

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHIOT MATOT-MASEI · 28 TAMMUZ 5770 · JULY 10, 2010 · VOL. 17 NO. 39

PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE BIGGEST OIL SPILL IN THE WORLD

“G-d said to Moshe, saying, ‘Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites.’” (31:2)

Rabbi Berl Wein once remarked, “All of my stories are true; just some of them haven’t happened yet.” The following story – though not one of Rabbi Wein’s – falls into this category.

A well-known rabbi was standing in line at the “Customs” check at a certain airport. In front of him were two equally religious-looking gentlemen. The customs officer came over to the two and asked them if they had anything to declare. They replied, “No.” The customs officer, however, decided to ask them to open their suitcases.

After a few seconds of careful probing in the lining of the case, somewhat reluctantly the cases disgorged a fair number of diamonds. They lay there on the counter. Both men collapsed in tears at the terrible desecration of G-d’s name that they had perpetrated.

The custom’s officer turned his attention to the next in line, the rabbi, and asked him: “Anything to declare, sir?”

He replied “No, officer.”

“Sir, would you mind opening your case, please.”

“Officer, I will happily open my case, but I think I should tell you that you are wasting your time.”

“Oh yes, sir. And why might that be?” replied the officer, a cynical smile playing around the corner of his lips. The rabbi continued. “Officer. I am an Orthodox Jew and the Torah strictly prohibits smuggling.”

“I see, sir.” said the customs officer, sarcastically “And what, pray, are these two religious Jewish gentlemen who preceded you? Martians?”

Replied the rabbi, “Which two religious gentlemen are you referring to, officer? I’m afraid I don’t see religious Jews. I see only diamond smugglers.”

When an Orthodox Jew behaves in a despicable fashion the damage is felt on the other side of the cosmos. Someone who wears a kippa is an ambassador for the Jewish People to the whole world. However, the world will not only judge Judaism based on the actions of this person. They will also judge its Author.

Everything in this world was created for the honor of its Creator. When a person brings credit to the Jewish People, he

also brings honor to He who chose us from all the peoples, and he fulfills the purpose of his creation and Creation itself. If he does the reverse, G-d forbid, he both writes himself out of reality and damages the whole cosmos.

He has blemished Creation more than the biggest crude-oil spill in the world.

But there’s another side to *chilul Hashem* (desecrating G-d’s Name). When a Jew sees or hears someone doing an unspeakable act, he thinks to himself, “How could he have done that? I would never do such a thing in a million years! You know something? I’m not such a bad person after all. I’m really a *tzaddik*. My small transgressions are nothing compared with this guy. You know something? I’m really okay.”

It takes a lifetime’s work to correct the flaws in our character, both big and small. The only way we have a hope of improving ourselves is if we sensitize ourselves to our shortcomings and realize that we have a long way to go. When someone behaves in a grossly immoral fashion, it makes us think that we are really okay because we would never sink to that level, and thus we give up trying to be better. As a result, not only do we suffer, but the whole world becomes a darker place because we have given up on the light.

In this week’s Torah portion, there is an interesting anomaly. G-d says “Take vengeance for the Children of Israel against the Midianites.” And in the very next verse, Moshe directs the Jewish People “to inflict G-d’s vengeance against Midian.” So which is it? Is it G-d’s vengeance or is it ours?

The answer is that at the deepest level the Jewish People and G-d are inextricably linked.

When we blemish the good name of the Jewish People, whether through some gross illegal act or the smallest complacency that tells us “I’m okay, Jack!”, we cause a diminution of G-d’s light in the world.

And when we do something that brings credit to the Jews — even if that act is the smallest attempt to improve our character and about which no one will ever know — we bring the whole of mankind closer to G-d.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

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. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. 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 *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken 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 allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help 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 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the Canaanites, 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 48 cities for the *levi'im*, 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 Tzeloachad 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.

ISRAEL Forever

FIRST THINGS FIRST

When the tribes of Reuven and God negotiated with Moshe for receiving their portion of *Eretz Yisrael* on the already conquered east side of the Yarden, they offered to participate in the conquest of the rest of the Land.

“We shall build pens for our livestock and cities for our small children,” they promised, “and we shall not return to our homes until the Children of Israel have all inherited their Land.”

When Moshe repeated their offer he put things in a different order: “Build for yourselves cities for your small children and pens for your flock.”

Rashi points out that the petitioners were more concerned about their possessions than about their sons and daughters and Moshe subtly told them to put first things first and first care for their children.

As the secular public in Israel painfully struggles with the shortcomings of its educational system there is a powerful lesson to be learned from the Torah portion we will read this Shabbat. Focusing primarily on the material development of the Jewish State has somehow left behind the mission of communicating values to the young. Only by putting first things first will we succeed in securing Israel forever.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PLACES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and *Eretz Yisrael*

THE “SEVEN TOWNS” TRANSPLANTED

In the Romema area of Jerusalem, near the entrance to the capital, is a community called Kiryat Mattersdorf. Established in the early sixties it was named for one of the “Seven Towns”, a loose federation of seven Jewish communities in pre-war Hungary.

The low prices of apartments due to its location so near the Jordanian border attracted many Jews to purchase homes there despite the apparent danger. Jordanian shells did indeed strike the community during the



Six Day War but there were no casualties.

Among the original residents of Mattersdorf were many American *olim*, including Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg who established his Yeshiva Torah Ore there.

The special Torah-observant character of Mattersdorf attracted many young couples to purchase older apartments in the periphery, thus transforming much of Romema into a vibrant Torah community.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Matot

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machane" (camp). Which machane?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

Masei

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *yovel*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

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

Matot

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machane Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikve*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

Masei

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

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A digest of the topics covered in the seven weekly pages of the Talmud studied in the course of the worldwide Daf Yomi cycle along with an insight from them

- Sanctifying the vessels of the Sanctuary
- The thanksgiving sacrifices, psalms and music needed for extending sanctity of Yerushalayim or Sanctuary
- The duration of the first sanctification of the *Beit Hamikdash*
- When impurity is contracted within the Sanctuary and forgotten
- The time period for remaining in Sanctuary in impure state which necessitates atonement or punishment
- The similarity between *mikdash* and *mishkan*
- The long and short of leaving the Sanctuary
- Atonement for forbidden marital relations
- Some of the laws of *niddah*
- Impurity resulting from contact with dead rodent or animal carcass
- Oaths to do or to refrain from doing
- False oaths or one made in vain

KIDDUSH FOR WOMEN

Although women are generally exempt from *mitzvot* with a time orientation, one of the exceptions to this rule is the mitzvah of saying *kiddush* on Shabbat.

The command to honor the holy day with *kiddush* is found in the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Shabbat to sanctify it.” (*Shmot* 20:8) The command to desist from creative labor on Shabbat is also found in the Ten Commandments: “Safeguard the Shabbat to sanctify it.” (*Devarim* 5:12)

While there would appear to be a clash between the two commands, our Sages resolve this conflict by informing us that both *Zachor* (Remember) and *Shamor* (Safeguard) were

said simultaneously at Sinai, something which only G-d Himself could do. This matching of the two teaches us that whoever is obligated in the mitzvah of *Shamor* is also obligated in the mitzvah of *Zachor*. Since women are obligated in regard to all transgressions — such as violating the Shabbat — they are also obligated in the positive commandment to observe the Shabbat with *kiddush*.

Tosefot cites a *gemara* in *Mesechta Nazir* which seems to indicate that the mitzvah to make *kiddush* over wine on Shabbat is not of Torah origin, only a rabbinic law. The conclusion reached by *Tosefot* is that there is definitely a mitzvah of Torah origin to say the words of the *kiddush* but the requirement to do so over wine is only of rabbinic origin.

• *Shavuot 20b*

What the SAGES Say

“Whoever makes *havdalah* over wine at the conclusion of Shabbat will be blessed with sons.”

• *Rabbi Chiya bar Abba in the name of Rabbi Yochanan - Shavuot 18b*

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MOUSETRAP

From: Mark

Dear Rabbi,

Would you please clarify if and under what circumstances one may kill insects or pests? On the one hand, it would seem that one should be able to do so. On the other hand, since these are G-d's creations, how can we justify taking the life He's created?

Dear Mark,

This is a delicate question, and it shows your sensitivity to the presence of G-d in all levels of His creation.

First, it's important to understand that according to the Torah, G-d created mankind at the pinnacle of Creation in order to give him mastery over all the creations under him. All of Creation was given over to him in order to fulfill man's mandate as partner with G-d. However, this dominion is not only a right but also a responsibility. We may only manipulate G-d's world, including its creations, according to His will and for the purpose of perfecting ourselves and coming closer to Him.

Since we can do this only while alive and healthy, we are allowed to take the life of anything that threatens life or health. Therefore, not only is one allowed to kill, for example, poisonous snakes or scorpions, it is actually a mitzvah to do so. This does not mean that one is allowed to go hunting them out of their natural habitat, because there they are not a threat. But when found among

people, they must not just be left alone, but rather every effort (including killing them) must be made to prevent them from causing future harm. This is so even on Shabbat when ordinarily it's strictly forbidden to kill anything.

Regarding things like bees, wasps, mosquitoes, ants or rodents, the answer depends on to what extent they may harm us. In most cases, bees and wasps are not aggressive or particularly harmful. They also generally stay out of our way. It's best to leave them alone when there's no particular threat. Of course, people especially allergic to bee stings, or a wasp nest in reach of children, are examples of situations where one could definitely exterminate the threat. Mosquitoes, though less harmful, are very aggressive and bothersome. They can also get into food and cause it to be thrown away. Rodents may also bite and waste food. Ants certainly disqualify food. Any of these may be repelled (preferable) or killed (if necessary). To avoid desensitizing us from taking life, it's better to indirectly cause death than to actively kill them.

The above applies only in the case of threat to life or health, or significant discomfort or loss. However, to indiscriminately kill anything for no reason, or even to make no effort to avoid killing something, like stepping on an insect rather than over it, is a flagrant disrespect for G-d's Creation and an insensitive disregard for life. Even sitting on the lawn and inadvertently uprooting grass, or walking along and inadvertently tearing a leaf off a bush or tree shows great disregard for G-d's love of all creations.

Since this is true regarding even insects and plants, imagine how careful we must be regarding our treatment of fellow human beings!

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THE THIRD PARTY

Question: As a student in a yeshiva far away from home I rent an apartment together with a fellow student and we share the expenses. An old friend of my partner recently arrived at our yeshiva and wishes to join us in our apartment. My partner is all for consenting, but I have some serious reservations about adding another party to our limited living quarters. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: From a halachic point of view you have every right to object to the crowding of your apartment. You must consider, however, what sort of an effect your objection will have on the partner with whom you must go on sharing your apartment. If it is going to destroy a relationship that is important to you, perhaps you should make a special effort to adjust to a new situation.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY _____

CATCHING THE SEVEN FORTY

When a new kosher restaurant recently opened in Moscow there was almost as much excitement about its unusual name as there was about the fact that it was the sixth kosher eatery to be established in the Russian capital.

“Seven Forty” is the name of the restaurant – a name with an interesting background. This is the name of a Russian folk song that is familiar to almost all Russian Jews.

One explanation given for this strange appellation takes us back to the dark days of the Czars when it was forbidden for Jews to live in the Ukrainian port city of Odessa. If they had businesses or worked there they could be there only from six in the morning till eight in the evening. In order to comply with this regulation all Jews had to be at the railway station at exactly 7:40 to board the train for departure from the city.

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