

# Torah Weekly



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## Parshas Matos

For the week ending 24 Tamuz 5755  
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### Summary

**M**oshe 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 quite 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.

### Commentaries

#### The Three Weeks

The *Parshios* of Matos and Masei, whether they are read together or apart, always fall in the days between the two fasts of the Seventeenth of Tamuz and the Ninth of Av. This period in the Jewish Calendar is known as "between the constrictions": Two seminal disasters befell the Jewish People on these two dates — on the Seventeenth of Tamuz, Moshe returned from receiving the Torah on Sinai to find the people involved in the worship of a golden calf. On the Ninth of Av, the spies brought back a distorted report about the Land of Israel, weakening the faith of the people, and bringing about forty years of wandering in the desert until all of the adult males of that generation had passed away. Throughout history, Tisha B'Av is a day ear-marked for tragedy and suffering. So at this time of sadness, to give strength and refresh our downtrodden spirits, we read specifically about the division of the Land of Israel, reminding ourselves of Hashem's promise "to these you will apportion the land" — however long we may wander in exile, all the Jewish People will eventually return from exile to the land that Hashem has promised them.

(Based on the *Bnei Yissaschar*)

**...Similarly when a person comes to purify himself from his spiritual impurity, first he must remove the "spiritual rust"**

**"And Moshe spoke to the heads of the tribes of the Bnei Yisrael saying 'This is the what Hashem has commanded...'”(30:2).**

'Where does it say that in the Torah?'

'It's a Rabbinical decree'

'Oh — It's **only** a Rabbinical decree...'

Moshe speaks to the *Bnei Yisrael* through the heads of the tribes to show how they should respect the words of their leaders. For when their leaders speak — "This is the what Hashem has commanded" — it is as if Hashem Himself was speaking. A Rabbinical decree is like a decree of the Torah, and is to be treated as the words of the Living G-d.

(Based on *Toras Moshe*)

**“Everything that comes into the fire you shall pass through the fire” (31:23).**

This is the place in the Torah where we are taught how to *kasher* (lit. “make fit”) cooking utensils which have become *treif* (spiritually “poisoned”). Firstly, the pot needs to be thoroughly cleaned and any rust removed. If the pot absorbed the taste of the forbidden food via fire, then the absorption is expunged by fire, and if the absorbed taste was imbibed through boiling non-kosher food, so too it is purified through boiling. Similarly when a person comes to purify himself from his spiritual impurity, first he must remove the “spiritual rust” of his transgressions by *teshuvah* — returning to Hashem, regretting his past actions, and accepting upon himself a different code of behavior for the future. After this, the form that his *teshuvah* takes will depend on the form of his sin: If his sin was ‘with fire’ — with great enthusiasm — likewise his *teshuvah* must be with an equal fiery enthusiasm. In that same area that he stumbled, there must be his reparation: If, in the past, he used his mouth to speak *lashon hara*, so now he should use his power of speech to learn Torah. If he made bundles of sins, let him make bundles of *mitzvos*! The essential “*kashering*” of a person is through Torah, for the Torah makes him both fit and pure.

(Chafetz Chaim)

**Haftorah:**

**Yirmiyahu 1:1 - 23**

**“See, I have appointed you this day over all the nations, and over the kingdoms to pull down, to destroy and to annihilate, so as to build and to plant” (1:9).**

**E**ven in the last hour before the Babylonian exile, the prophet Yirmiyahu warns the people that defection from Hashem — the prevailing lack of morals, the worship of sensuality, the scorn of justice, the misuse of power and the oppression and exploitation of the poor and the defenseless — will lead to the collapse of the Jewish State. These same warnings apply to all nations at all times, and ignoring them will lead to the same fate. Eventually the time will come when one permanent, secure peace will be established, when Justice and Love will reign based on the acknowledgment of, and loyalty to G-d. Until that time, these principles, embodied by the prophet in the midst of his people, and Israel (by the mere fact of its continuing existence) in the midst of the nations, will stand in eternal opposition to all institutions that are based on the abuse of power and the murder of happiness.

(Adapted from Rabbi Mendel Hirsch)

# Pirkei Avos

## Chapter 2 Group Insurance

**“Do not isolate yourself from the community and don’t trust yourself until the day of your death.”**

Hillel (Avos 2:4)

You can never be sure that your success in either material or spiritual matters will last forever. King Solomon lost his throne towards the end of his life and Yochanan was *Kohen Gadol* for eighty years before deserting his tradition by becoming a *Tzduki* (Sadducee). It is therefore crucial for you to avoid pridefully isolating yourself from the community so that you will retain friends who will come to your aid in time of trouble and who will be available to steer you back to the proper road if you slip in your responsibilities.

Tiferes Yisrael

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