

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. *Bnei Yisrael* war against *Midian*. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males, and *Bilaam*. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive, 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 *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering which 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 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 to the crossing of the Jordan river into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem 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 Tzlafchad 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.

Insights

ROLLS-ROYCE

“Hashem said to Moshe ‘Calculate the total of the captured spoils...’ ” (31:25)

Given the choice between renting a Rolls Royce for a day and owning one, I think most people would go for the latter.

If you think about it though, on the day when you actually rent the Rolls Royce, what's the difference? You experience the same silky ride as someone who owns a Rolls-Royce. You enjoy the same people gazing through the window to make sure you're not someone they ought to recognize. The smell of the leather, the quiet air of refined luxury...everything is the same. With one small difference...

In life, things make us happy to the degree that we feel we own them. Renting a “Roller” is never going to feel the same as owning one.

In *Parshat Matot*, the Torah goes to unstinting length to itemize all the spoils of the war against Midian. It describes exactly how they were divided among the *kohanim*, *levi'im*, the warriors and the general population. What is the significance of such exactitude?

Everything in this world has a limit. The spoils captured by *Bnei Yisrael* may have been very large — but as they were physical objects, there was an end to them. This is the lesson the Torah teaches us here: The physical world is finite, limited. It's this much — and no more.

Even when we have that elegant automobile sitting in the drive, it will never bring us the sort of happiness that a spiritual achievement can bring. Because in the back of our mind, we know that tomorrow someone else could quite easily be driving it. We may have paid a “Rolls-Royce” price for it, but it's not really ours, because it can be taken away from us in a second. It can be stolen. A tree can fall on it. Its owner can die.

Everything in this world is finite; thus the pleasure we can get from this world is finite. It can be taken away from us in a second. However, our spiritual acquisitions can never be taken away from us. They become part of who we are. It is for that reason that we get more joy out of spiritual accomplishments than out of material possessions, because no one can take them away from us. We truly possess them. And thus we are truly happy with them.

Sources:

Rolls-Royce - *Sfat Emet*, *Alter from Kelm*, *Rabbi Mordechai Perlman*

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 has 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