

SHABBAT PARSHIOT MATOT-MASEI-DEVARIM · 2-9 AV 5775 · JULY 18-25, 2015 · VOL. 22 NO. 41

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Matot-Masei

LEFT AT THE THIRD CACTUS

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

This week we complete the synagogue reading of the fourth of the Five Books of the Torah, *Bamidbar* — “In the desert.” What is the theme of the Book of *Bamidbar*?

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

The power of speech is synonymous with the power to give direction. The word *dabar* can mean a leader or a director in Hebrew, as in “*One leader for a generation, and not two leaders.*”

When the Jewish People left Egypt, they went straight into the desert. There’s something special about the desert. It’s very difficult to give directions there. “Turn left at the third cactus” will not get you very far. In Hebrew, the word for desert is *midbar*, which is from the root *mi’dibur* — “from speech”. The desert is the place that is removed from speech. Since the desert is the maximum place of non-speech, of non-direction, it is the ideal place to rebuild the power of speech

from the ground up.

And that’s what the Jewish People were to do in the desert. When the Jewish People left Egypt, they had to rebuild this power of speech that had been in exile with them.

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

The power of speech is the essence of the Book of *Bamidbar*. And what is the climax of *Bamidbar*? The concept of *nedarim* — “vows”. In truth, the English word “vow” is an inadequate translation of the Hebrew word *neder*. A *neder* means that a Jew has the ability to change the physical reality of the world through speech.

And where do we go after the rebuilding of the power of speech? To the “Book of *Devarim*” — literally, “The Book of Words.”

Sources: heard from Rabbi Chaim Zvi Senter in the name of Rabbi Moshe Shapiro

Devarim

THE RISE OF SEMITISM

By Rabbi Y. A. Sinclair

“How can I alone carry your contentiousness?” (1:12)

A few years ago I happened to be on a late-afternoon flight out of Guatemala City, bound for JFK. The sun was dropping rapidly toward the sea and I hadn’t yet davened *Mincha* (prayed the afternoon service).

I pushed the panic button — I mean the “call button” — in my armrest. The stewardess came over, all smiles, and asked

me what I needed. “Can you help me?” I asked, “I have to pray. Is there somewhere that I could stand for about ten minutes without getting in your way?”

Another stewardess joined her, and together they escorted me to the rear galley of the plane. “You’ll be fine here, sir. Please don’t rush! Take your time!” They almost bowed as

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Matot

Moshe teaches the rules and restrictions governing oaths and vows — especially the role of a husband or father in either upholding or annulling a vow. *Bnei Yisrael* wage war against Midian. They kill the five Midianite kings, all the males and Bilaam. Moshe is upset that women were taken captive. They were catalysts for the immoral behavior of the Jewish People. He rebukes the officers. The spoils of war are counted and apportioned. The commanding officers report to Moshe that there was not one casualty among *Bnei Yisrael*. They bring an offering that is taken by Moshe and Elazar and placed in the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Tent of Meeting). The Tribes of Gad and Reuven, who own large quantities of livestock, petition Moshe to allow them to remain east of the Jordan and not enter the Land of Israel. They explain that the land east of the Jordan is quite suitable grazing land for their livestock. Moshe's initial response is that this request will discourage the rest of *Bnei Yisrael*, and that it is akin to the sin of the spies. They assure Moshe that they will first help conquer Israel, and only then will they go back to their homes on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moshe grants their request on condition that they uphold their part of the deal.

Masei

The Torah names all 42 encampments of *Bnei Yisrael* on their 40-year journey from the Exodus until the crossing of the Jordan River into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d commands *Bnei Yisrael* to drive out the Canaanites from *Eretz Yisrael* and to demolish every vestige of their idolatry. *Bnei Yisrael* are warned that if they fail to rid the land completely of the Canaanites, those who remain will be "pins in their eyes and thorns in their sides." The boundaries of the Land of Israel are defined, and the tribes are commanded to set aside 48 cities for the *levi'im*, who do not receive a regular portion in the division of the Land. Cities of refuge are to be established: Someone who murders unintentionally may flee

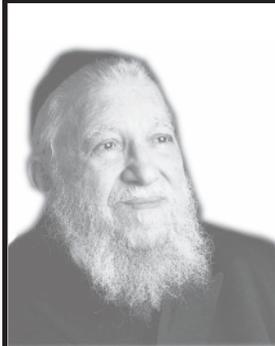
there. The daughters of Tzefochad marry members of their tribe so that their inheritance will stay in their own tribe. Thus ends the Book of *Bamidbar/Numbers*, the fourth of the Books of the Torah.

Devarim

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

The central theme this week is the sin of the spies, the *meraglim*. The Parsha opens with Moshe alluding to the sins of the previous generation who died in the desert. He describes what would have happened if they hadn't sinned by sending spies into *Eretz Yisrael*. G-d would have given them without a fight all the land from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, including the lands of Ammon, Moav and Edom. He details the subtle sins that culminate in the sin of the spies, and reviews at length this incident and its results: The entire generation would die in the desert; Moshe would not enter *Eretz Yisrael*. He reminds them that their immediate reaction to G-d's decree was to want to "go up and fight" to redress the sin. He recounts how they wouldn't listen when he told them not to go, that they no longer merited vanquishing their enemies miraculously. They ignored him and suffered a massive defeat. They were not allowed to fight with the kingdoms of Esav, Moav or Ammon — these lands were not to be part of the map of *Eretz Yisrael* in the meantime. When the conquest of Canaan will begin with Sichon and Og, it will be via natural warfare.

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Rav Bulman *zt"l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

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they backed up a few paces. From their expressions I could see they were thinking, “This guy is praying to keep the plane in the sky — we better give him plenty of space!” They exited, pulling the curtain across the galley with quiet and reverent precision.

It always strikes me that in spite of the perceptible rise in anti-Semitism in the past few years, I often find people who, far from being antagonistic to my Jewishness, are actively helpful and very respectful.

Of course, one explanation is that there are just some people in the world who are nicer than others. But maybe there’s a deeper reason.

This week’s Torah portion always occurs the week before Tisha B’Av, the saddest day in the Jewish year. The Rambam lists five tragedies that occurred on Tisha B’Av: The spies returned with a negative report about the Land of Israel; the destruction of both Holy Temples; the destruction of Betar and the massacre of thousands of Jews, and lastly, on the ninth of Av Jerusalem was plowed over like a field by the Roman emperor Turnus Rufus. However, there’s another Tisha B’Av event that is closer to home: In the early hours of July 23rd, the first Jews from the Warsaw ghetto were loaded onto a train of sixty closed cars. The car doors were locked from the outside, and the air apertures barred with barbed wire. That was the 9th of Av, 1942. The day the first killings started at Treblinka. Historically, anti-Semites have accused the Jewish People of being filthy rich, filthy poor, grabbing capitalists, grabbing communists, the lackeys and the paymasters of the establishment, and, at the same time, rootless cosmopolitans. In fact, the only thing on which all anti-Semites agree is that the world would be an infinitely better place without the Jew. What exactly the Jew’s crime is, however, remains endlessly elastic.

The granddaddy of all anti-Semites was Haman in the Purim story. As with all anti-Semitism, ostensibly, Haman’s hatred of the Jewish People defies a logical explanation. Haman was one of the most powerful people in the greatest empire the world had yet seen. He had vast wealth, a large family and celebrity status. All of the king’s court bowed before him. Haman had it all. How could he then say, “All this is worth nothing to me whenever I see Mordechai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate”? (Megillat Esther 8:13) What bothered Haman so much about Mordechai? The question becomes even stronger when we remember that Haman made this remark after the death sentence against the Jewish People had already become an incontrovertible law. At that point Mordechai was no more than a walking dead man. What possibly could have bothered Haman so much about Mordechai that Haman’s entire world of fabulous riches and fame was “as nothing” to him?

Sixty-five years ago, a young yeshiva *bachur* who had escaped from Nazi Europe with the Mir Yeshiva was walking

through the streets of Shanghai. He was stopped in his tracks by hysterical ranting coming from a radio in an upstairs apartment, the voice sounding like that of a wild animal. And then he realized that he could understand what was being said. The voice was shrieking in German, “Come, let us obliterate from the world that nation that will not let us live in peace!” A sea of voices swelled behind him, chanting, “Seig Heil! Seig Heil!”

The young man was shaken to the depths of his soul. He had never heard such a statement. He ran immediately to the *mashgiach* (spiritual mentor) of the Mir Yeshiva, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, and repeated what he had heard. “For once,” responded the *mashgiach*, “For once, he’s telling the truth.”

The Jewish People will not let the world live in peace. The Jewish People proclaim to the world, by their very existence, that everything the world holds dear - money, status and pleasure - are worthless. Our very existence does not let them live in peace. When Haman looks at Mordechai, he sees someone to whom all his power and money and status is a joke. Mordechai negates his entire existence.

For this, the Jewish People have been hated down throughout the generations.

But it was not always so.

When G-d gave the Jewish People the Torah on Mount Sinai, the kings of the East and the West were aware that something had happened that could destabilize their power. They felt the shaking of the earth beneath their feet. They feared another global flood, and so they enquired of the gentile prophet Bilaam what the cause of this disturbance of the natural order was. Bilaam said that there would be no flood, nor would a deluge of fire envelop the world; rather the world was responding to the momentous event of the giving of the Torah on Sinai. To which they responded, “May G-d bless His people with peace.”

The default reaction of the nations of the world is “May G-d bless His people with peace.” With the sin of the golden calf, however, the Jewish People rejected the Torah. Then the *luchot* (the Tablets of the Law) were broken with catastrophic results. For until this day, there is not a tragedy, not a disaster, which is not an “instalment-payment” for the sin of the golden calf.

When we lose our connection to Torah, the response of the nations is that of Haman. They see us no more than a choker around their necks, stifling their enjoyment of this world. They see in us no spirituality, no “chosen people.” They see us as a gang of killjoys, for we have lost the ability to be the light to the nations, which is G-d’s role for His people.

However, when we try to exemplify our true heritage, there will be those among the nations who will still say, “May G-d bless His people with peace!”

NEDARIM 58 - 71

Until the 'kayitz' — (this is) until the people begin putting the figs in their baskets."

Our Mishna teaches that if a person makes a *neder* not to drink wine "until the *kayitz*" or "until the *kayitz* arrives", he is forbidden to drink wine only until it's the time when people begin to pick figs. Why specifically figs, and not grapes?

In Hebrew each word has a specific meaning, and "*kayitz*" means picking the fruit with one's hand, the manner in which figs are picked, whereas "*chaticha*" is the correct Hebrew word for describing the way of picking grapes, which is by cutting them from the vine with a knife. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

An aside: "*Kayitz*" is the modern Hebrew word for "summer", and indeed this is the time of year for picking and harvesting many soft fruits (in Israel and in the northern hemisphere). The root of this word appears to be the same root as that which means picking fruits with one's hand, "*katziza*".

• Nedarim 61b

"And you will sanctify him (a kohen) for all matters of holiness — to open first, to bless first, and to take the first portion."

This teaching of the Beit Midrash of Rabbi Yishmael explains in practical terms how we are to fulfill the command to sanctify a *kohen* stated in the Torah: "*v'kidashto*" (Vayikra 21:8) — "and you will sanctify him".

A *kohen* must be allowed to recite the first blessing for the public Torah reading, be given the honor to lead the *birkat hamazon* blessing after a meal, and he must be offered first-choice of his portion when dividing an object with another person who is not a *kohen*. (Rabbeinu Nissim) Another explanation of receiving the honor to "open first" is that the *kohen* should be the first speaker at a public gathering. (Rabbeinu Asher)

Regarding leading *birkat hamazon*, the halacha requires to honor him with leading only if each person provided his own food. However, if there is a host who provides the food for everyone who eats together, it is the host's option to decide who will lead and he does not need to choose a *kohen*. He does not even need to ask the *kohen* for permission for someone who is not a *kohen* to lead, although the custom nowadays is that the leader mentions that he is doing so with the permission of the *kohanim* (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 201).

• Nedarim 62a&b

"Until Rabbi Akiva came and taught: A neder that is partially permitted is completely permitted."

This teaching, in the first *mishna* on our *daf*, changed the way that earlier authorities taught and ruled. Previously if a person made a *neder* to forbid something, he would be asked if he would have still made the *neder* if he had known that sorrow was forbidden on Shabbat and Tom Tov — and this would lead to permitting his *neder* on those days but not on the rest of the days. Rabbi Akiva came along and ruled that since the *neder* was partially permitted, it was totally permitted. (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 129:1)

One explanation for this rule is that it is logical that the person who made the *neder* wanted it to be valid only if all aspects of it would be valid. (Rabbeinu Asher) The Yerushalmi Talmud learns the rule in our *mishna* from the verse, "as all that goes out from his mouth (his *neder* that he spoke) he will do." (Bamidbar 30:3) This implies that the *neder* exists only as long as all of the *neder* exists. (Rabbeinu Nissim)

• Nedarim 66

"The woman broke two lamps on the head of the Sage Bava ben Buta."

Bava ben Buta said to her, "You did according to what your husband requested. G-d will bless you and grant you two children who will be great Torah scholars like Bava ben Buta."

Why did she break the lamps on his head, and why did she receive such a wonderful blessing? The *gemara* relates that her husband came from Bavel, where Aramaic was spoken, to live in Israel, where he met this woman and they married. However, she repeatedly misunderstood what he meant, due to a language barrier, and he was frustrated and upset. When he asked her to break the lamps on the door ("*bava*" in Aramaic) she thought he meant on "Bava ben Buta" who was sitting at the door at the time. (The *gemara* mentions that he was sitting at the door to explain how she could possibly think that her husband intended that she break the lamps on a great Rabbi. — Maharsha)

Due to the great importance of "*shalom bayit*", preserving family harmony between husband and wife, not only did the *Gadol Hador* not become upset with her, but he gave her an extraordinarily wonderful blessing.

• Nedarim 66b

PARSHA Q&A ?

Matot

1. Who may annul a vow?
2. When may a father annul his widowed daughter's vows?
3. Why were the Jewish People not commanded to attack Moav, as they were to attack Midian?
4. Those selected to fight Midian went unwillingly. Why?
5. What holy vessels accompanied the Jewish People into battle?
6. Those who killed in the war against Midian were required to remain outside the "machane" (camp). Which machane?
7. Besides removing traces of forbidden food, what else is needed to make metal vessels obtained from a non-Jew fit for a Jewish owner?
8. "We will build sheep-pens here for our livestock and cities for our little ones." What was improper about this statement?
9. During the conquest of the Land, where did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* position themselves?
10. What promise did *Bnei Gad* and *Bnei Reuven* make beyond that which Moshe required?

Masei

1. Why does the Torah list the places where the Jewish People camped?
2. Why did the King of Arad feel at liberty to attack the Jewish People?
3. What length was the camp in the *midbar*?
4. Why does the Torah need to specify the boundaries that are to be inherited by the Jewish People?
5. What was the *nesi'im*'s role in dividing the Land?
6. When did the three cities east of the Jordan begin to function as refuge cities?
7. There were six refuge cities, three on each side of the Jordan. Yet, on the east side of the Jordan there were only two and a half tribes. Why did they need three cities?
8. To be judged as an intentional murderer, what type of weapon must the murderer use?
9. Why is the *kohen gadol* blamed for accidental deaths?
10. When an ancestral field moves by inheritance from one tribe to another, what happens to it in *Yovel*?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Matot-Masei's Questions!

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

Matot

1. 30:2 - Preferably, an expert in the laws of *nedarim*. Otherwise, three ordinary people.
2. 30:10 - If she is under 12 1/2 years old and widowed before she was fully married.
3. 31:2 - Because Moav only acted out of fear against the Jewish People. Also, Ruth was destined to come from Moav.
4. 31:5 - They knew that Moshe's death would follow.
5. 31:6 - The *aron* and the *tzitz*.
6. 31:19 - The *Machane Shechina*.
7. 31:23 - Immersion in a *mikve*.
8. 32:16 - They showed more regard for their property than for their children.
9. 32:17 - At the head of the troops.
10. 32:24 - Moshe required them to remain west of the Jordan during the conquest of the Land. They promised to remain after the conquest until the Land was divided among the tribes.

Masei

1. 33:1 - To show G-d's love of the Jewish People. Although it was decreed that they wander in the desert, they did not travel continuously. During 38 years, they moved only 20 times.
2. 33:40 - When Aharon died, the clouds of glory protecting the Jewish People departed.
3. 33:49 - Twelve *mil* (one *mil* is 2,000 *amot*).
4. 34:2 - Because certain *mitzvot* apply only in the Land.
5. 34:17 - Each *nasi* represented his tribe. He also allocated the inheritance to each family in his tribe.
6. 35:13 - After Yehoshua separated three cities west of the Jordan.
7. 35:14 - Because murders were more common there.
8. 35:16 - One capable of inflicting lethal injury.
9. 35:25 - He should have prayed that such things not occur.
10. 36:4 - It remains with the new tribe.

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Abarbanel

ON THE PARSHA

Matot-Masei

At the end of Parshat Masei the Torah discusses five *mitzvot* which would become relevant after the Jewish People entered the land of Canaan. At this point in time Moshe knows that his death is imminent and that he will not be the one to lead the nation into Canaan. In order to alleviate his disappointment, G-d tells Moshe to communicate these particular *mitzvot* to the people in order that he should have a connection to them despite the fact that he would not witness their implementation.

If Moshe had entered the Land of Israel he would have had a direct hand in the implementation of each *mitzvah*. The first *mitzvah* was the conquest of the Land and the driving out of the enemies of the Jewish People along with their idolatrous practices. Second was the establishment of the exact borders of the country. Third was its division among the tribes. Fourth was the designation of specific cities to the tribe of Levi. Fifth was the designation of cities of refuge, as had already been done on the eastern side of the Jordan River. None of these *mitzvot* could be performed by one individual alone. Even if Moshe had been permitted to enter the Land, he would have needed to appoint others to assist him. By commanding others to perform tasks that G-d had commanded him, all these *mitzvot* would have a direct relationship to Moshe. Now also, even though Moshe would not be able to actually enter the Land, he is commanding the Jewish People to perform them. In this way, it is as if Moshe is performing them *in absentia* in Canaan. This would serve to mollify Moshe.

This also explains why these *mitzvot* are specifically mentioned at this point. Clearly, they had already been communicated at Sinai. Additionally, most of them had already been referred to earlier in the Torah, as several references had already been made to the inheritance and conquest of the Land, the driving out of the inhabitants and their idolatry, and the division of the Land among the tribes. Here, at the end of Moshe's life, G-d is giving him the opportunity to experience a virtual relationship with *mitzvot* that are intimately tied to the Land.

The exact details of the borders that are given to Moshe in this Torah portion could have easily been given to Yehoshua when he would lead the Jewish People into the Land. Similarly, Moshe is told the names of the leaders of

each individual tribe who would lead the nation into the Land. This is designed to let Moshe feel as if he was participating in the conquest as well. Since he is also from the tribe of Levi he is given the details of the configuration of the Levite cities that would be established in the Land, to give him a sense of participation in their establishment. Again, as has already been mentioned, the Torah makes it clear that this *mitzvah* will require the participation of more than a single individual: "G-d spoke to Moshe... saying, 'Command the Children of Israel that they shall give to the Levites, from the heritage of their possession, cities for dwelling...'" (Bamidbar 35:1) Finally, since Moshe had already designated three cities of refuge on the east side of the Jordan, he naturally wanted to designate the three cities on the west side as well. By commanding the Jewish People to designate those three cities it is as if Moshe is designating them through his command to the people.

Devarim

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the Divine authorship of the Torah was challenged by the Wellhausen school of 'Biblical Criticism', which claimed that the Torah had multiple, human authors, and was compiled over a period of several hundred years. Interestingly enough, Abarbanel confronts a similar, albeit less dramatic, challenge which existed in his time. Because the fifth Book of the Pentateuch, Devarim, is primarily Moshe's first-person farewell address to the nation, the question arose as to whether Moshe, rather than G-d, was the author of this final Book.

Abarbanel explains that the impetus for such a challenge comes from three anomalies in the Book of Devarim. First of all, if G-d was the sole author, why would it be necessary to repeat so much material in this Book? If the purpose was to give a further explanation, what would be the purpose of mentioning them earlier if they had to be clarified later on anyhow? This is not how authors normally proceed. Secondly, the first four Books are written as a third-person narrative, but the Book of Devarim, until the portion of Vayelech, is written as Moshe's first person narrative. If G-d was the author, how could Moshe ascribe these words to himself? Thirdly, if the entire Book was written by G-d how can we explain the Talmudic passage (Megillah 31): "The curses in the Book of Vayikra were received by Moshe from

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BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

DESTRUCTION AND THE FIERY LION

From: Max

*Dear Rabbi,
I understand that one of the reasons the Temple was destroyed was the Jews being steeped in idolatry. What I don't understand is how they could have done that. They were a people who had such a unique relationship with G-d, from the miraculous redemption from Egypt to all the miracles that occurred in the Temple. How is it that they sought idolatry in the face of G-d?*

Dear Max,

This is a very probing question, and certainly apropos for this period of collective mourning over the destruction of both Temples, when we are to contemplate not only the reasons that they were destroyed, but also why the future Temple has not yet been rebuilt.

Recall that even after the Jews experienced the miraculous redemption from Egypt and salvation at the crossing of the Reed Sea, and even after they collectively witnessed G-d at the Revelation of Sinai, still shortly thereafter they lapsed into a large-scale celebration of the Golden Calf.

And as you point out, despite a long history of a special relationship with G-d, and actually living in the presence of the Holy Temple, Jews were still enthralled by, and embroiled with, the spirit of idolatry.

Whereas nowadays none of us has the slightest inclination to serve idols despite the fact that G-d's presence in our lives is much less obvious. So how are we to make sense of this?

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 64a) explains that shortly after the building of the Second Temple the Sages gathered together to beseech G-d to nullify the drive for idolatry.

They cried out to G-d that because of idolatry the First Temple "was destroyed, the sanctuary was burnt, the righteous were murdered and the Jews were exiled, and still the drive for idolatry is taunting us. Since You gave it to us for the purpose of gaining reward through it by overcoming it, but we can't, it would be better that we not have it or its

reward".

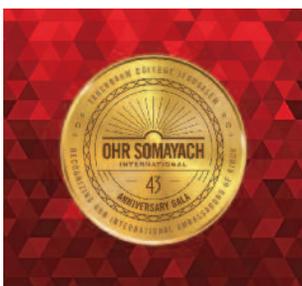
In answer to their prayer, a note crystallized and fell from Heaven upon which was written the Hebrew word *emet*, which means truth, indicating that G-d gave His seal of approval to their request. At that time, a lion of fire came leaping out of the Holy of Holies, and before the Sages were able to "cage" it, a hair of its fiery mane got loose into the world.

It's clear from the continuation of the story regarding the removal of the drive for immorality that G-d doesn't go half-way on such matters, and removing the drive behind immorality requires the removal of the drive entirely. This means that the fiery lion, too, was not the drive for idolatry per se, but rather the general drive for spirituality that simultaneously burns and yearns for idols or G-d.

This explains what the fiery lion was doing in the Holy of Holies, the universal focal point for prayer and service of G-d. And when it leaped out, and was secreted away and concealed, not only was the consuming drive for idolatry nullified, but the burning, voracious desire for G-d was also lost. So if we don't understand what the draw of idolatry was, it's because we're post-fiery lion. But by the same token, we don't really understand what it means to serve G-d either.

The only remnant of the blazing desire for spirituality is the single hair of the fiery mane that dissipated into the world. It's for this reason that the power and force of idolatry within and without us has become so diminished. However, unfortunately, for the same reason, our connection to G-d is correspondingly so tenuous, and we're spiritually hanging on by a thread until such time as the Jewish People return to their Land, the righteous are revived, the sanctuary is restored, and the Temple is rebuilt.

Then the voracious drive to serve will return to the Holy of Holies, unadulterated by the lures of idolatry, but rather leaping and bounding singularly toward G-d.



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STANDING TOGETHER

It is well known that the Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of the terrible sin of baseless hatred. We are taught that the remedy that will rebuild it is “*ahavat chinam*”, unconditional love. One of the most powerful expressions of this love can be found in the prayers of the Jewish People.

When one stands in prayer, he must realize that he is not alone. He stands together with all of *Klal Yisrael*. It is for this reason that most of the texts formulated by the Sages are in the plural. Even though the Jewish People are scattered around the world, praying in different places and at different times, all of their prayers unite as one.

The rabbis teach us that “All Jews are responsible for one another.” (Shavuot 39a) Rabbi Moshe Kordevero explains that the reason we are all responsible for each another is because spiritually all of the souls of Israel are one. Therefore, from a perspective of souls, there is a part of one’s fellow person in him, and likewise, a part of him is in his fellow person. (Tomer Devorah)

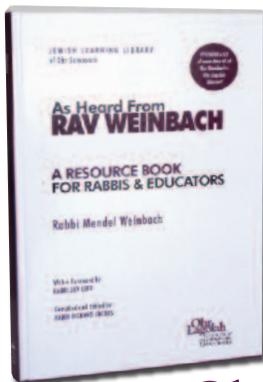
In fact, the word for “man” in Hebrew (“Adam”), which is used exclusively for the Jewish People (Yevamot 61a), has no plural form. This alludes to the aforementioned concept that

all members of the Jewish People are in reality part of one collective soul. For just as many different limbs and organs make up a human body, yet they are all part of one whole organism, so too Israel is in truth one entity. Thus, even though our bodies separate one from another, our souls — which are our essence — unite us.

“You Must Love Your Fellow...”

We can now gain a deeper appreciation of the command, “You shall not stand idly by while the life of your fellow person is in jeopardy.” (Vayikra 19:16) Not everyone is in a position to help his fellow. For example, if someone is not a doctor he cannot help a sick person get well. Or someone who is not wealthy cannot help save a person from bankruptcy. So what can we do to help our fellow person in his time of need? Answer: We can pray.

In connection to this the rabbis have taught, “When I am only for myself, what am I?” (Pirkei Avot 1:14) When this teaching is applied to prayer we learn that in addition to praying for ourselves we must also pray for others. (Rabbi Yaakov Abuchatzera)



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TISHA B'AV

Megillat Eicha laments the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash and the tragedies that followed. In discussing the time period during which Megillat Eicha was written, Chazal tell us that Rabbi Yehuda says: It (Eicha) was said in the days of Yehoyakim (decades before the actual destruction). Rabbi Nechemia retorted: Should one cry over the dead before their death? Rather it was said after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. (Eicha Rabbah 1:1) In this Midrash Rabbi Yehuda is claiming that Eicha was written before the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, while Rabbi Nechemia disagrees. Rabbi Nechemia challenges Rabbi Yehudah, for indeed the book details the destruction in the past tense. With Rabbi Nechemia's question seeming so obvious, how can we understand Rabbi Yehudah's opinion?

The Gemara explains that following Nevuzaradan's attack on Jerusalem and the Beit Hamikdash a Heavenly voice emerged and declared the following:

It is a slain nation that you slew; it is a burned sanctuary that you burned; it is ground flour that you ground; as it is stated "take millstones and grind flour" ... it does not say wheat; it says flour. (Sanhedrin 96b & Eichah Rabbati 1:43)

We need a brief background in Jewish thought to understand the source above. All that happens in the physical world has a source in the spiritual world. Furthermore, what happens in the spiritual world is an outcome of our physical actions and moral decisions. Even when other nations attack us, they are only messengers as a result of a deficiency in our service of G-d.

As the following examples demonstrate, the Jewish approach has always been to attribute spiritual reasons behind our physical struggles with our enemies. The Midrash says that the nation of Amalek, which represents heresy, was able to attack the Jewish People when they displayed a lack of trust in G-d. (Shemot Rabbah 26:2) It was due neither to Amalek's "strength," nor to Yisrael's "weakness," but rather it was all dependent on the Jewish nation's spiritual state. Furthermore, the reason that is given for why Haman was able to pass a decree against the Jewish People was not due to political mistakes on the part of the Jewish People. Rather the Gemara says that it was because they bowed down to Nevuchadnezar's idols and partook of Achashverosh's feast. (Megillah 12a) Similarly, the Bach (*Hilchot Chanuka*) says that the reason why the Greeks were able to defile the Beit Hamikdash was because the Jews were being lax in the services in the Beit Hamikdash.

The source behind the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash was no different. The Gemara teaches that the first Beit Hamikdash was destroyed because of the three cardinal sins — adultery, idol worship, and murder — while the reason for the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash was baseless hatred.

(Yoma 9b) There are many more examples of this idea, but the main point is that not once do Chazal attribute a physical defeat to the lack of a mighty army, bad strategy, or politics. This is because as Jews we fully believe that any war in the physical world is only a reflection of a spiritual war above.

We can now better understand the Gemara with which we started. The Nefesh Hachaim (1:4) explains that, in essence, it wasn't Titus or Nevuchadnezar who destroyed the Beit Hamikdash. Rather it was our sins that destroyed the spiritual Beit Hamikdash. Titus and Nevuchadnezar only destroyed a building that was devoid of G-d's presence that had already left due to our sins. This is what the Gemara means when it says, "you grounded flour that was already ground". The Gemara is explaining this very idea. Nevuzaradan destroyed something that was already destroyed in the higher worlds.

This should be our approach with our modern-day enemies as well. While they will all be held accountable for choosing to be the messengers to carry out the iniquitous acts, we too will be held accountable for our sins that were the spiritual root for the resulting destruction. When the Jewish nation experiences a tragedy, instead of wondering how or why the other could have wronged so grievously, we should be wondering what actions we performed to deserve such a harsh decree against us.

It follows from the above that the main mourning we experience on Tisha b'Av is not just over the physical destruction, but over the spiritual destruction that came about through our actions. We can now begin to answer the question we started with. Rav Moshe Shapiro, *shlita*, suggests that according to Rabbi Yehuda's view, this is precisely why Eicha was written before the actual destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. It was written when the spiritual destruction took place, which preceded the physical destruction. In this sense Megillat Eicha was a physical description of the spiritual destruction that had already taken place.

How does this relate to our service on Tisha b'Av? The Gemara says, in every generation that the Beit Hamikdash is not rebuilt it is as if in that generation it was destroyed. (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:1) The reason for this is that if we would do sincere *teshuvah* for the sins that caused the Beit Hamikdash to be destroyed, then we would merit seeing it rebuilt. The fact that it is not rebuilt is therefore a sign that we are currently continuing in the wrong ways of our ancestors — and had we had a "living" Beit Hamikdash, it would have been destroyed in our very own days. Tisha b'Av is a day in which we mourn our present sins that are hindering the Beit Hamikdash's rebuilding. May we all merit to use the mourning as a stepping stone to do sincere *teshuvah*, thereby helping to bring about the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash in our days.

RABBI SIMON TAYLOR

Ohr Lagolah Graduate

Current Positions: Regional Director, New England NCSY; Chaplain in the British Armed Forces

Previous Positions: Director of London Schools, Aish UK

Learning Background: Mir, Jerusalem; Whitefield Kollel; Tiferet Zvi; Yeshivat Hakotel

After an extensive year-long search, NCSY has selected Rabbi Simon Taylor as new regional director of New England NCSY. Previously, Rabbi Taylor, who hails from England, worked for Aish UK as the director of London schools and the director of the national advisor program. He also serves as a chaplain in the British Armed Forces, where he provided pastoral care to soldiers, and teenagers in the Army Cadet Force.

Although it was a difficult decision for Rabbi Taylor to relocate with his family to the States, in some ways it was also an easy one. "NCSY brings the largest opportunity to connect with Jewish



teens around the world, reaching collectively 20,000 teens annually," Rabbi Taylor explained. "The opportunity to reach out to so many people was very appealing, and an opportunity I couldn't match in England."

Asked about the differences between teens in the UK and America, he stressed their similarities. "Youth in both countries do seem to have more or less the same interests and challenges," Rabbi Taylor stated. "They all want to be empowered and loved, to have fun, to feel part of something authentic, and to meet and share good times with other like-minded teens."

Abarbanel **ON THE TORAH** continued from page four

G-d and given over in the plural, while the curses in the Book of Devarim were spoken in the singular by Moshe himself." The clear implication is that these curses were not transmitted to Moshe by G-d.

Abarbanel answers that the Book of Devarim must be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, it *should* be viewed as Moshe's personal farewell address to the nation. His purpose in repeating some of the *mitzvot* was not to admonish the nation or to teach them *mitzvot* that they had not heard at Sinai. On the contrary, they had already received all the *mitzvot* at Sinai. Some had been explained in detail, while others had been mentioned briefly or only hinted at. Knowing that his death was imminent he took it upon himself to explain those matters that required further clarification. In regard to the historical events that had transpired during the forty years in the wilderness, especially those which had transpired immediately after the Exodus from Egypt, Moshe's goal was to explain to the new generation that was about to enter the Land what had happened to their fathers so that they would not have any doubts about the imminent entry into the Land of Israel. This answers the first question.

In regard to the second question, even though this was

Moshe's personal address to the nation, its final written form as the Book of Devarim was dictated by G-d. In essence, G-d himself was the final Editor. Moshe delivered the speech; that is why it is expressed in the first person. But it was G-d who determined the exact wording to be recorded for posterity. Furthermore, there are numerous instances of first-person dialogue throughout the other Books of the Torah. In the Book of Exodus, for example, there are numerous instances of Pharaoh and Moshe speaking in the first person. Once again, G-d determined exactly how that dialogue was to be written down.

This approach answers the third question as well. After having Moshe explain the *mitzvot* to the nation, G-d gave him the general commandment to issue blessings and curses to the people. The exact detailed content was left to Moshe. But, as we mentioned above, it was G-d who dictated to Moshe the final form of these blessings and curses that were written down in the Book of Devarim.

The principle that emerges from all of this is that the entire Book of Devarim is the precise word of G-d, Who commanded how it was to be written, word for word, like all the other Books of the Torah.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Devarim

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

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Devarim's Questions!

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

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

WHY CRY? — A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Today, why do we mourn for Jerusalem? How can a Jew weep on Tisha B'Av for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Beit Hamikdash which took place thousands of years ago, when he sees how beautifully Jerusalem has been rebuilt in our days?

Perhaps we can learn a lesson from Rabbi Gershon Kitover, brother-in-law of the Ba'al Shem Tov, who arrived in Jerusalem two and a half centuries ago with the first group of Chassidim to settle in the Holy Land. He looked around at a city which sported foreign legations and all the signs of a serene community restored, in sharp contrast to the desolation described by Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) in his famous letter reporting on his visit to the city some five centuries earlier.

Rabbi Gershon broke into tears. Now, he said, I fully understand the words of the prayer that Jews say at the end of the final *ne'ilah* service on Yom Kippur, when the gates of Heaven are about to close. As they stand at this dramatic moment, weakened in body from a long day of fasting and strengthened in spirit from prayer and repentance, they strive to send one more prayer Heavenwards, invoking the thirteen attributes of Divine mercy. The opening lines, sounding more like a Tisha B'Av lamentation than a Yom Kippur prayer, cry out: "I recall, O G-d, and I am overcome by emotion, as I see every city solidly built on its foundation, while the City of G-d is reduced to the depth of the grave. Nevertheless, we are with G-d and our eyes are turned to G-d."

Until Rabbi Gershon saw the rebuilt Jerusalem of his day, he assumed — as we all do — that the above lament contrasts a desolate Holy City with the mighty capitals of the world, such as Rome, Paris, London and Berlin. But when he saw the beginnings of a rebuilt Jerusalem and contrasted it with the ruins of the Beit Hamikdash he sensed a deeper meaning in those words:

"Every city" — said Rabbi Gershon — refers to the

"Jerusalem of Below", the city of brick and mortar; while the "City of G-d" refers to the "Jerusalem of Above", the Heavenly city characterized by the Beit Hamikdash.

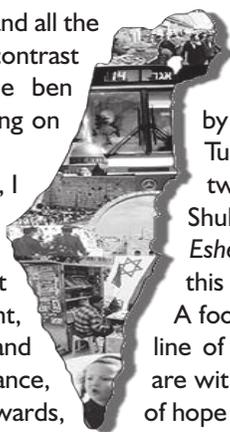
It is certainly painful to contrast these ruins with the prosperity of foreign cities. But the pain is indescribably greater when one sees the contrast between material prosperity and spiritual ruin before his very eyes. It is small wonder that this great man of spirit, who finally realized his lifelong dream of reaching Jerusalem, was moved to tears when he sensed the awful contrast.

The above account of Rabbi Gershon Kitover's experience and observation is recorded by one of the great halachic authorities, Rabbi Yosef Tumim, who served as rabbi of Frankfurt, Germany two centuries ago. In his classic commentary on Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim, "*Pri Megadim*" (661a *Eshel Avraham*), he quotes his father as the source for this moving story about Rabbi Gershon Kitover.

A footnote to this is the sentiment expressed in the last line of the above mentioned prayer: "Nevertheless, we are with G-d and our eyes are turned to G-d." This sense of hope amidst mourning reminds us of the story of a father who took his young son to the Western Wall for the first time. It was Tisha B'Av, and the youngster asked his father why grown men were weeping.

"Here," said the father, "our Beit Hamikdash once stood. The Har Habayit (Temple Mount) on which it stood was surrounded by four large walls. Now the Beit Hamikdash is destroyed, as well as the walls around the Har Habayit. All we have left of all our sacred glory is this one wall where you see people praying. Is it any wonder that they cry when they remember what once stood here?"

"But father," responded the son, "isn't it true that Mashiach will soon come to redeem us, rebuild the Beit Hamikdash and the four walls around Har Habayit? We should take comfort in the fact that one of those walls is already standing, and there are only three more to go!"



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