear?

Germane to one who tears keriah for the loss of a close relative, the Gemara lists several halachic stringencies that apply when tearing keriah for the loss of a parent that do not apply when tearing keriah for other relatives. When tearing keriah for the loss of a parent, the tearing must be done by hand and includes a requirement to tear any garment worn at the time that is included in the laws of keriah, regardless as to how many one is wearing (Mo'eid Katan 22b). As we will see shortly, this excludes both undergarments and coats and similar outer garments. After the loss of any other relative, one tears only one garment, and it may be torn by using a scissors or knife. We will soon explain which garments are excluded and what is the halacha germane to someone tearing his garment because he sees the Beis Hamikdash grounds.

There is no requirement to be wearing many garments when tearing keriah for a parent, but any garment that qualifies for the rules of keriah (see below) that is worn at the time must be torn.

Which garment does one tear?

Which garment is one required to tear upon seeing the destroyed remnants of the Beis Hamikdash? Prior to answering this question, I need to provide some background, regarding the laws of rending keriah for the loss of a close relative. Based on the descriptions provided by Chazal, the rishonim explain that there is no requirement to tear garments worn next to the body that are meant to "absorb perspiration." Nor is there a requirement to tear garments that are worn only outside the house, such as a coat, but something worn both indoors and outdoors must be rent (Aruch Hashulchan, Yoreh Deah 340:9).

In practical halacha, there is a dispute among the early poskim which garment to tear for the loss of a close relative (Yoreh Deah 340:10 with Taz and Nekudos Hakesef). The common practice among Ashkenazim in America is to tear keriah on a jacket, whereas the common practice in Eretz Yisrael is to tear keriah on a shirt.

Common custom is that, upon losing a parent, one tears keriah on the left side of a garment, and the halacha requires that it be from the top of the garment downward. The left side is torn, in the case of a parent, because of the reference of Chazal that, in this instance, one should tear until he "reveals his heart," and the heart is on the left side. Custom is that someone who lost a different relative tears keriah on the right side of the garment. Someone who tore on the right side for a parent or on the left side for someone other than a parent has fulfilled the mitzvah and should not make another tear, provided he tore the front part of the garment (Rema, Yoreh Deah, 340:2).

How to tear for the Beis Hamikdash

Someone should feel as emotional about the loss of our Beis Hamikdash as he feels about the loss of a parent, and, therefore, should tear "until he reveals his heart," meaning, on his left side. How many garments must he tear?

This is the subject of a dispute among the rishonim. The Rambam (Hilchos Ta'anis, 5:17) understands that, since the Gemara rules that the tearing performed for a parent and for the Beis Hamikdash may never be repaired, we see that tearing for the Beis Hamikdash is considered the more severe type of tearing and should therefore be on all his garments. In the Rambam's opinion, just as someone tearing keriah upon the loss of a parent is required to tear his jacket, his shirt and any other garments that he might be wearing; someone tearing because of loss of the Beis Hamikdash should tear all the garments he is wearing at the time – perhaps even his jacket, sweater and shirt.

On the other hand, the Ra'avad (ad loc.) and other rishonim (Magid Mishnah ad loc.) rule that, although the tear rended because of the Beis Hamikdash can never be repaired, there is no requirement to tear all his garments, only one. Although the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 561:4) concludes like the stringent opinion of the Rambam to tear all the garments being worn, and specifically only by hand, the accepted practice is to tear only one garment, usually a shirt, and to allow use of an instrument to make the tear (Ir Hakodesh Vehamikdash, Volume 3, 17:1.1; Shu"t Minchas Shlomo 1:73).

The custom is to tear a shirt and, as mentioned above, to tear it on his left side, from the collar area of the shirt downward one tefach.

Yerushalayim today

Above, we quoted the Gemara that requires tearing keriah when seeing cities in Yehudah that are destroyed and when seeing Yerushalayim. The poskim rule that this does not refer to the newer areas of Yerushalayim, which were not destroyed at the time of the churban (see also Sha'arei Teshuvah 561:1).

The more recent authorities dispute whether seeing Yerushalayim nowadays, when the city is, thank G-d, rebuilt with a large Jewish population, still requires tearing keriah. Some contend that since today there is a sizable Jewish population in Yerushalayim, one does not need to

tear keriah when seeing the city (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 5:37), whereas others contend that, since the city is still not in the ideal way the Torah would like it to be, we should still tear keriah upon seeing it (Shu"t Minchas Shlomo, 1:73; Shu"t Shevet Halevi, 7:78).

The common custom is not to tear upon seeing Yerushalayim (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 5:37).

Upon seeing the place where the Beis Hamikdash once stood, everyone agrees that there is an obligation to tear one's clothes (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:70:11; 5:37). When we speak about the obligation to tear one's clothes upon seeing the place of the Beis Hamikdash, what does one have to see? Does one have to see the actual ground where the Beis Hamikdash stood on Har Habayis, also called Har Hamoriah, the top of the mountain where the Beis Hamikdash stood? Perhaps it is sufficient to see the mosque or the Dome of the Rock that stands where the Beis Hamikdash once stood? Or is it sufficient just to see the Kosel, which is the wall surrounding the Har Habayis (Makom Hamikdash page 6)?

There are poskim who hold that tearing keriah opposite the Kosel fulfills the mitzvah (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:70:11; Halichos Shlomo, Tefillah, chap. 16, footnote #15; see Makom Hamikdash page 6). However, this matter is disputed, since the Kosel is the wall surrounding the Har Habayis, the top of Mount Moriah, and is not where the Beis Hamikdash stood. Although Har Habayis has kedusha, and the gedolim of previous generations across the hashkafic spectrum banned entering the Har Habayis until we again have ashes of the parah adumah, many poskim rule that tearing keriah is for seeing the area of the Beis Hamikdash itself or signs of its destruction.

Some authorities contend that it is preferable to see the actual floor of the Har Habayis before tearing. This involves finding a high enough point from which he can see over the walls surrounding Har Habayis, such as from parts of Har Hazeisim, Har Hatzofim, or perhaps a rooftop within the Old City (Shu"t Teshuvos Vehanhagos, 1:331 in the name of the Brisker Rav). However, most authorities rule that seeing the mosque or the Dome of the Rock is sufficient. After all, the Gemara states that something attached to the ground is considered like the ground itself (see Shabbos 81a; Gittin 39a). Therefore, since both the mosque and the Dome of the Rock standing on Har Habayis are connected to the ground, seeing either of them is the equivalent to seeing the ground itself (Zichron Betzalel 38:2). More importantly, there is perhaps no greater indication of the churban than seeing a mosque on the site where the Beis Hamikdash should be (Sefer Eretz Yisrael; Halichos Shlomo, Tefillah, chap. 16, footnote #15).

Standing

As mentioned above, keriah must be made while standing (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 561:4), unless the person

is physically unable to stand. Someone who tore his garment while sitting or while leaning on something with enough weight that he would fall if it was removed suddenly, has not fulfilled the mitzvah of keriah and must tear again. Therefore, someone who sees the area where the Beis Hamikdash once stood or something constructed on its site while riding in a car or a bus should not tear while seated. If he can, he should get out of the vehicle and tear.

The proper procedure

The Bach (Orach Chayim 561) cites the following: Someone who enters Yerushalayim and sees where the Beis Hamikdash stood is required to bow facing its direction, tear his clothes, cry, moan, mourn and feel sorrow over the the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash -- crying in a bitter way and reciting first the 79th chapter of Tehillim describing how the gentiles entered, contaminated and destroyed Hashem's holy sanctuary. When tearing keriah, he should recite the words, baruch Dayan ha'emes, without the Name of Hashem. He then recites several pesukim: Devarim 32:4; Nechemiah 9:33; Eicha 2:9. Other sefarim present other, similar procedures.

The Bach then explains that the recital of this passage and these pesukim is so that it is obvious why he is rending his clothes. Although the ruling that someone cry and moan about the churban is not mentioned in the Gemara specifically in reference to seeing the destroyed location of the Beis Hamikdash, the Bach notes that common sense dictates that one act as if his loved one lies dead in front of him. This idea is implied by the pasuk in Yirmiyahu (41:5).

Thirty days

Someone who saw the place where the Beis Hamikdash once stood and tore keriah is not required to tear keriah again, until thirty days have passed since the last time that he saw it (see Yerushalmi, Brachos 9:2; Rambam, Hilchos Ta'anis 5:18). The Magen Avraham (561:6) notes that someone born in Yerushalayim may never be required to tear keriah for the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, if he saw the area of the churban within 30 days before turning bar mitzvah, and then returns to it within every thirty days.

Second visit

Someone who did not tear his garment upon seeing the churban hamikdash area, either because he was unaware of the halacha or because he was unable to (such as, it was Shabbos) and revisits the area within thirty days, must he tear now, since he did not tear the first time? This question is disputed by the poskim. Rav Moshe Feinstein maintains that he must tear his garment at his next visit (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:52:4), whereas Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach contends that he is exempt (Shu"t Minchas Shlomo, 1:73) and notes that this is the accepted practice.

Someone who arrives at the Kosel dressed for Shabbos, and will not have anything else appropriate to wear on Shabbos, is exempt from tearing (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:52:4 and Orach Chaim 5:37; Shu"t Minchas Shlomo, 1:73).

Chol Hamo'eid

Does someone who sees the Beis Hamikdash area on chol hamo'eid tear keriah? Although the halacha implies that there is an obligation to tear even on chol hamo'eid, the minhag is to follow the opinions of the rishonim that one does not tear on those days (Shu"t Minchas Shlomo, 1:73).

Yerushalayim residents

Some authorities contend that Yerushalayim residents do not need to tear again, even if they did not see the place of the churban for thirty days (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chayim 561:2; Sha'arei Teshuvah 561). This is the prevailing practice, although there is much discussion among late authorities whether it is halachically correct (Sha'arei Teshuvah 561; Shu"t Shevet Halevi 7:78; Shu"t Divrei Yetziv 1:89; Zichron Betzalel #38).

I have been told that Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explained the reason why the minhag is not to tear is because a person living in Yerushalayim who does not come to the Kosel at least once a month indicates that he does not feel the pain of the churban, and there is no point for him to tear his clothes.

Meat and wine

The Mishnah Berurah (561:4) rules that the first time someone tears keriah for seeing the destroyed Beis Hamikdash, it is proper that he not eat meat or drink wine that day.

Conclusion

The prophet Yeshaya declared: "Exult with Yerushalayim and rejoice over her, all those who love her. Rejoice with her rejoicing all those who mourned over her" (Yeshaya 66:10). "From here we see," says the Gemara, "that whoever mourns over Yerushalayim will merit to see her happiness, and whoever does not mourn over Yerushalayim will not merit to see her happiness" (Ta'anis 30b).

The Midrash (Midrash Rabbah, Shemos 15:21) teaches that Hashem will bring forth ten new creations in the era of Moshiach:

1. He will endow the world with a new light.
2. Hashem will create a spring in Yerushalayim whose waters will heal all illness.
3. He will create trees that will produce new fruits every month that cure disease.
4. All the cities of Eretz Yisrael will be rebuilt, including even Sodom and Amora.
5. Hashem will rebuild Yerushalayim with glowing sapphire stone. It will attract all the nations of the world to come and marvel at the beauty of the city.
6. The cow and the bear will graze together, and their young will play together (see Yeshaya 11:7). The commentaries dispute whether this pasuk is meant to be understood literally or as a parable for the nations of the earth.

7. Hashem will make a covenant with all the creatures of the world and banish all weapons and warfare (see Hoshea 2:20).

8. There will be no more crying in the city of Yerushalayim.

9. Death will perish forever.

10. Everyone will be joyful, and there will be an end to all sighing and worry.

May we all merit seeing these miracles speedily and in our days.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Masei

Kinder and Gentler Killers

This week we read about the cities of refuge. A man who kills someone accidentally is exiled to an Ir Miklat, a city of refuge. In addition to killers, a very distinguished group of people, the Levites, lived in those cities. Their job was something similar to today's Rabbis. They traveled throughout Israel, teaching and preaching. The Levites would return to their homes and neighbors, people who killed through carelessness, who were convicts of sorts. They played an integral role in the killer's rehabilitation.

The sentence imposed on the killers was also very unique. It was not defined by time, but rather by circumstance. The killers would go free only when the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) would die. The Talmud in Makos tells us that the Kohen Gadol's family members were quite worried. They were not concerned that there would be an assassination plot against the Kohen Gadol's life. They were worried that the convicts would pray that the Kohen Gadol would die before his due time, thus releasing them early. In order to dissuade them, the mother of the Kohen Gadol would distribute food and clothing to the inmates to deter them from praying that her son die.

It is hard to understand. Are there no loved ones waiting for these outcasts with food and clothing to be offered upon release? Were the Kohen Gadol's mom's cookies worth exile in the city of refuge? How did these gifts work as bribes?

Reb Aryeh Levine took it upon himself to visit Jewish inmates, mostly members of the Irgun, held under British rule prior to Israel's statehood. He became like a father to those prisoners, bringing them food, clothes and love. For years, despite sweltering heat and frigid rains, he never missed a Shabbos visit, save one.

Once, in the midst of a Shabbos service, a very excited messenger called him out of the prison. Reb Aryeh's daughter had become paralyzed and the doctors were helpless. He was needed for support at home, immediately. After the Shabbos, an Arab messenger was sent by the

concerned inmates to inquire what tragedy interrupted the weekly visit.

The next Shabbos, despite the enduring tragedy at home, the Rabbi went to the prison as usual. Normally during the Torah reading, prisoners would pledge a few coins to charity. This 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 announced that he would give a month from his. 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 unbelievable 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 and within days was fully recovered.

The cities of refuge were not jails, nor were they mere detention camps. They were environments in which reckless people became aware that careless actions have serious ramifications. They were constantly under the influence of their neighbors, the Levites. They would observe them pray, learn, and teach others. They would see the epitome of awareness and care for fellow beings.

The mission of the Kohen Gadol’s mother was not just to distribute food. It was to develop a bond with those people whose carelessness spurred a death. They saw the love a parent had for her son as she subconsciously plead with the inmates to spare her child. They saw how a total stranger, despite her great esteem, would make sure that their needs in the city of refuge were cared for. They may have even thought of the loved one they killed and his family.

After developing an awareness of life, they would never be able to pray for the death of anyone, even if it meant their own freedom. In fact, they, like Reb Aryeh’s prisoners, may have offered their years for the merit of the Kohen Gadol.

The Torah can not punish without teaching and rehabilitating. It infuses a love for life and spirituality into former careless killers. Its goal is to mold a new person whose attitudes will cause him to be kinder, gentler, and a lot more careful.

The story was adapted from A Tzadik in Our Time, by Simcha Raz, (c) 1976 Feldheim Publishers.

Good Shabbos!

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Matos

I Didn't Take Your Spoons!

This week we read the double parsha of Mattos-Massoy thereby concluding the Sefer {Book} of Bamidbar. The

nation of Moav, afraid of Bnei Yisroel, joined forces together with Midyan and hired Bilaam to curse Bnei Yisroel. When that proved unsuccessful, Bilaam offered them devious advice which led to Bnei Yisroel’s succumbing to the idolatry of Baal P’ore. This, in turn, led to the death of twenty four thousand Jews.

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: N’kome nikmas Bnei Yisroel me’eis haMidyanim {avenge the revenge of Bnei Yisroel against the Midyanites} achar tay’a’saif el amecha {then you will ‘gather to your nation (die)}. [31:1-2}” Hashem made it clear to Moshe that this would be the final mitzvah {commandment} before his death. Yet Moshe, with unfaltering zealotry, immediately began to implement it. Why was there a command to avenge Midyan, but not against Moav who had initiated the partnership with Midyan and who had actually hired Bilaam to curse?

Rashi explains that Moav had a legitimate fear. Bnei Yisroel, on their way to Eretz Yisroel, had wiped out the nations of Sichon and Og and had conquered their land. They were now heading for Moav. Moav was therefore acting in self defense.

Midyan, on the other hand, had nothing to fear. Bnei Yisroel were not heading toward them. They get involved in a fight that wasn’t theirs—that didn’t involve them. The command to avenge was therefore only against Midyan.

We are now in the midst of ‘The Three Weeks’ during which we mourn the destruction of both the First and Second Temple. The Temple could never have been destroyed through a simple battle. Only the degeneration of Bnei Yisroel’s spiritual standing could cause the Shechinah {Hashem’s holy presence} to leave the Temple. Only then, stripped of its holiness, could it be destroyed.

The Talmud teaches that the First Temple was destroyed through our involvement in idolatry, incestuous relationships and murder. However, during the time of the Second Temple we were involved in Torah, mitzvos {fulfillment of commandments} and acts of kindness. Why was that destroyed? The Talmud teaches that it was because of sin’as chinam {baseless hatred}. >From here we derive that sin’as chinam is equal to idolatry, incestuous relationships and murder [Yuma 9B].

The Ro”sh warns not to get involved in an argument that doesn’t involve you. “In the end they will make peace and you will remain with anger.” They had a point of contention. Once that becomes resolved, their anger also rests. However, you, whose anger was not based on a real issue, will never fully resolve that anger.

The fact that we are still in the exile of the Second Temple today clearly shows that we are still plagued by the scourge of sin’as chinam. As a bent paper can only be straightened by bending it the other way, so too we must try to go to the other extreme in our interpersonal relationships. Viewing all others as children of Hashem, de facto brothers of ours, and showering them with ahavas chinam {baseless love}.

The Zichron Meir offers a beautiful insight. In the Shoshanas Yaakov prayer recited on Purim we state: “Cursed is Haman who tried to destroy me, blessed is Mordechai.” Why is a reason given for us to curse Haman but no reason given for us to bless Mordechai? He explains that even a Haman could not be cursed without a very valid reason. Every person was created in the ‘form’ of Hashem and is therefore dear and special. Our hatred of Haman is only because of his want to destroy us. However, to bless and love Mordechai—for that no reason needs to be given. Ahavas chinam...

He writes that the way of scholars is to be “marbeh shalom ba’olam”—to increase the peace of the world. Not only to abstain from hating others and not only to love them but to actively increase the peace in the world.

I saw a beautiful story in a book entitled “Gut Voch” (and I thank my father for always searching out and sending me books to aid me in my writing—sheli shelcha). Rav Abish Frankfurter was traveling to Frankfurt to begin his tenure as the Rav there. On the way he stopped at an inn where he was given a room to share with a merchant.

A robber furtively entered their room that night and stole valuable spoons from the merchant. Early the next morning, Rav Abish arose, prayed and resumed his journey. When the merchant awoke, he saw that his roommate had left and realized that his valuable spoons were also missing. Unaware of the towering stature of his roommate, he assumed that the quiet, simple-looking man had stolen them. He dashed to the station where the wagon drivers would await customers and hired the fastest driver. Having been offered double fare if he’d catch up to the ‘thief’, the driver whipped his horses and pursued the unsuspecting Rav Abish.

Finally overtaking the bewildered Rav Abish, the merchant began to shout at him to return his spoons. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!” cried Rav Abish. “I never saw any spoons and I certainly didn’t take them!”

The merchant grabbed Rav Abish and pulled him off his wagon, demanding that he reveal where he had hidden the spoons. When Rav Abish didn’t reply, he tied the poor, innocent man to a tree and began to whip him mercilessly. When the merchant saw that his torment wasn’t loosening his tongue, he stalked off to the inn, leaving poor Rav Abish behind, still tied to the tree.

Rav Abish finally managed to untie the bounds and, bruised, battered and humiliated, he made his way to Frankfurt. There he was greeted by a large crowd who had come to honor their new Rav. He disguised his pain and returned their smiles and greetings.

The next day, Rav Abish delivered a brilliant two hour shiur {lecture} which awed the townspeople. Afterwards, people crowded around their new Rav to discuss various points with him.

Among them was none other than the merchant from the inn who kept wondering why the voice had sounded so

familiar to him. Suddenly he realized that the ‘thief’ he had tied to a tree and beaten was none other than the new Rav of Frankfurt. Horrified, he shrank into his seat, wondering if the Rav would ever forgive him.

He finally gathered the courage and approached the Rav with his head bent in shame and remorse.

Rav Abish immediately recognized the man standing before him. Though he was still standing in front of hundreds who were admiring his brilliance, the Rav gave no thought to his own dignity. He ran to the merchant and cried over and over, “Please believe me, I never took your spoons. Please, please believe me...”

Scholars are “marbeh shalom ba’olam”—they increase the peace in the world. Ahavas chinam. Chazak, chazak v’nischazek.

Good Shabbos,
Yisroel Ciner

Rav Kook Torah

Massei: The Merit of Building the Land of Israel

“You shall take possession of the Land and settle in it; for I have given you the Land to possess it.” (Num. 33:53)

The Ramban interpreted this verse as the Biblical source for the mitzvah to settle and build up the Land of Israel.

The Yemenite Visitor

The following remarkable story was told by Mr. Yigal Gal-Ezer, who served as Israel’s vice state comptroller. In his younger days, Gal-Ezer would often visit Rav Kook’s home to be inspired by his holy presence.

During one of my visits, I found the rabbi in his study, engrossed in a complex Talmudic topic. Suddenly I heard a hesitant knocking at the door. The door opened partially, and a Yemenite Jew — slight of stature, with streaks of white in his beard and long peiyot — entered the room.

The guest closed the door behind him and stood in the doorway, his back to the door. He lowered his head to the floor, afraid to look at the rabbi directly.

Rav Kook raised his eyes from his Talmud and looked at the man kindly. “Come closer, my son.” With a gentle voice, the rabbi tried to instill confidence in the visitor.

With slow steps, the man approached the rabbi’s desk. He remained standing, head down.

“What troubles you, my son?”

“Honored rabbi,” the Yemenite said. “I came to ask the rabbi an important question.”

“Ask, my son, ask.”

“For twenty-five years, I have engaged in backbreaking labor, working from morning till evening. I weeded plots of land so that orchards could be planted. I planted saplings, removed stones from fields, and dug foundations for buildings in Eretz Yisrael. I have spent all my strength in exhausting manual labor. And yet I barely earn enough to support my family.”

Embarrassed, the Yemenite lowered his voice. “I would like to ask,” he said hesitantly, “is it permissible for me to immigrate to America? Perhaps there my fortune will shine and I will be able to properly support my family....” The visitor finished his short speech and stood in silence.

For several minutes, Rav Kook remained deep in thought. Suddenly, he rose from his seat, pointed to his chair, and instructed the man, “Sit.”

The visitor was filled with trepidation. “Honored Rabbi,” he stammered. “It is improper that a stranger should sit on your chair.”

“Sit,” the rabbi repeated firmly.

With short, reluctant steps, the Yemenite circled around the desk until he reached the rabbi’s chair. He slowly lowered himself into the seat.

The Dream

As soon as he settled in he chair, his head dropped to the desk and he fell into a deep sleep. A short while later, he awoke, startled.

“What happened when you slept?” asked the Rav.

“I dreamt that I had passed on to the next world,” he recounted. “My soul ascended to heaven. When I reached heaven’s gates, an angel stood at the entrance and directed me to the heavenly court. There I saw scales — scales of justice.”

The Yemenite laborer continued his account. “Suddenly, carriages drawn by horses rushed in front of me. The carriages were loaded with packages. Some of the packages were small, some medium-sized, and some large. The angels proceeded to unload the packages and place them on one side of the scales. That side of the scales plunged downwards due to the weight, until it nearly touched the ground.”

“What is the meaning of these packages?” I asked the angel standing before me.

“These,” the angel responded, “are your sins and transgressions from your earthly days. Everything is accounted for.”

Hearing this, my spirits sank.

Then other carriages arrived. These carriages were loaded with dirt, rocks, stones, and sand. As the angels loaded them on the other side of the scales, it began to lift up — slightly — the side bearing the sins and transgressions.

“What is the meaning of these bundles of dirt?” I asked.

“These are the stones, the rocks, and the dirt which your hands labored to remove from the ground of the Holy Land,” the angel explained. “They have come to speak in your defense, testifying to your role in the mitzvah of yishuv ha’aretz, settling the Land of Israel.”

“Trembling, I stared at the side of merits. I watched as it dipped lower and lower, lifting the opposite side. Finally, the side of merits stopped moving. It came to a halt as it outweighed the sins — but just barely.”

“You see, my son,” Rav Kook told the man gently. “You have received your answer from Heaven.”

Parshas Mattos-Masei Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Moises ben Shabtai, Moises Behar.

Man of Your Word

Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of Bnei Yisroel saying, “This is the matter that Hashem commanded: If a man takes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath [...]” (30:2-3).

Parshas Mattos begins with Moshe introducing the laws of vows to the heads of the tribes. Rashi (ad loc) points out that this was a remarkable departure from Moshe’s usual method of teaching the laws of the Torah to Bnei Yisroel and that Moshe taught the heads of the tribes first as a way of according them honor. Rashi also notes that a tribunal of three common people can nullify a vow if no expert in vows is available.

The holy day of Yom Kippur begins with this concept of vows – Kol Nidrei. What is so essential about the laws of vows that it opens the service on what is arguably the most intense day on the Jewish calendar?

The Talmud (Bava Basra 88a) comments on the verse “speaks truth in his heart” (Psalms 15) as referring to someone who truly fears Hashem. Curiously, the Gemara found it necessary to give an example of such a person: Rav Safra. Rashi (ad loc) goes on to explain how Rav Safra came to be the paragon of this virtue:

Rav Safra was in the middle of saying Krias Shema when someone approached him to buy something that Rav Safra was selling. The buyer proceeded to offer a sum of money for the item he wished to buy. Rav Safra, who was still davening, was silent. The buyer understood Rav Safra’s silence as a reluctance to sell because the sum wasn’t high enough, so he kept raising his offer until it was a very large sum of money. Once Rav Safra finished his prayers he turned to the buyer and sold it to him for the original price offered. Rav Safra explained, “I had already decided after hearing your first offer to accept the original amount offered.”

Most people grow up valuing the concept of “keeping your word.” Unfortunately, modern society has all but abandoned this ideal, in fact in some cultures a signed contract is only a basis for further negotiation. In general, this notion of being “a man (or woman) of your word” is seen as being morally binding because once you give your word someone else has ownership over your expected performance, which in turn causes them to make decisions and commitments of their own based on your word.

However, we see from the Gemara that there is really a much more profound reason for keeping your word. The story that Rashi cites has nothing to do with keeping your word; Rav Safra was silent the entire time, he never

committed to a price. Why was Rav Safra bound to fulfill the price that he had only agreed to in his mind?

The answer is that there is a much higher truth that we are ALL bound to: we are obligated to be truthful to ourselves. We don't have to live up to our word because someone else has relied on it and made decisions based upon it; we have to fulfill our promises because we said it and we have an obligation to ourselves to make it a reality. This is why the verse says, "speaks truth in his heart" (Psalms 15): It has nothing to do with our commitments to other people – the basis for keeping our word is because we owe it to ourselves. That is what the whole discussion in this week's parsha regarding vows is all about: when a person takes something that is permitted and forbids it from himself.

We often feel like we own the rights to ourselves. Therefore, even if we make commitments to ourselves (I will stop smoking, I will lose weight, etc.) we often have no compunction at all, or perhaps only a fleeting sense of guilt, about breaking those promises to ourselves. This is wrong. We don't own ourselves, we are here as a gift of the Almighty. Our responsibility to ourselves lies in the obligation to Hashem; that's why the Gemara calls those like Rav Safra "those that truly fear Hashem."

This is why the subject of vows is so central to the Yom Kippur service. We acknowledge that we understand that even within commitments to ourselves we have an obligation to Hashem. Only when we articulate the severity of the obligation that comes with giving our word can we commit to fulfilling our word and changing our ways through teshuvah. This is the very essence of Yom Kippur, and thus why we begin with Kol Nidrei.

Violations and Obligations

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, "Take vengeance for Bnei Yisroel from the Midianites [...]" (31:1-2).

Hashem asks Moshe to go to war with Midian and take revenge for what they did to the Jewish people. Interestingly enough, Moshe chooses not to go himself, but rather sends Pinchas to lead Bnei Yisroel into battle. This seems somewhat odd as Hashem told Moshe to take vengeance on the Midianites. Why didn't he go himself? Is it possible that it was because he was getting up there in years? However, just shortly prior, Moshe himself defeated the two greatest world powers: Sicho and Og. So why didn't Moshe go to fight the Midianites as Hashem had commanded?

There is a concept known as hakoras hatov – recognizing the good that someone has done for us. We see this in Egypt when it came to striking the water to create the plagues of blood and frogs. Aharon was asked to perform

these plagues instead of Moshe because both these plagues entailed afflicting the Nile, so to speak, and the Nile had served to protect Moshe when he was a baby (see Rashi Shemos 7:19). Similarly, Moshe was not permitted to strike the ground for the third plague (lice) because the earth had helped him by hiding the corpse of the Egyptian that he struck down (see Rashi Shemos 8:12).

So too, Moshe could not possibly attack the Midianites as he owed them a debt of gratitude from when he was a fugitive from Egyptian justice. Eventually, he also married the daughter of Yisro, a high priest in Midian, and had children there.

We see something quite fascinating here; even though Hashem clearly told Moshe to go and take vengeance from the Midianites, Moshe understood that he himself could not go because that would display a deep sense of personal disloyalty. The Torah is teaching us an incredible lesson: Hashem doesn't just issue a command and in doing so, abrogate a core principle and tenet of Jewish philosophy. Moshe understood that even though Hashem wanted the Midianites to pay for what they had done, it was inappropriate for him to lead an attack.

This message is often lost on those who blindly follow what they believe to be the right course of religious action, believing they are doing it for the sake of Hashem. In fact, the Torah gives us an example of a person who had every intention of acting for the sake of heaven, but the Torah castigates her for what she wanted to do. The wife of Potiphar tried to seduce Yosef in order to have children with him – believing that she saw in her astrological signs that some of the Jewish tribes would descend from her. The Torah considers her act so repulsive that she is called a "wild animal" for what she wanted to do; even though she thought she was doing it for the sake of Hashem.

Having the right intention isn't enough. We cannot abrogate Hashem's other commandments to fulfill those that we would like to do, or to make social commentary (e.g. throwing rocks on Shabbos at cars traveling through a religious neighborhood). We must remember that Hashem places the highest importance on the value of shalom, even allowing His name to be erased for the possibility of shalom. Finally, it is important to remember that Hashem destroyed the generation of the flood because they were fighting with each other, while he kept the generation of the disbursement alive because they got along (even though their unity was really only grounded in fighting a war against Hashem).

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל