

ב"ה **Torah Tidbits**

ISSUE 1622

JULY 26TH 2025 • א' אב תשפ"ה

פרשת מטות-מסעי
PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI

ROSH CHODESH | PIRKEI AVOT 2
SHABBAT CHAZAK

United
We Stand



**A Practical Guide to
the Nine Days** Page 62
Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel



Willing Our Way to Wisdom
Mrs. Leah Feinberg
Page 68

זאת תהיה לכם הארץ
במדבר ל"ד:י"ב

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT MATOT-MASEI ZMANIM

CANDLES 7:05 PM • EARLY 6:14 PM • HAVDALA 8:21 PM • RABBEINU TAM 8:57 PM



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Table of Contents

04	Dear Torah Tidbits Family Rabbi Avi Berman	46	Reclaiming Truth in the Age of Noise Rabbi Moshe Taragin
08	Give Me Yavneh and Its Sages Rabbi Moshe Hauer	52	Coming to Our Senses Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman
12	Aliya-by-Aliya Sedra Summary Rabbi Reuven Tradburks	54	Navigating Life's Journeys Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider
16	Breaking Promises Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb	60	Cutting Off Threads Rabbi Daniel Mann
20	The Prophetic Voice Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l	62	A Practical Guide to the Nine Days Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel
24	Probing the Prophets Rabbi Nachman Winkler	68	Willing Our Way to Wisdom Mrs. Leah Feinberg
28	Soldiers Fighting Midyan - Only Those Who Placed Shel Yad Before Shel Rosh Rabbi Shalom Rosner	70	To Live Torah: An Insight into Galut and Geulah Mrs. Atara Starr
30	Menashe's Mention Rebbetzin Shira Smiles	72	Identifying Red Flags Aleeza Ben Shalom Shagririm Balev
34	Word is Bond Rabbi Judah Mischel	74	The Y-Files Comic Netanel Epstein
36	Bishul Akum Conditions- Eaten Raw - Part 2 Rabbi Ezra Friedman	76	Torah 4 Teens by Teens Sam Frank // Yiriel Golubtchik
44	Simchat Shmuel Rabbi Sam Shor		

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

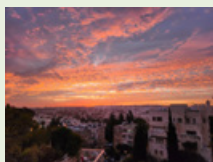
🌙 *Kiddush Levana Av**

Earliest Kiddush Levana 3 Days After Molad: 4 Av/ Mon. night July 28

7 Days After Molad: 10 Av/ Sun. night Aug. 3

Last Opportunity to Say Kiddush Levana until: 14 Av /Thurs. night Aug. 7

**Many wait until after 9 Av*



COVER IMAGE Photographed by Mike Basilyan

The photograph was taken in Katamon, Jerusalem. I made aliya with my wife Chava and 3 kids in August of 2020 at the peak of COVID. We live in Jerusalem.

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OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

**Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
July 23 - August 2 / 27 Tammuz - 8 Av**

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	4:52-4:59
Sunrise	5:49-5:55
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:17-9:20
Magen Avraham	8:35-8:39
Sof Zman Tefila	10:26-10:28
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	12:45
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	1:20-1:19
Plag Mincha	6:14-6:09
Sunset (Including Elevation)	7:46-7:39



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	MATOT-MASEI			DEVARIM		
	Candles	Early	Havdala	Candles	Early	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	7:05	6:14	8:21	7:00	6:10	8:15
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	7:22	6:16	8:22	7:17	6:12	8:17
Beit Shemesh/RBS	7:23	6:15	8:21	7:18	6:11	8:16
Alon Shvut	7:20	6:14	8:21	7:15	6:10	8:15
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	7:22	6:16	8:23	7:17	6:12	8:17
Modiin/Chashmonaim	7:21	6:15	8:22	7:16	6:11	8:16
Netanya	7:23	6:17	8:24	7:18	6:12	8:18
Be'er Sheva	7:21	6:15	8:21	7:16	6:11	8:15
Rehovot	7:22	6:16	8:23	7:17	6:12	8:17
Petach Tikva	7:05	6:16	8:23	7:00	6:12	8:17
Ginot Shomron	7:21	6:15	8:22	7:16	6:11	8:16
Haifa / Zichron	7:13	6:17	8:24	7:08	6:13	8:18
Gush Shiloh	7:20	6:14	8:21	7:15	6:10	8:15
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	7:22	6:16	8:23	7:17	6:12	8:17
Givat Zeev	7:25	6:14	8:21	7:20	6:10	8:15
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	7:20	6:14	8:20	7:15	6:10	8:15
Ashkelon	7:22	6:17	8:23	7:18	6:13	8:17
Yad Binyamin	7:22	6:16	8:22	7:17	6:12	8:16
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	7:16	6:15	8:23	7:10	6:11	8:17
Golan	7:20	6:14	8:22	7:15	6:10	8:15
Nahariya/Maalot	7:22	6:17	8:24	7:17	6:12	8:18
Afula	7:22	6:15	8:23	7:16	6:11	8:17

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Matot-Masei 8:57 PM • Devarim 8:52 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Avodah Zarah 38



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OU ISRAEL
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This past Shabbat, along with my wife and three of our children, I had the honor of spending Shabbat at Camp Dror up north in Chispin. Our Chispin campus has multiple different OU Israel summer programs going on. Not only the boys and girls Camp Dror programs, but also boys and girls programs of Manhigut, which is for 10th-12th graders, NCSY Chai Girls, NCSY Chai Boys, and Yachad Nofesh, Yachad's summer camp. All seven camps are running in Chispin this summer, and all are having an incredible time.

Meanwhile, a tremendous amount of NCSY and Yachad programs from the United States are joining us here in Israel. For example, there is Yad B'Yad, a beautiful program for

Yachad participants that come in with buddies from North America, and they spent the past week in Chispin. That's just a taste of the interconnectedness and unity we are promoting this summer in the many OU camps in Israel.

A very instructive story happened to me right before Shabbat. After the drive up to Chispin with my family, we came to the front desk at the youth hostel there. I asked the receptionist, "Do you know if there are any other groups here besides OU groups?" As I asked the question, somebody came up behind me and gave me a hug. It was Rabbi Aryeh Wielgus, who is running JOLT, one of the incredible NCSY Summer programs that is in Israel now. Apparently JOLT was in Chispin for Shabbat as well. The receptionist asked, "Wait, is JOLT an OU program?" When I confirmed, she said, "So I guess we have an OU group here." I said, "No, you have many OU groups here!" After I ran through the list who were all in Chispin for Shabbat, she was shocked. "Camp Dror, NSCY Chai, and Yachad... All those are OU?", she asked? I told her it was true.

Then she said something that shocked me. She declared, "Then I'm also in the OU." I thought that she was joking; maybe that she was going to tell me that she eats OU-certified food or something like that. Instead, she told me that she lives in Katzrin, her mother is our OU Israel Teen Center branch director in Katzrin, and that she also volunteers, working with the teenagers in our Teen Center. What

ANNUAL YAHRZEIT SHIUR

לע"נ ר' צבי בן אפרים הכהן ז"ל
Mr. Harry Reiss ז"ל

**Who is Obligated to Serve
in the Army of Israel?**

By Rabbi Yona Reiss שליט"א
Sunday, July 27th - ב' מנחם אב
Chicago 9:30am | Israel 5:30pm

On ZOOM:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84786263664?pwd=nqWacCM-STu3kWUs7nPOIRT71cVXnPT.1>

**Meeting ID: 847 8626 3664
Passcode: 278905**

a small world that the receptionist in Chispin is connected to the OU as well. All of these amazing camps and programs are under the OU umbrella, and it should be common knowledge that what the OU and OU Israel are doing is at the forefront of the next generation of Jewish youth.

Shabbat was extremely inspiring. I got to spend time with the Camp Dror girls on Friday night, which was together with the Yachad Nofesh program. They asked me to speak in shul, and then I also spoke to the Chai and Manhigut girls after the Friday night meal late into the night. It was so uplifting to see how deeply these girls connected to messages about their *tafkid* not only as Jews, but particularly as Jewish women. I spoke to them about the incredible and miraculous times that we're living in, but also the challenges that we have ahead of us. To see all these young women together, connecting and lifting each other up, should give their parents tremendous *nachat*.

The same is true for the boys. On Shabbat morning, I was with the Camp Dror boys. I spoke in shul before *Musaf* and then gave a *shiur* to the older boys before lunch. On Shabbat afternoon, I also gave a short talk to the Yachad Nofesh group, and then afterwards did ebbing together with the incredible Camp Dror team that is doing a remarkable job. I got to see all these kids working together, growing together, hearing what they're enjoying most about camp, how they're helping clean off the tables, watching them give out the *benchers* and sing *zemirot* together, doing skits and acting out *Mishnayot*, and listening in the *shiurim*. It's just really amazing to see the amount of camaraderie that they have, and the amount of fun that they have. It was a very busy Shabbat, but such an inspiring



and uplifting one.

On *Motzei Shabbat*, the boys played Capture the Flag and had a great time together. I stopped them in the middle to take a picture of them. Their excitement and determination to capture their flag is clear on their faces.

I was especially touched to see a number of advisors from previous years there for Shabbat. Many of them are currently in the

army or in *sherut leumi*, and they came to camp to spend time and to bond.

As always, over Shabbat, I asked the campers how they felt about camp, and what they felt could be improved. I told them that the last time I was here was two years ago, and the main request I got, from both the boys and the girls, was to make Camp Dror longer, from two weeks to three weeks. Happily, we were able to accomplish that request this year. Since we really do listen, I told them, we want to hear what they have to say. I got a few requests to continue to extend camp even longer, to four weeks, but otherwise, everyone seemed really happy and felt that the camp is doing a great job.

One of the best things that we do in camp is not allow phones, except for an hour on Friday to wish their parents and grandparents a Shabbat Shalom. The fact that there are no phones in camp, no pressure of social media and all the nonsense it entails for the social lives of the youth, means they have the opportunity to appreciate every moment to the fullest. The fact that they're able to do that for three weeks straight, and only use their phones to connect to their parents and grandparents before Shabbat, but then to put it away again after and continue to have fun with their friends and connect with their advisors and to the Torah, has a real impact all by itself.

I really want to give a tremendous, tremendous *yashar koach* to Esti Moskowitz (OU Director of Anglo Engagement and Programming in Israel), and Rabbi Ari Cutler and his wife Adina, who were there with their beautiful newborn daughter (*mazal tov* to them!), Rav Eitan and Rabbanit Rachel Aviner, Cindy Weisel, and the entire Camp

Dror staff. As well as the Yachad Nofesh and NCSY Chai staff. Not only are these amazing educators doing such holy work, really taking upon themselves to inspire the next generation, but to have so much fun doing it, is really incredible.

I cannot truly describe in words the excitement in the air when Yitzy Shmidman from Yachad walked in with a bag of Torah Tidbits. Everyone wanted to get one for themselves, and soon there were none left. *Baruch Hashem*, I brought a stack of my own and was able to distribute them on the boys' campus on Shabbat morning when I went to daven there. On Motzei Shabbat, I announced that I was going to be writing about Camp Dror this Shabbat in Torah Tidbits, and whoever wants to be in a picture for Torah Tidbits is welcome to come and join. So many campers came from all three camps to be in the picture, happy and excited to be able to tell their parents, grandparents, and loved ones that they were going to be in Torah Tidbits!

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel
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FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



Give Me Yavneh and Its Sages

In the second century, the Romans martyred Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon by wrapping a Torah scroll around his body and burning them together. The Talmud (Avodah Zara 18a) records how, as he was dying, Rabbi Chanina observed that only the parchment scrolls were going up in flames while the letters rose into the air and flew away.

Eighteen centuries later, post-Holocaust, Rav Shlomo Yosef Kahaneman of Ponevezh noted that at times of conflagration our Jewish historic mission is to find the place to lay out a fresh parchment to serve as the next home for those traveling holy letters.

**May the Torah learned
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
be לע"נ**

**הר"ר נתן
ב"ר מאיר לימן ז"ל**
גלב"ע כ"ז תמוז תשנ"ה

**Sorely missed
and fondly remembered by all of us**

Lehman Family

Rav Kahaneman, whose family, yeshiva, and community went up in the flames of the Shoah, made it his own life's mission to rebuild in Israel the Torah institutions that the Nazis had sent up in flames.

The Three Weeks begin with the 17th of Tammuz, the anniversary of the smashing of the *luchot*, the tablets upon which Hashem inscribed the Ten Commandments, as well as the burning of a Torah scroll by Apostomus (Taanis 26b). While the latter represented an attack on the Jews and our faith, the former was a self-inflicted wound committed by Moshe himself, the ultimate trustee of the Torah, who saw us create and worship the Golden Calf and concluded that the *luchot* were essentially already broken as their words were clearly not meaningful to us.

The tablets broke when their words were treated as irrelevant.

In the same vein, on Tisha B'Av we read the lament *Shaali Srufa b'Eish* that elegizes the burning of the Talmud in Paris in 1242. The author of that poem, *Maharam* of Rothenburg, included the following:

I will shed enough tears for a river to reach the graves of your two noble princes, Moshe and Aaron on Mount Hor, and will ask them, "Has a new Torah been given? Is that why the old scrolls were burned?"

While we might focus on the horrific image of parchment burning, the deeper pain is for the loss of its letters. While Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon comforted himself knowing that his steadfast commitment to his faith ensured

that those sacred letters would find their way elsewhere, we are living at a time where the letters and words of the Torah are struggling with homelessness as its sacred values of faith and morality have become more and more alien and irrelevant to society. Has a new Torah been given that the old one goes up in flames?

Parshat Massei records the travels of the Jewish people through the desert. Those travels have continued throughout our history, and our staying power has derived from the holy ark of the Torah that traveled at the center of our people, *vayehi b'nso'ah ha'aron*. The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 31a) richly notes that the Torah records how G-d's presence journeyed from location to location ten times as the Jews went into exile and - corresponding to that original divine journey – during the destruction of the Mikdash, the Sanhedrin (the center of Torah teaching of our people) would similarly relocate ten times. That was the message that Rav Yochanan ben Zakkai conveyed when he requested of Vespasian that even as he destroyed Jerusalem, he should grant salvation to Yavneh – the new home of the Sanhedrin – and its sages (Gittin 56b). Yavneh was not our ultimate home, but it was where the new parchment was laid out to catch and preserve the holy words and messages of the Torah. Yavneh was where our commitment to the eternal preservation of Torah was most clearly manifest.

While we cry over the burning of the parchment by others, we must be even more keenly aware of our own ongoing responsibility to preserve its values and obligations as no new Torah will ever be given to replace the “tree of life for all who uphold it.” ■

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OU... BEYOND KASHRUT

New! Torah Tidbits Live

OU Israel is excited to launch Torah Tidbits Live, a new initiative to bring your favorite Torah Tidbits writers and educators to learn together with communities across Israel. This is part of our strategic efforts to enhance our connections and impact with English-speaking Olim and their communities.

This past Shabbat, Rabbi Sam Shor (Director, OU Israel Torah Initiatives) spent Shabbat as scholar-in-residence in Nahariya for the Torah Tidbits Live pilot. While Torah Tidbits has long provided tens of thousands of English-speaking Olim and visitors with inspiring Torah content, many smaller communities have limited regular English-language learning opportunities. Torah Tidbits Live brings the publication's scholars and columnists to these areas for uplifting Shabbat experiences of Torah and connection. The Nahariya Shabbaton marks the first of many more Torah Tidbits Live Shabbatot across the country.

If you are interested in bringing Torah Tidbits Live to your community, please email info@ouisrael.org.

Each week we will share one of OU Israel's impactful programs helping English speaking olim with their *klita* and impacting Israeli society.





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A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOKH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

נקם נקמת בני ישראל מאת המדינים אחר תאסף אל עמך (לא:ב)

"Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites; afterwards you shall be gathered to your people." (31:2)

Why did Moshe insist on witnessing this battle while still alive?

Dubno Magid (R' Yaakov Kranz 1741-1804) answers that Moshe wanted to be sure that the Israelites truly despised and rejected the evil values of Midian. This war against Midian was more than just avenging the life loss which they had caused with Bilaam's advice, but also to counter any moral corrupt influence which Midian have had on the Israelites. "Distress the Midianites" and "smite them". (25:17)

The Mesech Chochma (Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk 1843-1926) points out that there was a need for this campaign against Midian now before Moshe's demise, to prove that Moshe was not opposed to fighting them. Some might accuse Moshe of siding and defending Midian. It was Moshe, upon his own escaping Egypt, became a resident of Midian. Furthermore, Moshe's father-in-law was Yitro, a Midianite. The Torah relates therefore, that Moshe was not hesitant in battling Midian, thereby conducting this war before Moshe's death.
Shabbat Shalom

Jonathan Rosenblum, DPM

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PARSHAT MATOT-MASEI



1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 30:2-31:12)

Vows: A commitment must be kept. A young woman's vow may be nullified by her father on the day it is taken; if not nullified, it need be observed. A married woman's vow may be nullified by her husband; if not nullified, it need be observed. Conduct a battle of retribution on Midian, after which Moshe shall die. 1,000 soldiers per tribe are led by Pinchas accompanied by the holy vessels and trumpets. The leaders of Midian are killed, the cities destroyed. All the booty is brought to Moshe and Elazar at the plains of Moav opposite Jericho.

The book of Bamidbar is preoccupied with the march to the Land of Israel, albeit in fits and starts. But interspersed are various mitzvot. The timing and placement of these

mitzvot invites explanation.

Why is the narrative of the march interrupted here with the mitzvah of honoring vows and how vows may be voided? What has just happened and what is about to happen which prompts placing the subject of vows right here?

It could be following on the tails of Bilaam. Look at how powerful words are; his curse would have damaged us. Similarly, there is power in *our* words to obligate us. Be careful with words.

Additionally, this foreshadows what is about to happen in this parsha. The tribes of Reuven, Gad and half of Menashe want to remain on the east bank of the Jordan. Moshe requires them to join in the battle for the Land and only afterwards to return to their families and possessions on the east bank. They give their word. Is their word sufficient; after all it is only their word? People lie and exaggerate. Therefore, the Torah demands of us to keep our word. And once having done so, Moshe too can rely on the word of these tribes. We may doubt the word of man; but the Torah does not. In the eyes of the Torah, a promise is a promise. And can be relied upon.



2ND ALIYA (31:13-54)

Moshe is angry that the women have been spared, as they were the snares in the illicit affairs of Baal Peor. He orders their death. Elazar teaches to pass the Midianite utensils through fire and through water before use (kashering and immersing). The vast booty is divided. The soldiers receive



half, the people half. The soldiers shall give 1/500th of their booty to the Kohanim; the people 1/50th to the Leviim. The booty was: 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys and 32,000 young people. The tithes were given. The leaders of the war approach Moshe: no soldier fell in the battle. We shall give all the gold and silver booty as an atonement; it numbered 16,750 shekel.

The detail of the booty and its division must be for a reason, for some lesson. The booty is divided equally between the soldiers and the rest of the population. There were 1,000 soldiers per tribe, 12,000 in total. The census last week yielded a total population of 601,000. That's not fair: 12,000 soldiers get the same as 589,000? The soldier is getting 50 times the share of the non-soldiers. What a powerful statement: we value the soldiers so much we reward them with a 50 fold share of the booty. This expresses the profound appreciation we have for our soldiers. The benefits that our modern Israeli society grants to soldiers who serve our country is rooted in our Torah. And while a tithe does go to the Kohanim and Leviim who provide spiritual strength, it is miniscule compared to that given to the soldiers. The Kohanim receive 1/500th of the soldier's half. The Leviim 1/50th of the general population's half. We appreciate the contribution of the religious leaders while appreciating more the contribution of the soldiers.



3RD ALIYA (32:1-19)

The tribes of Reuven and Gad have extensive flocks, while the region just conquered has lush grazing land. They requested of Moshe to settle in this spot. Moshe asked rhetorically: your brothers go to war and you sit here? You will demoralize

the people as did the spies into not wanting to enter the Land. You saw G-d's reaction in not allowing that generation to enter the Land. The tribes of Reuven and Gad offered to house their flocks and families in place while joining the rest of the people in the battles in the Land.

The war with Midian yielded a vast booty of animals. The Bnei Reuven and Gad figure "if this land could yield such success, why not stay here?" Makes perfect sense. After all, this is economically secure and stable. It is not the same as the spies. The spies were fearful of taking the Land; which in essence was a repudiation of G-d's promise to champion our settling the Land. These people are merely comfortable in chutz laaretz. The grass is greener on this side; why venture to the other, the unknown? They don't question whether the Land can be taken; they question why give up the good life.



4TH ALIYA (32:20-33:49)

Moshe agreed to the offer of the tribes of Reuven and Gad: they would join the battle for the Land and upon its conclusion would return to the east bank of the Jordan. Moshe informed Yehoshua and Elazar of this, instructing them to ensure that all that was agreed upon be fulfilled. The lands of Og and Sichon were divided amongst Gad and Reuven, while the region of Gilad was given to half of the tribe of Menashe. (Parshat Masei) Moshe recorded all the travels until here, listing them all in great detail including that upon arrival at Hor Hahar Aharon died at age 123 on the first of the fifth month (1 Av). The travels concluded at the plains of Moav opposite Jericho.

The acquiescence to the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad is surprising.

Why allow them to stay outside of the Land of Israel, settling in the lands of Og and Sichon? It could be that the Jewish people are conveying a message of what could be called a Newtonian law of national justice; every opposition to us, will be met with an opposition to you. Sichon and Og fought the Jewish people. And were conquered. These lands now can unequivocally be claimed as ours. Justice for nations demands that opposition not be easily forgiven. Were all the Jews to have entered the Land, this area would be resettled by the adversary. And that would be unjust. So too with the war with Midian. The national effort at seduction cannot be left unopposed. And so, the offer to settle these lands is accepted by Moshe.



5TH ALIYA (33:50-34:15)

On the banks of the Jordan, the people are commanded: take the Land of Israel and settle it for it is given to you. You must supplant the people of the land for if not, they will be a thorn in your side; and inevitably, what I am commanding of you to supplant them, will be done by them to you. The borders of the Land: in the south from the Mediterranean Sea to the Dead Sea, the western border is the Mediterranean Sea north into Lebanon, the North into Syria, the east along the Jordan.

The delineation of the borders of the Land is tricky because some of the landmarks it describes are not familiar to us. Nonetheless it is clear that the southern border does not extend all the way down to Eilat. The northern border extends well into Lebanon of today. And the eastern border includes much of Syria of today.



6TH ALIYA (34:16-35:8)

The leaders of the tribes shall apportion the Land. The Leviim shall be given cities amongst the tribes. Each city shall have open area and grazing area surrounding it, 2,000 amot in total area outside the city. The Leviim may settle in the cities of refuge or in 48 designated cities. These cities are provided by the tribes, according to the size of the tribe and their allotted area.

The description of the open and grazing area around the city is one of the ecological passages of the Torah. Green lung around the city. 2,000 amot is about a kilometer. As the cities were small (no need for wide roads for cars in the ancient world), this amounts to a healthy greenbelt around the city.



7TH ALIYA (35:9-35:13)

Cities of Refuge are to be allocated, 3 on the west side of the Jordan, 3 on the east. One who kills accidentally may flee there. It is not accidental but rather murder if one attacks with a lethal weapon, or the assault is premeditated. The murderer shall be put to death; he may not flee to these cities. The relatives of the daughters of Zelophchad pointed out to Moshe that their family inheritance will be damaged. For the daughters will marry men of another tribe; the integrity of their family allotment will be damaged. It will not even return in Yovel, for it will begin with another tribe. Moshe

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instructed that these women marry men from their family so as to maintain the integrity of the family allotment.

In the description of the cities of refuge, any illusion that the Jewish society in the Land will be perfect is dispelled. There will be murders; accidental and pre-meditated. And earlier in this parsha, we fought a battle due to the failing of sexual impropriety with the women of Midian. And earlier in the Torah, the Golden Calf and idol worship. So there you have it: the Jews of the desert have covered the big 3, idolatry, adultery and murder. We aren't, nor do we have illusions that we will be a perfect society. But, with that full knowledge, G-d is promising us that we will enter the Land imminently. Some Jews will err, will sin, will fail. But not the Jewish people. The covenant with the people endures. Rocky at times, but enduring. The book of Bamidbar ends on the banks of the Jordan, poised to enter the Land.

YIRMIYAHU 2:4-28, 4:1-2

This week's *haftarah* is the second of a series of three "*haftarot* of affliction." The prophet Yirmiyahu transmits G-d's message to the Jewish people, in strong tones chastising all the sectors of the people, including the leadership, for their abandonment of G-d. He reminds them of the kindness Hashem did for them, taking them out of Egypt and leading them through the desert and settling them in the Promised Land, yet they repaid kindness with disloyalty.

Hashem asks them to view the actions of their neighboring nations, the Kittites and Kedarites, "and see whether there was any such thing, whether a nation exchanged a

god, although they are not gods. Yet My nation exchanged their glory for what does not avail."

Yirmiyahu then goes on to foretell the suffering the Jewish people will experience at the hands of their enemies, and also their former allies: "Your evil will chastise you, and you will be rebuked for your backslidings; and you shall know and see that your forsaking the L-rd your G-d is evil and bitter."

The haftarah ends on an encouraging note, assuring the people that if they return to Hashem with sincerity, they will be restored to their full glory. ■

	Matot	Mas'ei	M&M
of 54 Sedras	42 nd	43 rd	-
of 10 in Bamidbar	9 th	10 th	-
Lines in a Torah	190	189	379
Rank	29 th	30 th	1 st
Parshiyot	9	8	17
Ptuchot	4	6	10
Stumot	5	2	7
Pesukim	112	132	244
Rank (Torah/Bamidbar)	24/7	12/5	1/1
Words	1484	1461	2945
Rank	29/6	32/7	1/1
Letters	5652	5773	11425
Rank	30/7	28/6	1/1

	Matot	Mas'ei	M&M
Positive	1	2	3
Prohibitions	1	4	5
Total	2	6	8



THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

Breaking Promises

It was a typical park bench conversation. I hadn't seen my friend for quite some time, and we both were delighted when we ran into each other by chance that afternoon.

We shook hands and withdrew to a bench in the shade to spend a few minutes together catching up with each other. As is often the case in such conversations, we found ourselves discussing mutual acquaintances with whom one or the other of us had lost touch. Pretty soon we were discussing Sam.

Sam was a person who had many fine qualities, indeed some outstanding ones. But the one that made the biggest impression upon my park bench partner and me was Sam's impeccable honesty.

"Once Sam says something," my pal remarked, "he never backs out or changes his mind. You can count on him to keep his word."

Something deep inside of me, perhaps the ornery part of me, then spoke up. "Is it always a virtue to keep your word and never change your mind? Isn't that a sign of a certain rigidity, which is not always beneficial, and may even sometimes be morally wrong?"

My friend objected. "Surely," he said, "you don't mean to condone lying."

At this point, I realized that our idle

conversation was taking a deeper turn. We were beginning to wax philosophical and would soon have to resort to a higher level of discourse than we had bargained for when we initially sat down together.

But before changing the topic of conversation, I was reminded of this week's Torah portion, *Matot-Masei*, and of its opening passages which discuss the binding nature of vows and promises, and the circumstances under which those verbal commitments can be annulled.

"When a man vows a vow...or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth." (*Numbers* 30:3)

The binding quality of one's promises is emphasized by many non-biblical authors. The Roman sage Horace writes in his *Epistles*, "Once a word has been allowed to escape, it cannot be recalled." The Spanish novelist, Miguel de Cervantes, puts these words in the mouth of his hero Don Quixote: "An honest man's word is as good as his bond."

It is apparent that being true to one's words is a universal ethical standard. The Torah, however, while fully supporting the binding quality of one's promises, also recognizes that there are situations which call for the revocation of those promises. Times change, circumstances are altered, and a reassessment of past commitments is not only permitted but is to be commended.

Blind obedience to one's past vows can lead to disastrous consequences.

Whereas the Torah explicitly grants the authority to a father to annul the vows of his daughter, and under certain circumstances allows a husband to abrogate his wife's vows, our sages recognize that every individual must have access to a wise man, a *chacham*, who can help him assess his verbal commitments, and, when justified, release him from those commitments.

The classic case of misguided adherence to one's words is the story, narrated in the book of *Judges* chapter 11, of Jephthah (Yiftach). He was a great military leader who, when he embarked upon a battle against the Ammonites, vowed that if God would grant him victory, he would offer "whatever comes out of the door of my house...as a burnt offering." Tragically, it was his daughter, his only child, who came out to meet him. He felt bound by his words and "did to her as he vowed."

Our Sages see his blind obedience to his own words as being a result of his ignorance, and they do not commend his fidelity to his vow. Quite the contrary; our rabbis recognize the complexities of life and understand full well that situations which call for morality can be most ambiguous.

In certain circumstances, a sense of being bound by one's promises is an example of integrity and honesty of the highest order. But even one's promises need to be assessed in the light of changing circumstances. When those circumstances demand a loosening of the bond of verbal commitment, our tradition knows of procedures whereby one can be released even from his most fervent oaths and vows.

The opening passages of this week's Torah

portion recognize this complexity. These passages teach that one must be careful never to profane or violate his words. But they also teach that one's words need to be revisited, re-examined, and reassessed. And they teach that, under the guidance of a wise and pious *chacham*, the bonds of words can be undone, and the chains of past commitments can be loosened.

There is an additional lesson here, and that is the lesson of forgiveness. Sometimes human relationships necessitate certain reactions. My vow to have nothing to do with you may have been based upon the factual consideration that your behavior was undesirable and might have a negative effect upon me or my family. But I must be ready to say, "That was then and this is now." I must be ready to realize that you have changed and that now our relationship must change.

And when I realize that, I must re-examine my past promises and commitments and be ready to undo them. That is the underlying concept behind the procedure known as *hatarat nedarim*, the undoing of the bonds of words. That is among the messages of this week's Torah portion.

I am sharing these thoughts with you, dear reader, but didn't share them with my park bench partner. Certain matters are much too important for a park bench. But I am sharing my thoughts with you, and hope you find them meaningful. ■

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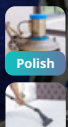
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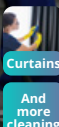
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HaRav Ya'akov Zvi ben David Ariele zt"l

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The Prophetic Voice

During the three weeks between 17 Tammuz and Tisha b'Av, as we recall the destruction of the Temples, we read three of the most searing passages in the prophetic literature, the first two from the opening of the book of Jeremiah, the third, next week, from the first chapter of Isaiah.

At perhaps no other time of the year are we so acutely aware of the enduring force of ancient Israel's great visionaries. The prophets had no power. They were not kings or members of the royal court. They were (usually) not priests or members of the religious establishment. They held no office. They were not elected. Often they were deeply unpopular, none more so than the author of this week's Haftara, Jeremiah, who was arrested, flogged, abused, put on trial, and only narrowly escaped with his life. Only rarely were the prophets heeded in their lifetimes.¹ Yet their words were

recorded for posterity and became a major feature of Tanach, the Hebrew Bible. They were the world's first social critics, and their message continues through the centuries. As Kierkegaard almost said: *when a king dies, his power ends; when a prophet dies his influence begins.*²

What was distinctive about the prophet was not that he foretold the future. The ancient world was full of such people: soothsayers, oracles, readers of runes, shamans, and other diviners, each of whom claimed inside track with the forces that govern fate and "shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will." Judaism has no time for such people. The Torah bans one "who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead" (Deut. 18:10-11). It disbelieves such practices because it believes in human freedom. The future is not pre-scripted. It depends on us and the choices we make. *If a prediction comes true it has succeeded; if a prophecy comes true it has failed.* The prophet tells of

spoke to non-Jews, the citizens of Nineveh.

2. Kierkegaard actually said: "The tyrant dies and his rule is over; the martyr dies and his rule begins." *Kierkegaard, Papers and Journals*, 352.

1. The one clear exception was Jonah, and he

the future that will happen if we do not heed the danger and mend our ways. He (or she – there were seven biblical prophetesses) does not predict; he or she *warns*.

Nor was the prophet distinctive in blessing or cursing the people. That was Bilaam's gift, not Isaiah's or Jeremiah's. In Judaism, blessing comes through priests not prophets.

Several things made the prophets unique. The first was his or her sense of history. The prophets were the first people to see God in history. We tend to take our sense of time for granted. Time happens. Time flows. As the saying goes, time is God's way of keeping everything from happening at once. But actually there are several ways of relating to time and different civilisations have perceived it differently.

There is *cyclical* time: time as the slow turning of the seasons, or the cycle of birth, growth, decline and death. Cyclical time is time as it occurs in nature. Some trees have long lives; most fruit flies have short ones; but all that lives, dies. The species endures, individual members do not. In Kohelet we read the most famous expression of cyclical time in Judaism:

"The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course ... What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then there is *linear* time: time as an inexorable sequence of cause and effect. The French astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace gave this idea its most famous expression in 1814 when he said that if you "know all forces that set nature in motion, and all positions of all items of which nature is composed,"



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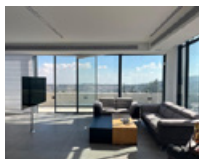
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together with all the laws of physics and chemistry, then “nothing would be uncertain and the future just like the past would be present” before your eyes. Karl Marx applied this idea to society and history. It is known as historical inevitability, and when transferred to the affairs of humankind it amounts to a massive denial of personal freedom.

Finally there is time as a mere *sequence of events* with no underlying plot or theme. This leads to the kind of historical writing pioneered by the scholars of ancient Greece, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Each of these has its place, the first in biology, the second in physics, the third in secular history, but none was time as the prophets understood it. The prophets saw time as the arena in which the great drama between God and humanity was played out, especially in the history of Israel. If Israel was faithful to its mission, its covenant, then it would flourish.

If it was unfaithful it would fail. It would suffer defeat and exile. That is what Jeremiah never tired of telling his contemporaries.

The second prophetic insight was the unbreakable connection between monotheism and morality. Somehow the prophets sensed – it is implicit in all their words, though they do not explain it explicitly – that idolatry was not just false. It was also corrupting. It saw the universe as a multiplicity of powers that often clashed. The battle went to the strong. Might defeated right. The fittest survived while the weak perished. Nietzsche believed this, as did the social Darwinists.

The prophets opposed this with all their force. For them the power of God was secondary; what mattered was the righteousness of God. Precisely because God loved

and had redeemed Israel, Israel owed Him loyalty as their sole ultimate sovereign, and if they were unfaithful to God they would also be unfaithful to their fellow humans. They would lie, rob, cheat, etc. Jeremiah doubts whether there was one honest person in the whole of Jerusalem (Jer. 5:1). They would become sexually adulterous and promiscuous:

“I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife.” (Jer. 5:7-8)

Their third great insight was the primacy of ethics over politics. The prophets have surprisingly little to say about politics. Yes, Samuel was wary of monarchy, but we find almost nothing in Isaiah or Jeremiah about the way Israel/Judah should be governed. Instead we hear a constant insistence that the strength of a nation – certainly of Israel/Judah – is not military or demographic but moral and spiritual. If the people keep faith with God and one another, no force on earth can defeat them. If they do not, no force can save them. As Jeremiah says in this week’s Haftara, they will discover too late that their false gods offered false comfort:

They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’ Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah. (Jer. 2:27-28)

Jeremiah, the most passionate and tormented of all the prophets, has gone down

in history as the prophet of doom. Yet this is unfair. He was also supremely a prophet of hope. He is the man who said that the people of Israel will be “as eternal as the sun, moon and stars” (Jer. 31). He is the man who, while the Babylonians were laying siege to Jerusalem, bought a field as a public gesture of faith that Jews would return from exile:

“For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.” (Jer. 32)

Jeremiah’s feelings of doom and hope were not in conflict: they were two sides of the same coin. The God who sentenced His people to exile would be the God who brought them back, for though His people might forsake Him, He would never forsake them. Jeremiah may have lost faith in people; he never lost faith in God.

Prophecy ceased in Israel with Haggai, Zekhariah, and Malachi in the Second Temple era. But the prophetic truths have not ceased to be true. Only by being faithful to God do people stay faithful to one another. Only by being open to a power greater than themselves do people become greater than themselves. Only by understanding the deep forces that shape history can a people defeat the ravages of history. It took a long time for biblical Israel to learn these truths, and a very long time indeed before they returned to their land, re-entering the arena of history. We must never forget them again. ■

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PROBING THE PROPHETS

BY RABBI NACHMAN (NEIL) WINKLER
FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

“The Tragic Seer”

Over the past years and previous articles, I have made the point that Yirmiyahu – whose prophecy is read for our haftarah – is rightly considered as the “The Prophet of Doom”. As one whose messages from G-d that were to be shared with Israel were filled with the most difficult predictions of the fall of Judea – he, understandably, has “earned” that unflattering title. However, I feel that a more fitting appellation, might be “The Tragic Seer”. Rather than focusing on the harsh messages that he was charged to deliver to the sinful nation, we would do well to focus on the agony that filled his years in pursuit of social justice and spiritual redemption for his beloved nation. It is precisely this oft-ignored component of Yirmiyahu’s character that must be understood and appreciated.

This approach rests upon our realization that the condemnations he issued were not given with an anger and bitterness against the people but, rather, as strong messages meant to bring the nation that he deeply loved back to the G-d they had abandoned.

In a most enlightening essay, Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein supports this approach by comparing the prophecies of Yirmiyahu with those of his predecessor, Yishayahu. These two n’vi’im prophesied at different times and to different communities, and, therefore, offer dissimilar visions to their

respective communities. However, Rav Lichtenstein also uncovers a difference in the very tone of their messages of censure to the people – differences that reflect their separate approaches in delivering Hashem’s criticisms to the nation.

And it is through the very tenor of Yirmiyahu’s criticisms that his overwhelming affection for his nation is revealed.

The first prophecy in Sefer Yishayahu – the haftarah that we are to read next week – relates the prophet’s first condemnation of the sinful nation. In it, Yishayahu calls out Israel as being “weighed down by iniquity” (*“keved avone”*), who were “evil offspring” (*zerah m’re’im*) – all because “they had forsaken G-d” (*“azvu et Hashem”*). Clearly, the prophet used these horrific depictions of G-d’s people for having committed the most despicable of iniquities – idolatry. It is no wonder that Chazal allowed these harshest of condemnations to be read only on the Shabbat before Tish’a B’Av.

And yet, 150 years later, when Yirmiyahu had to condemn his generation for the self-same outrage in the opening chapters of his Sefer, he does not describe idolatry as a result of national corruption but, rather, as a tragic mistake committed by a confused and misled people. The language he uses is not one of censure or denunciation but one

of question: "Why?"

Rav Lichtenstein points to the navi's questions asked in our haftarah: "*Ma matz'u avoteichem ahvel?*", "What 'wrong' did your **fathers** find in Me?" asks G-d (and Yirmiyahu); "*Ha'eved Yisra'el?...Madu'a hayah lavaz?*", "Is Israel a slave? Why did he become (the enemy's) prey?" The obvious answers to the questions are, of course, unspoken criticism of Israel but, having been couched in question form, the censure calls for more thought and consideration from the people and not a reaction of anger and denial.

The navi's love for his people is further reflected by the criticism that he directs to the leadership, the religious guides and the false prophets. Just listen to Yirmiyahu crying out Hashem's words (2:8): "The Kohanim did not ask: 'Where is G-d', the teachers of

Torah knew Me not... (and) the false prophets prophesied by the B'aal!" Who, then, is to blame for the iniquities and moral morass, asks the navi. NOT the nation herself, but only those who MISLED the masses!!!

These are the opening words of the reluctant seer, one who could not willingly condemn his beloved people. In these early messages to his generation, Hashem's agent acts much like a teacher who hopes to help and support his charge – not frighten or threaten a confused student.

This is the essence of Yirmiyahu.

And why he truly is, in my estimation, "The Tragic Seer". ■

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Soldiers Fighting Midyan – Only Those Who Placed Shel Yad Before Shel Rosh

In Parshat Matot, Am Yisrael prepare for war with Midyan. Rashi claims that those drafted were Tzadkim- righteous individuals. The Midrash describes all 12,000 soldiers who went to battle with Midyan as follows: *“none of them placed their tefillin shel Rosh before their tefillin shel yad.”*

The Netivat Shalom inquires as to the significance of this statement. Selecting soldiers that wore tefillin may highlight their religious observance, but what is the significance of specifying that these soldiers did not adorn the tefillin shel rosh **prior** to wrapping themselves with the tefillin shel yad?

We have two major senses that control

how we feel, our heart and our mind. We need to channel and subjugate both to our avodat Hashem. This is what tefillin is all about. As we state in the tefilla prior to putting on tefillin (לשם יחוד) - we first wrap tefillin around our arm, next to our heart, only thereafter, do we place it on our head, near our mind. We first need to conquer our desires, then we will be able to think clearly. At times, we fall victim to our desires and seek to rationalize our decisions so that we can fulfill our cravings.

Fighting Midyan required individuals that could overcome their desires. Bilam sought to entice Am Yisrael with the women of Moav. Therefore, the soldiers selected to confront Bilam had to put on their *tefillin shel yad before their tefillin shel rosh*. They had to be able to control their hearts desires and channel them to avodat Hashem. Only then, could their mind properly and clearly be directed towards serving God.

On Shabbat we do not wear tefillin. In fact, the acronym of שבת – may be understood as shabbat replacing tefillin. שבת במקום תפילין. Shabbat achieves the same purpose. On Shabbat our desires are channeled to

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oneg Shabbat- 'ה אז תתענג על ה' and our mind is focused properly – נפשי חולת אהבתך. On Shabbat we are able to feel and think straight and sanctify the day appropriately.

As we put on our tefillin, may we be able to comprehend the significance of *the shel yad and shel rosh*, and be able to conquer our desires and think clearly so that we can act as proper soldiers in serving our creator. ■



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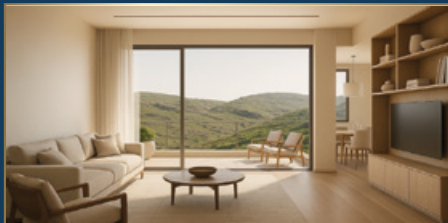
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Menashe's Mention

Am Yisrael's forty-year sojourn in the desert is coming to an end and they are preparing to enter the Land of Israel. The tribes of Reuven and Gad approach Moshe Rabbeinu and request to remain where they are, east of the Jordan River, to settle the territory as their inheritance. Moshe Rabbeinu reacts strongly yet acquiesces, after the Reuvenites and the Gadites promise to lead the rest of the tribes in the conquest of Eretz Yisrael.

What is most fascinating is that the Torah then tells us that two families from the tribe of Menashe joined them, 'splitting off' from the rest of their tribe to also inherit land on this side of the Jordan. What prompted these families to do such a thing? It is clear from the text that the tribes of Reuven and Gad had a lot of cattle which motivated them to seek a more expansive space to settle, but we don't hear that that was necessarily the case with Menashe's people. What is the back story here?

On the simple, textual level, the *Ramban* *zt'l* posits that this suggestion was initiated by the tribes of Reuven and Gad. Being granted a very large portion, they invited any of the tribes to join them. Two families from Menashe did indeed join them, perhaps since they also had a lot of cattle.

Clearly, though, it is not incidental that the tribe of Menashe accepted their offer. As we know, every event and detail in our world is meticulously orchestrated by Hashem. *Midrash Lekach Tov* views this tribal split as a punishment to the tribe of Menashe.


It was Menashe, son of Yosef Hatzadik, who managed Yosef's household, and it was he who ran after the brothers, accusing them of stealing Yosef's goblet. As a result, the brothers tore their garments in mourning once the goblet was found in Binyamin's sack. Since Menashe caused their garments to be torn, measure for measure, his tribe was torn in two. How exacting is Hashem's judgement and how careful we must be to avoid causing pain to another! Every act we do has consequences, whether we will see it or not; nothing in this world goes unnoticed or uncalculated.

A more positive perspective is offered by the *Netziv* *zt'l* who suggests that Moshe Rabbeinu himself convinced members of the tribe of Menashe to remain in Transjordan. Menashe's tribe was known for its scholars and erudition. Moshe Rabbeinu was concerned that Torah learning would be weak in this far territory and therefore invited Menashe to boost the spiritual level of the area. Clearly, when choosing a place to settle, we must be careful to ensure that there is a strong Torah infrastructure to which we can connect and thrive spiritually.

Sha'arei Aharon shares yet another

perspective. The tribe of Yosef represents the totality of the nation; *Klal Yisrael* is called his descendants (*Amos* 5:6). Therefore, he, through his son Menashe, was chosen to dwell on both sides of the Jordan to safeguard the feeling of oneness and brotherhood among all the tribes.

It is during this time period of the Three Weeks that we can concentrate our energy to inculcate these very lessons into our lives. How careful we must be not to hurt others, not to create divisiveness; rather focus on unity and brotherhood. It is also an imperative to strengthen our Torah foundation and build upon it in a focused and purposeful way. Through our efforts, may we merit to see the rebuilding of Tzion and Yerushalayim with kinship and solidarity among our people, Amen. ■



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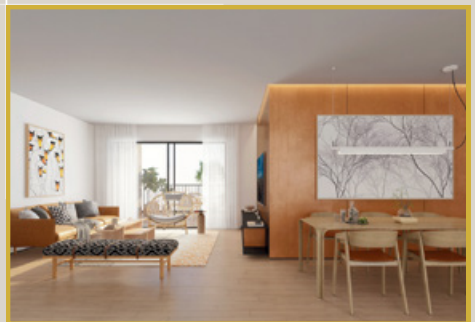


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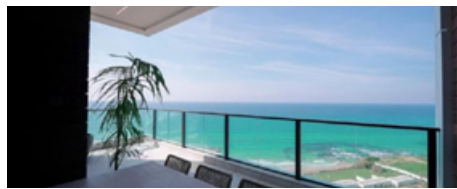


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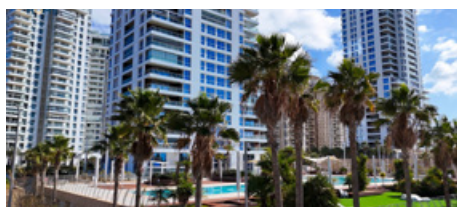
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Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt'l, beloved Rosh Yeshiva of Torah VoDaas and one of the *Gedolei haDor*, was respected for his wisdom, sensitivity and *yashrus*, unwavering commitment to honesty and truth. When he was 90 years old, during his last visit to Eretz Yisrael, relatives were surprised to see the Rav taking off his tefillin at the end of davening and then putting on tefillin of Rabbeinu Tam (today worn by Chasidim and Kabbalists in addition to the 'standard' tefillin of Rashi).

Reb Yaakov's family members knew that it had never been his custom to wear Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, and wondered aloud why the Rosh Yeshiva was doing so now. "You see," he said, "about fifty years ago, Reb Shraga Feivel (Mendlowitz, zy'a, the founder of Torah VoDaas) encouraged me to add the donning of Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, and to strengthen his case, he mentioned that the Chofetz Chaim had also added this practice in his later years. During the conversation, I told Reb Shraga Feivel, 'The Chofetz Chaim started donning Rabbeinu Tam tefillin when he turned 90... when I reach 90 I'll put them on.' That was a long time ago... 50 years. But since I gave my word to Reb Shraga Feivel, on my 90th birthday I started putting them on."

Our double *sedra* begins with the parsha of *Nedarim*, 'Vows', referring to a voluntary

verbal declaration of an intention to make an additional offering to Hashem. This declaration not only expresses a desire to do something 'more' to draw close to Hashem, but creates an obligation to perform that action:

"Ish ki yidor neder, if a person makes a vow to Hashem or makes an oath to prohibit himself something that the Torah permits, *lo yachel devaro*, he may not violate his word, *k'chol hayotzei m'piv, yaaseh* — and whatever has come out of his mouth he must do" (30:3).

Rashi clarifies: through speech, we have the opportunity to draw down *kedushah*, holiness, to illuminate and sanctify... *Lo yachel devaro* — our words shouldn't be *chulin*, mundane... *Lo yechaleil devaro* — we must not profane our words, nor treat our words as being 'unholy'.

Through our speech we are empowered to create new realities. We have the ability *le'esor issar*, to make an object or activity which is permitted into one that is forbidden. We can also elevate a mundane act into a holy act.

From the phrase in our pasuk, *k'chol hayotzei m'piv, yaaseh* — "and whatever has come out of his mouth he must do," Chazal deduced that there is both a *mitzvas aseh*, a 'positive commandment' to fulfill what one has said, and a 'negative commandment' to not desecrate one's word.

In *Yiddishkeit* the power of speech is paramount. The legally binding power of *nedarim* is considered so strong that many have the practice of saying *b'li neder*, 'without a promise', after stating their intention to do something. This is to ensure that if, in the

event of unforeseen circumstances one is not able to fulfill their pledge, one's words did not constitute a *halachic* vow.

This week marks Rosh Chodesh Menachem Av, and the loss of our Temple and exile is at the forefront of our thoughts and practice. The Sefas Emes, Rebbe Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur zy'a points out that the *semichas haparshios*, the juxtaposition of the end of the previous parshah and the beginning of our parshah, is significant. The previous parshah (Pinchas) concludes with a discussion of the *Korbanos*, the sacrificial offerings and libations of the Yamim Tovim, and our parshah begins with the *sugyah*, the topic, of *nedarim*. This is to show that a Jew's speech, when reciting the Torah's verses of the *Korbanos* in prayer has the power to bring *re'ach nicho'ach*, "a pleasing fragrance" to the Creator, even in times when the Temple is destroyed.

Indeed, our words of Torah and tefillah are the highest manifestation of elevated speech: *K'chu imachem devarim, v'shuvu el Hashem...* "take words with you and return to Hashem... *v'neshalma parim sefaseinu...* "and let us render for bulls, the offering of our lips" (Hoshea, 14:3).

May we be *zocheh* to honor our commitments and fulfil all that we pronounce, and to believe in the power of our words and prayers. And may Hashem fulfill His promise that the Beis haMikdash be rebuilt, speedily in our days. ■

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Bishul Akum Conditions- Eaten Raw - Part 2

Our Sages prohibited the consumption of kosher food cooked by non-Jews, a decree known as *Bishul Akum*. In previous articles, we examined the conditions that determine whether this prohibition applies. One of these conditions is whether a food is commonly eaten raw. The rationale behind the prohibition is to discourage excessive social interaction with non-Jews, which could potentially lead to intermarriage.

The halachic ruling is clear: if a food is typically eaten raw, it is not subject to *Bishul Akum*. This is because such food is not considered significant or unique in a way that fosters close social bonding. Since raw-edible foods lack this unique culinary aspect, our Sages did not include them in the prohibition.

As eating habits evolve over time, it is essential to assess whether historical and

culinary developments affect which foods qualify for the *Bishul Akum* prohibition. Although halacha is rooted in tradition, it accounts for changes in societal norms, particularly in how food is prepared and consumed.

HISTORICAL CHANGES

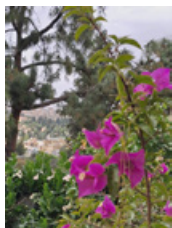
An analysis of rulings by early and later halachic authorities reveals that what is considered "eaten raw" can change depending on the time period and food culture.

For example, the *Shach* (YD 113:2) ruled that mushrooms fall under the *Bishul Akum* prohibition, reflecting a time when raw mushrooms were not commonly eaten. Today, however, raw mushrooms are widely consumed, and therefore, they are no longer subject to the prohibition (*Pitchei Halacha* p.289).

On the stricter side, the *Darchei Teshuva* (113:6) presents the case of certain oils. The *Gemara* (Avodah Zara 38:b) mentions that some oils are exempt from *Bishul Akum* because they are eaten raw. However, many modern oils, such as canola or cottonseed, are not typically consumed raw. As such, the *Darchei Teshuva* holds that these oils do require *Bishul Yisrael* (see *Pesakim U'teshuvot* 113:8 for the accepted lenient opinion

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regarding oil).

Other examples of foods that were once cooked exclusively but are now eaten raw include spinach, broccoli, and cauliflower. In the not-too-distant past, these were generally only eaten cooked, but today they are commonly consumed raw and are thus exempt from *Bishul Akum* (*Otzar Halachot* p.261).

GEOGRAPHICAL & CULINARY DIFFERENCES

A central question among the authorities is: What determines whether a food is considered "eaten raw"? The *Pri Chadash* (113:3) writes about this extensively.

He begins by citing the *Rashbam* (cited in *Hagahot Oshri*, *Avodah Zara* 2:38), who suggests that the rule of *Ne'echal Chai* (eaten raw) might be subjective—dependent on each individual's dietary preferences. According to this view, if someone personally never eats a certain food raw, then that food would be subject to *Bishul Akum* for that individual. The *Bnei Chayai* (113:2), a later authority, rules in accordance with this opinion. The rationale is that since the decree is based on the social intimacy created by shared meals, the halacha should reflect the individual's experience. If a person never eats a particular food raw, consuming it when cooked by a non-Jew could potentially lead to the type of social closeness our Sages sought to prevent.

However, the *Pri Chadash* strongly rejects this position. He brings numerous proofs from the *Gemara* that halachic standards are determined by communal norms, not individual behavior. Therefore, even if an

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individual does not eat a food raw, if the general population does, that food is exempt from *Bishul Akum* for everyone.

Conversely, if a food is not typically eaten raw by the broader public—even if a small minority does consume it raw—it still falls under the prohibition (*Pesakim U'tehuvot* 113:3).

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The discussion becomes more complex when considering differences between countries or communities in eating customs.

The *Pri Chadash* (ibid) appears to maintain that the standard for determining whether a food is eaten raw must be based on global

majority consumption. The *Magen Avraham* (OH 320:1) agrees with this view. However, the *Aruch HaShulchan* (YD 113:12) and *Chochmat Adam* (66:4) take a different stance: if a particular country or large community has a distinct culinary custom, then that local custom defines the halachic ruling for its residents, regardless of global trends.

Later authorities confirm that the prevailing custom is to follow the *Aruch HaShulchan* and *Chochmat Adam* (*Pesakim U'teshuvot*, *ibid*). A practical example of this is found in the Far East, where vegetables such as carrots and peppers are consumed only when cooked. Accordingly, Jewish communities in those regions are required to adhere to *Bishul Yisrael* for such vegetables, even though in Western countries they are eaten raw and therefore exempt.

SUMMARY

- “*Ne’echal Chai*” (eaten raw) is determined by contemporary eating habits. Foods like spinach and broccoli, once only consumed cooked, are now eaten raw and are not subject to *Bishul Akum*.
- Halachic norms follow the majority: Even if an individual has personal preferences, halacha is based on widespread societal behavior.
- Local customs matter: In countries or communities where food consumption differs significantly, those local practices define the halachic requirements for *Bishul Akum*, even if they differ from global norms. ■

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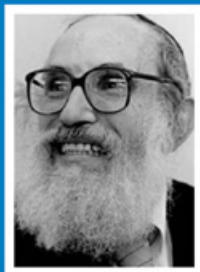
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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
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The second of our two *parshiyot* this week, *Parshat Maasei* recalls for a second time the passing of *Aharon HaKohen*, and tells us that the date of his passing is *Rosh Chodesh Av*.

And Aharon died there, during the fortieth year after Bnai Yisrael went forth from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month on the first of the month.

Why does the *Torah* specify the exact date of *Aharon's* passing, a detail that is not elaborated upon for any of the *Avot* or *Imahot*, or for *Moshe Rabbeinu*? Why is the date of *Aharon's* passing mentioned here in this second account, and not in the earlier account of his passing which we read of a few weeks ago in *Parshat Chukat*? Why is the date of his passing specified now, in the midst of describing the journeys of the Jewish people in the wilderness?

Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Horowitz, the Patiker **Rav zy'a**, suggests that there is an eternal message to be gleaned from the date of *Aharon's* passing being both revealed during the verses which describe the

extended wanderings of the Jewish people in the wilderness, as well as the actual date of *Rosh Chodesh Av*.

Aharon, as we know, represents the ultimate *Ish Shalom*, the great peace-maker and unifier of the Jewish people. The Jewish people, as we know, will experience an extended reality of wandering that will occur following the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*, which of course we commemorate, during the Nine Days, beginning with *Rosh Chodesh Av*. As we begin these days of reflection of the destruction and absence of the *Beit HaMikdash*, we also recall the life and legacy of *Aharon HaKohen*, whose legacy we must work to emulate, which will form the foundation to re-building the *Beit HaMikdash*.

The work of these Nine Days is the work of repairing the world. and building a better, more unified and peaceful tomorrow.

Yehi Ratzon, may we be blessed to be of the *talmidei Aharon HaKohen*- to use these days wisely and bring about that brighter future together. ■



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Reclaiming Truth in the Age of Noise

Parashat Matot and Masei effectively conclude the halachic sections of the Torah. Sefer Devarim primarily reviews halachot already introduced earlier in the Torah. With the halachic framework largely complete, the Torah now turns to explore how individual initiative can operate within—and even expand—that framework. The first section of Matot introduces a fascinating and empowering concept: the human capacity to generate personal obligations beyond the fixed mitzvot of the Torah. This extraordinary power enables us to create new issurim and bind ourselves to voluntary commitments.

Broadly speaking, there are two paths toward generating personal obligations.

A person can take a shevuah, binding himself to perform—or refrain from—specific actions. Alternatively, a person can pronounce a neder, associating otherwise neutral items with the domain of hekdesch. Benefit from these quasi-hekdesch items is prohibited just as one is forbidden to benefit from hekdesch proper.

While introducing the halachot of shevuah and neder, the Torah provides a general instruction:

כָּכֹל הַיֵּצֵא מִפִּי יַעֲשֶׂה — “he shall do according to all that proceeds from his mouth.”

On a purely halachic level, this directive reinforces the legal binding force of verbal declarations such as a neder or a shevuah. However, this phrase gestures toward something broader and more profound beyond the halachic responsibility to keep an oath.

TRUST BEGINS WITH SPEECH

Beyond the legal framework, this pasuk underscores a broader moral expectation: to live truthfully and to honor our word. Even when our speech doesn’t assume halachic formality in the form of a neder or shevuah, there is deep value in remaining true to what we say. In matters of money, violating our word borders upon theft. But even when no financial harm is caused, failing to uphold our commitments is a breach of trust. Standing by our word reflects a larger aspiration: to live a life anchored in truth.

When people can’t be held to their word, trust crumbles—and trust is the foundation of all human connection. Without it,

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relationships unravel and communities fracture. A world without truth is a world of isolation, where language becomes hollow and no one can reach the other.

WHEN SELF-DECEPTION BECOMES HOME

Additionally, dishonesty stifles personal growth and arrests moral development. When we lose reverence for truth, we lose the ability to even recognize it. As Eric Hoffer observed, “We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves.” Once truth is abandoned, we begin scripting false narratives about who we are and what our lives mean.

Dishonesty is contagious. When we deceive others, we begin to dull our inner compass—our ability to distinguish between what is real and what is imagined. And once that boundary between truth and falsehood is crossed, we find ourselves in unfamiliar territory of dishonesty, having lost our passport for return.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

There is a third frontier in the battle for truth: the realm of intellectual honesty. Intellectual honesty is indispensable if we hope to internalize and personalize the ideas and values we encounter—especially Torah. An honest thinker, when studying a text—even a sacred one—must ask: Does this make sense to me? Given my current knowledge and understanding, does this Rashi ring true? Does this pasuk, this Tosafot, align with my logic?

For the skeptic, this question is often the final stage—if it doesn’t make sense, it is discarded. But for the believer, who reads with reverence and submits his intuition to the authority of Torah, this is only the first step in the analytic journey.

When an idea doesn’t align with our



current understanding, the next question is how to rethink an idea to uncover its inner truth? How can I engage the wisdoms of those wiser and more learned than me who also grappled with these questions? And how do I recalibrate my assumptions when faced with the dissonance between my present outlook and this new layer of Torah insight?

Without the ongoing effort to reconcile our understanding with a Torah text or idea beyond our current grasp, Torah wisdom remains external—hovering above us rather than becoming part of us. A person may accumulate vast Torah knowledge, yet that knowledge can remain unanchored, never settling into the deeper recesses of the heart or fusing with the core of our identity.

To deeply root Torah within our being, we must *personalize* it. And to personalize Torah, it must make sense to *me*. That does not mean reducing Torah to our instincts or intuitions, but rather lifting our understanding until it meets the Torah’s light. A religious person doesn’t suspend intellectual honesty but sees it as the gateway to deeper inquiry and truer understanding.

TRUTH SET ASIDE

Often communities prioritize other values above intellectual honesty, sometimes at a

heavy cost. Every culture filters the range of ideas it exposes itself to. Some degree of intellectual insulation, with limited exposure to the full sweep of ideas, is a value that every religious culture aspires to.

However, some communities actively omit truth or set facts aside to better craft one homogeneous and “seamless” ideological narrative. While revisionism and selective memory may serve certain ideological or communal aims in the short term, we must ask whether the price—the erosion of intellectual honesty—is too steep. Does sacrificing “truth” for a more “streamlined” narrative ultimately undermine our ability to internalize and personalize Torah in a deep and enduring way? When we discourage intellectual honesty, do we cause more harm than good?

CULTURAL FOG

There is yet another battlefield on which truth must be defended—the broader cultural arena. Societies, like individuals, can drift from truth, lured by powerful myths and cultural haze. Cultural forces often cloud collective judgment, blurring the lines between truth and falsehood until entire societies lose their moral compass.

The Gemara in Sotah (42a) speaks of a *kat shel shakranim*—a faction of liars—who cannot stand in the presence of the Shechinah. This haunting image suggests that dishonesty is not merely a personal failing but can become a social affliction. The battle for intellectual honesty is not only personal or religious—it is civilizational.

THE RISE OF INDIVIDUALISM AND THE COLLAPSE OF CERTAINTY

The Gemara in Sotah (49b) teaches that in the era preceding the arrival of Mashiach:

“חוצפה יסג’... ואמת תהא נעדרת” — insolence will increase, and truth will disappear.

Evidently, the erosion of truth and the collapse of moral standards is the direct result of rising *chutzpah*. In this context *chutzpah* means more than irreverence. It refers to the unraveling of classic hierarchy and the collapse of authority.

In a structured, hierarchical society, values are clear and absolute, often embodied by those at the top—kings, sages, or kohanim—who should serve as moral exemplars. Ideally, a king rules with integrity, and a kohen lives a life of sanctity. Their behavior models the values of the society, which are then absorbed and imitated by the broader public.

But when hierarchy is dismantled and every voice carries equal weight, values become subjective and truth becomes unstable. The modern era has dismantled longstanding hierarchies—social, political, and religious. In their place, it has elevated the individual and championed the importance of personal expression. This cultural shift has birthed political freedom, economic mobility, and a world in which human dignity is protected.

Yet alongside these gains, something precious has been lost. The clear lines between truth and falsehood have blurred. No longer is truth anchored in an objective or absolute standard; it has become personal and fluid. Each person is entitled to *their own* truth, and in such a world, truth no longer transcends—it fragments. It no longer exists on a stable plain but is contextual, shifting from one perspective to another.

The internet has only accelerated this

collapse. A flood of content—fueled by algorithms, bots, and unfiltered voices—has overwhelmed our ability to discern what is real. The concept of truth has been destabilized.

As Yeshayahu (59:15) laments:

“אמת נעדרת, וסר מרע משתולל”—truth is gone, and one who turns from evil is deemed mad.

When truth disappears, moral clarity collapses. Values lose their foundation. Moral decisions can only be made against a backdrop of objective standards. Without truth, even goodness becomes incoherent. And once *emet* vanishes, righteousness no longer makes sense—leaving the one who resists evil to be mocked, while confusion reigns.

We are living, quite literally, through the prophecy foretold in the Gemara in Sotah—the collapse of hierarchy has eroded our grasp of truth. The rise of *chutzpah* or the replacement of social codes with rampant individualism has led to the disappearance of *emet*.

The redemption of our people—and of all humanity—must restore truth, and that restoration cannot be achieved by human effort alone. As much as we strive for truth—and we must—it will always remain just beyond our reach, both individually and collectively. The world cannot fully reclaim truth without divine intervention.

We long for *Mashiach* not merely for national purposes—to complete the resettlement of our land or to rebuild the Mikdash. We yearn for *Malchut Hashem*, so that society may once again be illuminated by the brilliance of divine truth.

As Dovid Hamelech asks:

מי יגור באוהלך, מי ישכון בהר קדשך? הולך

תמים ופועל צדק ודובר אמת בלבבו –

Who may dwell in Your tent? Who may abide on Your holy mountain? One who walks with integrity, does what is right, and speaks the truth from his heart.

Truth is not just a moral virtue—it is the language of Hashem. And only through its restoration can the world be healed. We still await the day when *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* redeems a world lost in a house of mirrors—where illusion parades as reality and falsehood masquerades as wisdom. We await the moment when His light will shatter the illusions, and truth will no longer be concealed but will emerge clear and undistorted. ■



Rabbi Taragin's newest sefer entitled **"To be Holy but Human: Reflections upon my Rebbe, Rav Yehuda Amital (Kodesh)"** is now available at: mtaraginbooks.com and in bookstores

CORRECTION: Last week's Torah Tidbits article (Pinchas), entitled "A Land in Which Tradition Breathes and Changes Flow" incorrectly stated that according to one position in Chazal, Tzelaphchad was the blasphemer of Parshat Emor. The actual alternative position in Chazal is that he was among the Ma'apilim discussed at the end of parshat Shelach.

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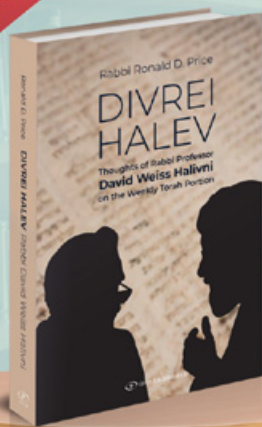
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HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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Coming to Our Senses

JEREMIAH 2:4-28, 3:4, 4:1-2

This Shabbat, we read the haunting words of the prophet Yirmiyahu in the haftorah known as *Shimu Dvar Hashem*. The Gaon of Vilna, zt”l, offers a striking explanation as to why this haftorah was chosen for this moment of national mourning. He teaches that the Jewish people sinned in three essential areas: **speech**, **sight**, and **hearing**—the very senses through which we encounter and connect to spirituality.

These faculties—so fundamental to our spiritual lives—were given to us as tools to perceive Hashem in His world:

- **Speech**, modeled after Hashem’s own creative speech, is meant to build, bless, and communicate truth.

- **Hearing** allows us to receive Torah, to absorb wisdom, and to cultivate humility.
- **Sight** enables us to witness the wonders of creation and recognize Divine presence around us.

But when these faculties are corrupted—when **speech is used for lashon hara**, when **eyes are turned away from suffering**, when **ears are closed to the voice of Hashem or the cries of others**—the damage is profound.

This is why, the Gaon explains, the first haftorah we read begins with “**Divrei Yirmiyahu Hashem**”—the word of Yirmiyahu, alluding to speech. It continues with “**Shimu Dvar Hashem**”—listen, referring to hearing. The third haftorah begins with “**Chazon Yeshayahu**”, the vision of Yeshayahu, referring to sight. Each haftorah in the Three Weeks underscores one of these critical senses, showing us that the path to destruction was paved by their misuse—and that the path to redemption begins with reclaiming them.

As we draw closer to Tisha B’Av, the haftorah of *Dvar Hashem* invites us to do more than mourn the past. It calls us to examine how we use our **senses**—not just to avoid sin, but to reconnect with our purpose. It asks us to re-tune our ears to Torah, to sharpen our eyes to see meaning and beauty, and to refine our speech until it resembles the voice of Hashem—creative, compassionate, and true.

The road back to the Mikdash begins here—with the eyes to see clearly, the ears to truly hear, and the courage to speak words of truth and peace. ■



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Navigating Life's Journeys

Parashat Masei summarizes the Jewish nation's journey from Egypt to the border of the Land of Israel, listing the places that the Jewish people camped throughout its forty years of wandering in the desert. The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of *Chassidut*, once said: "All of these forty-two journeys happen to every person from the day he is born until he returns to his world, because from the day of birth and his emergence from his mother's womb it is a kind of exodus from Egypt, from which he journeys from place to place until arriving at the supernal land of the living."¹ The forty-two stops along the Israelites' way represent the highs and

lows, setbacks and successes, disappointment and delight, that each of us encounters on the long road of life.

This psychological reading is rooted in an earlier approach best exemplified by Rab-



Piaseczno Rebbe zt"l

beinu Bachya in his multi-layered Torah commentary. On the *peshat* (literal-contextual) level, the list of pit stops and pitfalls is intended to corroborate the earlier account of the trek through the wilderness, preempting future skeptics and scoffers. On the *derash* (homiletical) level, the list shows God's abiding love for His people. Rabbeinu Bachya

cited a midrashic parable of a king who takes his ailing son far away to obtain medical treatment, and who fondly recalls episodes that took place at various junctures on their shared journey. On yet another plane, this itinerary provides the mile markers for the future, ultimate redemption, whose stages will parallel the Exodus from Egypt.²

Part of what makes the Chassidic approach captivating is its psychological and spiritual insights that have practical application. The teachings of the *Sefat Emet* offer us three such insights:

1. *Netivot Shalom, Bemidbar*, 176, quoting *Degel Machaneh Efrayim*.

2. Rabbeinu Bachya on Numbers 33:1.

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(1) One way of looking at a journey is as movement towards a destination. The *Sefat Emet* reminds us that it is by definition also movement away from a point of origin. The Jewish people were putting more and more distance between themselves and Egypt. In a sense, the significance of the various waypoints is that they mark the continuation of the Jewish people's progress and egress from Egypt. The key word here is *motza'ehem* (Numbers 33:2), a difficult word that can be translated as "their goings-out." As we journey through life, we must constantly be going out from Egypt like the Children of Israel. We must gravitate towards what is holy and good and eschew what is profane and evil.

שֵׁשׁ מְקוֹמוֹת שָׁאִין לָהֶם קִיּוֹם, רַק עַל יְדֵי שְׁמִתְרִחָק הָאָדָם מֵהֶם, כָּכָל עֲנִיֵי עוֹלָם הָזֶה, שֶׁבִּטּוֹלָם זֶה קִיּוֹמָם. וְנִקְרָא 'מִסְעוֹת', שֶׁהַמִּסָּע מְשֻׁם הוּא הַמַּעֲלָה.

"There are places that only exist by distancing oneself from them, as with all worldly affairs, for they exist only negatively via rejection. They are called *masa'ot* (journeys), for the journey (*masa*) from there is upwards."

(2) The log of travels with its dozens of stops—some of greatly unequal duration—reflect, much as the Baal Shem Tov said, the shifting fortunes of life. The constant refrain of "they traveled and they camped" represents the fits and starts of life. Sometimes, the route can be circuitous and seem as if it is leading to a dead end or a place of great peril, but we must push on.

וְנִכְתְּבוּ כָּל הַמִּסְעוֹת לְהוֹדִיעַ לָעָם ה' כִּי כָּל עוֹבֵד ה' לֹא יָפֵל לְבוֹ עָלָיו מִכָּל הַנְּפִילוֹת שֵׁשׁ לוֹ, כִּי כָּךְ הוּא הַמַּדָּה לְהִיּוֹת עוֹלָה וְיוֹרֵד.

"All of the journeys are written to teach

God's people that no servant of God should be discouraged from all of his failures, because that is the way it is, to rise and fall.

(3) The opening Midrash on *Parashat Masei* says that all the waystations were recorded so that the Jewish people know that it was only by miracle that they kept their forward momentum. In the desert, the Jews never had to flee from their enemies, as is the natural course of a weak nation traveling with women, children, and all their possessions.³ In the same way, the rebbe says, we should look at the path of our life and see God's "footsteps" accompanying ours, and draw strength knowing that the same is true going forward."⁴

וּבְכָל עֵת שֶׁנִּסְגַּר הַדֶּרֶךְ בְּפָנֵי אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל הַכֹּל הוּא רַק כְּדֵי שֶׁיִּסְתַּכֵּל הָאָדָם כָּלְפֵי מַעֲלָה לְשַׁעֲבֹד אֶת הַלֵּב לְאִבּוֹ שֶׁבְּשִׁמְסֵם.

"Whenever a Jew feels as if the path is blocked, it is only so that he look up and commit his heart to his Father in Heaven."

This seems well and good for the regular

3. *Numbers Rabbah*, 23:1.

4. Ibid., Masei 5661, s.v. במדרש גדולי עולם. The rebbe further wrote that this is why we read this *parashah* during *Bein ha-Metzarim*, the three weeks leading up to Tisha be-Av. During these trying times, when we reflect on the terrible detour our entire nation has taken from its glorious destiny, we need to remember how God saved us when there was no way out.

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ups and downs of life, but what of life journeys that include forced turnoffs onto paths of immense suffering that threaten to loosen our grip on the steering wheel of faith?

The Piasetzner Rebbe, Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, was distinctly qualified to answer this question. As rebbe of the Warsaw Ghetto, every Shabbat he shared words of Torah that helped his fellow Jews cope with life under the impossible conditions of the ghetto that tested even the most faithful.

Commentators have long noticed the reversal of terms within a single verse: “Moshe wrote the goings-out (מוֹצְאֵיהֶם) of their journeys by the mouth of the Lord, and these are the journeys of their goings-out (מִסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצְאֵיהֶם)” (Numbers 33:2). The rebbe explained that Moshe was writing after the fact, when he could reflect and record how the arduous treks helped to bring forth (לְהוֹצִיא) the kingdom of Heaven, that is, the divinely intended purpose of the routes taken. In the middle of the wandering, however, the meaning of the travels and travails was inscrutable, so the order is reversed. The hardship of the road is immediate; the expression of God’s plan lies over the horizon of present comprehension.

The rebbe wrote the same about the

suffering in his day. He unshakably believed that even within the darkness a great light was gradually being revealed, even if it could not be seen yet. He compared it to the excruciating pain of a woman in labor, whose pain becomes more intense as the final moment of birth and release approaches. We can only imagine the rebbe, surrounded by his Chassidim in the horrifying conditions of the ghetto, instilling and cultivating hope: “Moshe will lead us once again in the days of Mashiach and teach us why all this torment and pain was necessary.”

The Piasetzner ended by saying that in the messianic era especially, there will be no more anguish or “journeys” that are not followed by the immediate and evident revelation as the workings of God’s designs. He then quoted the four words of the kaddish—*yitgadal ve-yitkadash shemeh rabbah*—which both gave voice to the ongoing destruction and loss, and declared his faith in God’s providential plan.⁵

We can now understand why Chassidic rebbes throughout the generations have referred to the passage of the forty-two journeys in *Masei* as one of the Torah’s loftiest.⁶ As we travel through the year and make our weekly stop at *Masei*, we are reminded to make the most of our own life’s journey and turn even the hardships into a revelation of God’s light. ■

5. *Esh Kodesh*, 5701, *Masei*, 107–108.

6. *Netivot Shalom*, *Bemidbar*, 176.



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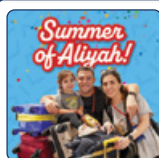
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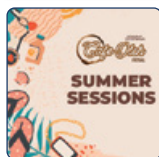
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Cutting Off Threads

Question: On Shabbat, I noticed on my suit a thread that needed to be cut off, which tends to bother me. Was it permitted to cut it on Shabbat?

Answer: The first candidate for prohibition is the *melacha* of *koreiah* (tearing/cutting material). The *mishna* (Shabbat 73a) describes the case as being done to subsequently sew up, but the Rambam (Shabbat 10:10) indicates that it applies whenever the tearing has a positive outcome (see Be'ur Halacha to 340:14).

Because it is flimsy, it is possible that *koreiah* does not apply to the thread itself (see Rav SZ Auerbach, cited in Shemirat Shabbat K'hilchata (=SSK) 35:(48), regarding the fibers that rip when one pulls off a piece of cotton – admittedly, thread is stronger). Also, the thread has no independent significance and will never be used again.

On the other hand, one is severing part of the **garment**, which is thereby improved. Location and context can make a difference. If one cuts off strings at the edges, it may violate the *melacha* of *mechatech* (Be'ur Halacha to 340:13 in the name of the Yerushalmi – a less than authoritative source applies that prohibition

to our case). SSK (15:66) forbids removing a string of warp or woof from a woven fabric as *potzeia* (the opposite of weaving). Orchot Shabbat (11:(26), and citing communication with Rav N. Karelitz) makes a distinction for leniency in our case. The string protruding from a garment is not considered a part of the fabric, and so cutting it, even close to the garment, relates only to the thread. This is different from the leftover stitching from a button that fell or pieces of wool that protrude from the fabric, where they are more significantly interconnected and many forbid removing them (see SSK 15:68; Orchot Shabbat 11:18). The case for leniency is bolstered by the opinion (Be'ur Halacha *ibid.*) that *koreiah* is when both sides of the rip are used afterwards, and **perhaps** it is not even Rabbinic *koreiah* when this is not so (Chut Shani, Shabbat I, p. 142).

Sometimes it is permitted to cut string around a utensil even when the cutting facilitates using the utensil (Shulchan Aruch, OC 314:8). However, that is a special leniency that applies to destroying an impediment that is preventing one to get to food (see Chazon Ish, OC 51:13). One cannot learn from there to cut a string in order to beautify the thing to which it is attached.

Another potential problem is *makeh b'patis* (=mbp), a Torah-level prohibition of doing a final stage of preparing a utensil, or the related Rabbinic prohibition of *tikkun mana*. In other words, a suit with uncut threads from its sewing is a not fully ready-to-wear suit. The *gemara* (Shabbat 48a) forbids on the

Torah-level opening the knots that are made to the collar area of a cloak, and Rashi (ad loc.) explains that this is *mbp*. The Shulchan Aruch (OC 302:2) forbids purposely removing the pills that formed on clothing as *mbp*. The more serious the imperfection, the more likely it is that it might be considered *mbp/tikkun mana*. Since in the garment industry, one of the final things that was classically done before sending the suit to market is “thread trimming,” it is quite plausible that the cutting would be *mbp*, especially regarding a new suit where the thread always stuck out. On the other hand, while *poskim* debate whether and when one may remove a label from a suit (SSK 15:79; Orchot Shabbat 11:13), they do not consider it *mbp*, even though it is something one always does before wearing it. There are differences with this case (see *ibid.* (20)), but applications of *mbp* are among halachic matters that are very difficult to predict.

To be honest, your case has happened to me many times, and I have always thought (I believe like most *shomrei Shabbat*), that it was forbidden to cut the hanging threads. To my

surprise, the only serious discussion I found is in Orchot Shabbat (11:(26)), which is not a lenient *sefer*, and he believes it is permitted to cut them. I have read and heard “passing” opinions of respected *rabbanim* who forbid it. So, I do not plan to be lenient for myself, but I would not rule clearly that it is forbidden. ■

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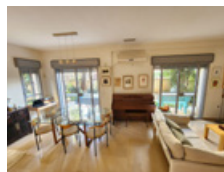
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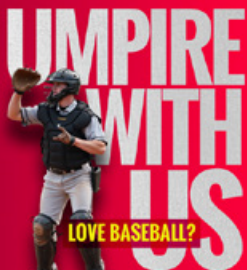
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RABBI SHIMSHON HAKOHEN NADEL

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A Practical Guide to the Nine Days

The days prior to Tisha B'Av are days of mourning, sadness, and reflection, both national and personal. The Mishnah (*Ta'anit* 4:6) instructs: "When [the month of] Av enters, we reduce our joy." As we approach Tisha B'Av, our national day of mourning - the day on which we mourn the destruction of our Holy Temple and Jerusalem, along with national tragedies and calamities throughout Jewish history - we begin to observe a number of restrictions and customs of mourning. Refraining from some of life's simple pleasures reminds us that our lives are incomplete without our Holy Temple standing. The Talmud (*Ta'anit* 30b) relates, "All who mourn for Jerusalem will merit to see her in her joy." Below is a practical guide to the laws and customs of the Nine Days, to

help make them easier and more meaningful.

MEAT AND WINE

During the Nine Days, Ashkenazim abstain from eating meat (including poultry) and drinking wine (including grape juice, according to many authorities), with the exception of Shabbat or at a Se'udat Mitzvah, like a Brit, Pidyon HaBen, or Siyum, where meat and wine may be enjoyed. Included in the prohibition are dishes cooked with meat which have absorbed the flavor of the meat.

Havdallah may be made on wine, and the custom among many Ashkenazim is to give some of the wine to a child who does not know how to properly mourn for Jerusalem. If no child is available, one may drink the wine himself. Alternatively, one may use grape juice or a popular beverage, ideally one which contains alcohol like beer, but beverages like coffee, tea and soft drinks are also acceptable.

Sfardim do not eat meat beginning from the day after Rosh Chodesh Av, and may drink wine at Havdallah.

BATHING

Bathing for pleasure and swimming are prohibited during the Nine Days. It is permitted to bathe for hygiene by showering in cooler water than normal, and for a shorter duration than usual.

Sfardim may bathe until 'Shavua She'chal Bo Tisha B'Av - the week in which Tisha B'Av falls.' As this year Tisha B'Av occurs on a Sunday, there is no *Shavua She'chal Bo*, Sfardim may bathe without restriction up until Shabbat Chazon.



LAUNDERING CLOTHES

Ashkenazim abstain from laundering clothes and wearing freshly laundered clothing during the Nine Days. Included in the prohibition are linens, towels, and tablecloths. Many authorities permit wearing clean undergarments and socks, since they are changed frequently. Stains on clothing may be removed to avoid embarrassment.

One may prepare by briefly pre-wearing his clothes ahead of the Nine Days. One who did not do so may place them on the floor prior to wearing, so they are no longer considered freshly laundered.

One who has no clean clothes to wear may wash his clothes. In addition, many authorities permit laundering the clothing of small children, as they constantly soil their clothes and change them frequently.

On Shabbat, including Shabbat Chazon, it is permitted to wear freshly laundered, clean Shabbat clothing. A father, mohel, and Sandek may wear freshly laundered dress clothes at a Brit.

Sfardim may launder clothing and linens and wear freshly laundered garments during the Nine Days, up until '*Shavua She'chal Bo Tisha B'Av* - the week in which Tisha B'Av falls.' As this year Tisha B'Av occurs on a Sunday, there is no *Shavua She'chal Bo*, and Sefaradim may wear freshly laundered clothing up until Tisha B'Av.

HAIRCUTS AND SHAVING

Ashkenazim abstain from haircuts and shaving the entire Three Weeks, while some authorities permit shaving before Shabbat. One who shaves during the Three Weeks for professional or personal reasons should abstain during the Nine Days. Many authorities permit one to cut his nails, especially in

honor of Shabbat.

A father, mohel, and Sandek may cut their hair and shave before a Brit.

Sfardim may cut their hair and shave up until '*Shavua She'chal Bo Tisha B'Av* - the week in which Tisha B'Av falls.' As this year Tisha B'Av occurs on a Sunday, there is no *Shavua She'chal Bo*, and Sefaradim may cut their hair and shave until Shabbat Chazon, but many authorities rule that it is improper for Sefaradim to enter Tisha B'Av looking freshly shaven.

MUSIC AND CELEBRATIONS

The common custom is to refrain from listening to music and dancing during the Three Weeks. Celebrations and festive gatherings should not be held during the Nine Days. It is permitted to get engaged during the Nine Days, but engagement parties should not be held until after Tisha B'Av.

SHEHECHIYANU, NEW CLOTHING, AND NEW PURCHASES

The blessing of Shehechyanu is not recited during the Three Weeks, with the exception of a Brit or Pidyon HaBen.

During the Nine Days we abstain from purchasing new clothing or making any purchases that cause one joy, such as jewelry. Essential purchases may be made, including items that would impose a financial loss if not made during the Nine Days.

Religious articles or items necessary for the performance of Mitzvot, such as Tefillin, Sefarim, etc., may be purchased, including items needed for a wedding following Tisha B'Av.

Newly purchased garments may not be worn, and new clothing should not be made, but repairs may be made to torn clothing.

BUILDING, REPAIRS, AND PLANTING

Construction, repairs, and home improvements should not be made during the Nine

Day unless such repairs are urgent and cannot wait, or one won't be able to make such repairs after Tisha B'Av. Similarly, one should not plant trees or plants during the Nine Days.

Construction and repairs for the sake of a mitzvah, such repairs to a synagogue for example, are permitted.

TRIPS AND VACATIONS

One should abstain from making unnecessary trips or taking vacations during the Nine Days. Business trips, or trips necessary for one's livelihood, are permitted.

Next week we will explore the laws and customs of Shabbat Chazon and Tisha B'Av. ■

Rabbi Shimshon HaKohen Nadel lives and teaches in Jerusalem, where he serves as mara d'atra of Har Nof's Kehilat Zichron Yosef, rosh kollel of the Sinai Kollel and Kollel Boker at Hovevei Zion.

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בס"ד

Willing Our Way to Wisdom

In Sefer Mishlei, Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men, extols the virtues of wisdom. HaRav Chaim Shmulevitz zt"l points out that Shlomo gained his wisdom as a reward for having prized its value above all else. When Hashem appeared to him in a dream and offered to grant him any request, Shlomo expressed his desire for wisdom rather than long life, wealth or victory over his enemies. Because he recognized the over-riding value of wisdom, Hashem granted his request. Who better than Shlomo HaMelech to help us grow in our own appreciation of the wisdom of Torah?

As we commemorate the approaching anniversary of the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash during these three weeks between the Seventeenth of Tammuz and Tisha B'Av, it behooves us to contemplate the causes of the devastation and improve our own Avodah in those areas.

The Talmud (Bava Metzia 85b) records a discussion in which Hazal sought an answer to Yirmiyahu's question: "על מה אבדה ארץ" - For what reason was the land lost?" Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Because

when they studied, they didn't make a blessing on the Torah first. The entire Land of Israel was destroyed and her people led into exile for not reciting Birchot HaTorah, the blessing over the study of Torah, before opening a sefer and diving in! The study of Torah itself was not abandoned - in fact, it proliferated during the Second Temple era. Rashi explains that through the failure to recite Birchot HaTorah, the people revealed that the study of Torah was not a precious gift that they valued. They were going through the motions of learning Torah intellectually, but remained emotionally disconnected from its messages. Their failure to appreciate the wisdom of the Torah as the source of eternal life led to death and destruction.

The Sfat Emet in Parashat Terumah teaches that the Torah was given to the people of Israel in accordance with their level of preparedness to receive it. In every generation, our ability to comprehend and apply the teachings of the Torah is directly linked to our will to do so. In Parashat Vayeitzei, the Sfat Emet explores the power of man's will to draw closer to Hashem. When Yaakov Avinu stopped at dusk to rest on his way to Haran, having run from Eisav and on his way to the home of his uncle Lavan, the pasuk states "ויפגע במקום וילן שם" - he encountered the place and rested there." Rashi, citing Hazal, explains the verse homiletically, to mean that in that place Yaakov encountered Hashem through prayer, and established Tefillat 'Arvit, the Evening Prayer.

The Sfat Emet notes that in the darkness of night, both literal and figurative, it is difficult to apprehend the light. In our darkest moments, light can only be revealed through man's determined effort to seek Hashem's illumination. When we exert ourselves in pursuit of spiritual growth through the study of Torah our efforts will be rewarded beyond measure. "הכל תלוי ברצון" - everything depends on will."

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch on Mishlei elaborates on the connection between the will to learn and the success thereby engendered. At the time of Creation, Hashem willed the world into being. By studying the Torah and acting in keeping with its teachings, we align ourselves with the will of the Creator. This infuses our soul with energy and resolution and leads to the goodwill of G-d and man.

Rav Soloveitchik zt"l taught that the words of Birchot HaTorah reflect these ideas. We bless Hashem Who sanctified us with the mitzvah בדברי תורה - לעסוק - not merely to learn the teachings of the Torah, but to engage with them meaningfully. We ask Hashem to make the words of Torah sweet in our mouths - we want not just to speak words of Torah, but to enjoy their very taste, and to transmit that delight in Torah to the following generations.

May our study of Torah be preceded by the heartfelt recitation of Birchot HaTorah, in which we express our profound sense of privilege in having been chosen to receive, study and act upon the teachings of the Torah. May our appreciation be reflected in the will to deepen our wisdom as advocated by Shlomo HaMelech in Sefer Mishlei, and may our increased desire lead to the restoration of

our close personal and national relationship with Hashem, evidenced by the building of the Beit HaMikdash במהרה בימינו. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program



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Yoni thanks Hashem for having the opportunity of having Tziporah in his life, to learn of her caring, patience and happiness, to overcome her challenges. May Tziporah's Neshama be a light onto the world, in a time of darkness, and may her Neshama shine to Gan Eden. Yoni misses Tziporah with tears in his eyes, as Hashem gave him a gift, a crown jewel, now he returns her to Hashem.

With thanks and Toda. Love, Yoni

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MRS. ATARA STARR

JEWISH EDUCATOR
TEACHER AT MIDRESHET HAROVA AND THE OU ATID PROGRAM

GUEST DVAR TORAH

To Live Torah: An Insight into Galut and Geulah

As we find ourselves deeply entrenched in the *avodah* and *aveilut* of the Three Weeks, the words of a once longing and heartbroken prophet, linger in my mind:

על מה אבדה הארץ נצתה כמדבר מבלי עבר?¹

“Why has the land been destroyed, laid waste like a wilderness with no passerby? “

This outcry of Yirmiyahu HaNavi, which appears in the haftarah of Tish’a B’av itself, is called out amidst a lament of what has become of society and a deep sense of mourning for the churban that is speedily and surely on its way. Yirmiyahu himself presents us with an answer straight from Hashem:

ויאמר ה' על עזבם את תורת אשר נתתי לפניכם
ולא שמעו בקולי ולא הלכו בה.²

God replied: Because they forsook the Teaching I had set before them and have not hearkened to My voice, nor walked by it.

An important discussion relating to this *pasuk* appears in the Gemara Nedarim³ in which our *chachamim* try to understand the repetition in Hashem’s answer. What is the difference between not listening to Hashem’s voice and not walking in the way of Torah? Rav Yehuda says in the name of Rav that

the expression “nor walked by it” refers specifically to: “שאין מברכין בתורה תחילה”, they did not first recite a blessing on the Torah!

This is a true wonder! We are talking about a generation of Jews who have been engaging in the three cardinal sins along with other abominations and societal corruption! How can we understand the gravity of the failure to recite a blessing over the Torah – a failure which, according to Rav, led to the churban itself?

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch⁴ offers a powerful insight into the significance of ברכת התורה. The fact that they said no Bracha before learning Torah means that they approached Torah like any other subject worth learning. “The Torah was to them merely one of their possessions. It was merely one of the things with which they occupied themselves. It was only another one of the tasks which they must accomplish in life.” When we make a bracha, according to Rav Hirsch, it places us before Hashem with a commitment to bring blessing to Him, fulfill His will and further His Kingdom. It removes self service and gives us the right mindset that the action following the bracha will be meaningful in our lives and for Hashem’s sake. The failure to recite the bracha can then be understood as a failure

1. ירמיהו ט"ז.

2. ירמיהו ט"ז.

3. נדרים פא עמוד א.

4. Collected Writings V. I, Tammuz III

to recognize that Torah is not just meant to be learned, it is meant to be lived. Torah is a pathway to the fulfillment of Divine Will, not a science to be studied.

While every bracha we make should ground us in our understanding that the physical actions we take here on this earth contain a spiritual element, the words of ברכת התורה in particular should serve as a constant reminder that Torah study must impact our hearts deeply as *Yidden*.

Rebbe Nosson of Breslov⁵ explains that the fault of *Am Yisrael* in the generation preceding churban lay in the lack of emunah, belief, in the words אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים וכו', that we are the chosen nation, different from all other nations. *Am Yisrael* was aware that they had sinned and strayed from God, and therefore assumed that He would not see them as the chosen people any longer and so, they “gave in” to their (already mistaken) belief that they were just like the nations.

According to Rebbe Nosson, there was a general lack of *emunah* that our relationship with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* could withstand our mistakes and treachery. Had they continued to bless the Torah and allow themselves to **believe** the words they were saying: that we were chosen by Hashem many

5. ליקוטי הלכות ברכות השחר ה:ז

generations ago, the *pintele yid*, the Divine spark that exists within us does **not** cease to exist however much we stray, then we would have been able to do Teshuva.

Instead, what we find is a generation that did not find its way back. The Torah became a source of information but not a wellspring of life and tragically the generation preceding churban engaged in sins we never want to dream of. Our task in this time is to right their wrongs, to pray fervently to Hashem to understand the merit and responsibility of being His chosen nation and to allow the words of Torah to shape us in every way so that our actions are favorable in His eyes.

A story is told that a student came to the Kotzker Rebbe and said “I finished learning all of Shas!” and the Rebbe responded: “And what did Shas teach you?”. Torah is most valuable when we let it seep from our minds into our hearts. When we *live* Torah we have really learned Torah. May we all be *zoche!* ■

Atara Starr is a passionate Jewish educator currently working in Midreshet HaRova. Atara teaches Tanach, Topics in Chassidut and Jewish Philosophy. One of the highlights of her time in HaRova is joining the girls for their annual trip to Poland where her passion for Chassidut and Jewish History come alive. Atara is originally from New York where she studied Bible and Jewish History in Stern and earned her Masters degree in Azrieli in Jewish Education. She lives in Mitzpeh Yericho with her husband and four children.

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Identifying Red Flags

Alex asks:

My candidate recently came to me with this deep concern. "How can I recognize red flags in a relationship or in the person I'm dating? I want to stay open, but also protect my heart and make wise choices."

Aleeza answers:

Thank you for bringing up such an important question.

Sometimes, when we want something to work especially when we see good qualities in the other person we might ignore or minimize signs that something is off. But Hashem gave us intuition for a reason. That quiet inner voice? It's not paranoia. It's protection.

And when something doesn't sit right, it's worth paying attention.

A red flag doesn't always look dramatic. Sometimes it's subtle. She doesn't feel safe being herself. She feels small after conversations. She's constantly second-guessing what's okay to say. Or maybe the relationship feels like it's all on her terms or never on her terms.

Torah teaches us that shalom, peace, is one of the highest values in building a bayit ne'eman. That doesn't mean perfection. But it does mean a sense of emotional safety. A feeling that her soul can rest here with him.

Here are some helpful questions she can ask herself:

- Do I feel emotionally safe with this person?
- Can I express myself without fear of being shut down, criticized, or ignored?
- Do I walk away from conversations feeling more secure or more anxious?
- When I raise concerns, does this person respond with care and take me seriously?

And she shouldn't ignore her body either. A knot in the stomach, a sense of dread, or even just constant tension those can be signals, too.

Now, there's a difference between red flags and human imperfections. We're not looking for someone who never messes up. We're looking for someone who is growing. Who is self-aware. Who takes responsibility when needed.

So if something feels off, she can slow down. Ask more questions. Speak with someone she trusts.



And remember: if something isn't right, that's not a failure. That's a gift. There's a blessing in a no.

Blessings, Aleeza ■

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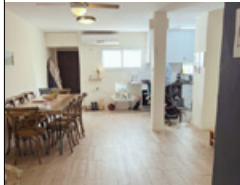
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MENASHE'S ROLE IN BUILDING UNITY

In this week's parshiyot, we encounter the famous request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to settle just outside of Eretz Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu eventually agrees and grants the land to Reuven, Gad, and *chatzi* Menashe. Wait a minute—when did the tribe of Menashe get involved?

Some suggest that Moshe Rabbeinu, in an effort to ensure there would never be a disconnect or lack of unity between the tribes living inside Eretz Yisrael and those outside, chose to split a single tribe. A tribe would never forget its other half, so effectively, the two groups living on opposite sides of the Yarden could never fully forget each other.

But why Shevet Menashe specifically? Why not any other tribe?

Shevet Menashe had a unique and deep connection to Eretz Yisrael. Moshe was confident they would not lose that connection even while living outside the Land—a risk he may not have been willing to take with other tribes. We see this connection most prominently in the episode of the daughters of Tzelafchad, who was from Shevet Menashe. They argued that their family should not lose their father's portion in the Land. Later, the elders of

Menashe insisted that their tribe should retain that land, and that the daughters should marry within the tribe to prevent the land from transferring to another shevet.

Additionally, Yosef HaTzadik—Menashe's father—made his brothers swear to bury him in Eretz Yisrael. The Gemara in *Bava Batra* even brings an opinion that Tzelafchad died as one of the *ma'apilim*—those who attempted to enter Eretz Yisrael after Hashem decreed that their generation would die in the desert.

The half of Shevet Menashe that remained outside the Land should never lose their connection to it, and should always yearn to return. And those fortunate enough to live in Eretz Yisrael should carry that same deep appreciation and connection to our homeland.



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Our parsha begins by exploring the laws of oaths and vows, particularly those made by women.

Throughout this section, we find a repeated phrase: "וְיָהּ יִסְלַח לָהּ". Though the *p'shat* of this phrase is unclear, Rashi explains that it refers to a case where a

woman takes an oath to prohibit something upon herself, and her father or husband nullifies the oath without telling her. She then violates the oath, still believing it to be valid. According to Rashi, even though she hasn't technically transgressed, she still needs Hashem's forgiveness—hence, “וְהָיָה יִסְלַח לָהּ.”

Understandable, right?

The *Da'at Mikra* offers a similar explanation but adds that even when a woman is informed that her oath has been nullified, she must refrain from violating it until she has mentally accepted its invalidation. She must internalize that the oath is no longer binding before acting otherwise.

Throughout Jewish history, many safeguards and prohibitions have been established to help prevent sin or to reflect evolving ethical standards. These don't just apply on a national or rabbinic level; they should also be embraced personally. A person must create boundaries for themselves—prohibitions that help them avoid sin or align with their values. And just as one treats rabbinic safeguards with the seriousness of Torah law, they should view their personal boundaries as equally binding—just as the *Da'at Mikra* suggests. ■

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