

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT MATOT • 24 TAMMUZ 5782 23 JULY 2022 • VOL 29 NO. 37
MASEI • 2 MENACHEM AV 5782 30 JULY 2022
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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Matot

Things Go Better With Coke

“So Moshe gave to them - to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, and half the tribe of Menashe...” (32:33)

Rabbi Benzion Yadler (21 November 1871 - 15 August 1962) was one of the great Torah teachers of his generation. Once he was visiting a community where he was trying to raise the level of Torah learning, and he wanted to impress on the congregation the great pleasure of learning Torah. Said Rabbi Benzion, “You know the *g’shmake* (delicious) feeling you have after eating a bowl of cholent on Shabbat and you wash it down with a glass of cold coke? Well, I have the same feeling when I go to *shul* a little earlier on Shabbat and open my Gemara and learn Torah.”

A few months later, a man came over to the rabbi and said, “Rabbi Yadler, I just want to tell you that I was at that *derasha* that you gave about the cholent and the coke, and I want you to know I got such inspiration from it.”

“Really!” said Rabbi Benzion. “Yes,” said the man, “and now on Shabbat I never eat my cholent without following it with a nice glass of chilled coke.”

Life is full of messages – you just have to make sure you get the *right* message.

“So Moshe gave to them – to the children of Gad and the children of Reuven, and half the tribe of Menashe...”

Moshe acceded to the tribe of Gad and Reuven’s request to settle the east bank of the Yarden only after part of the tribe of Menashe volunteered to settle the east bank and make themselves available for the spiritual welfare of Gad and Reuven. Moshe insisted that the families of Menashe would settle in the east because for a Jewish community to survive spiritually, it requires outstanding Torah scholars to lead it. The tribe of Menashe contained such people, and it was only on that condition that Moshe felt that the tribes of Gad and Reuven would “get the right message.”

• Source: *Ha’amek Davar to Devarim 3:16*

Masei

Cancer of the Cancel Culture

“If he pushed him out of hatred...” (35:20)

Two actors are sitting and talking in a coffee bar on Melrose Avenue in Hollywood. One is telling the other about the jobs he got, the jobs he didn't get, the jobs his agent didn't send him up for but should have sent him up for, the jobs she sent him up for, but shouldn't have sent him up for, the jobs he was too short for, the jobs he was too tall for, the jobs he wasn't good-looking enough for, the jobs he was too good-looking for. He goes on like this for about half an hour. Finally, he stops and says to the other actor, “Well, that's enough about me. Now, you talk about me.”

It's very difficult not to see ourselves as the center of the world. It's very easy to think (G-d forbid), “Shema Yisrael, Hashem Elokenu, Ani Echad.” “Hear O Yisrael, Hashem is Our G-d. I AM ONE!” There's a G-d in the world, for sure. But I'm the center of my own universe. If it's my world, then you're driving my Ferrari, you're married to my film-star/*tzadekes* wife, you're wearing my Zegna suit, you're walking around in my Gucci shoes and you're breathing MY AIR!

The opposite of *sinas chinam* is *ahavas chinam*. It's easy to love and respect someone when they are just like you, but can you respect someone when they're completely different than you? Can you respect them when they are greater than you? Can you respect them when they are smaller? Can you respect when they're more religious than you? Respect them when they do things with 'pride' that disgust you? Can you respect the soul inside even when the outside repels?

Every person is priceless. A smile says, “You matter.” A hello says, “I noticed you – I didn't cancel you.”

A nod says, “You are in my world – I didn't remove you from my radar.” I respect you because you have a *neshama* – even when you make choices I wouldn't make and even when you're wrong.

I see the pure *neshama* inside you.

I love you for free.

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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. The 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 even one casualty among the 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 on the eastern side of the Jordan River and not enter the western 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 the Bnei Yisrael, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer the Land of 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 the Bnei Yisrael on their 40-year journey from the Exodus to the crossing of the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael. Hashem commands the Bnei Yisrael to drive out the Canaanites from the Land of Israel and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. The Bnei Yisrael are warned that if they fail to completely rid the Land 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 Levites, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established so that someone who unintentionally kills another person may flee there. The daughters of Tzlofchad marry members of their own 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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Q & A

Questions – 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?

Questions - 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*?

Answers - 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.

Answers - 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.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE AMIDAH (PART 19) – BLESSING OF THE DAVIDIC DYNASTY

“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”
(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The fifteenth blessing reads: “The offspring of Your servant David may you speedily cause to flourish, and enhance his pride through Your salvation, for we hope for Your salvation all day long. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who causes the pride of salvation to flourish.”

Our blessing opens with the entreaty, “The offspring of Your servant David may you speedily cause to flourish.” Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer explains that the word used for offspring – *tzemach* – has the same root as the word for flourish – *tatzmiach*. The phrase is based on a verse in Tehillim (132:17): “There [in Yerushalayim] I shall cause pride to flourish for David.” In his commentary on Tehillim, Rabbi David Kimche writes that when the Jewish People are in exile, they resemble a shriveled tree with one small branch showing signs of life. But it is from that seemingly insignificant shoot that the regeneration of the entire tree will occur. In the same way, we await that “small branch,” the descendant of King David, to reveal his identity so that he can rejuvenate Hashem’s chosen nation. In Zechariah (6:12), the Mashiach is called *Tzemach* (see *Targum Yonatan*), “Behold, there is a man, and his name is Tzemach, and he will flourish in his place; he will build the sanctuary of Hashem.”

Rabbi Alexander Susskind of Grodno in Belarus was an eighteenth century Kabbalist. His most popular work is called *Yesod v’Shoresch HaAvodah* – The Essence and Root of Worship. It is mostly a Kabbalistic commentary on the Siddur and has been reprinted countless times since it was first published in 1782. He cites the Ari Zal’s, teaching that as we recite this blessing, we should yearn for the Mashiach and the final redemption, and that by doing so, we will fulfill the dictates of our Sages to eagerly await the Mashiach. However, the

Messianic Era will not only be a national experience. Every single Jew will experience his own personal salvation. Consequently, Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Margolis (1780-1823), the Rabbi of Dubno in Ukraine, writes in his indispensable commentary printed alongside the *Orach Chaim* section in the *Shulchan Aruch*, titled *Sha’arei Teshuvah* (118): “When we recite the words “for we hope for Your salvation all day long,” we should have in mind to ask Hashem to save us from all of the personal problems that plague us.”

The blessing is not telling us that we should hope for our salvation just three times a day when we pray. Rather, we should anticipate the arrival of the Mashiach *all day long*, because the Messianic Era will not just be a “religious” experience. It will be an all-encompassing experience that will have impact, in the most wonderful way, on every detail of our lives.

A famous story is told to describe the extent of the Chofetz Chaim’s yearning for the Mashiach. His longing to greet the Mashiach was so great that he kept a packed suitcase in his home so that he would be ready to travel to Israel the minute he would hear of the Mashiach’s arrival. It is certainly a story with a powerful message. However, I once heard from one of the Chofetz Chaim’s grandchildren that there was a very good chance that this was not actually true. And then he added, “The *Zeide’s* (Yiddish for grandfather) anticipation and longing for the Mashiach was far, far greater than having a packed valise waiting under his bed. For the *Zeide*, the imminent arrival of the Mashiach was as real to him as the room next door is to us. It was palpable!”

The fact that the blessing relating to the Davidic dynasty is the fifteenth blessing in the *Amidah* is not by chance. Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher (1255-

1340), not to be confused with Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Paquda, the author of *Chovot Helevavot* who lived two hundred years earlier also in Zaragoza, was one of the most influential rabbis of his generation, renowned for his brilliance and Torah scholarship. His commentary on the Torah incorporates Kabbalistic interpretations extensively, and is considered to be a timeless masterpiece. Rabbeinu Bachya points out that there are twenty-nine and a half days in a lunar month. The moon waxes for fifteen days and then wanes for the last half of the month until it disappears, and then the whole process begins anew, heralding in the beginning of the following month. On the fifteenth day of the month, the moon is at its fullest and its luminance radiates at its maximum potency. In a similar fashion, there are fifteen generations from Avraham Avinu until Shlomo Hamelech. In allegorical terms, Avraham Avinu represents the very nascent beginnings of

the Jewish nation – the very first generation – when the moon is only a tiny sliver of what it will become. Shlomo Hamelech is comparable to the fifteenth night of the month, when the full moon lights up the night sky. The reign of Shlomo Hamelech was a time of peace and tranquility. It was a time when there were miracles continuously occurring in the Holy Temple. Shlomo Hamelech's reign was a moment in history in which maximal spiritual potential was attained. It was an era in which the spiritual light of Yerushalayim and the Holy Temple illuminated the entire world. It was a time of spiritual levels that will be surpassed only with the advent of the Messianic Era. So, too, our blessing is the fifteenth blessing, as we plead with Hashem that He will send the Mashiach so that the world can, once again, be suffused with the purest and most sublime light of all – the light of the Mashiach.

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Matot: The Names of Jericho

The City of Jericho features quite prominently in the Bible: In the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, Jericho is mentioned multiple times as the place adjacent to the Jews' last stop in the wilderness, right across the Jordan River from where they would enter the Holy Land (Num. 22:1, 26:3, 26:63, 31:12, 33:48, 33:50, 34:15, 35:1, 36:13, Deut. 32:49, 34:1, 34:3); while in the Book of Joshua, the name of Jericho appears 30 times, most notably as the first city the Jews conquered when they entered the Promised Land. Now, read this very carefully: Every time that Jericho is mentioned in Numbers and Deuteronomy, it is vocalized in the original Hebrew as *Yereicho* – and the same is true of whenever the city is mentioned in Jeremiah (Jer. 39:5, 52:8), Ezra-Nehemiah (Ezra 2:34, Neh. 3:2, 7:36), and Chronicles (I Chron. 6:63, 19:5, II Chron. 28:15). But, when the city is mentioned in the Book of Joshua and Samuel (II Sam. 10:5), it is always vocalized as *Yericho*. In the Book of Kings, the city is sometimes vocalized as *Yereicho* (II Kgs. 25:5) and

sometimes, *Yericho* (I Kings 16:34, II Kings. 2:4-5, 2:15, 2:18). In this essay we explore the different names for Jericho and discuss how each name focuses on one particular aspect of the Ancient Canaanite stronghold.

One of the appellations given to the City of Jericho in the Bible is *Ir HaTmarim*, “the City of Dates” (Deut. 34:3, II Chron. 28:15). Indeed, when the Bible refers to *Ir HaTmarim* without stating which city is meant (Judges 1:16), Targum and Rashi explain that it refers to Jericho, which, Radak notes, was blessed with a plethora of date-producing palm trees. Similarly, when discussing the future borders of the Holy Land, Yechezkel mentions a city named *Tamar* (Yechezkel 47:19), and again Targum and Rashi explain that this refers to Jericho.

The Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus (37-100) is one of the earliest sources to mention the city of Jericho in connection with its palm trees and

balsam trees (see his *Antiquities of the Jews* Book IV, ch. 6 and Book XIV ch. 4, *War of the Jews* Book I, ch. 6 and ch. 18). This connection is elaborated upon in the later work *Yossiphon*, which is a Hebrew abridgement and adaptation of Josephus' writings, probably written in tenth century Italy. *Yossiphon* adds that the city of Jericho is also known as *Ir HaReyach*, "The City of Scent" on account of the balsam trees that grew there that produced the sweet-smelling balsam oil.

Of course, the Hebrew word for "smell" is *reyach*, so it seems that *Yossiphon* understood the etymology of the place-name *Yereicho* as stemming from its connection to good smells. Indeed, this is how Rashi (to II Kings 20:13, Isa. 39:2, Yechezkel 27:17, and *Brachot* 43a) understood *Yossiphon's* intent, because he quotes *Yossiphon* as explaining that *Yereicho* is called such because of the sweet-smelling balsam that grew there. Rabbeinu Yoel and the *Peirush HaRokeach* likewise note that in most places in the Bible, the name of Jericho is vocalized as *Yereicho* – which is similar to the word *reyach* ("smell") – in allusion to the smell of the dates that are found there.

By the way, Jericho's associated with good smells can also be gleaned from the Mishna. The Mishna (*Tamid* 3:8) relates that some of the sounds associated with the service in the Temple in Jerusalem were so powerful, that they could be heard as far away from the Holy City as Jericho. The Mishna even relates that the smell of the *ketoret* ("incense") burnt in the Temple was so strong that it could be smelled even as far away as Jericho. This also implies some sort of connection between Jericho and smells, but I have not seen any sources that explicitly tie this into the name of the city.

Yossiphon continues by relating a legend that claims that the balsam tree was only able to grow in the environs of Jericho, and when foreign kings tried to transplant a balsam tree to their land, the tree would dry up and shrivel. This state of affairs apparently only lasted until the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, but once the Temple was destroyed, people outside of Jericho were able to successfully plant and cultivate balsam trees in such faraway lands as Egypt.

But then, *Yossiphon* switches topics and says something else about Jericho. He writes that the city was also called *Ir HaYareach*, "The City of the moon."

Of course, the Hebrew word for "moon" is *yareyach*, so it seems that *Yossiphon* understood the etymology of the city's name as somehow stemming from its connection to the moon. *Yossiphon* explains that every month when the New Moon would first be visible, the very first place where it could be sighted would be Jericho, which is why the most reliable witnesses who would testify to the Sanhedrin about the appearance of the New Moon tended to come from Jericho.

What emerges from *Yossiphon's* writings is that the name of Jericho is associated with both the Hebrew word *reyach* ("smell") and *yaryach* ("moon"). The anonymous editor of the 1999 Oraysa edition of *Yossiphon* writes that based on this we can perhaps account for the variants in spelling: Sometimes the name of the city is spelled with the letter YOD between the letters REISH and CHET, and sometimes is spelled sans the YOD. Whenever Jericho is spelled with that YOD, it alludes to the city's association with "smell," because *reyach* also has a YOD between the REISH and CHET. But when the city's name is spelled without that YOD, it alludes to the city's connection to the "moon," because *yaryach* also does not have a YOD between the REISH and CHET.

Rabbi Yedidya Tia Weil (1721-1805), son of Rabbi Nesanel Weil (1687-1769) the famed author of *Korban Netanel*, presumes that the city's two vocalizations correspond to the two spellings found in the Bible. Indeed, whenever the name Jericho is vocalized as *Yericho*, the letter YOD appears in between the letters REISH and CHET, while whenever the city is vocalized as *Yereicho*, that YOD is absent.

At first, Rabbi Weil considers that the additional YOD in *Yereicho* appears as a tribute to Hashem (whose four-letter name begins with the letter YOD) and hints to the great miracle He performed when the Jews conquered Jericho and subsequently consecrated it.

But then, Rabbi Weil concludes that the difference between *Yericho* and *Yereicho* is more practical. He argues that while the city itself is called *Yericho* (with the additional YOD), the surrounding area was called *Yereicho* – associated with *reyach* – because that is where the sweet-smelling balsam and date trees grew. To bolster this argument, Rabbi Weil goes through

all the different places in the Bible wherein the names *Yericho* or *Yereicho* appear, and accounts for why in each case the Bible uses one name and not the other. Interestingly, Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) in *Maayan Beit HaShoeivah* independently came to the same conclusion as Rabbi Weil.

The great Kabbalist Rabbi Menachem Azaria of Fano (1548-1620) offers a different way of reconciling the names *Yereicho* and *Yericho*. He writes that at first the city was named *Yereicho* by its Canaanite inhabitants, who worshiped the moon and other celestial bodies. Afterwards, once the Jews conquered Jericho, a special Divine blessing was bestowed upon the dates that grew there that gave off a strong scent, so the city was later renamed *Yericho*. This explains why in the Pentateuch (which predates the Jewish conquest) always refers to the city as *Yereicho*, while Joshua and Samuel (later books of the Bible) refer to the city as *Yericho*. However, this does not explain why Jeremiah, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles, and Kings (which post-date the conquest) use the old city's name.

A similar explanation is offered by Rabbi David Luria (1798-1855), who writes that the city of Jericho was originally named *Yereicho* after the moon, as its pagan Canaanite inhabitants were evidently idolaters who worshiped the moon. In fact, archeologists have found evidence of the ancient Canaanite worship of a moon-god known as *Yarikh*. Because of the idolatrous connotations of the city's original name, when the Jews conquered the place, they changed its name to *Yericho*, which instead alludes to the sweet-smelling balsam that the Jews encountered when they conquered the city. The problem with Rabbi Luria's explanation is that he too does not account for the appearances of *Yereicho* in later books of the Bible.

When considering the etymological roots of these words related to Jericho, there are some interesting points. The classical lexicographers like Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970), Yonah Ibn Janach (990-1055), and the Radak (1160-1235) all trace the word *reyach* to the trilateral root REISH-YOD-CHET and the word *yareyach* to the trilateral root YOD-REISH-CHET.

However, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) actually sees a shared etymological

connection between *reyach* and *yareyach*. He sees both of these terms are derivatives of the two-letter root REISH-CHET ("air"). The most common manifestation of "air" in Hebrew is in the word *ruach* ("wind"). But Rabbi Pappenheim takes this a few steps further, explaining that just as "air" is light and almost indiscernible, so does the term *ruach* refer to the "soul" or anything else "spiritual/abstract" that is likewise immaterial and cannot be detected by the physical senses. In that sense, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *reyach* refers to olfactory sensations that cannot be perceived by the other senses, but travels within the *ruach*. Similarly, he explains that the moon is called *yareyach* because its movements somehow control the *ruach* ("tides/winds").

A parallel discussion occurs with the word *tamar*. The aforementioned classical lexicographers all understand the word *tamar* and its cognate *tomar* to be derived from the trilateral root TAV-MEM-REISH, which refers to "dates or date trees." Radak adds that because of the tall and straight appearance of palm trees, this root also expanded to refer to anything that is tall and straight, including pillars of smoke, known as *timrot* in Hebrew (Yoel 3:3, Song of Songs 3:6). Interestingly, Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) claims that the root of the Hebrew *tamar* is related to the Akkadian/Sumerian word for "sight," because tall palm trees can often be "seen" from quite a distance.

Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *tamar* to the biliteral root MEM-REISH, whose core meaning he sees as "replacing/switching." He explains the connection by noting that different parts of the palm tree are often cut down for various purposes (e.g., branches to use for a *lulav* or *schach*, or dates to be eaten), but they are duly "replaced" by the relatively fast-growing tree. I elaborated on other words derived from this biliteral root in various essays, including "Razor's Edge" (May 2018), "That's Amore" (June 2019), "The Old Switcheroo" (May 2020), and "Revolted Revolutions" (June 2021).

*NOTE: The Mishna (*Yevamot* 16:7) refers to Zoar as *Ir HaTmarim*, as does Targum Yerushalmi (to Deut. 34:3). See *Hagahot HaRashash to Yevamot* who already notes that this is contradicted by Deut. 34:3, which clearly calls Jericho *Ir HaTmarim*, not Zoar.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Matot: Yevamot 115-122 (*Siyum*)

Masei: Ketuvot 2-8

Reflections

“Like the reflection one sees when looking into the water, so is the heart of one person to another.” (Mishlei 27:19)

Our Sages see a number of “Torah Tips” reflected in this verse that teaches the nature of reciprocity. Some applications are clearly halachic, applying to testimony that is not acceptable due to an implicit bias based on human nature.

Rabbi Yehuda, however, teaches that the “reciprocity principle” in this verse has importance for enhancing Torah study. Rashi explains this in two possible ways. One is that a person’s success in becoming a proficient Torah scholar reflects the degree to which the person has dedicated his “blood, sweat and tears” in pursuit of this goal. Another explanation is the importance of learning Torah from a teacher who genuinely cares for the welfare of his students in this world and the next. If the Torah teacher shows sincere interest in the student’s advancement, the student will see this, appreciate it, take advantage of it – and pursue a successful path of becoming a wise Torah scholar.

▪ ***Yevamot 117a***

Personal Q-Tips®

Bar Kapara said, “If a person hears inappropriate words spoken near him, he should place his fingers in his ear lobes and block his ears from hearing negative speech.”

He explains that he can derive this teaching from the following Torah verse: “You shall have a *yated* (shovel) together with *azenecha* (your equipment). (*Devarim 23:14*)

What equipment? The context of this verse and its straightforward meaning is the Torah instructing the Jewish People, as a holy nation, in practices that are

conducive to holiness. If the people need to go to war, they should take with them a shovel-like instrument for help in covering their waste. This is an important prerequisite for having a clean and pure camp in which Torah may be learned and blessings may be said.

Bar Kapara says to “not read” the word in the verse as *azenecha*, but read it as *aznecha*. In reading it this way, the verse “leaves” its contextual meaning and takes on the a novel meaning: “plug your *ears* to not hear negative speech.” The commentaries find this idea of a “close but no exact” reading to be quite intriguing, leading to a variety of explanations being offered as the basis for expounding the verse in this unique fashion.

In his *sefer* *Moreh Hanevuchim*, the Rambam addresses this teaching from Bar Kapara, particularly what is meant by his saying, “Do not read it *this* way (as it appears), but rather read it *another* way.” The Rambam states that this is not meant to be taken literally. Rather, it is a technique employed to *help us remember* a halacha that is know by means of *mesora* from rabbi to student, dating back to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The halacha is not actually taught in the verse, but one who reads the verse will hopefully see it and recall the appropriate halacha. The Rambam writes that this explanation is also true for what Chazal call an *asmachta* – a place in the Torah one can lean on to “see” and remember a halachic teaching.

This approach is accepted by numerous Torah commentaries, including the Maharal from Prague in his *sefer* *Be’er HaGolah*, towards the end of the “third well.” However, other great *Rishonim* and *Achronim* disagree with this view. While not advocating reading the word in the Torah in a different manner than written, they explain that an

unusual aspect of the verse “calls out” for Chazal to interpret the verse in a (non-obvious) manner that accounts for the particularities in each specific case. The Ritva and the Maharsha are representatives of this school of thought.

Regarding the example in our *sugya*, many novel ideas have been created by brilliant and pious Torah scholars to explain how “digging with a shovel to

cover waste in the camp” is also teaching “putting a finger in one’s earlobe to plug the ear to prevent hearing negative speech.” Or, perhaps I should call it “wasteful speech”? One explanation I have heard is that the Torah is teaching us to protect the cleanliness and purity of our thoughts in order to be as close to the source and keeper of our pure souls, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* – The Holy One, Blessed is He.

• *Ketuvot 3a*

PEREK SHIRA

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE EAGLE

The eagle says: “And You Hashem, G-d, L-rd of Legions, G-d of Israel, awaken to mete out justice upon all of the [enemy] nations; do not favor deceitful traitors, Selah!” (*Tehillim* 59:6)

The eagle is the “King of Birds.” Grand, strong, and fearless, it soars majestically above other birds and sits on the top of the avian food chain. When any other bird of prey attacks, it will first look around it to ensure it is not vulnerable to other predators, whereas the eagle attacks without caution or fear. It is also known to attack larger birds. An additional expression of its loftiness is that it tends to fly alone and not mingled with other birds. The eagle thus sings of Hashem’s kingship and supremacy.

It also sings of Hashem’s compassion towards His people, despite the fact that He must generally maintain a face of strictness in order to maintain justice in His world. Although the eagle is cruel to its prey, it displays compassion for its young. When it has to transport them, it carries them on its wings, indicating that it prefers that arrows enter it than its eaglets. This is a symbol of how Hashem carried us to freedom from Egypt “on eagles’ wings,” speedily and safely, protecting us with His Clouds. When an eagle arrives at its nest, it first hovers above, so as not to startle its young. So too, if Hashem’s nation is “asleep” regarding the mitzvahs, He awakens them at first gently, and then continues as needed with gradually increasing intensity.

In its song, the eagle calls for Hashem not to favor deceitful traitors and not to compromise on truth and justice. This is expressed by the fact that it

displays all four signs of impurity, which indicates it does not flatter the wicked but rather shows its true predatory colors. Moreover, its superiority makes flattery needless.

The eagle’s verse refers to Hashem by His four-letter Name of Mercy as well as “Elokim” – G-d of Justice – and it bids Him to deal justice on our wicked enemies out of His mercy for His nation. We, too, should utilize unbending justice to maintain the order of society, yet at the same time we should exhibit characteristic Jewish heart and compassion. To correctly balance opposing character traits is a disciplined wisdom. Its beautiful display is the song of the eagle.

*Note: This is the song of the “*neshet*.” We have translated “*neshet*” as “eagle,” but this is actually a matter of dispute. *Chizkuni* translates *neshet* as “eagle.” *Rasag*, *Ramban*, and *Ran* apparently translate it as “vulture.” Some identify it as the Griffon Vulture (see *Sichas Chullin* and *Mesores Ha’of*; however, see also *V’Zos HaChayah*). In this commentary we have followed the opinion that it is the eagle since it seems to represent the song better.

- Sources: *Chagigah* 13b; *Tanchuma*, *Eikev* 2; *Pi Eliyahu*; *Kol Rinah*; *Shem MiShimon*

*In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

More than Kettle to the Metal

In this week's Torah portion we are taught the law of *tevilat keilim*, immersing vessels in the purifying Mikveh waters. When the Jews return from the war against Midian with booty, Elazar instructs them not only to pass all metal vessels under fire, to make them kosher, but also to immerse them in Mikveh waters to sanctify them.

The law dictates that metal food-vessels that pass from non-Jewish to Jewish possession require immersion. This is true even if they were never actually used by the non-Jews, and if they never absorbed any forbidden foods. This is not a law of *kashrut*. It is a law of *kedusha*. Its purpose is to teach the Jew that even the sensual enjoyment of food must be sanctified.

However, the fact that only metal (as opposed to earthenware) vessels require immersion teaches a more nuanced lesson. Metal represents man's intellectual mastery over the earth and its materials. Eating serves man's physical and sensual nature. Thus, a metal utensil used for eating represents the intellectual side of man in the service of his sensual nature. This would be antithetical to the Torah's regime, where man's sensual drives are subordinate to his intellect. Only with this subordination can he freely choose to serve Hashem.

Precisely where the symbolism could be understood as the intellect serving the sensual, the Torah ordains ritual immersion. Indeed, the Hebrew word used to describe the process of purification of these vessels – *yitcha'ta* – is a conjugate of the Hebrew word for sin. In this context, the purification is intended to revive and strengthen the consciousness of moral freedom. And it is precisely this awareness – that the physical experience is at the service of the intellect – that reinforces the ability to abstain from sin.

▪ Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 32:23

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions,
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