

OHR NET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

Matot/Masei

LEFT AT THE THIRD CACTUS

"If a man takes a vow to G-d..." (30:3)

This week we complete the synagogue reading of the fourth of the Five Books of the Torah, *Bamidbar* – "In the Desert."

What is the theme of The Book of Bamidbar?

The captivity of the Jewish People in Egypt was more than just physical bondage. On a deeper level Egypt represents the enslavement of the power of speech. Egypt not only enslaved the bodies of the Jewish People, it put in chains the major weapon of the Jewish People – speech. Thus, the Torah writes that the Jewish People "cried out" to G-d. It never writes that they "prayed." For in Egypt, speech itself was bound.

The power of speech is synonymous with the power to lead, to give direction. A leader directs through speech. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they went straight into the desert. There's something special about the desert - it's very difficult to give directions there. "Turn left at the third cactus" will not get you very far. In Hebrew, the word desert is *midbar* which is from the root *mi dibur* – "from speech" – because the desert is the place which is separated and removed from speech. Since the desert is the maximum place of non-speech, of non-direction, it is the ideal place to re-build the power of speech from the ground up.

And that's what the Jewish People were to do in the desert. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they had to re-build this power of speech which had been in exile with them.

If we look back over the book of Bamidbar, the book of "In the desert", we will notice that the vast majority of sins committed by the Jewish People there were sins of speech: those who complained about the manna; Miriam speaking slander about Moshe; the spies speaking defamation about the Land of Israel; the rebellion of Korach – (a rebellion about who should lead the Jewish People – who should be its 'speaker'); Moshe striking the rock instead of speaking to it.

The power of speech is the essence of the Book of Bamidbar. And what is the climax of Bamidbar? The concept

of *nedarim* –vows. The English word "vow" is an inadequate translation of the Hebrew word *neder*. A *neder* means that a Jew has the ability to change the physical reality of the world through speech.

And where do we go after the rebuilding of the power of speech? To the Book of *Devarim* – literally "The Book of Words."

More next week.

Bli neder ("without a vow").

Sources:

Heard from Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter in the name of Rabbi Moshe Shapiro

Devarim

THE POWER OF WORDS

"And these are the words..." (1:1)

Last week we saw how the captivity of the Jewish People in Egypt was more than just physical bondage. On a deeper level Egypt represented the enslavement of the power of speech. In Egypt, the Jewish People "cried out" to G-d. The Torah never says they "prayed." In Egypt, speech itself was bound and gagged.

The job of the Jewish People in their forty-year journey through the desert was to rebuild the power of speech, the power of words.

Last week we finished the fourth book of the Torah, which is called in Hebrew "In the desert." This week we begin the synagogue reading of the last of the books of the Torah, *Devarim*, which means "Words." *Devarim* represents the redemption of the power of speech that was exiled in Egypt and resuscitated in the journey of the Jewish People in the desert.

Let's say you were to conduct a survey on the following question: "Which is worse: killing someone or speaking negatively about him to others?" There are many people who wouldn't even understand the question. Society's accepted mindset is that physical murder is incomparably worse than the ephemeral damage of character assassination.

continued on page ten

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, 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 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*. 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 Tzlofchad 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.

Devarim

This Parsha begins the last of the Five Books of The Torah, *Sefer Devarim*. This Book is also called *Mishneh Torah*, "Repetition of the Torah" (hence the Greek/English title Deuteronomy). *Sefer Devarim* relates what Moshe told *Bnei Yisrael* during the last five weeks of his life, as they prepared to cross the Jordan into *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe reviews the *mitzvot*, stressing the change of lifestyle they are about to undergo: From the supernatural existence of the desert under Moshe's guidance to the apparently natural life they will experience under Yehoshua's leadership in the Land.

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The Parsha opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn't sinned by sending spies into *Eretz Yisrael*. Hashem would have given them without a fight all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav, and Edom. He details the

subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results: The entire generation would die in the desert, Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to Hashem's decree was to want to "go up and fight" to redress the sin; he recounts how they wouldn't listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon — these lands were not to be part of the map of *Eretz Yisrael* in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

Va'etchanan

Although Moshe is content that Yehoshua will lead the nation, Moshe nevertheless prays to enter the Land of Israel in order to fulfill its special *mitzvot*. Hashem refuses. Moshe reminds *Bnei Yisrael* of the gathering at Sinai when they received the Torah — that they saw no visual representation of the Divine, but only the sound of words. Moshe impresses on *Bnei Yisrael* that the Sinai revelation took place before an entire nation, not to a select elite, and that only the Jews will ever claim that Hashem spoke to their entire nation. Moshe specifically enjoins *Bnei Yisrael* to "pass over" the Sinai event to their children throughout all generations.

Moshe predicts, accurately, that when *Bnei Yisrael* dwell in *Eretz Yisrael* they will sin and be scattered among all the peoples. They will stay few in number but will eventually return to Hashem.

Moshe designates three "refuge cities" to which an inadvertent killer may flee. Moshe repeats the 10 Commandments and then teaches the Shema, the central credo of Judaism, that there is only One G-d. Moshe warns the people not to succumb to materialism and thus forget their purpose as a spiritual nation. The *parsha* ends with Moshe exhorting *Bnei Yisrael* not to intermarry when they enter *Eretz Yisrael*, as they cannot be a treasured and holy nation if they intermarry, and they will become indistinguishable from the other nations.



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A RUN FOR HIS LIFE

Planning and building roads for the enormous amount of today's automobile traffic is one of the great challenges of modern engineering and technology, and drivers caught in traffic jams will always be dissatisfied with their achievements. A different sort of challenge faced those who had to plan and build roads in days of old for human traffic.

"Prepare for yourself the road" (*Devarim 19:3*) is how the Torah cryptically instructs those in charge of planning the roads which will lead to the Cities of Refuge. Should a Jew unwittingly kill another Jew he was not punished by death, but the victim's blood avenging kin had the right to put him to death. Cities of Refuge were therefore established in evenly separated sections of *Eretz Yisrael* to which the killer could flee and be safe from the avenger.

The Torah's carefully calculated concern for proper accessibility to these cities is expressed in the cryptic command to "prepare the road". The word "prepare" is interpreted by Rabbi Kahana (*Mesechta Makkot 10b*) as a directive to place at every crossroads leading to one of these cities a clearly marked sign indicating which of the roads leads to the refuge city. While the Babylonian Talmud defines this as a sign reading "Miklat" (Refuge) pointing the way, the Jerusalem Talmud interprets it as a hand-shaped structure indicating which road to take.

Our own *gemara* goes beyond signposts to aid the fleeing killer escape the avenger and discusses the quality of the road itself. Although a normal public thoroughfare was 16 cubits wide, the use of the term "the road" rather than just a "road", says Rabbi Huna, is a directive to make the road leading to the refuge cities twice as wide. On the basis of other Talmudic sources Rambam (*Laws of Murder and Life Saving 8:4*) writes that the road builders had to make sure that no obstacle along the roads to these cities would obstruct the killer's flight. This meant the removal of any mounds, and the erection of bridges over any gorges or rivers along the way. A road free of obstructions and wide enough to avoid any human traffic jams gave this fellow a fair chance to run for his life.

• *Bava Batra 100b*

THE SEVEN VANITIES

"Vanity of vanities... all is vanity." (*Kohelet 1:2*) Seven times is the term "vanity" mentioned by King Solomon in this passage. (Twice in the plural and three times in the singular.)

Rashi, in his commentary on *Kohelet*, writes that this number corresponds to the seven days of creation, and was

intended to convey the message that everything created in those seven days is meaningless. As the wisest of men points out in the very next passage, "What gain is there for Man in all of his efforts under the sun?" which our Sages interpret as implying that only the service of Hashem, which is "above the sun," has lasting value.

In our *gemara*, however, the number seven is seen as the source for the seven stoppings and sittings which used to be done in some places when returning from a burial. Rashbam cites two explanations for this custom of walking and then stopping. One approach is that this was done in order to comfort the mourners, or to inspire tears over the loss and move all the participants to give serious thought and repent their sins because all of life is such vanity. The seven vanities of *Kohelet* correspond to these seven pauses for reflection on the vanities of life and the need to seek the meaningful aspects of life.

A second approach which Rashbam cites from other commentaries is that since evil spirits attach themselves to those returning from the cemetery, the stoppings and sittings are done in order to allow these spirits to depart. This approach, he notes, is problematic because it fails to explain the connection to the seven vanities of *Kohelet*.

Nimukei Yosef offers a third approach. Following the Great Deluge Noach was told by Hashem that the six two-month seasons of the year and the daily cycle of day and night would resume and continue without interruption (*Bereishet 8:22*). The seven stoppings and sittings were intended to communicate to all those involved that everything in this ongoing world is mere vanity and that the only thing worthwhile is involvement in Torah and good deeds.

• *Bava Batra 100b*

ALL IN THE FAMILY

When someone is considering a woman for marriage, advises the Sage Rava, it would be wise for him to check on her brothers.

The source for this advice is the passage in the Torah which informs us that "Aharon took as a wife Elisheva, the daughter of Aminadav and sister of Nachshon" (*Shmot 6:23*). After telling us that she was the daughter of Aminadav, why was it necessary to also let us know who her brother was? The answer is that Aharon married her because her brother Nachshon was the head of the Tribe of Yehuda, and this teaches us the importance of checking out the brothers of the intended mate.

The reason for this investigation is not to determine the character of the woman but rather to ensure that the children she will bear will be of good character. This is based on

what our Sages tell us in this very same *gemara* that most children take after their mother's brothers.

This reason is the background for an interesting dispute between two brother *Tosefists*. The *gemara* (*Mesechta Yevamot 62b*) has high praise for someone who marries his sister's daughter. Rashbam (Rabbi Shmuel ben Meir, grandson of Rashi) contends that this praise extends also to marrying a brother's daughter, and the only reason the sister's daughter is mentioned is because a sister is more likely to persuade her brother to marry her daughter. Rabbeinu Tam (Rabbi Yakov ben Meir, grandson of Rashi and brother of Rashbam) disagrees. His reasoning is that only in the case of marrying a sister's daughter is it considered an ideal marriage, because she takes after her uncle and they are therefore perfectly matched, a situation which does not necessarily exist in regard to a brother's daughter.

• *Bava Batra 111a*

BLESSED DAUGHTER

“In order that your days and the days of your sons will be increased” (*Devarim 11:21*) is a blessing of the Torah which is familiar to us as the concluding passage of the second chapter of *Shema* we recite each morning and evening.

How this passage relates to women is the subject of two different Talmudic discussions.

In *Mesechta Kiddushin (34a)* the question is raised that perhaps women should be exempt from the mitzvah of affixing a *mezuzah* to the doorposts of her home. The reason for suggesting this is because immediately preceding the command of *mezuzah* is the one about learning and teaching Torah to your *sons*, which our Sages interpret as excluding women from the obligation to learn Torah. The proximity of these two *mitzvot* suggests that just as they are exempt from Torah study they should be exempt from the mitzvah of *mezuzah* as well. This is soundly rejected by the *gemara* because following the mitzvah of *mezuzah* is the above mentioned reward “In order that your days... be increased”, which leads to the rhetorical challenge of “Only men need to live long and not women?”

In our own *gemara* the focus is on the meaning of “sons” in this passage. In regard to a daughter's right to inherit a parent where there is a son, the *gemara* cites a passage to prove that she has no rights of inheritance. In discussing ownership of a Canaanite slave the Torah instructs us that “You will cause him to be inherited by your sons after you” (*Vayikra 25:46*) The fact that the term “sons” is used rather than “offspring” teaches us that where there is a son the daughter does not inherit at all. If so, asks the *gemara*, are we

to assume that the blessing of long life was limited only to sons because that term is used rather than offspring?

A blessing is different, answers the *gemara*. There are reasons for assuming that the Torah limits inheritance to sons. The failure to use the term “offspring” fortifies those reasons and leaves us with the conclusion that sons take precedence in inheritance as well. There is no logic, however, in limiting the Heavenly blessing for performing *mitzvot* to long life for sons and not for daughters. The meaning of “sons” in this context therefore means all children.

• *Bava Batra 110b*

NIECE VERSUS AUNT

A major debate was waged between the Sages and the Tzedukim (Sadducees) who denied the authority of the Oral Law which ruled that if a man leaves behind a daughter she has no rights of inheritance together with her niece, her deceased brother's daughter. Their argument was that the daughter who is directly descended from him should have as much right to inherit her father as the granddaughter who is only directly descended from his son and thus one generation removed. They were mistaken of course because a grandchild is considered as a child and the granddaughter has the status of a son.

When the Sages finally overcame the Tzedukim on this issue it was the 24th day of the Month of Tevet and that day was observed as a day of celebration during the time of the *Beit Hamikdash*.

One of the refutations presented by the Sages to their argument was based on an analysis of two passages in apparent conflict. In the Torah's account of the family of Sair the Chorite which lived in the land eventually occupied by Esav, Anoh is identified as the son of Sair and the brother of Tzivon (*Bereishet 36:20*). Four passages later (*36:24*) this same Anoh is identified as the son of Tzivon. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai's resolution of this apparent contradiction is that Tzivon was indeed both the brother and father of Anoh. This was the result of Tzivon's incestuous relationship with his mother which produced Anoh, who is his son but also his brother because they share the same mother.

The first of the above-mentioned passages nevertheless refers to Anoh as a son of Sair, while according to the scenario just described he is really only a grandson, the son of his son Tzivon. That passage also calls these descendants of Sair as “the residents of the land” and thus teaches us that Sair's grandson Anoh inherited his grandfather in the same manner that his son did.

Once we see from this subtle message that grandchildren are considered like children in matters of inheritance it fol-

lows that the daughter of the deceased son has the same power as her father. Had her father been alive when her grandfather died his sister would have no claim according to what the Torah sets as the laws of inheritance. She therefore has the same power and inherits the entire estate to the exclusion of her father's sister.

• *Bava Batra 115b*

LIKE FATHER LIKE SON

In his old age King Solomon's many wives turned his heart towards idolatry and he was no longer as faithful to Hashem as was his father David. As punishment Hashem set up two enemy forces to oppose him. One of these was led by the Edomite Hadad. When Yoav, the commander-in-chief of David's army vanquished Edom and slaughtered all of its males, the young Hadad, who was a scion of the royal family, escaped to Egypt where he was virtually adopted by the reigning Pharaoh.

As long as either David or Yoav was alive Hadad was afraid to leave the security of Egypt to initiate any action against them. Then came the turning point. "Hadad heard, in Egypt, that David reposed with his ancestors and that Yoav, the military commander, had died, and Hadad said to Pharaoh: Send me away and I shall go to my land." (*Melachim I 11:21*) Thus began Hadad's career of causing trouble for David's heir.

Why, asks Rabbi Pinchas ben Chama, is David's passing described as "reposing with his ancestors" while Yoav's as

"dying"?

In his commentary on *Melachim*, Rashi offers two answers to this question. The first is that David's death was a natural one while Yoav's was the result of an execution (ordered by Solomon at his father's request). The second one is mentioned by Rabbi Pinchas in our *gemara*. Since David left behind a son, Solomon, to succeed him as king, he could not really be considered as dead. Although Yoav also left behind children none of them was capable of succeeding him in his role and he is therefore considered dead.

Although this statement of Rabbi Pinchas does not relate directly to the laws of inheritance of property discussed in this *perek*, it appears here, along with the preceding statement of Rabbi Yochanan in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai regarding the importance of a man leaving behind a son to inherit him, because they are both extensions of the concept of inheritance as continuity.

"Who leaves behind no replacement" is how the person who fails to leave behind a son to inherit him is critically described (*Tehillim 55:20*). While this focuses on the dimension of continuity as expressed in the transmission of property, Rabbi Pinchas' statement deals with the vacuum created by the passing of a man whose position in life is not filled by his son. This is described as death. When one leaves behind a son to succeed him, as did David, his passing only has the appearance of death – like someone asleep – but in actuality he lives on through his son.

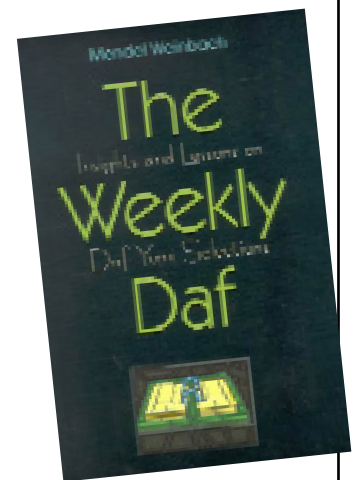
• *Bava Batra 116a*

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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 "*machaneh*" (camp). Which *machaneh*?
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 Matot/Masei'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 and 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 *Machaneh Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikveh*.
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 Hashem'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*.
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.

PARSHA Q&A?

Devarim

1. How do we see from the beginning of *Parshat Devarim* that Moshe was concerned for the Jewish People's honor?
2. How much time elapsed between leaving Mt. Sinai and sending the spies?
3. Moshe rebuked the Jewish People shortly before his death. From whom did he learn this?
4. Why did Moshe wait until he had smitten the Amorite kings before rebuking the Jewish People?
5. What were some of the achievements that resulted from the Jewish People "dwelling" at Mt. Sinai?
6. Why does the Torah single out the names of the *avot* in connection with the giving of the Land?
7. What did Moshe convey to the Jewish People by saying: "You today are like the stars of the Heavens"?
8. "*Apikorsim*" (those who denigrate Talmud scholars) observed Moshe's every move in order to accuse him. What did they observe, and what did they accuse him of?
9. Moshe was looking for several qualities in the judges he chose. Which quality couldn't he find?
10. Moshe told the judges, "the case that is too hard for you, bring it to me." How was he punished for this statement?
11. Why did Moshe describe the desert as great and frightful?
12. Which tribe was not represented among the spies?
13. Which city did Calev inherit?
14. How many kingdoms was Avraham promised? How many were conquered by Yehoshua?
15. Why were the Jewish People forbidden to provoke Ammon?
16. Why were the Jewish People not permitted to conquer the Philistines?
17. How did Hashem instill the dread of the Jewish People into the nations of the world?
18. Why did Moshe fear Og?
19. Who was instrumental in destroying the Refa'im?
20. What was the advantage of Reuven and Gad leading the way into battle?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Devarim's Questions!

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

1. 1:1 - Moshe mentions only the names of the places where the Jewish People sinned, but does not mention the sins themselves.
2. 1:2 - 40 days.
3. 1:3 - From Yaakov, who rebuked his sons shortly before his death.
4. 1:4 - So that no one could say, "What right has he to rebuke us; has he brought us into any part of the land as he promised?"
5. 1:6 - They received the Torah, built the *mishkan* and all its vessels, appointed a Sanhedrin, and appointed officers.
6. 1:8 - Each of the *avot* possessed sufficient merit for the Jewish People to inherit the Land.
7. 1:10 - They are an eternal people, just as the sun, moon and stars are eternal.
8. 1:13 - They observed the time he left home in the morning. If Moshe left early, they accused him of having family problems (which drove him from his home). If he left late, they accused him of staying home in order to plot evil against them.
9. 1:15 - Men of understanding.
10. 1:17 - When the daughters of Tzlofchad asked him a halachic question, the law was concealed from him.
11. 1:19 - Because the Jewish People saw huge, frightening snakes and scorpions in the desert.
12. 1:23 - Levi.
13. 1:36 - Hebron.
14. 2:5 - Avraham was promised the land of ten kingdoms. Yehoshua conquered seven. The lands of Moav, Ammon and Esav, will be received in the time of the *mashiach*.
15. 2:9 - This was a reward for Lot's younger daughter, the mother of Ammon, for concealing her father's improper conduct.
16. 2:23 - Because Avraham had made a peace treaty with Avimelech, King of the Philistines.
17. 2:25 - During the battle against Og, the sun stood still for the sake of the Jewish People, and the whole world saw this.
18. 3:2 - Og possessed merit for having once helped Avraham.
19. 3:11 - Amrafel.
20. 3:18 - They were mighty men, and the enemy would succumb to them.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Va'etchanan

1. "And I prayed to Hashem at that time." Why "at that time"?
2. What characteristic trait is represented by Hashem's "strong hand"?
3. What is *ha'levanon*?
4. What did Hashem tell Yehoshua after the battle of Ai?
5. What will happen if the Jewish People fail to keep the *mitzvot* properly?
6. How did the decree that Moshe not enter the Land affect him even in death?
7. What is hinted by the word *v'noshantem*?
8. Why were the Jewish People exiled two years earlier than indicated by Moshe's prophecy?
9. "You'll serve man-made gods." Is this literal?
10. Why is east called *mizrach*?
11. "Keep the Shabbat day as I have commanded you." When had Hashem previously commanded us to keep Shabbat?
12. Where did the Jewish People first receive the command to honor parents?
13. What is meant by "Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is One"?
14. What are two meanings of loving Hashem "with all your might"?
15. How well-versed must one be in Torah?
16. Where does the word *totafot* come from?
17. Who is fit to swear in Hashem's name?
18. What does it mean that the Jews are the "smallest nation"?
19. When someone serves Hashem with love, how many generations receive reward?
20. Why are evil-doers rewarded in this world?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Va'etchanan's Questions!

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

1. 3:23 - Defeating Sichon and Og, whose lands were part of *Eretz Canaan*, Moshe thought perhaps Hashem had annulled the vow against his entering the Land.
2. 3:24 - His willingness to forgive.
3. 3:25 - *Ha'levanon* means the *Beit Hamikdash*, which makes "white" (*lavan*), i.e., atones for, the Jewish People.
4. 3:28 - Yehoshua must lead the army into battle.
5. 4:9 - The non-Jewish world will regard them as foolish.
6. 4:22 - Even his remains weren't buried in the Land.
7. 4:25 - The *gematria* of *v'noshantem*, 852, hints at the number of years until the first exile.
8. 4:25 - So that the rest of the prophecy "that you shall utterly perish" would not be fulfilled.
9. 4:28 - No. It means you'll serve others who serve idols.
10. 4:41 - It's the direction from which the sun shines (*mizrach* means shining).
11. 5:13 - Before *Matan Torah*, at Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*)
12. 5:16 - At Marah. (*Shmot 15:25*).
13. 6:4 - Hashem, who is now our G-d, but not [accepted as] G-d of the other nations, will eventually be [accepted as] the one and only G-d.
14. 6:5 - 1) With everything you own. 2) Whether Hashem treats you with kindness or harshness.
15. 6:7 - If asked a Torah question, one should be able to reply quickly and clearly.
16. 6:8 - *Tot* means two in Caspi. *Fot* means two in Afriki. Together they allude to the four sections of tefillin.
17. 6:13 - One who serves Hashem and reveres His name.
18. 7:7 - *B'nei Yisrael* are the humblest nation.
19. 7:9 - 2,000.
20. 7:10 - So that they get no reward in the next world.

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COPING WITH LIFE & DEATH

From: David

Dear Rabbi,

I was wondering about something that always bothers me. Unfortunately, people die, sometimes tragically, sometimes from natural causes.

Relatives and friends will often say it's for the good, it's what G-d wants, it's meant to be, etc. I can see that side. Then on the other hand, we have these murders in Israel on what seems like a daily basis, and bombings and brutal massacres of our people in Israel. When this happens I don't hear anyone saying, it's for the good, it's meant to be, etc. We have outrage, rallies, prayers.

The point of this question is not to compare what happens in Israel to other deaths, the point is that where do we as Jews hold? Do we say that death is meant to be and it's part of the big picture that we can't understand? Or do we mourn and cry and hold rallies? It appears that we do both and they seem to contradict one another. If it's all meant to be then why are we sad?

I sit at my computer and read the news in Israel. I am saddened, I say a little tehillim, but then I have to go to work, or to lunch, or to a baseball game. Life goes on for me while people in other places are losing their limbs, suffering and dying. Do I enjoy life because "ahh, it's meant to be" or should I walk around mourning, quit my job and say tehillim all day, etc. How are we supposed to react to tragic

events? And even when I daven hard and with emotion, I go home and hear of another bombing! But hey, life goes on, what can I do, I have to go play baseball! Thank you.

Dear David,

I was very touched by your sincere concern for the suffering of Jews in Israel and your search for an understanding of what you should do about it.

The Torah, as a "Torah of Life", teaches us that we must do everything in our power to protect ourselves from danger because life is a sacred opportunity granted us by our Creator. At the same time we are expected to accept the outcome of all our efforts as being divinely ordained for our ultimate benefit. Our failure to take natural steps for our protection can serve as an indictment of our neglect to preserve the precious gift of life which can indeed invite unwelcome developments.

We mourn and cry for the deaths of terror victims in the same way that we mourn the death of relatives and friends – not because we have any doubt that their passing was for their ultimate benefit and ours but because we are saddened by the vacuum which has been created in our lives and the world. We hold rallies because we take the natural step of trying to rally world opinion for our military and diplomatic moves of self-defense. And, finally, we pray to Heaven because we realize that whatever is happening is a reminder that we must improve ourselves.

There is no need to quit your job in order to pray all day long. But there is a need for you, for me and for all Jews everywhere to make some serious resolutions for coming closer to G-d, the only One who can really bring peace and security to our people and the world.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

SHMUEL – BORROWED FROM HASHEM

The name given to him by his long childless mother Chana expressed the career of service which the Prophet Shmuel was to render to his people. She had made a promise to Heaven when she prayed for a child in the Sanctuary at Shiloh that if her prayer were answered she would dedicate him to the Service of Hashem for his entire life. Her



prayer was answered and the name given to him was a double expression – she had borrowed him from Hashem and had loaned him to Hashem.

As soon as he was weaned, Shmuel was brought to Shiloh to serve under Eli Hakohen, eventually succeeding him as the leader of his people whom he faithfully served for half a century until his passing.

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The Torah tells us the reverse: *Lashon hara* – literally “evil tongue” – is the worst possible sin. Speaking badly about someone is worse than immorality, worse than idol worship, worse than murder. Speaking *lashon hara* is considered to be as bad as transgressing all other sins put together. Why?

The word in Hebrew for “things” is identical to the word for “words” – *Devarim*. Why does the mystical and holy tongue of Hebrew equate things with words?

Because this whole world and everything in it is no more than G-d speaking.

G-d created this world with speech. “And G-d said ‘Let there be light... And G-d said let there be... And G-d said...’” Over and over again, G-d brings things into existence with words. Things are the words of G-d. No more. And no less. “With G-d’s word the Heavens came into being, and with the breath of His mouth all their multitudes.” And just as He called everything into existence with His word, so too everything continues to exist through His word, as we say in the blessing “for everything exists in His word.” Look for something in this world that is not the word of G-d and you won’t find it, because there is nothing in this world except the word of G-d. Existence is no more than G-d speaking.

When a person speaks *lashon hara*, he is perverting the building blocks of creation. He is poisoning the whole world, since the world is no more than speech.

A Jew’s job in this world is largely to do with speech. The voice of Jacob is the voice of Torah, the voice of prayer and Torah. When a person speaks *lashon hara*, he takes the word of G-d — the world and everything in it — and literally makes it bad.

He is destroying the world.

Va’etchanan

TOO JEWISH?

“Surely a wise and discerning people are this great nation!” (4:6)

A true story. A well-known Orthodox Rabbi was invited to a dinner at Buckingham Palace. The Rabbi replied that we would be honored to accept the invitation but he feared that his kosher dietary requirements would make it impossible for him to attend. The palace replied that far from being too much trouble they would be happy to supply whatever food he needed and together with appropriate supervision.

The Rabbi happily accepted the invitation and a *mashgiach* (kosher food supervisor) was appointed to take care of his needs. In order to be unobtrusive, food was selected that appeared to be the same as that for the other guests.

Before the other guests arrived, the *mashgiach* showed the Rabbi where he would sit. The *mashgiach* lifted a plate. Superficially it seemed identical to the other hundreds of plates in the dining hall. However on its underside was affixed a discrete sticker. The *mashgiach* had bought an entire new set of plates and cutlery. Everything had been *toveled* (purified

in a ritual bath) and labeled.

The Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Charles and others of the royal family entered the room. Everyone rose. The meal began in an atmosphere of stately grandeur. The Rabbi was not the only Jew at this dinner but he was certainly the most conspicuous in his large black *kippa*.

Immersed in conversation as the first course came to its end, the Rabbi suddenly noticed the lights dimming. “What’s happening?” he asked the famous pop-star sitting to his right. “Oh, I can see you haven’t been to one of these before. What happens now is that everyone changes tables. That way everyone gets a chance to meet everyone.” The pop-star may have noticed the cloud that momentarily passed across the Rabbi’s sunny countenance, but certainly he had no idea of its cause.

The Rabbi was now faced with a problem. He realized that he would have to carry his entire place-setting to his next location. To the bemused smiles of his fellow guests he proceeded to gather up his plates and silverware and carry them ceremoniously to their next location.

Palace dinners are not short affairs. While carrying his decreasing number of plates between the fifth and sixth courses, one of the other Jewish guests hissed at him under his breath. “Will you please stop that! I’ve never been so embarrassed in my life.” “I’m sorry” said the Rabbi “but I keep kosher.” “Well, make an exception!” said the other.

The Rabbi stuck to his guns. For all twelve courses.

At the end of the meal, the guests all lined up to take leave of their royal hosts. As the Rabbi was shaking Prince Charles’ hand, the prince said “Excuse me, but I couldn’t help noticing that you were carrying your dishes around the room.” “Yes,” said the Rabbi “I did it because of the Jewish dietary laws.” “Yes,” said the Prince “I know about kosher food, but I didn’t know it extended to the plates as well. How interesting! Please tell me more...”

By this point, the master of ceremonies had come over to see what was holding up the line. In order to continue their discussion, the Prince beckoned the Rabbi to step out of the line and join him.

So there they were. The Rabbi and the Prince. Shaking the hands of the guests and discussing the laws of *kashrut*. Finally it came the turn of the Jewish guest who had objected to the Rabbi’s behavior to shake the hand of the Prince. As he was doing this, he mentioned confidentially to the Prince “I’m Jewish too.”

“Really?” said the Prince, “I didn’t notice you carrying your dishes...”

When we keep the Torah properly with all its details, non-Jews know instinctively we’re doing what we’re supposed to – and they respect us for it. When we try and water down our Judaism to conform to our own preconceived secular standards, there will always be a voice asking us where our dishes are.

Source: Rabbi Dovid Orlofsky