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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Generational Perspective

“They approached him (Moshe) and said, ‘Pens for the flock shall we build here for our livestock, and cities for our small children.’ (32:16)

How often is it that we might reveal our shortcomings to others, while we ourselves stay blissfully ignorant of our true selves? A slip of the tongue often speaks louder than an amplifier in the red on 11.

The tribes of Reuven and Gad were blessed with large flocks. Recognizing that the terrain on the east bank of the Jordan was ideal for cattle grazing, they petitioned Moshe for this to be their share of the Land.

The Midrash says that their request to Moshe betrayed a somewhat materialistic orientation. In the order of their priorities, ‘pens for the flock’ preceded ‘cities for our small children.’ Moshe, in his response, subtly corrected their priorities: “Build cities for your small children and pens for your flocks...” Children first.

It seems that Moshe’s subtle rebuke had its effect, for they replied, “Our small children, our wives, our livestock and all our animals will be there in the cities of Gilead.” (32:26)

Nevertheless, this Midrash appears difficult to understand. How could it be that Reuven and Gad, two of the tribes, two of the progenitors of the holy nation of Yisrael – how could they seemingly have been more concerned with their own possessions than about their children?

We should never make the mistake of comparing our own failings to the perceived failings of our holy ancestors. Their smallest ‘slip’ would, in our hands, appear like a jewel of a mitzvah! On their spiritual level, the children of Reuven and Gad were considered overly materialistic, but if they were walking around today, they would seem so spiritual as to be scarcely part of the planet.

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Q & A - Matot

Questions

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?

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

Answers

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.

Q & A - Masei

Questions

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?

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

Answers

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.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Batra 25-31

Facing North or South

Rabbi Yitzchak said, “One who wants to have wisdom should turn to the south; and if he wants wealth he should turn to the north.”

In addition to this statement on our *daf*, our *gemara* also teaches a *siman* – a memory device – in order not to mix up which direction is advised for wisdom and which direction for wealth. The *Shulchan* (Table; i.e., source of material sustenance and wealth) was in the northern side of the *Mishkan* and *Batei Mikdash*, whereas the *Menorah* (symbolizing the light of wisdom of the Torah) was in the south.

It is interesting to note that despite Rabbi Yitzchak’s statement, which offers a choice between praying in a manner either fortuitous for wisdom or for wealth, but not for both simultaneously, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi teaches otherwise. He says that one should *always* face the south, and in this way will be better positioned not only for wisdom but also for wealth. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi claims that when one has the wisdom of the Torah, he also has great wealth, as the verse teaches: “Long life is on its (the Torah’s) right, while wealth and honor are on its left.” (Proverbs 3:16)

As beautiful as this teaching is, this opinion is not codified in the *Shulchan Aruch* and it is also not our *minhag* (custom).

Rashi explains that the directional words of advice in our *gemara* refer to “turning one’s head” (not body) south or north when praying. And “praying” refers to the “standing prayer” that we often call “the *amida*” or “the *Shmoneh Esrei*.” Turning only one’s head, but not body, south or north, is consistent with the *gemara* elsewhere (Masechet Berachot 30a). There it teaches that the main direction for prayer is toward the Land of Israel, Jerusalem and site where the Temples stood, as taught by King Solomon when dedicating the First Temple (Kings I ch. 8). Therefore, according to Rashi, one would position his body towards the east (towards the Land of Israel), and angle his head to the south or north, depending upon his objective.

The Rema, however, seems to prefer to explain our *gemara* as speaking about the position of one’s *entire body* for wisdom or wealth, and not only the head. In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* 94:2, the Rema states: “And one who wants to fulfill the words of our Sages to turn to the south for wisdom and to the north for wealth, should do so – however, he should turn his face towards the east.”

The *Mishneh Berurah* (ibid 94:2:12) writes that this implies that one should stand with his *body* towards the south or north, and angle only his *head* toward the east (such as in the Askenazic countries of Eastern Europe, which require prayer towards the east in order to be praying in the direction of the Land of Israel). The *Mishneh Berurah*, however, points out that Rashi explains our *gemara* differently. One’s body should face the Land of Israel and only the head should be angled to the side – south for wisdom or north for wealth. He concludes that it is correct to pray according to Rashi’s explanation, and that this is in fact our widespread *minhag*. This means that we should position our bodies towards the Land of Israel (in the east when we are west of Israel), and angle our heads sideways, to the south or north, if so desired, in prayer for increased wisdom and wealth.

▪ *Bava Batra 25b*

TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when performed by someone who understands its significance” (Meiri, Bava Kamma 17a).

THE DAILY OFFERINGS (Part Two)

Mitzvah #401; Bamidbar 28:1-8

The offerings differ from each other in many respects in accordance with the symbolism they each express. For example, the Tamid offering consists of a *keves* (lamb or kid) in its first year. As a living being, it represents living beings, and by offering it, we offer ourselves, as it were. Every animal offering is essentially a human offering. We thus find that there is an Altar in Heaven upon which the angel Michael offers the souls of the righteous – not animals – to Hashem. In general, each offering communicates that we owe our lives to the Creator and that we therefore dedicate ourselves to His service. Hashem responds by bestowing additional bounty upon His world, and upon us in particular, so that we may better know the extent of His greatness and kindness and so that we may increase our praise and service of Him and merit greater eternal pleasure.

Aside from this, our daily offerings in which we dedicated ourselves to Hashem are a form of repentance, and Hashem responds to them by forgiving us for our sins. The morning offering atones for sins of the evening, and the afternoon offering atones for sins during the day. Thus, we offer a *keves*, related to the word *kevisah*, “laundering,” for it cleanses our souls from the stains of our sins. We bring an animal in its first year because it renews us and makes us as pure as a baby (*Pesikta Rabbasi* §16).

Having clarified that the offerings are essentially vehicles that express the feelings of our hearts, we may suggest a new interpretation of Hashem’s words to Moshe, “I am not asking them to bring Me offerings according to My ability, but rather only according to their ability.” Hashem says that He does not demand us to serve according to “His ability,” that is, what He deserves – absolute perfection. This high degree, as Moshe correctly pointed out, would require more offerings than are contained in this limited world! Instead, He demands only that we serve Him according to our limited ability – but with *all* of our limited ability! Thus, we bring only a single lamb, but one which is the best of the flock (*Yoma* 34b) and without any blemish. We cannot possibly bring infinite animals every day as Hashem truly deserves, but by bringing the Tamid offering every single day, on and on and on, we communicate a limitless and perfect worship of the limitless and perfect Hashem.

This idea is relevant to us even today, for although we do not have the privilege of bringing offerings, we have ways of expressing the messages of the offerings, and that is what Hashem wants the most. First, we have daily prayers corresponding to the daily offerings. Second, Hashem regards the study of the offerings as if bringing them. Third, the twice-daily *Shema* corresponds to the twice-daily Tamid offering. The Midrash compares this to a son who would prepare meals for his father twice daily. One day, the father realized that the son could no longer afford the meals. He told him, “I give lectures in the *Beis Kneses* twice a day. Come and hear those two lectures and it will give me as much pleasure as the two daily meals you have offered me until now.” (*Eileh HaDevarim* pg. 5; cited in *Torah Shleimah*). In other words, although we cannot connect to Hashem in the most intimate way through the daily offerings, we can relate to him in a comparable way simply by reciting the *Shema*. Reciting the *Shema* is like hearing a lecture from Hashem because we thereby express our dedication to Hashem, which is the primary message of the offerings. We should view the twice-daily recital of *Shema* as an opportunity to unite lovingly with Hashem, thereby bringing much blessing into our lives.

Whenever we serve Hashem, we should remember that He is well aware of our limitations. He does not expect perfection from us, but He does expect us to serve him to the best of our limited ability, which is perfection in human terms. He patiently waits for us to do so, for only then can we be worthy of the perfect goodness that He wishes to bestow upon us.

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.

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

KIDDUSH LEVANAH (PART 8)

UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON

“My walk on the moon lasted three days. My walk with G-d will last forever.”
(Charles Duke – Lunar Module Pilot, Apollo 16)

Kiddush Levanah then continues with the following sentence that is repeated three times: “May fear and terror befall them at the greatness of Your arm; may they be as still as stone.” (Shemot 15:16)

After just having declared that our enemies will not be able to harm us, we now pronounce that they will be filled with terror when they contemplate the Might of Hashem.

As Rashi explains, each nation fears the Jews for their own reason. Some have valid fears for their future as the Jewish nation begins its journey towards the Land of Israel. Others, such as Edom and Moav, have no reason whatsoever to fear the approach of the Jews or to harbor any hatred towards them. The land that they inhabited was not a part of the Land of Israel and they would neither be overrun nor exiled. Why then did they behave in the reprehensible way as they did? Because their hatred of the Jewish People Nation was so great that they could not tolerate the thought that the Jews would establish their own, independent kingdom, even if it had no direct impact on them at all. It seems that Edom and Moav are the prototypes of all Jew-hatred throughout history.

Eric Hoffer (1902-1983), an American writer and philosopher who was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, summarized the irrational and innate hatred for the Jews in two short sentences: “The Jews are a peculiar people. Things permitted to other nations are forbidden to the Jews.” Or, in the words of an unattributed quotation, “An anti-Semite is someone who hates the Jews more than is necessary.”

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the difference between fear and terror. Fear is the dread of a superior force or power, whereas terror is the dread of a threatened danger. On being exposed to Hashem’s Might, the nations of the world will be filled with both fear and terror. Fear at the enormity of Hashem’s infinite power, and terror that it will be unleashed against them. So great will be their fear that the nations of the world will not be able to react in any way. They will be struck dumb.

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi in his HaKuzari writes that despite the fact that fear has no physical source, it can cause a person to exhibit physical symptoms. Fear can make a person’s skin turn white or it can make the skin have goosebumps. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi explains that this is due to fear being an expression of one’s spiritual essence.

However, fear is neither negative nor positive. As with virtually every emotion, it is not the emotion that defines whether it is good or bad but rather it is our reaction to the emotion. When utilized correctly, fear can drive a person forwards and draw them closer to Hashem. Rabbi Avraham Schorr, the rabbi of Congregation Nezer Gedalyahu in Flatbush and author of numerous scholarly works, said that a person can replace many fears with One fear – Yirat Hashem – the fear of Hashem.

The Sefat Emet cites our Sages teaching that Yitzchak's face was always shining with joy. He was happy all his life and was therefore called Yitzchak, which shares the same root as the word for laughter. Paradoxically, Yitzchak was also renowned for his acute fear of Hashem. Yaakov actually refers to his father as "Pachad Yitzchak – the Dread of Yitzchak". The Sefat Emet clarifies that fear is not contradictory to joy. "They actually go together, because no one is happier than the person who does not fear anyone other than Hashem."

To be continued...

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

On the Border

In lamenting the exile of Judah after the destruction of the First Temple and how the Jews were subsequently harried by the nations of the world, the Book of Lamentations states: "all those who chased after her [the Kingdom of Judah] reached her between the mitzarim" (Lam. 1:3). Rashi follows the Midrash (Eichah Rabbah §1:29) in explaining that "between the mitzarim" refers to the three-week period bookended by the tragedies of the Seventeenth of Tammuz and the Ninth of Av. This is why those three weeks are often called *bein ha'mitzarim*. In this explanation, Rashi interprets the word *mitzarim* as a cognate of *tzarah* ("sorrow," "suffering"). But Rashi also offers another, contextual-literal interpretation that explains *bein ha'mitzarim* as referring to "between the boundaries," meaning that the Jews were trapped by their enemies in situations from which they could not escape – as though they were stuck between two fences. To illustrate this point, Rashi uses the word *gevul* ("border"), while Targum and Mahari Kara (there) use the similar word *techum* to say the same thing. In this essay, we discuss the four words *mitzarim*, *gevul*, *techum*, and *s'far* all of which seem to be synonyms that mean "border."

Rabbi Yehuda Ibn Kuraish (a ninth century Spanish grammarian) in his *Risala* clarifies that *mitzarim* should be understood as the plural form of the word *meitzar* ("border") found in rabbinic literature. For example, this usage appears in Rabbinic Aramaic in the legal term *dina d'bar mitzra* (Ketubot 44a), whereby one who sells a field is legally obligated to offer to sell it first to the field's neighbor before anybody else. Ibn Kuraish further notes that this word *meitzar* is not related to the Biblical Hebrew term *meitzar* – famously used in the passage, "From the straits [*meitzar*] I call out [to] Hashem" (Ps. 118:5) – as that word relates to *tzar* ("narrowness") and denotes something slightly different.

That said, it should be noted that some commentators (like Ibn Ezra to Lam. 1:3 and Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim in *Cheshek Shlomo*) do actually connect *mitzarim* to the Biblical *meitzar*. We could explain that connection by realizing that a "border" essentially serves to narrow down the contours and boundaries of a given plot of land, so there is definitely a thematic connection between the two words.

It is interesting to note that Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz explains that there is no Zohar on the three parshiyot always read during the *bein ha'mitzarim* period (Matot, Masei, and Devarim) because during those three weeks, our minds are "constricted" and "minimized" by mourning all the tragedies that we have suffered. In such a "narrow-minded" state of being, it is inappropriate to study the esoteric secrets of the Torah, so the Zohar did not comment on those pericopes.

When Hashem tells Moses to command the Jewish People about the borders of the Holy Land before they enter, the Bible uses the word *gevul* and its various inflections fourteen times in a span of twelve verses (Num. 34:1-12). The trilateral root GIMMEL-BET-LAMMED from which *gevul* derives also refers to the act of “limiting” by delineating the borders of what is acceptable and limiting the scope of what people can do. An example of this is when Hashem tells Moses at Mount Sinai to restrict (*ve’higbaltah*) the Jew’s movements to around the mountain (Ex. 19:12), a verb cognate of *gevul* is used (see *HaKtav VeHaKabbalah* to Ex. 19:12).

The standard word for rendering the Biblical Hebrew *gevul* in Targumic Aramaic is *techum/techoma* (Gen. 10:19, 23:17, Ex. 19:12, 19:23, Deut. 19:4). This word was also used in Mishnaic Hebrew to refer to what falls within the bounds of a certain area. For example, it is used in the phrase *techum Shabbat* which refers to the area of 2,000 cubits outside the city-limits within which one may walk on Shabbat (see *Eruvin* 5:5, *Beitzah* 4:2, *Sotah* 5:3). Rabbi Ernest Klein in his etymological dictionary of Hebrew sees the Rabbinic Hebrew usage of *techum* as a loanword from the aforementioned Aramaic word, which he sees, in turn, as borrowed from the Akkadian *tahumu*.

Rabbi Benzion Chaim Lubetzki in *Midrash Safah Echat* sees *techum* as a metathesized form of the word *chatum* (“sealed”), as the space demarcated within the *techum* is “sealed” – so to speak – by its boundaries that surround it on all sides.

**For the full version of this article, check out: http://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/*

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