

OHRNET

THE OHR SOMAYACH TORAH MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNET

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME

“These are the journeys of the Bnei Yisrael...” (33:1)

The Baal Shem Tov’s carriage sped through the swirling mists of a Russian morning. Inside the carriage the Rebbe and his *shamas* (attendant) sat in silence. All that could be heard was the dull thud of hooves cantering on thin turf.

The Baal Shem Tov’s face was impassive. Suddenly he motioned to the *shamas* to stop the carriage. The *shamas* leant out of the window and shouted to the driver to stop. The carriage came quickly to rest. The horses snorted and whinnied, pawing the ground with their hooves.

Silence. Apart from the horses. And the birds singing their dawn chorus to the Creator. Silence.

Then, quite distinctly, there came from the field the most beautiful sound. The voice of a man singing a song that almost made the trees cry. It was the most beautiful song you could imagine.

The Baal Shem Tov listened intently to the song for some time. His brow was creased as though he was trying to remember something. A memory that went so far back that it seemed to be beyond this incarnation.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed and his mouth widened with a smile of all-encompassing joy.

“Please ask the man to come here!” he ordered his *shamas*.

After a few moments the *shamas* returned with a Russian peasant to whom the voice belonged.

“When I heard you singing,” began the Rebbe, “I couldn’t help thinking what a beautiful tune that is.”

“Yes, I like it” said the peasant.

“I’m not sure I heard all of it. Would you mind singing it for me again?” the Baal Shem Tov said.

“Why not?” said the peasant, and with that he began to sing the tune again. After he had finished, it seemed that even the birds had stopped to listen.

“Beautiful” said the Rebbe. “I wonder, would you be so kind as to sing it again?”

“All right” said the peasant, and he repeated the tune.

“On that day,
Hashem will be
One, and His
Name, One.”

After he had finished singing this time, the Rebbe said “Yes, I think I have it. Does it go like this?” And the Baal Shem Tov began to sing the tune. As beautiful as the peasant’s rendition had been, the Rebbe infused into the tune a heart-breaking yearning like the re-uniting of a mother and child.

“Yes. That’s it exactly” said the peasant.

“I wonder... would it be asking too much... if before I go, could I hear you sing it one more time?”

“All right.” said the peasant, and he opened his mouth to sing.

Nothing came out.

Not a note. Not a squeak. He closed his mouth and tried again. Nothing.

The Baal Shem Tov looked at him

with a strangely intense look, and then said to him slowly “Good Morning...” And with that, he climbed back into the carriage.

The Rebbe and his *shamas* sat in silence for a good few minutes and then the *shamas* could no longer contain his curiosity.

“What happened back there?”

“When I heard that peasant singing, I realized that he was singing one of the songs that the *Levi'im* (Levites) sang in the *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple). For two thousand years that tune has been in exile, passed from one stranger to the next, wandering from one country to another. That peasant was like a shell containing a precious spark of holiness. As soon as the spark had been returned to its owners — the Jewish People — there was no further need for him to remember the tune any longer, and therefore, he forgot it.

GATHERING THE SPARKS

At the beginning of *Parshas Masei* the Torah lists the forty-two places where the Jewish People encamped on their way to *Eretz Yisrael*. What is the reason for these forty-two stops in the desert?

There is a mystical concept that the purpose of these encampments was for the Children of Israel to release and *gather the sparks of holiness* which are trapped in the desert’s emptiness.

Each of these stopping places corresponds to a letter of Hashem’s Name, and so by *gathering the sparks* from each place, a little more of Hashem’s Name — His recognition in the world — is revealed.

Three thousand years later, the Jewish People are still journeying. A hundred years here, two hundred there. On their journeys through Spain, England, China and America, etc., the

continued on page four

PARSHA OVERVIEW

MATOS

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. The *Bnei Yisrael* go to war against *Midian*. They kill the five Midianite kings, all of the males, and *Bilaam*. Moshe is upset that women were taken as captives, because they were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe

that there was not one casualty among the *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering, which is taken from them by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to remain where they are and not traverse the

Jordan river into Israel. They explain that the land where they are presently located is suitable as grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of the *Bnei Yisrael*, and is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help the *Bnei Yisrael* wage war and conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

MASEI

The Torah names all forty-two encampments of the *Bnei Yisrael* on their forty-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan river into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem commands the *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the *Canaanim* from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish all vestiges of their idolatry. The *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the *Canaanim*, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside forty-eight cities for the *Leviim*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the land. Cities of refuge are to be established: someone who murders unintentionally may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of Bamidbar/Numbers, the fourth of the Books of The Torah.

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FATHERLY ADVICE

*Tidbits From the 'Ethics of the Fathers'
Traditionally Studied on Summer Sabbaths*

DO NOT BE A WICKED PERSON IN YOUR OWN ESTIMATION.

Rabbi Shimon, Avos 2:13

One who has no self-esteem as to his spiritual level has no hesitation to continue sinning. ("Another log on the fire!") This does not mean that he should consider himself to be a righteous *tzaddik*. Our Sages (*Niddah 30b*) tell us that before a child is born his soul is challenged with this oath: "Be a *tzaddik* and not a wicked person. But even if

the entire world considers you a *tzaddik*, you should consider yourself to be wicked." One should not evaluate himself as a *tzaddik* who needs no further growth nor as a wicked person beyond redemption. He should consider himself as being balanced between credit and debit, with each action capable of tipping the scales.

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF

JACK WILLNER ע"ה

(YAAKOV BEN MOSHE)
OF HALLENDALE, FLORIDA

ON THE OCCASION OF HIS YAHRZEIT ט"ו תמוז

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

MATOS

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. The Jewish People were commanded to attack Midian. Why were they not commanded to attack Moav?
3. The people selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
4. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
5. Why was Bilaam with the Midianites when the Jewish People attacked?
6. What portion of the spoils went to the soldiers who fought Midian?
7. How were Kalev ben Yefune and Osniel ben Kenaz related?
8. *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* said, "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. What promise did the *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required of them?
10. Which part of the Tribe of Menashe inherited land on the eastern side of the Jordan?

MASEI

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. What happened in Ritmah?
3. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
4. How much land surrounded the cities of the *Levi'im*?
5. From whom did a city of refuge shelter a murderer?
6. Who separated the cities of refuge on the eastern side of the Jordan?
7. When did the cities of refuge begin to function as places of refuge for murderers?
8. In order to be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why does the murderer remain in the city of refuge until the death of the *Kohen Gadol*?
10. When an ancestral field moves through inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to the field in *Yovel*?

BONUS QUESTION?

"Aharon was 123 years old when he died on Hor-Hohar. The Canaanite king of Arad heard..." (33:39-40). The Midrash states that this was actually the Amalekite king *imitating* the King of Arad in order to fool the Jewish people (see Rashi 21:1). The Talmud, however, proves from this verse that the King of Arad was still alive when Aharon died. How can the Talmud prove from this verse that the King of Arad was alive, if in fact the verse is referring to the King of Amalek?

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

"Vast livestock was owned by *Bnei Reuven* and *Bnei Gad*, and mighty..." (32:1). The sheep of *Bnei Gad* were extraordinarily fierce and 'mighty,' and were thus able to defend themselves against wolves and marauding bandits. Therefore, *Bnei Gad*'s first priority was to build sheep-pens, which would serve as a first line of defense against enemy invasion.

• Kli Yakar

HAFTORAH: YIRMIYAHU 2:4-28 & 3:4

MUDDY WATERS

"For My people have perpetrated two evils: Me have they forsaken, the source of living waters; to dig themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water." (2:13)

In this, the second Haftorah of the "three (*Haftorahs*) of affliction," the prophet speaks out, not only against Israel's disloyalty to Hashem who saved them from slavery, but also against the disloyalty to the Torah which had been exchanged for

the empty vanities of foreign culture. Our Sages teach us that Hashem lamented: "If they had forsaken only Me, but had kept the Torah, its spiritual light would have influenced them to return to the path of righteousness." However the Jewish People, seduced by the superficial glitter of the foreign ideologies, abandon the Torah, their only lifeline, and imbibe the brackish water of false ideas which constantly change and contradict themselves. From this, only tragedy and exile can ensue.

WEEKLY DAF

NIDDAH 11 - 17

WASTING SOULS

Those who are involved in “child’s play,” our Sages tell us, are guilty of holding back the arrival of our redeemer Mashiach. The “child’s play” referred to, explains the Gemara, is the action of a grown man marrying a girl too young to bear children.

Mashiach, the scion of David, will not arrive, says Rabbi Yossie, until all the souls which have been decreed to enter this world have arrived. Since this man has married a woman too young to bear children he has delayed realizing his procreative potential which would have brought closer the day when all the souls had arrived and set the stage for Mashiach’s arrival.

Tosefos presents an interesting challenge to this scenario for Mashiach’s arrival. The Gemara (*Mesechta Shabbos 118b*) states that if all Jews would properly observe two Sabbaths they would immediately be redeemed. This statement certainly reveals the tremendous power of Sabbath observance to influence the destiny of our people and the world. But how do we reconcile this promised immediate redemption with the aforementioned requirement of the arrival of the souls who are supposed to enter the world?

The solution offered by Tosefos echoes the Talmudic account of the miraculous birth rate of our ancestors in Egypt when it was standard for Jewish women to give birth to sextuplets. This same miracle would take place if Jews observed those two Sabbaths. Jewish mothers would be involved in so many multiple births that all the souls would be born and Mashiach would arrive.

• *Niddah 13b*

THE WISE CHOICE

When human life is to begin, the angel in charge of conception takes the seminal drop before Hashem and says:

“Sovereign of the Universe, what will be the destiny of this drop? Will it produce one who is strong or one who is weak? One who is wise or one who is foolish? One who is wealthy or one who is poor?”

He does not ask, however, whether it will produce a wicked man or a righteous one, as Rabbi Chanina has already pointed out that “Everything is predestined by Heaven except the fear of Heaven.”

This statement about predestination by Rabbi Chanina bar Popa raises

an interesting problem. Rambam (Laws of Repentance 5:2) writes that everyone has the free will to be as righteous as Moshe or as wicked as Yeravam and to be a wise man or a fool. His inclusion of human intelligence in the range of free will seems to run counter to the aforementioned Talmudic assignment of wisdom and foolishness to the realm of predestination.

One of the resolutions of this problem proposed by Hagahos Maimonios, is that what is determined by Heaven is the degree of intelligence with which a person will be born. It is this intelligence to which Rabbi Chanina bar Popa refers when he quotes the angel who asks the Creator what levels of wisdom or foolishness are to be instilled in the seminal drop at the moment of conception. There are, however, courses of life which are described as “wisdom” and “foolishness.” The choice of whether to follow the course of wisdom — obedience to Hashem — or that of foolishness — shortsighted indulgence in sinful activity — is a moral choice rather than an intellectual one. It is this sort of wisdom and foolishness to which Rambam refers and he therefore relegates it to the realm of free will.

• *Niddah 16b*

continued from page one

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Jewish People ‘extract’ and redeem the sparks of holiness which are trapped throughout the world.

When this process is complete, the Mashiach, the anointed one, will gather all the Jewish People to the land of Israel and all the songs of holiness will be heard once again.

Then it will be that Hashem will be revealed as the One True G-d. His Name will then be complete. “On that day, Hashem will be One, and His Name, One.”

STATIC AND DYNAMIC

“Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Children of Israel...” (30:2)

Matos and *Masei* are two *parshios* joined together, but their names are opposites.

The word “*mateh*” (of which the plural is “*matos*”) means a staff. A staff is something inert, cut off from the tree from which it sprouted. It has ceased to have the power of furthering itself, of bringing forth new life. It will always remain what it is now. Static and unchanging.

Masei (from the verb ‘to journey’) is the opposite. It is the essence of dynamism, of development and growth. For the journey is the paradigm of furtherance.

Really, this juxtaposition of *Matos* and *Masei* is symbolic of the Torah itself. The Torah has the power to take the lifeless and change it into life. To take Aaron’s inert staff and cause it to flower and bloom. To change it into a serpent.

A simple, inert staff becomes the instrument of the great signs and wonders wrought in Egypt, for splitting the sea asunder. A simple, inert staff becomes the symbol of the beginning of life itself for the Jewish People. The ultimate reversal of the lifeless staff — the *mateh* — brings furtherance and an eternal future — the *masei* — to the journeys of the Children of Israel throughout history.

Sources:

The Song Remains The Same - The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh; The Malbim; Rav Shmuel M’Ostropole; Rabbi Mordechai Perlman; Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb
Static and Dynamic - Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin

ASK the RABBI

TRY IT! YOU'LL LIKE IT!

OUT OF THIS WORLD!

LASSIE GOLDBERG?

P. C. Bruening
<PCGerleve@t-online.de>
from Germany wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I would like to know where I can find this passage in the Talmud. I think the indication I found in the Internet is wrong or defective. "Rabbi Hezekiah the Kohen said in the name of Rav: A person is destined to give an accounting before the Heavenly Tribunal for everything he saw but did not enjoy, ignoring G-d's world which He meant for man's enjoyment."

Dear P. C. Bruening,

The source that you are looking for is the Jerusalem Talmud, Tractate Kiddushin Chapter 4 Halacha 12 (page 48, side b).

The Talmud states that anyone who saw food and did not partake of it will, in the future, have to give an accounting of his actions. (Unless of course, he has a valid reason, such as health.)

This statement means that when a person partakes of food he must make a blessing before he eats it. That blessing serves as a method to 'enhance' G-d's presence in this world. By choosing not to eat, a person is relinquishing the ability to praise G-d and His creation. Obviously, the Talmud is only referring to kosher food.

The Jewish outlook on physical pleasure is very beautiful. We believe that G-d is kind, and therefore made a world full of pleasure for us to enjoy.

Sources:

• Pnei Moshe, commentary on the Jerusalem Talmud

Jonah Wahrman
<jonah.wahrman@lvcg.org>
wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
Tonight, July 3rd, on the Ted Koppel Nightline show, an interesting comment was made. The discussion concerned the supposed incident that took place in 1947 in Roswell, New Mexico, where the claim is being made that a space ship crash landed that contained the bodies of extra-terrestrials. Two men were interviewed, one a believer in the space craft and one a former believer and a former commercial airplane pilot who is now a non-believer. Mr. Koppel made the statement that anyone who has religious faith would be a believer in the Roswell incident, as a belief in G-d is a belief in an extra-terrestrial being! An interesting concept. Any comments?

Dear Jonah Wahrman,

Mr. Koppel is making a major mistake, based on an extremely superficial comparison. He is confusing two totally different ideas. Belief in G-d is belief in an infinite, non-physical being, beyond time and space. He does not live within our reality, we live within His reality. Belief in extra-terrestrials is belief that there are finite, physical beings who live on other planets. Belief in God obviously does not mean belief that physical beings live on other planets, and vice versa.

Madeline Davis
<phoenix@buffnet.net> from
Kenmore, NY, wrote:

Dear Rabbi,
I'm writing a story about a Jewish child who has adopted her first pet — a puppy. She asks her Sunday school teacher if Emily, her dog, is or can be Jewish? The teacher takes her to the Rabbi for an answer. The child loves Judaism and loves her dog. What can the Rabbi tell her about G-d's relationship to animals that will let her know that the dog is not Jewish, but is still loved by G-d? What Biblical references will explain this? Thanks for the help.

Dear Madeline Davis,

Perhaps the Rabbi should explain how G-d created the world and all the creatures in it. On the sixth day of the Creation, G-d created the animals "each according to its own kind" and "G-d saw that it was good." "Each according to its own kind" teaches that G-d gave each individual type of animal its own nature.

Every one of G-d's creations has a reason for its existence. To "make a dog Jewish" is removing the real identity that G-d wants it to have, just as if the dog tried to turn the little girl into a dog!

By the way, Glynda Kramer sent us the following note:

Here is a joke: Why did the dog bite the rabbi? Because he had no "mazel." (Isn't that a real "canine horror! [keninina hara]!")

Sources:

• Genesis 1:24-25

• Mincha Belula, commentary on the Torah

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PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

MATOS

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an individual who is an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. If such a person is not available then three ordinary people.
2. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
3. 31:5 - They knew that the death of Moshe would follow the execution of vengeance upon Midian.
4. 31:6 - The *Aron* and the *Tzitz*.
5. 31:8 - He went to claim his reward for the people who died in the plague as a result of his counsel.
6. 31:27 - Half.
7. 32:12 - They were half-brothers. Kalev's mother married Kenaz and gave birth to Osniel. (Osniel led the Jewish People after the death of Yehoshua.)
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their

children.

9. 32:24 - Moshe required that they remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised not to return home for an additional seven years while the Land was being divided.
10. 32:39-42 - *Bnei Machir* ben Menashe. They independently conquered part of the Amorite land, east of the Jordan. Moshe promised them that land.

MASEI

1. 33:1 - To show Hashem's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During the span of the 38 years they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:18 - The *meraglim* slandered the Land.
3. 34:2 - Because there are certain *mitzvos* that apply in the Land, but not outside of the Land.
4. 35:4 - 2,000 *amos*. The inner

1,000 was the "*migrash*" (an open area of land which served to beautify the city), and the outer 1,000 was for their fields and vineyards.

5. 35:12 - From the *go'el hadam* (avenger of blood), a close relative of the deceased who had the right to avenge the victim's death.
6. 35:13 - Moshe.
7. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities on the western side of the Jordan.
8. 35:16 - One which is capable of inflicting a lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - Because the *Kohen Gadol* causes the *Shechina* to dwell in Israel and prolongs life, and the murderer causes the *Shechina* to depart from Israel and shortens life. The murderer is not worthy to stand in the vicinity of the *Kohen Gadol*.
10. 36:4 - It remains in the possession of the new tribe.

BONUS ANSWER!

If the King of Arad had not been alive, it would have served no purpose for the Amalekite King to imitate him.

• *Tosafos, Rosh Hashana 3a*

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

MATOS

Ramban

- 30:16 Responsibility
 31:2,6 Vengeance
 31:23 Cleansing Vessels
 31:36 Miracle of the Spoils
 31:49 Jewish Victory
 32:33 Menashe's Inheritance

32:41

Yair's Ancestry

Sforno

31:15 The Meaning of Silence

Ramban

33:53 The Land

MASEI

35:14

Cities of Refuge

35:29

The *Sanhedrin*

Kli Yakar

33:49

The Greater Loss

35:6

Temporary Dweller

Sefer Hachinuch

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Cities of the *Levi'im*

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Capital Punishment

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Exile

Sforno

33:1

The Merit of the Journeys

36:4

The Inheritance of Daughters

36:12

The Husbands of the Daughters of Tzlofchad

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