

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

MATOT-MASEI

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 2:4-28, 3:4, 4:1-2

AUGUST 5-6, 2016 2 AB 5776

Rosh Hodesh Ab will be celebrated on Friday, August 5.

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Simcha Bat Sara

In memory of Hacham Yomtov Yedid ZT"L (Yomtov ben Zakieh)

Yosef ben Shafiya - Joseph Aboudi, Mordechai ben Gloria Chana - Mitchell Mansour

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Editors Notes

Living Beyond the Veil and Within the Fog

Why are we mourning these days?

A couple of weeks ago as we finished reading the Sefer Torah on Shabbat and we were announcing the fast of the 17th of Tevet, someone asked me, "What are we supposed to focus on during the fast and the three weeks?" A great question and I asked the Hazan to pause.

The world speaks of guaranteeing the rights of Moslems to their holy sites in Jerusalem. Few of those making that call remember that in mid-1949 Israel and the Arab states agreed to an armistice in separate agreements, The West Bank of the Jordan was occupied by Jordan and later annexed. The Old City of Jerusalem together with all its holy sites was also in Jordanian hands. Every Jew was forced to leave the Old City and the Synagogues and Jewish places were destroyed.

Less than 18 years later, came the Six Day War and the miraculous liberation of the Western Wall.

A taxi driver described the scene. "I was there. I was a soldier in a unit fighting the Jordanians in the Old City. Our troop advanced into a section of the Old city. Although I had never been there before, and the Arabs had animals grazing and manure scattered between their houses and the ancient walls of the Old City, I seemed to recognize where I was. Suddenly I realized I was standing at the Western Wall.

"I went to a school that was not religious. I remember we only had one textbook with anything religious in it. It had three religious pictures: the Tomb of Rachel, the Cave of Machpella where Avraham, Sara and the other forefathers are buried, and the Western Wall.

"This was the picture of the place from my schoolbook. I was standing at the Western Wall. Suddenly I couldn't move. My entire body was tingling, and I became overwhelmed by the holiness of where I was. Over my head I felt the presence of the "Shechina" (the Presence of G-d which is said to always dwell at the Western Wall), and I became completely paralyzed.

"Out of nowhere a Rabbi appeared. Rabbi Goren. We were soldiers ready for battle, but he was only a civilian. We ran to cover him. He was carrying a shofar, and was headed straight for the Wall.

"As he reached the wall he said the Shehechianu prayer, and then took his shofar and began to blow.

"We had no orders to capture the Kotel. We just ended up there."

Soldiers ran to the Kotel. Some were brought up in a religious home and they cried. Others who were not religious but had some traditional Jewish upbringing cried. There was one soldier who grew up in the North, in a communist kibutz completely devoid of any religion or tradition. He knew nothing of the Temple, neither its history nor its remnants. He too began to cry.

A religious soldier looked at him surprised and asked:

"I know why I am crying, but why are you crying?"
 The nonreligious soldier answered back: "I am crying because I don't know what I am supposed to be crying about."

I explained that unlike our forefathers, we are living in a different world and almost all of us have lost sight over why we should be crying during these three weeks. And perhaps more than anything, that's why we should be crying. I suggested that each of us dedicate time over the next three weeks to explore and have an inkling of understanding as to what we lost.

One of the rabbis came over to me at and asked, "what should he be reading?"

There are countless great books out there, I noted. But after having just read the Haftara, I suggested focusing on the words of the prophets and trying to imagine a world where the reality of G-d was palatable, where cures came from prophets and not doctors, and where miracles didn't need to be shrouded in a cloud of plausible deniability. I suggested that he use those words to find a place prior to the destruction after which the fog of confusion and the veil separating us from our Father in Heaven fell upon us.

Earlier this week in our class in the morning we were discussing a Gemarah from the Tractate Sanhedrin Page 102B

When Rav Ashi reached Perek Chelek, he told his students that "tomorrow, we will discuss our colleagues," equating the level of scholarship of these kings (Yarov'am, Achav, and Menasheh) with his own.

Menasheh appeared to him that night in a dream and rebuked him for calling him his "colleague." I remember Rabbi Noah Weinberger of Aish, Z'SL telling the story in his animated way as only he could. "Just imagine, Menashe, this master of idolatry turning to this great sage and yelling at him, 'You ignoramus, how dare you even think to equate yourself with me?'

Now let us pause for a moment.

Who was Rav Ashi? After the death of Rav Papa (apx 370 of the Common Era), Rav Ashi was known as the greatest Torah scholar of his time. He felt that it was his duty to make use of the wisdom granted him by the Almighty, and to write down all the laws and the conversations of the Talmud, in order to perpetuate it for all time. He arranged the "Gemara" (Talmud) in the first thirty years of his leadership, and in the second thirty years he edited it. It was a gigantic task which Rav Ashi handled as only he, the great Torah scholar, could. We Jews dare not underestimate the debt of gratitude we owe him for having compiled the "Sha'as," which we call "the Babylonian Talmud." The story is told that, shortly before his death, Rav Ashi met the Angel of Death on the street and begged him to let him live another thirty days to enable him to review the Talmud just once more, as it is said: "It is good for one to come to the next world with the Talmud in his hand." The Angel of Death agreed, went away, and returned thirty days later.

And who was Menashe? The son of Chizkiyahu, Menashe, was only twelve years old when he succeeded his father to the throne of Judah. In no way did he resemble his father whose piety and faith were not equaled by any other king who followed him. The young ruler, despite the efforts of his father to train him in the ways of Torah, was immediately surrounded by the clique of court-notables who, during Chizkiyahu's reign, had gone into hiding. Menashe's weak character and susceptibility to idolatry made him a willing tool in the ruthless and selfish hands of these men. Despite the ceaseless efforts and admonitions of the greatest prophets of all times, Isaiah and others, the people of Judea followed in the evil steps of their king. The temples and altars of the idol-worshippers which had been destroyed under Hezekiah were reconstructed. Even into the Holy Temple they brought idols, and some of the basic concepts of Jewish thought and tradition were falsified and distorted. A complete reversal to idolatry as it had been practiced under King Ahaz, Chizkiyahu's father, threw Judea into turmoil of immorality and lawlessness. The believers in the one and only G-d were persecuted, and even the sacred person of the prophet Isaiah was not spared. When he came out sharply against the evil ways of King Menashe and his notables, Isaiah was murdered. Stranger still was that Isaiah may have been Menashe's grandfather.

So back to our story keeping in mind that Rav Ashi represents the "greatest" in our minds while Menashe represents the "worst"!

In the dream, Menasheh asks Rav Ashi, "Where do you cut the bread when you recite the Berachah of ha'Motzi?"

Rav Ashi admitted truthfully that he did not know. He asked Menasheh to teach him the answer, and he told him that he would teach it in the Yeshiva, in Menasheh's name, the next day. Menasheh taught him that the Berachah is to be recited upon the first place that the bread becomes baked. Based on this, in our days, we typically look for the most well done part and that is how we hold.

Rav Ashi then asked Menasheh, "If you are so wise, then why did you worship Avodah Zarah?" Menasheh replied that the Yetzer ha'Ra was so great at that time that "even you would have lifted up your coattails and run to worship Avodah Zarah."

The following day, Rav Ashi referred to Menasheh by saying, "Let us discuss our teachers," and he did not say "our colleagues."

We have to ask. What was different about Menashe's time that would have drawn Rav Ashi to sin in a way that he would never even consider doing in his own time? How would it be possible for Rav Ashi to succumb to idolatry? We all look at idolatry as a foolish worship of stones and wood. Would any of us even imagine that we would succumb, much less the editor of the Talmud? And where is the lesson for our own time?

The Talmud in Yoma writes that following the destruction of the Temple, realizing the danger of the inclination towards idolatry, the Rabbis realized that they needed to rid the world of this desire. They ordered a fast of three days and three nights, after which [the yetzer hara] was surrendered to them. He came out from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion. The Rabbis clarify that following this event the craving for idolatry left the world.

I explained to the class that morning. We need to understand Hashem created and maintains this world in perfect balance as the Rambam teaches. The world is always 50/50. What does it mean that inclination of idolatry was removed? How are we to understand?

The answer seems clear. In the Talmud the sages recorded ten miracles that occurred regularly in the Temple. Hashem was very real. Prophets heard and relayed his word. Questions could be asked through the Urim VeTumim. There was universal knowledge of Hashem. With Hashem so real, how then could one go after avoda zara? The answer is because; G-d is committed to keep the world in balance. Where the genuineness of the Divine is so tangible, contact and craving for evil had to be just as existent. Idolatry in those days as the Ramban explains was very real. There was a dark side and idolatry was accessing the dark side for one's own power and enrichment. Yes, straight out of Starwars, "The dark side is a pathway to many abilities some consider to be unnatural."

Menashe must have been a brilliant scholar. His father Chizkiyahu who could have been the Mashiach took him each day on his shoulders to learn from the greatest academics of the day, from prophets and wise men, from his own grandfather Isaiah. Menashe knew that Hashem was very real as we see in Divrei HaYamim when he was brought in chains to the Assyrian king and he turned to Hashem to save him. Yet in a world where Hashem was so real, the attraction towards evil was just as real and Menashe succumbed.

How real was Hashem in those days that to balance His own reality He allowed the dark side to exist? And how much can we understand from the fact that

this dark side had to be completely removed from our world? What is revealed in the need for every vestige of it to be taken away and destroyed to maintain the balance once the Temple was taken from us? We can only begin to fathom how much we lost, the prophecy, the miracles and the direct-connect, when the veil and fog of exile descended upon us.

This is why as we begin these nine days we need to mourn and cry. Our reality is no reality. We lost the true reality. We are orphans separated from our home. The lifting of this veil and this fog is what we must pray for. May we be zoche to see that day quickly, Amen!

Shabbat Shalom, David Bibi
(The two bios are primarily from Chabad.org)

'When the Olympic Spirit was Extinguished' (reprinted from Times of Israel, Wednesday August 3, 2016)

The murder of 11 Israeli athletes during the 1972 Olympics remains one of the most notorious terrorist attacks in history. Little-known and always-ignored is the fact that the financier of the attack is the current president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. Abbas, unrepentant, has never expressed remorse or sorrow for his involvement in this shocking mass murder. Abbas was never tried nor ever punished. And he still stands unapologetic. Why should he not? Certainly, he has no incentive to do so, particularly because the Palestinian Authority is again allowed to field an Olympic team – as they have for twenty years. Well, it was never required of them. Nor was there a demand that they pay any reparations to the victims' families.

On all levels, it is quite simply outrageous that the Palestinian Authority is allowed to again field a team in the Summer Olympics, a gathering every four years that is ostensibly conducted in the "true spirit of sportsmanship."

Four years ago the families of the 11 Israeli athletes were denied a request for the Olympics to honor the memory of the victims with a short moment of silence. It was not the first rejection of such a request. Jibril Rajoub, president of the Palestinian Olympic Committee, sent a letter to then-IOC President Jacques Rogge praising his decision to turn down the moment of silence. Rajoub wrote: "Sport is a bridge for love, unification and for spreading peace among the nations. It must not be a cause for divisiveness and for the spreading of racism." According to Rajoub any such tribute would be tantamount to spreading racism. Where is the

condemnation of the world over such an outlandish statement? Rajoub is still the head of the Palestinian Authority Olympic Committee.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), for the first time, is taking steps to officially recognize the murder of the 11 Israeli Athletes at the Olympics in Brazil. The IOC will dedicate a memorial stone, describing the 1972 terrorism, in the center of the Olympic Village in Rio de Janeiro. The large stone that will commemorate the victims will display also a smaller stone on top, to symbolize Jewish mourning. The stone will be brought to the next Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 2020. There will be an additional Olympic ceremony for the Israeli victims that will be conducted under Jewish auspices in Brazil on August 14. The IOC will have a "moment of reflection" during the closing ceremony where it is hoped that IOC President Thomas Bach may read the names of those who lost their lives at the Olympics, which would of course include the 11 Israeli athletes. Moreover, for the first time the IOC is supporting a memorial at the former Olympic Village in Munich to the 11 Israeli athletes. These steps are long overdue and are only happening due to the leadership and tenacity of the victims' families.

It is not expected that PA President Mahmoud Abbas will attend any of these events. Why would he, when only a few years ago he lauded Abu Daoud, the last living Palestinian Arab terrorist who personally perpetrated the attack in 1972. Abbas' official telegram, sent in 2010 shortly after Daoud's death, called him "one of the prominent leaders of the Fatah movement." He continued his praise of the man who "lived a life filled with the struggle, devoted effort, and the enormous sacrifice of the deceased for the sake of the legitimate problem of his people, in many spheres." And finally: "He was at the forefront on every battlefield, with the aim of defending the [Palestinian] revolution. What a wonderful brother, companion, tough and stubborn, a relentless fighter." Daoud himself years earlier wrote a book about the Olympic attack in which he described how Abbas kissed him on the forehead and wished him luck before the Munich attack. Ironically, Daoud could not understand how Abbas was now treated as a respected head of state.

There is a famous saying in the Talmud that he who is merciful to the cruel will in turn be cruel to the merciful. Barring the Palestinian Authority from fielding an Olympic team is the moral and proper thing to do. Making it a requirement that they need to condemn the generation-old Olympic Munich massacre, and pay reparations to the victims, before being able to participate would be considered a

reasonable requirement. And yet, even such a trivial requirement is not made. Instead, the Palestinian Authority is allowed to field an Olympic team while still proudly being led by the unapologetic financier of the Olympic Munich massacre.

The fight against terrorism will only be won when there are consequences for engaging in terrorism. The failure to hold the Palestinian Authority to even minimal standards of human decency is why terrorism continues within their midst. In keeping with the Olympic spirit that is often spoken about, it seems only right that we start to follow moral principles and standards. Understandably, the expectation that such principles and standards be enforced seems little to ask if we are to ever win the battle against such evil.

Abbas Sues History. Not a Parody.
JONATHAN S. TOBIN / JULY 31, 2016

This week, the leaders of the Palestinian Authority decided to take action. It wasn't to reform their corrupt government, make progress toward genuine peace, or anything else that might improve the plight of their people. Instead, they're going to sue Britain over the 1917 Balfour Declaration. It's no joke. The Palestinians are serious about legal action to undo a historical document. The plan is the brainchild of PA leader Mahmoud Abbas and was announced by Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki. They are asking Arab states to support them and plan to launch the suit in an as yet unnamed international court.

Is this a publicity stunt intended to buttress their campaign to get the United Nations to recognize their independence without first making peace with Israel? Maybe. Perhaps they think some court in an increasingly anti-Semitic Europe might actually rule in their favor. But though walking back a century of history is pretty much the definition of futility, this effort not only speaks volumes about the inanity of Palestinian politics, it also demonstrates why peace is not possible for the foreseeable future.

The Balfour Declaration was a brief statement issued in a public letter in which the British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour said the following:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

The text didn't commit the British to building a Jewish state and also pointedly including language that

protected the rights of Arabs living in an area that today encompasses all of Israel, the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan. By 1917, Jews had already begun to return to their ancient homeland (from which they had never completely departed) in large numbers, but Balfour's letter was the first formal recognition by a great power of the justice of the cause for which Zionists had been working the previous 20 years and for which Jews had prayed for 2,000 years.

It's true that the British decision to back the Zionists was as much the result of London buying into anti-Semitic myths about Jewish power (that would presumably solidify U.S. support for the war against Germany as well as keeping Russia in the fight) as it was also philo-Semitism and sympathy for Zionism on the part of men like David Lloyd-George and Balfour. The British promise led to the creation of a Mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations after World War I that was tasked with facilitating the creation of a Jewish national home. That's why Palestinians who rejected any idea of sharing the land a century ago as much as they do today regard the declaration as the start of all their troubles. The irony is that while the Arabs are seeking legal redress against Britain for setting in motion the process that led to Jewish statehood, the truth is that they soon betrayed their promise to the Zionists. By 1939, Britain had shut the gates to Palestine to Jews fleeing Hitler, a move that might have destroyed the growing Jewish polity and doomed millions to die in the Holocaust.

But even if we ignore that historical fact, the real blame for the plight of the Palestinians (a term that only began to be associated with Arabs rather than Jews after the birth of the State of Israel in 1948) belongs to their own leadership. They rejected every offer of partition from the 1930s to the current day. Instead, they choose war and with each defeat their share of the country decreased. Nevertheless, they were still offered a state in almost all of the West Bank, Gaza, and a share of Jerusalem by Israel and rejected each one. If they are seeking intervention by the UN or international courts, it is only because they refuse to engage in direct negotiations with the Israelis. Doing so would require them to make peace and end the conflict for all time.

But there is more to this than just a diplomatic evasion. By focusing on Balfour and treating it as illegal, what the Palestinians are doing is rejecting the very legitimacy of the Jewish presence anywhere in the country. It is not for nothing that Abbas has often referred to pre-1967 Israel as being occupied territory rather than just the West Bank.

For years, those intent on pressuring Israel into making more territorial concessions to the Palestinians have tried to claim that "moderates" like Abbas truly want peace. But every peace negotiation

or Israeli gesture such as Ariel Sharon's withdrawal of every soldier, settler, and settlement from Gaza in 2005 hasn't budged the Palestinians from the same intransigent position they've held since they rejected Balfour, the Mandate, and the 1947 UN partition plan. So rather than merely a nonsensical diversion into fantasy, the Palestinian lawsuit illustrates the plain fact that their goal remains reversing the verdict of history altogether; not merely a demand for an Israeli pullout from the West Bank and Jerusalem. This reflects the state of Palestinian public opinion and the fact that their national identity has remained intrinsically tied to the century-old war against Zionism. Not until they give up this futile quest will peace be possible—something that the majority of Israelis already understand but which has eluded the U.S. government and many liberal American Jews. As the Obama administration and the Europeans plot their next move to pressure Israel into making the same mistake in the West Bank that Sharon made in Gaza, they ought to be paying attention to the signals Abbas is sending to the world. So long as the Palestinians are still trying to erase Balfour, the idea that they are prepared to accept the state of Israel is the real joke.

Summary of the Perasha

Matot - Benei Israel conquer Midyan and prepare to enter Israel (year 40)

- 1- The laws of oaths and vows and how they can be nullified
- 2- Benei Israel takes revenge killing all the men of Midyan
- 3- Moshe says to also kill the women and male children. Laws of koshering kelim (that were taken from Midyan as spoils).
- 4- The spoils of the war are divided up - What the soldiers and Elazar received
- 5- The spoils of the war are divided up - What the rest of Benei Israel and Leviim received. The soldiers bring a korban and gold as thanks for their success in the war.
- 6- Gad and Reuben ask Moshe to have their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan.
- 7- Gad and Reuben agree to come conquer Israel with the other tribes and Moshe gives them the land

Masei - A recap of Benei Israel's journeys, Israel is divided among Benei Israel (year 40)

- 1- Benei Israel's first 7 travels from Mitsrayim to Israel (all took place before matan Torah)
- 2- Travels 8-42 to Eretz Israel.
- 3- The boundaries of Eretz Israel are given.
- 4- Leaders are appointed to take possession of the land for each tribe

- 5- Benei Israel are told of the land they must set aside for the Leviim (which did not receive land)
 6- Cities of refuge are set aside. Laws are given for one who kills by mistake or intentionally.
 7- Menashe expresses concern that Slaphchad's land will be lost to other tribes if his daughters marry out of their tribe

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER
"If a man will make a vow to Hashem." (Bemidbar 30:3)

Our first perashah discusses the laws of vows. One should always be very careful to fulfill all that he says he will do. In reference to the verse above, the Sages in the Midrash quote a verse from Kohelet. "For a man does not know when his time will come..." (Kohelet 9:12). What is the correlation between these two verses?

The Sefer Shaar Bat Rabim (quoted by Torah Ladaat) explains that the Gemara (Sanhedrin 10) says that when a person pledges a sacrifice, he should not say Hashem's Name first by saying "La-Adon..korban," but rather say "Korban La-Adon..," saying Hashem's Name last. The reason is because we are afraid that he may die after pronouncing Hashem's Name, and he would have recited the Name of Hashem in vain.

When the verse in our perashah enumerates the laws of vows, it says "וְנָדַר לֵאמֹר יִכְשָׁאֵי". The question arises: Why does it say 'וְנָדַר לֵאמֹר' and not 'נָדַר לֵאמֹר'? The answer is: For man does not know when his time will come," as the Midrash above explained. Therefore, he should never say Hashem's Name before mentioning his vow.

In our community we have a beautiful custom when going up to the Torah when getting an aliya. We start off by saying "Adon...imachem." But according to the Midrash (and the Kaf Hahayim brings it down in the halachah 139:35) one should not say Hashem's Name first. Therefore, I humbly suggest to keep this beautiful minhag of saying "Hashem imachem," but instead of actually saying Hashem's Name, say the word "Hashem imachem." Rabbi Reuven Semah

"And they traveled from Elim and they encamped by Yam Suf" (Bemidbar 33:10)

Elim hints to the word alimut, which means violence. Yam Suf hints to the word sof, the end. They traveled from the trait of violence. How? By coming to the trait of looking at the end of a person.

Violence induces both actions and words. There is the physical violence of hitting or pushing someone, and there is the verbal violence of shouting at someone or putting him down. Any form of violence not in self-defense is against the principles of the Torah. What is the main cause of violence?

Frustration and anger! When you become frustrated or angry, you are likely to lash out at someone. When you remember your true purpose in this world, most things that get other people angry will not affect you very strongly. Also, the more you appreciate life and the more joyous you feel, the less angry you will become. By remembering the end of each person, you will gain a greater appreciation for life. You will value your time and utilize every opportunity for growth. This awareness will keep you far away from any form of violence. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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Parashat Matot - Fulfilling Commitments

The opening section of Parashat Matot deals with the subject of Nedarim – vows. The Torah affords great importance to fulfilling one's pledges and commitments. It is very easy to pledge a donation, or to make a commitment to improve one's religious observance, but fulfilling those commitments is far more difficult. The Torah states in no uncertain terms that a person who made a commitment must follow through and fulfill his pledge. The Pasuk says in Parashat Matot about one who makes a pledge, "He shall not defile his words; he shall perform all that comes out of his mouth" (30:3).

A number of Rabbis noted that this command, at first glance, appears redundant. After the Torah warns that one "shall not defile his words" by failing to meet his commitments, why does it then repeat, "he shall perform all that comes out of his mouth"? What message does the Torah convey through this repetition?

One explanation is that failing to fulfill one's commitments adversely affects his prayers. After all, the "instrument" we use for prayer is the mouth, the faculty of speech. If a person misuses and "defiles" his speech by making commitments that he does not fulfill, then this mechanism is damaged and incapable of praying properly. A person's prayers cannot be effective if he misuses his mouth by making pledges that remain unfulfilled. Fulfilling commitments is thus vital for ensuring the success of our Tefilot. The Torah here teaches us that a person "shall not defile his words," and if he fulfills all his commitments, then God "shall perform all that comes out of his mouth." By ensuring the purity and innocence of one's speech, he ensures that his prayers will be accepted.

This might also explain the significance of the Kol Nidreh prayer with which we begin the Yom Kippur service. Kol Nidreh is recited with great reverence

and emotion as we usher in the holy day of Yom Kippur, and yet, when we look at its words, we see a technical, legal text, a formal declaration that annuls vows and pledges made during the previous year. Why was this declaration chosen for the emotional moments of the onset of Yom Kippur? The reason is that as we begin the observance of Yom Kippur, preparing to spend a full day immersed in soulful prayer to God, we must first clean the slate, so-to-speak, of any unfulfilled pledges. Our prayers cannot earn acceptance as long as we have outstanding commitments. We therefore "recalibrate" our mouths, as it were, formally annulling our pledges, so that we can pray on Yom Kippur and have our prayers answered.

I know several individuals in our community who serve as inspiring examples of keeping commitments. There is one individual who frequently runs into trouble because whenever he receives an Aliya on Shabbat and pledges a donation, he brings the check immediately on Sunday, but the synagogue office issues its statements only on Wednesday. This man thus routinely receives the bill several days after he made his payment, and then has to deal with the secretary who is asking him for a check. Then there is another congregant who goes even further. When he knows that he will be receiving an Aliya on Shabbat, he makes out checks on Friday and brings them with him to the synagogue before Shabbat. Immediately following Habdala in the synagogue on Saturday evening, he quickly presents the checks to the Gabbai, thereby ensuring that no time goes by after Shabbat without his pledges being fulfilled. I know another man who pleaded with me to have the synagogue immediately issue a statement to his son who had pledged a donation on Shabbat. The man said that he simply could not sleep knowing that his son has an outstanding obligation to the synagogue, and he therefore wanted the synagogue to send the bill and receive the payment as soon as possible.

We can only imagine how warmly God accepts the prayers of such individuals. If a person is careful to immediately fulfill his commitments, then Hashem, too, will ensure to immediately fulfill his requests. The more careful we are to follow through on our commitments, the more likely we are to have our prayers answered in full, and to see the fulfillment of all the requests we bring to the Almighty.

Parashat Maseh - It's All in the Attitude

In the beginning of Parashat Maseh, the Torah lists the different stations where Beneh Yisrael encamped during their forty-year sojourn in the wilderness. One of the places listed is Mara, which literally means

"bitter." After Beneh Yisrael left Mara, we are told, they encamped in a place called Elim, where they found twelve springs of water and seventy date trees (33:9).

This account gives us the opportunity to analyze the events that took place in Mara and Elim as told earlier in the Torah, and to draw the life lessons that these events teach us.

In the Book of Shemot (15:23), the Torah relates that after traveling for three days without finding a water source, Beneh Yisrael finally discovered water upon their arrival in Mara. However, the waters were "bitter" and undrinkable, and for this reason they named the site "Mara."

Although this is the conventional reading of the Torah's account, the Ba'al Shem Tob (Poland, 1700-1760) offers a different explanation. He commented that when the Torah writes, "but they could not drink water from [the waters of] Mara, because they were bitter," it means not that the waters were "bitter," but rather that the people were "bitter." When Beneh Yisrael arrived in Mara, they were aggravated and despondent. And when a person feels unhappy, everything seems "bitter." Indeed, psychologists say that a depressed person's food taste sour; his mood affects even the sense of taste. The Ba'al Shem Tob says that the waters of Mara were not inherently bitter, but this is how it tasted to the people because of their emotional state. Depression has a way of clouding a person's senses and distorting his judgment. Things that are good seem bad; he experiences sweetness as bitterness.

I recall one point during my years in yeshiva that I considered leaving the yeshiva and entering into business. I spoke to my Rabbi about my thoughts, and, to his credit, he did not discount my feelings. Instead, he mentioned to me that I appeared a bit upset and down, that I was going through an unhappy period at the yeshiva. In such a condition, he advised, one should not be making critical decisions. Melancholy prevents a person from thinking clearly, and therefore one should not be making major life choices in such a state.

This is why the Torah affords such importance to joy and happiness. There is no greater Misva than being happy, because this state of mind is critical for observing all other Misvot. It is what enables us to make the right decisions of how to act and what to say.

The story of Mara also instructs us how to find happiness and serenity. The Torah relates that God

instructed Moshe to resolve the crisis by casting a tree into the "bitter" waters. After Moshe threw the tree into the water, it miraculously became fresh and drinkable. How does a tree turn "bitter waters" into "fresh waters"?

The Torah is referred to as an "Etz Haim"—a "tree of life." The way we transform "bitterness" to "sweetness" is through Torah study. Torah has a calming effect on a student, as it provides meaning and direction, and reassures him during difficult times. The secret to avoiding "bitterness," depression and anxiety, is the "tree," the Torah, which is the source of ultimate fulfillment and satisfaction. (For this reason, Torah learning is forbidden on Tisha B'Ab, when we are required to feel saddened and empty, and therefore should not be experiencing the elation and satisfaction that Torah study brings.)

As mentioned, after Beneh Yisrael left Mara they arrived in Elim, where they found seventy palm trees and twelve water springs. A nation of three million people can certainly not be properly fed by seventy palm trees and twelve water springs. Nevertheless, Beneh Yisrael rejoiced upon discovering these resources. After learning the message of Mara, that through Torah we gain a healthier and more positive perspective on life, they were able to celebrate the water springs and palm trees of Elim. They engendered an attitude of looking favorably at whatever they are given in life, rather than seeing everything as "bitter."

Attitude is everything. Nothing will bring us satisfaction and happiness if we do not look at what we have in life from a positive angle; it will all taste "bitter." But through the joy of Torah we are able to recognize and appreciate our blessings in life, and thereby achieve the happiness and fulfillment that we seek.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
I DON'T KNOW**

My dear friend and esteemed member of our congregation, Professor Robert Aumann, told me a thoroughly wonderful story with a deep moral message. He had gone to visit the late, great Rabbi Gustman in the hospital where the rabbi was being treated for a sore on his foot. His physician was the

famed Dr. Heiman, an exceptional person in his own right.

The doctor came into the room and told Rabbi Gustman that he did not know the cause of the sore on his leg. The rabbi responded: "I also do not know." To which the old doctor said: "Honored Rabbi, do you mean to equate your not knowing to my not knowing?!" Not knowing the cause of the sore is certainly more troublesome and perhaps even more ominous to the physician than to the patient himself.

When Rashi, in his commentary to Talmud remarks, as he often does, that he does not know the meaning of a word or phrase in the text, is certainly in a different league and on a much higher level than our not knowing the correct interpretation or meaning of that word or phrase. So, it is obvious to all that there are many different levels of knowing, depending upon the intellectual level, previous knowledge, experience and common sense of different individuals.

Since, as Rashba points out: "The ultimate goal of all knowledge is to make one realize that one really does not know," it is important for us to realize that there are different levels of knowledge and to be able to discern them and to cope with the resulting uncertainties.

We are certainly living through a period of intense uncertainty. The world seems to be falling apart around us. Europe was certainly a mess before the Brexit vote and it now seems to be in an even greater mess. The Middle East is in constant turmoil and the tentacles of Islamic extremism and terrorism extend over the entire globe.

No one seems to have any good answers or practical solutions to these uncertainties and instabilities. To me, the fact that almost all of the world's leaders have no clue as to how to deal with these issues and problems is far more troubling than the fact that I can admit that I do not know what the answer should be. All of the political rhetoric, empty campaign promises and personal blustering only serve to emphasize the uncertainties of our time and the dangers that we face.

We like to believe that we can solve all problems....and more so, that all problems are truly capable of human solution. The fact that all of history belies that belief makes little impression upon us. The world is ours to conquer and conquer it we shall, no matter what the cost involved. No one likes to hear the words "I do not know" from the lips of government leaders, physicians, savants and other worthies. We

all realize that their not knowing is different from ours, but, at the end of the day, it is still an unknown.

The basis of life is uncertainty. We can plan for the future, as that is our nature, but that future rarely, if ever, conforms to our plans. It is flexibility, and the ability to adapt, that is a far more valuable asset to individuals and nations than certainties and inflexible ideological beliefs.

People may expect that their leaders, spiritual and temporal, know everything and have an answer for all difficulties and issues. The person who pretends to be omniscient will eventually pay a great price for that type of arrogance and hubris. It is a great temptation to believe that one can really know all of the answers for all of the problems for all of the people.

This temptation is even greater for people of high intellect and great knowledge. To warn us of this innate danger, Rashi, one of the greatest scholars of all time, sprinkles into his holy words of commentary the phrase; "I do not know what this means." He is warning us of the pitfalls of being a know-it-all regarding one's self and the lives of others as well.

The prophet Elisha tells his servant Gaichazi that he does not know why the woman of Shunam is so desperately anxious to see him. How can a prophet of God not know? Yet even prophets are human and therefore full knowledge is not always present in life, no matter what level one may be at.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Complexity of Human Rights

The book of Bamidbar comes to a close that is very strange indeed. Earlier in the parsha of Pinchas we read of how the five daughters of Tzelophehad came to Moses with a claim based on justice and human rights.[1] Their father had died without sons. Inheritance – in this case, of a share in the land – passes through the male line, but here there was no male line. Surely their father was entitled to his share, and they were his only heirs. By rights that share should come to them: "Why should our father's name be disadvantaged in his family merely because he did not have a son? Give us a portion of land along with our father's brothers" (Num. 27:4).

Moses had received no instruction about such an eventuality, so he asked God directly. God found in favour of the women. "The daughters of Tzelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them." He gave Moses further instructions about the disposition of

inheritance, and the narrative then passes on to other matters.

Only now, right at the end of the book, does the Torah report on an event that arose directly from that case. Leaders of Tzelophehad's tribe, Menasheh, son of Joseph, came and made the following complaint. If the land were to pass to Tzelophehad's daughters and they married men from another tribe, the land would eventually pass to their husbands, and thus to their husband's tribes. Thus land that had initially been granted to the tribe of Menasheh might be lost to it in perpetuity.

Again, Moses took the case to God, who offered a simple solution. The daughters of Tzelophehad were entitled to the land, but so too was the tribe. Therefore, if they wish to take possession of the land, they must marry men from within their own tribe. That way both claims could be honoured. The daughters did not lose their right to the land but they did lose some freedom in choosing a marriage partner.

The two passages are intimately related. They use the same terminology. Both Tzelophehad's daughters and the leaders of the clan "draw near". They use the same verb to describe their potential loss: yigara, "disadvantaged, diminished". God replies in both cases with the same locution, "kein ... dovrot/dovrim," rightly do they speak.[2] Why then are the two episodes separated in the text? Why does the book of Numbers end on this seemingly anticlimactic note? And does it have any relevance today?

Bamidbar is a book is about individuals. It begins with a census, whose purpose is less to tell us the actual number of Israelites than to "lift" their "heads", the unusual locution the Torah uses to convey the idea that when God orders a census it is to tell the people that they each count. The book also focuses on the psychology of individuals. We read of Moses' despair, of Aaron and Miriam's criticism of him, of the spies who lacked the courage to come back with a positive report, and of the malcontents, led by Korach, who challenged Moses' leadership. We read of Joshua and Caleb, Eldad and Medad, Dathan and Aviram, Zimri and Pinchas, Balak and Bilam and others. This emphasis on individuals reaches a climax in Moses' prayer to "God of the spirits of all flesh" to appoint a successor – understood by the sages and Rashi to mean, appoint a leader who will deal with each individual as an individual, who will relate to people in their uniqueness and singularity.

That is the context of the claim of Tzelophehad's daughters. They were claiming their rights as individuals. Justly so. As many of the commentators

pointed out, the behaviour of the women throughout the wilderness years was exemplary while that of the men was the opposite. The men, not the women, gave gold for the golden calf. The spies were men: a famous comment by the Kli Yakar (R. Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550 –1619) suggests that had Moses sent women instead, they would have come back with a positive report.[3] Recognising the justice of their cause, God affirmed their rights as individuals.

But society is not built on individuals alone. As the book of Judges points out, individualism is another name for chaos: "In those days there was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes." Hence the insistence, throughout Bamidbar, on the central role of the tribes as the organising principle of Jewish life. The Israelites were numbered tribe by tribe. The Torah sets out their precise encampment around the Mishkan and the order in which they were to journey. In Naso, at inordinate length, the Torah repeats the gifts of each tribe at the inauguration of the Mishkan, despite the fact that they each gave exactly the same. The tribes were not accidental to the structure of Israel as a society. Like the United States of America, whose basic political structure is that of a federation of (originally thirteen, now fifty) states, so Israel was (until the appointment of a king) a federation of tribes.

The existence of something like tribes is fundamental to a free society.[4] The modern state of Israel is built on a vast panoply of ethnicities – Ashkenazi, Sefardi, Jews from Eastern, Central and Western Europe, Spain and Portugal, Arab lands, Russia and Ethiopia, America, South Africa, Australia and other places, some Hassidic, some Yeshiva-ish, others "Modern", others "Traditional", yet others secular and cultural.

We each have a series of identities, based partly on family background, partly on occupation, partly on locality and community. These "mediating structures", larger than the individual but smaller than the state, are where we develop our complex, vivid, face-to-face interactions and identities. They are the domain of family, friends, neighbours and colleagues, and they make up what is collectively known as civil society. A strong civil society is essential to freedom.[5]

That is why, alongside individual rights, a society must make space for group identities. The classic instance of the opposite came in the wake of the French revolution. In the course of the debate in the French Revolutionary Assembly in 1789, the Count of Clermont-Tonnerre made his famous declaration, "To the Jews as individuals, everything. To the Jews as a

nation, nothing." If they insisted on defining themselves as a nation, that is, as a distinct subgroup within the republic, said the Count, "we shall be compelled to expel them."

Initially, this sounded reasonable. Jews were being offered civil rights in the new secular nation state. However, it was anything but. It meant that Jews would have to give up their identity as Jews in the public domain. Nothing – not religious or ethnic identity – should stand between the individual and the state. It was no accident that a century later, France became one of the epicentres of European antisemitism, beginning with Édouard Drumont's vicious *La France Juive*, 1886, and culminating in the Dreyfus trial. Hearing the Parisian crowd shout "Mort aux Juifs", Theodor Herzl realised that Jews had still not been accepted as citizens of Europe, despite all the protestations to the contrary. Jews found themselves regarded as a tribe in a Europe that claimed to have abolished tribes. European emancipation recognised individual rights but not collective ones.

The primatologist Frans de Waal, whose work among the bonobos we mentioned in this year's Covenant and Conversation on Korach, makes the point powerfully. Almost the whole of modern Western culture, he says, was built on the idea of autonomous, choosing individuals. But that is not who we are. We are people with strong attachments to family, friends, neighbours, allies, co-religionists and people of the same ethnicity. He continues:

A morality exclusively concerned with individual rights tends to ignore the ties, needs and interdependencies that have marked our existence from the very beginning. It is a cold morality that puts space between people, assigning each person to his or her own little corner of the universe. How this caricature of a society arose in the minds of eminent thinkers is a mystery.[6]

That is precisely the point the Torah is making when it divides the story of the daughters of Tzelophehad into two. The first part, in parshat Pinchas, is about individual rights, the rights of Tzelophehad's daughters to a share in the land. The second, at the end of the book, is about group rights, in this case the right of the tribe of Menasheh to its territory. The Torah affirms both, because both are necessary to a free society.

Many of the most seemingly intractable issues in contemporary Jewish life have appeared because Jews, especially in the West, are used to a culture in which individual rights are held to override all others.

We should be free to live as we choose, worship as we choose, and identify as we choose. But a culture based solely on individual rights will undermine families, communities, traditions, loyalties, and shared codes of reverence and restraint.

Despite its enormous emphasis on the value of the individual, Judaism also insists on the value of those institutions that preserve and protect our identities as members of groups that make them up. We have rights as individuals but identities only as members of tribes. Honouring both is delicate, difficult and necessary. Bamidbar ends by showing us how.

[1] The word "rights" is, of course, an anachronism here. The concept was not born until the seventeenth century. Nonetheless it is not absurd to suggest that this is what is implied in the daughters' claim, "Why should our father's name be disadvantaged?"

[2] These two passages may well be the source of the story of the rabbi who hears both sides of a marital dispute, and says to both husband and wife, "You are right." The rabbi's disciple asks, "How can they both be right?" to which the rabbi replies, "You too are right."

[3] Kli Yakar to Num. 13:2.

[4] See most recently Sebastian Junger: Tribe: On homecoming and belonging, Fourth Estate, 2016.

[5] This is the argument made most powerfully by Edmond Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville.

[6] Frans de Waal, Good Natured, Harvard University Press, 1996, 167.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
" Mizmor Shir Leyom Hashabbat Tov Lehodot
LaHashem... " (Tehillim 92:2)

"A Psalm, a song for the Shabbat Day:

It is Good to give thanks to Hashem, and to sing to Your name, O Most High."

What is good? The best thing in the world is to give thanks to Hashem.

That is our job and Shabbat is the time.

We are called 'Yehudim', after the name Yehuda that our great Mother Leah named her son. She said, "This time I will Thank Hashem". The Yehudim are the Nation whose purpose is to Thank Hashem. "Ki simachtani Hashem befaolecha..." You've made me happy Hashem with Your handiwork, I sing at the deeds of Your hands."

It's a wonderful and marvelous world! Look at the beautiful sky. Isn't it a wonderful day?

We have to teach ourselves the happiness of life. Life is happy and Hashem wants us to enjoy this great gift of Olam Hazeah (this world).

"Olam hesed yibaneh " (Tehillim 89:3). The world is built on Kindliness.

We have a kindly Father. Instead of complaining and ignoring all the blessings He is showering on us,

let's utilize the Shabbat and sing of the deeds of Hashem's Hands.

Let's thank Hashem for Water, which we cannot live without. Therefore, Hashem created the world with a reservoir covering 65% of the Earth. The Oceans are holding water which is briny and not suitable for drinking. So Hashem brings the Sun's rays, from 93 million miles away, and in eight minutes ("ad mehera yarutz debaro" Tehillim) sunlight comes to the surface of the ocean causing the water to evaporate. Only pure distilled water vaporizes, rising to form clouds. Hashem causes the winds to blow ("mashiv haruach") the clouds over the continents and condense. Pure, life giving, rain water is brought to the soil and our reservoirs

This is a wondrous miracle, which we should keep in mind as we drink a glass of water.

It is no less a miracle than when the bitter waters were purified through Moshe by putting a tree in the waters causing them to sweeten, according to Hashem's command. "Vayimteku Hamayim", "And the waters became sweet"! (Shemot 15:25)

Water causes your eyes to sparkle. It is the water that makes you able to see. Water is the most important element of the blood, causing your blood to be liquid and flow freely to bring nourishment to your body.

Baruch Hashem for the glass of Water! The elixir of Life!

Shabbat should make us happy & filled with Bitachon and Peace of Mind, in the kindness of Hashem. Try to appreciate that gift. That is part of the purpose of Shabbat.

Adapted from "Rav Avigdor Miller Speaks"

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